

Writing in the Key of Life:
Inquiry into Writing Processes and Pedagogies

A thesis submitted to
the Nova Scotia Inter-University Doctoral Administrative Committee
and the Mount Saint Vincent University Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies

Halifax, Nova Scotia

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2016

**INTER-UNIVERSITY DOCTORAL PROGRAM
IN EDUCATIONAL STUDIES**

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Writing in the Key of Life: Inquiry into Writing Processes and Pedagogies

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September 13, 2016
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Abstract

This inquiry investigates the complexities of writing and teaching writing in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms. What must we understand about language in order to teach writing well? How can inquiry into language and our lived experiences of language inform writing processes and pedagogies?

Using writing itself as a method of inquiry, this autoethnographic study investigates writing as a multidimensional process, a linguistic, composing, rhetorical, and inquiry process, searching for streams of meaning among childhood language experiences, public school teaching experiences, university teaching experiences, and writing experiences. By layering one teacher's lived experience of language, writing, and teaching writing with scholarly literature, teaching artifacts, and curricular documents, a more complex perspective on writing processes and pedagogies has emerged, one that views language diversity as a resource, not a deficit, in writing development in educational settings.

This investigation concludes by proposing an inquiry-based framework for understanding the complexities of writing processes and pedagogies in the twenty-first century, highlighting the imperative of an inquiry stance—toward writing processes, writing pedagogies, and the lived language experience of all developing writers.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all who have generously shared expertise and experience, offered new perspectives, and given encouragement at just the right times.

To my Doctoral Supervisor, Dr. Lorri Neilsen Glenn, and Committee Members, Dr. Ann Vibert and Dr. Rebecca Luce-Kapler: thank you for your wisdom, guidance, and time, and for brilliantly illuminating the life of writer-teacher-scholar. Such inspiration! To Dr. Anthony Paré, External Reviewer: thank you for your feedback, and for asking complex questions in a way that welcomed me into the ongoing scholarly conversations about writing.

Thank you to the Nova Scotia Inter-University Doctoral Program in Educational Studies—professors, administrators, and colleagues, and to the graduate students, undergraduate students, public school students, and teaching colleagues from whom I have learned so much during the past thirty-five years. I am grateful for the SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship, which allowed me to teach less while writing, and for the MSVU library, where much of this inquiry took shape.

Finally, I am profoundly thankful for the love, support, and encouragement of my family and extended family, who, along with teachers, mentors, and friends, have shared and nurtured a passion for language and writing.

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PART ONE

BACKGROUND TO THIS STUDY

Motown

I grew up in Motown, in the neighborhood between the bridge to Canada and the Cadillac Plant. Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac landed first in Nova Scotia before he started the French settlement of Ville-d'etroit in 1701. My family took a similar path from Nova Scotia to Detroit the year before I was born, arriving in 1958 across the Ambassador Bridge. That Ambassador Bridge has always been a reflection of my family. Like the two main towers of the bridge, my parents—one Canadian, one American—anchored a family with origins in two different places. My two sisters were born in Nova Scotia. My brother and I were born in the heart of Detroit.

We moved to the house on Vinewood when I was six years old. Our three-story stone-block house looked like a castle—an unexpected motif in our working class neighborhood. From the bridge we could pinpoint its blue roof through the trees. And likewise, from its tiny third-floor windows we could see the red Ambassador Bridge letters glowing at night. My room was partly in the turret on the second floor, a room that transported me away from the here and now, even if I could see our neighbor's window four feet away. At night the rhythmic booms of the drop forge lulled me to sleep. In the morning I would wake up with gritty pollution on my face, happy because the open window meant it was summer. And in the afternoon rainbows danced all over the walls and floors of my house when the sun shone through those old leaded-glass windows.

The houses on my block were old and huge and built around the time Edison and

Ford were creating light bulbs and horseless carriages. A century later, Stevie Wonder, Berry Gordy, and the Funk Brothers were creating the Motown sound a few miles away, and our houses were still kept up in a neighborhood where things were beginning to run down. The world outside my house was rough and tough and sometimes overwhelming, but usually not. The kids on my block adopted me, and my siblings, into their games of Kick-the-Can and Release. We would play outside till the streetlights came on, when dusk blurred the different colors of our skin. And then we'd hear our names—in all kinds of languages and dialects—called out in the twilight to come home.

—Excerpted from a narrative nonfiction work in progress, and developed from “In the Shadow of the Ambassador Bridge,” 2nd Place Creative Nonfiction Entry in the Detroit 300 Writing Competition, 2001, Sponsored by Detroit Women Writers

1. Why this Study? Rationale and Overview

In 1976, the year I graduated from high school, I bought Stevie Wonder's hot new double record album, *Songs in the Key of Life*. Forty years later, his songs are still spinning on my turntable. I titled this dissertation "Writing in the Key of Life" because as writers we use life and language to inform and shape our writing. Our writing decisions and choices work best when we understand we can write in different keys. Inquiry into our lived experience of language is essential to finding those keys, to our ongoing development as writers. I play bassoon in a wind quintet. In order for our quintet to make music together, we need to play in the same key at the same time. Writing, too, is like this. In order for our writing to reach its audience and achieve its purpose, it needs to be written in a key that suits the context and our audience.

Language binds us together as human beings. It is the symbolic system we use to communicate shared intention and experience. It is both highly personal and highly social, the sign system we use in our transactions with the world (Rosenblatt, 1988). It is the way we organize and understand our experience in the process of learning about the world (Britton, 1970). It is both sign and tool (Smagorinsky, 2013; Vygotsky, 2012).

The English language, in which this dissertation is written, is, like all languages, not a fixed entity. The English language, in all its variation, is continuously changing. There are, in fact, many Englishes. The English I grew up speaking in Detroit is not the same English I speak now in Nova Scotia, nor is it the same English I have heard in other

parts of the world. It varies in sound, word, and structure even within language users in Detroit or Nova Scotia or anywhere else it is spoken.

Language difference is not language deficit (Charity Hudson & Mallinson, 2014). In fact, language variation is an area rich for the harvest of inquiry. Learners even at the elementary school level are interested in language, in discovering how their own real, living, vital language works in real, living, vital contexts (Delpit, 1995; Domm, 2007; Dyson, 2003, 2015; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Y. Goodman, 2003; Heath, 1983; Paugh & Moran, 2013; Wheeler & Swords, 2006). This interest in language is the starting point for writing.

This interest in language is also the starting point for my research. How can we use inquiry into language, into our lived experience of language, to strengthen the ways we learn and teach writing in school?

This dissertation is divided into three parts: Part One sets out the research context; Part Two is the inquiry itself; and Part Three offers an inquiry-based framework for conceptualizing writing processes and pedagogies. Each part begins with a short narrative exploring my own early language experiences.

Part One contains three chapters.

Chapter 1 articulates specific research aims and questions, the significance of such an interdisciplinary inquiry, and my location as researcher in relation to three academic discourse communities: literacy education, composition and rhetoric, and linguistics.

Chapter 2 reviews the research on writing in diverse classrooms, highlighting persistent pedagogical questions about writing and language diversity and relevant gaps in educational policy and curriculum.

Chapter 3 sets out the methodological framework for this inquiry, describes autoethnography, and explains how it will facilitate this examination of writing.

Part Two, also containing three chapters, is the heart of this inquiry. It traces one person's journey (my own) as learner, teacher, and writer through linguistic and pedagogical terrain—terrain marked by meaningful discoveries and perplexing uncertainties. The chapters in Part Two are ordered to reflect the unfolding of my understandings of writing, first as a linguistic process in the context of my childhood (Chapter 4), next as a composing process in the context of public school teaching (Chapter 5), and finally as a rhetorical process in the context of university teaching (Chapter 6).

Part Three concludes this investigation by offering an alternative and tentative theoretical framework for conceptualizing writing: an inquiry-based perspective. Chapter 7 describes the inquiry-based theory of writing processes and pedagogies that has evolved through the process of engaging in this autoethnographic study, a theory that weaves together the linguistic, composing, rhetorical, and inquiry processes of writing. Chapter 8 explores the implications of this inquiry-based perspective, offering recommendations for teacher preparation, the curriculum, the classroom, and future research. Finally, Chapter 9 articulates, in the form of a letter to a new teacher, what I

have learned from this inquiry, and what I wish I had understood about language, writing, and teaching writing when I first set out to be a teacher.

1.1. Research Questions, Aims, and Significance

Writing is a powerful mode of communication, inquiry, and learning. Yet, after four decades modifying the ways we teach P-12 writing, questions remain. How do we teach writing meaningfully and effectively in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms? What must we understand about language in order to teach writing well? In the 1970s and 80s our view of classroom writing shifted from product to process (Britton, 1978; Cooper & Odell, 1978; Elbow, 1973; Emig, 1971; Graves, 1975; Murray, 1968), revolutionizing the way writing was taught. As a pre-service teacher in 1981 with a passion for writing, I embraced this approach. Nevertheless, I soon discovered that writing process pedagogy did not equip me with all the tools I needed to teach writing in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms. The concerns Lisa Delpit (1988) raised about process pedagogy meeting the needs of all students became my concerns as well. As I taught English as a second language and English language arts in Canada and the United States over the next twenty-seven years, I encountered tensions in writing pedagogy such as process versus product and language use versus explicit language skill instruction (Boldt, Gilman, Kang, Olan & Olcese, 2011), as well as dissonance in the ways stated writing pedagogies worked in practice in diverse classrooms.

More recently, as a university writing course instructor, I have observed unevenness in the writing abilities and understandings of students as we approach writing

not only as a composing process, but also as a rhetorical and linguistic process (Sargent & Paraskevas, 2005). This latter emphasis means students must learn to adjust language choices to fit the writing context—the genre, topic, audience and purpose. At the outset of this investigation I asked the question: *Might this framework—attending explicitly to rhetorical and linguistic functions of language as well as composing—be an approach to writing pedagogy at all grade levels?* Although literacy researchers and practitioners have demonstrated what a rhetorical approach at the elementary level looks like (Dudley-Marling & Paugh, 2009), few have specifically included the study of language diversity in their approach. Paugh and Moran’s (2013) study demonstrates how systemic functional linguistics, combined with a critical pedagogy of place framework, fosters language awareness in elementary school, leading to greater agency in young writers.

With increasing classroom linguistic diversity, there is a growing call in North America for the study of language diversity, critical language awareness, and the functions of language within both language arts curricula and teacher preparation programs (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2014; Cummins, 2000; Delpit, 1995; Denham & Lobeck, 2010; Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Goodman, D., 2006; Goodman, Y., 2003; Wheeler & Swords, 2006; Young & Martinez, 2011). My master’s research investigated how linguistic inquiry might support and motivate students in the language arts curriculum. Findings suggested that when students develop an awareness of their own linguistic expertise by observing language use, collecting language data, and investigating what they find—that is, taking a descriptive instead of a prescriptive approach, they become more engaged language users across subject areas (Domm, 2007).

Now, in this doctoral research, I investigate the complexities of writing and writing pedagogies, including the role of linguistic inquiry within writing pedagogies.

This research investigates writing as a composing, rhetorical, linguistic, and inquiry process, and examines the evolution of North American writing pedagogies over the past four decades as expressed in scholarly literature and selected policy and curricula. In this research study I have used an autoethnographic approach to investigate writing and writing pedagogies in contexts of linguistic diversity. The study began with the following questions:

- (1) To what extent are there—and what documented evidence is there to suggest that there are—theoretical, conceptual, or policy-based frameworks for writing pedagogy that value the linguistic and cultural diversity students bring with them into the classroom?
- (2) Given the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity in our classrooms and the need to forefront linguistic and rhetorical considerations, what would the framework for such a writing pedagogy look like?
- (3) In what ways might linguistic inquiry inform writing theory and practice in diverse classrooms, and in so doing, lead to more confident, effective writing in school?

As this autoethnographic inquiry continued, I arrived at a tentative, inquiry-based framework for considering the complexities of writing and teaching writing. This

framework conceptualizes writing as four interacting and overlapping processes: a linguistic process, making language visible; a composing process, making idea creation visible; a rhetorical process, making communication visible; and an inquiry process, making thought, exploration, discovery, and learning visible while uniting all the processes together.

This study aims to highlight the complexities of writing and the need for more effective and responsive ways to teach writing in linguistically and culturally diverse P-12 classrooms. In Nova Scotia these classrooms include students from African-Nova Scotian, Mi'kmaq, and Acadian backgrounds as well as a growing number of students from immigrant backgrounds who speak languages other than English or French at home, such as Arabic or Tagalog. The intention of this investigation is to contribute to deeper understandings of the complexities of language, writing, and teaching writing, particularly in an educational era of accountability, often at the expense of responsibility to marginalized communities (Vibert, 2005). The aim is to discover classroom practices and perspectives that affirm students' linguistic and cultural identities while supporting literacy growth, to find a framework for helping students themselves to develop linguistic understandings about language and language diversity on their journeys to become flexible, confident, effective writers—writers who are knowledgeable and passionate about language.

Why are these research aims important? My practice and experience indicate that not all students are becoming confident, engaged, and effective writers in school. This observation is confirmed by results on the 2014-2015 Nova Scotia Assessment of

Reading and Writing in Grades 3 and 6, showing a decrease in writing scores in all areas (content, organization, language use, and conventions) across the province. In the context of increasing classroom linguistic and cultural diversity, teachers often lack an awareness and understanding of language complexities, such as language variation, diversity, and change, and how these complexities impact writing in school. Sometimes teachers themselves lack confidence as writers (Frank, 2003). Additionally, the current climate of quickly evolving digital technologies compounds pedagogical complexities, creating new challenges alongside new possibilities for writing in diverse classrooms.

In 1988 educational researcher Lisa Delpit voiced concerns about writing process pedagogy. She stressed that while validation of the home language was important, it was equally important to equip students to operate effectively in a new language code in order to be successful in school and to compete in the world outside the home community. It has been my experience that Delpit's concerns have not yet been addressed in schools in Nova Scotia, and this has resulted in writing instruction that is not producing confident and effective writers in diverse classrooms. As noted in the 2007 Canadian study, *Toward an Equitable Education: Poverty, Diversity, and Students at Risk* (Portelli, Shields, & Vibert, 2007), schools all too often operate from a deficit, rather than resource, perspective on students from diverse backgrounds. Perhaps this is why Thiessen's (2009) study found troubling gaps in the literacy (reading) performance of African Canadian and First Nations learners when compared to learners of European descent on provincial assessments.

After moving to Nova Scotia from the United States in 1992, I observed writing process pedagogy at work in the elementary and junior high schools where I was an English as a second language instructor. I also observed a growing concern among some classroom teachers that this approach was not producing effective writers. More recently, in teaching a first-year university writing course, I have encountered wide variation in the writing experiences and understandings of my students. Some students arrive believing the five-paragraph essay format is the only structure they will need for academic writing. Others arrive with a rigid understanding of *the* writing process: they believe it is a linear series of steps. Still others think revision means fixing spelling and grammar between the “first copy” and the “final copy.” In doing this research, I have come to understand that as a public school teacher I also contributed to confusion about teaching and learning writing by oversimplifying it as *the* writing process for my elementary and junior high students. Although it is clear that all instruction cannot be the same, that student understandings and learning styles differ across grade level and school, this research suggests that certain beliefs and practices about writing pedagogy, often oversimplified and perpetuated, are not addressing the current climate of linguistic and cultural diversity in North American classrooms.

Often, when they begin school, students encounter bewildering differences between the language and culture of home and the language and culture of school. When these linguistic and cultural differences remain unrecognized, unexplored, or misunderstood by the teacher, the contextual “disconnect” creates barriers for students learning to write and read (Compton-Lily, 2015; Delpit, 1995; Dyson, 2015). Because

writing is a vehicle for the affirmation and sharing of identity, and a way to validate and honor diversity as a resource, not a deficit, it is crucial to construct more critical, creative, and effective ways to teach writing in diverse classrooms.

Language diversity refers to diversity *among* languages and diversity *within* a single language. Language variation is natural, and is evident across generations, genders, cultural groups, and geographical areas. We each speak a language, a particular dialect of that language, and our own personal variety of that dialect (idiolect). As well, we modulate our register depending on the communicative situation we are in. Halliday (1978) defines register as a variety of language used in a particular situation. It is determined by what one is doing and the role of language in that particular social context.

My experience and practice, as reflected in this autoethnographic study, indicate that engagement in what I call linguistic inquiry is important for both students and teachers. I see linguistic inquiry as the exploration of language itself: what it is, how it works, and how we use it in diverse contexts. Linguistic inquiry is not a return to teaching prescriptive grammar out of context; rather, it requires moving beyond isolated skill instruction toward engaged student inquiry into the promises and complexities of language function and use. Inquiry connects students' lived experience of language to writing instruction in school.

1.2. Researcher Location

Essential to this research project are my own lived experiences: growing up white in a diverse, working-class neighborhood in the heart of Detroit, teaching experiences in

multilingual, multicultural urban schools in Canada and the United States, learning experiences in Kenya and India, and writing experiences as a student, teacher, and writer. Childhood linguistic experiences of code switching prompted a study of linguistics as an undergraduate before entering the Urban Teacher Preparation Program at Syracuse University in 1980. Experiences with language, teaching, and writing have molded who I am as a researcher and raised questions for me about language diversity and teaching writing.

My family moved from Nova Scotia to Detroit in 1958 because of my father's work: pastoring a small church in a diverse, working class neighborhood near the Ambassador Bridge. When we moved into the neighborhood, my sisters, brother, and I attended local public schools until high school, when we attended a public magnet high school downtown, where we were part of the visible (white) minority.

Language invention, improvisation, and code switching were part of every day life for me as a child. Before coming into the house from playing outside, I would have to spit out my gum and leave the word "ain't" at the door. Gum, swear words, and "bad grammar" were not allowed—in the house, at church, or at school. So while my mother was saying "yes" on the inhale (the Nova Scotian way), my neighbors were speaking Arabic, Spanish, and varieties of English, such as African-American varieties and Appalachian varieties; we were the only family I knew of speaking a Canadian variety. Speaking "correctly" was valued highly in my lower-middle-class home. But on the streets and in the alleys I learned to speak another variety of English; from my nerdy white-girl perspective I thought of it as "talking tough." It was not the same kind of

English I used at home or at school: the syntax included double negatives, the lexicon featured urban slang, and the pronunciation involved dropping word-final consonants and flattening out the vowel sounds. I learned to speak this way in order to fit in, to be accepted by my peers. I learned *not* to speak this way at home or at school.

Without being able to name it, I was code switching. My language experiences prompted a study of linguistics as an undergraduate.

Written language, too, has always fascinated me. As a child, books offered an escape from the “rough and tough” world I lived in; they also ignited my desire to write. Even before starting school, I would spend many hours (according to my parents) “working” at my father’s desk at home, experimenting with drawing and making marks on paper. My parents and older sisters read to me when I was young, and specific Detroit Public School teachers—most often women of color—continued to nurture in me a love and respect for written language. Writing continued to be a passion for me as an undergraduate studying linguistics, even when struggling with academic papers. Writing became the vehicle through which I could best express my ideas—as well as the vehicle for exploring, synthesizing, and organizing my ideas. After making the transition from the role of student to teacher, I had hoped to foster in my own students a passion for and facility with language and writing, yet how to do this well remained a challenge.

1.3. Three Academic Discourse Communities

Writing is important to all academic disciplines. However, writing processes and pedagogies are of particular concern to the fields of literacy education, composition and rhetoric, and linguistics.

Literacy education places writing development within a larger view of “new” literacies: multiple, social, multilingual, multimodal, characterized by an increasingly diverse educational context, a context also increasingly impacted by technological innovation (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Purcell-Gates, 2007). This technological innovation and the pervasiveness of digital social media is leading to what many parents consider to be “risky literacies,” that is, unregulated and unsupervised online writing seen by parents as potentially dangerous spaces for their children (Corbett & Vibert, 2013). How should these new forms of writing, viewed by many parents as “dangerous literacies,” be approached in school? How should we support writing development within this complex literacy landscape?

Composition and rhetoric places writing—and the teaching of writing—front and center: how can writing, particularly academic writing, be developed in high school, college, and university settings? Scholars, such as Elbow (1973; 1993; 2000; 2012) and Murray (1968; 1992; 2005) have guided our understandings of learning and teaching written composition. Debate continues in the academy on how the complexities of writing should be approached in the context of university academic writing demands (Sargent & Paraskevas, 2005).

Linguistics places writing in an evolutionary and developmental framework: how and why has writing developed over time? How do phonological, morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic systems of a language impact the development of writing at school (Denham & Lobeck, 2010; Freeman & Freeman, 2004)? How are speaking and writing different (Biber & Vasquez, 2008)? Sociolinguistics draws our attention to the interconnections between language variation and social and cultural context.

I came first to the field of linguistics as an undergraduate at Cornell University, 1976-1980. In the linguistics department at that time the theory of generative, transformational grammar eclipsed the structural, functional approach to the study of language, but I was also introduced to a functional/structural theory of language in my phonology and morphology courses. In addition to the required linguistics courses, I studied Hindi and Spanish. After graduation, I completed the Urban Teacher Preparation Program at Syracuse University, and became an English as a second language teacher.

In 2002, I began work on a master's degree in literacy education at Mount Saint Vincent University in Nova Scotia. This graduate degree built on my experience as a teacher, and extended what I had learned in the Urban Teacher Preparation Program, particularly in the area of literacy. It is significant to note that the name of this graduate education program changed from *reading* to *literacy* in the 1990s when literacy education adopted a broader, more sociocultural view, encompassing new literacies, multi-literacies, and multimodal texts. (As a graduate student I was also introduced to new perspectives, such as critical literacy and postmodern views of language.) Initially, I was resistant to a broader definition of literacy. In time, I came to appreciate the impact of

social context on the functions of written language. However, I also wondered if a focus on writing was being lost within this broader view of literacy.

Finally, in 2009 I came to the field of composition and rhetoric when I began to teach a first year university writing course in the English department at Mount Saint Vincent University. Rhetoric was a new concept and perspective for me. Overlaid on the composing process, the rhetorical process of writing made writing decisions more explicit, the communication context more tangible. Nevertheless, in time I realized that language choices, decisions, and contexts in writing were more complex than a purely rhetorical approach seemed to account for.

This investigation joins the academic conversations on writing theory, practice, and pedagogy in several ways: it examines writing as a linguistic, composing, rhetorical, and inquiry process; it investigates the complexities of writing pedagogies in diverse classrooms; and it offers an inquiry-based framework for conceptualizing writing processes and pedagogies that makes sense in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms—and in all classrooms.

2. Writing Research to Date: A Literature Review

A review of the research on teaching writing in culturally diverse classrooms since 1987 reveals that we are still seeking cross-disciplinary approaches to the study of writing that will inform a broad research agenda to assist us in effectively teaching students from culturally diverse backgrounds in critical and creative ways.

—Arnetha F. Ball (2006, p. 293)

In 2006 Ball articulated the need for cross-disciplinary approaches to research on writing and teaching writing in diverse classrooms. This research project aims to take such an interdisciplinary approach by investigating writing and teaching writing in diverse classrooms through the eyes of literacy education, composition and rhetoric, and linguistics. In this chapter I examine the research on writing in diverse P-12 classrooms, highlighting persistent questions about writing pedagogy over the past four decades and their implications for contexts of growing linguistic diversity, as well as related gaps in educational policy and curriculum in Nova Scotia. (A review of the literature on writing processes—linguistic, composing, and rhetorical—is woven into the inquiry in Part Two.)

2.1. What Is Writing?

At the 2013 National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Annual Convention, Arthur Applebee emphasized the importance of asking the question, *what is writing?* As a panelist for a session titled, “Nothing Beats a Good Theory,” Applebee

shared his view of writing as *a socially constructed set of language practices used to participate in conversations we care about* (Applebee, 2013). Although he acknowledged that his view differed from the one currently held in many American classrooms, he emphasized that without a broader understanding of writing, classroom pedagogy would become “writing without composing” in the Common Core era, an era of high stakes assessment, on-demand writing, and teacher accountability.

Although Canada does not share the United States’ Common Core State Standards, Canadian classrooms may also be on a return journey to a writing product paradigm, a view of writing divorced from exploration, inquiry, and discovery. This subtle pedagogical shift is mirrored in the recent textbook change for Writing Theory and Practice, the first-year university writing course I taught from 2009-2014. Our former textbook, *Conversations about Writing: Eavesdropping, Inkshedding, and Joining In* (Sargent & Paraskevas, 2005), highlighted the practice of inkshedding, or focused freewriting, as an exploratory tool for learning. It encouraged students to make their own discoveries about writing as they engaged in the composing process, and allowed them to “eavesdrop” on the academic debates about writing and teaching writing. The new course text, *Everyone’s an Author* (Lunsford, et al., 2013), emphasizes writing as a communication tool—a carefully executed rhetorical act. Although this rhetorical view is important for students as they begin their university careers and face the challenges of academic writing, I believe it is not a complete view of writing without a concurrent emphasis on writing as a process of discovery.

Writers know intuitively that writing is a process of discovery. Lorri Neilsen (1998) emphasizes writing's power to illuminate what we know and what we have yet to learn. She writes of her experience as writer and researcher: "Words entice me; they are hooks on which to hang ideas, malleable clay to mold tentative thoughts into coherent forms, matches struck to sear my consciousness, alarm my senses" (p. 11). Rebecca Luce-Kapler (2004) describes writing as a site of possibility, stressing its potential to empower us to learn about ourselves, imagine different choices, and interpret experience in new ways (p. 103). Luce-Kapler believes language, despite its limitations, enables new understandings, and carries with it the potential to resist, to disrupt, and to change. "Writing, then, becomes a site of possibility, a place of 'as if' that works in multiple ways with, through, and beyond the text" (2004, p. 88). Educational philosopher and writer, Maxine Greene, championed writing's capacity to release the imagination and to make us more aware, explaining "we need to make it possible for writers to name not only the shapes and byways of their lived worlds but the problems and the predicaments that have stopped and silenced them" (1995, p. 108). Greene calls on us to live deliberately, to be awake, to be explicitly aware of our existence in the world. Writing enables us to do this.

At the beginning of this research project, I hypothesized that a rhetorical framework might be a useful way to incorporate linguistic inquiry (what I had observed to be missing from classroom writing pedagogy) into writing instruction. Now I question this hypothesis as I observe a renewed rhetorical emphasis leading to what Applebee calls "writing without composing" (Applebee, 2013), or mechanical, formulaic writing divorced from inquiry, discovery, and learning. Perhaps it is valuable to consider writing

as a multi-dimensional process—a composing, rhetorical, linguistic, and inquiry process. An inquiry-based, multi-dimensional framework would see writing as idea creation (a composing process) and communication (a rhetorical process) fuelled by language (a linguistic process), enabling both the formation and representation of an idea (Smagorinsky, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978), as well as its preservation and passage through space and time. Above all it would see writing as an inquiry process, a process of questioning, thought, exploration, discovery, and learning. It would acknowledge writing’s “heuristic potential” (Paré, 2009).

2.2. Research on Writing in Diverse Classrooms

In 1986 Farr and Daniels published *Language Diversity and Writing Instruction* with the intent to offer both a theoretical framework and practical suggestions for high school teachers wanting to improve their writing instruction in classrooms with dialectal diversity. The authors’ focus was on learning about language. “Thus we can improve literacy instruction by increasing our understanding of language and of the complex human capacities for learning and using it” (p. 9). Farr and Daniels recognized the need for teachers to specifically understand that dialects change over time and between situations; dialects are not fixed entities. Farr and Daniels called for a synthesis of research on linguistic variation and composition instruction.

Twenty years later, in her 2006 review of current research literature on teaching writing in culturally diverse K-12 classrooms, Ball noted that much of the research at that time appeared to fall into three broad categories: research on issues related to the *context*

for teaching and learning writing, research on issues related to the *culture* of the students, and research on *instructional and assessment strategies* (p. 295). In her section on research related to the culture of students, Ball noted the importance of language and the interconnectedness of culture, language, and writing. “In addition, these researchers help us to understand how students’ community-based discourse patterns can help to inform teachers and allow them to create curricular bridges that link students’ home, community, and school communication practices and demands” (p. 301). Many of these empirical studies (including her own) focused on African-American students.

Ball concluded her review of the research studies done in all three categories by outlining what she viewed as important areas for further research: (1) research on the development of voice in the writing of culturally diverse students; (2) research into how to balance writing-as-process with skills development; (3) research on the use of technology in teaching writing to diverse students; (4) research on teacher education; and (5) research that deepens our understanding of how the needs of culturally diverse struggling writers with learning disabilities differ from the needs of underachieving students in culturally diverse classrooms who have been denied access to the excellent teaching and resources they deserve.

Ball alluded to the confusion over the term “struggling writer,” making clear that students with learning disabilities have differing instructional needs from students who are struggling with writing for other reasons. Dudley-Marling and Paugh (2009) use the term “struggling writer” to refer to any student who is struggling with writing, including students with special needs and second language students. Nevertheless, Dudley-Marling

and Paugh mention only briefly the problem of language: “Learning the more formal ‘academic’ language genres associated with schooling is particularly difficult for struggling writers, especially students whose first language isn’t English or who speak nonstandard English dialects” (p. 70). Ball makes the distinction between culturally diverse students (the focus of her study) and immigrants and second language students (the topic of a different chapter of the book—see Fitzgerald, 2006).

Graves and Rueda (2009) use the term “CLD students” to refer to students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who are learning English as an additional language. They describe “a myriad of factors that characterize these students” including language, culture, socioeconomic status, and ethnic or racial background, but they clearly are referring to students who are non-native speakers of English, not to students who speak dialects of English often consider “nonstandard.”

Young and Martinez (2011) focus on “immigrants, minorities, and the poor” as one group and call for all students to be exposed to “a variety of Englishes” (p. xix). They also propose a new pedagogical framework: code-meshing. One of the key dilemmas facing teachers of writing in culturally diverse classrooms is: What is “standard” English and whose standard is it? In the first-year university writing course I teach, I describe it as the English used in public life. It is not the same kind of English we use in our homes or with our friends. I explain that language variation is a natural occurrence: we all speak a unique idiolect and share a common dialect with others in our geographical or cultural space, but we also use different linguistic registers in different situations—we modulate our speech depending on the context. We do this automatically

(and mainly subconsciously) as native speakers of a language. As we raise our intuitive language knowledge to a more conscious level, we become better equipped to make appropriate choices in our writing—choices that fit the rhetorical situation. Yet the question remains: Who determines what is “appropriate” for a particular rhetorical situation?

Wheeler and Swords (2006) have identified code switching as a strategy for teaching children in urban schools how to switch from informal to more formal kinds of language to fit the context. But this code-switching strategy has been challenged by those who see *code meshing* as a more democratic and empowering strategy for addressing linguistic diversity in the classroom (Young & Martinez, 2011). As Young and Martinez, editors of *Code-Meshing as World English* (2011), write in their introduction:

Thus the difference that Young and Canagarajah see between code-switching and code-meshing is that the former arises from traditional English-only ideologies that require multilingual/multidialectal students to choose one code over another while privileging codes associated with dominant races and further alienating the codes of traditionally oppressed peoples. However, code-meshing promotes linguistic democracy, as students are not called to choose but are rather allowed to blend language and identities. (p. xxiv)

Perhaps engagement in linguistic inquiry is a way to bridge these two perspectives. Espinosa (2006) describes a dual language Grade 5 class where bilingual writing is incorporated into a genre study of memoir. “From our perspective, by making children’s lives, languages, and experiences an integral part of the curriculum, we were able to offer the children a learning experience that reflected and affirmed who they really are” (p. 143). In a similar way, Cummins and Early (2011) describe the collaborative work of teachers and students in multilingual Ontario schools. Through a Vygotskian (social constructivist) and Freirean (critical) lens, Cummins and Early describe the identity texts created collaboratively by students and teachers, texts reflecting and celebrating students’ identities, experience, and knowledge, often produced in multiple languages. Freire’s (1970) concept of teachers and students as co-teachers and co-learners is important in this work because “under current social and global conditions, education can lay claim to ‘effectiveness’ only when classrooms become sites for knowledge production and teachers and students together take on the roles of agents who are collaboratively producing this knowledge” (Cummins & Early, 2011, p. 162). Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development is relevant in diverse classrooms only when students’ identities are being affirmed and valued (Cummins & Early, 2011; Smagorinsky, 2013). Student-teacher collaboration works when there is mutual respect and a classroom atmosphere honoring diversity.

Recognizing the close relationship between language and identity is key. Christensen (2009) incorporates a unit on “Uncovering the Legacy of Language and Power” in her autobiographical account of teaching and curriculum text, *Teaching for Joy*

and Justice. In her introduction Christensen writes of the language students bring to school: “Their language is a history inherited from their parents, their grandparents, and their great-grandparents—a treasure of words and memories and the sounds of home, not a social fungus to be scraped from their mouths and papers” (2009, p. 2). The underlying issues in teaching writing in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms are complex and many. Language and learning are entwined in complex ways while language and culture are entwined with a student’s sense of identity and place in the world. Spoken language is a complex phenomenon—and written language involves additional layers of complexity. Pedagogical questions magnify the complexity of these issues.

2.3. Persistent Pedagogical Questions

Newkirk (2007) believes the assumptions underlying writing process pedagogy have not been acknowledged or adequately explored. He challenges both the anti-developmental stance and the bias against popular culture that have evolved, he believes, alongside writing process pedagogy in the elementary classroom. Additionally, Newkirk perceives a chasm between research and instruction in elementary-aged writing.

Pedagogy and scholarship in children’s writing often seem to operate in isolation from each other. Like two great ships maintaining radio silence as they pass in the night, the most imaginative researcher of children’s writing (Anne Dyson) and

the greatest innovators in literacy instruction (Lucy Calkins and her associates) are a case in point. (Newkirk, 2007, p. 542)

The work of Lucy Calkins, integral to many literacy programs in Nova Scotia, emphasizes the importance of students writing about their own lives (Calkins, 1986; 1991). Nevertheless, by favoring memoir in the writing workshop, Newkirk maintains we impose an adult genre on childhood and devalue the cultural resources students bring to the classroom. Newkirk (2007) believes literacy educators would benefit from greater attention to Dyson's research, which challenges educators to value cultural exchange in the classroom, by accepting, for example, "the invented genres that children create when multiple worlds are juxtaposed" (p. 547). Newkirk also argues that although critical theorists and social constructivists have situated all human endeavors as ideological and contestable, a critical perspective has been missing in writing process pedagogy (p. 542).

Anne Haas Dyson's (e.g. 1995; 2003) research highlights the importance of linking writing pedagogy to critical pedagogy. For decades her work has illustrated the importance of viewing young writers as "complex people, learning to construct more coherent and cohesive worlds" (1995, p. 35), not simply as learners constructing with words. Dyson's work emphasizes the transaction between individuals and contexts, and the imperative that we support young writers in developing flexibility in discourse use.

Boldt, Gilman, Kang, Olan and Olcese (2011) have researched the evolution of elementary writing pedagogy through the 88-year history of the journal, *Language Arts*, highlighting a persistent tension between what the authors refer to as a *language skills*

perspective and a *language use* perspective. Noting the work of James Britton and James Moffett in the 1970s and 80s, this article describes the genesis of a language use perspective, which views expressive language and expressive writing as key in developing facility with written language. Boldt et al. believe that as writing process pedagogy developed with the work of Donald Graves and Lucy Calkins, a restriction in what was considered “good” writing in the classroom also evolved. Fiction, fantasy, and authentic children’s voices were seemingly undervalued by process pedagogy. “Accepting diversity that expresses itself in children’s writing is not limited to dialect; it emerges also in topic and genre choice, ways of writing, motivations, and the ability to produce writing widely valued as good” (Boldt et al., 2011, p. 445).

Berninger, Garcia, and Abbott (2009) present an evidence-based perspective on the historical development of writing pedagogy in “Multiple Processes that Matter in Writing Instruction and Assessment.” Berninger et al. discuss the paradigm shifts they have observed in writing instruction from a focus on product to a focus on process to what they see as the current focus on process-plus-product. “However, this paradigm shift to the recognition that writing is both process and product did not generate a unified paradigm for writing instruction” (p. 17). The authors briefly describe the two divergent instructional approaches they see in practice today: one, a workshop model emphasizing authentic, meaningful writing activities; the other, an explicit, strategy-teaching model incorporating explanation, scaffolding, modeling, and feedback. Berninger et al. (2009) are clearly in favor of the second method, and support this belief with quantitative research findings.

In their book, *A Classroom Teacher's Guide to Struggling Writers* (2009), Curt Dudley-Marling and Patricia Paugh contest the quantitative, evidence-based assertion that writing workshop does not include explicit strategy instruction. They see effective writing instruction as a blend of the two approaches outlined by Berninger et al. (2009). But Dudley-Marling and Paugh (2009) add: “explicit instruction should not be equated with the mindless drill and practice of fragmented, decontextualized writing skills. Still, all students will require some measure of explicit teaching to help them learn the craft of writing effectively for particular audiences and purposes” (p. 4). In defining the needs of struggling writers, Dudley-Marling and Paugh reference quantitative research findings that show struggling writers have difficulty with specific writing processes, such as planning and revising (2009, p. 4). They also acknowledge the misconceptions and misunderstandings that have grown out of process pedagogy, such as teachers prescribing “the one and only” process, a linear process of brainstorm, draft, revise, edit, publish.

Dudley-Marling and Paugh (2009) offer a rhetorical view of writing instruction, emphasizing the importance of genre, and the understanding that writing involves a range of decisions closely connected to genre, audience, and purpose. They believe it is important for students to learn that writing decisions are connected to the writing context. What is yet missing from this rhetorical perspective is a focus on language variation and language diversity.

Pedagogical questions persist. How do new technologies impact children's writing processes as they develop? How can writing and language be approached in the classroom in ways that engage and value the expertise of students from diverse language

backgrounds and experiences? Do the language arts outcomes and curriculum reflect the complexities of writing while valuing the linguistic and cultural diversity of learners?

2.4. Curriculum and Educational Policy in Nova Scotia

According to Statistics Canada (2011), twenty percent of the current population of Canada uses a language other than French or English as a first language. This has been increasingly the trend in Nova Scotia as well. After moving to Nova Scotia in 1992, I was hired to work as an English as a second language (ESL) teacher. As an ESL circuit teacher I was expected to support the learning outcomes in *all* subject areas for *all* grade levels in *all* my circuit schools (eight schools in a 50% position) as I taught students of differing abilities and language competencies and helped them acquire not only conversational English, but academic English as well. My students spoke Albanian, Arabic, Armenian, Farsi, French, German, Hindi, Ilocano, Indonesian, Mandarin, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Sinhalese, Spanish, Tagalog, Tamil, Ukrainian, and Urdu. They also had varying literacy backgrounds. Some had strong literacy skills and academic knowledge in their first languages. Many did not. Cummins' (2000; 2007) distinction between conversational English and academic English became pivotal in my understanding of literacy development in a second language.

In Nova Scotia, provincial guidelines for English as a second language programming and services require schools to provide appropriate educational opportunities for English language learners so that they will acquire the English language

proficiency necessary to meet curriculum outcomes (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003). How this is implemented is largely left to individual school boards. The ESL guidelines document states: “The first language, prior knowledge, and culture of ESL students should be valued, respected, and wherever possible, used in educational programming” (p. 7). It has been my experience as an ESL teacher that this often does not happen in the regular classroom. I believe this is partly due to a lack of focus in the language arts curriculum on language itself.

Although its “Equity and Diversity” page calls for fostering an understanding of diversity in school, nowhere in the *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum* (Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, 1996) is the actual study of *language* diversity included. Likewise, although teaching practices “should recognize and address materials, resources and experiences which exhibit racial, ethnic, cultural, gender and socio-economic bias or which students, parents or teachers perceive to exhibit those biases” (p. 42), nowhere in the language arts curriculum is the problem of *linguistic* bias considered, even though the English language in Nova Scotia is diverse (Falk & Harry, 1999), and unspoken language assumptions and biases exist in many classrooms.

The Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum Guide: Grades 4-6 (1998) contains curriculum outcomes accompanied by suggestions for teaching, learning, and assessment with additional notes and vignettes. It also contains introductory information and useful appendices such as recording charts and observation guides. In the introductory section on English as a Second Language Students, the following instruction is given: “Teachers may need to make explicit the ways in which different

forms, styles, and registers of English are used for many different purposes” (p. 6). This type of explicit instruction on language variation is important for *all* students in the context of teaching writing, not just for second language students. Why is this—the relationship between linguistic register and writing purpose, genre, topic and audience—not a curriculum outcome for all students?

The following Key Stage Curriculum Outcome is given for Writing and Other Ways of Representing: “By the end of grade 6, students will be expected to...make language choices to enhance meaning and achieve interesting effects in imaginative writing and other ways of representing” (p. 19). Why are language choices only explicitly mentioned in the context of imaginative writing? It is my belief that writers must make appropriate and effective language choices in all genres and for all audiences and purposes, and these language choices are guided by a writer’s understanding of a particular rhetorical situation. Again, the English Language Arts Curriculum seems to display gaps when it comes to an explicit focus on language and the study of language diversity, particularly in the context of writing.

In 2004 each grade five student in Nova Scotia received a copy of the writing handbook, *Canadian Writers in Action Handbook* (Steinberg, 2003). In this handbook the topic of formal and informal language is briefly addressed in the context of genres such as reports, letters, emails and narrative dialogue (pp. 77-78). What is lacking, however, is a link to what students already know about formal and informal language based on their individual experiences of language use. An additional weakness of the *Handbook* is the description of formal language as incorporating “proper grammar” and

informal language as breaking “grammatical rules” (p. 77) instead of an acknowledgment of language variation and language diversity—as well as language change. (The “rules” change over time.) All students can be empowered by linguistic insights. Instead, students often experience alienation or failure in school because of a lack of linguistic knowledge on the part of their teachers, and because of a lack of emphasis on the study of language diversity in their curriculum and in educational policy.

In her most recent book, Lisa Delpit (2012) describes the way curricular trends have changed in North America, from a “whole language” climate that discouraged any focus on language skills to the current focus on skills such as phonemic awareness worksheets and drills. She writes:

I believe that we have to find and hold fast to a middle ground. Children need to participate in real literacy activities, but some who do not come from homes that reflect school culture, need to learn the skills necessary for literate communication. To be clear, I believe that the ideal teaching of “skills” should be intentional and explicit, as well as be: (1) situated within engaging activities; (2) embedded in real writing, reading, and communication or, if taught in isolation, put immediately into the context of real writing, reading, and communication; and (3) taught flexibly when needed, rather than as an unvarying curriculum. (Delpit, 2012, pp. 63-64)

When Dr. Delpit spoke at the 2014 Africentric Conference in Nova Scotia, she challenged us to value our students' inherent brilliance. Writing in diverse classrooms all too often becomes a negative experience for students (and teachers). All too often students from diverse language backgrounds are perceived as "at-risk" or "disadvantaged" instead of as inherently brilliant.

Tensions exist between the lived experience of students and the culture of school. Understanding writing as a dynamic, multi-dimensional inquiry process may offer students and their teachers a way to meaningfully explore these tensions while honoring lived experience of language.

3. Writer as Researcher: An Autoethnographic Methodology

Methodological categories in social science research have given way to multi-dimensional paradigms, theories, and contexts, creating a methodologically complex (and contested) landscape (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

Qualitative researchers, influenced by postmodern perspectives as well as by the “critical turn” (a turn toward social justice) and the “narrative or rhetorical turn” (a turn toward artful representation), are re-envisioning new ways of doing and representing research—and transforming the qualitative research landscape (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p. 1115).

Patti Lather (2006) characterizes this complicated moment in educational research history as a time when neo-positivism has called into question postmodern complexities and reintroduced the quest for objective truth. Lather endorses a ‘disjunctive affirmation’ (p. 52) of multiple ways of doing research and emphasizes the need to maneuver through an ever-changing research landscape grounded by an understanding of the “stuck places” such as objectivity, difference, and interpretation. She writes: “Facing the problems of doing research in this historical time, between the no longer and the not yet, the task is to produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently” (2006, p. 52).

This complex methodological landscape opens up new possibilities for doing educational research. One of these methodological possibilities is an autoethnographic approach (Chang, 2008; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2000), an approach which disrupts the binary of art and science, crosses disciplinary borders, and resonates with my view of written language as both process and product, both science

(intricate structure) and art (infinite creativity) (Domm, 2007). Autoethnography facilitates examining, from different disciplinary perspectives, the complexities of writing and teaching writing in diverse classrooms. This approach enables the layering of personal experience with scholarly literature, curricular documents, and teaching, learning, and writing artifacts in order to arrive at new educational understandings and interpretations.

This research study is situated within a particular rhetorical context. The research aims to draw attention to the complexities of writing and teaching writing in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms. Additionally it aims to contribute to a transformation of writing pedagogies by offering teachers ways to help students leverage linguistic understandings about language and language diversity to become engaged, effective, and confident writers. The audience for this research includes not only the educational research discourse community, but also teachers who are striving to teach writing critically, creatively and effectively in diverse classrooms. Given the research topic, purpose, and audience, and my location as teacher, writer, and researcher, autoethnography as method (and genre) is the research approach I believe best facilitates this investigation. As Heewon Chang (2008) writes of this approach: “Autoethnography is becoming a particularly useful and powerful tool for researchers and practitioners who deal with human relations in multicultural settings” (p. 51). Why? Because autoethnography acts as a window through which to view self and others, and, through writing, analysis and interpretation, leads to deeper self-awareness and new cultural and

educational understandings—with the potential for a transformation of practice. This point will be examined within, and illustrated by, the inquiry ahead.

3.1. Theoretical Framework: Four Conceptual Spheres

The theoretical framework for this autoethnographic investigation consists of four conceptual spheres—writing as inquiry process, writing as composing process, writing as rhetorical process, and writing as linguistic process—viewed through a lens of language inquiry and critical language awareness. This framework draws on understandings about language and writing from three distinct discourse communities: literacy education, composition and rhetoric, and linguistics. This theoretical framework enables a multi-disciplinary examination of writing and teaching writing in diverse contexts by (1) describing, analyzing and interpreting the experiences of one teacher/writer in relation to social and cultural contexts, and (2) employing writing itself as a research tool. Writing is both topic and method in this autoethnographic inquiry.

Three of the conceptual spheres investigated in this study—writing as a composing process (Britton; 1978; Calkins, 1986; Cooper & Odell, 1978; Elbow, 1973; Emig, 1971; Graves, 1975; Murray, 1968; Perl, 1990); writing as a rhetorical process (Bitzer, 1968; Dudley-Marling & Paugh, 2009; Kinneavy, 1971; Lunsford, et al., 2013; Paré, 2009); and writing as a linguistic process, with a focus on language variation and critical language awareness (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2014; Cummins, 2000; Delpit, 1995; Elbow, 2012; Espinosa, 2006; Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Goodman, D., 2006; Goodman, Y., 2003; Halliday, 1978; Paugh & Moran, 2013; Vygotsky 1978, 2012;

Wheeler & Swords, 2006; Young & Martinez, 2011)—draw on understandings about language and writing from three distinct academic discourse communities: literacy education, composition and rhetoric, and linguistics. The fourth conceptual sphere, writing as inquiry process (Emig, 1983; Greene, 1995; Luce-Kapler, 2004; Neilsen, 1998; Neilsen, et al., 2001; Richardson, 1994; 1997; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), draws on understandings from multiple discourse communities, and is both topic and method of this investigation.

3.2. Writing as Inquiry

What is inquiry? Bai (2005) describes inquiry as a living practice, a way of working with and through life's complexities and uncertainties.

In inquiry, we ask questions for the creative possibility of seeing things differently for more enriched, novel, vital, or deeper meanings. Inquiry is our quest for meaning or sense-making, value, purpose, perspective, and awareness. (Bai, 2005, p. 46)

Inquiry is the “inclination to openness and growth, to take risks, to create critical spaces” (Neilsen, 1998, p. 263). As an instrument of inquiry, writing is a tool for seeing differently. It enables us to probe thoughts, ideas, and experiences through tangible, written words, allowing us to pause, consider, and reflect on our experience. Writing as

inquiry empowers us to discover the “transformative possibilities” of language (Luce-Kapler, 2004) and of using written language to transform the world.

In articulating a problem-posing model of liberation education, Paolo Freire (1970) emphasized the importance of collaborative inquiry between teachers and students. “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 72). Whereas a banking model of education views students simply as objects ready to be “filled” with knowledge, Freire’s problem-posing model of education recognizes students (and teachers) as active subjects in the world, and written language a powerful tool to be used for creative and critical intervention in reality, a powerful tool for inquiry and dialogue.

In research on writing, I believe the practices of writing and teaching writing inform writing theory. Writing theory, as it deepens and evolves, re-informs practice. As a researcher, I have been interested in using writing as a method of inquiry to analyze and synthesize certain understandings of writing as a composing, rhetorical, linguistic, and inquiry process in order to apply linguistic inquiry to writing theory and practice across grades P-12. As a teacher, I have informally gathered anecdotal data to inform my teaching. In this research, I have used writing as a method of inquiry (Emig, 1983; Luce-Kapler, 2004; Neilsen, et al., 2001; Richardson, 1994; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) to draw upon my experiences in thirty years of teaching and writing to write myself into an understanding of the relationships among writing as a composing process, a rhetorical process, a linguistic process, and writing as an inquiry process.

Although we usually think about writing as a mode of “telling” about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of “knowing”—a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable. (Richardson, 1994, p. 516)

Richardson’s work affirms Janet Emig’s (1977) analysis that writing is a unique mode of learning, a way of “shuttling among past, present, and future” through the processes of analysis and synthesis, that is, breaking entities into their constituent parts and then recombining these parts, “often into fresh arrangements or amalgams” (p. 127). Richardson applies this understanding of writing as a way of knowing to social science research, arguing that writing itself can be an inquiry method. Since its first publication in 1994, Richardson’s article, “Writing: A Method of Inquiry,” has appeared in subsequent editions of the *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. In the third edition of the *Handbook*, Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) together offer a fresh revision of this article, a rendition in two voices. They report that in the decade since the original article was published, writing as a method of inquiry has been used in a variety of disciplines by qualitative researchers who have found it to be a “viable way in which to learn about themselves and their research topic” (p. 959). In her section of the 2005 version of this article, Richardson focuses on the research context. She explains how a poststructuralist

lens on language informs the research setting. “Poststructuralism links language, subjectivity, social organization, and power. The centerpiece is language. Language does not “reflect” social reality but rather produces meaning and creates social reality” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961).

Perhaps this productive, creative function of language is particularly true of *written* language. Emig (1977) delineates clear and unique correspondences between writing and learning, such as: (1) writing provides a record of the evolution of a thought process; (2) writing makes connections (semantic, syntactic, and rhetorical) more explicit and systematic; (3) writing provides the means for re-evaluation and review (p. 128). This function of language is the foundation for the Canadian concept of *inkshedding*, the term coined by Russell Hunt and James Reither in the 1980s (Sargent & Paraskevas, 2005, p. 4), a type of writing-to-learn, or a variation of Elbow’s (1973) freewriting concept. My own experience as doctoral student, writer, and instructor of a first-year university writing course confirms the power of inkshedding in making one’s thinking visible, in organizing thought, and in discovering new conceptual connections, meaning, and knowledge.

I believe we live in an evolving real world—a natural world and a social world—that exists independently of our knowledge of it, but, like Fairclough (2005), I believe that the social world is dependent on human action for its existence and, therefore, is socially constructed. Reality, in a state of constant transformation, is never static. Based on this ontological perspective, I view knowing as a process of both constructing and discovering meaning. As Sargent and Paraskevas (2005) claim: “Any knowledge that

we take seriously is simultaneously both things at once, discovered *and* created” (p. 177).

I believe writing-as-inquiry is a research tool that simultaneously constructs and discovers meaning.

My personal experiences with writing—as a student, teacher, and writer—frame, shape, and inform this research. My belief that writing is a tool to probe, organize, and extend thought, to make connections, to solve problems, and to make discoveries is explored in light of Richardson and St. Pierre’s (2005) reflections on language as a site of struggle, of competing discourses, of social organization and power. While I agree with Donald Murray (2005), who echoes Emig (1977) in his assertion that “Writers use language as a tool of exploration to see beyond what they know” (Murray, 2005, p. 396), Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) remind social science researchers (including me) to adjust our research lenses and “zoom out” to see a wider social context.

3.3. Critical Language Awareness

Since 1988, Lisa Delpit has voiced concerns about writing process pedagogy meeting the needs of all students, particularly students whose home languages do not match the language of school. Often these students are students of color and white students from diverse, working class neighborhoods. Much of what Delpit’s (1988; 1995; 2012) writing describes mirrors my own experience of language and culture in the classroom as a white child in a diverse, working class neighborhood in the heart of Detroit during the 1960s and 70s. The teacher who influenced me most in my elementary school years was a woman of African descent who had high expectations for all her grade

3 students. She regularly reminded us to “enunciate our words,” which was her way of teaching us to code-switch. I had to code switch from home to street, and from street to school because my Canadian mother also demanded I speak “correctly” at home.

Already familiar with the language of school, I learned to use a new dialect of English out on the streets with my friends. Many students must confront an unfamiliar variety of English (formal, academic, “standardized”) when they start school.

Delpit (1995) observes that many teachers in diverse classrooms are not acting effectively as linguistic and cultural “translators” for their students because they do not understand language variation, nor do they value language diversity or identify standardized English as the language of power. Joining voices with Delpit, an increasing number of educators have called for a renewed focus on critical language awareness in school (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2014; Cummins, 2000; Goodman, D., 2006; Goodman, Y., 2003; Janks, 2014; Sweetland, 2010; Wheeler & Swords, 2006). Pointing to the inequalities that persist in North American schooling, Delpit (2012) calls for a more critical lens on language and learning in the classroom, and challenges us to look at the assumptions underlying writing process pedagogy.

Newkirk (2007) agrees that a critical perspective has been missing in writing process pedagogy. Tracing the evolution of writing pedagogy over the past four decades, Newkirk challenges the privileging of particular genres (such as memoir) over other genres (such as popular culture fiction writing) and the anti-developmental bias that has evolved alongside writing process pedagogy. He, too, calls for a more critical lens on K-12 writing pedagogy. As Ball (2006) notes in her review of recent research literature on

teaching writing in culturally diverse K-12 classrooms, there is only a limited amount of research from a critical perspective. Most of the research has been done from a socio-cultural, sociolinguistic, or social-constructivist perspective (p. 295). Denzin and Lincoln (2005), in their overview of methodological “moments” in qualitative social science research history, include this comment about the critical turn in their own perspective: “We want a social science that is committed up front to issues of social justice, equity, nonviolence, peace, and universal human rights. We do not want a social science that says it can address these issues if it wants to. For us, that is no longer an option” (p. 13).

Like Cummins, who recognized that his earlier psycho-educational perspective did not account for the impact of sociopolitical context on the education of marginalized students (Cummins & Early, 2011, p. 12), I, too, now recognize that my constructivist stance on learning in the classroom needs a more critical perspective. Cummins and Early (2011) conceptualize a transformative pedagogy, one that combines a Vygotskian (social constructivist) lens with a Freirean (critical literacy) lens in viewing classroom diversity as a resource, not a deficit. That, too, is the intent of this methodology. Freire’s (1970) concept of teachers and students *together* creating a questioning, critical consciousness toward lived experience underpins my inquiry into language, identity, and the transformational power of written language. I have attempted to investigate writing pedagogies within the context of the concrete situation of students, their lived experience, and the power structures at work in the school and wider community. As Portelli, Shields, and Vibert (2007, p. 5) observe of daily educational practices and language,

“When left unexamined and intact, many of these practices conceal or reify societal inequities in education.”

By investigating the need for critical language awareness within writing pedagogies, the impact of context—the linguistic, sociocultural, educational, and even political context—on learning has become more apparent. Additionally, I have strived to identify and critically examine my own in relation to teaching, writing, language, and learning. For example, how do my multiple identities interact and impact this research? What does it mean to say that I grew up female and white in a diverse, working class neighborhood in the heart of Detroit during the 1960s and 70s; that I attended a magnet high school where 80% of my fellow students were African-American; that I taught English language arts in a federally funded program for at-risk students in a bilingual (Spanish/English) urban school in the United States in the 1980s; or that I was an ESL teacher in urban public schools in Canada in the 1990s? I grew up surrounded and enriched by ethnic, racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity in my urban neighborhood, nurtured by a family who also valued diversity. I have learned from diverse people in diverse places in profound and numerous ways, and therefore honor and value diversity of language, race, culture, religion, gender, and socioeconomic status. I also recognize—although not nearly enough—the sites of pain, struggle, and injustice brought on by racism, classism, gender bias, and ethnocentrism in North American society, and in the education system itself. Identity has played a key role in this inquiry.

3.4. An Autoethnographic Research Design

Autoethnography is an approach to research and the writing of research that aims to bring about change in the world and in the researcher. It is a way to apply methodological tools and research literature to the thick description and analysis of personal experience in order to better understand cultural experience (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). An autoethnographic research design foregrounds the understanding that teaching *is* research and that individual teachers have something of value to contribute to the ongoing scholarly conversations about pedagogy, curriculum, and the educational experience of students. An autoethnographic approach contextualizes the research and the researcher, recognizing that research is never objective. My axiological perspective views the researcher's values and experience as inseparable from the research process itself. This axiology aligns well with an autoethnographic approach.

Autoethnography as method disrupts binaries, blurs genres, and crosses disciplinary borders (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). It also enables the synthesis of conceptual frameworks for writing. By using writing as an inquiry method to investigate writing and writing pedagogy, a new layer of writing experience has been created, which has also contributed to the overall inquiry. Through a writing-as-inquiry lens I have observed my own writing processes and critically examined how these processes connect with memory, discovery, and learning. I have investigated how my practice of writing fits with the scholarly literature on writing as a composing, rhetorical, linguistic, and inquiry process.

3.4.1. Autoethnography as Method: Process and Product

A qualitative research method, autoethnography involves writing about and analyzing significant personal and interpersonal experiences (“auto”) that are situated in and produced by participation in a particular culture (“ethno”). The systematic recording and analysis (“graphy”) of experience is informed by research literature, field notes, cultural artifacts, and sometimes interviews (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Like writing itself, autoethnography is both process and product. As a process, it combines elements of autobiography and ethnography, weaving narrative details into cultural analysis and interpretation (Chang, 2008). As a product, it is an accessible text produced by artful writing (and assumes a writerly researcher) and by the discernment of patterns within and among scholarly literature, field notes, and artifacts. In this research, the act of writing about critical language and teaching experiences has facilitated an examination of these experiences from multiple perspectives. Writing as a method of inquiry has enabled more explicit connections between educational experience and the scholarly literature, leading to new interpretations and new understandings of writing pedagogies in diverse classrooms.

3.4.2. Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability

Autoethnographic inquiry acknowledges the fallibility of memory and the inability of language to precisely represent experience. Autoethnography also acknowledges the lens of researcher perspective—that the same event is often experienced, remembered, and articulated in different ways by different people. Because

autoethnography values narrative truth, truth generated by the impact a story has on those involved (the narrator, the audience, and the participants), the notions of reliability, validity and generalizability function differently in the context of autoethnographic research (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, para. 32) than they do in quantitative research or in research from a positivist perspective.

According to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011), the *reliability* of an autoethnographic research study depends upon the narrator's credibility and the credibility of the narrator's account. In the written accounts of my experiences in linguistically diverse classrooms as student and teacher, I have strived to demonstrate authenticity, honesty, and reflexivity. I have strived to produce a reliable text, in a credible voice.

The *validity* of an autoethnographic research study involves creating a powerful connection with readers. Does it impact the audience in meaningful ways? Does it create a resonance between writer and audience? Are the narrative accounts and analyses both engaging and useful for readers? Does the analysis offer a way to improve the lives of readers (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, para. 34)? Throughout this inquiry, I have aimed to connect with teachers who are striving to teach writing in meaningful, critical, and creative ways in diverse classrooms.

The *generalizability* of an autoethnographic study is determined by the reader: Has the autoethnographer made familiar for the reader unfamiliar people, lives, or cultural practices (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, para. 35)? In this inquiry, I have attempted to make familiar—for teachers and researchers—my own lived experiences in

linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms from the perspective of student and teacher. I have searched for patterns across contexts, from childhood to teaching to writing, with the hope of illuminating, as one voice among many, the complexities of language, writing, and teaching.

3.4.3. Revision and Reflexivity

Revision is an essential element of both writing and teaching. The “revisioning” process is a reflexive process as well. Murray (2005) makes the distinction between internal and external revision, defining internal revision as “everything writers do to discover and develop what they have to say” (p. 399). This is what also takes place in teaching. As teachers, we continue to discover and develop how to teach something well through creativity and through reflexive critical reflection. Reflexivity—critical reflection on the research process and on oneself as researcher—is connected in complex ways with revision. Ongoing questions I have asked during this inquiry: Does the research process or product need to be revised in some way? What assumptions am I operating with? Have I proceeded along the research process carefully? Have I considered all ethical concerns? Have I produced a relevant analysis and an engaging text? Has my analytic process been sufficiently recursive? These are a sample of the reflexive, “revisioning” questions I have considered throughout this autoethnographic study.

3.4.4. Initial Assumptions about Classroom Language and Writing

At the outset of this investigation, it was important for me to articulate my assumptions about classroom language diversity and writing practices. These assumptions, then, would be examined as part of this inquiry into writing and writing pedagogies in linguistically diverse classrooms.

In contrast to those who view language as a stumbling block or impediment to learning, I see language as a rich resource for exploration and learning in the classroom. All students come to school already language experts: they have acquired a complex linguistic system on their own—no matter what dialect or language they speak. As a result of observation and experience in many schools, I believe teachers and students do not know enough about language; they are not aware of their own intuitive language knowledge. Collaborative engagement in language inquiry might remedy this. I believe there are foundational understandings about language that all teachers should help develop in their students, e.g. language variation is natural, all languages and dialects are equally complex but in different ways, all languages change over time. I believe there is a need for greater communication between linguists and teachers. I am not alone in this belief. (See, for example, Denham & Lobeck, 2010; Elbow, 2012; Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Goodman, D., 2006; O’Neil, 2010; Sweetland, 2010.)

My observation has also been that students who speak languages other than English and dialects other than “standardized” English are often not valued in the classroom for the wealth of linguistic knowledge they actually have. Delpit (1995), Dyson (2003; 2015), Dyson and Smitherman (2009), and Cummins and Early (2011)

observe this as well. Recognizing language difference as a strength, not a deficit, is key in creating equitable classrooms and in developing sound writing pedagogy. Language inquiry benefits everyone in the classroom. Students can learn from each other about how various languages and dialects organize and articulate the world. Students already familiar with academic language, or the school code, can learn about other dialects and languages from students who speak them.

Many teachers would self-identity as confident, competent readers. Far fewer teachers would self-identity as confident, competent writers. This lack of confidence becomes problematic in teaching writing. (On the other hand, teachers who enjoy writing and feel confident and competent may not anticipate the roadblocks their students may face in becoming confident, competent writers.) I believe an understanding of language diversity leads to stronger writing. Students (and teachers) who become aware of using different linguistic registers (and many of us use different dialects) come to see that different genres call for different linguistic registers.

These beliefs (and assumptions) about language have grown from my own experiences with language diversity, such as growing up in a multilingual, multi-dialectal neighborhood, studying linguistics as an undergraduate, living in Kenya and India as an exchange student and a volunteer, and teaching students whose first languages have been as diverse as the languages of my students in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, who spoke more than twenty languages utilizing more than seven different writing systems (Domm, 2007). These initial beliefs and assumptions about language have been critically examined as part of this research inquiry.

3.4.5. Potential Pitfalls of an Autoethnographic Approach

Chang (2008) cautions inexperienced researchers to avoid certain pitfalls when undertaking an autoethnographic research study. The first pitfall Chang describes involves overly focusing on self instead of others in the study. The second pitfall, related to the first, is the overemphasis of personal narrative at the expense of cultural analysis and interpretation. Additional pitfalls include not attending to privacy issues in the representation of others, and the use of personal memory as exclusive data source. In this research study I have masked personal identities and places (except for my childhood city) and have carefully attended to privacy matters and related ethical issues. All names have been changed unless the name itself (first name only) is essential to the story as an example of language invention. Additionally, I have used curricular documents, scholarly literature, cultural artifacts, and teaching journals (in essence, field notes) to support and critically examine personal memory and experience. Finally, I have been mindful of using personal experience only as it serves usefully as a source of data for cultural analysis and interpretation.

3.5. Data Collection, Analysis, and Interpretation

Data collection and data analysis cannot be separated when writing is a method of inquiry. And positivist concepts, such as audit trails and data saturation, become absurd and then irrelevant in postmodern

qualitative inquiry in which writing is a field of play where anything can happen—and does. (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 971)

Although data collection and data analysis are intricately interwoven when a writing-as-inquiry lens is employed, a general plan for gathering particular kinds of data and looking for patterns in particular ways is helpful when using an autoethnographic approach. Chang (2008) suggests that having a data collection plan at the outset “enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of an autoethnographic study” (p. 67). Nevertheless, as Chang also reminds us, this original plan will likely be modified in a recursive and dynamic research process. What follows first is an overview of my initial plan for data management—for the gathering, choosing, analyzing, interpretation, and representation of the research data. Next is a description of how the initial plan changed in the course of this inquiry, in multiple and unpredictable ways.

3.5.1. The Initial Plan

Following my initial plan, the data has been gathered from scholarly literature, from curricular documents, from teaching artifacts, and from personal retrospection and introspection. This collection of data includes thick description of contexts, curriculum, and teaching choices through the eyes of an individual teacher. Specifically, the data in this autoethnographic study includes the following:

- reading and rereading of scholarly literature related to (1) the composing process, (2) a rhetorical framework for teaching/learning writing, and (3) linguistic inquiry (critical language awareness/language diversity study) in order to arrive at salient themes and issues

- an autobiographical timeline (significant events as teacher, writer, and learner)

- narrative accounts of significant events/experiences in my life as a teacher, writer, and student in multiple and diverse contexts as they relate to writing pedagogy and linguistic inquiry

- critical reflection on these narrative accounts to discover themes, patterns and intersections

- descriptive, analytic memos related to the reading and review of curricular and policy documents, teaching artifacts, and writing artifacts

Layering reflective narrative accounts with scholarly research, I have searched to discover connections and patterns among theories about writing and language from different academic disciplines—literacy education, composition and rhetoric, and sociolinguistics. I have listened to the voices of other teachers who have written about

what they have learned from their students and from writing with their students (for example, Atwell, 1998; Christensen, 2009; Kittle, 2008; Lamott, 1994; Luce-Kapler, 2008; Neilsen, 1998; among others), in order to more deeply and critically examine my own experiences with teaching, writing, and language. In analyzing the data, I have looked for ways to connect, link, and/or synthesize a rhetorical framework for writing, a composing process framework for writing, and a language inquiry stance towards language diversity. I believe a synthesis of these conceptual frameworks is possible in a way that might contribute to a transformation of writing pedagogies in diverse classrooms.

Analysis of the data has involved the re-understanding and re-framing of experience in light of the current research literature. It has also involved re-conceptualizing pedagogical concepts in light of critical reflection on my practice. Analysis and interpretation have evolved as data patterns and intersections became more evident. Threaded in and through the interpretation is artful writing—writing towards a deeper understanding of myself as a teacher, and, more importantly, towards a deeper understanding of the complexities of writing and teaching and learning writing in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms.

3.5.2. How the Plan Evolved

Given the dynamic nature of an autoethnographic approach and the element of discovery in writing as inquiry, the initial data collection and analysis plan evolved in unpredictable ways during the research process itself. The scholarly literature pulled me

into a world of conceptualization: the process took a deeply analytic turn, one that culminated in a new conceptual framework for understanding writing processes and pedagogies. Through the writing-as-inquiry process I have reached new understandings of myself as teacher and the culture of teaching. At the same time I have produced a research product that does not fit neatly into a familiar genre.

This research project has also become an inquiry into autoethnography itself. I have learned that when the inquiry process is fluid and dynamic, discoveries are made. As Chang (2008) suggests, autoethnography as research method is complex and multiple. Now through the eyes of experience I can say that an autoethnographic methodology best reflects my values and location as researcher and teacher, best represents research for a complex audience of educational practitioners and researchers, and best fits the intent of this research to contribute to a transformation in P-12 writing pedagogy, a transformation that will honor students' lived language experiences and value linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom.

PART TWO

WRITING AS: THREE PERSPECTIVES ON THE WRITING PROCESS

Messiah

My view of Detroit expanded the first time I took the Joy Road bus downtown with my two best friends. We called ourselves the Mod Squad 'cause we patrolled the alleys—feeling pretty big and bad for ten year olds—solving alley crimes. We also happened to be the same color combination as the TV show. Our lawn-mowing, rummage-selling money burned a hole in our pockets till we took an elevator up to the top of the Gas Building downtown. We ordered way-too expensive Cokes in a swanky restaurant called “Top of the Flame.” The bartender said we should take a table by the window after coolly askin’ us—three ragtag tomboys sittin’ at the bar—if we were twenty-one. When our Cokes arrived, we said, Man, what a rip off, lookin’ at all those ice cubes. But the fancy ladies’ bathroom with those floor-to-ceiling windows made up for it. We got dizzy looking down at ant-sized people and cars, and we had fun finding our neighborhood off in the distance. All we had to do was look for the Ambassador Bridge.

My family moved to Detroit 'cause of a church on West Grand Boulevard. Messiah Church is still there on the corner, even though the Tip Top Bakery across the street burned down. As a little kid I used to love the smell of fresh-baked bread when I'd stand behind my father greeting folks out on the church porch after the service. I could breathe in that smell all day long.

When my family first arrived from Nova Scotia, the sidewalk church sign read “Messiah Lutheran Church.” But some time later that sign was redesigned and the word “Lutheran” disappeared. You didn't have to be Lutheran to follow Jesus, everybody

said. Even the cornerstone had only the letters M-E-S-S-I-A-S (Messiah in German) printed in the rock.

My mother always sang in Messiah's choir. I usually heard her vibrato-rich voice at home when she made the beds and dusted. As I grew older, I realized she could have done things with that opera star voice. Instead, she used it to power on the housework and to sing in Messiah's choir.

I sat in the choir loft only once in my childhood—the Sunday I played the cymbals for a Psalm 150 choir anthem. I even got to use the secret passageway through the organ pipes. After opening the hidden door in the choir loft wall, I finally understood how my mother could keep an eye on us kids no matter where we sat in church. And if we sat in the balcony—where we were never supposed to sit—she would freeze us into place with her piercing eyes. (Sometimes, if we weren't lookin' her way, my father would preach on down the aisle and stop right next to where we were sittin' and foolin' around.)

From the choir loft I had a whole new perspective on the sanctuary and those stained glass windows. I loved the green-brown-gold patterns lit up by the morning sun. And there was Jesus, on the middle pane of stained glass, carrying a lamb in his strong brown arms. I would stare and stare at him.

My childhood was graced with people who kept their eyes on Jesus. Ms. Ella, my first Sunday school teacher, taught the lesson I learned at home: Jesus was real and loved us all the same no matter what color we happened to be. Everybody learned things from Ms. Ella. She took my brother fishing on Belle Isle and taught me how to fry

*chicken the right way while her poodle Pierre watched from his bed on her kitchen floor.
And Ms. Ella wrote poetry about Jesus, Dr. King, and JFK.*

*When we went to Ms. Ella's home on 25th Street for Thanksgiving dinner, the
aroma of homemade rolls, turkey and sweet potato pie almost turned us inside out with
hunger before we even opened the door. Photos of her Sunday school children jazzed up
every wall. We have always been her children—Black, White, Mexican, Palestinian,
Jewish, Pakistani, First Nations, Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, Japanese...*

*One hot summer morning, standing up in front of a sea of Vacation Bible School
kids, Ms. Ella taught us a new song in her deep, low voice:*

I will not be afraid,

I will not be afraid,

I will look upward and travel onward,

And not be afraid.

*This is the song I should've been singing on my way to elementary school. But I
was humming a different tune instead.*

*—Excerpted from a narrative nonfiction work in progress, and developed
from "In the Shadow of the Ambassador Bridge," 2nd Place Creative
Nonfiction Entry in the Detroit 300 Writing Competition, 2001, Sponsored
by Detroit Women Writers*

4. Writing as Linguistic Process: Lessons from my Childhood

25th Street

For sixth grade math we had a jazzy student teacher named Mr. Mosley. We could tell he was a new kind of teacher—real upbeat. We couldn't intimidate him at all, even if he was the new person at school. He was always cool, calm, and collected.

Mr. Mosley recognized our 1960s street smarts. He knew we were capable—just needed more exposure to the world outside our neighborhood. Although the bridge to Canada was only two blocks away, he knew a lot of us had never been to Windsor. A lot of us had never even been to the east side, even though our families had come from far away places like Mexico and Syria.

In the winter of 1970 Mr. Mosley took a group of us to the Free Press Learn-to-Ski School at Mount Brighton. Definitely outside the neighborhood. He even took us there on school nights. Those drives to Mount Brighton were a blast, packed into the back seat of Mr. Mosley's sports car with Lonnie and Abraham, two handsome, quiet boys from class.

Maybe it fulfilled a requirement for Mr. Mosley's teacher preparation program—Wayne State University was a progressive kind of place. Maybe he designed it as a project to broaden our horizons, to build cross-cultural bridges between different kinds

of kids in class. Or maybe he just wanted to take us skiing. No matter what, it was a revolutionary idea.

Abraham—the first Abraham I ever met in real life—had a first name I thought carried huge responsibility and a fancy Spanish last name. Abraham’s family moved from Mexico. He was bilingual. My family moved from Nova Scotia, so I grew up speaking English different ways. (Years later I learned I was bi-dialectal.) And although I knew there had to be some kind of colorful roots somewhere in my family history, I did, unfortunately, look white. I wished I looked Latino like Abraham, or African-American like Lonnie and Mr. Mosley. In my neighborhood white was boring and definitely not tough or cool.

We were a diverse group, but I bet Mr. Mosley didn’t realize that Lonnie and I already knew each other from our church on West Grand Boulevard where we went to Sunday school together. That’s where we learned about the Abraham in Genesis, the man who heard God’s voice calling him to leave his homeland and go to a new place.

*Abraham left his homeland, too, like lots of kids in our neighborhood. Even our public library got a new bilingual sign: *La Biblioteca de la Gente*. But our elementary school wasn’t a bilingual school yet when we were there, so the sign over the main entrance was still in English only.*

The front of our school faced 25th Street. A few blocks in one direction the Cadillac plant churned out new cars. A few blocks in the other direction the bridge shot over the river dividing Detroit and Windsor. The Canadian customs officials always oohed and aahed over my mother when we crossed the bridge because she was a

Canadian from Nova Scotia. They treated her like a celebrity when my father flashed her US alien registration card out the window.

Seven years after elementary school, after my freshman year in college, I came home to work as a summer recreation leader for the Detroit Recreation Department. The Rec. Department gave me a plastic badge and assigned me to the playground at my old elementary school. I was kind of nervous about this assignment. The swings were gone. The slide was broken. The deserted playground, surrounded by a chain link fence, just lay there like a sea of gray dirt and broken glass. But the kids helped me settle in.

There was this kid on the playground everybody called Spaghetti Eddie. He only stood four foot ten but he had a lot of weight to throw around. For a ten-year-old, Eddie had a dignified maturity. He didn't talk too much in Spanish or in English, but he was good at smashing people up against fences and brick walls. Even the fifteen-year-olds didn't get him too riled up. I didn't overlook this fact when I needed to earn a little respect myself, especially during the first few weeks on the job without a partner, when the kids knew me only as the "recreation lady" and had to put me through all the well-known endurance tests developed in public school. I guess I had to prove I was really from the neighborhood.

Another kid on the playground also commanded a lot of respect. It was still my first week on the job and kids were showing up to check me out, more and more of them every day. I set up the recreation table by the fence so people walking by on the sidewalk would notice. Our first "activity" was checkers, and I soon discovered that most of the kids could beat me—even the youngest ones.

“Hey lady, whadya doin’ here?”

I looked up from my checker game with a girl they called Betty White (her name wasn’t White, but she was a white girl) to see a cloud of dust coming straight for the table. A real small boy on a real big ten-speed skidded to a stop two inches from the table.

“Hey,” I said, relieved he had good brakes.

“Whadya doin’?” he demanded again, smacking his Juicy Fruit gum.

“Playin’ checkers. Know how to play?” By this time I was sure everybody on the street knew how to play checkers—probably ten different ways.

“Checkers? That’s dumb. But, sure, I can play.”

His deep black eyes stared at me hard.

“But lady, whadya doin’ here?”

I told him I worked for the rec department and was going to be on the playground all summer, making teams, playing games, doing art, and taking trips. Everybody wanted to know about the trips.

The boy on the giant ten-speed told me about the recreation lady last year who made puppets and quit in the middle of the summer.

“Puppets are real dumb,” he added.

“What’s your name?” I thought I’d change the subject.

“Manual,” he said the Spanish way, flashing a gigantic smile when everybody explained how they called him Little Man.

It didn't take me long to discover that even though he was the smallest sixth grader at school, everybody looked up to Little Man. Nobody pushed him around. Like Spaghetti Eddie, there was something special about this kid. Even the older guys on the block would shoot the breeze with Little Man.

One real hot day Little Man called out from across the street where the older guys were lifting weights in Spaghetti Eddie's front yard.

"Hey lady, I'm goin' on that trip next week." He shot his famous smile.

"That's great," I said, glad he was coming, but sure he would have a few things to say when he saw the run-down bus from the Y—the only thing I could find to take us to the beach.

It wasn't Mr. Mosley's sports car, that's for sure.

4.1. Our Lived Experience of Language

In education we all too often view language one-dimensionally, as a prescribed tool for learning. Language *is* a tool for learning; yet, it is also multi-dimensional, with layers of complexity far greater than we as educators generally acknowledge. It is important to ask questions about language, to inquire into language. How does language develop in a young child? How does language work? How does it function in different contexts and vary between contexts? How does it change over time? How is it connected to identity, culture, and power?

I believe the complexities of language can best be viewed in context, by striving to understand language in experience, our experience of language. Narrative writing facilitates such an exploration of language experience. While expository writing might adequately convey a multi-dimensional view of language, narrative writing can more effectively convey the richly textured complexities of language experience, the interlacement of language with identity, race, class, culture, and context.

Keith Gilyard's *Voices of the Self: A Study of Language Competence* (1991) illustrates beautifully the power of personal narrative to convey language experience. Through the juxtaposition of personal narrative and analysis, Gilyard explores his own sociolinguistic language development, asking questions such as how did he, a native Black English speaker in an urban public school context, acquire standardized English language skills? What internal and external forces were at play in shaping his linguistic insights and behavior during his growing up years? In his exploration of language experience, Gilyard employs a transactional perspective, a perspective that acknowledges the ongoing transactions between humans and their particular social contexts.

Gilyard's work (1991) has prompted me to look more deeply into my own racial, cultural, and linguistic identity from a transactional perspective. On the one hand, my complex genetic code has produced brown eyes, skin that looks white, and dark hair that kinks up in humidity. On the other hand, the context I grew up in has shaped me profoundly; I often cannot find the precise words to effectively describe it. Narrative writing helps me do this. The narrative mode helps me analyze personal experience in

order to reach new understandings, searching for meaning that will resonate, too, with someone else.

Bruner (1986) writes that a good story (narrative mode) and a well-formed argument (paradigmatic mode) are two ways of knowing, two modes of thinking, two functions of language. The power of narrative, he believes, resides in the construction of two landscapes at once: a landscape of actions and a landscape of consciousness in the probing of human intentions (p. 14). The narrative mode is enabled through the unique design features of language, its organization on different levels, its enacting of selection and combination in our linguistic choices.

In his compact book about language for young people, David Crystal (2010) writes that language “is the most complex thing human beings ever learn” (p. 233). He emphasizes that language “allows us to talk about our experience of the world in a way that no other means of communication can” (p. 237). We can paint or dance or compose music as creative expressions of our experiences in the world, but only spoken and written language enables us to describe, name, and discuss with others these expressions of our experience. Britton (1970) also articulates the key role language plays in how we represent—and organize our representations of—experience, how we make sense of the world. Language, he writes, “is a highly organized, systematic means of representing experience, and as such it assists us to organize all other ways of representing” (Britton, 1970, p. 21).

4.2. A Transactional/Structural/Functional View of Language

Language is complex. I now appreciate more fully why Linguistics 101 was overwhelming for me in 1978. Hoping to make sense of childhood language experiences, I chose linguistics as my undergraduate major. I hoped to better understand why I spoke different ways in different situations. And how did my experience of language relate to the linguistic experience of others? As a bewildered undergraduate, with metalinguistic capabilities yet undeveloped, I was immediately confronted with the big question, what is language? Struggling to understand the differences between linguistic competence and linguistic performance, between prescriptive grammar and descriptive grammar—and where transformational grammar fit in, I thought I would never “get a handle on this stuff.” To use language to think about language tied my brain in knots.

Linguists draw a distinction between linguistic competence (intuitive, mainly unconscious knowledge of a language) and linguistic performance (how this knowledge is used). Fromkin and Rodman (1993) articulate the complex kinds of linguistic knowledge, or competence, speakers of a language acquire as very young children: knowledge of the sound system and how these sounds work together (the phonological system), knowledge of the meaning signified by particular groups of sounds (morphological and semantic systems), knowledge of how words are combined in particular ways to form phrases and sentences (the syntactic system), and knowledge of how and when to use particular phrases and sentences in particular situations (the pragmatic system). Most of this linguistic knowledge is an unconscious kind of

knowledge, intuitive. However, written language requires the application of a more conscious kind of knowledge.

The relationship between spoken and written language is complex and important: both similarities and differences exist in development, function, and form. Spoken language is acquired. Written language is learned. Spoken language (except for sign language) is auditory and exchanged in the present moment. Written language is visual and exchanged across time and space. Writing requires a “double abstraction” (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 192), an abstraction from both the sound of speech and from the originator of the message. Vygotsky described spoken language as spontaneous, involuntary, and “nonconscious”; he described written language as abstract, voluntary, and conscious (2012, p. 194).

Janks (2014) believes speech and writing are best conceptualized as opposite ends of a continuum, not as separate categories. Many genres combine attributes of both spoken and written language, especially in the present era of quickly evolving digital technologies. An example is texting, which uses informal conversational language in a written mode.

Biber and Vasquez (2008) also challenge the simple dichotomy of speech versus writing by looking at patterns of register variation in large, multidimensional studies of these two linguistic modes. Because of the wide range of spoken and written registers (Biber and Vasquez use the term *register* to denote a “language variety that is defined by situational characteristics and communicative purposes” (p. 536)), their analysis has found few “absolute” linguistic differences, except when focused on what Biber and

Vasquez call stereotypical speech and stereotypical writing, that is, conversational spoken language versus informational written text. Biber and Vasquez do, however, find that speaking and writing “differ considerably in their linguistic potential” (p. 546). Whereas speaking is a linguistic act constrained by time, writing allows for additional time to manipulate linguistic features of the text.

The patterns of register variation Biber and Vasquez (2008) detect between informal, conversational spoken language, and formal, academic written language resonate well with Cummins’ (2000) articulation of the differences—which have evolved historically—between conversational (spoken) and academic (written) English, an important distinction for teachers of students acquiring English as an additional language, as well as for first language writers whose spoken language does not match the academic language required in academic genres in school.

Traditionally, language is presented in school as a rule-based, fixed entity. Its use is prescribed. School most often operates on a prescriptive approach to language. Linguists take a descriptive approach to language; they are interested in understanding and describing both language competence and language performance, how language is actually used by real people in real contexts. When I was an undergraduate studying linguistics, the new linguistic theory at the time, generative/transformational grammar, proposed a description of, and explanation for, the deep structures of language. I found this theory to be an overly abstract way to view language, one that did not seem to take into account the real ways in which language was used.

In contrast to a generative/transformational grammar theory, linguist Roman Jakobson (1990) paved the way for a more structural/functional approach to linguistics, one that recognized the inseparability of sound and meaning, signifier and signified. His model of the speech event connected the elements of the event—addresser, addressee, message, contact, and code—to corresponding functions of language: emotive, conative, referential, poetic, phatic, and metalingual.

In his general theory of language, Jakobson captured both the simplicity and the complexity of language. His theory drew our attention to the two-fold character of the linguistic sign: sound and meaning. It demonstrated the imperative of the unity of sound and meaning, of language structure and language function, of sign system and communication tool. In the introduction to their edited collection of Jakobson's writings (Jakobson, 1990), Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burston articulate the Jakobsonian view: "Language is not an abstract object but is constituted through and related to the act of communication" (p. 14). The structure of language as sign system enables its multifunctionality as communication tool.

I had the privilege of learning from one of the editors, Linda R. Waugh, when she was my phonology and morphology professor at Cornell University in 1979. At that time, Professor Waugh was working with Jakobson on their first edition of *The Sound Shape of Language* (Jakobson & Waugh, 3rd Ed. 2002), a book in which they focused on the multifunctionality of the speech sound. Professor Waugh demonstrated to me, a bewildered undergraduate, that phonology and morphology made sense, by connecting linguistic theory (from a Jakobsonian perspective) to social function and context, to real-

life language, using frequent examples from children's verbal art and language acquisition, poetry, advertising, and everyday conversation. This structural/functional perspective was refreshingly authentic, in contrast to the abstract quality of the transformational/generative grammar theory I was learning in my other linguistics courses. I now believe this structural/functional view of language is a useful way to view language—in the context of this inquiry and in education as a whole.

Also working from a functional perspective, M.A.K. Halliday (1978) has constructed an interpretation of language that forefronts the interconnectedness of language and social context. His perspective embraces and explains language variation, diversity within a language (dialects and registers) and diversity among languages, emphasizing how language “*actively symbolizes* the social system, representing metaphorically in its patterns of variation the variation that characterizes human cultures” (1978, p. 3). Language and context are intertwined and always transactional.

Louise Rosenblatt (1988) also describes language as a transactional process, pointing out that although language is socially generated, a shared communication system, it is also an individual transaction with a particular context. From this transactional perspective, Rosenblatt views language as both an individual and a social process. Rosenblatt's description of the writing transaction illustrates this well:

Writing, we know, is always an event in time, occurring at a particular moment in the writer's biography, in particular circumstances, under particular pressures, external as well as internal. In short, the writer is

always transacting with a personal, social and cultural environment. (We shall see that the writer transacts also with the very text being produced.) Thus the writing process must be seen as always embodying both personal and social, or individual and environmental, factors. (Rosenblatt, 1988, p. 11)

Rosenblatt's transactional theory draws on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978, 2012), who investigated the complex interactions between human development and social context by closely observing the language development of young children. Resonant with Jakobson's theory of language, Vygotsky viewed language as a complex sign system and tool for communication and thought, a process both highly individual *and* highly social. Vygotsky conceptualized a child's development as a "complex dialectal process" between changing social connections and biological development, an "interlacement" of an individual and her social environment (1978, p. 121). He also acknowledged that the environment itself was historically and culturally shifting and would both impact the developing individual and eventually be changed by that individual.

4.3. Language Diversity and Learning

Britton (1970) has influenced our understanding of the role of language in learning, by emphasizing the importance of expressive, informal language in the learning process, in intellectual development. According to Britton, the organizational properties of language itself help us organize and consolidate our representations of experience.

These representations enable us to see beyond the present moment, to detect patterns of experience, make predictions about future experience. Britton's educational learning theories are influenced by Halliday's functional linguistics perspective and Vygotsky's sociocultural view (Durst, 2015).

Smagorinsky (2013) also recognizes the particular relevance of Vygotskian thought for today's language arts teachers. Vygotsky's concept of language as both sign and tool, he believes, is a significant, useful concept for language learning in schools today. According to Smagorinsky (2013), it is essential for teachers to understand that language "can both represent an idea *and* contribute to the formation of an idea, and when speech is coordinated and orchestrated to produce a text, the sign function of its form may then serve as a tool for yet new thinking by either the speaker or others" (p. 194).

Smagorinsky (2013) explores the relevance of Vygotskian thought for diverse classrooms, emphasizing the importance of attending to the social context for learning in all its complexity. "Vygotsky's emphasis on the social climate of learning strikes me as especially critical for teachers to understand, particularly for those students whose home cultural practices are out of sync with the established routines of school" (p. 201). Those home cultural practices include language.

Halliday (1978), like Vygotsky, emphasizes the central role of language in the development of the child as a social being. Halliday's functional, sociocultural framework understands language in the developing child as a means to make sense of the world around her. In this view, language develops in an individual through "an ongoing

exchange of meanings with significant others” (p. 1). Language, then, is both an element of culture and an encoder of culture.

A social reality (or a ‘culture’) is itself an edifice of meanings—a semiotic construct. In this perspective, language is one of the semiotic systems that constitute a culture; one that is distinctive in that it also serves as an encoding system for many (though not all) of the others. (Halliday, 1978, p. 2)

To view language from this perspective means we recognize the linguistic expertise all children bring with them to school (Delpit, 1995; Dyson, 2015; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Heath, 1983). We ask questions such as what function has language already played in the life of a child? We consider the functions written language will play in the life of a child once she enters school. Halliday (1978) emphasizes the need for literacy learning to make sense to a child by its connections with prior language experiences. Otherwise, he cautions, learning to read and write will become a “meaningless exercise,” unrelated to familiar language use. The implication is that literacy learning must be grounded in the real language experience of students, the spoken language expertise they have already developed before they enter school.

As an intern teacher, I was assigned a three-month substitute position in a Grade 3 classroom. The “lowest” reading group (designated by the regular classroom teacher) contained disengaged boys of color who were not at all motivated to use the basal reader.

I was learning about the Language Experience Approach in my teacher preparation courses, so I decided to try it, to use their own real-life language (mainly a non-standardized form of English), recorded on chart paper, to create reading material. It worked well. Their surprise at seeing their own words written on chart paper—validated, and their sudden ability to actually read the words, has stayed with me all these years. Rickford (1997) has documented the success of dialect readers with African American students, another example of honoring and valuing our students' lived experience of language.

Dyson and Smitherman (2009) also affirm the imperative of children finding their way into writing through language that is their own, and of teachers valuing the everyday voices and language practices children bring with them to school. Dyson and Smitherman argue for “sociolinguistic flexibility,” for helping students listen to diverse voices (including their own) and to learn about language diversity early on. Dyson and Smitherman convey the disconnect between teacher and student in many classrooms because of an official school view of language: “the ruling conception of language is that there is a fixed, as opposed to a situated, proper way of speaking and writing” (p. 989).

Dyson (2015) challenges the persistent deficit discourse in language arts education, calling on educators to disrupt the false assumptions made about children of color and children from homes of limited economic means. When these assumptions go unchallenged, the linguistic strengths and resources of students labeled “at-risk” are erased.

If we are not to erase children's language strengths, we must look through a lens other than one grounded in official requirements; we must pay attention to children's use of language to participate in relations with others—to their storytelling, persuading, arguing, playing, and teasing. If we do not, we may severely limit our ability to help children build new capacities on the foundation of children's everyday practices. (Dyson, 2015, p. 202)

As educators, we often do operate on false assumptions about language, particularly in multilingual, multidialectal classrooms (Delpit, 1995; Dyson, 2015; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Gilyard, 1991; Goodman, D., 2006; Sweetland, 2010). In an article published in *Language Arts*, Debra Goodman (2006) describes her graduate education course for teachers, *Language, Culture, and Identity: Issues for Teachers and Children*, a course designed to help teachers understand language from a sociolinguistic perspective, explaining why such a perspective is important. "As teachers gain knowledge of language diversity and pedagogy, teachers and students can become linguists together, investigating language functions and forms, exploring linguistic diversity, and addressing linguistic stereotypes" (pp. 155-156). A sociolinguistic perspective on language has direct implications for writing instruction. As students and teachers explore their own language use in different contexts, they discover the concept of language variation, of

speaking and writing in different “keys.” An understanding of language variation is essential to effective writing across genre, audience, and purpose.

Delpit (1988) exposed an ongoing tension in writing pedagogy. On the one hand, students have a right to their own language, and all languages and language variations have the right to be honored in the classroom; on the other hand, we, as educators, have a responsibility to prepare students for the real world by equipping them with all the tools they will need to interact in the world effectively through writing. This means providing them with opportunities to develop linguistic proficiency in formal, standardized English while conveying the understanding that this form of English is merely one variation, albeit a powerful variation, of English. In so doing, we enable explicit conversations about issues of power and privilege with our students (Portelli, Shields, & Vibert, 2007), issues related to language and writing.

Linguistic diversity in the classroom includes diversity *between* languages and diversity *within* languages. In *We Do Language: English Language Variation in the Secondary English Classroom* (2014), Charity Hudley and Mallinson (2014) explore language variation in the context of teaching secondary English in the United States. Their aim is to “move the conversation from the question of *why* consider language variation to *how* to effectively do so, making linguistic information and language awareness tangible and relevant to the classroom” (p. 5). The authors identify three linguistic concepts they see as vital for students and teachers to grasp in building linguistic awareness:

- (1) communication happens in social contexts (p. 12)

(2) language changes over time (p. 21)

(3) language difference does not mean language deficit (p. 34)

While examining primarily spoken language and literature (not writing instruction), this book includes valuable and practical sociolinguistic insights for teachers in diverse classrooms, ways to develop metalinguistic awareness.

4.4. Metalinguistic Awareness

Bruner (1996) believes those of us most constrained by the limits of language are those of us who are least aware of the very language we use. He writes: “But as the greatest linguist of our century, Roman Jakobson, long ago noted, the *metalinguistic* gift, the capacity to ‘turn around’ on our language to examine and transcend its limits, is within everybody’s reach” (Bruner, 1996, p. 19). Bruner argues that cultivating linguistic awareness must be a function of pedagogy.

A growing number of scholars (for example, Denham & Lobeck, 2010; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Freeman & Freeman, 2004; D. Goodman, 2006; Y. Goodman, 2003; Hawkins, 1987; Sweetland, 2010; Traugott & Pratt, 1980; Wheeler & Swords, 2006) have also emphasized the need for greater metalinguistic awareness and the importance of language study for teachers and students together, offering a view of language that is not prescriptive, but descriptive, a view that encourages language exploration and investigation. They call specifically for greater collaboration between linguistics (particularly sociolinguistics) and education, between linguists and teachers in schools.

Sweetland's (2010) sociolinguistic work with elementary teachers shows that teacher attitudes toward language difference are crucial, and that linguistic prejudice can be changed through the lived experience of teaching about sociolinguistic diversity in the classroom.

Freeman and Freeman (2004) demonstrate the relevance of linguistic knowledge for teachers in the teaching of all areas of language arts, including writing. Wheeler and Swords (2006) provide practical ways to explore and honor language variation by using a code-switching approach (switching across a range of informal to formal language) instead of a "correctionist" approach in the language arts classroom, particularly in the context of writing. Yetta Goodman (2003) calls for the study of language within the language arts curriculum as an inquiry rooted in the natural curiosity learners have about new language encountered in new contexts (p. 3). Goodman also emphasizes the importance of raising our intuitive language understandings to a more conscious level.

Peter Elbow (2012) echoes this notion in *Vernacular Eloquence: What Speech Can Bring to Writing*. Elbow argues for "speaking onto the page," for applying to our writing process the intuitive linguistic knowledge we use when we speak. Elbow cautions: "But in order to use the tacit knowledge in our mouths and ears for good writing, we will need to engage in plenty of conscious reflection and thinking" (p. 6). Elbow explores specific ways in which spoken language can aid in the writing process. He advocates "talking onto the page" in the early stages of writing and reading aloud during later stages, in order to use the sound of spoken language to get beyond the stuck places writers often encounter as they write, particularly in academic genres.

However, what happens when our intuitive linguistic knowledge resides in a language other than the one we are writing in? In the context of second language learning, Cummins (2000) articulates the fundamental differences between conversational English and academic English, a pivotal understanding not only for second language students and their teachers, but for first language students struggling with (or resistant to) a new linguistic code in school. Characterized by low-frequency vocabulary (most often of Greek or Latin origin), complex syntax, and abstract concepts, academic language is also referred to as formal language, the language of school, or the school code.

Paugh and Moran (2013) demonstrate the application of this academic language concept in an urban third grade class where academic literacy is explicitly taught as a critical social practice. In their article, “Growing Language Awareness in the Community Garden,” Paugh and Moran describe an action research project where students engage in informational writing as an authentic, student-led extension of a garden project at an urban school. Two social theoretical frameworks, critical pedagogy of place and systemic functional linguistics, support pedagogical decisions in this classroom, the latter providing Moran with concrete linguistic tools for fostering language awareness in her students. Paugh and Moran’s study demonstrates that students are well able to discover the language patterns (such as past tense verbs in recounts) required by the particular genres they choose to write.

The systemic functional linguistic approach is derived from Halliday (1978), who stresses the importance of understanding register. “The notion of register is at once very simple and very powerful. It refers to the fact that the language we speak or write varies

according to the type of situation” (pp. 31-32). Halliday (1978, p. 35) makes clear the distinction between dialect (variety of language according to the user) and register (variety of language according to the use). In classrooms of dialectal diversity, this distinction is especially important, because modulating register and modulating dialect may, in fact, be two different processes for some writers in certain writing contexts.

4.4.1. Linguistic Inquiry

In 2007, I completed a master’s thesis on linguistic inquiry in the classroom. It explored ways to help young language arts students become more aware of their own language expertise by observing language use, collecting language data, and investigating what they found. The research examined how linguistic inquiry (viewing language as linguists do, descriptively, not prescriptively) might motivate and support learners engaged in the language arts curriculum. As part of that research, I produced a book-length manuscript about language and linguistic inquiry for young people in grades 4-8. The manuscript’s nine chapters explored topics such as language acquisition, the evolution of writing systems, the structure and creativity of language, and code switching. The manuscript was never published: children’s book publishers believed it was not marketable enough, and educational publishers viewed linguistic inquiry as something “extra,” which teachers had no time for in the classroom. This latter response has made clear to me the imperative of articulating a strong rationale for linguistic inquiry, particularly as an essential element of writing pedagogy in diverse classrooms.

In hindsight, I am thankful the manuscript has not yet been published; I continue to see it as a work in progress, informed in new ways by this doctoral inquiry. Now I recognize additional elements I might include, as well as revisions I would make. From Janks (2014) I have been reminded that there are open and closed sets of grammatical categories in English. While the closed categories—prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, and articles—resist change, the open categories—nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs—are dynamic, inviting language change through invention and borrowing. This insight is important for inquiry into language change.

I might also revisit and expand the chapter on code switching. In that chapter, I used the following sentence as an example of something my 25th Street playground work partner said to me in an African-American variety of English: “I finned to go home and bust some suds.” After reading Rickford and Rickford (2000) and Smitherman (1998), I realize I was using my own kind of “language lens” or “language earpiece” to recall what she had said. What my work partner more likely said was: “I finna go home and bust some suds.” The language I heard/created in my memory was most likely a synthesis of what was actually said with my own faulty understanding of one variety of Black English. My work partner lived in an African-American neighborhood a few miles away from mine. She spoke a different variety of Black English than the varieties I had heard in my neighborhood and in my high school downtown. Regardless, I understood her meaning: she was about to go home and wash the dishes. And I had remembered it as a poetic, creative example of language use.

My work partner did not always code switch when speaking with me. I believe this was her choice, and I took it as a compliment. Even when code switching is primarily an unconscious linguistic maneuver, it is motivated by intent, activated by choice, and prompted by situation. In analyzing his own language experience in and out of school, Gilyard (1991) writes that the process of becoming bi-dialectal, or code switching into standardized English, is a matter of choice, something beyond the curriculum. It has much to do with identity, with affirmation of self.

What has been commonly referred to by educators as “failure” to learn Standard English is more accurately termed an act of resistance: Black students affirming, through Black English, their sense of self in the face of a school system and society that deny the same. (Gilyard, 1991, p. 164)

While I grew up hearing different varieties of Black English, and different varieties of language in general, “talkin’ tough” was a kind of *lingua franca* in our neighborhood. My African-American Mod Squad friend was code switching just as I was when we played together on the street. My other Mod Squad friend, whose family “talked southern” and was white, was also code switching. My next-door neighbors, who spoke Arabic at home, were code switching when they were “talkin’ tough” in English, as were my friends down the block who spoke Spanish at home. Because of my faulty memory, and the fact that I have not lived on my block in Detroit for more than three

decades, I can only surmise that “talkin’ tough” was an amalgam of the syntax of different languages and varieties of English, which became over time its own variety of English. This variety was passed on to new kids (like me) arriving on the block. It became part of our neighborhood identity, a badge of belonging.

We needed a *lingua franca* because language was a key element in all kinds of interaction on the street. When we played on the sidewalk or in the alley or in someone’s yard, we all talked the same way, code switching from different languages and varieties of English. We used toe rhymes to find out who would be “It” for our games, and other specialized rhymes for specific games. When we played Kick the Can, we said “olley olley in free” to call everyone in from hiding places all over the block. When we played Release, the jailer always terrorized the younger, captured ones by talking extra tough.

At home my family corrected my grammar if “talkin’ tough” slipped out. Double negatives and misused pronouns were always caught. There were also certain words we were not allowed to say at home, such as *ain’t*, *shut up*, and any kind of swear word.

4.4.2. Bad Words and Church Words: Early Language Experiences

My middle finger must have been accidentally sticking up.

“Don’t you know what the F-word means?” my new friends demanded.

My six-year old self, new to the neighborhood, had no idea what the F-word meant—or was—or that sticking up my middle finger was signifying the same thing.

Clearly, it was a bad word, whatever it was. Of course, I wanted to fit in, so I pretended

to know what the F-word meant. And from then on I made sure my middle finger stayed in place.

Later I saw the F-word written as graffiti in the alley. But I never expected to see it in published form until I checked out a book in seventh grade. I returned that book fast, hoping no one at school (or at home) would ever know I had checked it out.

Yetta Goodman (2003) believes the concept of taboo words is a rich area for language inquiry in school. Although as an elementary language arts teacher I never tried to lead such an inquiry, as an ESL teacher it was important for me to convey to my students the inappropriateness of certain words in the context of school. Taboo words do not sound taboo in a new language.

While bad words were taboo in my home, church words were taboo out on the street. During my elementary school years, my family would have fifteen minutes of “family worship” every morning after breakfast. It included a song, a Scripture reading, the choral recitation of a psalm together, and a prayer. (The psalms we recited together are etched forever in my memory—in King James’ English, another variety of English I was exposed to early on.) At church I sang hymns, heard scripture readings, sermons (my father often wove parable-like narratives into his sermons) and lots of prayer. I could hear different language styles and prayer styles during open prayer time. Like the neighborhood, church, too, for me was a place of rich language variety, a place where I heard language used in different keys.

4.4.3. Growing Language Awareness in Elementary School

I attended an elementary school with an innovative instructional design: beginning in Grade 3, students spent half the day in a homeroom on the second floor where our homeroom teacher taught us Language arts and Math. During the other half of the day we “traveled” from room to room on the first floor for specialist subjects taught by specialist teachers in social studies, science, library, music, art, and physical education.

My Grade 3 homeroom teacher used *The Roberts English Series* (Roberts, 1966), a text that left a lasting impression on me. I still remember the day she wrote indefinite pronouns on the chalkboard because I was surprised by the pattern of these words:

anyone	anybody	anything	anywhere
everyone	everybody	everything	everywhere
someone	somebody	something	somewhere
no one	nobody	nothing	nowhere

The words reminded me of the mathematical times tables we were also learning. The patterns of language were made visible through writing.

The Roberts English Series was subtitled, *A Linguistic Program*, but “linguistic” was a fallacy, because although the series combined a reading strand with a grammar strand, the grammar was mainly prescriptive. Nevertheless, I have distinct memories, such as the indefinite pronoun lesson, from using this book. Book 3 was published in

1966 and I used it in the 1966-1967 school year, so I believe I am among the first group of students to have ever used this book. What the book accomplished for me was an awareness of the patterns of language and an appreciation for the interesting history of certain words. Each chapter included a short reading, such as a poem or fable, introducing new vocabulary. I also learned about subjects and predicates, common and proper nouns, punctuation and alphabetical order. *The Roberts English Series, Books 3 and 4*, provided the only formal instruction in traditional grammar I can remember receiving in Grades K-12.

There were harsh critiques of this series. O'Neil (1968) criticized the series' devaluation of teachers, and its failure to connect grammar study with reading and writing. Allen, Martellock, Olsen, and Ray (1970) criticized its lack of consideration for the sociocultural background of students. Although the books were often used in urban schools, like mine, many of the literature selections reflected rural experience, and were written in formal varieties of English. Allen *et al.* also rejected the prescriptive tone—for both students and teachers—set in the grammar content as well as in the instructional delivery prompts for teachers.

Despite its limitations, I believe my Grade 3 teacher used this series well, making it a meaningful and memorable experience for her students. She believed in the value of exposing us to standardized English. She, herself, was aware of language, always prompting us to enunciate our words, to code-switch. Like Delpit (1995), my teacher saw her role as a cultural translator; she honored who we were and where we came from, but she also equipped us with the tools she felt we would need to succeed in the world

beyond our neighborhood. This Grade 3 teacher influenced my growth in literacy in many ways. My practice of reading for pleasure blossomed at my desk in her classroom near the window overlooking the 25th street playground: she instructed us to keep a book in our desks to read when we finished our assignments. She also inspired my practice of writing for pleasure, even outside of school.

Although I enunciated my words in her classroom, as a child I rarely spoke using academic language, or “big words.” Talking that way didn’t sound “for real” and made me look like a show off in front of my friends. However, we were all introduced to academic words in elementary school.

Accommodations (social studies) and *conservation* (science) are two academic words I can remember learning. Our student teacher in social studies asked us to work in groups (something we had never done before) with tourist brochures and accommodations pamphlets. It was chaotic and unnerving to work on our own in groups, but we did come to understand in tangible ways the meaning of this new word, *accommodations*. In science class, on the other hand, *conservation* remained a mystery. While the social studies teacher found ways to make *accommodations* concrete, the science teacher simply explained the word *conservation* and I didn’t get it. It was uncomfortable not really understanding what the word meant.

If I encountered academic words in independent reading, I tried to figure them out on my own (something I have instructed my own students to do). However, the strategy of detecting meaning from context has the potential to backfire: I grew up believing *opaque* and *transparent* were synonyms, not antonyms; and I grew up believing the

words *dearth* and *lack* were antonyms, not synonyms. The meaning fit the syntactic structure, but I must not have understood the context well enough. I should have used the dictionary—as we often did in library class.

In library class we had a strict, dynamic teacher. Like my Grade 3 teacher, she was a woman of African descent, strong and confident in her teaching methods, with high expectations—educationally and behaviorally—for her students. In library class we participated in an eclectic mix of language-related experiences. Sometimes we looked up words in the dictionary, copied their pronunciations and definitions after putting them first in alphabetical order. (This gave purpose and concreteness to the concept of alphabetical order. It also provided us with a way to check our alphabetical order while exploring the dictionary.) This was a silent activity. In addition to reading-based activities, we also listened to record albums of the spoken word, like Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. We would arrange our chairs like an orchestra around the record player, facing the windows that looked out at 25th street.

In library class we also acted out fairy tales such as *The Three Little Pigs* and *Rumpelstiltskin*. Although this required improvisation, our library teacher was a strong director. We used the classroom space well in showing different “places” in the fairy tales. Because we knew the stories well, we had sufficient linguistic and conceptual input to improvise our lines—with some coaching. Although our library teacher did not often smile in class, her sternness softened when we acted out these tales, when we used language in creative, imaginative, and innovative ways.

4.4.4. Developing Metalinguistic Awareness

When I began my high school career at Cass Tech, a magnet public school in downtown Detroit, my Grade 9 English teacher presented a unit on linguistics and I was hooked by the idea of scientific inquiry into language. As I have described in the narrative, while majoring in linguistics as an undergraduate, I worked two summers on the playground next to my old elementary school. Experiences as a recreation leader on the 25th street playground made me newly aware of my code-switching capabilities. I was accepted by kids in my own neighborhood because I could speak the same way they did. “Talkin’ tough” was a powerful way to connect to the kids on the playground, to earn their trust. (I continue to ponder this question: If I had been teaching inside the school, would I have been able to establish the same kind of rapport, get to know the kids in the same way, through our shared community language and experience? Or would the official views and expectations of school have created a barrier between us?)

Code switching between street language and school language involved word choice, grammar choice, pronunciation, and delivery. *Bad* meant good and *ain’t* was an extremely efficient word. *Big and bad*, a frequent phrase, encapsulated the essence we all were striving for.

4.5. Discoveries and Uncertainties

Language and literacy researchers have shown that young children *are* attuned to language (Cummins, 2000; Cummins & Early, 2011; Dyson, 2003, 2015; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Y.Goodman, 2003; Heath, 1993; Paugh & Moran, 2013; Sweetland,

2010), and they bring with them to the classroom plenty of linguistic experience and expertise. They only need their teachers to recognize this reality, to take a language inquiry approach in the classroom.

Linguistic inquiry is not the “linguistic approach” of *The Roberts English Series*, nor is it a return to traditional school grammar. It is an exploration of language, what language is, how it works, and how it is used. While linguists continue to strive to understand the immense complexities of language, there are certain concepts particularly relevant to linguistic inquiry in the classroom, such as: (1) language use varies by contexts; (2) language difference does not mean language deficit; (3) all languages and language varieties are complex, but in different ways; (4) all languages change over time.

Traditional school grammar takes a prescriptive perspective, viewing grammar as a set of rules to be applied in speaking and writing. Linguists take a descriptive perspective, describing language as it is actually used. *The Roberts English Series* attempted to combine a descriptive and prescriptive view of language for students in elementary school and junior high, with limited success. The question remains: does any type of grammar instruction improve writing quality?

Weaver (1996) and Noguchi (1991) believe we need to make *less* grammar *better*, by teaching grammar only as a tool for writing improvement (a writer’s grammar), and by capitalizing on the unconscious language knowledge students brings with them into the classroom. Noguchi concludes: “In general, less formal instruction in grammar will mean more time to develop in students a healthy awareness and appreciation of language and its uses, not just of limits but also of possibilities” (p. 121).

Debra Myhill (2010) argues that most studies of grammar's impact on writing instruction in school have been flawed. These studies, she suggests, have not adequately distinguished between grammar taught as a separate entity and grammar (or linguistic concepts) woven into writing instruction. Myhill explains that linguistic concepts, when woven into writing instruction, have an important, twofold role to play: to support learners in becoming effective writers, and to support teachers in assessing the instructional needs and writing development of their students (2010, p. 108).

Sargent and Paraskevas (2005) title the fifth chapter of their anthology for first-year university writing students, "The Grammar-as-Style Debate: Does Grammar Instruction Help or Hurt Student Writing?" In this chapter they invite university students to join the ongoing debates about grammar instruction. They introduce students to the notion that grammar is a problematic word, with multiple definitions and interpretations. Sargent and Paraskevas propose a stylistic grammar, similar to Schlepegrell's (2004) functional grammar, in which grammar is viewed as a range of linguistic choices, not a set of linguistic rules. Schlepegrell (2004) defines functional grammar:

Functional grammar is different from traditional school grammar in focusing on language as a meaning-making resource rather than as a set of rules, and in recognizing the link between the linguistic choices of speakers and writers and the contexts those linguistic choices help realize. (p. ix)

This functional view of grammar as a meaning-making resource is dependent upon the development of metalinguistic awareness through linguistic inquiry.

What might a linguistic inquiry approach to writing instruction look like? *First, it would honor the lived experience and language of all students.* It would acknowledge all students as language experts because of the complex, intuitive language knowledge they have already acquired before entering school. *Second, it would explore language in all its complexity,* beginning with the lived experience of students: language variation, language diversity, language acquisition, language change, and language structures. *Third, it would approach writing as an intriguing linguistic invention,* explore the speech/writing continuum, and investigate the functions of writing. *Fourth, linguistic inquiry would potentially enable students to discover their own voices, their own agency, and their own capacity to write in different keys—to use written language as both sign and tool across contexts.*

When I first became a teacher, however, I struggled to apply these linguistic insights in the classroom. In fact, I think I forgot about these linguistic insights. Instead, I adopted the official school view of language. As a new teacher, I was overwhelmed by the context of teaching, the needs of my students, and my uncertainties about how to teach writing as a composing process—the new approach to teaching writing I was introduced to in my teacher preparation program—in the complexities of the classroom.

5. Writing as Composing Process: Lessons from Public School Teaching

José's Illustration

1.

José slams the front door and walks down the street. Slowly. Looking tough. Carefree. He doesn't have any books or notebooks. No school bag. Just himself. When he shuffles into writing class he plunks himself down into a seat and stares at the ceiling.

"José, how 'bout you do one of the illustrations for our class book?" the teacher asks. "We need somebody to show what the church is made of, you know, the pattern of the bricks."

It's a gamble to ask, but she has to try something. She knows it's a miracle he's even in class today. She knows he's getting too close to the gangs. Grade 6 is a tricky year.

2.

Ándale, José.

I'm goin'. Don't push me. Don't care if I'm late for school anyway. I hate that place. And that writing teacher gets on my nerves.

I drag my feet on down the street, lookin' all around. Man, I hate school. What a waste of time. Don't even wanna open the door.

That crazy teacher wants us to write a book about the church. I ain't gonna write nothin'. Now she's askin' me to draw a picture for the book. What? The bricks? Yeah, okay lady. I'll draw the bricks if it'll get you off my back.

5.1. Teaching Writing in a Bilingual School: 1986-1991

When I began teaching English language arts—with a focus on writing—in a large, urban public school system, I was twenty-seven years old. As a teacher in a federally funded program for “at-risk” students in a K-8 bilingual school, there were many things I did not yet know or understand about teaching or writing, but I had a passion for both. I hung a banner across the front of my Chapter 1 ECIA (Education Consolidation Improvement Act) classroom: *Writing Helps Me Think, and Thinking Helps Me Write*. This was my view of writing, and I hoped my students would come to share it too.

We were an overcrowded school in a neighborhood struggling with gang activity: 1400 students in a school built for 700, with a staff of 70. The main building accommodated half the students and staff; the rest of us were accommodated in alternative spaces—mobile units on the playground, classrooms in the former Catholic school across the street, and a small auxiliary building, where I taught, across the street, back by the alley. The auxiliary building contained only two classrooms, one on each floor, with washrooms in the basement and a telephone for security purposes. My first floor classroom was light-filled and spacious, a room conducive to writing.

The students who qualified for the ECIA Chapter 1 program scored two years or more below grade level in reading on the Iowa Test, and they came from families who were part of the free lunch program. There were eight ECIA Chapter 1 teachers at our school. From 1987-1990 I taught students specifically in grades 5-8, on average seventy-

five students daily in five class periods. I tried to schedule my classes during language arts time. This gave both the classroom teacher and me time to focus on literacy, and in particular, writing. My “pulled-out small groups” usually contained fifteen or more students (half of a regular classroom) whom I escorted back and forth across the street in all kinds of weather. Many of my students had exited the bilingual program without strong literacy skills in Spanish or English. Ninety-eight percent of the students in our school spoke Spanish at home, or had parents or grandparents who spoke Spanish at home, many first- or second-generation families from Mexico. The remaining two percent of our school population spoke Arabic, or were students of African or European descent. Most of my students were operating in English as their second language. Even when students were fluent in conversational English, written and academic forms of English remained challenging.

5.1.1. Children’s Literacy Project: Becoming a Community of Writers

A new writing curriculum was introduced system-wide in the fall of 1987. To coincide with the new writing curriculum, the staff at our school participated in professional development provided by a local college through a children’s literacy project. In staff development sessions, we were encouraged to view writing as a composing process, and to engage in this process ourselves. For many teachers on staff, this was a new perspective on writing. We met together for professional development after school, on in-service days, and on the occasional weekend to explore writing by engaging in the writing process ourselves. We wrote about our lives, our writing

practices, and the school neighborhood. For example, we were asked to write about our first impressions of the school neighborhood. In addition to leading the staff development writing workshops, the children's literacy project staff visited some of our classrooms.

The program director visited mine.

5.1.2. Class Book Project

“How many of you have been inside the church next door?” The program director stands in front of my class of seventeen fifth grade students.

Most hands go up.

“Does anyone know how old the church is?”

No answer.

“How could we find out?”

Outside, we find a cornerstone with 1913 imprinted in the rock. We notice the pattern of the bricks and the shapes of the doors and windows. We look up at the roof.

When we return to the classroom, our guest helps us do the math. On the board for everyone to see he writes: 1988 – 1913.

Seventy-five years old.

Our guest asks the students if they would be willing to make a class book about the church.

Hands shoot up enthusiastically.

“Okay,” he says, standing near the board with a piece of chalk in his hand. “Tell me everything you know.”

He records on the board all the facts and ideas offered by my students. Then he artfully guides them in discovering a way to organize all the information: inside, outside. Once the text is rearranged, reread, and agreed on, students sign up to illustrate sections of the text. Then we discuss what the book cover should look like. A few weeks later, when the book is assembled, we present a copy to our guest, a copy to the school library, and we keep a copy in our ECIA classroom.

The text reads:

The church is seventy-five years old. The cornerstone tells the date.

Fathers Miguel, Rick, and Antonio are some of the priests. Everyday we have mass. People go in and pray.

People can give limosnas for the poor in baskets.

People can go to confession, communion, get married, have their quinceañeras, and be baptized, too.

The church is beautiful inside. It has lots of old pictures of God and saints. There is also a beautiful mosaic floor.

On the altar there are statues of the saints and angels. The angels have golden trumpets.

There are caves on the sides with more saints. Near the doors there are crosses with Jesus. Everywhere it smells like perfume and incense.

There are many light bulbs all around the church. You can see God the Father, God the Baby, and when Jesus was bleeding and dying.

The church building is made of bricks.

It's big like our school and tall like City Hall.

What color is the roof?

Blue and green. The pigeons like to play there.

We hear the bells at 10:00. When we were little kids, we thought the bells were ringing to wake us up.

There is a beautiful garden outside on the side of the church.

This church is a place we hope you will visit.

The most profound memory I have of this experience is the illustration José (not his real name) prepared for the text: “The church building is made of bricks.” He came to class rarely, and wrote very little. According to his classmates, his older brother was already involved in gangs, and he was being pressured as well. I remember hoping that this task would engage José, connect him to the writing class in a small but tangible way. He completed the illustration because, I believe, he knew he could do it well. He could show off his skills. His red ink drawing expertly shows the pattern of the bricks around a

doorway. His drawing of the double door includes hinges and doorknobs. José signed the last page of the book with the rest of the class. From my point of view, his participation in this class book project was a triumph. However, in hindsight, I am not sure it impacted his writing development in any way. If I remember correctly, his engagement and participation in writing class was fleeting.

What do I believe the rest of the students learned from this experience? I believe they learned about collaboration in producing a book. They learned that writing reflects spoken language and knowledge. They learned to match illustrations and book cover to the text. They learned to write for an audience and purpose. They learned to reflect on and articulate what they knew about a special place in their community. Our guest wanted to know about their neighborhood, their church, their lived experience. An outsider wanted to know about their neighborhood, and he encouraged students and teachers alike to find out more about its history.

What did I learn from this experience? I learned to pay closer attention to the lived experience of my students. I learned to pay more attention to place. This experience resonates with Paugh and Moran's (2013) study using critical place pedagogy as a framework. Now I see that as a community of writers we could have explored language, the language of this book, in much greater depth. (Why didn't we? I suspect we moved on quickly to individual bookmaking projects because of a school-wide deadline.) The text of this class book includes two Spanish words: *limosnas* and *quinceañeras*. It also reflects the English language proficiency of the students. Most of the text is composed using the present tense, which is natural for a description of place.

Because I lacked a Catholic background, I had to rely on my students for information—even sometimes for words. For example, they used the word “caves” for the small alcoves at the sides of the church. As the students wrote about the church next door, I realized what an integral part of most of their lives it was, this building we walked past together every day. If our guest had not visited, I would never have asked my students about this special place—and they would never have told me.

Why not? Although my own childhood church was also an integral part of my family life and neighborhood, yet somehow I felt that in the context of public school teaching, church was a taboo subject. As a young teacher, I thought the separation of church and state meant avoiding all talk of God (or church or religion). Our visitor helped me recognize this as a false assumption, to see that composing means writing about what matters to us, making discoveries through writing, and shaping our writing for an audience.

I made other false assumptions. Most of my students were bilingual and spoke Spanish at home; some had exited the K-3 bilingual program at our school at the end of Grade 3. Only a few were confident, motivated, and effective writers in English. I made the false assumption that only a few were confident, motivated, and effective writers in Spanish as well—although I never asked them to write in Spanish. (Why didn't I? I would request this now.) Their language competence in two languages was something to celebrate, and yet I stayed focused on “my job” to teach writing in English, not understanding how important it was to honor the linguistic expertise they brought into the classroom. I was trying to honor their lived experience, but not their lived experience of

language. Why did I not encourage more Spanish writing, at least in their dialogue journals?

We began each class with dialogue journal writing. Ten minutes of quiet writing and thinking. I usually wrote in my journal at the same time, modeling for students, participating in the writing process, hoping my example would help motivate them to write. Sometimes a few students would ask to share something they had written, even though it was never an expectation. Occasionally I was asked to read from mine. (This had some impact on what I chose to write.) I looked forward to reading and responding in their dialogue journals once a month, responding only to the content of their writing, never the mechanics. Their dialogue journals were a safe and private place to write, a risk-free zone (Elbow, 1973) for writing in a second language. In hindsight, I should have also encouraged them to write in Spanish too, honoring their multilingual writing potential, valuing their complex, multiple identities, beyond simply student or writer (Atkinson & Connor, 2008).

5.1.3. Dream Picture-Poems

The children's literacy project also included a visiting artist component. A visual artist worked with one of my language arts/ECIA groups in the fall of 1989. It was interesting to have a guest in my classroom again, someone not from "the culture of school." She brought a fresh perspective and an element of collaboration into my teaching. Initially she and I met to talk about the project, settling on an idea to use clay to mold the fantastic creatures in a class read aloud. However, after a discussion of reality

and fantasy with my students, and after learning how old our school kiln was, she decided to take the project in a new direction. The students would explore fantastic dreams they had had through writing and drawing. I had some reservations about invading the privacy of my students' dreams, and of the unknown direction some of the dream stories might take. It was also difficult to relinquish control of the project process. Nonetheless, I learned an important lesson: my students responded to the artists' genuine interest in their dreams, perceptions, and fears. Something real took place in this exchange of dreams (the visiting artist and I also shared a dream we each had had); the sharing of our dream stories connected us in new and deeper ways.

The visiting artist asked my Grade 5 students to write down their dreams before her next visit. They did, enthused about a real audience and purpose for their writing. When she returned, the artist appreciatively read each dream story aloud. Their writing was honest and real, full of unexpected detail. However, when they later drew their dreams, she noticed their drawings lacked the same specific and interesting details their words had conveyed. The text they produced read like poetry, she said, so she wondered aloud with the students if the words themselves could become part of the pictures. A new genre, the picture poem, evolved, and it would entail seeing words as shapes as well as messages.

What did the students and I learn from this experience? We learned that while the creative process sometimes involves uncomfortable uncertainty, it culminates in discovery and new possibility. We learned that genres are fluid, evolving, and that language and visual art can work well together in a single genre. We learned to look at

written words as physical art as well as linguistic art. We learned to try to fight the “hurry to be finished.” As the students drafted and revised their writing, I helped correct the spelling errors, knowing that the final pieces of art would likely be displayed. However, when given Magic Markers to work with, some students sped ahead. This resulted in some creative spellings becoming embedded in the art. Once part of the art, the misspelled words were not corrected.

Little did I know this would cause trouble.

Initially, I had planned to display the Dream Picture-Poems in my own ECIA classroom for Open House. Instead, they were hung in the hallway outside the students’ Grade 5 classroom—a more public venue. One particularly powerful teacher on staff voiced publicly her displeasure that misspelled words were displayed in the hallway for parents to see. I heard it “through the grapevine;” she did not speak directly to me. When those misspelled words became a staffroom controversy, I finally confronted her for criticizing the students’ work and my writing program because of those misspellings.

Nevertheless, I, too, felt at the very least ambivalent about those words. How did the project process get away from me? Or did it? Did I consider the misspellings part of the creative process, part of the dream picture poem artwork, authentically reflecting the developmental writing level of the students? Or did I think of them as embarrassing mistakes? At the time, the joy of the birth of my first child smoothed over the bad feelings about that experience and between teachers; I had more on my mind than just spelling. In the end, though, how sad that the misspelling fiasco is what I remember most

intensely—instead of the beauty of their words and drawings, the honesty of what they did, the rich collaboration between a visual artist and my class.

Writing as inquiry enables me to find memories I did not know I had, to connect experiences. Until I began writing about this collaboration with the visual artist, I did not remember that I used the idea of Dream Picture-Poems again as an English as a second language teacher years later in Nova Scotia. I produced my own Dream Picture-Poem as a model. This time, we talked about the word, *dream*, and how it could mean a visual story created by one's subconscious during sleep, or it could be an aspiration, a hopeful plan for the future. In all future renditions of this project, I made sure the spelling was corrected before the final pieces of art found an audience. The students and I considered the process and the product carefully.

5.2. Paradigm Shift: Composing

In the process of writing, we begin with what is inchoate and end with something that is tangible. In order to do so, we both discover and construct what we mean. ...Once we have worked at shaping, through language, what is there inchoately, we can look at what we have written to see if it adequately captures what we intended. Often at this moment discovery occurs. We see something new in our writing that comes upon us as a surprise.

—Sondra Perl, 1990, p. 49

In the late 1960s and early 1970s scholars such as Emig (1971), Elbow (1973), Murray (1968), Moffett (1968), and Graves (1975) began to challenge the traditional approaches to teaching writing in school. They viewed writing as a process of composing, creating with language, and they believed writing could more effectively be

taught as a process, not a product, in school. These scholars challenged the traditional role of teacher as transmitter of knowledge, and the traditional limits placed on writing topics and genres in school (Newkirk, 1990, p. xv). They also challenged the notion of writing as mere transcription of ideas, believing that written language was intimately connected with the generation of new ideas for thinking and learning.

In her description of what happens during the composing process, Sondra Perl (1990) emphasizes discovery. She characterizes composing as a process of creation using written language to discover, shape, and communicate what we mean. Donald Murray (2005) also viewed discovery as essential to the writing process, defining writing as “the process of using language to discover meaning in experience and to communicate it” (p. 395). In his essay, “A Writer’s Habits,” Murray (1992) described ten writing habits essential to his craft, such as awareness, connecting, drafting, and revision, emphasizing the importance of paying attention to exactly what we are doing when the writing goes well, so we can discover our own “habit of ease.”

In my experience as teacher and writer, composing is a process that does not look the same in every rhetorical situation. It does not look the same from writer to writer. It is a process that develops, adapts, and changes over time. Resonant with the insights and understandings of writers who are also writing teachers and researchers (Elbow, 2012; Emig, 1977; Luce-Kapler, 2004; Murray, 2005; Neilsen, 1998; Perl, 1990; Richardson, 1994), I believe writing is a process of discovery. It makes thought tangible. It makes language tangible. It enables new connections and ideas, inviting critical reflection, activating new learning.

When Emig (1971) researched the composing processes of twelfth graders, she discovered something about their teachers as well. She found that the teachers would “underconceptualize and oversimplify the process of composing” (p. 98) because they had only limited experience with writing as a composing process themselves. For the teachers in Emig’s study, planning meant simply outlining and revision meant merely correcting errors. Emig made another unexpected discovery about the more able writing students in her study:

This inquiry has shown that some able students can translate an abstract directive such as “Be concise” into a set of behaviors involving the selection of lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical options. But there is no indication they were taught how to make such a translation in school. (1971, p. 99)

Ten years after Emig’s study, I enrolled in “Developing Students’ Writing Competency: The Composing Process,” a graduate education course in the Urban Teacher Preparation Program at Syracuse University. In this 1981 course, we learned to view writing not as a product, but as a process, and we wrote in class in order to experience the process of composing first hand. Our class met four hours each afternoon over two weeks in the summer, with class time balanced between the theory of writing and the practice of writing ourselves. We explored three general stages in the composing process: a pre-writing stage (generating ideas), a writing stage (putting ideas down on

paper) and a post-writing stage (refining the ideas to make them clear). We came to believe that when writing was introduced to children as a process, it became a less nebulous, less arduous task; it became more tangible. We also explored how writing developed in young children, and we came to believe that writing was developmental, mirroring the processes of cognitive development and language acquisition.

Britton's (1978) terms were helpful in our understanding of this developmental concept that, in student writing, fluency precedes control. Expressive writing (personal response to experience), the most basic, natural form of writing, precedes and prepares the way for transactional writing (writing to get things done, e.g. informing or persuading) and poetic writing (focus on the written language form itself). Similar to the ways in which the babbling stage of language development leads to eventual control of the sounds and structures of spoken language, we learned that expressive writing leads to more mature, controlled forms of written language. In the same way that child language acquisition is rooted in experience, so too should writing development be rooted and grounded in experience. We learned that if we encourage children to write expressively, audience awareness, and the ability to understand what the reader needs, will develop naturally over time. From Donald Graves (1975) we learned that a writing process approach was premised on the recognition that every child needs her own "turf" to write on, a comfort zone where lived experience is valued as input for writing, and motivation for writing remains high. In my course notes I wrote: motivation = genuine interest + the perception of the ability to do well. We also explored Graves' ideas about revision and

the importance of children seeing their written work as tentative, malleable, an exploration.

More recently, the work of literacy researcher, Anne Dyson, shows one way the composing process begins in very young children: naturally and authentically in play. Dyson (2003) believes language itself is a kind of material used by children in the social interactions of play. In the context of play, young children detach meaning from objects and manipulate it, experiment with it, helping to develop abstract thought, linguistic symbolism fueled by intention. The composing process begins as linguistic discovery in the context of creative, playful interactions with others.

5.2.1. The Complexities of Composing

When we speak, we use language spontaneously. There is little time to deliberate, to contemplate language choices—unless we have prepared ahead. But when we write, there is time to stop and consider our language choices, selecting words and their combinations and arrangements more carefully. What happens when we compose? How do professional writers do it? This is the question Murray asked of himself and other writers when researching the composing process. For professional writers, do the right words come out at the right time and in the right order always? What happens in our brains when we plan, execute, and reshape written expression?

Flower and Hayes (1981) set out to answer these questions as they formulated a cognitive process theory of writing, premised on the idea that all writing begins with a rhetorical problem. “Insofar as writing is a rhetorical act, not a mere artifact, writers

attempt to ‘solve’ or respond to this rhetorical problem by writing something” (p. 369). In order to compose, a writer needs to “juggle” the demands of audience, rhetorical situation, and the writer’s own goals. Flower and Hayes conceptualized writing as a process that included planning (generating, organizing, and goal setting), translating (putting ideas into visible language), and reviewing (evaluating and revising), noting that these writing activities take place recursively, not always in a linear fashion. Flower and Hayes (1981) challenged the “stage” models of writing, stressing the need to search for underlying cognitive processes that unite planning and revision.

Because stage models take the final product as their reference point, they offer an inadequate account of the more intimate, moment-by-moment intellectual process of composing...As every writer knows, having good ideas doesn’t automatically produce good prose. Such models are typically silent on the inner processes of decision and choice. (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 367)

The cognitive model of Flower and Hayes focuses on the inner workings of the brain during the composing process, on the interplay of discovery and choice. What it does not take into account is the social context for writing beyond identifying the rhetorical problem. How is genre shaped by social context? How are language choices shaped by social context? I believe a sociolinguistic view of language and its variation in different contexts is the missing element in their otherwise important and thought-

provoking model. As Flower and Hayes' cognitive model demonstrates, writing is indeed a recursive process. It is rarely linear. And yet, in teaching young children, perhaps it is helpful to organize the writing process in a way they will grasp. Perhaps it is helpful to simplify, organize, and make accessible the composing process.

Graves began his work on the writing processes of young children from a developmental stance, but in time came to believe there were similarities between the composing processes of young writers and those of experienced writers (Newkirk, 2007, p. 539). Lucy Calkins (1986) shares in this belief. Calkins affirms that children, as well as adults, can learn to use language to discover and construct what they mean. She emphasizes the importance of children rereading their own writing, asking questions about their writing as they work to develop a text. While using Donald Murray's terms for the stages of the writing process, rehearsal, drafting, revision, and editing, Calkins also cautions that the writing process is not a linear series of steps, but a "dialogue between the writer and the emerging text" (1986, p. 19).

Graves (1984) also cautioned against a rigid understanding of the composing process, such as revising and publishing every piece of writing in school or always allowing students to choose their own topics. He explained: "The Writing Process Movement has been responsible for a new vitality in both writing and education. But orthodoxies are creeping in that may lead to premature old age... These orthodoxies are substitutes for thinking. They clog our ears" (p. 185).

As I look back on my public school teaching experience, I realize that I often taught writing as a linear process. Although this linear process was most often situated in

bookmaking projects—what I thought was the most authentic type of writing experience for my students, it nonetheless conveyed a more fixed than recursive process for composing. I struggled to find a balance between consistent structure and creative possibility. I also struggled to find a balance between motivating my students as writers, and actually giving them the tools they needed to become more effective writers in a new language. My public school students were most often writing in English as an additional language. They were developing second language proficiency and second language literacy simultaneously.

5.2.2. Composing in New Languages

After completing the Urban Teacher Preparation Program, I was hired at the last minute to teach in a pilot high school English-as-a-second-language program, a program designed to accommodate the sudden influx of refugees from South East Asia after the Vietnam War. Because funding for the ESL program was only approved late in the summer, we began the school year with no teaching materials, no curriculum, and no program administrator for a program comprising three teachers, three teaching assistants, and eighty students—all of whom were new to the school. Our teenaged students were suffering silently from trauma and culture shock, and many had arrived in the new country without their parents.

Nothing in my teacher preparation program had prepared me for meeting the diverse needs of students in the ESL Level One course: Hmong students from the mountains of Laos who had never been to school before; Cambodian students who

needed to transfer literacy skills to a new language and writing system; and Vietnamese students who were literate in Vietnamese and French, but spoke no English. I did not know at that time how to plan different literacy activities for the different literacy needs of my students: some students needed to develop first-time literacy skills in a second language; some needed to transfer literacy skills and academic knowledge from one language to another; some needed to acquire a new writing system before transferring skills and knowledge to the new language. And, of course, all the students needed to acquire spoken English first. How was I to teach the vocabulary and structures of spoken English without any reliance on written language? How was I to introduce basic literacy skills to those who had never attended school—who had never been introduced to the concept of written language? How was I to keep cognitively engaged the students who were highly literate in Vietnamese with a wealth of academic knowledge? How was I to introduce a new writing system to the Cambodian students who had developed literacy skills in a much different writing system?

These complexities overwhelmed my first year of teaching. Without materials for the first few months, I stayed up late planning and yet improvised daily. The new function of writing in a new language as a means to learn the new language had to somehow be woven into my theoretical understandings of writing as a composing process. Writing tasks had to be tailored to varying second language proficiency levels. Because descriptive writing can be accomplished using simple sentence structure and present tense verb forms, I brought in magazine photographs of animals for students to describe in pairs. More able students created narratives, and used the simple past tense

effectively to tell their stories. Saved as an artifact from that first teaching year, a class anthology titled “Writings in ESL” demonstrates the students’ collaborative use of writing as a composing process. The final copies, handwritten on loose-leaf paper, were glued onto large pieces of construction paper, folded in the middle and bound.

(Computers were not yet part of our teaching practice in 1982.) As I read them now, I hear deep layers of meaning embedded within their straightforward descriptions.

Only after many years of teaching did I finally begin to understand the profound differences between a student writing in the comfort of her first language and a student writing for the first time in the discomfort of a new language. Cummins (2000) concludes that literacy in one’s first language supports the development of literacy in a new language. He stresses the importance of maintaining the first language, while making connections between the two languages. However, the reality is that in many North American schools, this is not happening. When students arrive in North American schools without the opportunity to develop literacy and academic knowledge in their first languages first, the challenges of learning English (or French) as a second language in school become immense.

5.2.3. Composing as Authors

Throughout my public school teaching career, bookmaking projects played an important role in my approach to writing instruction. Bookmaking projects provided an authentic venue for English language learners to create in the new language. My objective was to foster a sense of authorship using the writing process and a sense of

ownership using the new language. The most compelling feature of this bookmaking strategy was its flexibility: it was easily adaptable to different age groups, language proficiencies, and developmental writing levels. For younger students and students at the early stages of English language proficiency, drawing supported and most often preceded the writing. Often students discovered important details to add to their writing as they drew. Sometimes they discovered new vocabulary while drawing. For example, as a Grade 1 student talked about and drew the airplane his family had arrived on from Pakistan, he learned that “runway” was the name for “the road airplanes use.”

The arts were increasingly part of my ECIA Chapter 1 writing program. I believed strongly in the creative process, in using bookmaking projects to validate identity, to build writing skills, and to help students see themselves as writers. Our federally funded program had the resources to provide a blank book for each student in the program. Sometimes there were two projects in the same year. The fall project began as a school-wide Young Authors contest and culminated in a state wide Young Authors Conference for students with winning books. Twice I accompanied students from our school to this impressive conference run like an adult writing conference with author-led workshops. The spring project, hosted by the 4-H program, involved 4-H judges coming to the school to award each entry a ribbon. These books were then displayed at our school Writing Fair. They were also sometimes displayed at the local public library. Bookmaking projects provided motivation for students to write, and allowed their artistic, creative skills to augment their developing writing skills. The process mirrored that of professional writers and illustrators—brainstorming, contracts, drafting, revision, editing,

illustrations, layout, and finally the publishing of their work. Bank Street Writer provided the computer program for typing up final copies of their texts on our classroom computers.

Cummins (2007) discusses the value of dual language book production as a successful strategy for English language learners, a way to validate identity and prior knowledge while learning academic English. Cummins and Early (2011) provide a theoretical framework for understanding these creative projects, which they name identity texts, as vehicles through which students develop and share authentic voices in authentic ways. They define identity texts as “products of students’ creative work or performances carried out within the pedagogical space orchestrated by the classroom teacher” (p. 3). Identity texts often involve multiple languages. If I were teaching in that Chapter 1 ECIA program now, I would pay much closer attention to the language and literacy background of my students: How much were writing and reading valued at home? How strong were their literacy skills in Spanish? When were they first introduced to English and how? How was writing taught in the bilingual program? I operated at the time on too many assumptions. Even as I recognized the need to do more than merely motivate my students to write, I was not quite sure how to do this.

5.3. Teacher as Composer

As a writing teacher in the public schools, I often struggled with the balance between modeling, discovery, and instruction. In the development of our students’ writing, how do modeling, discovery, and instruction work together? How do they work

together in molding young writers' experiences of learning to compose? Writers' voices are important to aspiring writers. Does this hold true in the elementary grades? Do young writers care about what experienced writers say about their composing processes? Do novice writers care to know what professional writers think about writing? Can they learn from the composing experience of others? Writers' insights on writing help inform pedagogical decisions. As teachers we often use examples of quality writing to model new genres and to analyze language choices; yet, are these examples of writing products alone rather than writing processes? As teachers, do we reflect on how we learned to write? Do we reflect on our own evolving writing processes, on how we compose? Do we actually spend time composing—trying out the assignments we give to our students?

Peter Elbow (2012) characterizes his own writing process as a process of both carelessness and care while emphasizing the need to “relinquish care” in the early stages of his process. Elbow explains: “Most of us need to welcome unplanned, unvetted, probably-wrong words and ideas onto the page if we want to find rich enough fodder for the vigilance and care we need later” (pp. 207-208). Elbow's observations of his writing process resonate well with my own experience of writing.

I believe it is helpful to be aware of what writers, such as Elbow (2012) and Murray (1992), have discovered about their own writing processes. It is also helpful to be aware of teacher accounts of pedagogical journeys with writing, such as those of Atwell (1998), Kittle (2008), and Christensen (2009). However, as Luce-Kapler (2004) points out, only Nancie Atwell can “do” Nancie Atwell. As teachers we need to pay closer attention to our own experiences and understandings of writing.

5.3.1. Composing in Journals

My Grade 7 English teacher first introduced me to the concept of journal writing when she asked the class to keep a journal for one month. Miraculously, my Grade 7 journal has survived forty-five years, even though it is only bound by red construction paper and yellow yarn. Ms. Martinez (pseudonym) wrote the assignment as a letter to each of us. We would keep a journal for the month of December (1970), and write six days a week (50-75 words) about anything we chose. No one would read the journal but her. The written words on these loose-leaf pages are a time machine back to my first year of junior high and a snapshot of that time and place in my life. (Surprisingly, we learned about morphemes in that Grade 7 class.) My assignment mark was A- because a few of the entries were not actually written; I had taped in artifacts to cover the days I had missed.

For me, the function of journal writing has changed, evolved, over time. In 1970, it was a school assignment. In 1975, my Kenya journal recorded experience (as a high school exchange student) and helped me write my way through homesickness and culture shock. In 1979, my India journal also recorded experience (as a rural assistance volunteer), and it helped me write my way through the experience of losing my suitcase, passport, and plane ticket home. It became a prayer journal in India. Now, I write in a journal early in the morning to meditate on scripture, to focus in prayer, to solve problems, to express thankfulness. I also have journal notebooks specific to writing projects. These function differently. They help me inquire, learn, remember, analyze,

interpret, and solve problems; to write my way through complexity; to think. If I were to categorize my different kinds of journals by function, I might do it this way: personal journals, travel journals, prayer journals, research journals, writing project journals, teaching journals, and dialogue journals (with students).

The experience of rereading old journals for this research has been strange—listening to a younger, less mature version of myself, but also enriching. I am reactivating memories of people and places I had long forgotten, and remembering how certain events unfolded in my life. This experience has caused me to notice a distinction between writing to remember and writing to memorize (as I sometimes do with scripture). I have also been wondering if the written word (such as old journals) might be therapy for dementia, triggering otherwise inaccessible memories. (I cannot recall everything I read in my old journals. Some old memories are triggered, while others are not.) My journals also remind me that memories are actually fluid and changing.

Recently I had an interesting conversation with my 22-year old son who also writes in journals and uses this analogy: journal writing for him is like putting books and papers on a shelf where they can be easily found later instead of leaving a mess of papers and books all over the floor. My son says that when he writes in journals about his experiences and feelings, they become “findable.” I believe this is the perfect word. Writing makes our thoughts accessible, retrievable, “findable.” My son grew up with journal writing in elementary school. Journals were an integral part of how he learned to write in the late 1990s. I did not write in a journal until Grade 7. Now, forty-five years later, those Grade 7 experiences and feelings are “findable” again.

5.3.2. Composing and Technology

When the drafting goes well for me, it is early in the morning; a cup of strong coffee sits next to the intensity lamp on my desk. The attic room where I work is dark except where the light shines on my desk. All is quiet. My brain is refreshed from sleep, awake with caffeine, working. I have a black pen in my right hand and a notebook or legal pad in front of me. Ideas move quickly from brain to hand to paper. The movement and the text appearing on the page generate new ideas, new thought. All of this activity is mediated by language, by my first language, English, and the words flow. If I were writing in a second language, the experience would be different.

Do I think of the audience? Not yet. For the moment I think only of ideas and words. I will think of the audience later, when I revise.

In writing this dissertation, I am aware of the rhetorical situation—the purpose, subject matter, audience, and academic context—for the writing. The genre is new. (I am trying not to be daunted by its length and breadth. I was advised not to think of this as my “life’s work.” But I am 56 years old and it feels as if it should certainly be my life’s work as I inquire into three decades of teaching and writing.) The organization is a dance between traditional structure and the organic organization growing out of the writing as inquiry. Initially, academic language is a struggle: it is not appearing easily in early sections, early drafts, until I realize that the problem is not my brain or my ability to use academic language. The problem is technology: my laptop keyboard does not entice words from my brain in the same way my black pen does. A pen in my hand has

miraculous power to ignite the flow of academic language from my brain and onto my paper, words I do not normally speak unless I am teaching.

Since the introduction of personal computers in the mid-1980s, technology has had an increasing impact on our composing processes. Where once we composed entirely by forming letters on paper by hand (our dominant hand), increasingly we compose at the computer screen, locating and punching preformed letters on a keyboard with two hands. Technology impacts the composing process in multiple ways. On the one hand, new technology facilitates proofreading, editing, even revision moves. On the other hand, it creates, I believe, a more abstract connection between thought, language, and the word on the page.

New technology makes writing seem less permanent, which encourages more risk-taking by students who struggle with writing. New technological tools also allow students to bypass certain roadblocks that might impede their writing, such as spelling and handwriting issues. Every writer is different.

When I compose by hand, I feel in my body that I am crafting something. It is a pleasing sense of creation, as if the physical and mental parts of my being are working together, an embodied experience. When I compose at the computer screen, I feel as if I am squeezing the words out of my brain. It is a painful kind of work, as if the physical and mental parts of my being are out of sync. For me, writing as a thinking process can only take place when I have a pen in my hand, when I hear the sound of pen tip gliding on a pad of paper, see the words form, feel the movement of the words. Spoken language moves through time. Written language moves through time and space—and this

movement is only tangible to my body when writing by hand. It is not tangible to my body when I punch keys on a keyboard, using both hands, looking at the screen. For me, composing at the computer is mentally exhausting and thoroughly frustrating. My handwriting looks terrible, but this is not at all relevant to my composing process. It isn't the look of the words formed, but the feel of the words formed, the connection between electrical energy in my brain down through my neck, arm, hand, fingers, to form letters, words, sentences, discourse on the paper. It is this lived, embodied experience that draws the language out of my mind, shapes the thoughts. I think best with a pen in my hand.

In their reflection on the haptics (physical movement and perception) of writing, Mangen and Velay (2010) draw our attention to the differences between writing by hand with pen and paper and writing with a keyboard and screen. Writing by hand involves using only one hand (the dominant hand), whereas typing on a computer keyboard involves two hands. Writing by hand is a slower, more focused process, where visual perception and motor skill are focused at the point where the shapes of the letters are being formed. While writing at the computer is often a faster process, it involves a dual focus on keyboard and screen. It does not involve making the upper and lower case shapes of the letters; it simply involves locating upper case letters on a keyboard and pressing the keys.

Our experience of writing is altered by new technologies. Mangen and Velay (2010) call for greater attention to the links between cognition and the haptics of writing: “The current radical shift in writing environments mandates an increased focus on the role of our hands in the writing process, and—even more importantly—how the

movements and performance of the hand relate to what goes on in the brain” (p. 392). My experience of writing affirms their call for an increased focus on the hand-brain connection. The graphic, material representation of language helps me think in a way I find difficult at the computer. I am more creative, productive, with a pen in my hand. Nevertheless, this does not seem to be true of everyone.

5.4. Discoveries and Uncertainties

I recently visited a rural school as part of the Writers in the Schools (WITS) program. The Grade 6 students astounded me with their technological savvy and their writing abilities. New technology impacts their writing processes in positive, productive ways. By using mini-computers and flash drives for all their writing in school, revision and editing become much less arduous, more purposeful and engaging. All the needed tools are right at their fingertips—spell check, definitions, synonyms, cut and paste tools, comment applications. New technology has made it fun and easy for students to interact during their composing processes, to offer and receive feedback on their writing. For the teacher, too, new technology makes reading and commenting on student work a streamlined process, and offers the opportunity of recording and sharing student growth in writing from year to year.

In my WITS presentations, I encourage students to discover on their own what helps them write, or, using Murray’s (1992) phrase, what helps them develop a “habit of ease.” I ask them to discover for themselves what makes the composing process more comfortable, natural, and productive. For me it means NOT composing at a computer

screen. For many students, it means composing at a computer screen. What time of day works best for their writing? A quiet place or background noise? Snacks? Music? Lighting? I tell them I write best in the early morning in a quiet place with a cup of coffee. I use my favorite kind of pen and my favorite kind of paper (black pen on a legal pad). This helps me draft. Because, as I admit to them, the place I get stuck in the composing process is not doing all the pre-writing “stuff”—reading, research, observation, notes, brainstorming, journal writing, drawing, photography, etc.— and it is not doing all the post-writing “stuff”—rereading, asking for feedback, reorganizing, adding material, taking material out, editing for word choice, other revision, editing, and proofreading moves. No, it is getting started on the first draft, which is also true for many students. Unless I am exercising the “habit of ease” when I set out on a new project, I will get stuck there, paralyzed by the feeling that I have no words, or that I cannot find the right words. I always share with students the reality that my first draft is absolutely terrible, completely and utterly a mess. My first drafts always look like a formless glob of clay waiting to be sculpted into something meaningful.

My first piece of fiction writing as a child was an example of what Greene (1995) calls “imagining the possibilities.” It was titled, “Helen Greene Moves to the Country,” and I wrote it sitting on my back porch steps the summer after third grade. Stephen King (2000) describes fiction writing as getting lost in another world, and this was true for me. (Canadian children’s author, Deborah Ellis, recommended I read Stephen King’s writing memoir, *On Writing* (2000) at a writing workshop she was leading. I found her recommendation surprising, but when I eventually read King’s memoir, his insights on

writing far surpassed my expectations.) Growing up in the inner city, I had always wished to live “out in the country.” Writing empowered me as a child and teenager to imagine the possibilities. Since then, as a writer, I have operated more easily in a nonfiction world, wanting to bear witness to my experiences. King believes we gravitate to writing the genre we most enjoy reading. I most enjoy reading narrative nonfiction. As an adult I have become more hesitant to cross back into fiction territory. Instead, I dance along the border, play around with this complex, and perhaps false, dichotomy.

When I do WITS presentations, I talk about writing fiction and nonfiction, sometimes combined, sometimes juxtaposed, and I ask the students if they prefer to write fiction or nonfiction. Consistently, the majority of hands go up for fiction, for creating their own stories, their own worlds. I realize now that I, too, preferred this as a child. It was a much more exciting endeavor because there were more discoveries to make. Lucy Calkins has been challenged for keeping children in the adult genre of memoir in learning to write (Newkirk, 2007). Maybe children, in fact, would rather not write about their real lives. Maybe they would, in fact, prefer to make up new worlds. Maybe we, as teachers, should encourage this more often.

King begins new fiction writing with an imagined “what if?” scenario, focusing on narrative, description, and dialogue. He approaches a new writing task as unexplored territory, a journey with an unknown destination. Do we teach this to our students? Do we make writing adventurous? King’s approach to fiction writing surprisingly resonates with writing as a method of inquiry. We are not certain what connections will emerge as we write, what new ideas, understandings, and perspectives will unfold. Writing

connects language with thought in unexpected ways. Yes, the sound of language is important and helpful in the writing process (Elbow, 2012), but the sound of my thoughts is the real eye-opener. Yet, these thoughts are expressed in language, written language. I cannot express (or discover) my thoughts in spoken language nearly as well—not even if I am alone in the car, “thinking out loud.” My spoken language repertoire is limited to mostly conversational language, but my written language repertoire is much broader, deeper, perhaps, due to decades of reading.

It is essential for teachers of writing to write (Graves, 2003). As we make discoveries about our own composing processes and become more effective, insightful writers, we are better equipped to support the developing writers we teach. And, yet, as I discovered while teaching writing to students with rich and diverse language backgrounds, teaching writing with composing process pedagogy alone does not translate into effective instruction. As a writing teacher I needed to do more than motivate young writers to write. When my students struggled with writing, it was not because of any deficit on their part; it was because of my own as of yet underdeveloped understandings of writing as linguistic, rhetorical, and inquiry processes. How do effective writers make good choices? What kinds of choices and decisions do they make? Using the Topic-Audience-Purpose acronym, TAP, helped define the assignment, but did not translate into a way to connect specific kinds of writing decisions with specific contexts. Only after teaching a first-year university writing course many years later would I come to understand writing as more than composing process alone.

6. Writing as Rhetorical Process: Lessons from University Teaching

Week Three

“The name of this course is Writing Theory and Practice. During our first few weeks together, we’ve focused on the practice of writing—our composing processes, habits, and strategies. Today we focus on the theory of writing.”

I sound upbeat, but I know the word theory is deadly.

Most of the twenty-five undergraduates enrolled in the course have arrived. Although this is a first-year university writing course, not everyone is a first-year student. Some postpone taking the course as long as possible.

It’s the third week of class, and we are ready to tackle the concept of the rhetorical situation. On the board I’ve written two definitions from our course text (Sargent & Paraskevas, 2005):

rhetoric = the art of effective expression

rhetorical situation = the situation that calls for effective expression

“Writing theory is the research, inquiry, and scholarship done by writers, teachers, and researchers on writing itself. By understanding the processes of writing, and the ways quality writing will look different in different rhetorical situations, we become more effective writers. We come to understand that we, as writers, have choices

to make, rhetorical choices, involving not only content, but genre, organization, and language, and that by making good choices, our writing becomes more effective. But what do we mean by effective writing?"

At this point there is often discussion. In some classes, there is silence.

I continue: "Effective writing is writing that accomplishes its purpose. It knows its subject well, understands its audience, and uses an appropriate genre, organization, and style for a particular audience and purpose. Writing theorists have tried to describe, categorize, and explain writing in various ways in order to better understand, teach, and evaluate writing. Today we investigate some of these different ways to view writing."

First, I draw the rhetorical triangle on the board and connect it to Aristotle's persuasive appeals—ethos, pathos, and logos.

Then I ask, "But is the writing context more complex than this rhetorical triangle suggests? Do we need to consider more than speaker, audience, and subject?"

Class participation begins to pick up.

Yes, speaking and writing are different. Yes, in writing, the writer and audience are usually separated by space and time.

We look for elements of the writing context not reflected in the rhetorical triangle.

"What about language?" I ask.

From the rhetorical triangle we move on to the traditional model of communication (encoder/decoder/reality/signal), which acknowledges the role of language, and Kinneavy's aims of discourse: expressive, persuasive, referential, and literary. We consider his scheme of categorizing all forms of discourse by which element

of the communication context is most emphasized. Expressive forms of writing emphasize the encoder (or, writer), as in journal writing. Persuasive forms of writing emphasize the decoder (or, audience), as in editorials. Referential forms of writing emphasize reality (or, the subject matter), as in academic reports. Literary forms of writing emphasize the signal itself (or, language), as in poetry.

Next, I briefly mention the “modes of discourse,” noting that although the framework of narration/description/exposition/persuasion persists as a popular way to categorize writing in school, it is a problematic framework because the modes actually overlap in many genres.

“For example, we can find both narration and description in personal narratives.”

I also mention the genre-as-social-action framework for writing.

“This framework explicitly shows the close connection between genre and purpose. It also recognizes genre as socially constructed and fluid.”

After exploring these various models and frameworks for understanding what happens in the act of writing, I ask students to create their own models, keeping in mind the elements we have discussed—writer, audience, subject, language, purpose, genre, and organization—with, perhaps, additional elements of the communication context we have not considered. I emphasize that this is a work in progress for all of us.

“No one has this all pinned down,” I say. “You might create a unique and brilliant model that deepens our understandings of the rhetorical situation.”

For some students, this is a difficult task. Like me, they need time to digest the concepts before envisioning something new. Those who do create models on the spot often come up with brilliant ideas—models, metaphors, and analogies I have not imagined, such as trees or stars or interesting geometric shapes linking the elements and showing their interdependence. In sharing our models, we come to a deeper awareness of the complexities of writing. Writing is not simply an individual composing process. It is a complex social process of communication, shaped by experience, expectations, and constraints.

As I lead my students in this exploration of writing as a rhetorical process, I am also leading them along my own journey to understand what for me is a new perspective on writing. Why had I never understood writing this way as a public school teacher? Why had I never questioned the TAP (Topic/Audience/Purpose) framework I used in teaching writing in the public schools? Although TAP was a useful tool in approaching writing assignments with my public school students, I never probed more deeply to connect the rhetorical context to specific rhetorical choices in writing. Was this because my students were most often writing in a second language? Or was it because I had not yet adopted an inquiry stance toward writing processes and pedagogies?

6.1. The Rhetorical Situation

The rhetorical situation calls into existence rhetorical discourse; it calls for a fitting response (Bitzer, 1968, p. 10). An understanding of the rhetorical situation guides discourse decisions. When rhetorical choices fit the situation, discourse achieves its

purpose, bringing about some kind of change. James Moffett articulated a more social perspective on discourse decades ago, viewing all discourse as rhetorical action (Paré, 2010). Somehow, I did not absorb this perspective then. As a teacher and writer, the concept of the rhetorical situation has been an epiphany for me only recently.

Nevertheless, the term *rhetoric* has been problematic in teaching first-year university writing.

In *A Theory of Discourse*, Kinneavy (1971) describes three views of *rhetoric*: a stylistic view, an Aristotelian view, and a communication view encompassing most types of discourse (p. 213). It is this last view that is used in our first-year university writing course. In *Conversations about Writing: Eavesdropping, Inkshedding, and Joining In*, Sargent and Paraskevas (2005) define *rhetoric* as the art of effective expression.

Lunsford et al. (2013) define rhetoric as “the art, practice, and theory of ethical communication” and the rhetorical situation as “the circumstances that affect writing or other communication, including purpose, audience, genre, stance, media, design, and context” (p. 718).) An understanding of the rhetorical situation guides a writer’s choices and decisions during the writing process. Effective writing in one rhetorical situation will not necessarily look (or sound) the same as effective writing in a different rhetorical situation.

Writing, therefore, involves making choices about content, genre, organization, and language, rhetorical choices that fit the rhetorical situation. How do writers make these choices? Although this question was posed by Odell, Cooper, and Courts (1978) more than three decades ago, it has yet to be answered in a way that translates into

effective teaching practices in diverse classrooms. Kinneavy (1971) drew our attention to the importance of aim, or purpose, in guiding a writer's choices. Moffett (1968) believed a writer's choices were guided by an understanding of subject/speaker/audience relationships. However, as Odell, Cooper, and Courts (1978) pointed out, these rhetorical theories were based on an analysis of writing products rather than writing processes.

In 2009, after almost three decades in the public schools, I began teaching the first-year university writing course described above. For the first time in my teaching career, my practice felt profoundly theory-based. Perhaps it was because Writing Theory and Practice was an established, multi-sectioned course with clear objectives, pre-selected course texts—a writing anthology (Sargent & Paraskevas, 2005) and a writer's handbook (Faigley, Graves, & Graves, 2011), and general course guidelines with ample creative space for individual teaching styles and decisions. The course was designed from a rhetorical perspective to meet the needs of diverse students in a range of academic programs.

My course teaching notebooks contain teaching plans, notes on assigned readings, in-class writing exercises, student questions, problem-solving inksheds, notes on evaluation and grading, early drafts of exams, and notes for future renditions of the course. These teaching notebooks reflect my own growing understandings of writing and teaching writing in this new context.

At the beginning of each term I asked for in-class writing samples, which helped me understand my students' prior experiences with writing as well as some of their personal and academic writing goals. Although these writing samples conveyed wide

variation in prior writing experience, they also contained some recurring writing goals: (1) to become stronger and more knowledgeable academic writers; (2) to gain confidence and enjoyment in writing; (3) to explore new genres and styles of writing; (4) to improve writing clarity; (5) to strengthen mechanical skills (grammar, spelling, or punctuation); (6) to become more confident sharing writing and more comfortable receiving constructive feedback; (7) to expand vocabulary; (8) to improve organizational skills; (9) to develop research skills; (10) to lose bad writing habits; (11) to take more risks; and (12) to become more effective in “writing on demand” situations. At the beginning of the term, few students expressed a desire to understand the writing process more deeply. Virtually none in five years mentioned revision.

I structured my sections around four general topics: language and the writing process; the rhetorical situation; academic writing; and revision (sometimes with an exploration of grammar-as-style). We began the term with a focus on language in a global sense, highlighting the need to become more aware of language. We ended the term with a focus on language in a more specific sense, exploring specific kinds of syntactic and lexical choices that would make our writing more effective. Students produced writing in a range of genres, from informal (a personal narrative) to formal (a research-informed academic paper), demonstrating that content, organization, and style (language) choices were informed by different rhetorical situations. For example, we discussed why sentence fragments might be appropriate in a personal narrative, but not in an academic paper. Or why a formal introduction works in an academic paper, but not in a personal narrative.

We began the term with a discussion of our own individual composing habits and strategies, using Murray's (1992) "A Writer's Habits" (reprinted in Sargent & Paraskevas, 2005) as a jumping off point. We talked about how the writing process was not linear, as many were taught in school, but recursive, and it looked different from person to person and from situation to situation. We also considered the ways technology had impacted our writing processes, changing how we approached planning, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading. Throughout the term, we explored the intersections of writing as a composing process, writing as a rhetorical process, and writing in academic genres—the overarching purpose of the course.

6.2. Genre Variation

Many students begin university believing genres are static, fixed categories, as in sections of a library. To refute this idea, we would brainstorm as many genres as possible, including both literary and nonliterary genres, both technology-based and non-technology based. Blogs, emails, grocery lists, sermons, research papers, lab reports, poems, journal entries, songs, recipes, film scripts, and personal narratives—the list grew. Then we defined *genre* simply as a kind or type of—in this case—writing. After establishing this definition, it became clear that genre and structure (or organizational choices) were linked, and that genre variation was an important concept to explore.

Probably the single most useful tool you can learn in a writing class is the principle of genre variation and how to respond to it. That is,

if you learn how to be alert to different rhetorical situations, how to analyze them, how to determine the genre constraints you're facing in each situation, you'll have a theoretically grounded practice that will serve you well in *all* the writing you need to do, both in the academy and in your career. (Sargent & Paraskevas, 2005, p. 290)

Experienced writers often wrestle with genre and the related structural and organizational decisions. Experienced writers understand the impact of genre constraints on writing decisions. For experienced writers, genre is itself a choice. However, for first-year university students, genre is usually *not* a choice; it is assigned. It is therefore difficult for first-year university students to understand genre as a writing decision leading to other writing decisions such as content, organization and language.

In teaching Writing Theory and Practice, I, too, wrestle with genre. I wrestle with genre in writing final exams and in writing revision feedback for students. I also wrestle with genre when shaping writing assignments. One assignment constant is the mandated research-informed academic paper: the topic must be linked to writing theory and/or practice and the assignment itself serves as the culmination of all course learning. Leading up to it, I have wrestled with which genres best convey the idea of genre variation. I have not been overly courageous thus far.

Personal narratives usually begin the term: narratives about significant experiences with language, literacy, or writing, in educational settings or outside of formal educational settings. These narratives are telling because of content and because

they allow students to write in authentic narrative voices. We usually read two examples in the Sargent and Paraskevas (2005) anthology: an excerpt from “Saved” in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and an excerpt from Eva Hoffman’s *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*. These excerpts are models of powerful writing about language experience. We pay attention to specific language choices, such as verb tense, and the effects these choices produce.

The personal narrative and the research-informed paper are the first and last writing assignments for the term, forming endpoints on a continuum from informal to formal genre. Between these, I have assigned metaphor essays (metaphors for writing), rhetorical analyses, book reviews, and research proposals, all nonfiction genres—a realization sparked by Bonnie Sunstein’s (2010) article on teaching nonfiction writing. Like Sunstein, I believe that: “To achieve art, you master craft” (2010, p. 13) and nonfiction is a rich and varied landscape for exploring new genres.

Students sometimes struggle with unfamiliar genres. What should a writer do when faced with unfamiliar genre constraints? We talk about finding examples of the new genre, reading, analyzing, and asking questions. I emphasize the importance of asking for clarification of writing assignments in all their courses. Often, as teachers, we do not anticipate the varying educational experiences of our students, or how a research paper in a psychology course might look different in a history or education or biology course. Sometimes labels, such as report or essay, are too general. What are the specific expectations, the constraints, behind the label?

Even now, I find the word *essay* problematic. As a student, the only time I was ever assigned an essay to write in school was when I was an exchange student in Kenya, and because I was unfamiliar with the five-paragraph essay format and tone, my essay attempt was unsuccessful. Most of the academic writing I did in high school and university was in a genre simply called *paper*, which I understood to mean expository academic writing. Now I recognize that genre is a more fluid concept than I understood it to be when I first began to teach university writing. I now embrace the perspective that genre is socially constructed, always evolving, a “living tool” for communication (Whitney, Ridgeman, & Masquelier, 2011). At the same time, genre is a cognitive tool for thinking and learning (Bazerman, 2009).

If the concept of genre is explored in elementary school, young writers will see the power of genre variation from the beginning. As Dudley-Marling and Paugh (2009) illustrate, young students do not learn to write as a blanket skill; they learn to write in particular rhetorical situations using particular genres. If they learn to see that genre features are linked to social situations (audience, purpose, specific context), they will be more likely to make effective writing decisions, rhetorical choices. They will develop as writers using a range of genres with growing language awareness (Paugh & Moran, 2013), a foundation for making sense of academic writing.

6.3. Academic Writing

In the first-year university writing course, we explore the nature of academic writing, beginning with these questions prompted by our course text (Sargent &

Paraskevas, 2005): What is the purpose of academic writing? What makes academic writing *academic*? What forms (genres) can it take? Who is the audience for academic writing? What have you noticed about the academic writing you are required to read? How would you characterize your experience with academic writing in school? An inkshed (focused freewriting) I have written and shared in class conveys my perspective:

Academic writing is different from non-academic writing in that it is intended more specifically for an academic audience—a particular discourse community. Its language, then, is often more formal in word choice (semantic choice) and sentence structure (syntactic choice). Academic writing is often more condensed, compact, and formal. Yet it still can—and should—be clear and direct. Academic writing takes different forms: papers, lab reports, lectures, journal articles, books, etc. The audience is a particular academic community of inquiry and the purpose is to carry forward the academic conversation by reporting findings, explaining, challenging, exploring, carrying out inquiry, etc. When students write academic papers they, too, are carrying the academic conversation forward by synthesizing what they have learned with what they already know or have experienced. They can and should be contributing something of value to the academic conversation—not merely summarizing or reporting what others have written.

After considering the nature of academic writing, we then begin an examination of the academic research process—finding and evaluating sources, documentation styles,

academic integrity, and the use of academic language. In introducing the concept of academic language, I often use the term, *linguistic register*. Sometimes unfamiliar to first-year university students, the term is defined as the variety of language appropriate to a particular situation. Examples are helpful. I begin with examples from spoken, conversational language. How would we greet a friend? How would we greet the president of our university? Sometimes I share authentic experiences. For example, once, having breakfast with my teenaged son, my toast got burned, so I said: “Man, this toaster must be in hyper-mode today!” Informal language. Trying to be “cool” in front of my teenaged son. However, if I had been attending a professional conference, I would have modulated my linguistic register (code-switched) and said something like, “Something must be wrong with the toaster” or “The toaster must not be working properly today.” In spoken conversation, different contexts—rhetorical situations—elicit different linguistic registers, most often automatically.

Why does academic writing require a more formal linguistic register? We consider the purpose, the audience, the subject matter, all more formal. Then we search for strategies to make informal writing more formal. Students often offer strategies such as: avoid contractions, avoid sentence fragments, and use “I” and “you” sparingly. (This prompts an interesting discussion of different expectations in different discourse communities, and how even the “rules” of formal English change over time.) We examine less familiar strategies for making the linguistic register more formal such as the use of simple verb tenses instead of progressive tenses, the use of the present tense to write about art and literature, and the replacement of multiple-word verbs with single-

word verbs. We also explore strategies for making vague writing more precise, and wordy writing more concise, striving always for clarity.

Students point out that much of the academic reading they are assigned in their university courses does not model clear, direct writing. We consider the possibility that sometimes wordiness is used as a strategy to mask unclear ideas, or to insulate the writer from critique. In fact, some students believe that by making their writing “wordier,” they make it sound more formal. However, as we discover throughout the term, excess wordiness blurs ideas, frustrates the audience, and makes the writing less effective.

One of the university writing course objectives is to enable students to view academic writing as an ongoing conversation among scholars. Ideally, we all work collaboratively to advance our understanding in a particular academic field. As an example, we read the back and forth essays of David Bartholomae and Peter Elbow first printed in the academic journal, *College Composition and Communication*, and reprinted in our course anthology (Sargent & Paraskevas, 2005) about what academic writing courses should look like at the university level. This example of a scholarly academic conversation, or debate, or polite argument, enriches our understandings of academic writing and inspires a frank discussion of two very different perspectives on the design of a first-year university writing course. How should an academic writing course be taught? What role should reading play in an academic writing course? What role should personal writing play in an academic writing course? What role should the teacher play? How much writing should be done and what kind? And how should we approach academic language? Does a rhetorical perspective help us understand the language variation at play

in university writing? How is academic language different from non-academic language forms? How does it vary across academic discourse communities?

Gee (2014) points out that academic language is contextualized in specific discourse communities, and that its comprehension is dependent upon not only the decoding of its grammar, but also the deciphering of its range of possible inferences and situated meanings. Shared understanding is acquired through a shared context, point of view, and culture. Gee writes: “Academic social languages, that is, those social languages used in school and in academic disciplines, require one to contextualize them in terms of the practices, values, norms, and conversations of a particular academic discourse community” (2014, p. 19). Gee’s arguments shed light on students at the university level acquiring the academic language required of their specific discourse communities.

However, I do not believe that Gee’s theoretical perspective proves helpful in understanding students at the elementary school level who are faced with academic language. In elementary school, students are most often meeting this new language form, academic language, for the first time, compounded by the demands of learning to read and write. Gee’s analysis overlooks the important linguistic differences between register and dialect (Halliday, 1978), and the problem of motivation when students either opt in or out of using school language as a new language form (Gilyard, 1991). Gee’s perspective also misses the important distinction Cummins (2000) makes between first-time literacy development in a new language and the transferring of literacy and academic skills from one language to another.

In discussions and articles on the frequent disconnect between home discourse and school discourse and the resulting impact on learning in school, Gee's theories often surface. However, it was not until I read Lisa Delpit's (1995) essay, "The Politics of Teaching Literate Discourse," that I was able to articulate my own discomfort with Gee's perspective.

Delpit challenges two notions:

- (1) the notion that students not born into the dominant discourse will have trouble acquiring it; and
- (2) when teachers teach the dominant discourse, they devalue student discourse and identity.

Delpit explains: "If teachers were to adopt both of these premises suggested by Gee's work, not only would they view the acquisition of a new discourse in a classroom impossible to achieve, but they might also view the goal of acquiring such a discourse questionable at best" (1995, pp. 154-155).

This debate between scholars highlights the importance of lived experience: I wonder if Gee has experienced first-hand the complexities of code switching in home, neighborhood, and school. I believe theory is not only developed using careful, analytic thought and research, but also using the analysis, interpretation, and application of lived experience. This is why I believe autoethnography can be and is so powerful. Delpit's voice has more credibility, more authority, because she weaves into her analysis

descriptions of lived experience. Her words resonate, too, with my own childhood language experiences in Detroit. A rhetorical perspective helps make sense of these debates on language.

6.3.1. My Undergraduate Experience of Academic Writing

My undergraduate papers in the 1970s were drafted on legal pads, revised by hand, and then typed up on typewriters at the undergraduate library. Personal computers did not yet exist, and I did not have my own typewriter. I saved many undergraduate papers, with grades and comments from my professors. However, I saved only one handwritten draft, a draft of a senior year paper submitted to our visiting professor for *The History of African-American Literature*.

If I were to rely solely on memory, and the evidence from this single draft, I would say that as an undergraduate I was able to compose early drafts using academic language. (Something I seem to have difficulty doing now.) Perhaps this was because of my childhood code-switching neighborhood survival skills. Perhaps it was because of all the academic reading I was required to do. As an example of what Jim Cummins (2000) calls “harvesting the language of reading for writing,” I was able to use the tone and vocabulary of my academic reading to produce academic papers. In fact, I was so adept at this I was once called in to defend a paper I had written for a course in international relations. My TA thought I might have used an unnamed source. Because of my minimal participation in section discussions, he did not believe I could produce such a paper on my own. Although I was shy and quiet in class, I had indeed produced it on my

own. I had harvested the academic language of international relations to make my point in the paper—something I was able to do much more effectively in written language than in spoken language. In class I was not good at “thinking out loud” and I felt uncomfortable *speaking* in academic English. My international relations paper received an “A” only after I had defended it in front of the TA and the professor—who had also written the course text.

When I revisit my other undergraduate papers, mainly from linguistics, I have an overwhelming sense that I could write better then than now. Perhaps as an undergraduate, the new experience of being completely immersed in academic language facilitated my writing of academic papers. In many ways, academic language is a new dialect that can, in fact, be learned for use in particular rhetorical situations.

6.3.2. Academic Writing in New Languages

As an undergraduate, I faced additional new rhetorical situations when I began writing in new languages. My first experience required the learning of two new writing systems in addition to the new language. When I took the beginning Hindi/Urdu course freshman year, I was taught both the *Devanagari* script for Hindi, and the Persian/Arabic script for Urdu. (The spoken languages are very similar.) Most of the writing we did, however, was in Hindi using the *Devanagari* script, and I appreciated its regularity. (Arabic script also featured regular sound/symbol correspondences, but involved varying the shape of the letter slightly depending on its position in a word.) The new writing

systems were enjoyable to learn. It was interesting to form new visual representations of sounds.

Writing in Hindi proved challenging not because of the new writing system, but because it required using new vocabulary and syntax. (For example, Hindi is a Subject-Object-Verb language, so the verb occurs at the end of a sentence.) I quickly discovered that writing in a new language did not mean simply knowing the writing system and then plugging new vocabulary into the new syntax: the syntax did not always operate as expected. Our Hindi writing assignments mostly entailed translation exercises. In retrospect, it might have been more productive and enjoyable to write in shorter, more creative genres first: advertisements, poems, or text for children. (Our Hindi reading texts were children's readers.) The feedback we received on our writing assignments consisted entirely of grammar corrections. Little, if any, positive feedback was offered on what was done well, or what was attempted.

In my university Spanish classes, a new writing system was not required, but there were many things to remember when writing in this new language, too: vocabulary, grammar, idiomatic language. As I remember, writing assignments in Spanish also felt mainly artificial, with little or no personal investment or creativity. Only after visiting good friends in Cuba, years later, was I inspired to write my first poem in Spanish. Since then, I have carried on correspondence in Spanish. (Nowadays, my Spanish writing is supported by the application of Google Translator.)

How have my experiences informed how I teach writing to students who are writing in English as an additional language? With university students, I try to focus on a

specific, relevant language area for improvement, instead of “marking up” everything I can find when giving second draft feedback. I try to remain aware of their writing and academic expertise in a different language or dialect of English. In the public schools, I generally tried to make writing interesting and affirming of student identities through bookmaking projects, dialogue journals, and letter writing (for example, to authors). I tried to provide positive feedback and encouragement. Nevertheless, I am not sure I always gave constructive feedback on student writing, particularly on grammatical accuracy. (Is this because as a student I did not appreciate the feedback I received, overwhelmed by the amount of errors I had made?) For bookmaking projects, I may have assumed the role of editor too wholeheartedly, wanting the finished products to reflect well on the students (and me, particularly after the Dream Poem fiasco). I am also not sure I have always assigned the right kind of writing tasks. Perhaps I have overused bookmaking projects, although I did, and still do, believe strongly in their value, affirmed by Cummins and Early’s (2011) concept of identity texts. Writing in new languages—and new writing systems—creates additional complexity in navigating unfamiliar rhetorical situations.

6.3.3. Supporting Academic Writing

Peter Elbow’s article (1993), “Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking: Sorting Out Three Forms of Judgment” (also reprinted in the Sargent & Paraskevas (2005) text) examines the problems inherent in evaluating and grading student writing. Grades, as one-dimensional rankings, do little to support improvement in student writing. Elbow

believes there should be far less ranking, far more evaluation free zones for writing, and when evaluation of student writing does occur, it should acknowledge the many dimensions of writing, offering feedback on strengths as well as on areas for improvement. Writing students need to have a sense from their teachers that their writing matters, their ideas are valued.

An example of what Elbow calls “an evaluation free zone for writing” is inkshedding, the powerful new genre I discovered in the process of teaching first-year university writing. Inkshedding, a Canadian term coined in the 1980s at St. Thomas University by James Reither and Russell Hunt, is a more social kind of freewriting. While Reither and Hunt valued the safety and fluency that Elbow’s (1973) freewriting made possible, they also wanted to develop a form of public, focused freewriting that involved students in dialogue with each other and with their teachers (Sargent & Paraskevas, 2005, p. 5). My experiences with freewriting in the public schools often had not been positive: it was too easy for Grade 5 students to simply write, “I don’t know what to write,” for ten minutes. For them, freewriting seemed purposeless. They needed something specific to write freely and safely about; they needed more input and motivation. They needed a better-defined rhetorical situation.

With my university students, I began to use inkshedding in the classroom as an informal kind of writing to learn, a type of freewriting focused on a specific topic, a way to link writing, reading, and thinking. It was an especially risk-free zone for students writing in a new language, or for students writing in a new dialect of English, or for students striving to use academic language effectively. Inkshedding has been an

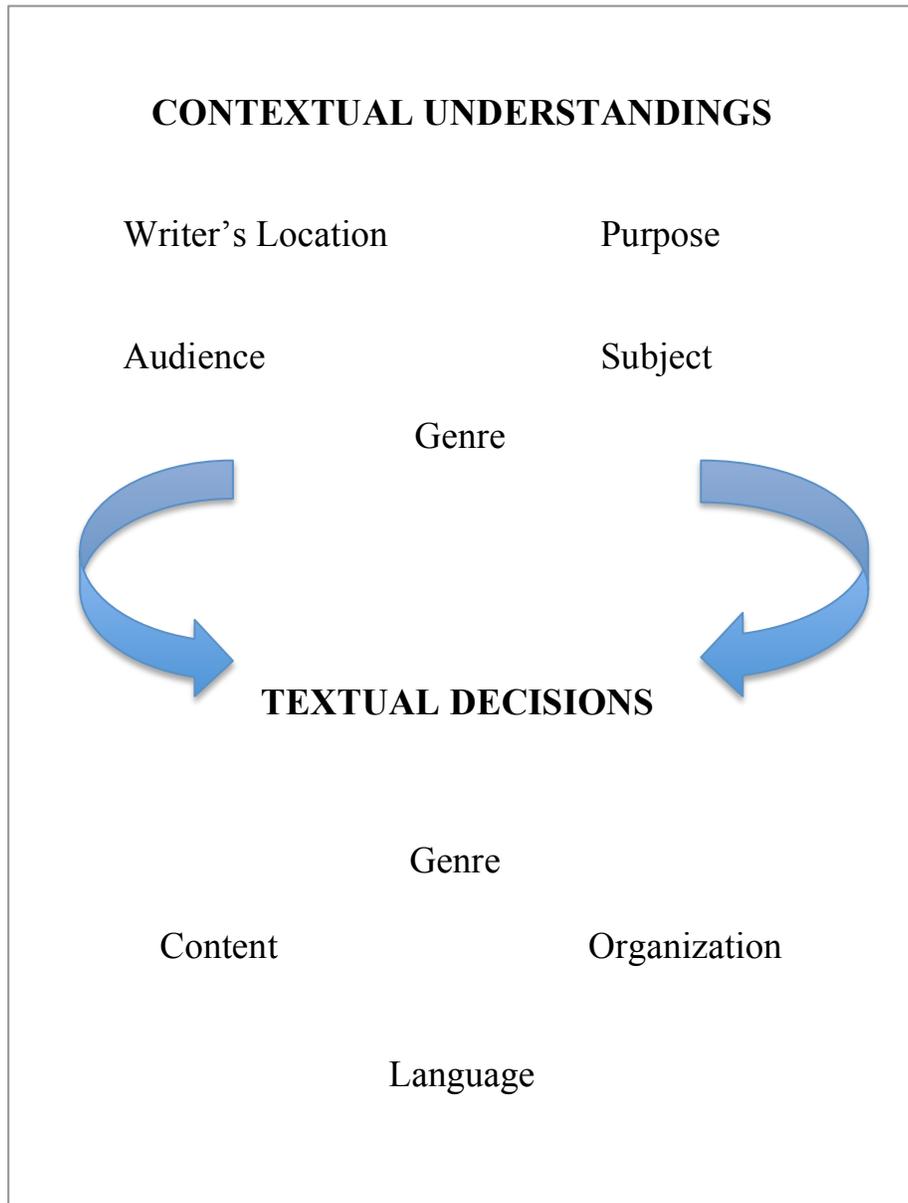
important discovery for me, not only as a teacher, but also as an academic writer myself. I see inkshedding as a powerful way to prepare for “joining in” on the academic conversations.

Inkshedding became a valuable “pre-writing” strategy to share with students, a risk-free zone where the writing was not evaluated. However, I was required to evaluate most other writing assignments. Over time I experimented with different versions of Elbow’s analytic grid to respond to student writing before it was assigned a grade in the writing portfolio at the end of the term. On second drafts I offered revision suggestions for strengthening the writing, while also pointing out sections, features, or ideas that were working well already, or had the potential to work well with additional revision. This was a time-consuming and sometimes difficult task, a new rhetorical situation. I had to resist the urge to mark up every mechanical error. I also had to learn how to offer revision ideas as possibilities, with the idea that my students might discover even better revision moves on their own or with their writing response groups. I agree with Elbow: we best improve as writers with the help of a few appreciative readers. All writers need outside ears and eyes and minds to recognize the strength of the work. I do not believe there is a perfect system for handling grades in a university writing course. However, I do believe in the power of feedback during the revision process, guided by a clear understanding of the rhetorical situation.

Figure 1 represents my unfolding understanding of writing as a rhetorical process, showing how specific contextual (rhetorical) understandings inform textual (rhetorical) decisions.

Figure 1

Textual Decisions Informed by Contextual Understandings



6.4. Discoveries and Uncertainties

As a new public school teacher during the “writing process movement” of the early 1980s, I failed to understand writing as a rhetorical process, that is, writing as a situated process *and* product deliberately shaped to accomplish certain actions (Paré, 2009). I understood writing only as a composing process, having limited awareness of the different ways writing could be shaped for greater effectiveness in particular situations.

Why is a rhetorical perspective on writing important for teaching? A rhetorical perspective unites writing pedagogy at all grade levels, creating a smoother transition as well between high school and university. A rhetorical perspective prepares students for writing in a range of genres and for a range of audiences and purposes; it is a framework for understanding the context for writing. A rhetorical perspective on writing, when combined with inquiry, helps raise intuitive language knowledge to a more conscious level, helping to develop critical language awareness. It builds on the diversity of students’ strengths and language experiences, making writing pedagogies more responsive to linguistic and cultural diversity. It connects a critical understanding of language with writing development, in order to foster increased agency, and stronger, more effective writing. Additionally, it is a useful framework for understanding new rhetorical situations.

Evolving technologies create new rhetorical situations for writers, impacting the rhetorical process in both positive and negative ways. On the one hand, new technology facilitates writing reaching a wider audience. It speeds up the time/space connections

between writers and readers. On the other hand, new technology makes writing decisions more challenging because the audience is too wide, too broad, too unknown; the rhetorical situation becomes more difficult to fully and accurately understand. As quickly evolving technologies create new genres, the navigation of new technologies as well as new genres becomes crucially important to producing effective writing.

Teaching at the university level for me is a new rhetorical situation. The audience, purpose, context, and subject matter are all different from teaching in the public schools. The educational culture is different. It has been essential to learn to adapt. Even within the university context, there are different rhetorical situations: graduate education courses in the Faculty of Education present a different teaching context from undergraduate writing courses in the English Department. A rhetorical analysis of each pedagogical situation has helped me learn to make more effective teaching decisions—in content, organization, structure, and language.

The experience of teaching Writing Theory and Practice from a rhetorical perspective has helped me write this dissertation by enabling me to understand that I am joining an ongoing academic conversation—actually, multiple ongoing academic conversations. It has also helped me understand the rhetorical situation of doctoral work and what is expected in this genre (such as careful documentation, academic register, linking to the ongoing conversations). Operationally, it has helped me analyze my own writing processes in order to strategize ways to get past blockages (e.g. inkshedding as a drafting strategy). Perhaps most importantly, it has prompted me to consider more

carefully the intersections between writing as a composing, rhetorical, linguistic and inquiry process, intersections I did not probe as a public school teacher.

However, when a new writing textbook was adopted for Writing Theory and Practice a few years ago, the exploration of writing as a composing and inquiry process was overshadowed by a markedly rhetorical approach. In using the new textbook, writing became formulaic. Prescribed. Sterile. The exploratory, discovery, inquiry aspects of writing—encouraged by our former writing anthology—disappeared. It was challenging to teach well with this new textbook. Its purely rhetorical approach “demotivated” me. Although the rhetorical situation was for my teaching and writing an epiphany, I quickly discovered that writing could not be reduced to a rhetorical process alone. If writing was a rhetorical process as well as a composing process and a linguistic process, how were these processes woven together?

PART THREE

WRITING IN THE KEY OF LIFE: A HARMONIZED PERSPECTIVE

School

In my neighborhood you had to be tough. You had to know how to walk tough and talk tough if you wanted to survive—and it mostly had nothing to do with the color of your skin.

Walking tough meant exuding confidence, leading with your shoulders, dipping your knees, facing your palms back like swimming through water. Eyes straight ahead. No smile. Talking tough meant exuding confidence again, flattening out your vowel sounds, accentuating the rhythm of the stressed syllables, and losing a lot of word-final consonants. It also meant a different kind of grammar. I was not an expert at walking and talking tough. But I sure did try.

Crossing the boulevard on my way to elementary school, I would slam down my boots in the puddles and hum what I heard on my sister's transistor: "These boots are made for walking, And that's just what they'll do..." The words helped me conjure up some imaginary toughness. Helped me put on some internal armor.

There was one place in my elementary school where I didn't need internal armor. The windows of Ms. Bell's third-grade classroom looked out over the gravel playground and the wood-frame houses on 25th Street. She was strict and demanding and I loved her for it.

Through my childhood eyes, Ms. Bell nearly touched the top of the doorway when she walked through it. Her steady gaze commanded respect in any situation, and she meant business, even as she smiled her brilliant smile. When she wore her beautiful

embroidered suit—the one that matched her red lipstick and ebony hair, setting off her warm brown skin—she was a knockout even in her comfortable school shoes.

Ms. Bell made us think about our words.

“You must enunciate your words, class,” she reminded us almost every day.

“Please, enunciate your words.”

It was a matter of courtesy, she said. What she didn’t explain was that by enunciating our words we would command the respect of others like she did. Ms. Bell had a strong, resonant voice and always spoke calmly and clearly. She was careless about nothing. She was never flustered, never in a hurry, and she never had to raise her voice. She always enunciated her words.

Ms. Bell treated us all the same, no matter where we came from, helping us set down new roots. She wove together classmates with different ways of talking and different shades of skin—wove us together as friends. I didn’t need the “tough song” on my way to Ms. Bell’s classroom. She was all I needed.

But junior high was a different story. My boots weren’t slamming down into any puddles then. I was filled with daily dread and teenaged self-consciousness. I’d walk down Vinewood, cut through the alley to Hubbard, pass the Yorba Hotel where weird white men stood around smoking and staring, and finally make it to my junior high’s front door. I usually had to pass a pair of tough girls, one white, one black, who threatened to beat me up if I got all A’s, whose mean stares drilled holes through my internal armor even before I made it to the front door.

“Girl, who you lookin’ at?” they’d yell if I happened to make eye contact, if I wasn’t walking very tough.

But there was a haven in junior high, too. I could sit next to those high-tech oval windows in Ms. Martinez’s Grade 7 English class and write poems with my classmate, C. C wore high-top All Star Chucks like me, but her Chucks really did make her tough. She could pull it off. She could be quietly smart and nobody messed with her. Nobody said they were after her. Nobody said they were gonna kick her butt after school. I never did get beat up, but the possibility always hung in the air.

At least in seventh grade somebody was looking out for me at school. My Palestinian next-door neighbor, two grades ahead of me, really had guts. She even passed out tracts about Jesus in our junior high cafeteria. She didn’t care what anybody thought. When she started an after-school Bible study in the park across from school, she asked me to come. How could I say no to such courage?

My next-door neighbor went to prayer meetings at the Jesus People commune across the street. Some people called them Jesus Freaks. They definitely looked like hippies with their long skirts, blue jeans, and beards. I used to play with my Mod Squad friend in that same living room. But her family moved out of the neighborhood and the Jesus People moved in. Now the Jesus People were having Bible studies in my friend’s old living room and I sometimes tagged along with my two big sisters and my next-door neighbor. The Jesus People did a lot of testifying about Jesus. They said that Jesus changed their lives, set them free from drugs. They sure did make an impression on everybody around them.

When the Jesus People started coming to Messiah Church, it didn't bother them that "Lutheran" was still on the sign. They brought revival. One Palm Sunday I kept my eyes partially opened during the prayers because I couldn't believe what was happening: everybody was moving out of their seats, kneeling in the aisles, kneeling all over the place. Even the choir started leaving the choir loft to kneel down and pray. It looked like the whole church was going crazy, crying and talking to God—out loud. It was unnerving but kind of fascinating at the same time. Revival didn't happen to me that day. I was still just taking it in.

In the meantime there were Brown Power walkouts in my eighth grade year. Chicano Power. Latino Power. Like the Black Power walkouts at my sisters' high school downtown. I'd never seen kids walk out of school before. I sure didn't have the guts to walk out of school. By the eighth grade I was on the margins—past the margins. Not even on the map.

But high school was a different story. It opened the world for me.

*—Excerpted from a narrative nonfiction work in progress. (A brief section of this excerpt appeared in *Aviso*, Spring 2004, in an earlier form.)*

7. An Inquiry-Based Theory of Writing Processes and Pedagogies

This theory has grown out of my experiences with writing and teaching writing in diverse settings and has been informed by scholarly voices in diverse disciplines. I propose writing can be viewed simultaneously as a composing process, a rhetorical process, and a linguistic process, held together—or harmonized—by an inquiry process, each process interacting with and impacting the other processes in a variety of ways in varying contexts. In other words, writing in the key of life.

The developmental nature of these interacting processes over contexts and time shapes writing pedagogies in significant ways. This theory of writing processes and pedagogies is an inquiry-based theory, acknowledging the imperative of inquiry within writing pedagogies. This theory is founded on the belief that inquiry facilitates writing and writing facilitates inquiry, leading to deeper understandings and the imagining of new possibilities.

Consider, for example, a writer I worked with in a high school English as a second language program. Ary had recently arrived from Cambodia, and although her language proficiency in English was developing well, it was still at an intermediate level. Writing in English required a new writing system, the Roman alphabet; it required Ary to understand the linguistic process of writing with new syntactic structures and vocabulary in this new writing system. For Ary to write, for example, a letter to a prospective summer employer, she also needed to consider the specific rhetorical situation: the

audience, the purpose, and the constraints on the genre of business letter in this new culture. What was the appropriate way to begin and end the letter? What level of formality was required? The composing process of planning, drafting, and revising this letter was crucial to her success. Throughout the process of writing this letter, Ary was inquiring into her new language, into a particular rhetorical situation and genre, into her own process of composing, and into the possibilities offered by a potential summer job.

7.1. Foundational Beliefs about Writing

This theoretical framework is underpinned by the following sociocultural, sociolinguistic, and transactional understandings of language and writing:

1. Writing is complex—involving multiple layered, interacting, and recursive processes that both develop and change.
2. Writing is both product and process—and the two are “interlocking concerns” (Rosenblatt, 1988).
3. Writing is highly individual and highly social—true of language itself.
4. Writing processes are developmental and occur within an evolving social context. (This is supported by Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of “interlacement” between biological development and changing social connections and

Rosenblatt's (1988) concept of an individual's transactions with the environment.)

5. The relationship between spoken language and written language is complex and important: similarities and differences exist in development, function, and form. (For example, spoken language is acquired, written language is learned; writing requires a "double abstraction" (Vygotsky, 2012) which is made additionally abstract in contexts of linguistic diversity.)

6. Writing is thought/exploration/discovery/learning made visible—an inquiry process.

7. Writing is language made visible—a linguistic process.

8. Writing is ideation/creation made visible—a composing process.

9. Writing is communication made visible—a rhetorical process.

7.2. The Conceptual Framework (see Figure 2):

This inquiry-based framework comprises one large sphere (inquiry process) within which are three overlapping/intersecting spheres (linguistic process, composing

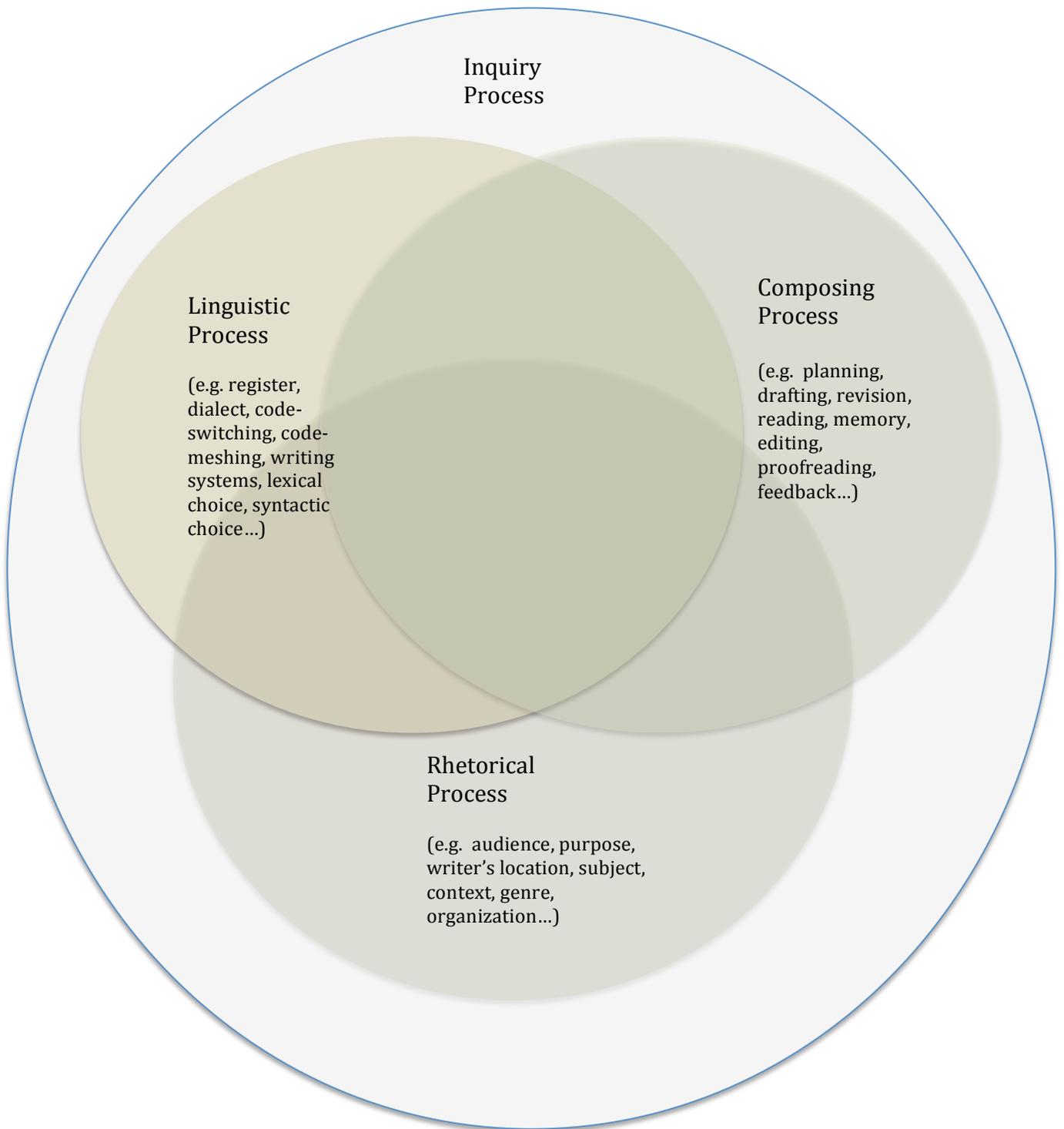
process, rhetorical process). Conceptually, all four spheres spin and grow, reflecting developmental time, while moving through space, reflecting evolutionary time. The largest sphere, inquiry process, acts as a container or context for the other three processes, linking and holding all three processes together.

As Ary worked on her job application letter, she read examples of the genre, talked about the genre with her classmates, and then planned and drafted her letter, returning to more planning and drafting while revising (a composing process). She needed to choose effective words, placing them in effective sentence structures in her new language using a new writing system (a linguistic process). She needed to keep in mind her purpose, the audience, and how the organizational structures of the genre worked (a rhetorical process). As these three processes worked simultaneously, Ary was also using an inquiry process: inquiring into language, the rhetorical situation, and her own composing process.

Writing as inquiry is both a process and a perspective, an atmosphere where the other writing processes can grow, develop, and adapt to new writing contexts. An inquiry perspective on writing is the prerequisite for effectively learning and teaching writing as a linguistic process, a composing process, and a rhetorical process.

Figure 2

An Inquiry-Based Theory of Writing Processes and Pedagogies



7.2.1. Writing as Inquiry Process

Writing is a process of exploration, discovery, and learning—a way to think, a way to “find out.” Writing is a tool for inquiry into language, into writing itself, and into one’s own and others’ thoughts, memories, communication, and experiences of the world. The exploration of writing as a symbolic tool is the starting point for young children. As Vygotsky (2012, p. 192) observed, children do not automatically see the relevance of, or the purpose for, writing. Relevance must be cultivated in young children through their natural curiosity, in this case, curiosity about capturing and encoding meaning in new, symbolic forms. Writing as an exploratory inquiry process matures over time into writing as a mode of learning, writing as a method of inquiry, and writing as a way to envision new possibilities. This overarching inquiry process encompasses the following three processes—linguistic, composing, rhetorical—and together provide a useful way to conceptualize writing.

7.2.1.1. Writing as Linguistic Process

Writing is the visual representation of language. However, it is more than spoken language encoded in a graphic, symbolic form. The conceptualization of writing as a linguistic process encompasses language function, language use, and the intimate connections of language with learning, identity, culture, and power. Sample elements include: spoken and written language differences, language variation, register, dialect, language and identity, code-switching, code-meshing, conversational vs. academic language, language and power, language function, language change, second language

writing, dual language writing, language acquisition, the invention of writing systems, the evolution of writing systems, the invention and evolution of punctuation, written language concepts such as letter, word, sentence, and paragraph, lexical and syntactic choice in writing.

7.2.1.2. Writing as Composing Process

Writing is a process of creation, of composing with ideas and words, of constructing meaning through finding, forming, structuring ideas, intentions, and thoughts by shaping them through language. Although composing is a recursive process that changes over time and between writers and contexts, we can think of it as including three general phases: a pre-writing phase, a writing phase, and a post-writing phase. Murray (2005) proposed using the terms prevision, vision, and revision, in order to emphasize discovery. Flower and Hayes (1981) used the terms planning, translating, and reviewing, emphasizing that these were not stages, but components of the composing process. I believe composing includes a range of strategies and activities, including: invention, planning, research, memory, brainstorming, inkshedding, reading, talking, photography, drawing, outlining, note-taking, drafting, rereading, receiving feedback, evaluating, revising, re-organizing, redrafting, re-revising, editing, and proofreading.

7.2.1.3. Writing as Rhetorical Process

Writing is a process of communication—with oneself and/or with others—across time and space. If rhetoric is thought of as the art, practice and theory of effective

communication, then the rhetorical situation is the particular context calling for, and shaping, effective communication. Sample elements include both textual and contextual understandings, decisions, and choices: audience, purpose, social context, genre, topic/subject, writer's stance/location, organization, content, language—lexical, syntactic, rhetorical punctuation choices, and choices in design and medium.

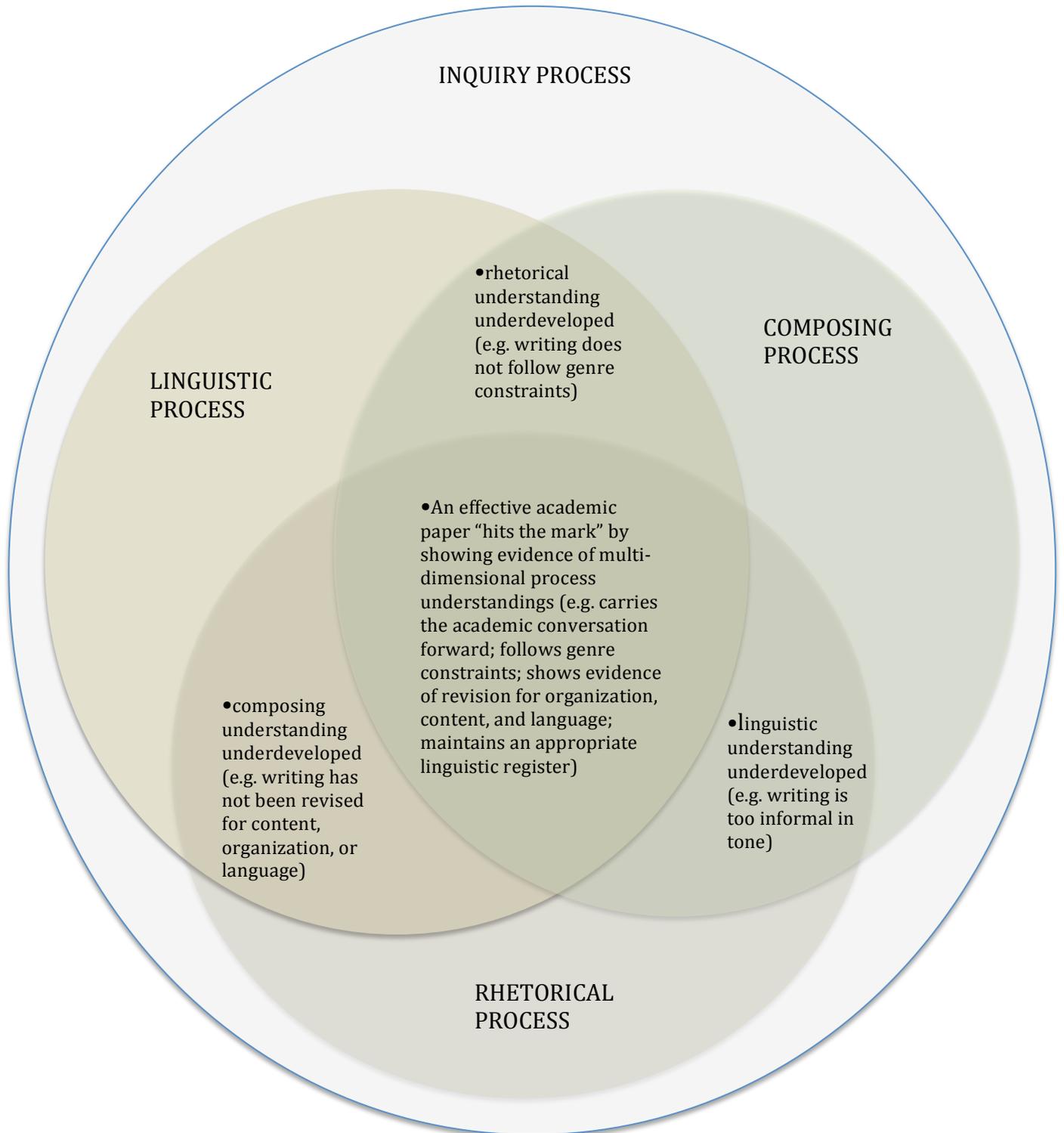
7.2.2. Interaction of Four Spheres

The elements within each sphere interact among themselves and interact with elements across “borders.” They interact differently in different contexts, forming different patterns, creating different results, and enabling us to view the world in new ways. This theory helps us account for the ways in which revision might look different for different genres, or how drafting might look different in different rhetorical situations. This theory is a way to show the interconnectedness of the conceptual spheres and the elements within the spheres. For example, I will revise differently when writing in different genres. Conversely, as I revise, I might decide to change the genre in order to fulfill my purpose more effectively.

This theory illustrates the ways in which effective writers “hit the bulls-eye” by making good composing moves, good rhetorical decisions, and good linguistic decisions in producing effective writing, writing that fulfills the intended purpose. An illustration of the application of this theory can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3

The Informal Assessment of an Academic Paper



An effective academic paper in a first-year university course carries forward the academic conversation (an inquiry process), uses an appropriate linguistic register and precise word choices (a linguistic process), follows genre constraints such as careful documentation (a rhetorical process), and shows evidence of drafting and revision in clear structure and organization. Inquiry process understandings need further development if the paper does not carry forward the academic conversation in some way. Linguistic process understandings need further development if the paper is too informal in tone. Rhetorical process understandings need further development if it does not follow genre constraints, such as careful documentation. Composing process understandings (i.e. revision) are lacking if it is poorly organized and therefore difficult to understand.

This theory emphasizes that effective writers maintain an inquiry stance toward their own writing processes and language use, contributing to writing growth and development. This theory also demonstrates that all writers do not share the same composing processes, habits, and strategies, nor do we individually use the same processes the same way in all contexts.

7.3. Probing the Framework's Potential Usefulness

This inquiry-based theoretical framework provides, I believe, a more specific, precise way to ask questions about, consider, and describe the complexities of writing and teaching writing. It is useful in considering particular process elements, such as revision, and the interconnectedness of these elements with other elements in other processes. It is

useful in considering particular pedagogical issues, such as assessment. It is useful for considering writing processes and pedagogies in contexts of linguistic diversity and quickly evolving technologies. It is useful for understanding writers at different developmental stages. I believe this inquiry-based theoretical framework highlights the importance of asking questions about language, learning, and teaching on an ongoing basis.

7.3.1. From Emergent Writing to Academic Writing

All writing processes are developmental. Uniting the processes is an inquiry stance. At different stages of writing development, particular processes may be more essential or fully developed than others. Although early elementary students may have only partial understandings of writing as composing, rhetorical, and linguistic processes, they are able to discover that written language is interesting, functional, and inventive. Pedagogical decisions and design are key.

One of my sisters teaches three and four year olds. She describes how her youngest students first begin to discover written language: they see their names in print. Everything with print in her classroom has a function, a purpose: the printed names show who the helpers are for the day, who sits at which table, and who the daily weather person will be. Meaningful print is everywhere in the classroom: illustrated song and recipe charts, illustrated process posters to reinforce sequencing, illustrated word cards in pocket charts used for visual discrimination activities. The children dictate stories about their projects and experiences and see their words in print. From the beginning, writing is

rooted in experience and real language. Children first learn to write their names in upper case letters (an easier motor skill) and later with both upper and lower case letters. Even before they have the small motor control to form the letters, children “write” using rubber alphabet stamps and plastic alphabet letters. The classroom contains blank books for experimental writing and drawing, and experimental writing is woven naturally into theme studies as well as play. Writing in this classroom is entirely functional, interesting, and available to be discovered and used in authentic ways.

A Grade 3 student might have only a partial understanding of her own composing process and a small repertoire of composing strategies, but she is still able to use written language for creation and discovery. Although the Grade 3 student might have only a partial understanding of the rhetorical context, she is still able to learn that different genres are connected to different writing purposes. Paugh and Moran (2013) demonstrate that Grade 3 students are well able to make linguistic discoveries, such as recounts requiring past tense verb forms, or procedural writing requiring command verb forms, as they discover that different genres require different types of language patterns. Heath (1983) visited a Grade 2 classroom where students also learned to be language detectives, discovering ways in which spoken and written language differed across contexts. They developed metalinguistic vocabulary as they observed, recorded, and analyzed their own language use, as they inquired into language.

When first-year university students are confronted with the genre of academic research-informed paper, they are most effective as writers when they understand and use a variety of strategies—composing strategies, rhetorical strategies, linguistic strategies,

and inquiry strategies. As was shown in Figure 3, when certain types of strategies are ignored, the results are often evident in their papers. For example, if composing strategies, such as drafting and revising, are not applied, the paper may lack content, cohesiveness, or effective organization. If rhetorical strategies are lacking, a piece of academic writing may not adhere to specific genre constraints and therefore not fulfill its purpose. If linguistic strategies have not been fully used, the paper may be too vague or informal in tone for the intended academic audience. An inquiry stance is necessary beyond doing research for the paper; an inquiry stance builds awareness of composing, rhetorical, and linguistic strategies that may be helpful in producing an effective research-informed paper. Only after formulating this framework have I been able to articulate what I find most compelling about the Sargent and Paraskevas (2005) text: their text approaches writing from an inquiry perspective.

An inquiry-based framework for writing is useful at the university level because it provides a conceptual basis for 1) the student and teacher inquiring into, understanding, and articulating with greater specificity the complexities of written language, and 2) the teacher assessing and providing feedback on student writing in clear and constructive ways.

7.3.2. Writing in Linguistic Diversity

Classrooms in North America are growing in linguistic and cultural diversity. Such diversity is an incredible resource for learning. As Sweetland (2010) has shown, when language diversity within and among languages is explored in the classroom, both

teachers and students grow in understanding and knowledge. Within such an exploration of language, writing also becomes more accessible, tangible, doable. Language is a deep and open field for inquiry; the more teachers and students learn about language together, the more writing becomes an adventure, not a chore, in school. An inquiry-based framework for writing allows us to ask questions about register, dialect, writing systems, punctuation, word history, syntax differences as we view writing as a linguistic process. It also leads us to ask questions about how language diversity interacts with the composing and rhetorical processes. Nova Scotia is rich in language diversity.

In his literary sketch, “The Career of Black English,” Africadian scholar and writer, George Elliott Clarke, traces the long and rich history of Black English in Nova Scotia, celebrating its role in the current Africadian Cultural Renaissance (Clarke, 1999, p. 135). Highlighting contemporary Africadian writers who write in both standardized English and Black English (like Clarke himself), Clarke emphasizes the importance of nurturing, through writing, through the creation of literature, one’s true voice. This type of code meshing is fertile ground for language inquiry within writing pedagogies in Nova Scotia.

Stephanie Inglis (1999) also emphasizes the importance of understanding and valuing one’s true voice in writing. Inglis describes some of the characteristics of written Mi’kmaq-English in Nova Scotia, showing how language contact over a long period of time has created a new variety of written English for some bilingual Mi’kmaq-English writers. Inglis shows that certain systematic grammatical variations evidence language transfer from Mi’kmaq to English, and they should be understood as systematic, syntactic

variations; they should not be misunderstood as errors. When educators begin to inquire into linguistic complexities such as these, they no longer operate from a deficit discourse perspective, but instead recognize fertile ground for linguistic exploration as part of an inquiry-based approach to writing pedagogies.

For students who are learning to write in English as an additional language, academic (versus conversational) language is an important area for inquiry. Academic English words primarily have come from Greek and Latin roots through Old French. Conversational English words have primarily come from Germanic roots through Old English. Students who speak Romance languages (also with Latin roots) often experience less trouble with academic English, than students with language backgrounds in other language families of the world.

A few years ago three university students were writing in English as an additional language in one of my classes. Two of these students, international students visiting for a year, had strong literacy and academic backgrounds in their first languages, languages descended from Latin. The third student, who immigrated to Canada as a youth, did not have the opportunity to develop a strong literacy and academic background in his first language, a language not descended from Latin, first. Although the spoken language proficiency of the two students with strong academic backgrounds was less developed than the third student's spoken language proficiency, they were able to complete the written assignments effectively. They understood writing as a composing, rhetorical, and inquiry process; only the mechanics of language (mainly syntax) created minor

challenges. Their academic knowledge and experience as writers in their first languages was clearly evident in their writing, and transferred easily into academic English.

However, the third student struggled because he did not see himself as an academic writer, and he had developed first-time literacy skills mainly in his second language. Although he excelled in creative, compact genres, he lacked both experience and confidence using academic language and academic writing. In addition to second language mechanical issues, his writing reflected a lack of experience with writing as a composing, rhetorical, and inquiry process. Drafting and revision strategies, organizational skills, as well as the mechanics of writing were challenging. Nevertheless, during the term he grew as a writer in confidence, understanding, and effectiveness as we approached writing as multiple processes.

This teaching experience confirmed what I first learned from Jim Cummins at the TESL Canada 2000 Conference in Halifax: There are specific differences between conversational and academic English. There are also essential differences between developing first-time literacy IN a second language and transferring literacy and academic skills from a first language to a new language. Developing first-time literacy IN a new language is a more challenging proposition.

This inquiry-based framework for writing enables students and their instructors to consider the complexities of writing, and to understand that developing a repertoire of composing strategies, rhetorical strategies, linguistic strategies, and inquiry strategies will lead to more effective academic writing. Instead of focusing primarily on mechanical issues in academic papers, instructors are equipped to introduce and support specific

writing processes that lead to more effective writing as they encourage students to make their own discoveries about written language.

7.3.3. Writing in New Technologies

An inquiry-based framework for writing processes and pedagogies is useful in examining writing in this era of quickly evolving technologies. Instead of considering the impact of technology on writing only in a general sense, the impact of technology on the composing, rhetorical, linguistic, and inquiry processes of writing can be considered in more specific, distinct ways.

New technologies impact the composing process. On the one hand, they facilitate proofreading, editing, and even revision moves. Quickly evolving digital technologies engage and motivate many students to write. On the other hand, these new technologies also bring with them new risks, new dangers, if they are not carefully and critically examined in the classroom (Corbett & Vibert, 2013). For some writers, new technologies even create roadblocks to the composing process; the act of writing by hand draws both ideas and language from my brain in ways that writing at a computer cannot.

New technologies impact the rhetorical process. On the one hand, they facilitate writing reaching a wider audience over larger distances more quickly. New technologies facilitate writing as communication. More young people are writing more often because of new technologies. On the other hand, these same technologies make effective writing decisions more difficult because the audience is often too wide, too vague. Additionally, evolving technologies create new genres more quickly, making technology navigation

seemingly as important as the writing itself. In the context of quickly evolving technologies, the rhetorical situation becomes more complex, more difficult to navigate.

New technologies impact the linguistic process in interesting ways. They blur the line between spoken and written language, they make knowledge of language and other languages more accessible, and they impact the inquiry process as well. Information is more easily accessible on the internet; however, in order to determine the reliability of this information, critical reading and thinking skills are essential.

7.3.4. Writing this Dissertation: Finding an Inquiry-Based Framework

The process of researching and writing this dissertation has brought me to an understanding of writing as an inquiry-based process. The dissertation itself serves as an example of its application.

The following reflections on this inquiry process show the progression of my thought over time, the incubation of my ideas, the synthesis of scholarly literature with teaching experience through writing as inquiry. A description of my search for a metaphor is followed by select inksheds (reflections) tracing the path of this inquiry.

7.3.4.1. Searching for a Metaphor

At the outset of this investigation, I contemplated using a braid as a metaphor for writing processes, showing how composing, rhetorical, and linguistic process strands entwine. Yet, as this inquiry continued, the complexities of writing deepened. The braid as metaphor became too confining, too finite, not open to time and growth. Next I

considered the kaleidoscope as metaphor, believing it would represent well the fluid, creative patterns of language.

Illustrating a synthesis of science and art, the kaleidoscope, like language, is both intricately structured and infinitely creative. The word *kaleidoscope* comes from the Greek words for *beautiful* (kalos), *form* (eidos), and *viewing instrument* (scope). A kaleidoscope contains a complex mix of colorful elements and uses light, mirrors, and movement to work artfully and scientifically. If something is *kaleidoscopic*, it is multifaceted, containing elements that shift and move into new arrangements and relationships, creating an endless variety of multi-colored patterns.

Writing, too, contains a complex mix of processes and elements, continuously shifting, changing, and creating unique patterns. Writing captures both language and thought, allowing us to view the linguistic and conceptual elements in new combinations, new arrangements. Writing involves light (vision) and movement across space and time. Writing mirrors the past, present, and future, reflecting complex elements and processes both inside (cognitive, emotional, psychological) and outside (contextual) the writer.

After reflecting on this, however, I realized a kaleidoscope was an overused metaphor and still too restrictive: everything happened in a container.

Then I discovered a variation on the kaleidoscope: the teleidoscope. It is a specific type of kaleidoscope with an open end, a lens on the world. When looking through a teleidoscope, the viewer sees unique, colorful patterns and designs formed from elements in the environment, outside the instrument. Perhaps this would be a more apt

metaphor for writing, I thought, reflecting how writing enables us to view life, and our place in it, in new ways.

Teleidoscopic patterns are formed from objects *outside* the viewing instrument, rather than from objects *installed within*. The teleidoscope was invented (and the word coined) by John Lyons Burnside III in 1970, and patented in 1972. In the process of this investigation into writing and teaching writing, I moved from the more general idea of a kaleidoscope to the more specific idea of a teleidoscope as a metaphor for writing for two reasons:

- 1) With an open lens, the teleidoscope uses elements outside the instrument to create beautiful patterns

- 2) The word itself is an invention (teleidoscope = kaleidoscope + telescope), a new creation.

Writing does enable us to view the world—and words—in new ways. However, the teleidoscope as a metaphor for writing processes fails to convey a sense of growth, change, and fluidity. As a fixed object, it can only create new patterns; it cannot grow organically itself; it cannot develop, adapt, and evolve, as writing does, as language does. The search for an apt metaphor for writing processes continues—now in a more fluid and musical direction.

7.3.4.2. Inksheds: Tracing the Path of this Inquiry

The following inksheds, selected from my research notebooks, reflect the path of this inquiry and how my thinking about writing processes and pedagogies have deepened and evolved over time.

December 2, 2014

There was a traffic jam on the approach to the MacKay Bridge today. We have to learn to merge better. Learning to merge is what I am trying to do in writing this dissertation: I am learning to merge into the chaotic traffic of these ongoing academic conversations about writing. I am trying to judge my distance, keep an eye on other cars, as six lanes merge into two heading across the bridge.

February 16, 2015

A recap of the inquiry direction:

Process pedagogy (composing process) changed everything for the better—but didn't answer all our questions.

Writing as a rhetorical process helped us understand the (drafting and revision) choices we make as writers and why and how to make them effectively in different rhetorical situations. But this also hasn't provided a complete picture.

We couldn't adequately consider language choices until we understood writing as a linguistic process. As Pinker (2014) points out, we often confuse issues of formal style,

standard dialect, logical coherence, and grammatical correctness in considering the “language rules” for writing. Skillful writers intuitively understand, and use, language, but is this use of language only intuitive or is it also conscious? Does a raised level of language awareness make us all better writers? (I believe it gives even novice writers greater agency.) Better writing teachers? (Yes, absolutely!) Writing teachers need to write. They need to learn with and from their students. They also need to have deeper understandings of language. As teachers, what exactly do we need to understand about language in order to teach writing well?

June 8, 2015

Can I apply this inquiry-based framework to this research project?

Writing is my method of inquiry—in the form of notes, inkshedding, academic papers, and everything that fills these research notebooks: narrative writing, analysis, interpretation, notes on scholarly literature. Writing enables me to handle complex material because I don’t have to remember everything. I also can reflect on what I have written, and build on what I have written (or modify it).

Initially, I thought a rhetorical framework would connect the composing process with the linguistic process. I began believing there were three essential “sub-processes” at work in the writing process, but now I believe there are at least four working simultaneously. Now I understand that inquiry is always part of the writing process. When we write, we are always inquiring into thoughts or experiences or language itself.

Working on this dissertation has also involved paying attention to my own composing process. It doesn't always happen easily. Mornings for me are best, most productive. Allowing my subconscious a seat at the table has also been key: I can't write in an orderly, linear, outline-driven fashion. I follow the threads of my thoughts, look for the connections, let discovery be part of, or the motivator for, composing. Inkshedding helps get me past the "first-draft freeze."

I have also had to pay attention to rhetorical considerations: I am joining an ongoing academic conversation about writing—what it is, how it develops in children and adults, and how it is best learned (and taught). Who is the intended audience? P-12 educators—and academics in three or more discourse communities. What is my purpose? To understand more deeply the complexities of writing and to communicate them in a way that will be helpful to other educators so that students will discover that writing—language in a visible, graphic form—is an exciting and powerful tool for communicating, creating, and learning. With the audience and purpose in mind, I have wrestled with the genre (doctoral dissertation) and with what kind of organization will work most effectively. I have also wrestled with content (what to put in, what to take out) and language choices. Academic language is required, but I want to write this in a clear, direct way, and in a way that honors and interprets non-standardized forms of English.

Finally, I learned more deeply what it means to say that writing is a linguistic process. I am thinking and using the lexicon and syntax of English—not Spanish or Hindi—to write this dissertation. All the reading I have done has been written in (variations of) English. But I have tried to listen to voices from other cultures and

language backgrounds, through my experiences in Detroit, Kenya, India, Nova Scotia, Cuba, Dominica, and with students from many cultures and languages, and through the academic reading I have done. Language variation, language change, language structure, and language development: all connected in important ways to writing. Writing is written language.

I draft best in conversational English. During the revision process I will change some linguistic choices to make the academic register more formal. I will revisit word choice as well as syntactic constructions and rhetorical punctuation. I will try to make my ideas clear and precise by cutting out unnecessary or confusing words, phrases, and sentences—even sections. Revision, itself, is an inquiry process, a linguistic process, a rhetorical process, and a composing process.

June 27, 2015

What have I learned from this investigation so far?

1. Writing is best taught from an inquiry perspective. This doesn't mean teachers don't teach things. I think there must be a balance between presenting new ideas to students and letting students make discoveries. Similar to the Directed Reading and Thinking Activity (DRTA) approach to reading, students need to discover the answers, but the teacher often needs to strategically place/pose the question ahead of time. So, maybe it is important for teachers to get students thinking about things, wondering about things, wanting to make discoveries themselves.

When I left the public schools in 2008, I had this uneasy feeling that everyone had lost sight of why we were there in the first place. What was the point anyway? We seemed to be perpetuating systems and school cultures that no longer made sense. Perhaps we need more “critical education awareness” to understand what we are doing and why we are doing it.

2. Teachers need to write, yes, but they (we) also need to inquire into language and writing, become more critically aware of language. Speaking and writing are different in important ways. We need to articulate what these are.

3. Writing is a composing process, a rhetorical process, a linguistic process, and, overall, an inquiry process. While these processes all interact, the encompassing motivator is inquiry. Composing processes, rhetorical situations, and the complexities of language are woven together through inquiry.

Inquiry is the encompassing process/atmosphere/container.

August 1, 2015

In an inquiry-based approach to learning and teaching writing, exploration and discovery create the fundamental context in which the composing, rhetorical, and linguistic processes thrive and work well together.

I see two ways this concept works:

1) as an explanation for the ways the elements of the different processes interact in different contexts (e.g. with new digital technologies; with second language writing; with bi-dialectal writers)

2) as a way to approach pedagogy and assessment decisions

August 17, 2015

What I have realized today is that an autoethnographic methodology (and method) only works now, after I've had years of teaching experience. We learn through experience, but only if there is time to reflect, analyze, and interpret those experiences in order to learn from them. In the "urgency" of teaching day to day there is rarely time or energy to do this. All surplus time and energy is used for planning, preparation, marking, evaluating, and then the extra duties—lunch duty, recess duty, and meetings, among other duties.

August 19, 2015

As teachers we only get better at what we do if we ourselves are open to learning, if we have an inquiry stance toward writing, toward teaching, toward our students, toward life. We are creatures designed for growth and learning. We need to maintain an inquiry stance toward all our transactions with the world—with other people and with our environment.

October 3, 2015

As I near the end of drafting my dissertation, I see that what Elbow (1973) wrote decades ago is true of me: I did not (and could not) draft all the sections of this long piece of writing in a linear fashion. I had to work on sections simultaneously, resisting

(with some difficulty) the urge to revise until all the drafting was done. Elbow's cooking metaphor for writing is apt: "Cooking is the interaction of contrasting or conflicting material" (p. 49). Yes, the separate parts of this dissertation most certainly interacted during the drafting process.

Sometimes, the order in which we add the ingredients when cooking produces different outcomes. Perhaps this is true of how we teach writing...

Young learners need to see writing first and foremost as a wondrous invention for capturing their real language (a linguistic process). Later, they can explore the composing and rhetorical processes in order to create different kinds of texts for different audiences and purposes, writing in new keys.

October 21, 2015

Conversation today with my eldest sister (a writer and writing teacher) helped me remember an essential concept as I revise this autoethnographic investigation: my audience must now be kept clearly in my mind.

Here is another example of how the rhetorical process and the composing process interact.

Who is my audience?

Initially, I thought it was a broad, complex audience: teachers, researchers, and scholars in three discourse communities. But now I see it must be an audience in sharper focus: perhaps a new teacher just starting out, and I am sharing with her what I did not

know when I began teaching, what I wished I had known then, what I have learned through experience, reflection, and writing as inquiry.

November 20, 2015

As a result of reading Dyson's 2015 article in *Language Arts* in tandem with this investigation, some important realizations have taken shape. I need to: 1) value and probe my own childhood language experiences more deeply; 2) value and probe my students' language experiences, strengths, and resources more deeply; 3) recognize and challenge persistent deficit discourses and the official school view of language; and 4) remember that writing is a "tool for composing a world in which one matters" (Dyson, 2015, p. 206).

Valuing (paying attention to, honoring, exploring, seeing as a resource) not only students' lived experience but students' lived experience of LANGUAGE is key in the language arts classroom. This is what Dyson has been trying to show through her research, and what I hope my dissertation will also help to illustrate.

7.4. Summary of Key Theoretical Concepts

Writing is a linguistic process: language made visible. All students bring lived language experience and expertise with them into the classroom. Inquiry is the key to unlocking the complexities of language. Through inquiry, students learn to recognize their own linguistic expertise as they develop into flexible and effective writers.

Writing is a composing process: idea creation made visible. Inquiry is the key to discovering the individuality and fluidity of composing processes across contexts. Through inquiry, students discover the ways they compose and the factors that enhance their capacity to compose.

Writing is a rhetorical process: communication made visible. Through inquiry, students learn to understand writing decisions as rhetorical choices made in the context of specific rhetorical situations. Students learn to make writing decisions effectively through understanding the rhetorical context more thoroughly.

Writing is an inquiry process: thought, discovery, and learning made visible. Inquiry harmonizes the linguistic, composing, and rhetorical processes of writing, while itself being a function of writing. Through inquiry, students learn the power of writing to solve problems, create, communicate, and learn. They discover writing's "heuristic potential" (Paré, 2009, p. 6).

8. Implications and Recommendations

How might this inquiry-based theory of writing processes and pedagogies contribute to transformation in educational practice—in teacher preparations programs, the curriculum, and the classroom? How might this conceptual framework contribute to future research directions in writing theory and practice?

8.1. Teacher Preparation

This autoethnographic study draws attention to the complexities of writing and teaching writing in diverse classrooms. For teacher development and training, two implications have emerged: the need for a renewed focus on writing practice and pedagogies, and the need for a new focus on language and language diversity.

The first implication is that we need to return to a more explicit focus on writing within language arts, beginning with teacher preparation. If writing is important across the curriculum and at every grade level as a tool for learning, then even within an expanded notion of literacy as multiple and social, a specific focus on writing theory and practice is crucial for teachers in training. We need to understand the complexities and possibilities of writing from the very beginning of our careers. We need to reflect on our own identities as writers (Frank, 2003), striving to become more confident and effective writers ourselves as we write with our students and inquire into our own experiences of language. Instead of playing a secondary role to reading in language arts instruction,

perhaps writing, and writing first in one's natural "key," is a way *into* literacy for many students. As Ackerman (2016) observes of her kindergarten students: "my experiences as a kindergarten teacher indicate that my students identify as writers—even before they can write conventionally and even before they can read" (p. 200). I believe writing needs renewed attention in teacher preparation programs.

This autoethnographic study also highlights the need for an explicit focus on critical language awareness in teacher preparation programs, for raising the intuitive linguistic knowledge of pre-service teachers to a more conscious level. By critically examining personal language experiences, language assumptions, and linguistic biases, pre-service teachers would become better equipped to challenge the prescriptive, one-dimensional school view of language and to guide linguistically diverse students as they develop into confident, effective, and flexible writers.

I recommend that teacher preparation programs include courses specific to writing practice and pedagogy, linking the linguistic, composing, and rhetorical processes through inquiry. These courses would also include a linguistic inquiry component, developing critical language awareness and metalinguistic knowledge. These courses would probe linguistic assumptions and biases while leveraging the linguistic and cultural experience of diverse teachers-in-training through an inquiry approach to writing practice and pedagogy. Because understandings of language and culture deepen significantly through experience, teacher education programs would ideally provide all teachers-in-training with diverse linguistic and cultural experiences in preparation for teaching in diverse classrooms.

8.2. Curriculum

When new teachers set out on their teaching careers, their pedagogical decisions are informed not only by what they have learned in their teacher preparation programs (and by personal experience), but also by the curriculum they are expected to follow. Over the past twenty years in Nova Scotia, the English language arts curriculum outcomes for writing and other ways of representing have remained broad, and for many teachers, vague. By addressing writing and other forms of representing in a general, all-encompassing way, the curriculum has proven to be less than effective for teachers as a guide to instruction. As one grade one teacher explains it: “compared to reading instruction, writing instruction feels more abstract to me. Even when I read the curriculum guide and speak to other teachers, it seems there is no concrete criteria to define if a student is writing successfully.” Writing has remained an area of concern.

An inquiry-based theory of writing processes and pedagogies helps make visible the complexities of teaching writing as well as certain gaps in the English language arts curriculum. I believe the language arts curriculum would be strengthened by the addition of: 1) the explicit recognition of *multiple* processes at work when children develop as writers; and 2) the study of language and language diversity.

8.2.1. Multiple Processes at Work

The current language arts curriculum (Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, 1996) presents a large view of writing. In seeking to avoid prescription, it lacks a

meaningful framework for understanding writing development and the multiple processes at work when children learn to write. Perhaps an inquiry framework is needed. As we teach writing in the classroom, an inquiry perspective creates links between home and school, between diverse language forms and writing “keys,” between the student’s experience and the teacher’s experience. An inquiry perspective also leads to deepening understandings of the composing, rhetorical, and linguistic processes, and a way to harmonize these processes in developing writers.

Our language arts outcomes for writing would be strengthened by an explicit focus on writing as multiple processes: a composing process, a rhetorical process, a linguistic process, and an inquiry process. While each process is uniquely important, it does not act alone. We need to teach writing as a composing process in order for students to see it as a creative, revisionary process, not a “once and done” event. We need to teach writing as a rhetorical process in order for students to learn that “good” writing looks different in different rhetorical situations; writing involves making choices and decisions appropriate to the context. We need to teach writing as a linguistic process in order for students to discover that effective language choices look different from context to context; different contexts require different “keys.” Finally, we need to teach writing as an inquiry process so that students will learn to use writing as a way to probe thought and language.

An inquiry-based theory of writing processes and pedagogies provides a framework for probing and understanding writing complexities more deeply with our students. Take, for example, revision. As a composing strategy, revision is at work in

the earliest pre-writing activities, and continues throughout drafting, as ideas are generated and considered. As a rhetorical strategy, revision involves rereading, first as the writer and then as the audience: writing choices are reconsidered and refined in light of the rhetorical situation. As a linguistic strategy, revision involves finding the most effective syntactic and semantic choices, an amalgam of a writer's stylistic preferences and the constraints of a particular rhetorical situation. Above all, revision is an inquiry strategy, a search for meaning.

A second illustration is inkshedding, or focused freewriting. Inkshedding is an inquiry process strategy, a way to make visible and probe thoughts, ideas, and memories. Inkshedding is also a composing process strategy, a way to get beyond "writer's block." As a rhetorical process strategy, inkshedding is a way to figure out the rhetorical situation for a particular piece of writing. As a linguistic process strategy, inkshedding is a risk-free zone for experimenting with new linguistic forms—a new language, or a new variety of one's own language. An inquiry perspective enables us to recognize the complexities and the possibilities of writing, to see writing as a wondrous human invention, both sign and tool.

8.2.2. Inquiry into Language and Language Diversity

A second and corresponding element absent from the Nova Scotia language arts curriculum is inquiry into language and language diversity. I believe language inquiry is particularly relevant to written language, to writing instruction in school. In addition to curricular outcomes for listening, speaking, reading and other forms of viewing, and

writing and other forms of representing, the curriculum would be strengthened by the addition of outcomes specifically for the study of language variation, diversity, and change. This type of language study would not be a return to a prescribed grammar approach, but would be a fresh approach to language through inquiry.

The curriculum should play a leading role in challenging students and teachers alike to become more critically aware of language. Critical language study would affirm the language all students bring to school, challenge deficit thinking and linguistic bias, and connect students' lived experience of language with writing instruction in school. By viewing language diversity (between and among languages) as a resource, not a deficit, the language arts curriculum would become not only more responsive to linguistic and cultural diversity, but more engaging for all learners. In this way teachers and students would become co-teachers and co-learners together.

Examples of specific strategies the curriculum might suggest for developing critical language awareness include the following:

- critically examine informal/formal language patterns in everyday speech

- explore the language patterns used by specific genres (Paugh & Moran, 2013)

- critically examine the features of academic written English

- explore the languages and language varieties represented by students and families in the school community

- investigate diverse writing systems (e.g. Arabic, Amharic, Chinese, Hindi, Korean)

- use multicultural literature and children’s literature to explore language diversity, language variation, linguistic bias, and language discrimination

- investigate the mechanisms of language change (e.g. compound word formation)

- cultivate classroom language detectives by collecting and analyzing classroom language data (e.g. past tense verb forms: categorizing these forms by irregular / regular (-ed) patterns and inquiring further into the –ed pronunciation variation)

- investigate the history of punctuation marks in English; compare punctuation marks across languages and writing systems

- explore the history of writing as a human invention

8.3. Classroom Practices

For many students (and teachers), writing is an intimidating, prescribed school task often associated with failure. How can we make writing in school meaningful, relevant, and full of promise? I believe we need to start with the lived experience of language students bring with them to school. It is imperative that we recognize, and help our students recognize, the language expertise they bring with them into school.

8.3.1. Valuing Lived Experience of Language

Instead of adopting the official school view of language—a prescriptive, one-dimensional view, we educators must see language itself as an intriguing area for inquiry. We must value the language diversity in our classrooms, connecting writing instruction to our students' lived experience of language. If we recognize the language variations in our classrooms as rich resources for inquiry, instead of as deficits, I believe something vital and real would happen: the exploration of language together. Instead of taking a “correctionist” approach, we would take a contrastive approach (Wheeler & Swords, 2006), contrasting different ways of speaking and writing in different contexts. Writing instruction would grow naturally from this inquiry perspective: writing (rhetorical) choices would be linked to rhetorical situations. Content, organization, and language choices would be considered in light of their potential effectiveness in particular rhetorical situations. Grammar would be seen as a range of choices, instead of as a rigid

right/wrong prescription. Academic written English would be understood as one key among many.

I believe we need to empower developing writers by helping them discover the wealth of linguistic competence they already have when they come to school. By raising their intuitive linguistic knowledge to a more conscious level (Goodman, 2003), we help students make discoveries about language. In so doing, we help them develop their own voices and their own agency as writers. Then we can build on our students' strengths, experiences, and linguistic expertise, making writing pedagogies responsive to, and enriched and energized by, linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom.

A linguistic inquiry approach to writing instruction would: 1) view writing as a wondrous and still-evolving human invention; 2) explore language in all its complexity; 3) value the lived experience of language students bring with them to school; and 4) enable students to discover their own voices and agency, their own capacity to write in multiple keys.

When I began this autoethnographic study, I believed that language inquiry was an important but missing element in the language arts curriculum. Nevertheless, I could not articulate a clear theoretical and practical explanation for why it was important to writing instruction. As a result of this investigation, I have concluded that language inquiry is essential for both students and teachers in order to better understand language variation and its role in writing effectiveness and flexibility. This conclusion is affirmed by the recently revised National Council of Teachers of English professional guideline,

Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing (NCTE, 2016), an updated version of *NCTE Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing* (NCTE, 2004).

The 2016 NCTE professional guideline document acknowledges language and language variation more prominently in its revised and expanded section: “Writing is embedded in complex social relationships and their appropriate languages.” In 2004, this principle, “Literate practices are embedded in complicated social relationships,” placed less emphasis on language and was located near the end of the document. Now the second of ten principles, the revised section includes the following description of what this concept means for teaching:

The languages students learn first are the bedrock upon which all other language traditions and forms will be constructed... Teachers will want to engage in respectful inquiry with students about significant differences between patterns in their use of their first language and more conventionally written English... Further, expert writing teachers deliberately teach students to incorporate their heritage and home languages intentionally and strategically in the texts they write. (NCTE, 2016, p. 2)

Confirmed by the NCTE’s revised professional guidelines for effective writing instruction, this autoethnographic study illustrates the imperative of valuing language

variation and diversity in the classroom. It also emphasizes the role of language inquiry in writing pedagogies.

8.3.2. Inquiry at Every Level

An inquiry-based framework might provide a meaningful way to unite writing pedagogies across grade levels (P-12) while forming a foundation for workplace and post-secondary academic writing. Such a framework might create continuity through the grade levels (and connect to all subject areas) by acknowledging from the outset that writing is a linguistic, composing, rhetorical, and inquiry process, a complex process that grows, develops, and evolves with the writer over time and across contexts. Such a framework would be flexible, adapting to new grade level expectations. For example, discovering the shapes and sounds of letters in Grade Primary/Kindergarten is just as much an inquiry process as discovering in later grades that many languages use writing systems other than the Roman alphabet. Maintaining an inquiry stance from the earliest grades would encourage discovery and ongoing exploration into how writing is a linguistic process, a composing process, a rhetorical process, and an inquiry process.

In an educational era of prescribed curriculum and high-stakes testing, an inquiry stance may seem impossible to maintain. Nevertheless, if our goal is to develop young writers who are knowledgeable, flexible, effective, and confident, an inquiry stance is imperative. An inquiry stance is also genuine and real. We talk about creating authentic writing contexts for our students, but we rarely admit to our students that language, particularly written language, is complex and intriguing—and we teachers are still

making new discoveries about it ourselves. What a revolutionary (and honest) admission: there is much we can learn *with* and *from* our students about language variation, language diversity, and language itself.

8.3.3. Writing Complexities Made More Tangible

This inquiry-based framework for conceptualizing writing processes and pedagogies makes sense of my own experiences with writing and teaching writing; however, does this framework also make sense of the experience and observations of other teachers? Based on the sentiments expressed by my colleagues in a wide range of schools as well as by teachers in graduate literacy education courses I have taught, I believe this conceptual framework makes sense of the experiences of many teachers. I am convinced that we need to return to a more explicit focus on writing across grade levels united by an inquiry approach.

This conviction is confirmed by my eldest sister's observations and experiences teaching freshman composition and developmental writing in the community college context. My sister approaches writing from an inquiry stance, asking her students at the first class meeting to free-write about their expectations—both positive and negative—for the writing class. In the discussion that follows, many of her students admit they do not enjoy writing and do not see themselves as writers—because of past experiences of failure with writing in school. My sister elicits and dispels misconceptions about writing, creating a positive, engaging atmosphere in which students begin to move actively along the novice-to-expert writer continuum. She helps them see themselves as writers.

Why do so many students develop an aversion to writing during their P-12 education? Perhaps one clue is the myth that good writing depends on learning “proper” English—a sentiment expressed by my sister’s college students on that first day of class. Instead of having opportunities to inquire into writing as a linguistic, composing, and rhetorical process, and to explore these processes in ways that affirm their developing identities as writers writing in the key of life, many students meet only with failure and criticism for not writing successfully in the “key of school.” When P-12 writing instruction is approached from a mechanical, prescriptive perspective, using a one-dimensional (deficit) view of language, it is far less likely to produce engaged, confident, and effective writers.

A multi-dimensional, inquiry-based framework for conceptualizing writing processes and pedagogies makes the complexities of writing more tangible by demonstrating there are different kinds of processes working together. This framework suggests that young writers would first learn that writing is a graphic representation of their natural language “key” (writing as a linguistic process); then they would learn to compose in their natural language “key” (writing as a composing process); and building on this foundation, they would learn to branch out into learning and using new “keys” in new rhetorical situations (writing as a rhetorical process). All along the way, students and teachers would inquire into language and writing processes together. Such a framework suggests that students should learn to write first in their own “key” and only later in different “keys” by developing agency first in the language variety closest to self

and then developing an awareness of, and the ability to identify, different rhetorical situations and the possibilities of rhetorical choice.

This approach would help to grow agency, confidence and effectiveness in developing writers by connecting writing instruction to the lived experience of language students bring with them to school. This approach would be less likely to produce reluctant, disengaged, and struggling writers who feel that school writing is a chore at best or a failure-generating task at worst. An inquiry-based approach to writing processes and pedagogies would better equip students with the strategies and understandings necessary for writing across contexts—genres, audiences, purposes, and subject areas—beginning with the context and language “key” closest to self.

This conceptual framework might also equip teachers with a more nuanced approach to writing assessment. Teachers could assess their students’ growing ability to write in different “keys” by looking at their growth in understanding and use of writing as a linguistic, composing, rhetorical, and inquiry process. For example, a Grade 5 student whose first language is Arabic and who is learning to write in English as an additional language (inquiry process), may in fact draft and revise quite well (composing process), shaping the content and organization to meet genre expectations (rhetorical process), even though developing English language proficiency and first-time use of the Roman alphabet (linguistic process) may lead to mechanical missteps. By acknowledging multiple processes at work, teachers are better able to identify what the student does well, instead of merely focusing on mechanical errors.

8.4. Writing Research

Writing is a linguistic, composing, and rhetorical act of immense complexity. It is, and requires, inquiry from the earliest spark of emergence through every phase of development, evolution, and change over time in individuals and across contexts. Questions remain about how to understand and cultivate writing in school, particularly in this era of accountability and high-stakes testing, technological innovation, and increasing classroom linguistic and cultural diversity. The official school view of language persists, blocking many students from becoming effective, engaged, and confident writers. Fierce debates continue in staff rooms over the role (or disappearance) of cursive writing, and issues related to spelling, “proper grammar” (a phrase yet in use), and language diversity. Further research into the intersections of technology, language diversity, and writing processes is needed, in particular, in the following areas:

- 1) second language literacy development: what is the impact of having to learn to write *for the first time* in a second language or in an unfamiliar language variation (instead of being encouraged to write in one’s natural language “key” first)?
- 2) writing as multi-dimensional (linguistic, composing, rhetorical, and inquiry) in multiple languages and language varieties: how do the multiple processes of writing interact in multilingual, multidialectal writing?

3) the link between cognition and the physicality of writing by hand: what is technology's impact on individual composing processes and on composing processes over time?

This study illustrates the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to research on writing and the potential of an autoethnographic methodology for teacher research. While this inquiry, like all inquiry, has not reached a final destination, it has, hopefully, contributed something of value to the ongoing academic conversations about writing processes and pedagogies.

9. Coda: Letter to a New Teacher

Ary, I'm glad you have decided to become a teacher. Likely you are excited and maybe a little nervous about starting out. I know I was. When I became a teacher more than thirty years ago, teaching—in the context of a new teaching assignment at a new school in a new education system—felt like landing on a new planet. It took some time to grow into my new teacher identity, and I made many mistakes along the way. Perhaps the biggest mistake was forgetting what I knew about language. Although I had rich, foundational experiences with language diversity as a child—as I know you do, I somehow either forgot these experiences, or I ceased to value them as a teacher. I adopted the “official” school view of language.

Now I see that if I had heeded Maxine Greene's (1973) advice, developed a tough-minded stance toward the subject matter I was teaching and a tender-minded stance toward the lived experience of my students (Osman, 2012), I likely in time would have remembered the lessons from my childhood and their importance in writing pedagogies. Instead, I tried to teach writing as a composing process without acknowledging the rich language experiences of my students. I tried to motivate my students to write, but I was not yet able to provide all the tools they needed to develop into confident, effective writers across contexts. I was not yet teaching them to write in the key of life.

When I became a university writing instructor, and learned to view writing from a rhetorical perspective, I realized that writing was simultaneously a composing and a rhetorical process. But I knew that something was still missing from my understanding

of writing. Finally I realized that I needed to inquire into my own experiences of language in order to help my students inquire into their experiences of language. Writing was, in fact, a linguistic process of immense complexity. It required inquiry.

Autoethnography enables us to view the familiar in new ways as we search for patterns in experience. As I studied writing, I studied myself as a writer and teacher, and certain patterns emerged from the juxtaposition of public school teaching experience, university teaching experience, and childhood language experience. These patterns have emerged through writing as inquiry and have been deepened by an examination of scholarly literature on writing and teaching writing.

The most vivid pattern I've noted is this: *it is vital to learn about, honor, and value the lived experience of language students bring with them to school.* This is the foundation for all learning, all literacies. As teachers, we need to inquire into language ourselves, into our own language use, our backgrounds, and our linguistic history. We need to understand language diversity more deeply, to recognize both linguistic prejudice and hegemony. As Dennis Searle (1984) wrote, “who’s building whose building?”

As I have discovered through this inquiry, the culture of teaching sometimes makes us forget who we were, who we are, and who we might be. Writing helps us remember. By engaging in this inquiry, I have made the uncomfortable discovery that as a teacher, absorbed by school culture, wanting to “fit in” and “do well,” I sometimes forgot where I came from, forgot who I was—how language helped shape me as I shaped it.

So, my advice to you is simple: write. Write to remember your journey, to know who you are and want to be. Write with your students. Write about their struggles with writing. Write your way through teaching complexities.

In this research I have come to believe that how we view our students and their lived experience, how we view learning and teaching, how we view language, how we view writing, and how we view ourselves, all shape our decisions as teachers of writing, even within the official culture of school. Through writing, I have learned to acknowledge the complexities of writing and my own shortcomings in teaching writing. I have learned that above all, writing is an inquiry process. Learning to write is an inquiry process. Teaching writing is an inquiry process.

An inquiry-based perspective proves useful in understanding writing in the twenty-first century, in more precisely investigating the complexities of writing and teaching writing within contexts of linguistic diversity, expanding technologies, and educational constraints. In the 1980s I began teaching writing primarily as a composing process. In 2009 I began to teach writing explicitly as a rhetorical process. All along the way I sensed that language itself needed more attention in this endeavor to learn and teach the invention of written language. Over time I came to believe that language inquiry was a missing element in the language arts curriculum. Finally I began to wonder how linguistic inquiry might lead to stronger writing in school.

This research looks back on my experiences with language and teaching writing in diverse places. The common denominator, linguistic diversity, has enriched all my experiences of teaching—and living. This investigation is a synthesis of inquiry into

scholarly literature, reflection on practice, and the constructing of theory in order to arrive at deeper, more complex understandings of what is going on when we write and when we teach writing.

In the end, I have come to understand writing as a wondrous invention that evolves and develops just as spoken language evolves over time in communities and develops over time in individuals. Writing is not merely a composing process, creation originating in one person's mind—and yet it is a composing process. Writing is not merely a rhetorical process, prompted by a communicative context—and yet it is a rhetorical process. Writing is not merely a linguistic process, a graphic, visual representation of spoken language—and yet it is a linguistic process, a highly complex linguistic process. How are these three processes interconnected? They are woven together through inquiry. Writing is a process of inquiry—always.

As you embark on your own teaching journey, Ary, I want to thank you for what I have learned about language and writing from you.

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