READY OR NOT: ADDRESSING THE PREPARATION GAP BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE-LEVEL WRITERS

Jordan Y. Blackstone

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

August 2014

Committee:

Timothy Murnen, Advisor

Tracy Huziak-Clark

Cheryl Hoy
ABSTRACT

Timothy Murnen, Advisor

The educational community has long since recognized that there is preparation gap between high school and college-level writing. Current literature revealed six primary categories of concern: quantity of writing, use of formulaic writing strategies, development of cognitive skills, audience and purpose for writing/writing as communication, student qualities, and genre/cross-discipline features of writing. In light of these gaps, deliberate attention must be directed towards examining instructional strategies that might be effective in preparing students to meet the demands of college-level writing. Therefore, the focus of this research was to examine the effectiveness of current instructional strategies and their ability to address the preparation gap between high school and college-level writing. Three high school English Language Arts teachers participated in this study, which sought to explore the following research questions: 1) What instructional strategies are high school teachers using to teach college-preparatory writing? and 2) Are the instructional strategies used by high school teachers effective in addressing the main areas of the preparation gap between high school and college-level writers?

A series of three interviews were conducted with three teacher participants, and classroom observations were conducted over the course of two months; additionally, artifacts such as curricular materials and student work samples were collected. The six categories of the preparation gap were used as a framework to analyze data from teacher interviews, observations, and artifact collection. Five themes emerged which directly relate to the effectiveness of classroom teachers’ instructional strategies in addressing the preparation gap: philosophy and
purpose of high school writing instruction, instructional transparency, community, students’ identities as writers, and cross-discipline collaboration.

Results from this study suggested that when teachers clearly articulated a philosophy and purpose for writing instruction at the high school level, it better enabled them to implement instructional transparency with regard to writing. Particularly, the strategic use of formulaic writing structures supported by teacher modeling and the development of students’ writing-related cognitive skills were found to support college-preparatory writing instruction and address specific areas of the preparation gap. Furthermore, this study suggested that establishing a collaborative community in which students view themselves as writers may assist students in developing the techniques and student dispositions that support strong writing performance across the disciplines.
This work is dedicated to the Monroe Central High School class of 2012, Woodsfield, Ohio.

You taught me the most about the joys of teaching writing and were the first students willing to believe that “English is Magic!” Your efforts, dedication, and enthusiasm continue to inspire me to become the best educator I can be.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to my thesis advisor, Dr. Timothy Murnen, whose excellence as an educator served as an inspiration and an example for my own work. Your feedback and guidance throughout this process was invaluable; your questions and perspectives challenged me to dig deeper into my research and led to a greater understanding of this project and of myself as an educator. I treasure the conversations about teaching and learning that occurred during our time working together.

Additionally, I would like to thank my thesis committee members, Dr. Tracy Huziak-Clark and Dr. Cheryl Hoy. Your expertise in research and writing was instrumental, and your assistance, feedback, and encouragement throughout this process provided the additional support and insight that enabled me to be successful.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the teacher volunteers who participated in this study. Despite immense demands on your time, your willingness to open your classroom to me made this research possible. The insights and understandings I gained during our time together have now become a part of who I am as an educator.

Finally, my deepest appreciation goes to my family and friends for their constant love and support. Never once did you doubt my ability to succeed. Thank you for your willingness to listen to my frustrations and for your wisdom which always helped me to refocus. Your relentless encouragement and unwavering belief in my dreams as a teacher and a writer provided me the confidence to accomplish this next “big thing” in my life.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Chapters</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is There a Gap?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical support</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructors’ perspectives</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ perspectives</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of content standards</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining the Gap</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student disposition factors</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content-related factors</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity of writing</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre/cross-discipline concerns</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formulaic writing structures</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic audience and purpose; writing as communication</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive skills</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing Causes of the Gap</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Participants</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Remera</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Mahire</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. LeHilo</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examining the Areas of the Preparation Gap</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity of writing</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formulaic writing strategies</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive skills</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience, purpose, and writing as communication</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student dispositions</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre/cross-discipline features</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy and purpose of high school writing instruction</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional transparency</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and collaboration</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ identities as writers</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-discipline collaboration</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications and Recommendations</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school English Language Arts teachers</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school-level content teachers</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Effective written communication is one of the most transferrable skills students acquire, providing them access to advanced college and career options. In fact, “Writing may be the single overarching academic [skill] most closely associated with college success…” (Conley, 2008, p. 4) and “[is] central in both higher education and in the world of work that follows” (Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009, p. 250). However, the reality for many students is that they are unprepared or underprepared for the rigorous demands of higher-level writing. A disheartening number of students are enrolling in remedial college courses for writing, and an additional majority of students are failing to meet professors’ and instructors’ expectations for formal academic writing at the college level (Achieve, Inc., 2005; Acker & Halasek, 2008; Crank, 2013; Eodice, 2007; Fitzhugh, 2011; Haycock, 2010; Rothman, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

The educational community has long since recognized that there is a preparation gap between high school and college-level writing (Crank, 2013; Eodice, 2007; Fitzhugh, 2011; Haycock, 2010). In light of this, the focus now must turn, first, to understanding the nature of this preparation gap and, secondly, to examining ways in which current instructional approaches are capable of addressing it. In an effort to understand the pervasiveness of this preparation gap, many are tempted to question the nature of writing instruction at the high school level, some even implying that high school instructors are either not teaching writing skills or are not teaching them effectively (Achieve, Inc., 2005; Beil & Knight, 2007; Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010; Perin, 2013; Rothman, 2012). While this provides critics and analysts with a quick explanation in the form of a scapegoat, it is neither a sufficient or productive approach to the issue nor is it an accurate response. Rather, many dedicated high school English Language Arts instructors across the country are implementing admirable and creative means of teaching academic writing to their
students (Fanetti et al., 2010) in addition to the other curricular expectations that are comprised by the English Language Arts content area (Denecker, 2013).

Rationale

While the concern over students’ abilities to successfully meet the rigorous demands of post-secondary writing coursework is paramount, deliberate attention must be directed towards examining the efforts currently being implemented, or efforts that might be effective, to address this preparation gap. One such attempt to address this issue is the recent, nearly nationwide adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) focused on developing students who are college and career ready (Haycock, 2010; Rothman, 2012). A primary focus of the new CCSS is literacy, with special attention being directed towards writing both within the English Language Arts classroom and within the other academic disciplines (Crank, 2012; Haycock, 2010). With national, state, and local government and educational agencies’ attention now being so focused on the area of literacy, with the added pressures of accountability and related high stakes testing, educators need the support of proven and practical instructional strategies to meet these new demands and to serve their students well (Conker & Lewis, 2008).

Research Questions

Therefore, the focus of this research was to examine the effectiveness of current instructional strategies and their ability to address the preparation gap between high school and college-level writing. Emphasis is placed upon a review of strategies that will be effective and practical in implementation at the high school level with attention being directed towards their alignment with the demands of college-preparatory writing expectations. The intended outcome of this research is threefold: raise awareness of the specific areas of concern regarding the preparation gap between high school and college-level writing, offer a reexamination of the nature of college-preparatory writing instruction at the high school level, and provide a review of
instructional strategies in relation to specific areas of concern regarding students’ preparation to meet the demands of college-level writing. The study focused on the following research questions:

1. What instructional strategies are high school teachers using to teach college-preparatory writing?
2. How do the instructional strategies used by high school teachers address the main areas of the preparation gap between high school and college-level writers?

Summary of Chapters

The nature of this research provided the opportunity to deliberately consider the current discussion regarding college-preparatory writing instruction, and, in light of this, to carefully examine instructional strategies that may be implemented to improve professional practice and student learning. Establishing a basic foundation, Chapter One contextualized the importance of this research within the current educational climate and presented the focus research questions. Providing a more thorough exploration of the specific concerns about students’ writing abilities, Chapter Two reviewed the main areas of the preparation gap between high school and college-level writers evidenced in the research literature and highlighted the need for future research, including this study. Chapter Three outlined the theoretical framework and design for this study, reviewed the primary research questions, and also examined related limitations. Guided by the specific areas of the preparation gap that formed the coding matrix used in this study (Appendix A), Chapter Four presented the data that resulted from the three case study teacher participants. Finally, after discussing the focus research questions for this study, Chapter Five explored the five themes that emerged from the data, presented implications and recommendations for several stakeholders, and outlined potential focuses for future research.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background

Data depicting the trends of student writing performance dates back nearly three decades (Applebee & Langer, 2006), suggesting the importance of this academic skill and its impact on students’ abilities to respond to the expectations of college and career environments. Furthermore, educational reform efforts such as No Child Left Behind, which directed attention to equalizing and increasing students’ academic performance in general, and the more recent development of the Common Core State Standards, which focus on academic concerns of literacy and college and career readiness, lay the groundwork for a more critical examination of students’ writing abilities as they transition from high school to college environments. However, as Denecker (2013) noted, “Today, the relationship between secondary and post-secondary English programs remains a complex one, most particularly, in the area of composition studies” (p. 27). The current climate surrounding the implementation of the Common Core State Standards reflects the notion that “A large portion of U.S. high school graduates are ill-prepared to meet the challenges of college or career” (Rothman, 2012, p. 11); this transition, or “threshold,” according to Denecker (2013), “is not easily traversed, due in part to the uneven juncture where the paths of secondary and post-secondary writing expectations meet” (p. 27). Therefore, a review of the notion of a preparation gap between students’ high school and college-level writing abilities as evidenced in current literature is a crucial initial step in not only understanding this gap but developing a potential approach to determining what instructional efforts are appropriate, effective, and practical for addressing these concerns.

Is there a Gap?

Enrollment in remedial courses in both two-year and four-year colleges and institutions provides strong evidence that students are not prepared for the rigorous demands of college
academics. However, this is far from a new issue; concern about the preparation of students with regard to college readiness in reading and writing has existed as far back as the 1970s (Perin, 2013). And while there is a variety of issues associated with this lack of preparation, it is becoming more and more apparent that, as Conley (2008) noted, there are distinct “…gaps that exist between those who are college eligible and those who are college ready [emphasis added]” (p. 11).

Statistical support. A review of the data from the past ten years provides statistical confirmation of the gap that exists between high school preparation and college readiness in the area of writing, among others. In 2003, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that “approximately 70 percent of students in grades four, eight, and twelve were deemed ‘low-achieving’ writers”; furthermore, in 2005, the ACT “found that one-third of high school students who plan to attend college do not meet the readiness standards for college composition courses” (Conker & Lewis, 2008, p. 234). Additionally, D’Agostino and Bonner (2009) highlighted the difficulties colleges and universities face as they attempt to provide students with necessary remedial courses, later reporting that in 2001, “at least 42% of students in 2-year institutions and 20% of students in 4-year institutions enroll in remedial courses” (p. 25) which greatly impacts the likelihood that these students will actually graduate. As recently as 2011, the ACT reported that “just one in four students who took the ACT test met the benchmark scores in all four subjects” (Rothman, 2012, p. 12). The National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2011 that “36.2 percent of students entering American colleges and universities require at least one developmental course and 48 percent did not meet the reading benchmark for college readiness” (Mongillo & Wilder, 2012, p. 28).

Instructors’ perspectives. While the data are a strong indication of the preparation gap, feedback from key players offers additional insight. High school teachers and college professors
and instructors are the most intimate with the areas of concern regarding students’ college readiness in writing. In 2005, the Arkansas Department of Education surveyed over three hundred college instructors: “Sixty-six percent… believe that remedial or development courses are needed by over half of the freshman level students they teach” (p. 5). In fact, college professors are often the most critical of students’ preparation, with 62 percent being dissatisfied with writing quality and 70 percent expressing disappointment with students’ ability to read and comprehend complex materials (Achieve, Inc., 2005). Thirty-seven percent cited that “the writing quality that is expected” (Achieve, Inc., 2005, p. 9) at the college level is one of the two main areas of focus that should be addressed by high school educators.

While the need for remediation may be evident to college professors, there is a strikingly different perspective held by high school teachers. Biel and Knight (2007) shared that according to a 2006 study, “forty-four percent of [college] faculty members say students are not well prepared for college level writing, a view held only by 10 percent of [high school] teachers. Just 6 percent of professors view students as well-prepared writers, compared with 36 percent of [high school] teachers…” (p. 6). In light of this, it becomes questionable if the measurements being used at the high school level are accurately portraying students’ ability to meet the demands of college-level writing. In an attempt to explore this issue, the 2004 American Diploma Project examined six states’ English exit tests based on reading and rigor and passing scores, later comparing them to college and workplace knowledge and skills benchmarks; results indicated that the “items on the exit exams… were found to measure only a small portion of the knowledge and skills expected from colleges and employers” (D’Agostino & Boner, 2009, p. 26). While the task of proving or disproving the alignment of secondary assessment and post-secondary academic demands is difficult, complicated, and fraught with the potential for great variations in outcome, the motivation behind such examinations is what is striking: it is due to the underperformance of
students at the college level that high school performance assessments are actually being critically questioned.

**Students’ perspectives.** And while high school teachers and college professors experience great levels of frustration with regard to students’ preparation, or lack thereof, the students themselves offer complaints about not being appropriately equipped to meet the demands of college-level writing. In 2005, Achieve, Inc. published a study that examined the issue of college readiness from the viewpoints of various key players, including students. The study reported that “…two in five recent high school graduates say that there are gaps between the education they received in high school and the overall skills, abilities, and work habits that are expected of them today in college and in the work force” (Achieve, Inc., 2005, p. 2). Commenting on more specific gaps in their preparation, “40% notice some gaps in their ability to do research (10% large gaps)” and “35% say that there are some gaps in the quality of writing that is expected (9% large gaps)” (Achieve, Inc., 2005, p. 4). The students’ awareness of their lack of preparation was connected to the level of rigor they experienced at the high school level; fewer than 25 percent felt “they faced high academic expectations and that they were significantly challenged in high school” (Achieve, Inc., 2005, p. 9).

**Development of content standards.** The concern over students’ preparation and ability to meet the demands of the college and career environments fueled efforts to develop and implement new content standards. From the beginning, Rothman (2012) reported that the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) development focused on the specific criteria “that the standards reflect research on college and career readiness” (p. 13). Further, “Topics that might be interesting but that were not essential for postsecondary success would be thrown out” (Rothman, 2012, p. 13). Again, Haycock (2010) stated that the central question during the development of the CCCS was: “What did students need to know in order to be successful in college?”, later stating that “evidence of its
importance to college success had to be proved” (p. 17). While this arguably suggests an unsettling narrowing of curriculum yet again, it does highlight that even state-wide and nation-wide focus is on the need to close the preparation gap with regard to college readiness, especially in terms of students’ writing abilities. Reading and writing are two focus areas within the new standards, and cross-discipline literacy standards are also now imbedded as an instructional expectation for all teachers; the intention is that this will be a strategic step towards addressing the preparation gap by promoting an emphasis on writing throughout the K-12 curriculum (Common Core State Standards Initiative).

Defining the Gap

Though the statistical severity, pervasiveness, and persistency of the preparation gap are significantly documented in research (Conker & Lewis, 2008; Crank, 2013; Fitzhugh, 2011; Hafner, Joseph, & McCormick, 2010; Mongillo & Wilder, 2012; Sanoff, 2006; Sullivan, 2009), clarifying the critical areas of concern in student performance is essential in the attempt to understand and potentially address this gap. Overall, the current literature revealed the following gaps with regard to students’ preparation for college-level writing: quantity of writing, use of formula or writing strategies, development of cognitive skills, audience and purpose for writing/writing as communication, student dispositions, and genre/cross-discipline features of writing (See Appendix A).

Student disposition factors. The central issues with regard to the preparation gap between high school and college-level students, especially with regard to writing, were found to fall into two general categories: student dispositions and content-related deficiencies (Sanoff, 2006). Though work ethic, study skills, attitude, or “grit,” as Sullivan (2009) called it, are universal factors in students’ success within higher education, the role these play in the abilities of underprepared or struggling writers certainly increases the likelihood of further difficulty with the
demands of college-level writing (n.p.). While it is difficult to place full responsibility for the
development of these or similar student characteristics at the door of high school teachers, it is
worth noting the added difficulties of cultivating these skills for the first time once students
encounter the raised expectations of higher education. Furthermore, considering that writing is
inherently a challenging task that demands students’ time and continued effort, the potential of
these student disposition factors to impact students’ writing performance in high school and
college is worth noting.

**Content-related factors.** The second category of student under-preparation is much more
content-related and specific in nature. In other words, these gaps, or areas of concern, are directly
connected to the topic of college-preparatory writing and their impact is directly related to the
challenges students face with regard to college-level writing expectations. Furthermore, these
content-related concerns are specifically connected to the manner in which teachers implement
college-preparatory writing instruction at the high school level.

**Quantity of writing.** While the notion “practice makes perfect” has its limitations, with
regard to college-writing preparation, significant exposure to appropriate reading and writing
materials and assignments is necessary for students to be sufficiently prepared. Fitzhugh (2011),
Crank (2012), and Sanoff (2006) stated that high school students are not prepared for the quantity
of writing at the college level. “Quantity,” however, refers not only to the number of assignments
but the frequency and length of the writing assignments students are expected to complete in
college. Fitzhugh (2011) stated that high school instructors often do not recognize the value in
longer assignments; furthermore, researchers indicated that high school teachers from multiple
disciplines “did not assign at least one . . . multiparagraph activity at least monthly” (Kiuhara,
Graham & Hawken, 2009, p.151). Additionally, Kiuhara et al. (2009) noted that “a sizable
proportion of the participating teachers seldom assigned activities that clearly involved writing
multiple paragraphs. Almost one third of language arts and social studies teachers did not assign such an activity monthly” (p. 151). Additionally, Sanoff (2009) noted that “[s]ixty-one percent of [high school] teachers never ask students to write papers more than five pages” (n.p.). While this helps to understand first-year students’ shock when over “…70 percent [of college professors] expect students to at least occasionally write papers of more than five pages” (Sanoff, 2006, n.p.), it does not negate or undermine the validity of this expectation.

*Genre/cross-discipline concerns.* Furthermore, in addition to the quantity, students are not prepared for the various genres of writing assignments they will be expected to complete or the diversity of disciplines for which they will be expected to write as a means of demonstrating understanding (Crank, 2012; Sanoff, 2006; Mongillo & Wilder, 2012). At the core of college-level writing is formal academic research writing, a skill which high school students are vaguely experienced with, at best. Fitzhugh (2011) cited a 2002 national study conducted for *The Concord Review* that stated that despite their belief in the value of the assignment, “62 percent [of high school teachers] never assign a [research] paper of moderate length” (p. 415). Though the reasons for this lack of experience are valid and will be discussed later, the reality is still very clear: many first-year college students have little to no experience in the formal research process.

So while it is often the case that students are not frequently writing lengthy, research-based, formal assignments at the high school level, to conclude they are not writing at all is not accurate. Sehulster (2012) and Crank (2012) stated that students’ writing experiences are often relegated to literary analysis or personal responses. Additionally, teachers use writing assignments as practice for standardized writing assessments (Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010). As a result, students’ perceptions of what “college-level writing” entails are shaped by the rather singular exposure they have had, reinforcing their lack of preparation for non-literary writing
tasks. Additionally, students’ lack of exposure to nonfiction texts hinders their ability to engage in writing assignments that do not fall within a “literary” genre (Fitzhugh, 2011; Sehulster, 2012).

**Formulaic writing structures.** Linked to the literary-based writing assignments, a formal and rather rigid writing process is stressed for high school students, often as a means of scaffolding them to a proficient level of writing for state tests. As a result, many college instructors express the difficulties they have with students who have only been trained to view writing in a “five-paragraph essay” format that includes a “thesis as the last sentence of the introductory paragraph” (Fanetti et al., 2010, p. 81). When interviewed about the gap between high school and college writing expectations, one professor noted that he was “arguing with the students in some way for the first part of the semester” (Fanetti et al., 2010, p. 80) as he attempted to, like many professors included in the study, help students “unlearn the rules and skills” (Denecker, 2013, p. 28) they had been taught to strictly adhere to in high school English classes. Thus, not only is the lack of experience with regard to various writing assignments a critical weakness for first-year college writers, their formulaic approach to writing, though a result of the process they were taught in high school, is thought to hinder their ability to engage in the multiple writing formats they are expected to complete throughout their college careers.

**Authentic audience and purpose; writing as communication.** Because high school education is often seen to be preparation for college or career, what many tend to consider to be more “real” environments, students at the high school level are often exposed to “artificial” writing assignments as a means of simply mastering the skills; students are not given a clear purpose for their writing nor are they writing for an authentic or specific audience (Conker & Lewis, 2008; Mongillo & Wilder, 2012; Whitney, Ridgeman & Masquelier, 2011). As students transition to college-level writing expectations, then, they struggle to no longer approach writing as a merely graded task. Fanetti et al. (2010) suggested that students’ high school writing
experiences lead them to adopt a “fixed understanding of writing as a defined and particular skill intended to produce a defined and particular product” (p. 81). In light of this perspective, it is no wonder that Crank (2009) noted students’ lack of understanding of writing as a personally expressive tool through which they engage in communication and assume a respected role within academic discourse settings.

**Cognitive skills.** Students’ perceptions of writing are a unique issue with regard to the preparation gap, and this concern has its roots in the cognitive skills that are intimately connected to writing instruction. Researchers claimed that students are not strong analytical, critical, or creative thinkers, and this is reflected in their perceptions of college writing as well as their understanding of their role as writers in an academic community (Crank, 2012; Mongillo & Wilder, 2012; Sullivan, 2009). Not only are these cognitive skills crucial for students to be able to engage in the level of thought that will generate college-level understanding of content, but they are essential for students to demonstrate that understanding through their writing, a difficulty for many first-year students.

The more clearly one can define the gaps in students’ writing abilities as they transition from high school to college, the better the likelihood that these gaps can be addressed. It is clear from the research that students are unprepared for the amount, frequency, length, genres, format, and processes associated with college-level writing as well as their role as thinkers and writers in the academic community. And though not solely responsible, high school teachers are the source of students’ knowledge of writing as well as the facilitators of their pre-college writing experiences. College instructors are then confronted with many challenges as they are faced with a significant portion of their student body that is unprepared to meet the demands of college writing. The comparison of research with regard to first-year college students’ writing abilities suggests
repeated, specific areas of concern. The fact that this gap is so clearly definable is a positive step towards developing targeted strategies for addressing and, with sincerest hope, closing it.

**Contributing Causes of the Gap**

Considering that an examination of the current literature provided clear definitions of the central issues of the preparation gap between high school and college-level writing (Conker & Lewis, 2008; Crank, 2013; Fitzhugh, 2011), it is no surprise, then, that the literature also identified specific aspects that can be classified as contributing causes of this gap (Conley, 2009; Daisey, 2009; Denecker, 2013). Furthermore, not only are these causes evident in the literature, but they reflect a progressive cause-and-effect relationship that offers an additional element to understanding the dynamics of this issue. Contributing causes of the gap included high school teachers’ lack of training in writing instruction, reflected in the types of writing assignments typical at the high school level (though not necessarily reflective of college-level assignments), which highlighted the potential lack of K-16 standards alignment and the variations in writing expectations at the high school and college levels.

**High school teachers.** The role high school instructors play, though a sensitive topic of discussion, is nonetheless a catalyst of the preparation gap. Though the blame cannot be placed entirely on high school instructors, as Daisey (2009) noted, “…high school teachers…play a crucial role as a positive or negative influence on students as writers” (p. 166). However, the nature of their role as a contributing cause of the preparation gap is multifaceted. Surprisingly, high school English Language Arts instructors are often not purposely trained in writing instruction (Isaacs & Kolba, 2009). According to a 2003 study by the National Writing Project, “A course in writing instruction is not a specific requirement in most state teacher certification programs” (Daisey, 2009, pp.157-58). As a result, it is no wonder that, in some instances, high school English Language Arts teachers’ writing instruction is considered to be inadequate,
especially with regard to the particular demands of college academic settings (Perin, 2013; Timperley & Parr, 2009; Denecker, 2013). Again, however, the nature of this inadequacy is not as simplistic as researchers would like. The labeling of high school writing instruction as inadequate may not necessarily be false, but it must be examined with regard to the realization that the educational nuances of high school English Language Arts classrooms and curricular expectations differ greatly from those in the post-secondary realm. High school English Language Arts instructors are faced with a curriculum that encompasses more than writing content; additionally, characteristics of secondary education include large class sizes and outside educational performance pressures that impact not only the type of instruction but also the feasibility of targeted writing instruction that would satisfy the demands of many college and university professors (Crank, 2012; Denecker, 2013; Fitzhugh, 2011).

**Types of high school writing assignments.** An additional cause of the gap is the varying types of writing tasks assigned at the high school level which are not typical of college writing (for example, informal journal entries or short opinion pieces) and, thus, contribute to students’ lack of preparation (Beil & Knight, 2007; Crank, 2012; Denecker, 2013; Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009). However, it is important to recognize that the writing tasks that are common at the high school level are often in response to logistical restrictions and outside performance demands faced by high school instructors. Furthermore, many of the tasks assigned at the high school level are designed to prepare students to meet the demands of high stakes tests required for graduation or by state and national legislation. Therefore, a related cause of the preparation gap is the impact the pressure of these high stakes tests have on writing and instruction (Fanetti et al., 2009) and their use as “reliable indicators of student readiness for college work” (Sanoff, 2006, n.p.). Often these tests, including Advanced Placement exams, are questioned by college professors as being
accurate representations of students’ writing abilities, while high school instructors are much more likely to value the scores (Sanoff, 2006).

**Standards alignment and rigor.** The differing estimations of students’ abilities highlight additional causes of the preparation gap which include inadequate standards and questionable K-16 curricular alignment (Acker & Halasek, 2008; Denecker, 2013; Rothman, 2012). As Rothman (2012) clearly stated, “A growing number of educators believe the answer [or cause] might be inadequate curricular standards…[which] have raised concerns that some states’ standards set expectations below what students need to succeed in college and careers” (p. 12). It was this opinion, shared by many educational and governmental agencies, which led to development of the Common Core State Standards.

**Differing high school and college-level writing expectations.** Perhaps the most pervasive cause of the preparation gap present in the literature falls within the broad category of differing expectations between high school and college-level educational settings (Denecker, 2013; Fanetti, et al., 2007; Hafner, Joseph, & McCormick, 2010). Conley (2008) stated that, “In short, the differences in expectations between high school and college are manifold and significant” (p. 6). Haycock (2010) reported that the volunteer states that were involved in the early stages of the Common Core State Standards development recognized that students were experiencing a gap between what was expected of them at the conclusion of high school compared to the learning expectations during their college careers. In light of these differing expectations, Isaacs and Kolba (2009) noted that “…when it comes to the practice of teaching writing, universities are often disconnected from schools despite many common concerns and goals” (p. 55). It is no surprise, then, that efforts at each level of writing instruction are aligned to their relative expectations; the result is the existence, and even persistence, of a gap with regard to students’ preparation and their
ability to transfer writing knowledge acquired in the high school setting to the vastly different college or university environment.

**Current Efforts for Addressing the Gap**

With the preparation gap between high school and college level writing so evidenced in literature and a current focus for educational and governmental entities, efforts to address this gap have been an equally important topic for researchers and educators alike. While it is important to understand the nature of this gap, the ultimate goal is to develop structured, adaptable, transferrable, and most importantly, effective strategies for addressing and perhaps even closing this gap.

**College-level efforts.** The majority of efforts for responding to unprepared student writers, however, is concentrated at the college level where students’ lack of preparation has the most crucial, and negative, impact (Conley, 2008; Perin, 2013). In reality, students’ lack of ability to meet the demands of college-level writing tasks is an immediate problem that must be addressed by the institutions which enroll these students. College-level efforts include remedial writing classes, a solution that has, in itself, turned into a topic of concern due to increased remedial enrollment and the cost to students and institutions. Furthermore, some college instructors support targeted, literacy skill-based instruction within remedial college courses as a means of directly addressing the learning gaps that impact these students’ writing performance (Conley, 2008; Perin, 2013). Beil and Knight (2007), while acknowledging the differing expectations for high school and college-level writing, advocated that colleges implement instructional efforts that target the college-specific writing needs of their students, highlighting the instinct to address the issue of the preparation gap at the college level, where its impact is often most critically experienced. Additionally, campus writing centers continue to be a method of meeting the needs of the large
number of unprepared writers who benefit most from individualized feedback and guidance regarding college-level writing expectations (Eodice, 2007).

**High school and college/university partnerships.** One of the most pervasive attempts to address the preparation gap is high school-college/university partnerships that promote extended collaboration and communication regarding expectations and instructional efforts to better prepare students for writing at the post-secondary level (Acker & Halasek, 2008; Conley, 2008; Hafner, Joseph, & McCormick, 2010; Sehulter, 2012; Sanoff, 2006). The general consensus regarding this partnership reflects “an urgent need for better communication and greater interaction among high schools and colleges” (Sanoff, 2006, n.p.). Efforts of these collaborative partnerships included the development of a focused literacy vision that aligns with college-level demands (Jetton, Cancienne, & Greeever, 2008), dual enrollment programs with targeted writing instruction (Blumner & Childers, 2011; Denecker, 2013), collaborations with college library staff to promote professional development for high school instructors and to develop “programs that promote college readiness” (Ewbonk, Guy, Tharp, & Welty, 2011, p. 28), and the implementation of writing centers at the high school level to provide the same individualized feedback for students’ writing that has long been a successful approach at the college level (Isaacs & Kolba, 2009).

**Standards alignment K-16.** An additional result of these secondary/post-secondary partnerships is their ability to provide a means to better align the standards and expectations for high school and college-level writing. One of the most broad-scope attempts at K-16 alignment is reflected in the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards which were developed through this type of collaborative process (Haycock, 2010). Hafner, Joseph, and McCormick (2010) noted the “national need for comprehensive polices and organizational structures to foster curricular coordination between high schools and secondary institutions” (p. 20), reflecting not only the nature of collaboration but also the necessity for consistency with regard to writing
curriculum expectations K-16. Furthermore, Conley (2008) depicted such collaborations that would facilitate the creation of “scoring guides, assignments, and even courses” (p. 11) that would promote targeted curricular alignment with regard to writing instruction.

**High school-level efforts.** More specific instructional strategies at the high school level are also advocated as appropriate means of addressing the preparation gap before students experience difficulty or even failure in college writing environments. These efforts included focused instruction in particular writing genres such as nature writing or fairytales as a bridge to other genres such as legal briefs or novels (Whitney, Ridgeman, & Masquelier, 2011), which provided students in-depth experience in studying and adapting specific genre forms. Similarly, targeted learning experiences regarding rhetorical analysis (Graff, 2010) further reinforced students’ understanding of text features (Collier, 2014) which improved their ability to translate that knowledge into their own writing. Both of these current approaches represent the belief that targeted instruction in writing processes and features will enable students to transfer their writing skills from high school to college environments.

Another common instructional approach is the development of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) or Writing Within the Discipline (WID) programs which, again, overtly teach procedural writing content with the goal of knowledge transfer (Crank, 2012; Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009). In other words, having gained a basic understanding of writing modes or forms, students are provided opportunities to engage in writing tasks throughout all of their courses, thereby reinforcing learning and writing skills. Accompanying this approach is also the advocacy of “additional task practice…at the high school and college level in deliberate forms aimed at improving advanced writing skills” (Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009, p. 251). Curricular/instructional programs, such as the Expository Reading and Writing Course (ERWC) detailed by Bernasconi (2008), represent efforts to provide writing instructors with more specialized strategies that focus
on “learning how to read rhetorically, to think critically, and to write authoritatively”, which are intended to address students’ needs “well beyond the academic world” (p.19). Similarly, Acker and Halasek (2008) explored the use of ePortfolios as a means of elucidating the writing process in order to potentially highlight and address related gaps in student performance or preparation.

While these instructional efforts are intended to address the writing preparation gap, evidence of deliberate teacher training in writing instructional strategies is limited in the existing literature (Perin, 2013). Isaacs and Kolba (2009) explored the concept of requiring students in English Language Arts educator preparation programs to participate as tutors in high school writing centers, thereby giving them one-on-one experience and insight into the nuances of writing instruction; this effort also sought to “…address the theory-practice conflict” (p. 66) commonly associated with educator preparation programs as well as research efforts to solve educational problems, such as this existing writing preparation gap. While their research offered an interesting perspective and further supports the notion of secondary/post-secondary collaborations, it is limited in its broad application to various educational settings.

**Conclusion**

Writing director of Brooklyn College and considered “the father of peer tutoring,” Kenneth Bruffee noted that “The state of ‘being underprepared’ in writing is a deeply rooted knot of complex issues” (Eodice, 2007, pp. 33, 36). However, he also expressed the importance of written communication as a universal academic and career skill when he noted that the majority of other academic disciplines “would [not] exist without writing, because these and many other fields of endeavor are handicapped by the inability of 80% of American college graduates to write effectively at a college level” (Eodice, 2007, p. 40). In fact, it would be difficult to argue that writing is not a critical academic skill for students at all levels. Therefore, it is imperative that students receive the necessary instruction and writing experience to be prepared to meet the
demands of college and career writing tasks. As Crank (2012) noted, the current research, “confirms our experiential understanding that students will experience writing very differently in college than they did in high school and explores how these differences complicate the transition from writing in high school to writing in college” (p. 51).

The same research, however, is lacking in its ability to offer a clear examination of the effectiveness of current instructional strategies as targeted attempts to address the preparation gap. While efforts do exist, many are relegated to the college writing classroom, and few are examined as appropriate strategies to implement at the high school level, especially considering the substantial differences in the two educational settings. Furthermore, many of the efforts represent wide-scale organization approaches to addressing this preparation gap and, as such, are not practically implementable by individual high school English Language Arts instructors who are seeking to better serve their students through research-supported best practices. It was the goal of this research, therefore, to offer a critical examination of focused instructional strategies and their appropriateness in addressing this preparation gap with the intention of providing high school English Language Arts instructors with practical approaches to teaching college-preparatory writing.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Research Questions

While the existence of the preparation gap between high school and college-level writing is discussed in the related literature (Conker & Lewis, 2008; Crank, 2013; Fitzhugh, 2011; Hafner, Joseph, McCormick, 2010; Mongillo & Wilder, 2012; Sanoff, 2006; Sullivan, 2009), research that offers high school English Language Arts instructors with an examination of the effectiveness of individual instructional strategies is lacking. However, multiple stakeholders, including educators, government officials, and academic researchers are “taking note not only of the importance of writing and the need for high quality instruction, but also of the need for additional research to inform instruction and intervention in writing” (Miller & McCardle, 2011, p. 122). Therefore, in light of the issues discussed in Chapter Two, and the call for additional research, this study focused on the following research questions:

1. What instructional strategies are high school teachers using to teach college-preparatory writing?
2. How do the instructional strategies used by high school teachers address the main areas of the preparation gap between high school and college-level writers?

Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the efforts of three current high school English Language Arts teachers in implementing instructional strategies that are effective in developing students’ college-preparatory writing skills. Data collected throughout the study resulted primarily from interviews and observations, as well as artifacts collected, such as curricular materials and student work samples. Data were then examined in regard to the previously identified areas of the preparation gap (Appendix A) as a means of exploring in what ways the instructional strategies being used were preparing students to meet the demands of college-level writing or were addressing specific areas of the preparation gap.
Theoretical Framework and Research Design

It is important to note that the purpose of this research was not an evaluation of the effectiveness of instructional strategies with regard to student performance data; rather, the purpose was to provide an examination of the appropriateness and practicality of these strategies in light of the previously discussed central issues that indicate the preparation gaps between high school and college-level writing. In other words, though increased attention in research is being directed towards examining student data as a means of determining teacher effectiveness, this study focused on examining teacher participants’ instructional strategies with regard to the particular areas of the preparation gap previously identified (Appendix A). Additionally, high school English Language Arts classroom are characterized by unique dynamics that can often reveal strategies to be less effective in practice than when previously considered from a theoretical perspective. Therefore, the use of a qualitative case study approach facilitated a focused and in-depth examination of the three teachers in this study in order to better understand the instructional strategies being used as well as the nuances of each participant’s classroom environment.

Supporting this theoretical framework and research design, Simon (2009) purported “that [the] qualitative case study is a particularly appropriate methodology for exploring problems of educational practice” (p. 5) because the resultant sharing of findings enables multiple audiences (in this instance, educational leaders, classroom teachers, and teacher preparatory educators) to utilize findings to practically inform current and future practice. Additionally, qualitative case study research is especially useful as a complementary approach to the data driven quantitative research studies designed for evaluative purposes during the 1960s and 1970s (Simon, 2009), which are also seemingly dominating today’s educational climate. While quantitative or even mixed-method approaches are useful and valuable, the narrative and story-driven characteristics of the case study provide a more humanistic view of educational issues and present findings in such a
way as to appropriately inform future educational practices. Simon (2009) defined a case study as “a comprehensive research strategy, incorporating specific data collection and analysis approaches to investigate phenomena in real-life contexts” (p. 20). Furthermore, the main objective for utilizing a case study approach is “to explore the particularity, the uniqueness, of the single case” (Simon, 2009, p. 4), and considering that the intention of this research was to compare various classroom teachers’ instructional strategies as they related to college-preparatory writing, an application of a qualitative case study approach was employed. Additionally, this study placed emphasis on interviewing and observing teacher participants as well as collecting artifacts such as curricular materials and student samples which supported many of the methods of data collection discussed by Simon (2009).

**Participants and Setting**

Because the nature of this research was an exploration of the effectiveness of specific instructional strategies for high school writing curriculum, high school English Language Arts instructors were the desired participants for the study. Preference was given for junior and senior-level instructors because of the related college-preparatory curriculum that typically focuses on more advanced writing instruction than earlier grades. Again, the uniqueness Simon (2009) referred to that so often characterizes case study research was certainly reflected by the participants selected for this study.

Three high school English Language Arts instructors in Northwest Ohio were contacted via e-mail and invited to participate as case study subjects. Pseudonyms were utilized in order to protect the identity of the teachers, students, and schools involved in this study. Mrs. Remera, a thirty-two year veteran teacher, was an instructor for junior and senior students at an all-girl private, parochial school in an urban city in Ohio. Mrs. Mahire had been teaching for eighteen years and was primarily an instructor of freshmen students at a small, rural high school. Finally,
Mrs. LeHilo was an instructor of junior and senior students at a large career center, where she had taught her entire career of nineteen years; additionally, she was also a college writing instructor at a satellite campus for a neighboring university. Clearly, each participant represented a unique demographic, providing additional insight into the nuances of various classroom settings. Data collection was focused on these three individual instructors and their respective classrooms with the intention of gathering a depth of data, rather than a breadth, to promote later analysis.

**Instrumentation and Procedures**

**Teacher interviews.** Three interviews were conducted with each teacher participant over the course of two months; interviews were audio recorded for later transcription and analysis. The initial interview, which lasted roughly one hour, was comprised of fifteen scripted questions (See Appendix A) which were designed to gather participant background information as well as to establish a common foundation for further data collection. Beyond the initial interview, however, rigidly scripted questions were no longer employed; rather, an “active interviewing” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997, p. 113) approach was utilized which allowed for the continued reflection and development of the teacher participants. Questions for the second and third interviews were developed in light of previous interview responses and classroom observations. As such, the interviews allowed for more flexible and even spontaneous construction of questions and resulting in a more natural “climate of mutual disclosure” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997, pp. 118-119). This approach to interviewing complemented the qualitative case study approach and provided the flexibility necessary to navigate the diversity of the participants and their respective environments. However, with regards to approach, though the subsequent interviews were not pre-scripted, the interview interactions were structured and guided by the general topic of focus for this study (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). Thus, the interview strategy employed in this study facilitated a progression from broader to more focused data collection, providing opportunity for an open-
ended and rich discussion of the central topic of writing instruction as well as an examination of participants’ views on the gaps in writing performance between high school and college environments and the effectiveness of particular instructional strategies.

**Teacher observations.** Teacher observations served as an ongoing step towards gathering data and insight with regard to instructional strategies currently being used in the classroom. The participant instructors were observed during their delivery of writing lessons over the course of two months; the observation protocol chart (Appendix B) served as a framework to guide observations and extensive field notes were also taken. The focus of the observations was curricular and instructional in nature; the emphasis of observations was to explore how specific instructional strategies aligned to meet college-preparatory writing expectations or address areas of the preparation gap previously discussed. Student responses, interactions, and performance were only examined for anecdotal or elaborative purposes as they related to specific instructional strategies observed.

**Artifact collection.** Throughout the course of the observation period, artifacts such as teacher lesson plans, instructional materials, and student samples were collected. Teacher materials collected served as a means to examine how instructional strategies discussed during interviews and observed in the classroom were implemented on a curricular level (i.e. – assignments sheets, rubrics, supplemental resources). Similarly, student work samples provided the opportunity to examine how students engaged writing as a result of instructional strategies being utilized and how the student writing produced compared to college-level writing expectations. Such artifacts were used to triangulate data and to support further analysis of the effectiveness of observed instructional strategies, their alignment with college-preparatory writing, or their effectiveness in addressing particular areas of the preparation gap.
Data Collection and Analysis

Over the course of two months, data collection consisted of audio-recorded interviews with each participant. The initial interview was structured using the scripted interview questions included in Appendix A. Subsequent interview questions were composed in response to previous interviews and classroom observations. Additional data collected resulted from observation notes taken during classroom observations. Classroom procedures and instructional strategies were recorded, using the Classroom Protocol in Appendix B as a guideline. Finally, teacher participants shared artifacts that included curricular materials such as assignment sheets, rubrics, worksheets, and Power Point presentations. Additionally, two of the three teachers provided student work samples which included sample journal entries and writing samples from students’ memoir projects completed at two of the three field sites.

Data analysis was guided by the use of a coding matrix (Appendix A) which listed the main areas of the preparation gap between high school and college-level writers as identified in Chapter Two. Similar areas of the preparation gap were combined to form six categories that served as the primary basis for coding participants’ interview responses and observation notes. Those categories included: quantity of writing, use of formulaic writing strategies, development of cognitive skills, audience and purpose for writing/writing as communication, student dispositions, and genre/cross-discipline features of writing. Teacher interview transcripts and observation notes were then examined and coded for evidence that aligned with each of these six categories. Artifacts collected were also examined in order to explore how teachers translated their instructional strategies into curricular materials and how student work samples reflected evidence of the effectiveness of instructional strategies in addressing particular areas of the preparation gap.
Limitations

The use of a qualitative case study facilitated the collection of rich data from participants through interviews, observations, and artifact collection; however, the timing of such a study (both in the sense of duration and the timing during the school year) were found to be limitations. This study was conducted over the course of two months, beginning at the end of March and concluding prior to the end of May. As is often the case, the end of the school year is a challenging time for students and teachers in terms of attitudes, school year fatigue, pressures to cover remaining curriculum, and the distraction of outside activities, all of which may have influenced the data collected. Furthermore, the school year during which this study was conducted was particularly challenging due to increased snow days which not only impacted students’ learning but also the intended scope and sequence of the writing curriculum.

Though this study included participants who represented a variety of settings, another limitation was that all participants were teachers in Northwest Ohio. Therefore, the results may not be appropriately applicable to other states or educational contexts. And while the different settings allowed for unique comparisons among participants, the variety of student demographics represented impacted teachers’ educational philosophy, writing-related curricular and instructional decisions, and potentially the effectiveness of a particular strategy. Thus, though students were not the subjects of this study, their attitudes, efforts, or abilities inherently impact data.

An additional limitation of this study related to the participants themselves, each of whom was a high school English Language Arts teacher. As such, the results of this study are limited to the high school context, and while issues of cross-discipline writing were explored, other content area teachers were not observed or interviewed. Therefore, findings may be limited in application to other grade levels or other content area classes.
Conclusion

The methods for data collection used in this study, particularly interviews, observations, and artifact collection, as well as the diversity of teacher participants and classroom settings resulted in the production of a body of data that provided a unique picture of the nature of writing instruction represented in the settings of the case study participants’ classrooms. An analysis of the relationship of this data and the areas of the preparation gap outlined in the literature provided a framework to then further discuss the observed strategies with regard to high school writing instruction.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

Though the number of students pursuing college education has increased, the reality that these students are not adequately prepared for the demands of advanced academic settings is contributing to great frustration among college professors and instructors, high school teachers, and students themselves (Burkhalter, 2000). There is an intellectual shift that must take place between high school and college, and many students are not equipped to make that shift, especially in the area of college-level writing (Burkhalter, 2000). As noted previously, the extensive literature on the subject reveals specific areas of concern, or gaps, between students’ high school and college-level writing abilities (Appendix A). While these gaps represent areas of challenge for students and educators, perhaps more importantly, they reveal areas of concern that can be carefully examined with the intention of determining what methods or approaches are successful in preparing students for college-level writing expectations.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine what teaching strategies high school English Language Arts instructors implemented in their respective classrooms and whether or not these approaches were successfully preparing students for college-level writing. Furthermore, this study explored the effectiveness of these strategies in addressing the main areas of the preparation gap between high school and college-level writing. Data was collected through teacher interviews, teacher observations, and the collection of teacher curricular materials and student work samples, which were then analyzed along the lines of the specific areas of the preparation gap outlined in Appendix A. The teaching context of each participant is described first, followed by a discussion of the six categories that resulted from coding and analysis: quantity of writing, use of formulaic writing strategies, development of cognitive skills, audience and purpose for writing/writing as communication, student dispositions, and genre/cross-discipline features of writing.
Teacher Participants

The three teachers who participated in this study represented a variety of educational contexts, each of which had a significant impact on the teachers’ curricular goals and instructional methods as well as the student demographics. By first establishing a context for understanding each case study, parallels drawn from analysis can be more appropriately explored and supported. The following case study descriptions resulted from an analysis of teacher interview responses, teacher observations, and an examination of artifacts (curricular materials and student samples) collected throughout the study.

**Mrs. Remera.** The most veteran of the three teacher participants, Mrs. Remera had not lost her passion for teaching or her content area even after thirty-two years in the classroom; laughing, she stated, “And I’m not ready to quit yet!” (Personal Communication March 27, 2014). Mrs. Remera spent her career working at an all-girls parochial school in an urban city in Ohio and currently serves as the department chair. With tuition costing $11,700, the school focuses on providing a competitive college preparatory curriculum. Mrs. Remera taught six classes of junior and senior students, ranging from eighteen to twenty-five students per class; her course load included regular, honors, and Advanced Placement English courses as well as a Theory of Knowledge course, and she has been involved in the International Baccalaureate program as well.

The school operated on block scheduling which allowed her to have her students for eighty-five minute periods on alternating days. Due to the nature of block scheduling, Mrs. Remera often chunked the class time in order to address various aspects of the English Language Arts curriculum, including vocabulary, grammar, literature, writing, and presentation skills. She emphasized higher order thinking skills and facilitated students’ experience with such skills through extensive class discussions. Additionally, each student had an iPad which allowed for consistent technology access throughout lessons. Perhaps more so than the other case study field
sites, Mrs. Remera’s classroom projected a focus on college preparation which was noticeable in the curricular expectations as discussed during interviews, in the teachers’ and students’ attitudes noted during observations, and the quality of student work collected throughout the study.

**Mrs. Mahire.** Representing a more traditional teaching environment, Mrs. Mahire had been teaching for eighteen years, the last ten of which she has worked at a small high school in a rural community in Ohio. She taught English for freshmen students, both honors and regular tracks, co-taught a special education class, and also taught Journalism and History of Drama courses for upperclassmen. Class periods were forty-seven minutes, and class sizes were typically around twenty students. Throughout the year, Mrs. Mahire hosted several pre-service students for field hours, and during observations for this study, she was hosting a student teacher (Classroom Observations, April 9; April 24, 2014); these extra individuals provided additional help and made her classroom an active learning space. She also revealed during interviews that she had a Master’s in Curriculum and Teaching and had qualified for administrative certification. Additionally, she was heavily involved in professional development for reading and writing strategies and was currently working on adapting a writing curriculum program being utilized throughout several districts in Northwest Ohio. Throughout the various interviews conducted during this study, it became apparent that Mrs. Mahire reflected a targeted passion for curriculum development with particular attention directed towards the writing process, which included a middle school through college-level scope and sequence.

Also particularly striking was the emphasis she placed on collaborative learning supported by technology. Mrs. Mahire remarked, “Writing is not an independent thing” (Personal Communication March 28, 2014), a philosophy consistently confirmed throughout interviews and observations. Her extensive use of collaborative work (i.e. - group work facilitated by teaching stations, peer review, and peer tutoring) served as evidence of her belief that writing was not an
independent task (Classroom Observations, March 31; April 9, 2014). Additionally, she stressed the use of technology for writing and supported a nearly paperless writing curriculum facilitated by Google Docs. While Mrs. Mahire’s educational context demonstrated a variety of student attitudes and abilities, as noted in honors and college preparatory classes versus regular courses, there was still an emphasis on college preparatory curriculum for all students, especially with regard to writing.

Mrs. LeHilo. Providing an important source of contrast, Mrs. LeHilo’s classroom consistently served as a reminder of the unique educational contexts with which some teachers are often unfamiliar. A non-traditional student herself, Mrs. LeHilo pursued her teaching career later in life, eventually earning her Master’s in English and gaining experiences as a college writing instructor as well. Having spent the last nineteen years teaching in a career center environment, Mrs. LeHilo’s experiences offer an important perspective on a one size fits all writing curriculum. Enrolling students from fourteen high schools, the career center offered over twenty different career program options which led to the demographics of this environment differing largely from a traditional high school setting. And while officially a TechPrep school, offering curriculum aligned with higher education pathways, Mrs. LeHilo revealed throughout multiple interviews that the majority of her students do not enroll in a four year college.

The logistics of scheduling in her school also posed challenges when discussing curriculum; students followed a block schedule where classes met for ninety minutes every day for one semester. Like many teachers who function in block scheduling environments, Mrs. LeHilo viewed chunking learning tasks as necessary as the need to accommodate taxed attention spans was a constant concern. Additionally, the nature of a semester-long course led Mrs. LeHilo to reflect many times on her sense that she did not have enough time to cover content to the depth that many outside entities would expect. Also, most often noted in this educational environment
was the challenge of students’ academic dispositions and how that consistently impacted writing curriculum and instruction. Mrs. LeHilo’s experience as a college writing instructor, however, allowed her to make valuable comparisons between the two levels of performance which contributed greatly to this study.

**Examining the Areas of the Preparation Gap**

Six categories (Appendix A) were used for coding and analysis, each of which aligned with one or more of the previously identified gaps in preparation between high school and college-level writing: quantity of writing, use of formulaic writing strategies, development of cognitive skills, audience and purpose for writing/writing as communication, student qualities, and genre/cross-discipline features of writing. Teacher interview responses, observation notes, and artifacts collected throughout the study served as a means of examining how strategies used by teacher participants addressed particular areas of the preparation gap associated with college-level writing expectations. Additionally, due to the variety of educational settings represented by each case study participant, contextual factors impacting writing instruction were also explored.

**Quantity of writing.** One significant concern regarding college-level writers is their limited experience in regards to the quantity of writing they are expected to complete, both the amount of writing (frequency) and the length of writing assignments (Crank, 2012; Fitzhugh, 2011; Sanoff, 2006). Though each teacher participant represented a unique student demographic, overall, similarities with regard to the quantity of writing students completed were evident. Mrs. Remera and Mrs. Mahire, both representing more traditional educational contexts, reported that students completed four to five large writing assignments per year. For Mrs. Remera’s students, the average assignment length was between four and five pages, with the biggest assignment (a research paper completed during students’ junior year) reaching between ten and twelve pages. Mrs. Mahire’s students completed assignments that averaged two to three pages in length, with
honors students often writing three to five pages and occasionally writing eight to ten. It is important to highlight that Mrs. Remera’s students are upperclassmen, while Mrs. Mahire’s students are freshmen, which may explain the slight variation in the length of writing assignments. Interestingly, however, the number of large assignments completed is still comparable and suggests an alignment with the school calendar, allowing students to more easily complete a significant writing assignment each term. Of additional interest was the fact that both teachers indicated that advanced students typically wrote more assignments and longer assignments. In some instances, such as Advanced Placement classes, this was a course expectation. However, it remained unclear how students in regular courses would respond to increased quantities of writing.

Representing a vastly different learning environment, Mrs. LeHilo reported that students completed three large assignments over the course of the semester, most of which averaged between three to five pages, though she stated that students typically wrote three pages; the longest writing assignment was five pages. Again, though she taught upperclassmen, Mrs. LeHilo often remarked that while she maintained high expectations, she was conscious that she was teaching a different student population than other writing teachers, and it became evident through interviews that she often felt the need to adjust her expectations appropriately. It is also important to note that informal writing was taking place within all three classrooms which provides evidence that students were writing more than just the formal, graded assignments previously discussed (Classroom Observations, April 8; April 14; April 24; April 25; May 8, 2014; Personal Communication, May 8, 2014). While these informal writing tasks add to the quantity of writing students complete at the high school level, their alignment with college-level writing was not always supported.
With regard to this particular gap in preparation, it became more clear that the quantity of writing completed at the high school level is significantly impacted by the logistics of a high school English Language Arts teacher’s schedule and curricular obligations, which highlights a tension between the differing educational contexts both among high school teachers and between high school and college environments. Also, the purpose of writing at the high school level was found to impact the number of writing assignments compared to those at the college level. For example, each of the participants articulated basic skills of writing as significant goals of writing instruction at the high school level (Personal Communication, March 27; March 28, 2014); as such, the related time constraints are compounded as high school instructors are responsible for teaching writing forms/modes, scheduling time for reviewing, editing, and publishing writing as well as providing appropriate levels of feedback both prior to and via grading. Though the amount of formal writing tasks assigned by each of the participants was comparable, none of the teachers provided a clear solution for increasing the amount of writing completed in the high school English Language Arts classroom. Possibilities of offering a specific writing course that allowed students to produce significant pieces more regularly were discussed; however, the logistics of grading such a volume of writing often discouraged further exploration of this idea.

**Formulaic writing strategies.** As noted by previous researchers (Denecker, 2013; Fanetti et al., 2010), college students’ reliance on strict writing rules has been cited as a problem for college-level instructors who must challenge students to move away from rigid, formulaic writing in higher education environments. However, throughout the course of this study, it became clear that the intentional use of formulaic writing strategies is a preferred (and arguably effective) instructional approach for teaching college-level writing techniques to high school students (Classroom Observation, March 31; April 22, 2014). This emphasis on the use of formulaic writing strategies was also found to be connected to the participants’ shared belief that structure
and organization were two of the main focuses of writing instruction at the high school level.

Also, as previously noted, having identified a main goal of high school writing instruction to be the development of basic writing skills, the teachers’ use of formulaic writing techniques (such as the skeleton outline included in Appendix D, Artifact 1) aligned to meet this purpose.

Mrs. Remera offered a balanced yet conflicted view with regard to her use of formulaic writing strategies in her classroom. During her initial interview, she noted that one of the biggest shifts she has seen in college-preparatory writing instruction has been “a backing off of formulaic writing” but also suggested that “it’s got its place,” explaining that the “formula is for people who have a hard time getting started” (Personal Communication, March 27, 2014). She clarified further stating that, “I find the formula is really helpful for students who aren’t as naturally...inclined towards writing” (Personal Communication, March 27, 2014). In her second interview, when asked to share specific strategies for helping students improve the structure and organization of their writing, she responded with slight hesitation: “I hate to say it, but it’s formula...you give them a formula” (Personal Communication, May 2, 2014). Her response revealed her struggle with the issue as she acknowledged that college-level audiences, such as Advanced Placement evaluators, “don’t like formulaic writing” (Personal Communication, May 2, 2014). However, she then offered an explanation of her approach to formulaic writing strategies as an optional support for struggling writers but flexible enough to allow individual students to adapt formulas and structures to meet their personal needs:

…most students aren’t confident enough to say, ‘Okay, I’ve got this piece that I have to analyze. I’m just going to go with what feels right for me.’ They’re not sophisticated enough; they don’t have enough experience to do that. So, I find that if I given them: Okay, here’s a prompt, here’s a structure to write to get to it, they do better with that. (Personal Communication, May 2, 2014)
For example, when introducing the memoir assignment, Mrs. Remera first provided students with a clear presentation of the specific purposes and features of a memoir, then led a discussion of the analysis of several sample memoirs excerpts, and finally explained the required elements students were expected to include in their own compositions, offering sample layout options with regard to how students may choose to structure their own writing (Classroom Observation, April 8, 2014; see Appendix D, Artifact 2). She then noted that she makes sure to tell students that “not everybody is okay with the formula. So, if you’ve got a better way, trust it” (Personal Communication, May 2, 2014), which suggests an intentional use of formulaic writing with embedded autonomy and flexibility for student writers.

Concluding this conversation, she reflected, “I find that the majority of students do better if you give them a formula” (Personal Communication, May 2, 2014). Conscious of the risk of locking students into a rigid approach to writing, however, Mrs. Remera shared during her final interview that she tried to also design writing assignments which “deemphasize…that formula” (Personal Communication, May 20, 2014), such as informal personal responses to readings that did not require a thesis or five-paragraph essay structure (Classroom Observation, April 8, 2014). Instead, these assignments allowed for more of a free-response (See Appendix D, Artifact 3) that focused on students offering their insights in a less formal context, which as Mrs. Remera noted, was her way of illustrating that “not everything that you write is for publication... that there’s a time and a place” (Personal Communication, May 20, 2014). Though she acknowledged that her “less creative students who aren’t interested in writing” (Personal Communication, May 20, 2014) still tend to gravitate towards formulaic approaches even for these free-response assignments, she purposed that this tendency was more connected to students’ attitudes towards writing rather than an over-reliance on a specific formula. Perhaps best encapsulating her views on formulaic writing, Mrs. Remera stated, “I’ll give them some strategies; but then it’s where are you going to go with
“it?” (Personal Communication, May 2, 2014), which suggests a recognition of the usefulness of providing students with clear strategies, or formulas, while still recognizing the need to also provide room for the flexibility, creativity, and individuality inherent in strong writing.

Echoing many of the same sentiments, Mrs. Mahire openly established herself to be an unapologetically strong proponent for formulaic writing. Her very first interview began with a statement that became a theme throughout all subsequent conversations and observations and was clearly evident in the artifacts collected. She began by stating, “When you’re explaining a writing structure to someone who does not understand writing structures…” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). Evident in this statement is Mrs. Mahire’s sensitivity to the fact that many of the students in her classroom are not naturally inclined towards English Language Arts; in other words, many students struggle with writing, which meant, for Mrs. Mahire, that “there has to be some kind of a…linear equation for the non-English minded students” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). For example, Mrs. Mahire used numbers or letters as a means of helping students determine appropriate structure and organization for the ideas in their writing. As students were observed working on their compare and contrast essays, they referred to these formulas (i.e. – a 1-2, 1-2, 1-2 organization pattern or an A-B, A-B, A-B pattern) as they discussed how they were supposed to arrange their ideas, how many supporting details they needed, and how many transitions sentences were necessary. This student-initiated discussion occurred on a day when Mrs. Mahire was absent from school (Classroom Observation, March 31, 2014), thus supporting her belief that when students are provided with a straightforward way of understanding writing, they are more prepared to meet established expectations. She later explained that “English is difficult sometimes, and writing is tricky too; so you have to boil it down to these things, these equations, these structures, the simplest one” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014).
In order to facilitate this, Mrs. Mahire designed her curriculum scope and sequence so that the latter part of her year was focused on advanced writing structures: expository, descriptive, argumentative, narrative. She stated that she engaged students in a direct and overt discussion of the features of each writing structure and explained that after students are aware of the various structures, having written in each mode at least once by the end of their freshman year, they can “pull up the formula and automatically be able to write an outline and apply it to what they’re doing and go to work” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). She then stated, “At the end of the year, they’ll do it without me even saying a word to them” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). This final state of independence and autonomy was observed as students continued to finalize their drafts from a research project, and though encouragement and assistance were available, minimal intervention from the teacher was required (Classroom Observation, May 8, 2014). Mrs. Mahire expounded on her advocacy for formulaic writing during her second interview, stating that students “need a system in order to be able to write; and, honestly, writing is all formula once you know those formulas” (Personal Communication, May 8, 2014). While formula may be a rigid word for some, Mrs. Mahire also described her approach as looking for patterns in writing which connected to her emphasis on structure and order (organization) as key features of writing. She then offered a more complete description of her approach:

So, all of this reinforces this idea that writing isn’t just a sit down and ‘bleh’ on paper and turn it in. But…there are a lot of steps involved. You’re not going to be good at it to start with. You have to practice, but if you follow a certain formula, you stand a better chance of being a better writer. (Personal Communication, May 8, 2014)

Responding to the concern that students may become restricted by a formulaic approach, Mrs. Mahire explained, “…I have learned that they need to know how it is organized first, and once they know how it’s organized, they can go from this to modifying it whatever way they need
to [in order] to suit their own personal needs” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). In order to achieve this, she advocated that “the formula has to be taught at the lower level” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014), in her case, to freshman students. She then explained that as students progress throughout their high school writing experiences:

…it then moves to, ‘Hey, so there is this formula we started with, but you need to now know that it is a living thing and that it breathes and changes and moves according to how you need it to function for you and what you need it to do for what [you’re] writing’.

(Personal Communication, March 28, 2014)

Much like Mrs. Remera, the use of formulas implemented in Mrs. Mahire’s classroom is also embedded with the expectation that students will adapt and manipulate these formulas as they advance as writers. As Mrs. Mahire noted, “…they know basically what the content would be [the mode] but they’re flexible in their ability to put it together now” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). Interestingly, however, she also noted that the “flexibility piece…needs to be taught” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014) as well, something that she feels is possible through an appropriate scope and sequence that introduces writing structures early enough to allow students extensive practice in adapting them for various situations. Mrs. Mahire concluded her first interview by stating, “…when you give them a strategy of where to go, and then not only that, when you provide them with a formula for what to use, give them some organizational tools, suddenly, they realize writing doesn’t suck as badly as it did” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). Though it does not completely resolve the concerns regarding students’ adherence to formulaic writing in college, this statement does suggest the potential culminating effect of an instructional approach for writing at the high school level that is founded on the teacher’s intentional use of formulaic writing strategies.
Though the first two teacher participants presented fairly well-supported arguments for implementing a formula-based approach to writing instruction for high school students, their views were not shared by the third participant in this study. Mrs. LeHilo challenged the notion of formulaic writing and offered a perspective that was found to be largely connected to her personal philosophy about writing as a creative, artistic expression. Mrs. LeHilo initially identified structure and organization as primary goals of high school writing instruction and stated that one of the major focuses of her writing curriculum was “at least having them be at a basic structure of a well-formed essay” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). However, her instructional strategies or approaches for achieving these goals were less clearly defined as Mrs. LeHilo stated, “I don’t have a formula” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). Rather, she often emphasized discussion and questioning as a means of helping students navigate this process (Classroom Observations, April 14; May 8, 2014) and more than once described an aspect of the connection between reading and writing as “…being prepared to see that pattern,” which suggests that there are patterns that exist in good writing. She later stated that the goal of developing a strong sense of structure and organization in students’ writing, however, was “the hard one” (Personal Communication, May 8, 2014). She continued to explain the individual and abstract nature of creativity as it is connected to writing and stated that, “…I think the majority [of students], even the ones that would like more of a structure, benefit from the search and the struggle of…finding that creative source within themselves” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014).

While Mrs. LeHilo certainly recognized that good writing does imply structure and organization, she believed that “the formula only generally serves its purpose once they have…something to work with,” explaining, “You have to extract ideas first… [and] the formula first will shut down all the ideas and then they’ll just be trying to plug into that…It’s a block” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). Sharing an anecdote of a one-on-one interaction with a
student during the brainstorming stage, she acknowledged the difficulty the student had in coming up with and developing ideas. She then remarked that, “…if you give kids like that formulas…the ideas that pass through their mind, I think, will just pass through because they won’t know how to apply it [the formula] anyway” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). So while Mrs. LeHilo shared a value for the structure and organization indicative of good writing, her discussion of the use of a formulaic approach to writing instruction highlights many of the concerns expressed in the literature.

Additionally, as a college-level writing instructor, she was also able to offer a dual perspective on the topic. Ironically, she reflected that the college-level writing she has been engaged with “is more formulaic” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014) and offered examples of a cause and effect essay with a problem-solution structure. Challenging the previous participants’ notion that these writing formulas are flexible and adaptable, Mrs. LeHilo offered the following perspective:

I think it kind of goes back to that formulaic writing. So…if you get them sort of caught in that… the college-driven kids are going to always write that way, so that’s really hard to break out of. So, I think that’s one of the complaints that you have there that they, they can’t switch gears that way to…loosen up a bit, if you can call it that. (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014)

She followed this remark by explaining the difficulty of making formulaic writing personal and suggested that less rigid or formal approaches to writing instruction provides the room for students to develop personal approaches to writing, which echoed a statement from her first interview: “You’ve got to come up with strategies,” and though she stated that “we try to go over strategies” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014), referring to peer review as one of those strategies, the implication here is that Mrs. LeHilo presented a perspective that suggests the development of
writing strategies is a personal responsibility of each student and is relative to students’ individual creative processes.

**Cognitive skills.** Inherently connected to students’ composition skills is their ability to engage in high-order cognition, such as analysis and critical or creative thinking (Crank, 2012; Mongilo & Widler, 2012; Sullivan, 2009). Not only do these cognitive abilities facilitate students’ interactions with complex texts indicative of college-level environments, but they are also the critical tools which students use to translate their understanding into an appropriate form of academic discourse that accurately demonstrates their knowledge. Therefore, high school English Language Arts teachers’ instructional approaches must also account for the need for students to develop these cognitive skills in relation to college-level writing expectations. Throughout the course of the interviews and observations, a shared definition of analysis with regard to student writing surfaced which essentially suggested two features of this skill: first, the ability to deconstruct various features of a text or one’s own writing and, second, the ability to include explanation in one’s writing in order to elaborate upon evidence cited as support for the writer’s claims. In light of this, developing students’ writing and thinking skills becomes a multi-layered process which each teacher addressed uniquely.

With extensive experience teaching higher-level courses, such as honors or Advanced Placement, Mrs. Remera was consistently aware of her need to embed the development of students’ cognitive skills within her writing instruction. While she noted that students’ development of confidence in “analyzing and in articulating responses in writing” was one of the most enjoyable aspects of her job, she later remarked that after her “seventh or eighth year of teaching...some of the things that I was asking them to do was a leap; they just weren’t cognitively ready to do [it],” explaining that “they don’t get that they have to provide the information *and* comment on it...that’s really the analysis part, that’s really the cognitive part”
(Personal Communication, March 27, 2014). She also agreed that even though students are told to analyze, teachers often assume that students “know what that is” (Personal Communication, March 27, 2014), which may not always be the case. She reflected that her awareness of this disparity in student understanding increased once she started teaching Advanced Placement courses which relied so heavily on such cognitive skills.

On more than one occasion, Mrs. Remera questioned whether or not these cognitive skills were always developmentally appropriate and, if not, how she could provide scaffolding to assist students with such higher-level tasks. She shared that the scope and sequence of their curriculum is designed to facilitate the development of these cognitive skills, as her department committed to “really teach them close reading strategies freshman and sophomore year, take it up a notch junior year, and then senior year is just second nature to them” (Personal Communication, March 27, 2014). Mrs. Remera then discussed specific approaches she had found to be successful in this area, such as the use of the TPCASTT (Title, Paraphrase, Connotation, Attitude, Shift, Title revisited, Theme) approach to poetry analysis, which supported students’ close reading skills and facilitated a more structured approach to formal analysis.

Though a seemingly inseparable connection between reading and writing and their shared cognitive skills became apparent, teaching these thinking skills in relation to writing was found to be more challenging. For example, Mrs. Remera would use close reading questions to guide students through a critical analysis of a text which would eventually support their ability to discuss that text in their writing. This often included having students highlight specific features in a text as they read, a strategy she then had students transfer to their own writing as they completed a self-check. She would tell students:

‘I want you to highlight where you think you are answering that ‘why’ part. And you have to do it in green highlighter.’ So, when they give me their papers, before they even hand it
in, [I tell them]: ‘So, every green thing I see, I’m thinking you’re thinking you’re analyzing’. And that helps me, too, to say, ‘You think you’re analyzing here, but you’re not… you’re not commenting on something’. (Personal Communication, May 20, 2014)

Additionally, Mrs. Remera shared her use of informal writing as a means processing, stating that “…the writing process helps them to articulate their thinking…that I know more what I think once I’ve written it” (Personal Communication, March 27, 2014), an approach observed several times throughout this study, as students were given time at the end of the class period to reflect in writing (Classroom Observations, April 8; April 22, 2014). Interestingly, at one point Mrs. Remera noted that “the brighter students are doing it [advanced thinking] intuitively” but later reflected that in light of shift to new content standards, all students are now being expected to perform at what was once considered more advanced levels, and while it may be an adjustment, she believed students could do it “with the right support” (Personal Communication, March 27, 2014). Therefore, much like her approach to formulaic writing, Mrs. Remera’s interview responses, classroom observations, and shared curricular materials suggested a connected approach to facilitating students’ development of these necessary cognitive skills, especially in relation to their writing.

Reflecting on past experience, Mrs. Mahire confidently stated during her first interview, “Teaching writing involves so many things. Writing is multi-dimensional” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). This sentiment was initially reflected in her use of formulaic writing methods (such overt instruction in the four modes of writing or assigning numbers and patterns to organize sources in research writing) and was later supported by her discussion of her approach to engaging students in the higher-level thinking necessary for college-level writing tasks. At the core of her approach was Mrs. Mahire’s extensive and deliberate use of modeling. Referring to the expectation for analysis or explanation throughout their writing, she stated, “you
have to verbalize that, that’s a whole lot of modeling” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). She continued to explain the role of questioning and discussion in the development of these skills and acknowledged that, “I honestly think it’s the weakest piece in every level,” concluding that her primary method is “just model, model, model, model, model, till it’s dead” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). Though humorous, her response reflects the importance of developing students’ cognitive skills connected to writing, arguably something that tends to be a bit “blind” for students.

Much like Mrs. Remera, one of the first steps implemented in Mrs. Mahire’s classroom reinforced the reading-writing connection. She referenced the active reading question (Appendix D, Artifact 4) students use to engage with texts in the first half of the year which are designed to scaffold students through the analysis process; these questions then serve as a bridge between the features of reading a text and the required components for writing a text. Mrs. Mahire offered a description of the reading-writing connection that demonstrated the inherent cognitive skills students were developing as they mastered both:

You are not going to be a successful Common Core graduate unless you can actively read, comprehend, and then translate that into a voice, a paper that can explain, can infer…that can make connections, and all of that is part of the whole, giant process. Writing comes from reading comes from writing comes from reading… (Personal Communication, March, 28, 2014)

By connecting the two areas, the observed goal was that her students would internalized the thinking process, as noted when Mrs. Mahire remarked, “in their brain, there has to be a progression that goes a certain way” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014), suggesting that students’ ability to advance as writers was closely connected to their ability to advance as thinkers. In addition to the use of active reading questions to facilitate close reading and thinking, Mrs.
Mahire also shared the perspective that informal writing was a method for developing these advanced thinking skills and stated that students engage in this type of writing at the beginning of the school year (Personal Communication, May 8, 2014).

Perhaps the most effective strategy that surfaced, though not directly described by Mrs. Mahire, was her use of questioning as students were engaging in the decision making process surrounding their writing tasks. Having established a foundation of formulas and strategies, as she described her interactions with her students, it became clear that through dialogue, through questioning, students were engaging in advanced cognitive skills in relation to their writing, though they may not have been overtly aware of it. While at times this process was described in terms of modeling, it indicated a far more intentional and insightful use of questioning to engage students and channel their thinking towards the construction of an effective writing piece. For example, when reviewing the final steps for completing a research paper assignment, Mrs. Mahire questioned students as to what steps they had previously completed and what steps would be logical to take next. As students provided the answers, they were engaged in the cognitive aspects of writing that enabled them to consider key features such as structure, organization, and writing processes. As Mrs. Mahire then recorded students’ responses on the board, she supported students’ ability to understand what was expected for this particular writing piece and where they each were in that process (Classroom Observation, May 8, 2014).

Additionally, unique to Mrs. Mahire’s classroom was her emphasis on collaborative work throughout the entire writing process, a strategy she believed to be essential in supporting students through the challenging steps associated with college-level writing tasks. She explained that collaboration consisted of “having other people in the same position as you trying to get a task done….if you have people in your group who you feel are strong writers, you can bounce ideas off
of each other” (Personal Communication, May 5, 2014), again serving as a method to make more concrete the internal, abstract aspects of advanced cognitive skills that support strong writing.

Serving as a reminder of the difference in environments, Mrs. LeHilo’s experiences highlighted many of the challenges she and her students faced with regards to engaging in the advanced cognitive skills necessary for meeting college-level writing expectations. During her initial interview, she reflected that her students struggled with basic decoding issues and that she was “spending a lot of time doing that instead of…at an analytical level or synthesis…those sort of upper level skills,” and she remarked that though she was trying to move a larger portion of her students towards that goal, “whether you can achieve it…that’s a challenge” (Personal Communication, March 8, 2014). Having identified the development of students’ higher-level thinking skills as her biggest challenge in teaching college-preparatory writing, she discussed the difficulty she had: “I think taking those higher-level skills, and again…hiding it in their food…is a big challenge” (Personal Communication, March 8, 2014), a notion that suggested a subtle approach to developing these skills which complimented her previous aversion to overt, formulaic writing instruction. So, while supportive of her previous philosophy about the creative aspects to writing, the instructional strategies that were effective in addressing the area of cognitive skills connected to writing were less obvious.

However, though representing a different perspective and a different educational environment, Mrs. LeHilo did share similarities with the previous teacher participants. She, too, discussed the role of informal writing as a means of engaging in these thinking skills, stating that, “First they have to get it down. They have to get it out. [Students] can’t walk around just writing a paper in their head… So, informal writing is fluency” (Personal Communication, March 8, 2014), which she viewed as a bridge to more formal writing and thinking tasks. Additionally, Mrs. LeHilo also discussed the reading-writing connection on several occasions and revealed that one
of her approaches was to “start out with mid-level stuff that is connective…so the language might not be as difficult, but you can…dig deeper for concepts and themes” (Personal Communication, March 8, 2014). Thus, much like the previous teachers, she used reading as an initial context for developing these advanced cognitive skills, even providing anticipation guides to support understanding and analysis. However, though she used more accessible texts as a beginning strategy, Mrs. LeHilo later discussed the need for students to engage with grade-appropriate texts. She challenged the notion that analysis was simply analysis regardless of text rigor, and connected this to her writing instruction by noting that students “…have to look at the literature and see how it’s done well” (Personal Communication, March 8, 2014) in order to be able to transfer that understanding into their writing. During several observations, one of Mrs. LeHilo’s dominant strategies for engaging students in higher level thinking involved her use of discussion and questioning, both as a whole class and in individual sessions with students (Classroom Observations, April 14; April 25; May 8, 2014). Additionally, she indicated that peer review was a successful strategy because “while they’re reading, they’re thinking, ‘Wait, I didn’t do that’ or ‘This has that, oh, I see’” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). Mrs. LeHilo was most clear in her belief that “the best way” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014) to help develop these advanced cognitive skills was through conferencing but quickly remarked on how much time such methods take, a significant factor in her particular teaching context.

Familiar with both high school and college writing instruction, however, she noted that a strength of the college environments was that it afforded her more time “to really sit down [with students] and we looked at the papers and talked about strategies to improve it” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). It appeared that this individual attention allowed her to engage students in the advanced cognitive skills relevant to their particular writing, which supported their improved performance. At the end of her second interview, commenting on the nature of
improving students’ writing, Mrs. LeHilo stated that “It’s an interactive process…and you interact with a text” (Personal Communication, March 8, 2014). What became more evident over the course of this study was the often hidden cognitive skills inherent in that interactive process, skills that students need to develop in order to meet the demands of college-level writing.

**Audience, purpose, and writing as communication.** As students advance to college-level writing environments, the audiences and purposes associated with their writing change drastically. Real-world writing tasks are more often incorporated into the classroom, and students become more aware that their audience has broadened. In light of this, writing begins to shift from an academic task to a means of communicating in a professional discourse setting. However, as noted by research (Conker & Lewis, 2008; Mongillo & Wilder, 2012; Whitney et al., 2011), students are often unprepared to view their writing in this context and therefore struggle to meet the new demands of college-level writing.

Mrs. Remera began to echo herself during interviews, and as evidence of her instructional methodology shared during conversations was reflected throughout observations, it became clear that she genuinely practiced what she preached: “I say [to students]…in terms of writing, what you do outside of this classroom is far more important than what you ever do inside of it” (Personal Communication, March 27, 2014). Exemplified by this statement was her awareness that students were writing for an audience that included more readers than herself and that her goal was to prepare students for those audiences by infusing an authentic purpose into their writing that helped students to make the real-world connection. She stated that students often struggle with the lack of relevance and advocated, “We should be having them write things that are more relevant. I should have them writing e-mails. I should have them writing letters... I think we need to be better, we, meaning English teachers, at making their writing real-world” (Personal Communication, March 27, 2014). As simple as this solution sounded, Mrs. Remera was also forthcoming with her
feelings that “students are given a lot of leeway by the business world, and even the college world, to take shortcuts” and further explained that students “get the message from all over that they don’t…really have to…be that clear in what they write” (Personal Communication, March 27, 2014). A lot of this was found to stem from the lack of relevance in their writing assignments which students often viewed as purely academic tasks.

Connected to this idea, Mrs. Remera also explained her belief that students “get a lot of mixed messages from English teachers from elementary school on up, and they don’t know who to believe or what to believe” (Personal Communication, March 27, 2014). She believed that students perceive writing instruction to be “totally subjective” and acknowledged, “I don’t think we talk to them enough about how we evaluate their writing” (Personal Communication, March 27, 2014). Hidden within this statement is a tension that continues to impact students’ development of writing skills: most of students’ exposure to writing was relegated to the classroom and, as such, authentic audience and purpose was often curtailed by the academic expectations students and teachers faced. With regard to purpose, it became clear that much of the initial writing instruction for Mrs. Remera’s students “moves them into what they have to do for their research paper” (Personal Communication, May 2, 2014), a substantial writing assignment completed during their junior year, or prepares them for the type of writing required on Advanced Placement exams. In an attempt to combat this narrowed approach to writing instruction, Mrs. Remera had her students submit to writing contests annually, which was intended to provide them with an alternative purpose and audience.

Another unique strategy was the emphasis she placed on students’ peer groups as an audience with whom students would share their writing. For example, during one class session, students had completed their memoirs and were given the opportunity to read their writing for their classmates (Classroom Observation, May 2, 2014). Before students began to volunteer, Mrs.
Remera encouraged them to view this as a means of publishing their work, to not apologize for their writing, and to not be afraid of their own voices as writers. As students unexpectedly cried while reading their writing, it became clear that having a real and present audience powerfully impacted how students interacted with the writing they shared. Additionally, she encouraged students to consider giving their memoirs, written about an individual who made significant impact on their lives, to those individuals, which was yet another attempt to provide students with an authentic audience for their writing. Concluding her final interview, Mrs. Remera built upon her previous sentiment and remarked, “Here, this is the training, this is the lab, but really, how you present yourself verbally and in written communication in other classes, at work…[is] where it really counts” (Personal Communication, May 20, 2014). She followed this statement with an anecdote of students who attended a school sporting event and brought a sign with a grammatical error on it. Mrs. Remera reminded students that “Outside the classroom is where it really counts” (Personal Communication, May 20, 2014) and used this to illustrate the importance of teaching students that writing is a tool for communication in all contexts.

Though her students occasionally wrote for contests, Mrs. Mahire’s approach to infusing writing experiences with a sense of audience was most clearly established by her expectation that students would be sharing their writing with their peers consistently. She explained that students are “totally foreign to the concept of collaborative writing, so you have to begin with the whole, ‘Okay, we’re going to share our writing’” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014), a conversation she has at length with students. She also utilized Google Docs in her classroom, which allowed students to engage in these shared writing experiences in a new way. Inherent in this expectation of writing for an audience was the notion of peer feedback, which she stated ended up being “very exciting to them because suddenly writing takes on a new life that it didn’t have before with that audience piece” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). She then
concluded by stating with a happily exaggerated smirk, “I can’t be the only person in the room grading writing; that’s insane” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). Though arguably a strong statement, the success of this approach was demonstrated during several observations as students’ collaborative efforts during the writing process enabled them to meet and exceed many of the expectations set forth. Mrs. Mahire challenged the once-accepted approach that many teachers held in the past that they were the only ones who would be reading students’ writing, which she termed “in-a-bubble-writing” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). She then explained the role of emphasizing an audience for students’ writing:

> Writers have to be collaborative and it has to be published and it has to be seen by other people and they need to know that there will be an actual, real audience of peers that will be looking at this because there needs to be some level of expectations…the minute that you say, ‘Oh, did I mention that you guys are going to share this with some of your peers?’…it takes on a whole new level. Now we have to pay attention because this is going to be what our peers think of us through our writing. Okay, so it’s using peer pressure to get kids to write better, great. (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014)

What was especially unique about Mrs. Mahire’s approach to establishing an audience for student writing was that it was consistent throughout the writing process, not simply relegated to a final product. As such, students were able to assist each other at multiple stages and learn from other writers. While the issue of establishing an authentic audience was, for the most part, relegated to within the classroom, her approach did sensitize students to the expectation that their work would be viewed by other people. For example, when students presented their research projects, the room was arranged to reflect an attentive audience, each student was assigned a role (such as time-keeper, picture-counter, or student judge), and Mrs. Mahire actually left the room as a means of emphasizing that the students’ peer group was the primary audience (Classroom
Observation, April 24, 2014). As far as establishing a clear purpose for students’ writing, Mrs. Mahire was less clear on her approaches. For the most part, the writing instruction implemented in the classroom was designed to develop students’ basic writing skills, and as such, an authentic purpose for writing that extended beyond the classroom or that offered a perspective of writing as a form of communication was not discussed.

Connected yet again to her questioning of formulaic writing, Mrs. LeHilo noted that one of the potential consequences she associated with such instructional approaches was the tendency for students to strictly view their audience as the teacher. And perhaps representing a merging of her perspective on audience and purpose, several times throughout the interview process, Mrs. LeHilo shared her desire for students to expand their view of themselves through their writing. She explained, “You have personal experiences…but you’re not the only one who has ever experienced that broader issue” (Personal Communication, May 8, 2014). One of the methods she used to help students gain this adjusted perspective was to merge the personal writing students were completing for their memoirs and the integration of an outside source (Classroom Observation, May 8, 2014). After students completed their rough drafts, the teacher engaged them in a discussion about the general topic or dominant theme of their memoirs. Then, students were directed to access the online database and to find a research article that related to their memoirs.

During the class session when this expectation was first introduced, students seemed to struggle to understand the connection. However, during subsequent teacher interviews, the instructor’s intention was clarified. She hoped that the integration of the source would serve as an opportunity for students to make broader connections through their writing and explained that “it is a vehicle to, maybe, academic discourse” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). Though stopping shy of a general sense of writing as communication, her statement did suggest the notion that students’ writing can and should be connected to a larger purpose than simply what takes
place in the high school English Language Arts classroom. Additionally, Mrs. LeHilo also used peer review, and she stated that she would tell her students to “…have people read your writing at various points. It doesn’t have to be an instructor, it doesn’t have to be…somebody that’s in this class…You need an audience” (Personal Communication, May 8, 2014). While this strategy supported the notion that the teacher should not be the primary audience for students’ writing, it did not necessarily facilitate a procedure that allowed students to responsibly meet this expectation, compared to what was observed in Mrs. Mahire’s classroom. Interestingly, however, this approach also emphasized the notion that students should have an audience during the writing process and not simply at the end. With regard to purpose for writing, Mrs. LeHilo’s students did not submit to writing contests, but she did share that some students were members of the Business Professionals of America, which provided them writing opportunities beyond the classroom.

**Student dispositions.** Many times, students are not prepared to meet the increased expectations for college-level writing on a skill-based level; however, as indicated in the literature (Sanoff, 2006), college professors and instructors also indicated that students have often not developed a work ethic appropriate for completing the extensive writing assignments associated with advanced academic environments. Because writing requires such an investment of time and skills, student qualities such as attitude, effort, and grit (Sullivan, 2009) become a central issue for writing instructors, especially at the high school level.

When asked to identify her biggest challenge in teaching college-preparatory writing, Mrs. Remera stated that it was students’ “unwillingness to believe that good writing takes time and patience. They want…to write it and hand it in and have that be good enough” (Personal Communication, March 17, 2014). She cited the mixed messages students receive about writing as a potential cause for their lack of effort and described students’ attitudes: “as long as you get close enough to what you’re saying, that’s good enough” (Personal Communication, March 17, 2014).
Similar to previous discussions, Mrs. Remera also attributed to adolescence some students’ expectation that their writing skills would develop later. Within her particular educational context, however, she believed that many of her students recognized the need to develop strong writing skills in order to be prepared for the demands of college-level writing tasks. Thus her challenge, then, was encouraging students who were less motivated and less interested in writing. One of the strategies she used was designing assignments that enabled students to engage in “actually researching topics they cared about” (Personal Communication, May 20, 2014), a reference to a student-centered research project she had used in the past.

She also indicated that the feedback she provided to students was an important factor in developing positive student qualities related to writing: “A lot of the time it’s written comments on their paper” (Personal Communication, May 20, 2014) as well as one-on-one conferencing, which allowed her to really discuss and challenge students. It was during those times she would also remind students of the cost for tuition and tried to use that as a source for added motivation for students to seek help and improve performance. However, for many students, she stated that grades are not a significant factor: “And so much of it, I think, is related to their motivation… the difference between an A and B really motivates a student; it’s a huge difference. The one who’s okay with Cs, they don’t care” (Personal Communication, March 17, 2014). In response to this, Mrs. Remera described her role as not only “a provider of information… [but] part of it’s cheerleader,” and she continued to explain, “…when my students have success, a lot of times it’s because I’m cheering them on” (Personal Communication, March 17, 2014). Additionally, Mrs. Remera noted that her consistency in grading facilitated students’ improved attitudes with regard to writing:

…another strategy that I find helps: right from the beginning, the rubric I’m using for you is the same rubric we’re talking about from day one. So… this isn’t my personal opinion
about what you’re writing…[while] I have more experience at it…[and] I know you’re probably going to be more trusting of that…these are things you can check yourself against as well. (Personal Communication, March 27, 2014)

This approach helped to limit the frustrations students often feel when assessment expectations for their writing are unclear or inconsistent and acknowledged the discomfort students felt at “the beginning of the year when they don’t have a whole lot of confidence in what they know or what they do” (Personal Communication, March 17, 2014).

Perhaps the most interesting strategy for developing positive student qualities observed and discussed throughout this particular case study was the way Mrs. Remera framed the experience of writing which challenged students’ notions that good writing denoted a career path as a writer; Mrs. Remera shared that her students often thought, “I’m not going to do that for a living” (Personal Communication, March 17, 2014) and thus they were relieved of the expectations of college-level writing. However, this was not the case in Mrs. Remera’s classroom. On more than one occasion, she referred to her students as writers, as American authors, and stressed the importance of viewing writing as an essential communication tool. She explained, “…a lot of it is to give themselves confidence and to have them think of themselves as writers. Yes, if I’m a student, I’m a writer” (Personal Communication, May 2, 2014). In light of this, students were able to “find their writing voice…and hone their voice” (Personal Communication, March 17, 2014), an aspect of teaching Mrs. Remera cited as one of her favorites.

Very conscious and open about her students’ struggles with writing, Mrs. Mahire’s approaches to addressing negative student dispositions that impact performance were woven throughout her instructional and writing curriculum design. She clearly acknowledged, “…we have kids in the room that hate [writing], hate it, because they suck at it. And they know it. So, we talk about, at the beginning of the year, filling in these holes in our individual Swiss cheese”
(Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). By openly addressing the reality many students faced, Mrs. Mahire was able to establish a classroom environment where she and her students “come together as a community of learners…[who] are all here to help each other” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). In support of this, she also owned and shared her personal struggles as a writer with her students: “I always say to them, yes, I’m a writer, but all writers struggle with the same things, go through the same things in their development” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). Faced with the challenge of changing students’ attitudes, Mrs. Mahire believed this was possible “when you dispel in their minds the idea that [writing] is no longer a pathless journey” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014), which she believed to be achievable through the use of formulaic writing strategies that were designed to assist students who were not particularly gifted in writing and who needed a familiar method for accomplishing these tasks.

Mrs. Mahire then supported these strategies by using the collaborative learning environment to collectively scaffold students through the process of translating their writing formulas into the rubrics that would be used for each particular assignment. By involving students in the development of the rubric, she explained that students learn, “It’s not something you do for…others. Sure, it helps me grade. It’s something you do for yourself. It’s a self-check” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). By providing a clear connection between the writing structures and the assessment criteria, again, the frustrations students often face with regard to unclear or inconsistent expectations were removed. This shared responsibility was echoed when Mrs. Mahire explained that she tells her students, “Don’t think it’s all on my shoulders. We do that: it’s not on my shoulders, it’s on our shoulders” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). Additional strategies for addressing student dispositions included her initial use of informal
writing at the beginning of the year as a means of scaffolding students and getting them comfortable writing.

While Mrs. Mahire noted the value of making writing assignments meaningful for students in order to promote more positive attitudes and effort, she recognized that such a goal was not always possible to reach. Therefore, she described how she provided students with a copy of the standards in an attempt to help them clearly understand the expectations and explained, “They have their responsibility too; it’s like a job, they have a job” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). Having implemented approaches to writing instruction that, first, addressed students’ struggles directly and, second, provided solid support, Mrs. Mahire then shared that “…while they may not like [writing], they’re getting better, which means they like it a little more” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014), supporting her belief that much of her students’ improved attitudes was connected to the successes they experienced as a result of the targeted and differentiated writing instruction they received.

Clearly aware that she was teaching students in a different environment than many other high school English Language Arts teachers, Mrs. LeHilo also expressed the opinion that students’ negative attitudes towards writing were in some way connected to “a certain message that’s being sent… that someone will bail you out,” and she further explained that because of the “mixed messages that kids get, they [think they] don’t have to perform” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). In light of this, one the major tasks she faced was altering her students’ perceptions of writing in the classroom by establishing high expectations:

So, I guess I, over the years, I have come to think…you have to keep your expectations high no matter what, no matter what you’re doing…not unrealistic, and I don’t know if that’s a contradiction or not, but… [students] will rise to a certain expectation; they may
not meet your expectation, but they will come further than if you say, ‘Well, they can’t really do that’. (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014)

Building upon this foundation, Mrs. LeHilo then discussed that while students were “good as long as you keep it verbal,” they would often be afraid or intimidated by writing tasks, and so part of her approach was to directly address this issue: “First you have to get them to write and they have to be interested and…you have to take some of the intimidation out of it, as least for these…students” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). She further explained that there were “good students here, but they’re here for a different purpose, and…you have to take the intimidation away from them or…they will not produce anything” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). One approach she used was providing informal writing assignments that helped her students “feel like they know something…giving them enough confidence” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). She also explained the role of teacher feedback in developing these positive attitudes, stating, “I think when I write in their journals and we interact on paper, it grows confidence” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). This sentiment was connected to her belief that in order for students to develop these positive qualities,

You have to model it. So, if you’re not going to write all over their paper or you’re not going to conference with them or you’re not going to invest yourself in their work, they will not produce the same for you. (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014)

And while she believed in the benefits of providing feedback, Mrs. LeHilo also discussed her frustrations when students would still not use that feedback to improve their writing and questioned, “How do you make them take ownership?” (Personal Communication, May 8, 2014), a theme that surfaced throughout her interviews. In a moment of honest frustration, Mrs. LeHilo shared, “The recursive process of reading what they write, I would just like them to do that” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014).
Connected to the ideas of providing feedback and students taking ownership of their writing, more than once Mrs. LeHilo reflected on her students’ aversion to the more tedious aspects of writing: “the technical, tedious, nitty-gritty, where you have to…sit there…and it’s really sort of dry and boring, I don’t know how to make this entertaining for you…But that wasn’t the fun part…they don’t really like it” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). Mrs. LeHilo’s response to this challenging aspect of writing was subtly revealed during interviews and observations. She often chose to be very selective about what she emphasized and explained that “…as an instructor, you have to pick” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). She later shared that she often focused on what she felt like were the important, overarching principles for students to understand as means of preventing students from becoming overwhelmed by the more tedious aspects of writing that ultimately contributed to their negative attitudes or lack of effort.

A unique aspect of Mrs. LeHilo’s situation was the way in which her school year was structured. She felt that having students for one semester was an issue and confessed, “I have a struggle with this schedule so much…because you’re just in a different timeframe,” and she explained that “you get more out of them their junior year than their senior year…Spring semester senior year is not the time to try to write” (Personal Communication, May 8, 2014). During her final interview, Mrs. LeHilo returned to this issue and stated, “Spring semester is hard for motivation…They’re a little more motivated, a little more academically driven in the Fall” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014), a realization that played a large role in shaping what types of writing assignments students were expected to complete and when. It became clear during her interviews that student dispositions were a consistent issue which impacted the writing experiences that occurred in Mrs. LeHilo’s classroom: “I don’t know, I still struggle with the idea that some, some people get it and some people don’t” (Personal Communication, May 8, 2014). This suggested that her philosophy about writing was once again a potential influencer with regard
to her approaches to writing instruction as she was found to often employ more general strategies for addressing the technical aspects and the student qualities that impact writing.

**Genre/cross-discipline features.** Though English Language Arts instructors are often viewed as the primary sources for writing instruction at high school level, their emphasis on literature-based writing tasks has led to criticism from higher education faculty members who believe students are unprepared to write in multiple genres for a variety of disciplines (Crank, 2012; Sanoff, 2006; Mongillo & Wilder, 2012). A recent shift in standards that emphasizes nonfiction texts has been one attempt to address this area of the preparation gap. However, the interviews and observations conducted throughout this study suggest that in order to meet this expectation for college-level writing, English Language Arts instructors should no longer be viewed as the sole influencer on students’ writing development.

Mrs. Remera identified the major goals of writing instruction in her department to be the development of basic skills in the first two years and a progression towards a more focused honing of style during the final two years. Though incredibly cognizant of the need for her students to view writing as a skill that stretches beyond the English Language Arts classroom, Mrs. Remera confessed, “I have to say, I think I’m guilty of literary analysis” (Personal Communication, May 20, 2014), which revealed a struggle with her writing curriculum. As an English Language Arts teacher, she desired for her students to become strong literature-based writers but was aware that they would also be expected to develop writing skills that could transfer to non-literary settings. In an attempt to accommodate this expectation, she shared that students completed a definition paper and wrote an editorial piece towards the beginning of the school year. Additionally, much of students’ writing experiences were in preparation for the research paper they would complete their junior year, which seemed to be the pinnacle writing assignment at the high school level. And,
while this research-based writing is an important experience for students, she was aware that much of their curriculum still favored literary analysis. She explained,

…we just had this epiphany about six years ago with the department that most of our students, guess what, are not going to go on to write poetry analysis…So, why are we spending so much time in the curriculum having them write poetry analysis? (Personal Communication, March 27, 2014)

This critical evaluation of the writing emphasis within the department indicated an important step towards expanding students’ writing experiences. It is important to note, however, that as an instructor for Advanced Placement English courses, Mrs. Remera was essentially required to continue to emphasize literary analysis in order to properly prepare her students for the type of writing they would encounter on the Advanced Placement exams.

An additional area of focus has been students’ exposure to nonfiction texts. Mrs. Remera explained, “We were a bit alarmed at first with the…switch to the nonfiction because our curriculum is really heavy in…fiction” (Personal Communication, March 27, 2014). She continued to explain that after they looked at the complete scope of their curriculum, however, they noticed that students were getting a lot of nonfiction, but that, “we just don’t dwell on it like we do the literature part” (Personal Communication, March 27, 2014). During her final interview, she reiterated that they were continuing to work through these adjustments, confessing that her department was still “biased towards fiction” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). However, she did share various nonfiction texts they were attempting to incorporate as a means of meeting this expectation, which suggested that one tendency is for instructors to add to rather than replace outright in regards to incorporating nonfiction texts. And though she referenced a cross-discipline research project students used to complete in previous years in conjunction with the History
department, few other examples of writing outside of the English Language Arts classroom were discussed.

Near the end of her initial interview, Mrs. Mahire confessed that “the biggest challenge in teaching college prep writing is getting my colleagues to understand that writing needs to be taught. It is not a skill that is intrinsic, that you are born with and know how to do” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). This perspective was evident in the instructional approaches and curricular materials utilized in her classroom. Again, focused on developing all students’ writing abilities, Mrs. Mahire offered a perspective that valued a clearly aligned scope and sequence that began with an emphasis on basic form, structure, and organization first, an expectation for response to literature writing second, an integration of grade-appropriate research tasks (papers, projects and presentations) third, and an expectation that writing tasks should increase in rigor as students advanced throughout elementary, middle, and high school.

In regards to students’ writing experiences no longer being concentrated within the English Language Arts classroom, Mrs. Mahire stated that a realization of this cross-discipline expectation “…won’t be until….the departments within a secondary program pull together,” and explained that “…because writing is a function of reading, and reading is a function of so many other things, these other subjects are required to support the reading and writing structure” (Personal Communication, May, 21 2014). Self-identified as a “disseminator of material” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014), Mrs. Mahire accepted her role “during this transition phase” as a writing expert within her school and stated, “…essentially, I am going to have to teach adults what these kids are beginning to know, and then they’re going to have to go through this four-year transition process where they’re just learning how to use [modes of writing]” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014) in their content area classrooms. Directly addressing the
expectations for writing in all disciplines, she expected that she would be able to help guide other teachers through the process of developing a writing component for their respective disciplines:

They don’t know how to teach writing. They need to know. They’re doing this. So, it’s time. It’s time that the social studies [teachers] step up first and we’re going to start talking about writing structures. But that’s simple; I just share my Power Point with all of you guys. The writing structure is right there…I’m not doing their job…I’m going to give them what they need so they can do it without having to do anything else. (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014)

In this sense, the expectation was that students would gain a more broadened experience in writing for multiple genres and disciplines and that responsibility would be shared by all teachers. Mrs. Mahire explained: “If it functions the way that it is designed to do, it should be across the disciplines and it would be one of those things where we are all on the same page” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). Though she did not directly address the issue of integrating nonfiction texts, Mrs. Mahire emphasized the need for evidence-based response to literature writing rather than informal, personal narratives and connected students’ ability to complete these more advanced writing assignments to their initial and ongoing development of close reading strategies as well as their experience in basic writing structures. As such, her approach to literary-based writing was considered a secondary step taken only after students have mastered basic writing forms.

The time constraints associated with Mrs. LeHilo’s particular educational context was once again identified as significant factor when discussing this area of the preparation gap. She described the questions she considers when she determined her writing scope and sequence for any given year: “How much time do I have? How can I work with the time that I have? Who’s my population? …What are they capable of?” (Personal Communication, May 8, 2014). While all of
these questions indicated her thoughtful consideration, more than once Mrs. LeHilo remarked, “I have a limited amount of time” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014), which, perhaps more so than other teachers in a more traditional environment, was a limiting factor with regard to the variety of writing assignments students could reasonably complete in a semester at the high school level. And, again, drawing on her experience as a college writing instructor, she stated, “…one reason… I do like teaching college writing [is] because you just take the field and you laser it down…inward” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014), instead of touching on a wide variety of topics briefly and simply moving on, which she associated as more indicative of the pace of high school writing curriculum and instruction.

Reflecting on the time constraints she faced, Mrs. LeHilo laughed as she stated, “…there’s only so much you can do, and I would rather instill, I guess, some of the concepts and some of the principles and then leave some of that technical refinement for a later day” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). Because of the size of the career center and the variety of student schedules that existed to accommodate their unique career interests, cross-discipline collaboration in writing was not necessarily found to be a viable option. Therefore, the writing students completed in their English Language Arts course was potentially of more importance, seeing as they were unlikely to receive extensive writing instruction elsewhere. Mrs. LeHilo expressed that “now the struggle becomes, how do you connect them to literature and to writing” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014), particularly in this educational context. An over-emphasis on literary-based writing was not as much of a concern for Mrs. LeHilo; rather, trying to connect students’ writing experiences to more meaningful contexts became a central goal. For example, with regard to research writing, she stated that she would try to explain the idea of research in general, outside of technical writing, as a means of providing purpose (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014).
When considering the expectations for college-level writing, however, she stated that she needed to “give them the technical formatting; they have to be able to do that and they have to be able to do it well, so they’re not spending their time having to format something instead of getting at content” (Personal Communication, March 28, 2014). Therefore, while her instinct seemed to be to broaden and generalize writing instruction as a means of making it more relevant for students, there existed a tension about whether or not this compromised the level of writing instruction students needed in order to be prepared to meet the demands of college-level writing (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). Mrs. LeHilo also recognized her role as an expert in writing and hoped that she could use that to assist her students through the writing process, though how that impacted students’ experiences in genre or cross-discipline writing was not evident. Rather, writing was approached in more of a general sense and was often discussed with a hint of frustration as college-level writing performance was not necessarily the ultimate goal for her students, many of whom were not college-bound.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the strategies high school English Language Arts instructors used to teach college-preparatory writing. Additionally, this study was intended to determine how the instructional strategies being used addressed the main areas of the preparation gap between high school and college-level writers. As evidenced by the three case studies, teachers’ instructional strategies were found to vary greatly in response to the teachers’ personal writing philosophy and related goals, the educational contexts, and the student populations being addressed. However, despite the variations, results supported a connection between the instructional strategies being used and their potential to address specific areas of the preparation gap.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Research Questions

In light of the areas of the preparation gap (Appendix A) between high school and college-level writers supported by previous research (Conker & Lewis, 2008; Crank, 2013; Fitzhugh, 2011; Hafner, Joseph, & McCormick, 2010; Mongillo & Wilder, 2012; Sanoff, 2006; Sullivan, 2009), this study explored the following two research questions:

1. What instructional strategies are high school teachers using to teach college-preparatory writing?

2. How do the instructional strategies used by high school teachers address the main areas of the preparation gap between high school and college-level writers?

With regard to the first research question, it is important to highlight that the participants in this study offered a shared definition of the purpose of writing instruction at the high school level, which focused on the development of students’ basic writing abilities, particularly with regard to structure and organization. In light of this, three main categories of instructional strategies were identified.

First, the use of formulaic writing strategies, such as the skeleton outline used by Mrs. Mahire (Appendix D, Artifact 1), were found to facilitate the overt instruction of basic writing forms and related structure and organizational techniques. Secondly, the participants shared an emphasis on the development of students’ writing-related cognitive skills, particularly analysis. This was achieved through the use of active reading questions and color coding to support metacognition, teacher questioning and class discussions, teacher and student modeling of writing techniques, as well as the use of informal writing tasks to facilitate initial brainstorming and refinement of ideas. Finally, the use of collaborative writing tasks such as peer review were found to support a development of students’ awareness of an audience for their writing. This compilation
of strategies examined throughout this study provides a starting point for better understanding how current high school instructors are engaging students in college-preparatory writing experiences.

How these strategies used by high school instructors addressed main areas of the preparation gap between high school and college-level writers was found to be a multi-layered issue of teacher engagement. In other words, teachers’ philosophies about writing instruction influenced how they framed the writing experiences in their classrooms. Consequently, writing-related learning objectives and instructional strategies implemented were a reflection of how teachers viewed the purpose of writing instruction at the high school level. Thus, the instructional strategies used by teachers were found to be secondary to their philosophical and pedagogical beliefs. And, considering that a gap in students’ high school and college-level writing abilities still exists, even when teachers implement instructional strategies such as those used by participants in this study, additional results of this research suggest that the “why” behind how teachers engage students in college-preparatory writing is just as important of an issue when discussing the extent to which instructional strategies address particular areas of this preparation gap.

Overall, then, the results of this study indicate that while certain instructional strategies were found to support teachers’ efforts to develop high school students’ college-preparatory writing abilities, further exploration of the peripheral factors such as teachers’ educational philosophies and pedagogical decisions should be further explored as they relate to addressing particular areas of the preparation gap between high school and college-level writing. Therefore, the following discussion explores five themes that surfaced from the data presented in Chapter Four and potentially provides a framework for helping high school teachers navigate the multi-layered process of successfully preparing their students to meet the expectations of college-level writing.
Discussion

A synthesis of the six categories that surfaced during coding and analysis resulted in five related themes which provide additional insight with regard to the connection between instructional strategies and their potential to address main areas of the preparation gap associated with high school and college-level writers. The five themes include philosophy and purpose of high school writing instruction, instructional transparency, community, students’ identities as writers, and cross-discipline collaboration, each of which will be discussed individually. Making these connections clear through a discussion of these related themes assists researchers and writing instructors in making the often difficult leap from theory to practice.

Philosophy and purpose of high school writing instruction. The unique and individual aspects of being a teacher were clearly highlighted throughout the interview process with each participant, and as these relate to writing instruction, the notion of a personal philosophy channeled into a clearly articulated purpose for writing instruction at the high school level became a dominant theme. In a sense, this allowed for a returning to the very core of teaching in order to see how instructional methods were impacted by teachers’ beliefs regarding writing. Mrs. Remera presented a philosophy that was accommodating of college-preparatory writing expectations but was expansive enough to include the notion of writing as a communication tool all students should master. Similarly, Mrs. Mahire’s philosophy emphasized her belief that though all students were not naturally gifted writers, through the use of intentionally designed curricular materials, all students could master the basics of college-level writing formats. Offering an alternative perspective, Mrs. LeHilo’s philosophy that writing was an individual, creative experience greatly influenced the type of instructional strategies she implemented in her classroom.

Despite the difference in philosophy, all three participants indicated that they viewed the purpose of writing instruction at the high school level to be focused on the development of basic
writing skills. Thus their writing instruction followed a similar pattern: exposure, experience, evolution. Mrs. Remera and Mrs. Mahire supported a direct approach of exposing students to writing structures through the use of formulaic writing strategies. On the other hand, while Mrs. LeHilo did provide students with basic information regarding the structure of particular writing assignments, she did not share the previous participants’ formulaic approach. With regard to experience, the quantity of writing students were expected to complete was comparable among the separate educational contexts observed during this study; however, additional variation in quantity was noted between particular tracks of students, with honors or advanced students often writing more or longer assignments. Concerns about time and their ability to provide meaningful feedback on a large volume of student writing were shared by each participate; however, there was a consensus that student writing abilities improved through practice.

Finally, the idea of an evolution of writing ability was also evident throughout each teacher’s interview, though the nature of and timeline for this advancement in writing ability was found to be unique. Mrs. Remera indicated that the scope and sequence of the writing curriculum implemented by her department emphasized high expectations for upperclassmen writers, namely juniors and seniors. But, in addition to advancement based on maturity and grade level, she also supported the notion that, as students progressed as writers, their use of formulaic writing structures previously introduced would evolve to support their individual interests, abilities, and writing contexts. Mrs. Mahire supported a similar approach, advocating for a deliberate emphasis on basic skills and formulas for younger grades and suggesting that as advanced students gained more experience writing, they would adapt those formulas as well. However, she indicated that students’ ability to understand the flexibility of these formulas and structures would also need to be taught; in other words, this evolution of writing ability would not necessary happen without additional instruction and scaffolding. Once again offering a different perspective, the nature of
Mrs. LeHilo’s educational context and her experience as a college writing instructor seemed to contribute to her notion that not all students would evolve as writers; however, in the instances that students did evolve, her views and interview responses suggested the idea that much of that advancement would occur during students’ college-writing experiences, where the learning environment and student motivation would allow for more targeted, in-depth instruction and writing experience.

Finn (1999) suggested teachers’ attitudes and perceptions of students’ abilities influence the type of literacy practices implemented in their classrooms, which was supported during comparative analysis of the three teachers who participated in this study. It can be seen that, though each teacher seemingly identified the same purpose for writing instruction at the high school level, each teacher’s philosophy regarding writing was clearly reflected in the instructional approaches they used to facilitate students’ progression through the exposure, experience, and evolution stages of writing. Furthermore, by examining the general purpose for writing instruction and how it was translated within participants’ classrooms, two additional categories surfaced that perhaps serve as a link to understanding not only the progression of writing instruction at the high school level but also for understanding the progression of writing from high school to college environments. Writing tasks were found to support one of two sub-purposes: learning to write and writing to learn. Learning to write included writing instruction that facilitated students’ mastery of basic writing forms and was typically assessed along guidelines of structure, format, and technique. Conversely, writing to learn tasks reflected writing as a means of communication and meaning-making through which students would demonstrate their knowledge. Such writing was often assessed in terms of clarity of content, effectiveness of argument, or level of understanding demonstrated. For example, the response to literature writing assignments common in English Language Arts classrooms would represent writing to learn tasks.
Importantly, the majority of writing assignments students complete at the college level would be considered writing to learn activities, and thus establish writing as a communication tool through which students demonstrate learning. It became apparent through this study that arguably half of teachers’ writing instruction at the high school level focuses on teaching students to write, which is in full support of the purpose of writing instruction participants’ unanimously identified. What is interesting to note, however, is that two of the three participants purport that as a result of targeted and overt instruction in basic writing forms (learning to write), students are prepared to transition to more advanced writing tasks (writing to learn) during their final years of high school, suggesting that students will eventually reach the advanced levels of writing expected by college instructors.

Briefly revisiting teachers’ philosophies about writing instruction allows for a greater understanding of the “why” behind particular instructional approaches implemented, or not implemented, in high school classrooms. Furthermore, examining the central purposes for writing instruction at the high school level enables writing instructors from various academic levels and contexts to begin to resolve the tensions about college-level writing instruction. In other words, by understanding why high school instructors engage writing the way they do, approaches for better aligning college-preparatory writing instruction to college-level expectations can become more targeted and relative to specific high school contexts.

Instructional transparency. One of the most significant findings of this study is the evidence that transparency in instruction effectively addresses the areas of the preparation gap with regard to high school and college-level writers. The first step in this process has essentially already been discussed: a re-examination of teachers’ philosophy with regard to writing and a clear articulation of the purpose of writing at the high school level. Because both of these factors were found to significantly impact writing instruction and curriculum, classroom teachers,
departments, and schools will benefit from a strategic reevaluation of the theory-based factors that are influencing the type of writing students are being asked to complete. Mrs. Remera’s experiences in questioning her departments’ emphasis on poetry analysis and their incorporation of nonfiction texts is an example of the potentially powerful changes that can result in a thoughtful reconsideration of “why” regarding writing curriculum. Additionally, Mrs. Mahire’s writing curriculum which demonstrated an enormous scope and sequence, across grade levels and academic disciplines, is a strong reflection of clearly articulated philosophy and purpose.

Conversely, the difficulties associated with the non-traditional academic setting Mrs. LeHilo represented could potentially be more easily addressed through a back-to-basics questioning of the philosophy and purpose of the writing curriculum within that particular context. For example, pausing regularly to consider (and reconsider) the factors influencing the writing curriculum being implemented enables teachers to identify the main purposes and goals for writing instruction and strategically examine how those purposes and goals are being translated into the day-to-day learning experiences in the classroom. Furthermore, what is especially powerful about this finding is its ability to be relative to a specific learning environment, be that a classroom, a department, a school, or a district.

Having a clarified, and potentially adjusted, philosophy and purpose for writing instruction naturally leads to a level of transparency with regard to learning goals and objectives, which this study revealed to be essential for students’ successful writing experiences. In other words, basic educational practice denotes that effective instruction begins with clearly articulated learning objectives, and this is particularly true with regard to the challenging tasks associated with college-preparatory writing. Students need to understand what they are expected to do, why they are expected to do it, how they are expected to do it, and they need to be clear on the assessment criteria for their work. Mrs. LeHilo was the only participant in this study to list daily learning
objectives on the whiteboard in her classroom; though, quite often, the objectives were essentially an abbreviated agenda. Conversely, while Mrs. Remera and Mrs. Mahire did not provide written objectives for writing assignments, they were consistent in their use of verbal explanations of goals, objectives, and assignment expectations (Classroom Observations, April 8; May 8, 2014). Thus, while a daily agenda is helpful for students, a clear framework for understanding what was expected of them and how they would be evaluated regarding certain writing tasks is crucial. And, as Mrs. Mahire shared during her interview, students are also provided a copy of the content standards as a means of clarifying learning objectives and connecting them to particular writing assignments completed throughout the course of the year (Personal Communication, May 21, 2014). Though not the same as clearly articulated learning objectives, all three teachers did provide assignment sheets and work samples to guide student performance.

And while the idea of transparency in learning objectives is important, it is inherently connected to assessment. Mrs. Remera noted that her students are made aware that the rubric she will use to assess their writing is the same rubric throughout the year, providing not only transparency but consistency to support student learning. Uniquely, Mrs. Mahire involved her students in a collaborative construction of the rubric for each writing assignment as a means of clearly showing them the connection between what they are expected to include in their writing and how those components will be assessed. At one point, Mrs. LeHilo discussed the format of her writing assessment, which once again supported a more generalized approach. While learning goals and objectives can at times seem to be far removed from the actual writing tasks students complete, this study supported the connection between transparency in this area and improved student writing performance.

At this point, the idea of transparency begins to build momentum and leads to one of the most supported findings from this study. Though research indicated a disapproval of formulaic
writing at the college level (Denecker, 2013; Fanetti et al., 2010), two participants in this study provided evidence of the role that formulaic writing instruction plays in supporting students’ development and mastery of writing in the high school classroom. Multiple words were used throughout interviews to describe this approach: structure, formula, strategy, mode, pattern. Essentially, the argument for transparency in writing instruction is founded on an agreement that there were consistent principles that govern strong academic writing; however, these principles were also found to be flexible in the sense that they can be adapted in various writing contexts. So, having identified the purpose of writing instruction at the high school level, the use of formulaic writing strategies was found to be the most effective technique.

It is important to note, however, that inherent in Mrs. Remera and Mrs. Mahire’s formulaic approach was the expectation that students would either eventually adapt these formulas or stronger writers would be free to use an alternative technique. In other words, an effective formulaic approach to writing instruction included an awareness of the broader scope and sequence of a writing curriculum and supported the ultimate goal of students’ adaptation of formulas for particular writing circumstances. Additionally, Mrs. Mahire highlighted the imbedded differentiation and scaffolding supported by formulaic approaches, such as allowing teachers to chunk certain material or facilitating self-paced writing assignments. Furthermore, students’ understanding of writing expectations were found to be strengthened through their ability to transfer learning to other writing contexts, many of which increased in difficulty as students advanced through high school.

Identifying an effective approach is only half of the process of supporting instructional transparency with regards to writing; the “what” needs to be followed by the “how”. Thus, this study also revealed that the writing, reading, and thinking processes need to become transparent for students. This was achieved not only by the use of active reading questions and formulaic
writing strategies, but it was supported by the use of modeling of related cognitive skills. For example, Mrs. Mahire implemented teacher talk-alouds, during which she would model the entire process for a particular writing assignment. This enabled her to make “visible” the inner workings of her mind as she processed a prompt, determined an appropriate writing structure, began prewriting, and so on. Additionally, as evidence of her emphasis on collaborative learning, Mrs. Mahire’s students were expected to teach their peers (Classroom Observation, April 9, 2014) which provided another instance in which the private thinking was made public. Mrs. Remera would also attempt to achieve this goal of transparency through discussions, written feedback on students’ papers, and conferences, during which she would challenge students to really examine their thought process with regard to the decisions they were making about their writing. Similarly, Mrs. LeHilo would engage students in discussions and used targeted questioning during brainstorming sessions to help engage students’ in the cognition so closely connected to effective writing.

Though teachers’ strategies with regard to writing instruction was the area of focus for this study, the revelation that the effectiveness of these strategies was inherently connected to the larger idea of instructional transparency was an unexpected finding. Furthermore, the subsequent realization that transparency includes a complimentary combination of theory and practice (i.e. philosophy and formula) suggests that preparing students to meet college-level writing requires more than simple plug-and-play strategies. Teachers’ beliefs and basic educational practices, such as clearly articulated learning objectives, have just as much potential to impact students’ writing performance.

**Community and collaboration.** Though writing is often viewed as an individual task, skill, or talent, the results of this study challenged this perspective, highlighting instead the collaborative components of writing that have a unique potential to address specific areas of the
preparation gap. With many students’ experience with writing being relegated to an academic and largely artificial environment, the goal of establishing an authentic audience for writing can be challenging. Mrs. LeHilo at times talked about her students’ need to consider their audience, but without a literal audience, students were unable to make that broader connection. And though a slightly isolated and limited solution, Mrs. Remera provided students the opportunity to write for particular contests each year, thereby removing herself as the primary audience for students’ writing. Additionally, her students would “publish” their writing by reading a certain piece for their classmates. Though not fully developed, this introduced the idea of peers as a primary audience for writing, an idea that Mrs. Mahire fully capitalized on within her classroom. An incredibly strong proponent for collaborative writing, Mrs. Mahire established a clear expectation that students would consistently be sharing their writing with their peers all throughout the writing process. She refused to entertain the notion that she was the only audience for her students’ writing and demonstrated the power of establishing not only an audience but community of writers.

Her advocacy for collaborative writing also included its ability to support struggling writers and to reinforce and encourage strong writers through peer coaching/teaching. While Mrs. Remera did not utilize collaborative writing as often, she did identify its value in brainstorming, especially for less formal writing tasks where an outside perspective can help students refine their focus or ideas. And though she struggled to find a manageable application within her high school classroom, Mrs. LeHilo referenced the benefits of establishing a collaborative writing workshop at the college level.

An aspect of collaborative writing, peer review, when implemented in a guided manner with clear expectations, was believed by participants to support the development of writers as they were able to see what other writers were or were not doing. In Mrs. Mahire’s classroom, this could
be as simple as students forming a peer review circle and merely reading multiple drafts by other writers. Or, as in Mrs. LeHilo’s classroom, students could engage in a more formal peer review which required them to answer questions about a classmate’s draft. She also had her students complete a reflection on the suggestions from peer review and explain how they would adjust their writing based on that feedback (See Appendix D, Artifact 5). Both of these participants indicated the value of students being able to identify strengths or weaknesses in others’ writing and transfer that understanding to their own work. While Mrs. Remera was open about her decision to selectively utilize peer review, questioning whether or not she was correct in this decision, she did emphasize the necessity for it to be structured in some sense in order for it to result in useful feedback for students (See Appendix D, Artifact 6).

Collectively, these factors of audience, collaborative writing, and peer review contribute to the establishment of community surrounding writing. The participants’ experiences and techniques, though different, do suggest that writing can be strengthened when it is shared. It is important to note again, however, that the sharing of writing is not relegated to a final product; rather, it is a shared experience, enriched by ongoing dialogue and discussion about techniques and strategies, struggles and strengths. And in the midst of this community, students and teachers engage in writing as more than a task or process.

**Students’ identities as writers.** By following the above progression, it becomes more evident how curricular and instructional supports help to address and potentially improve the student qualities that hinder writing success. Each of the teacher participants suggested that one of the first steps they face is fundamentally altering students’ perceptions about writing. By expanding the writing process beyond the traditional scope of the classroom and contextualizing it within the bigger picture of life and learning, the teachers attempted to challenge students to understand that the writing they were doing, though it may be mastering basic skills initially, was
connected to a more significant purpose (Collier, 2014). For example, Mrs. Remera’s reminder to students that their writing outside of school was more important helped them to refocus their efforts for a longer-lasting outcome. Similarly, Mrs. LeHilo often encouraged her students to see writing as a means of connecting their personal experiences with a broader group of individuals, though, arguably, the educational context and career paths of many of these students still made reframing writing a challenge. Mrs. Mahire attempted to adjust students’ perceptions of writing in such a way that would enable them to identify their areas of weakness and give them a sense of purpose for improving their writing as they continued through freshman year and the remainder of their high school careers. Though relatively regulated to an academic context, her reframing of writing was designed to provide a clearer purpose and end goal for students’ efforts.

Additionally, having simply reframed students’ perceptions of writing did not mean that students’ opinions or attitudes about writing had necessarily improved. However, acknowledging that a great source of those negative attitudes is often the difficulty students have in understanding advanced writing expectations, it became evident that clarifying the process for writing in order to support student success was essential. Thus, the formulaic approach to writing implemented by Mrs. Remera and Mrs. Mahire supported their attempts to alter students’ attitudes with the goal that as students experienced success in writing as a result of greater understanding of the expectations and processes, students’ attitudes about writing would be more likely to improve. Mrs. LeHilo’s students possessed the most challenging collection of negative student dispositions regarding writing, and while she did attempt to reframe the purpose of writing, students often continued to struggle in the absence of a simplified process that enabled them to better understand basic writing forms and advanced writing expectations.

Though the participants’ experiences represented different outcomes with regard to the development of student qualities that can impact writing performance, evidence in this study
suggests that, ultimately, with the right instructional approaches, writing experiences, and support, high school students can begin to develop improved attitudes and efforts with regard to writing. Additionally, those student qualities, including grit, were also often found to be translated into the self-monitoring skills that often typify strong writers. In other words, as students’ understanding of and attitudes about writing changed, they were better equipped to take ownership of their development as writers. In this sense, while not all teachers agreed, Mrs. Remera’s attempt to instil this identity of being a writer in all of her students, regardless of their academic or career pursuits, could be considered a potential technique for improving students’ dispositions regarding writing.

Cross-discipline collaboration. The interviews, observations, and artifacts from this study provided support for a variety of instructional strategies that were found to be effective in preparing students to meet the demands of college-level writing. However, two specific gaps in preparation, though discussed by participants, were not successfully addressed. The quantity of writing students are expected to complete in college and the multiple genres students will be expected to write for a variety of disciplines was found to be an expectation that these high school English Language Arts instructors were unable to meet on their own. Connected to the purpose of writing instruction they previously identified, it became clearer why students were not writing as much as college instructors feel they should be. Furthermore, the logistical nuances of the high school classroom (i.e. – larger class sizes and all-encompassing content area) provided additional support for the notion that a substantial increase in the quantity of writing was not a burden feasibly carried solely by English Language Arts teachers.

Additionally, meeting the expectation that students write in a variety of genres for disciplines other than English Language Arts was found to only be possible through a cross-discipline approach. Interestingly, this shared responsibility for teaching writing is supported by
the new Common Core State Standards which requires all content area teachers incorporate writing into their curriculum, not just English Language Arts teachers. Thus, as other content area teachers begin to integrate writing more intentionally, not only will students’ experiences in writing broaden with regard to genre, but they will also learn to respond to an increased quantity of writing as an academic expectation more similar to college-level writers. Finally, it is important to note, however, that by addressing the areas of the preparation gap previously discussed, English Language Arts teachers will be in a better position, as the writing experts in their schools, to help guide other teachers through a more efficient and effective approach to providing learning experiences that prepare students to meet the expectations for college-level writing.

**Implications and Recommendations**

Because the nature of this study was inspired by a divide that exists between two educational environments, high school and college, the implications for this research include multiple stakeholders. Furthermore, while the initial focus of this study was to examine particular instructional strategies used by high school teachers and how those strategies potentially address specific areas of the preparation gap, results of the study suggested that the philosophies associated with college-preparatory writing are just as influential as the strategies teachers implemented; thus the following implications and recommendations explore aspects of both theory and practice.

**High school English Language Arts teachers.** Often charged with the most responsibility for developing students’ college-level writing abilities, high school English Language Arts instructors can benefit from the results of this research. This study provided evidence that a clearly articulated philosophy and purpose for writing instruction should be established first and revisited frequently; this philosophy and articulated purpose may vary in scope, from individual classrooms to departments, schools, or districts. Additionally, teachers must revisit their use of clear learning
goals and objectives with regard to writing instruction as a necessary step for improving student performance. Furthermore, perhaps the most important implication for high school English Language Arts teachers is that instructional transparency is best achieved through formulaic writing approaches that correspond to teaching methods such as modeling and collaborative learning, which help students to develop the cognitive skills inherently connected to advanced writing. In other words, this study revealed that in order to develop students’ college-preparatory writing abilities, teachers need to engage students in the writing-related cognitive tasks that support their learning. This can be accomplished when teachers facilitate students’ learning by modeling the application of flexible writing formulas.

It is important to note, however, that while the singular use of lower-level engagement in formulaic writing approaches may not result in improved student performance in writing, formulaic writing as used by participants in this study was designed as a beginning support structure for more advanced levels of adaptation. Thus, in order for these writing structures to be successful, they must be integrated as one component of a multi-layered instructional approach, supported by teacher and student modeling and additional strategies for the development of writing-related cognitive skills that will enable students’ eventual advancement beyond basic writing formulas. Finally, the need for cross-discipline collaboration that surfaced during this study also implies that high school English Language Arts instructors are charged with the responsibility of serving as the writing experts in their schools and districts. While this can be daunting, by working through the themes outlined in Chapter Five, these teachers will be better positioned to fulfill this role.

High school-level content teachers. The Common Core State Standards recently established the expectation that all teachers integrate writing into their respective content areas, which provides additional support for a cross-discipline approach to writing instruction at the high
school level. While much of the English Language Arts classroom may focus on learning to write tasks, teachers of social studies, science, mathematics, and other electives have great potential to implement writing to learn tasks as a means of supporting their regular curriculum. Thus, the notion of a clearly articulated philosophy and purpose for writing is just as applicable to content area teachers as it is to English Language Arts teachers. Furthermore, as teachers of specific content, it is important that the learning objectives associated with writing are clearly outlined for students and teachers in order to support learning and assessment.

Additionally, because writing in various content areas requires students to not only demonstrate their mastery of particular genre forms but also their understanding of specific content knowledge, the notion of instructional transparency highlighted in this study is critical in content area classrooms as a means of supporting student learning. By implementing formulaic writing strategies, teacher modeling, and instruction in writing-related cognitive skills, content area teachers can more easily support students’ writing abilities without taking away from their demonstration of specific content knowledge. However, because content area teachers are not often experienced in teaching writing, it is important that they draw on the knowledge and expertise of English Language Arts teachers in order to create a fully integrated writing program that reinforces student learning across the curriculum. In the end, this cross-discipline collaboration of secondary teachers serves as a crucial step in addressing concerns about the limited quantity and variety of writing students complete in high school.

**College-level writing instructors.** Much like high school English Language Arts instructors, college-level writing instructors are often charged with the responsibility of preparing all students to successfully engage in writing tasks at the post-secondary level. However, the multiple writing forms students encounter in a variety of academic majors suggests such a broad scope of writing instruction that entry-level (or remedial) writing courses are unable to feasibly
address. Once again, a clearly articulated philosophy and purpose for college-level writing instructors is essential for supporting student success. For example, because students engage in writing to learn tasks throughout their college careers, a sensitivity to cross-discipline approaches should be embedded in college-level writing instructors’ approaches to writing. In other words, writing instructors in post-secondary environments must be fully aware that their students will all be writing for a variety of academic disciplines; as such, the philosophy and purpose for college writing programs needs to reflect an appropriate balance of general and genre-specific writing skills in order to appropriately prepare students to transfer learning from their writing courses to their general and major academic courses.

Clear and appropriate learning objectives designed as a bridge from students’ previous high school-level writing experiences will help support them during this transition process. Also, the implementation of instructional transparency is still important at the college level, even in contexts where formulaic writing strategies are questioned. At the core of this idea of instructional transparency with regard to writing is the realization that when writing expectations and processes are simplified and clarified, students are better prepared to meet those expectations. Therefore, if college-level writing instructors advocate a shift away from formulaic writing, so be it; what is most important is that instructors clearly present the adjusted expectations for writing at the college level in order for students to be appropriately prepared to succeed. Furthermore, the use of writing communities and writing workshops at the college level can also support the benefits of collaborative writing experiences highlighted by teachers in this study and should be incorporated to support students’ writing experiences at the post-secondary level.

**College-level content instructors.** The implications for college-level content instructors are less practical with regard to particular teaching methods. However, the theoretical aspects of writing instruction at the high school level suggest that college-level instructors may need to
reconsider their expectations for writing instruction at the high school level. If writing instruction at the high school level is appropriate in focusing on the development of students’ basic writing skills, then college-level instructors should develop a more realistic expectation for the writing abilities of their students, especially first-year college students. And while remedial courses are often required for struggling writers, college-level content teachers should also engage in the same process of articulating their own philosophy of writing as it relates to their academic discipline, crafting writing-related learning objectives, and potentially implementing instructional strategies that support students’ content-related writing skills. In many ways, much like high school content teachers are now being charged with the responsibility of serving as content writing instructors, college-level content teachers need to accept a similar role and responsibility for developing and reinforcing students’ learning as it relates to writing for their particular content area at the college level.

Additionally, the disparity in educational contexts presented throughout this study revealed that high school teachers, though accountable for the same academic standards, are often forced to make adjustments to writing curriculum in response to particular school settings or student demographics. As such, college-level instructors’ criticisms of high school writing instruction should also take in account the environmental factors that significantly impact student performance at the secondary level compared to the post-secondary environment. Therefore, college-level content teachers need to be prepared to support students at various ability levels. One important method for doing so is by collaborating with college-level writing instructors to insure that content-specific writing expectations and skills are being appropriately addressed in basic writing courses, thereby promoting a cross-discipline transfer of learning for college students.

**Teacher educators.** Though often experienced writers themselves, many aspiring teachers are unprepared for the challenges associated with teaching writing to students at the high school
level. Therefore, it is imperative that teacher educators provide pre-service teacher candidates with targeted instruction and practical tools for teaching writing. By designing specific writing pedagogy courses and requiring writing-related field experiences, teacher educators can provide pre-service teachers with knowledge of how to implement strategies that support the instructional transparency connected to teaching college-preparatory writing skills. Teacher candidates can then gain experience working with student writers, either by serving as a tutor at a campus writing center or as a writing tutor for high school students during pre-service field hours. And while overt instruction in writing-related pedagogy and strategies is essential for English Language Arts teachers, it is important that content area teachers also gain experience in teaching writing within their respective disciplines as well. Finally, by recognizing the need for teachers to be prepared to serve as writing experts in their schools, teacher educators can begin to work with novice and expert teachers and provide them the support they need to better prepare high school students to meet the demands of college-level writing. Because teacher educators work in a post-secondary environment but are responsible for training future secondary teachers, they are strategically positioned to positively influence the ability of stakeholders in both environments to more successfully address areas of the preparation gap between high school and college-level writers.

Future Research

While strategies for effectively teaching college-preparatory writing were the focus of this study, the sole participants were high school English Language Arts instructors. Therefore, data were limited to writing strategies within the context of an English Language Arts classroom. In light of the increased focus on writing across the curriculum, including the literacy standards now imbedded in each content area due to the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, future research should focus on how teachers from other disciplines are successfully integrating writing instruction in their classrooms. Additionally, though student work samples were collected
throughout this study, student perspectives regarding writing at both the high school and college environments were not explored. Thus, future research that focus on a broader examination of the student element throughout the grade levels would provide additional support for understanding the multi-dimensional nature of college-preparatory writing instruction. Finally, while a qualitative case study approach was found to be effective for the nature of this research, the shorter duration of this study limited the amount of data collected. Therefore, extended case studies that explore classroom teachers’ philosophies about writing instruction and their use of instructional strategies over the course of an entire academic school year would significantly enrich the data collection and better support future findings.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to examine what instructional strategies high school English Language Arts teachers were using to engage students in college-preparatory writing tasks. Additionally, this research sought to explore how those instructional strategies addressed main areas of the preparation gap as outlined by current research. Though the three teachers who participated in this study represented a variety of approaches and educational contexts, results suggested that when teachers clearly articulated a philosophy and purpose for writing instruction at the high school level, it better enabled them to implement instructional transparency with regard to writing. Particularly, the strategic use of formulaic writing structures supported by teacher modeling and the development of students’ writing-related cognitive skills were found to support college-preparatory writing instruction at the high school level and address specific areas of the preparation gap. Furthermore, this study suggested that establishing a collaborative community in which students view themselves as writers may assist students is developing the techniques and student dispositions that support strong writing performance across the disciplines, which may better enable them to, as DelliCarini stated “understand that writing is more complicated than
producing papers for review—that ‘writing is an ongoing learning process…’” (Collier, 2014, p. 12) that impacts students’ success in college and career environments.

Writing certainly plays an integral role in students’ ability to be successful in advanced academic environments, but as Dryer noted “‘students are…very, very anxious about writing and the expectations they believed they were going to be facing in the postsecondary environment’” (Collier, 2014, p. 10). Thus, the need for more targeted instruction in writing is an ongoing topic of discussion among high school and college-level instructors, and successfully preparing students to meet the increased expectations for college-preparatory writing will remain a central goal for high school teachers who actively seek instructional strategies that support student success.
REFERENCES


## APPENDIX A: CODING MATRIX

*Main Areas of the Preparation Gap between High School and College-level Writers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quantity</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Quantity of writing: limited amount and length of assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formulaic Writing</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Over-emphasis on strict process/formula/rigid rules (i.e. – 5 paragraph essay; thesis placement; 1st person language)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genre/Cross-Discipline</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lack of exposure to nonfiction texts/over-reliance on literary response writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Not prepared for various genres/disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Not prepared for research-based writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cognitive Skills</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lack of analytical/critical/creative thinking skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience &amp; Purpose</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Lack of clear writing purpose/sense of authentic audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Lack of understanding of writing as a communication platform or their role as writers in an academic discourse setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Dispositions</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Attitude, effort, grit, etc. (other student qualities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Students’ self-monitoring strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Compiled from Conker & Lewis, 2008; Crank, 2012; Denecker, 2013; Fanetti et al., 2010; Fitzhugh, 2011; Mongillo & Wilder, 2012; Sanoff, 2006; Sehulter, 2012; Sullivan, 2009
Teacher Interview Questions

High School Language Arts Instructors

*Participants’ responses will be audio recorded for later transcription, coding, and analysis.

1. What motivated you to enter the teaching profession?
2. What is the most enjoyable aspect of your job?
3. What is the most challenging aspect of your job?
4. How do you feel about the recent changes in the content standards?
5. In what ways have you noticed writing instruction expectations to have changed?
6. What role does research play in CPW instruction at the high school level?
7. How would you articulate the main goals of writing instruction at the high school level?
8. How would you describe the general goals you associate with CPW, or writing at the college level?
9. How would you describe the major focuses of your HS writing curriculum?
10. How would you describe your role with regard to CPW instruction?
11. What do you find to be the biggest challenge in teaching college-preparatory writing (CPW)?
12. What resources are available, outside of yourself, to assist students with CPW?
13. Can you share some of the approaches you have found to be successful in CPW instruction?
14. How would you describe student attitudes with regard to CPW?
15. What do students most often struggle with in terms of CPW?
# APPENDIX C: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL CHART

## Classroom Observation Protocol Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Area</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Personal Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom Environment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Environment is comfortable and engaging. Visualy stimulating.</td>
<td>□ Content-related materials displayed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Student work displayed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Environment feels sterile/institutional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical arrangement of classroom is flexible; adapted to fit instructional purposes.</td>
<td>□ Desks in rows</td>
<td>□ Tables</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Desks in clusters</td>
<td>□ Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Seating self-selected</td>
<td>□ Seating assigned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom has a clear procedure to direct flow of activities. Procedures are followed by students.</td>
<td>□ Posted within room</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Students follow procedures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Students frequently need reminders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Procedures reviewed with students when needed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom arrangement facilitates classroom procedure; clearly labeled/easily accessible resources for students.</td>
<td>□ Open walkways</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Calendar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Assignment Board</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Student Center with resources (i.e. – stapler, dictionary, tape, pencil sharpener, highlighters)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Materials</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher uses a variety of texts/media.</td>
<td>□ Fiction</td>
<td>□ Non-Fiction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Digital Materials</td>
<td>□ Print Materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Videos</td>
<td>□ Audio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-friendly Instructional Materials are provided to facilitate learning.</td>
<td>□ Students take notes from board/power point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Handouts of key concepts provided</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Written Assignment Sheets/Rubrics provided</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Materials are directly from curricular resource</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Materials are adapted by teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technology is utilized</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Teacher uses technology during instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Students use technology for learning/assignment completion.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Tasks</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear Learning Objectives</td>
<td>□ Objectives posted and/or reviewed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Objectives provide purpose for learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Objectives are clear/specific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Objectives are abstract</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Objectives are aligned with CPW expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Objectives are aligned with HSW expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Objectives include scaffolding/differentiation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connects to Prior Knowledge</td>
<td>□ Teacher explains connections learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Students provide connections learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Methods</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Lecture/Direct Instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Instruction Lesson Details</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General components</strong></td>
<td>Writing Lesson focuses on:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson duration is:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing Lesson Instructional Strategies:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Teacher provides student samples</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Teacher provides assessment examples (rubric)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student responses to lesson are used to gauge understanding and inform instructional tasks.</strong></td>
<td>□ Various students respond</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Few students respond repeatedly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Student response are immediate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Student responses are delayed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Student responses are appropriate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Student responses are inappropriate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Student responses demonstrate understanding/insight</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Student responses suggest misunderstanding of concepts/question</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher feedback to student responses is valued as an important instructional strategy. Appropriate feedback validates student effort, encourages future responses, and fosters positive learning environments.</strong></td>
<td>□ Teacher provides no feedback/response to student responses; teacher’s physical feedback is negative/discouraging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Teacher provides minimal (uh hm, yes, okay, etc.) feedback; teacher’s physical feedback is neutral.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Teacher provides positive feedback, verbal and physical encouragement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Teacher provides feedback in the form of follow-up, probing question(s), explanations, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Teacher feedback incorporates student response as a tool to further learning/discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lesson fluency suggests positive use of instructional strategy to facilitate student learning.</strong></td>
<td>□ Lesson is connected to learning objectives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Lesson stays focused on content</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Lesson goes off topic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Lesson is teacher-centered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Lesson is student-centered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Lesson is formally structured</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Lesson is informally structured</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Site Details**

| Dates of Observation: |  |
| Location: |  |
| Instructor: |  |
| Experience: |  |
| Course/Grade: |  |
| Class Size: |  |
| Period: |  |
| Other: |  |
APPENDIX D: ARTIFACTS

Artifact 1: Skeleton Outline – Mrs. Mahire

“Goldilocks” group essay worksheet

Names of group members:
1. _____________________________
2. _____________________________
3. _____________________________

Group topic: ____________________

3 pieces of textual evidence, in order of weakest to strongest:
1. _______________________________________
2. _______________________________________
3. _______________________________________

Key Sentence Structures for This Essay:

Thesis: basic: Goldilocks is _____x______.
advanced: In the story, “Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Goldilocks reveals,
through her actions and words, that she is _____x______.

Next: explain what x is. What does a person who is like x do?
What is the opposite and what would that kind of person do?

bridge sentence: Goldilocks shows she is _____x______ when she _____1_______,
when she _____2_______, and when she _____3_______.

FIRST Paragraph

Topic Sentence: First, Goldilocks her _____x______ nature when she _____1_______.

TEXT Tell story of this moment
insert the most important words in the story as a quote

EXPLANATION How (in what way) does this example show Goldilocks is _____x______?
What would a person who isn’t x do instead?
transition: Goldilocks _______1_________ and also _______2____________.

SECOND Paragraph

Topic Sentence: Another way Goldilocks shows she is __________ is when she _______2______.

TEXT Tell story of this moment
insert the most important words in the story as a quote

EXPLANATION How (in what way) does this example show Goldilocks is ____x____?
What would a person who isn’t x do instead?

transition: Goldilocks _______2_________ as well as _______3__________.

THIRD Paragraph

Topic Sentence: Last and most importantly, Goldilocks reveals she is _____1_______ when she ______3______.

TEXT Tell story of this moment
insert the most important words in the story as a quote

EXPLANATION How (in what way) does this example show Goldilocks is ____x____?
What would a person who isn’t x do instead?
Artifacts 2: Instruction in Genre/Form – Mrs. Remera

Traits of personal narrative writing:
- **Narrative** – more about what happens
- **Autobiography** – more about when it happens, a chronological sequence of events
- **Memoir** – more about who it happens to and how that experience represents an important theme in this person’s life.

Purpose of writing memoir:
- Gain the time and space necessary for reflection and critique.
- Make sense from the experience
- Assign meaning to memories.
- Rewrite our life to be what we want it to be.
- Author a self we can be proud of.
- Help others to understand what we know.

Purpose of the memoir you will be writing for this class:
- To reveal what you know and feel about an important person in your life.
- To share the new insights you gained about yourself in recalling your relationship with him or her.

Homework: More pre-writing
- Your memoir will include 4 elements:
  1. A description of the person
  2. At least one incident that reveals insights about the person.
  3. Your evaluation of the person.
  4. The influence the person had on your life.
Try to answer these questions for the person you will be writing about. You should have at least one page of prewriting/free response about these questions. Bring them to our next class.

Journal Entry 2 (continued)
- Sample organizational structure:
  1. Incident
  2. DESCRIPTION
  3. Evaluation
  4. Influence
- 2nd Sample:
  1. Influence
  2. Evaluation
  3. INCIDENT
  4. Description

Writing the first Draft
- Here are the standard techniques writers use to make the people they write about come alive. You must use them too.
  1. Using Action – Show your person in action. Let what the person does explain who he or she is. But be selective about the events you include. Pick an incident that involves those actions or skills that best sum up the person’s essential qualities. Let the actions you describe do much of the explaining about the person.
Writing Techniques (continued)

2. Using Dialogue - Reveal your person to your readers through what he or she says. Choose phrases or expressions that are typical of the person's language. Keep the action moving with vivid dialogue. Include descriptions of how the words are spoken. Try modifying the verb said with more specific verbs - replied, shouted, implied - or modify the word said with -ly adverbs ('he said sternly', 'he admitted grudgingly')

Writing Techniques (continued)

3. Using Explanation - Some of the qualities or characteristics your person possesses may be difficult to reveal through action or dialogue. In such cases, you'll need to explain just what it is that makes your person so special. You'll need to interpret your persona for your readers. Be careful, however, not to let interpretation dominate your memoir. (see page 54 for example)

Writing Techniques (continued)

4. Using Setting - You've probably noticed that when you think about your special person, you remember him or her in a specific place. You see your person in a setting that clearly typifies that person - a surrounding that, because of its close association with the person, strengthens your image of her or him.
April 8: Fat is Not a Fairy Tale

In today’s culture, girls are only considered beautiful if they are skinny. Beauty is determined based on physical appearance and not what truly matters—personality. Our culture affects the minds and thoughts of both boys and girls. Boys must be tall and muscular, and athletic. Girls must be skinny and petite. Makeup is what truly makes them beautiful. It’s truly sad that some people will do themselves to achieve this unrealistic image. Only to be told that skin and bones isn’t pretty.

April 10: Our Other Sister

It’s sometimes crazy how even telling a little lie can go. One lie turns into a whole story made of purely fiction. At that point, the liar has two choices. To continue and hope the web of lies stays strong or tell the truth. More often than not people don’t admit to the truth at this point. Feeding the other reaction. But it’s true what they say. It takes years to build up trust, but only seconds to destroy with a small, insignificant lie.
Artifact 4: Active Reading Questions – Mrs. Mahire

Active Reading - Non-Fiction

Name: ____________________________________________
Title: ____________________________________________ by: ________________________________________

**Predict:** make an educated guess about what you’re reading. Preview the topic and the type of nonfiction. You can do this by making inferences from the title and skimming the text. Then try to figure out the author’s main idea by looking for a thesis statement in the introductory paragraph. Also, think about the facts, reasons, and details the author may use to support the main ideas.

What will this selection be about?
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

What main idea will the writer have about the topic?
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

What evidence might the writer use to back up his/her ideas?
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

**Connect:** Consider what you already about the topic. Compare people and events with those in your life. Reflect on any experiences you have that relate to the topic. Read with the purpose of getting information or a new point of view on the topic.

What have I heard or read about this topic?
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

Of whom or what does this topic remind me?
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
When have I been in a situation like the one described?

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

**Question:** As you read, pause occasionally to question anything you do not understand. Reread any section that seems unclear to you. Read to find answers to your questions and those from this and the Critical Reading handout. Discuss lingering questions with other readers.

What is the writer’s point?

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

Why is the writer making this point?

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

What does his/her point have to do with the main idea?

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

**Visualize:** Note details the writer provides, and use them to form mental images. Think about the physical appearance of people, places, and objects. In your mind, picture events, the steps of the process, or the way something works.

What does this person or scene look like?

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

What happens after this step? What happened right before?

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________
How does this passage fit in with the entire work?

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

**Evaluate**: Make judgments about the material. Don’t accept a statement if it isn’t supported with plenty of evidence.

Is this fact or an opinion? Do I agree with it?

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

Do these facts and examples really support the author’s point?

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

Are the author’s arguments logical and realistic? Why, or why not?

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

Review: As you read, pause occasionally to check your understanding of the material.

The thesis statement is...

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

The evidence that supports this thesis is...

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
The steps in this process are...

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

This effect was caused by...

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

The author’s purpose for writing is...

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

**Respond:** As you read, think about your reactions to the facts and ideas you are reading. Note the spontaneous thoughts and feelings that you have about what the author is saying.

I’d like to ask the writer why...

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

I’d like to know more about...

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
The feedback that I got from my peer and teacher was relatively good, other than a few things that needed changed she liked my paper.

The major weaknesses of my paper would have to be that I assumed that my audience would know the details of my story, so I left out a few things, but put a few in the paper, the confused the audience, so I just took them out once I realized it.

The major changes I made to my paper was the details of non-important parts, and the ones that confused the audience. For example I put in there something to do with death, so after reviewing it and getting it reviewed, I took it out, because the audience wasn’t sure what to think, and it was of no importance of the paper.

The strengths of my paper, is that I put the emotion into my paper to let the audience feel what I was going through. The weaknesses of my paper would be it may seem repetitive to some but not much.
Artifact 6: Guided Peer Review – Mrs. Remera

**Peer Response for Memoir**

Working with a partner on revising requires tact and concern for your partner's feelings. A good resonder makes constructive suggestions. Praising the good qualities of the memoir is as important as pointing out the problem areas.

1. Describe the impression you have of the person the writer is writing about. (What is the writer evaluating of the subject of her memoir?)

2. Discuss any parts of the memoir that you liked.

3. Identify parts that you would like more specific information about.

4. What do you think the focus of the paper is? Was it easy to recognize the focus? Why or why not?

5. Is each element of a memoir -- Incident, Description, Evaluation, Influence -- included? Does each contribute effectively to the whole?

6. What various techniques did the writer use for characterizing the person of the memoir? (action, dialogue, explanation, setting) Were these techniques effective? If not, should others be used?

7. Explain what you believe was the influence of the person the memoir was written about on the writer.

8. Any additional comments?
Informed Consent for Teacher Participant

My name is Jordan Blackstone. I am a Graduate Student at Bowling Green State University in the Curriculum and Teaching Program. Previously, I spent the past three years teaching high school Language Arts but am now currently working on a Thesis Project which explores successful instructional strategies to teach writing at the high school level, with particular interest in college-preparatory writing. Dr. Timothy Murnen, my Thesis Chair at Bowling Green State University, highly recommended you as a potential participant in my research study.

The purpose of this study is to examine effective instructional strategies for teaching college-preparatory writing. The goal of this study is to identify instructional strategies that are helpful in addressing the preparation gap between high school and college-level writing. This study will benefit Language Arts teachers and contribute to the ongoing discussion surrounding this topic. The benefits of your participation include the opportunity to share professional expertise, reflect on your teaching practice, and to engage in professional collaboration. Please note, no monitory compensation is provided to participants.

This study includes no risks greater than those of everyday life.

The procedure for the research process is as follows:

1. **Teacher Interviews**: Three interviews throughout the study, typically 20 minutes to 1 hour for each interview; audio will be recorded for later transcription. Interviews times are highly flexible to accommodate your schedule/availability.
2. **Classroom Observations**: Three to five observations of your instructional strategies with regard to writing. You can determine the day and time of observations to best fit your schedule.
3. **Artifact Collection**: Teacher lesson plans, assignment sheets, rubrics, and related curricular materials will be collected. Samples of student work will also be collected. You will be provided with printed copies of student/parent consent/assent forms to be distributed to students who you have identified as potential contributors of student work samples/artifacts. You will be asked to help to collect completed forms from students which will be stored in a sealed envelope and returned to the researcher to then be stored in a locked filing cabinet. You may also be asked to discuss work samples or provide relevant background information regarding authors of student work sample materials.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to skip interview questions or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationship with Bowling Green State University, your school, or your job.

The identity of all teachers/schools/students will be kept confidential. All signed consent/assent forms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Audio recordings of teacher interviews will be kept on a digital device with a password. Identifiers of teachers/schools/students revealed in interviews will be redacted and replaced with pseudonyms during transcription. Transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet.

If you have any questions about this study or your participation, you may contact me by e-mail or phone (jblacks@bgsu.edu; 740.213.2016). My Thesis Chair, Dr. Timothy Murnen, may be contacted by e-mail or phone (tmurnen@bgsu.edu; 419.372.7983). You may also contact Amy Morgan, Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at 419.372.7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research.

Thank you for your time,

Jordan Blackstone, Graduate Student
Curriculum & Teaching
Bowling Green State University

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

Participant Signature

Date
Parent Informed Consent Form

My name is Jordan Blackstone. I am a Graduate Student at Bowling Green State University in the Curriculum and Teaching Program. I have been a high school English teacher for the past three years. Right now, I am working on a research study that explores what teaching strategies help prepare students for college-level writing. Your child’s teacher has agreed to help me with this study, which means I will be observing your child’s classroom.

The purpose of this study is to see which teaching methods help prepare students to write well in college. Participating in this study would mean that you agree to let your child’s teacher give me copies of your child’s work completed for class. For example, these could include journal entries, written papers, or essay responses on exams, etc.. Just because you agree does not mean samples of your child’s work will be selected. Please note, students will not be compensated for agreeing to participate in this study. Also, there are no risks in participating greater than those of everyday life.

Participation is completely voluntary. Participants are free to change their mind and not participate at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect students’ grade, relationship with their teacher or school. Also, deciding not to participate will not affect your child’s relationship with Bowling Green State University. Students under 18 years of age will also be asked to sign Student Assent Form, giving their permission to allow samples of their written work to be collected.

The identity of all teachers/schools/students will be kept confidential. All signed consent/assent forms and student work samples will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Names of teachers/schools/students on work samples collected will be removed and replaced with code names to protect students’ identities.

If you have any questions about this study or your child’s participation, you may contact me by e-mail or phone (jblacks@bgsu.edu; 740.213.2016). My Thesis Chair, Dr. Timothy Murnen, may be contacted by e-mail or phone (tmurnen@bgsu.edu; 419.372.7983). You may also contact the Amy Morgan, Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at 419.372.7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research.

Thank you for your time,

Jordan Blackstone, Graduate Student
Curriculum & Teaching
Bowling Green State University

Parent signature is required if student is under 18 years of age.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered, and I have been informed that my child’s participation is completely voluntary. I agree to allow my child to participate in this research.

_____________________________________ ___________________________
Parent Signature Date
Student Informed Consent Form

My name is Jordan Blackstone. I am a Graduate Student at Bowling Green State University in the Curriculum and Teaching Program. I have been a high school English teacher for the past three years. Right now, I am working on a research study that explores what teaching strategies help prepare students for college-level writing. Your teacher has agreed to help me with this study, which means I will be observing your class.

The purpose of this study is to see which teaching methods help prepare students to write well in college. Participating in this study would mean that you agree to let your teacher give me copies of student work completed for class. For example, these could include journal entries, written papers, or essay responses on exams, etc. Just because you agree does not mean samples of your work will be selected. Please note, you will not be compensated for agreeing to participate in this study. Also, there are no risks in participating greater than those of everyday life.

Participation is completely voluntary. You are free to change your mind and not participate at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your grade, relationship with your teacher, or with your school. Also, deciding not to participate will not affect your relationship with Bowling Green State University.

The identity of all teachers/schools/students will be kept confidential. All signed consent/assent forms and student work samples will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Names of teachers/schools/students on work samples collected will be blacked out and replaced with fake names.

If you have any questions about this study or your participation, you may contact me by e-mail or phone (jblacks@bgsu.edu; 740.213.2016). My Thesis Chair, Dr. Timothy Murnen, may be contacted by e-mail or phone (tmurnen@bgsu.edu; 419.372.7983). You may also contact Amy Morgan, Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at 419.372.7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research.

Thank you for your time,

Jordan Blackstone
Graduate Student, Curriculum & Teaching
Bowling Green State University

Student is 18 years of age.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I am 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research.

_________________________________________  _____________________
Student Signature  Date

BG SU HSRB - APPROVED FOR USE
IRBNet ID # 548600
EFFECTIVE 03/19/2014
EXPIRES 02/15/2015
Student Informed Assent Form (Under 18)

My name is Jordan Blackstone. I am a Graduate Student at Bowling Green State University in the Curriculum and Teaching Program. I have been a high school English teacher for the past three years. Right now, I am working on a research study that explores what teaching strategies help prepare students for college-level writing. Your teacher has agreed to help me with this study, which means I will be observing your class.

The purpose of this study is to see which teaching methods help prepare students to write well in college. Participating in this study would mean that you agree to let your teacher give me copies of student work completed for class. For example, these could include journal entries, written papers, or essay responses on exams, etc.. Just because you agree does not mean samples of your work will be selected. Please note, you will not be compensated for agreeing to participate in this study. Also, there are no risks in participating greater than those of everyday life.

Participation is completely voluntary. You are free to change your mind and not participate at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your grade, relationship with your teacher, or with your school. Also, deciding not to participate will not affect your relationship with Bowling Green State University.

The identity of all teachers/schools/students will be kept confidential. All signed consent/assent forms and student work samples will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Names of teachers/schools/students on work samples collected will be blacked out and replaced with fake names.

If you have any questions about this study or your participation, you may contact me by e-mail or phone (jblacks@bgsu.edu; 740.213.2016). My Thesis Chair, Dr. Timothy Murnen, may be contacted by e-mail or phone (tmurnen@bgsu.edu; 419.372.7983). You may also contact Amy Morgan, Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at 419.372.7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research.

Thank you for your time,

Jordan Blackstone
Graduate Student, Curriculum & Teaching
Bowling Green State University

Student is under 18 years of age; Parent Informed Consent Form is also required.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

__________________________________________________________________________  __________
Student Signature Date