

**THE PARADOX OF PERFORMANCE PRESSURES: AN EXPLORATION OF
WRITING ASSESSMENT IN HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASSROOMS**

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DEDICATION

For my children. To Henry for reminding me of why this work is important and to Gabrielle and Emilia for lighting the fire I needed to finish what I started.

ABSTRACT

Through interviews and analysis of writing assessment documents, this study focused on writing assessment programs of three Alberta high school English teachers to answer two questions. First, how do high school English teachers incorporate discourse community, process-oriented writing, writing community, self-assessment and feedback into their writing assessment programs? Second, what factors influence the implementation of these elements in the classroom assessment programs? Thematic analysis revealed that these elements are valued by teachers, but due to limited time and exam preparation pressures they are not all meaningfully incorporated on a regular basis. Process-oriented writing, teacher feedback and writing communities play a significant role in writing assessment programs, while discourse communities and self-assessment are rarely present. These findings prompt exploration into both the supports teachers need to encourage them to incorporate all of the elements into their writing assessments, and the impacts of full incorporation of these elements on student writing development.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

“Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to explore thoughts, ideas feelings and experience.” (Alberta Education, 2003 p. 8). I had never come across such a frustratingly vague statement in a document that was supposed to provide clear direction for designing instruction for students. I missed the familiarity, comfort and clarity of the Social Studies Program of Studies (Alberta Education, 2015) where content was clearly defined and I was confident about the direction in which I was supposed to go when planning for instruction. I majored in Social Studies Education because I loved the idea of teaching critical thinking skills to students. I found the content interesting and meaningful and was passionate about inspiring students to engage in the world around them. I truly thought I would be happy teaching Social Studies for my entire career. However, my first full-time job was in a tiny rural school where I was the solitary teacher of both English and Social Studies for grades 9 through 12. I would be teaching the subject I loved, but also trying to figure out how to teach a subject I knew very little about beyond my own high school experiences. I felt as woefully underprepared as most first-year teachers find themselves to be, but I was determined to figure it out.

While making my first attempts at planning for my new English classes I read (or tried to read) the English Program of Studies. Unlike the Social Studies curriculum, with which I was very familiar, this monster of a curriculum offered what felt like almost no guidance. After struggling to interpret what “discover possibilities” (Alberta, 2003 p. 12) and “extend awareness” (Alberta, 2003 p. 12) meant I did what made the most sense at the time - I did what I knew. Because the school was so small and isolated I had no one to ask for help early on, so I concocted an odd mix of what I remembered from my own high school experience combined

with some distinctly Social Studies flavoured assessments and activities and limped my way through the first few months of my first teaching assignment.

Despite my awareness of the weaknesses of how I was taught to write in school – primarily template-driven, never a real-world audience to address, nothing resembling anything I actually wrote in university - when it came time to teach my students, I found myself sliding back into teaching those same templates that I was taught. I was disappointed in myself, but I literally had no idea what else to do. I did not understand writing development well enough to even attempt anything other than the way I had been taught, so my students wrote some really nice five paragraph essays that year. In those first few months of teaching English the idea of “writing for life” was not a concept I was particularly familiar with beyond the vague notion that the way I wrote in high school English classes bore little resemblance to the way I had learned to write since graduating from high school. I had accepted long before that high school English does very little to actually prepare students for a robust writing life beyond its walls. I believed that high school English was for preparing for provincial exams and little else.

These beliefs were reinforced by the mentors I did eventually connect with in those first months of teaching. It comforted me to learn that they were teaching writing in a very similar way to how I was trying to do it in my classroom. I was generously given unit plans and assessments that culminated in a Diploma Exam-style critical analysis essay. Mentorship meetings were dominated by discussion of the various formulas that teachers taught their students to use on the Diploma to achieve the highest results possible. Occasionally I had conversations about how under-prepared students generally are for the writing demands they face in university, but the much more experienced teachers in the room seemed at a loss for how to solve this problem while still preparing students for the Diploma Exam.

Despite the apparent confirmation that what I was doing was common practice, I was well aware that it was a flawed way to teach writing. It had no resemblance to how I personally approached writing or to the skills that I had needed to frantically learn in order to write successfully in university. When I set out to complete writing tasks after high school I tended toward looking at a sample or two and imitating what I gleaned from reading through a completed version of what I was trying to write. This was far from a formal process and I do not recall being explicitly taught how to do it, but as I wrote blog posts in my personal writing life and essays in my academic life I honed a set of skills that have been refined over time as I have learned more about writing development as an English teacher and graduate student. But in my first year of teaching I was at a total loss as to how to impart even this informal knowledge to my students in a meaningful or helpful way. I lacked the knowledge and experience to imagine, let alone implement, any reality other than the imitation of my own high school English classes in my own classroom. Every other English teacher I knew at the time taught this way and with my limited experience I felt that I was in no position to challenge any of it.

It is from these early experiences in teaching that the initial questions that inspired this thesis arose. How can I de-mystify writing instruction for myself and my students in a way that will make their writing more closely resemble the writing I knew they needed to be successful outside of my English classes? How can I help my students feel well-prepared for the writing demands of post-secondary and life beyond the classroom? How can I help my students develop the skills they need to write in a more intuitive and natural way than what seemed possible under the template-based instruction upon which I had been relying? At the time, these questions were not backed by any particular academic research or in-depth awareness of what this “better” writing instruction and assessment would actually look like. However, I was aware that there

were serious weaknesses in the way I taught and assessed writing that were leading to my students graduating from high school under-prepared for the writing tasks they would encounter after they graduated.

By the latter half of my first year I knew that I wanted to find a better way to teach writing that would begin to address these questions, so I eagerly signed up for a workshop hosted by Professor David Slomp that focused on writing instruction and assessment. I had heard from those who were familiar with his work that this was a great opportunity to learn about alternatives to the traditional writing instruction practices that I had been following. It is no exaggeration to say that the things I learned in that workshop caused a seismic shift in both my understanding of writing and how I've taught writing ever since.

I was introduced to Beaufort's (2008) model for writing instruction and how it could be used to guide students as they tackle genres of writing that were unfamiliar to them. I was directly and explicitly confronted with the problems inherent in teaching writing using formulas and was actually shown a different path forward. I learned that students should be exposed to a variety of genres that are as authentic and as closely connected to the world outside of the classroom as possible and that involved addressing real-world audiences.

Within weeks of completing his workshop, I accepted an invitation to join Dr. Slomp in a research project with other English teachers in the school district to implement the practices covered in the workshop in our classrooms. After spending the remainder of my first year of teaching working on planning this project, which came to be known as the Horizon Writing Project (HWP), my second year of teaching was devoted to implementing a completely unfamiliar (and relatively uncommon) set of practices for teaching writing. Our goal was to teach students the strategies they needed to successfully write genres with which they were unfamiliar.

Having a series of strategies, heuristics and fellow teachers to guide me as I supported my students was revolutionary for my writing instruction. Many of the teachers in this group shared my experience of working with more experienced mentor teachers that focused primarily on exam preparation and template-driven instruction. We felt similarly that although these early mentorship experiences were helpful for giving us direction in our first years as teachers, we sensed that there could be a way to teach writing that better served our students' long-term writing needs after high school. Bolstered by the confidence of finding like-minded English teachers who also wanted to challenge traditional teaching methods, I became more comfortable with allowing my students to struggle through their writing as they explored new genres. I also had an arsenal of new questions to ask as I conferenced with them about their writing. My guidance shifted away from helping them more closely replicate the particular template I directed them to use toward helping them interrogate their own intentions and delivering on those intentions.

Although the HWP helped me find my stride as an English teacher, contradicting the instructional practices of so many English teachers has not been without its struggles. I often find myself to be a lone wolf in conversations about writing trying to find a way to diplomatically resist the pressure to conform. Additionally, the difficulty and uncertainty of the results of teaching writing without templates and formulas makes many English teachers nervous, in my experience. However, the conversations I now have with my students about their writing are so much deeper than following a template could ever illicit, but the fruits of their labour are much less certain. Students often produce work that is objectively weaker than what they likely would have produced by replicating a template, but the ownership they have over their writing is so much deeper. When students struggle I find myself digging into their intentions and guiding

them toward rhetorical techniques that will deliver on their goals. I share exemplars and samples of writing and have rich discussions about discourse community and genre. I watch as students pick apart the writing craft of the samples we study and silently cheer as I recognize their attempts to imitate these techniques in their own work. I feel that these experiences would not be possible to the same degree if I was simply leading my students through the exercise of replicating templates. Unfortunately, I often feel that I have to justify my practices when there are so many tried and true techniques for eliciting consistent results and high Diploma Exam marks.

Despite the doubts I've faced, I have begun to see teaching students to write well as a pathway to their empowerment. I feel confident that my role is not simply to help students prepare for the exam that looms large over their high school experience, but to do so by helping them find a voice that can carry them so much further than one exam that happens on one day in Grade 12. I want my students to leave my classroom confident in their ability to approach any writing challenge with which they are confronted. Confident that they are prepared to write in post-secondary. Confident that they will know how to write for the workplace when they get there. And most importantly, confident in their ability to self-advocate through their writing as they become citizens engaged in the world around them and as they are confronted by challenges in their adult lives.

Research Questions

My own experiences and conversations with teachers have led me to contemplate the prevalence of template-driven teaching, but what is actually happening in classrooms? How much of what teachers do to assess writing is actually informed by current research? If there are teachers who are moving away from the "five paragraph essay", what is replacing it? From these

early questions arose the following research questions that explore the ways high school English teachers incorporate what the research suggests are strong and effective assessment practices:

- How do Southern Alberta high school English teachers incorporate discourse community, process-oriented writing, writing community, self-assessment and feedback into their writing assessment programs?
- What factors mitigate or support the implementation of these elements in the classroom assessment of high school English teachers?

This project describes, in case study-form, the writing assessment practices of three Southern Alberta high school English teachers as they struggle through many of the same questions I found myself asking earlier in my career. I both interviewed each teacher about their assessment practices, priorities, challenges, triumphs and general experiences as writing teachers in high school, and analyzed a series of assessment documents that each teacher submitted to explore my research questions. I found that all three of the teachers I worked with are very committed to helping their students improve and grow as writers through written feedback, conferencing, and by providing ample opportunity to practice their writing skills. Each teacher approached writing assessment differently, with different priorities and techniques, but all three expressed similar struggles with finding the time they need to achieve what they want to in their classrooms. They also all described the significant impact provincial exams have on their writing assessment practices as they plan and implement their writing assessment programs. I found that the three participants in this study incorporated the elements of the assessment practices addressed in my research questions to varying degrees, ranging from frequent, deliberate and skilled incorporation of most of the elements to virtually no meaningful incorporation of any of the elements. However, all three participants are knowledgeable and skilled teachers who

demonstrated both an awareness of the practices outlined in the next section and an appreciation for their value, even if they feel they cannot meaningfully incorporate them to the degree that they would like.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL POSITIONING

Introduction

Through my exploration of the literature it became clear to me that the development of student writing abilities is supported by three key skill sets: satisfying an authentic discourse community, the ability to be flexible and creative in both writing process and writing products, and participation in a writing community (see Figure 1 for a visual summary of the writing ability construct that will guide this thesis). In turn, these skills sets are guided and improved upon when students have access to and engage in incorporating high-quality written and verbal feedback from their writing teacher. Finally, student capacity to engage in metacognitive thinking to self-assess and self-correct in their progress toward their writing goals underpins writing ability in a way that is integral to writing ability generally. Metacognitive thinking helps students engage with the feedback they receive from their teacher in that it allows them to reflect on the gap between their writing goals and the current state of the piece they are writing and to leverage the feedback they receive to hopefully close that gap to a greater degree as they develop as writers.

Each of these elements will be discussed in detail in the context of the literature in the following sections, the interplay between the construct elements is best illustrated through an analogy, so I will use the image of a fruit tree to frame this discussion (see Figure 2 for a summary). A healthy fruit tree shows its vigor and strength through its deep roots and its thick and flexible trunk, but perhaps the best indicator of a tree's health is the quality of its produce: the fruit itself. A tree that is getting the right balance of nutrients, water and sunshine will be healthy enough to produce ample fruit that both appears healthy from the outside and is satisfyingly delicious to eat. A tree that is lacking the nutrients it needs, or some other factor essential to its growth, may be able to produce a sparse scattering of fruit. These few fruits may

even appear to be healthy and robust upon visual inspection, but without the optimal combination of nutrients, water and sunlight one bite of the fruit will reveal a muted, flavourless imitation of the fruit we hoped to consume. Not unrecognizable in its imitation of the ideal, but certainly lacking the intensity and depth of flavour we were hoping for. Just as we can infer a tree's health from the quality and quantity of its fruit, we can infer a student's writing ability from the quality of the writing they produce. Writing ability is underpinned by students leveraging their metacognitive capacity to produce a wide variety of genres that serve the needs of authentic audiences through rhetorical problem-solving and participation in writing communities. Students build these capacities by engaging in recursive writing processes, self-assessing and monitoring the text as they write, and by internalizing feedback from their teacher and their peers as they develop as writers. When a tree is healthy we can observe its plentiful leaves, strong branches and new growth each summer; in truly optimal conditions fruit-bearing trees will produce ample, flavourful fruits as an added indication of their health and vigor. Similarly, competent writers can indicate their growing metacognitive capacity through their writing experiences in school by producing high-quality pieces of writing, from a variety of genres, for a variety of audiences throughout their time in their high school writing courses.

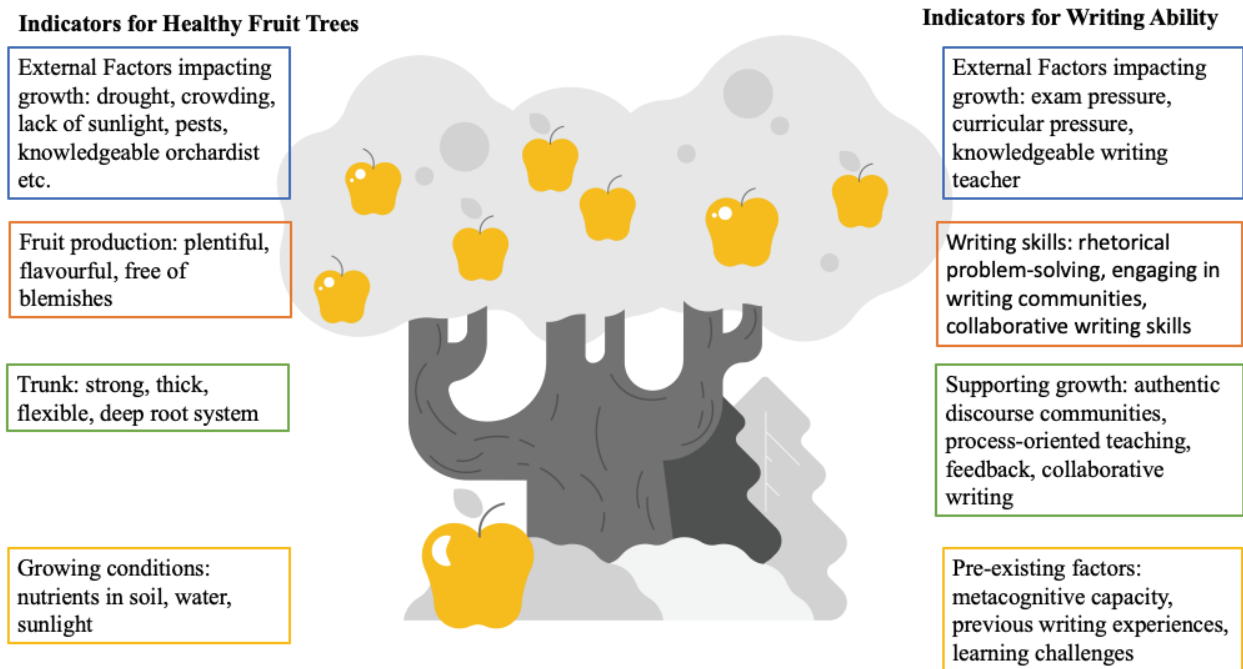
Figure 1

Writing Ability Construct



Figure 2

A Summary of the Fruit Tree Analogy



In this literature review I will begin by defining writing ability based on the literature, followed by an exploration of each of the elements of the writing ability construct outlined in Figure 1, beginning with a discussion of discourse communities, process-oriented writing, and participation in writing communities and finishing with an overview of the role of self-assessment and teacher feedback in writing assessment programs. Finally, I will contextualize writing assessment in Alberta by discussing the role of provincial exams and their influence on individual teachers and writing programs more generally.

Writing Ability Defined

The construct of writing ability continues to be somewhat enigmatic; there are currently no developmental scales or other tools that can directly measure a student’s writing ability (Corrigan & Slomp, 2021). Instead, writing teachers must infer an individual’s writing ability by observing the quality of the written products they produce (Burdick, Swartz, Stenner, Fitzgerald,

Burdick, & Hanlon, 2013) Students can demonstrate their writing ability by producing a variety of genres for a variety of contexts and a variety of audiences, with guidance and support at first, but eventually with independence and confidence. However, the ability to produce quality writing is only one indicator of writing competence. Students who also possess the capacity to leverage metacognitive monitoring and control are able to track the extent to which they are achieving the goals they have set for particular writing tasks and can implement a variety of strategies to realize their goals (Hacker, Keener, & Kircher, 2009).

Finally, students who have built metacognitive capacity will have the ability to productively participate in writing communities both inside and outside the classroom. Just as a fruit tree cannot produce fruit without cross-pollination with other fruit trees, students greatly benefit from writing within a supportive writing community. Students who engage in writing communities are able to write collaboratively to create pieces with other writers for a particular purpose and/or audience. The ability to write collaboratively is an important skill for students to develop as professional writing becomes increasingly collaborative (Leijten, Waes, Shriver, & Hayes, 2014). This skill is supported by having the capacity to monitor the goals of a piece as it is being created and to navigate and negotiate with other writers as the piece takes form to ensure that it is delivering on the intentions of the writers and fulfilling the needs of the audience. Students without the capacity to identify, monitor and deliver on their own goals as writers will certainly struggle to do so when they also have to contend with negotiating with another writer to ensure that their goals align and that they are able to use a variety of strategies and techniques to fulfill those goals. Over the course of their school careers, student writers should ideally develop the capacity to hold the needs of the text, the author and the reader in their working memory as the lower-order processes involved in writing become increasingly automatic (Kellogg, 2008).

Just as the quality of the fruit that a tree produces is an indicator of the overall health of the tree and its ability to access the water, sunlight and nutrients it needs to maintain its health, the quality of writing a student produces is an indicator of that students' ability to leverage their ability to effectively monitor their progress in a writing piece and to self-correct and adjust as they feel themselves straying from their goal, both individually and in collaboration with other writers – integral skills to the success of students as they move forward in their writing careers.

Given the value of strong written communication skills both in post-secondary education, the workforce, and in our personal lives, there is an urgent need for secondary teachers to prioritize imparting the skills students need to build their competence as writers for the wide variety of situations they will encounter after they leave high school. There are a variety of factors that influence a writer's competence, which makes concise definition of writing ability fraught with oversimplification. Due to the complex process of building writing competence, it is not a surprise that many of the common practices involved in teaching writing involve oversimplification as well. Many teachers rely on a formulaic approach to teaching writing as a means to efficiently develop the skills of young writers as they prepare students for high-stakes exams (Applebee & Langer, 2009). Although this practice allows many students to reproduce effective versions of most genres with relative ease, this approach removes much of the critical thinking skills necessary to be an effective writer beyond secondary school (Applebee & Langer, 2009) and much of the challenge of engaging in meaningful and motivational writing tasks. Unfortunately, the inauthenticity and repetitiveness of school assignments are often deadly to student motivation and writers who are strongly motivated to produce high-quality texts are more likely to edit and revise their work than writers who are less motivated (Hayes, 2012). Instead, writing ability should be viewed as the ability to both recognize and effectively serve rhetorical

purposes, based on the needs of flexible and dynamic discourse communities. By experiencing a wide variety of writing tasks that involve addressing real-world audiences, students develop increasingly sophisticated task schemas for revising, collaborating, summarizing and other important writing tasks (Hayes, 2012) that may otherwise be stunted if they are confined to a narrow set of repetitive templates for writing tasks that are primarily written for the eyes of their teacher alone. Writing ability then, is the ability to negotiate the interplay between rhetorical purpose and the needs of the discourse community, while remaining flexible and reflective as goals, conventions, and expectations of the discourse community shift away from established norms.

Writers who experience writing tasks that involve solving a rhetorical problem by serving a real discourse community must juggle audience, rhetorical problem, and writing goal to write effectively (Flower & Hayes, 1981). By approaching writing first from a rhetorical stance, writers are able to view language in terms of its role in both production and consumption (Salibrici, 1999). Having this understanding of both functions of language is important because it pushes writers away from treating writing as simply a matter of correct grammar or filling in the blanks of a template provided by their teacher. Instead, students view writing as having specific purposes in the "real world" outside of their classroom. To serve these purposes, students must define their goals in writing for themselves by attending to the rhetorical problem they must solve with their writing and by using both the text-in-progress and the rhetorical problem of the writing task to make plans for their writing goals (Ronald & Volkmer, 1989). As writers analyze the rhetorical problem, they make decisions regarding their persona or voice and their purpose, as well as more clearly defining their understanding of their audience (Brady, 1993). If students can generate a clear sense of their goals in completing a given writing task, then they will be able

to effectively make decisions regarding language use and argumentation as they complete the task. However, it is important to note that the goals set by a writer can, and probably should, change throughout the writing process as their understanding of the task and their audience develops (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

Once a writer has defined their goals in completing a writing task, they must recognize and use the subtle, but dramatic, rhetorical choices of effective writing (Salibrici, 1999). Strong writers can both use a variety of rhetorical moves, as well as articulate and defend their choices based on the context of the writing task (Brady, 1993). Furthermore, Dias, Freedman, Medway and Pare (1999) identified the mismatch between the writing abilities of graduating students and their ability to communicate in the workplace as related to their exposure to authentic contexts in the writing tasks they were assigned in school. They argue that in school, writing is primarily treated as an educational activity used mainly to communicate their knowledge of a subject, whereas writing in the workplace is a rhetorical action in which they are expected to use their knowledge to persuade. To bridge this gap, Kellogg (2008) frames the development of writing ability as a slow progression through three stages over the course of more than two decades. Initially, students primarily write to tell what they know about a subject before progressing to the intermediate stages of transforming their knowledge for their own benefit, thus developing an understanding of the interaction between author and text. Finally, for students who go on to become professional writers they may master the skill of juggling the needs of the text, the author and the reader by carefully crafting the content of their writing into a text that is written to serve the reader. The progression to this final stage, according to Kellogg, is to master the art of monitoring the extent to which a developing text is serving both the author's needs in

communicating a message and the reader's needs in understanding the nuance of the author's intended message.

Keeping Kellogg's (2008) definition of the development of writing competence in mind, writing ability relies not only on a writer being able to identify their goal in completing a writing task, but also on their ability to achieve their goal by deliberately making decisions in their writing to satisfy both the rhetorical purpose and the discourse community. Ivanic (2004) clarifies this further when she argues that good writing isn't grammatically and syntactically correct writing, but writing that is linguistically appropriate to the purpose it is serving. However, effectively delivering on writing goals is not a linear process. It requires the writer to adjust their goals and their approach to their chosen genre by negotiating the purpose of their writing throughout the process. This often involves responding to feedback from their audience (Brady, 1993). Therefore, as the New London Group (1996) argues, writing is not as simple as repeating Available Designs, or the commonly used and accepted formats and organizational styles of a particular genre, but is a complex negotiation of purpose that evolves as the text is created by a competent writer. Given the importance of the ability to both define and achieve goals based on solving a rhetorical problem, teachers can develop writing ability by incorporating writing tasks with authentic rhetorical problems for students to grapple with, rather than sticking to the more common and traditional approach of divorcing most classroom writing from any authenticity by ensuring that the only audience is the teacher.

Well-intentioned teachers often limit their students' ability to become strong writers by relying heavily on teaching writing through templates (Applebee & Langer, 2009). These templates are devoid of any meaningful context, so they limit the ability of students to reflect on their rhetorical purpose and discourse community because any decisions that students make are

unlikely to have transferability to any authentic writing tasks. Granted, the use of templates in writing instruction makes the production of competent versions of a variety of genres a very accessible goal for most students - their appeal is obvious. The increased success of students who use templates to create a variety of genres is likely due to the fact that following a template frees up the cognitive resources for language generation and transcription that might otherwise be overloaded by coordinating the processes of planning, reviewing, and organizing their text (Kellogg, 2008). Indeed, working memory and other cognitive resources used for producing texts are finite, so if students are to progress beyond simply telling what they know with relatively little consideration of their intention or their audience's needs, they need to develop greater automaticity in processes like transcription to free up resources for generating and translating their ideas (Hayes, 2012). This would involve teachers of younger students prioritizing age-appropriate transcription skills, like handwriting or typing and spelling, to build the foundation necessary to move toward automaticity in these processes, which, in turn, will free up resources for the more complex processes of organizing their ideas or designing texts with a nuanced understanding of audience (Hayes, 2012).

However, building automaticity in lower-order skills like transcription cannot come at the complete expense of neglecting the importance of writing in meaningful contexts or for meaningful purposes. Brady (1993) argues that when writing is taught in the abstract then writing is generally judged on the basis of textual features, rather than on the effectiveness of the message. Indeed, the business community strongly advises business faculty to better prepare students to write in professional contexts by bringing in as much "real-life" business experience to the class as possible to more closely align the contexts of educational writing and professional writing (Stearns et. al, 2003). However, assessing textual features is generally much easier than

assessing more enigmatic features like “effectiveness”, but these features do not necessitate effective writing. If students are only replicating templates, then they are not given opportunities to critically reflect on the rhetorical moves they need to make to serve the purposes of an authentic, dynamic discourse community.

Over-emphasis of lower-order transcription skills can develop into what Ivanic (2004) calls a skills discourse of writing instruction. This discourse emphasizes grammatical and syntactical rules of writing, with much less emphasis on the social context, creativity, or rhetoric that is essential to effective writing, thus almost entirely ignoring analysis of discourse communities (Ivanic, 2004). Correctness is obviously an integral quality of effective writing, but to emphasize correctness to the neglect of both rhetorical purpose and discourse community leads to writers who may be unable to define their goals in completing a writing task, nor be able to effectively signal their membership in the appropriate discourse community as they progress through the stages of knowledge-telling to knowledge-transforming (Kellogg, 2008). Consequently, if writing teachers prioritize writing mechanics and correctness to the neglect of higher-order skills like rhetorical awareness and engaging in discourse communities when designing and implementing assessments their students may not develop the skills they need to develop skills that allow them to progress simply telling what they know to transforming their knowledge to serve an audience. Brady (1993) states that weak writers are not consciously aware of their rhetorical choices, so they are unable to explain, defend, or systematically make effective choices. This is because skills taught in isolation, out of the context of meaningful discourse do not last and do not transfer to other writing situations (Stearns et. al, 2003). Therefore, writing assessment must prioritize rhetorical choices and discourse community analysis, and use

instruction in writing mechanics and correctness as one of many strategies to effectively serve writing goals.

Metacognition

Metacognitive thinking is a foundational capacity necessary for writing development in students. As demonstrated in the writing construct in Figure 1, metacognition underlies all of the other skills involved in writing by being the mechanism with which students can learn to both set goals in their writing and find increasing success in achieving them as their writing abilities develop. Many students may arrive in high school having experienced some instruction in metacognitive reflection in previous years of schooling. This instruction seems to be characterized by having students “self-evaluate” or “self-reflect” on their learning using checklists, rating scales or other heuristics to try to probe their metacognitive thinking. These strategies are likely a good starting place for metacognitive reflection, but if students are also given more complex opportunities to deeply reflect and build on this starting place throughout their years of school their capacity to leverage metacognition will likely grow. Hacker et al. (2009) define writing as using goal-directed metacognition to produce symbolic representations of thought for oneself and others. Given this definition of writing, writers must monitor and evaluate their thinking and writing by using both metacognitive monitoring and metacognitive control (Hacker et al., 2009) to be able to employ strategies that will ensure conformity to their goals in solving the rhetorical problem presented by a writing task. Through scaffolded instruction in metacognitive skills, teachers can help students develop the metacognitive competencies necessary to navigate the complex rhetorical problems they will encounter in future writing tasks.

Students who arrive in high school with a relatively high competence in metacognitive skills are often ascribed the label of “Strong Writer” by their teachers who may or may not

attribute their strengths to their metacognitive capacity. Given the pattern of relatively infrequent or shallow opportunities to develop metacognitive capacity in school, these students likely have built this capacity in spite of their limited opportunities to do so in school. They are able to leverage these skills throughout their high school English career to develop as writers and could be well-equipped for writing beyond high school regardless of the amount or type of instruction they receive regarding metacognition. Many students arrive with very little ability to access their metacognitive capacity and apply it to their writing and these students are often ascribed the label of “Weak Writer”; this label may lead to their teachers assuming that they simply need the help and support of templates and other scaffolds more than the Strong Writers do. Their weaknesses may not be attributed to their lack of metacognitive capacity, which is unfortunate, because if given deliberate, scaffolded opportunities to build this capacity they may one day be able to wear the mantle of Strong Writer like some of their classmates do. High school English teachers face the challenge of meeting students relatively near the end of their grade school careers when they have often firmly established assumptions about writing and their abilities as writers and have been deeply enculturated into a results-driven, product-oriented school environment. This certainly presents a formidable challenge to high school English teachers wishing to build the metacognitive capacity of their students, but with the right combination of fertile ground and optimal growing conditions there are opportunities for students to produce flavourful fruit by engaging the in hard work of building their metacognitive capacity throughout their years in high school English.

Veenman, Hout-Wolters and Afferbach (2006) defined metacognition as a set of self-instructions for the regulation of task performance. Metacognition has two components: metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive skills (Veenman et al., 2006). According to

Veenman et al., metacognitive knowledge is declarative knowledge about the interplay between a person, the task at hand, and the strategies employed to complete the task, while metacognitive skills involve monitoring and controlling the outcomes of a writing task. Monitoring is the feedback mechanism of the thoughts or behaviours of the writer while completing a task, while control requires modification of current thoughts or behaviour to ensure task completion by evaluating the effectiveness of various strategies. It is possible for the metacognitive knowledge and skills of students to include inaccurate assumptions about the efficacy of the strategies various strategies they employ and they are often very resistant to change. For example, students who believe that postponing studying for their exams until the night before the test is an effective strategy may hold on to this belief despite the anxiety, stress, and repeated lack of success they experience which results from their procrastination. For this reason, acquiring the skills to develop this awareness takes time and effort, so acquiring metacognitive knowledge is a labourious process.

Brent (2011) argued that students who have a deep understanding of how genres operate, how they are replicated, how they develop as circumstances change and have had practice in using a variety of examples in order to generalize the features of a genre will be equipped to competently write across a variety of contexts. This deep understanding of genre is often left unrealized, partly because of the widespread practice of teaching writing as a linear process designed entirely to produce a completed text for a grade. Hayes' (2012) update to the highly influential model first proposed by Flower & Hayes in 1980, on the other hand, represents writing as a complex interplay between specialized writing processes and the task environment, which is mediated by the working memory and motivation of the author. These underlying processes are expressed outwardly through goal-setting for the writing task and the process of

monitoring the intended plan for a piece against the piece itself as it takes shape (Hayes, 2012), all of which require a high-level of metacognitive competency in a variety of strategies to be effective. Treating writing this way could allow students to develop a deeper understanding of genre, and a more nuanced understanding of writing as it occurs beyond the walls of the classroom. Although writing is often taught as a linear process, it is in fact fraught with much more complex transitions between the various stages of planning, writing and reviewing involved in the writing process.

Planning, which includes generating, goal setting, reading the assignment, and organizing, allows the reader to establish a writing plan to guide production of a text that will meet the goals set by the author (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Skilled writers tend to spend a significant amount of time planning before they begin writing, whereas struggling writers tend to spend very little time planning, preferring to start writing with minimal forethought and to generate ideas as they go (Graham, Harris & Mason, 2005). This seems to lead to struggling writers ignoring or devoting little attention to the development of rhetorical goals and to the needs of the reader (Graham et al., 2005). Successfully solving a rhetorical problem requires confident command of a variety of metacognitive skills, including frequent review of the text as it develops. The purpose of reviewing is to improve the quality of the text by detecting and correcting weaknesses and by evaluating the extent to which the text accomplishes the writer's goals (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Throughout the writing process the writer must monitor and evaluate the progress of his or her thinking by reading, re-reading, reflecting and reviewing to ensure the text conforms with the author's goals for writing (Hacker et al., 2009). Monitoring and control of writing continues throughout the writing process until the author experiences a breakdown in meaning, which is an indication that their text no longer conforms to the writer's

goal (Hacker et al., 2009). To re-establish meaning production, the author must exert control strategies, such as accurately diagnosing the breakdown in meaning, reviewing what has been written, and rewriting to remediate any faults in their writing before continuing the writing process (Hacker et al., 2009).

Writing teachers should assess weaknesses as possible deficiencies in metacognitive skills or metacognitive strategy use because these skills are essential to developing writing competence. Veenman et al. (2006) identified availability deficiencies as a lack of instruction in or possession of metacognitive strategies, and production deficiencies, which are a failure to use metacognitive strategies for maximum effect. Production deficiencies may be due to task difficulty, writing anxiety, a lack of motivation or an inability to see the appropriateness of metacognition in a particular situation (Veenman et al., 2006). Teachers can help students develop metacognitive skills by providing frequent, scaffolded opportunities for self-reflection throughout the writing process that focus on the similarities between genres or rhetorical situations (Brent, 2011). Reflection can make metacognitive knowledge more accessible by raising it to a more conscious level (Brent, 2011). This allows students to explicitly consider which rhetorical moves might be most effective in a variety of genres and situations. Opportunities for reflection combined with experiencing a variety of writing tasks that are presented as rhetorical problems can allow students to refine their metacognitive competencies over time as they emerge from high school with a toolbox of strategies to carry with them into their writing futures.

Satisfying an Authentic Discourse Community

Opportunities to engage with and write for “real-world”, authentic, and meaningful discourse communities are integral for the development of student writers. In Figure, 1 satisfying an authentic discourse community is one of the three key skill sets essential to writing

development in part because it provides an important link between writing in school and the writing students will do after they graduate. Writing assignments that primarily focus on the teacher as the audience are akin to planting a tree in a location that lacks the nutrients or water necessary for growth; in order for the tree to grow significant effort would need to be made to mitigate the negative impacts of low-nutrient soil or drought conditions. In this way, students who lack opportunities to write for authentic discourse communities will be producing genres without the opportunity to practice accessing the relevant contexts in which those genres function. They may be able to write an editorial, business letter or persuasive essay that scores well on their teacher's rubric, but without the added element of having to address an authentic audience outside of their teacher, the writing they produce will lack the rhetorical depth it otherwise might have; the fruit of their labours will be a pale imitation of the fruit produced by a tree grown in optimal conditions.

Valid and reliable writing assessment is supported by an emphasis on writing tasks that involve satisfying authentic discourse communities that exist outside of the walls of the classroom. These types of tasks require students to learn the formal characteristics of various genres of writing within the context of the social situations in which they are intended to be used (Salibrici, 1999). According to Brady (1993), examples of genres need to remain as close to their original context as possible to be useful to students, otherwise, they will become templates for situations that students will never experience again. This is problematic because, as Brady (1993) shows, students who are primarily exposed to template-driven assessment tend to confuse widely accepted practices with prescriptive actions over which they have little control and in which they see little relevance. Students who are asked to write formulaic genres based on templates that will be read only by their teacher are missing out on opportunities to link both writing as a

general concept to the social contexts in which it is used and to the specific contexts in which the genres they write function outside of the classroom. Without this understanding of writing as an activity used to communicate and signal membership to a discourse community, students lack important knowledge about how genres function in the world outside of the classroom. For this reason, teachers who divorce their writing assessments from the social contexts in which they function by reducing them to fill-in-the-blank templates and by eliminating opportunities for students to write for audiences other than their teacher are reducing the number of opportunities students will have to build the skills they will eventually need to write for the real-world audiences they will encounter after high school.

According to Cope and Kalantzis (2009), the everyday experience of making meaning through literacy has increasingly been one of negotiating discourse differences, whereas the traditional literacy curriculum tends to emphasize a singular standard of assessment (grammar, standard forms of language, and the literary canon). There has traditionally been a neglect of authentic discourse communities in classroom assessment of writing in favour of formulaic structures, but writing ability is measured by how well a writer can negotiate, adjust and satisfy the needs of their audience in more authentic contexts (Brady, 1993). Kellogg (2008) suggests the use of cognitive apprenticeship to help students develop a greater ability to manage their goals in a writing task by reducing the cognitive load needed to perform processes like revision and planning. Students would observe while a mentor talks through their decision-making as they work to fulfill their goals with a text before trying the same strategies themselves, thus reducing the cognitive load of working through these processes entirely independently (Kellogg, 2008). Using a form of cognitive apprenticeship could help students learn to engage in a variety of discourse communities. Indeed, discourses are not mastered through overt instruction from a

classroom teacher, but through enculturation into social practices with those who have already mastered the discourse (Gee, 1989). Therefore, satisfying a discourse community involves careful negotiation of the writer's own voice and their ability to use this voice in a way that is appropriate for the audience for which they are writing. However, individuals should also be able to explore and appropriate discursive intentions without assimilating and smothering their own voice in the process (Brady, 1993). This is done using both traditional conventions such as accepted style, content, and format, as well as regulative conventions or prescriptive standards agreed upon by the discourse community itself (Brady, 1993). Therefore, teachers should be designing assessments that allow students to respond to specific contexts of construction (Beck & Jeffery, 2007) to help them build capacity as they learn to satisfy the various discourse communities they will encounter beyond the walls of the classroom.

Writers who have an authentic discourse community to address must have a strong sense of their rhetorical purpose, including their persona and their audience, as they begin a writing task (Brady, 1993) because these rhetorical elements guide diction, syntax, and organization as the writer makes decisions based on their sense of the relationship between the speaker, the subject, and the discourse community (Flower & Hayes, 1981). According to Salibrici (1999), the proper use and recognition of the rhetorical choices of writers exemplify strong writing and these skills are developed through writing tasks that involve real-world audiences and authentic rhetorical problems. Strong writers tend to approach writing tasks as rhetorical problems determined by a combination of the subject, purpose, and audience of the text (Breetvelt, van den Bergh & Rjilaarsdam, 1994). The more complex the understanding of the rhetorical problem, the more skilled the writer tends to be. According to Flower and Hayes (1981), strong writers can negotiate their approach to the audience, the problem and their goals, while weak writers tend to

oversimplify the task by focusing on the topic alone. However, Graham, Harris, and Mason (2004) found that when students were given explicit genre-specific instruction in strategies for planning and writing in conjunction with guidance and support for when and how to use the strategies effectively, their writing products and writing knowledge improved as they were better able to develop and deliver on their rhetorical goals in their writing. When teachers use narrowly defined writing tasks that involve inauthentic discourse communities and formulaic templates for composition, students are robbed of the chance to develop their capacity as rhetorical problem-solvers as their opportunities to respond to authentic audiences is severely limited.

Fluidity, Flexibility, and Creativity in Process and Product

The second core skill set of writing ability relates to a students' capacity to remain flexible and creative as they engage in the writing process and as they create their writing products. This means that students should strive to focus on the goals of the writing piece they are creating and engaging in a recursive process to achieve those goals by remaining open to feedback from their teacher and their peers as a means to adjust the writing techniques and strategies they use to satisfy their target audience. Students' previous writing instruction experiences have perhaps the largest impact on the extent to which they will be willing or able to engage in the process of building metacognitive capacity in high school. If their previous teachers relied heavily on using prescriptive templates and other strategies for flattening the learning curve of teaching a new genre of writing, students may struggle when confronted with a more open-ended problem-solving approach to teaching writing that requires them to do the heavy lifting of figuring out how to write a new genre. Previous English classes may have also emphasized a product-oriented approach to writing that centred on receiving grades and limiting the writing process to a series of steps focused on handing in a final writing piece for assessment. If this is the case, these students may believe that writing is a primarily product-oriented

endeavour from which they are only hoping to earn a particular grade, rather than focusing on building a variety of writing skills by deeply engaging in a recursive writing process that may or may not result in a grade being recorded in their gradebook. There do not seem to be many shortcuts in the development of writing skills in students. In the short term, teachers may be able to expediate the process of having their students write competent versions of a variety of genres by using methods like templates and prescriptive revision and editing processes, but these strategies seem to come at the expense of the development of the metacognitive skills that underpin a writer's ability to write a variety of genres for authentic audiences in situations in which they do not receive explicit instruction or templates for guidance. Ideally, students will develop writing confidence by practicing the skills and processes over the course of many years without attempting to expediate the process by relying heavily on templates and other shortcuts. Much like the best way to encourage a fruit tree to deliver high-quality fruit is to ensure the tree is growing in optimal soil and climate conditions under the care of an orchardist, the writing skills of students have the best chance to flourish in an environment where they can meaningfully engage in recursive writing processes under the guidance of a teacher that knows when to step in to provide direction and when to simply allow their students to experiment with their developing writing skills without intervention.

Janet Emig's (1971) foundational study represents an important shift toward a focus on writing processes, rather than writing products in writing research. The ripples from this shift can be felt throughout both writing research and writing instruction today as many teachers and researchers focus on the writing process, rather than the product as the goal of writing teachers. According to Cope and Kalantzis (2009), writing teachers should be focused on creating writers who are active designers of meaning and who are open to differences, innovation, and change.

Brent (2011) points out that writers who have a deep understanding of how genres work (i.e. how they operate, are replicated and developed) as circumstances change are equipped with a variety of conscious strategies that will serve them as they learn new genres outside of the school environments. Developing these skills requires ample practice in generalizing the features of a genre by studying the commonalities amongst a variety of exemplars to build transferable skills in genre use and production (Brent, 2011). Evidently, this is a much more process-oriented approach to writing instruction than more traditional, template-driven models that focus on the production of a formulaic, polished end-product that may have no real-world counterpart that the student can hope to encounter after graduation. Ultimately, writing involves satisfying a discourse community, but these communities are often moving targets, so writers often have to satisfy more than one at a time (Ivanic, 2004). This ability to negotiate purpose and deploy strategies to deliver on intention in writing develops over the course of many years as students increasingly develop the ability to hold the needs of the text, the author, and their audience in their working memory (Kellogg, 2008). By exposing developing writers to this flexible approach to the writing process, teachers are better preparing them to access the language of power, work, and community that they will encounter after graduation. Corrigan and Slomp (2021) point out that writers who are aware of the fact that discourses are a function of social and historical construction with arbitrary conventions around correct usage and conventions are better able to critically engage in the discourses they encounter with an awareness of their power to both marginalize and liberate. This ability to access language fosters critical engagement and encourages students to actively participate in designing their social futures in the world of work (Van Heertum & Share, 2006).

Leijten et al. (2014) found that professional writing is increasingly characterized by collaboration and the creation of texts by combining pre-existing texts with new content. They found that many professional writers design documents by combining multiple digital sources as they work to satisfy their intended audience. For this reason, flexibility in the writing process and greater emphasis on broadening the definition of acceptable products in the classroom is an important goal for preparing students for the increasingly complex and varied writing tasks they will encounter after high school. Lankshear & Knobel (2007) point out that today's literacy scene is a rapidly changing environment in which new ways of pursuing communication tasks are quickly developing. Exposure to podcasts, blogs, online forums, fan fiction and myriad other genres are part of the average student's literary upbringing. For this reason, teachers should start with the language that students bring with them to the classroom as a starting place (McKoski, 1995) to meet them where they are at and to move away from the assimilating nature of traditional education (New London Group, 1996). If students have the freedom to help define genres and to explore writing, the definition of genre will broaden beyond the traditional print-linguistic definition of text, which will help increase cultural accuracy for students (Witte, 1992). Indeed, Witte's (1992) discussion of situated writing encourages the recognition that students are arriving in school with a variety of cultural interpretations of the context in which they are writing, many of which go far beyond what academia traditionally values. Contemporary literacy is a broad set of flexible, fluid, and variable communication strategies that exist in an ever-diverging literacy environment filled with a diverse set of cultures, social languages, groups, organizations and niche clienteles (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009), so writing teachers would do well to respond to this landscape with an equally fluid and flexible approach to writing process and product.

Participation in a Writing Community

A fruit tree is unlikely to produce fruit in isolation. It will grow to a mature height and be generally healthy without the company of other trees, but without the opportunity to cross-pollinate fruit production may not be possible. Similarly, students are more likely to grow and improve as writers if they have opportunities to collaborate and work with other students in writing communities. Therefore, the third key skill set students must develop is the ability to participate in a variety of writing communities as both givers and receivers of feedback and as both writer and audience. And, as with the ability to satisfy an authentic discourse community and to remain flexible in writing process and writing product, this third skill set is honed with the help of high-quality teacher feedback. Interacting with other writers is valuable for students as they learn how to serve the needs of an audience and create texts for a variety of purposes. If they are writing in relative isolation with limited access to writing communities, students may not develop the fullest awareness of the function of writing as a primarily social activity; writing is generally meant to communicate information to another person after all. Behizadeh and Engelhardt (2011) argue that the dominant theory in writing instruction and assessment since the 1990's has included a sociocultural view of literacy, emphasizing the importance of context as a determining factor in writing. As "no text is autonomous" (Witte, 1992, p. 253) teachers must build writing competence by teaching students to analyze a wide range of texts to push beyond the traditionally accepted academic forms in order to help them better understand the structure, the ideological content and the conditions of the production and use of a text (Luke, 2012). This focus on participation in discourse demonstrates Rodrigues' (2012) assertion that the purpose of teaching is to achieve synchrony. It is not because communication without writing is impossible, but because reading the writing of others allows us to become a part of another's context. With this orientation in mind, it is important to remember that teaching is a skill that is developed to

help others participate in a specific task, not to achieve exam results (Rodrigues, 2012). Treating students as collaborators in the development of academic literacies can open a path to greater engagement in higher education and in literacy in general than a more traditional focus on academic socialization in writing (Lea & Street, 2006).

The emphasis on collaboration with students as suggested by Lea and Street (2006), can be realized by providing opportunities for social interactions with others as a means to support cognitive development, especially language development (deGravelles et al., 2012; Lacina & Griffith, 2012; Tunks, 2012). Teachers should build the expectation that students will regularly share their writing with their classmates to help them build an understanding of what may be interesting to their audience and to take ownership of the writing process and the craft of writing by having regular opportunities to share what they have written (Lacina & Griffith, 2012; Tunks, 2012). Students receive affirmation in their roles as writers as they receive responses to their writing from their audience, which in turn, provides motivation for them to continue writing (Tunks, 2012). If students write for a variety of audiences with which they could have opportunities to interact, they will provide more writing of higher quality (Lacina & Griffith, 2012) thus emphasizing the importance of incorporating a sense of writing community and active participation into the literacy classroom.

Along with a shift toward participatory writing and engagement with an audience, an emphasis on writing as a means to empowerment is an essential component of a strong writing instruction and assessment program. The "three R's" emphasized the need to maintain social hierarchy and social order by engraining an objectively correct way to do things to avoid disruption of the status quo (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). However, the contemporary focus on equity, collaboration, and relationships as foundational principles in many of today's workplaces

have created a greater need to teach literacy skills as a means to access these flattened hierarchies and to participate fully in them (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Lankshear and Knobel (2007) point out that the increasingly participatory, collaborative and distributed nature of everyday engagements represents an important shift in our understanding of the purpose of literacy. This is demonstrated by the democratization of many formerly exclusionary domains, such as the prevalence of Wikipedia as a source of important information, rather than Encyclopedia Britannica (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). For this reason, young people increasingly expect to be involved in and influence the world around them – they are not content simply being observers (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009) and writing instruction and assessment must reflect this shift. Indeed, literacy involves authority and social differentiation and has the power to challenge or to simply reproduce the structures of domination that have traditionally existed (Jocson, Burnside & Collins, 2006). Given this immense power for change, students should experience literacy as a medium for becoming empowered writers who can challenge different forms of social inequity (Jocson et al., 2006), and this shift in emphasis should be reflected in the writing instruction and assessment practices of teachers as they work to empower their students as change-makers.

Self-Assessment

Although not directly represented in the writing ability construct in Figure 1, self-assessment plays an important underlying role as students develop as writers. First, self-assessment is a key process in metacognition. Second, self-assessing their developing skills in satisfying authentic discourse communities, engaging in writing processes and producing writing products, and participating in writing communities can help students develop greater capacity in these areas. And finally, teachers can provide important feedback to students as they engage in self-assessment to help them internalize this important skill. According to Pajares and Valiente (2006), meaning is constructed through introspection and self-reflection, so it is imperative that

writing teachers instruct students in self-regulatory strategies to increase writing skills and self-efficacy by self-evaluating their progress. Graham, Harris & Mason (2005) found that given the limiting effect of working memory for young writers, particularly when processes like transcription and translating are not yet automatic, students who received explicit support in higher-order strategies like planning and organizing were able to engage more fully in self-regulation strategies while writing because their cognitive resources were more available for processes like idea generation and translation. They also found that instruction in genre-specific writing strategies and processes in combination with information about the purposes and characteristics of genres led to high quality writing. Essentially, in order to encourage students to access self-regulatory strategies and use them effectively, students need support in assessing their own writing as they write, including supports that can free up resources normally occupied by simply writing down their ideas in favour of deeper processes like tracking how well their piece is organized or whether the words they are choosing are effectively conveying their meaning.

Chapuis and Stiggins (2002) suggest that there are three questions that can help guide students in their self-assessment: Where am I going? Where am I now? How do I close the gap? Regularly reflecting in this manner on their progress as writers can increase confidence in students' use of self-regulatory skills, such as planning, organizing and using resources, which in turn can lead to greater strategy use and higher intrinsic motivation (Pajares & Valiente, 2006). Andrade and Boulay (2002) suggest five criteria for self-assessment: articulating clear criteria for assessing writing, supporting students in assessing their own work, identifying techniques for improving writing, providing opportunities for revision, and acknowledging students' developmental stages. Indeed, Black and Wiliam (1998) have found that students are generally

quite honest and reliable when they assess both themselves and one another when they have a sufficiently clear picture of the targets their learning is meant to attain. Teachers and students each have a crucial role to play in improving learner outcomes through feedback. Black and Wiliam (2009) suggest that students should both own their own learning and act as instructional resources for one another, which serves as an apt complement to Andrade and Boulay's (2002) criteria for self-assessment. In addition to the role students play in formative assessment, Black and Wiliam (2009) argue that when providing formative assessment and feedback teachers should focus on providing feedback that moves learners forward by clarifying learning goals and criteria for success and by facilitating learning activities that can provide evidence of student understanding. Strong writing assessment practices include both teacher and student actively reflecting on student progress in order to achieve competence.

The Importance of Feedback

In addition to self-assessment, students gain important information about their progress from regular feedback from their teacher; experienced writing teachers can give students carefully tailored and timed feedback to encourage students to continue improving their skills while not overwhelming them with so many suggestions that they are unable to meaningfully incorporate the feedback into their writing. Indeed, high-quality feedback from their writing teacher is a crucial factor in a student's ability to grow in their capacity to engage in metacognitive thinking, satisfying authentic discourse communities, engaging in the writing process, and participating in writing communities as indicated in Figure 1. Similarly, fruit trees benefit from careful pruning and training while they grow to ensure they are growing in a manner that best supports fruit production. A fruit tree can be encouraged to produce large quantities of flavourful fruit when it is carefully tended to through well-timed, seasonal pruning. Depending on the priorities of the arborist, pruning a fruit tree during different seasons can have

different impacts on the tree's growth and fruit production. Pruning a tree in winter will prompt fast, vigorous growth when spring rolls around, while carefully pruning branches that didn't survive the winter during the springtime will help shape the tree's growth more deliberately and carefully. Pruning an overgrown fruit tree in summer can make it easier to harvest the fruit, meanwhile pruning a tree in the fall could endanger the tree's survival by interrupting its ability to store nutrients for the long winter months. In much the same way that experienced orchardists know how and when to prune their orchard to promote maximum growth and fruit production during the growing season, teachers who are able to carefully tailor and time their feedback on their students' writing can maximize its impact for students who are looking to improve their writing skills.

Unfortunately, feedback on writing assessments is often comprised of numerical scores in combination with comments, which actually hinders the use of written feedback as students often ignore the comments when numerical scores are given (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & Wiliam, 2004). Black and Wiliam (2009) suggest that feedback is only useful to students to the extent that it is used by the learner to improve their performance on future tasks. Therefore, they suggest that teachers consider the extent to which the student understood the task at hand in order to tailor their feedback to guide the student closer to the learning target. Additionally, moving away from a deficient model of assessment in which teachers are positioned to assume that students lack skills toward an emphasis on guiding students to use the right skills in the right situations is a more productive model of giving feedback (Lea & Street, 2006) by emphasizing progress and achievement over failure and defeat (Chapuis & Stiggins, 2002). Feedback is more useful when it directs students to monitor their achievement of their goals and guides them to achieving learning objectives (Andrade & Boulay, 2002; Pajares & Valiente, 2006) by providing

explicit cues to students to reflect on their progress and to draw their attention to similarities between genres and rhetorical situations as they work on writing tasks (Brent, 2011). Much like the three guiding questions suggested by Chapuis and Stiggins (2002) for self-assessment, teacher feedback should be comprised of a recognition of the desired goal, evidence of the students' present position in relation to that goal, and some guidance as to how to close the gap between the two (Black & Wiliam, 1998) in order to maximize its effectiveness in a comprehensive writing assessment program.

Table 1

Summary of Key Features of Writing Assessment Programs

Characteristics of Strong Writing Assessment Programs

- Emphasis on building critical thinking skills by avoiding the use of templates that make writing little more than a fill-in-the-blank exercise
- Emphasis on satisfying a discourse community rather than over-emphasizing mechanics
- Opportunities for reflection that help students develop the metacognitive capacity to reflect on and improve their writing
- Writing assessments and activities should involve writing for real-world audiences
- Assessments that emphasize a process-oriented approach to writing that allows students to experiment and discover for themselves what process works for them
- A wide variety of genres, tasks and real-world audiences so students have to consider writing assignments as rhetorical problems they have to solve
- Emphasis on collaboration with other writers and on sharing their writing with people other than their teacher
- Opportunities to self-assess progress and to set goals for improving writing
- Opportunities to receive feedback from both the teacher and from peers throughout the writing process

Contextualizing Writing Assessment in Alberta

Although the growing conditions outlined above would be the ideal environment in which students could build metacognitive capacity, the reality of daily life in high school English courses often presents obstacles to fully realizing this environment. Just as drought, pests or a

lack of sunlight can prevent a tree from growing properly, there are a number of factors that, when present, can seriously hamper a student's ability to build metacognitive competence. For example, high-stakes exams that eliminate meaningful engagement in a recursive writing process and encourage a marks-motivated school culture can shift the focus of both teachers and students away from the underlying skills students should be learning to become competent writers across a variety of contexts, toward the products they need to reliably replicate on an exam in order to achieve acceptable marks. The additional limitations imposed by curricular pressure, instructional time, teacher preparation time, and other related factors can make it difficult for even the most committed teacher to give the feedback, guidance and scaffolding students need to develop metacognitive capacity in the three short semesters of English classes most students take over the course of their high school careers.

According to the Alberta Program of Studies for Senior High English Language Arts (2003), there are two basic aims of the current English curriculum. First, the program should encourage both understanding and appreciation of the artistry of literature. Second, it should develop the capacity for students to understand and appreciate language and to use language confidently and competently for a variety of purposes, audiences and in a variety of contexts. The Program of Studies acknowledges that upon successful completion of Grade 12 English, students who are strong language users are well-prepared for entry into post-secondary education or for the workplace as language development gives them a breadth of employability skills (Alberta Education, 2003). The curriculum also acknowledges that literacy demands in Canada and in the international community are ever-evolving, so students must be prepared to meet these challenges by a curriculum that is dynamic and responsive to these evolving demands (Alberta Education, 2003). Through exposure to all six interdependent language arts (reading, writing,

listening, speaking, viewing, and representing) language abilities of students are enhanced by continuously and recursively using what students already know in new and more complex contexts in an increasingly sophisticated manner (Alberta Education, 2003). Regarding writing specifically, the Alberta Program of Studies for Senior High English Language Arts (Alberta Education, 2003) requires that students write a wide variety of texts to make sense of their own and others' experiences by using effective strategies to discover and refine ideas and to compose and revise their writing. Additionally, the curriculum encourages teachers to provide opportunities for collaboration in creating texts. The front matter of the English Language Arts curriculum gives the impression of a robust and varied curriculum that envisions students reaching the end of the program in Grade 12 with a wide repertoire of literacy skills that prepare them to be critical thinkers, advocates and successful members of Canadian society. However, the delivery of this curriculum, as imagined, is often complicated by the looming pressure of the Grade 12 Diploma exam awaiting both teachers and students as students reach the end of their final year of high school English Language Arts.

The use of standardized exams as a requirement of graduation arose out of the academic trend of signalling legitimacy through association with scientism and objectivism (Broad, 2000). Klinger, Rogers, Anderson, Poth & Calman (2006) identified that the call for data-based decision-making in education as well as a desire for accountability frameworks led to a desire to use large-scale assessment data to guide decision-making, which in turn led to improvements and growth in education. MacDonald (2002) attributes the desire for standards that can be statistically defined and used as benchmarks for the measurement and comparison of students as a driving force for the reintroduction of the diploma exam in 1984. Although the primary purpose of the Alberta Diploma Exam is to credentialize students by determining which students

meet the acceptable standard of graduation and to provide documentation of the achievement of this standard, the results of the exams are used for a variety of additional purposes, including allocation of teaching assignments, school goal setting, assessment of curriculum delivery and setting goals for professional growth plans (MacDonald, 2002). The diploma exams are also used to provide various stakeholders with results and data regarding the performance of students on the exams, thus increasing the level of scrutiny and pressure experienced by both teachers and students who are involved in preparing for and writing these exams (MacDonald, 2002). Many teachers place heavy expectations on themselves to adequately prepare students for the exams because of the pressures from the community and administration to ensure students perform well and because of their knowledge that teacher selection and assignment are influenced by exam results (MacDonald, 2002). The high-pressure environment created by these exams has led to a variety of both positive and negative influences on instruction, assessment and curriculum delivery.

A number of positive influences on writing assessment can be attributed to the use of provincial examinations, including an increased focus on accountability in education (Slomp, 2008) and increased confidence of students that their scores are less likely to be determined by who happened to mark their exam due to measurement of their writing against a standard construct (Huot, 1990). Teachers may also work harder, have a greater focus on student achievement, and value pedagogical innovation (Slomp, 2008; MacDonald, 2002). It is also possible that students may experience increased motivation to learn in preparation for the exam and their parents may become more involved in their child's education (Lam & Bordignon, 2009). Finally, Diploma Exams may be valuable because they can prevent grade inflation, validate teaching, and provide a valid indicator of writing ability (Slomp, 2008). As an

educational accountability framework, the English Diploma Exam can be used to support and monitor educational reforms insofar as student progress and performance can be measured by the exam (Klinger et al., 2006). However, the relationship between schooling and student achievement is influenced by a variety of complex factors that need to be carefully considered when looking at the data provided by the Diploma Exam (Klinger et al., 2006). Conversely, there is not yet a developmental scale that can directly assess writing ability, so writing teachers are left to estimate a writer's capacity by observing written products as evidence of the underlying skill of the writer (Burdick, Swartz, Stenner, Fitzgerald, Burdick & Hanlon, 2013).

Therefore, large-scale assessments like the English Diploma Exam are limited in their ability to positively influence writing assessment in Alberta high school English classrooms. There are a number of test design issues, for example. According to Wiggins (1994), large-scale assessments that ignore the writing process by requiring students to write a paper in a limited time frame cause underrepresentation of the construct of writing ability. Also, standardized scoring rubrics limit the scope of the measurement of the construct by regimenting both teaching and learning (Mabry, 1999; Broad, 2000; MacDonald, 2002; Slomp & Fuite, 2005). Indeed, the exam tends to focus on relatively fewer objectives than the English Language Arts Program of Studies does, so there are concerns regarding the narrowing of curriculum in the classroom to focus on objectives that will be tested (MacDonald, 2002; Lam & Bordignon, 2009). Indeed, Lam and Bordignon (2009) found that in Alberta and British Columbia, the pressure of adequately preparing students for their grade 12 exams led teachers to focus on test preparation and test-taking skills at the expense of genuine learning and critical thinking skills development. Such practices also raise the concern of using instructional or administrative practices that raise test scores without affecting the quality of education that students receive (MacDonald, 2002; Lam & Bordignon,

2009). Large-scale assessments have a number of detrimental effects on writing assessment and instruction, including narrowing of the curriculum, over-reliance on test prep materials, unethical preparation practices, unfair use of test results, unintended bias against subgroups, increased tension in schools, increased grade retention and regression in pedagogical practice (Slomp, 2008). Overall, there is limited evidence to suggest that large-scale assessments and other test accountability programs are helping to improve education (Lam & Bordignon, 2009).

Despite the presence of some positive influences on writing assessment, the English Diploma Exam seems to have an overwhelmingly negative impact on writing assessments in the classroom. First, there is a significant mismatch between the skills measured by the exam and those emphasized in the curriculum, causing teachers to struggle with balancing their professional obligation to prepare students for the exam and their desire to teach the complete curriculum (Slomp, 2008). For example, the Alberta Program of Studies (2003), envisions writers who are flexible and open-minded in their thinking and who are able to negotiate a complex recursive writing process. However, the diploma exam emphasizes knowledge about language structure and the ability to use language as a tool to communicate (Slomp, 2008). The strict six-hour time limit for the written portion of the exam, while an improvement over the much shorter time frame students previously received, still limits their ability to work through a recursive writing process.

The limitations imposed by the structure of the exam are often reflected in the instruction and assessment practices of teachers in the classroom. For example, as of September 2015, Alberta Education reduced the weight of the Diploma Exams from 50% of the final course mark to 30%. While it would seem that this significant reduction in the relative weight of the Diploma Exam for students' final marks in Grade 12 would be a welcome change resulting in less

pressure to focus so heavily on exam preparation in high school English classes, Slomp, Marynowski, Holec, & Ratcliffe (2020) found that the reduction in weighting had a limited impact on the amount of emphasis teachers placed on preparing students for Diploma Exams. Furthermore, the rubrics used in the standardized writing assessments often replace teacher-designed rubrics, which can lead to a narrowing of the instructional focus in the classroom, including a shift from process-oriented approaches to more product-centered approaches as the exam date looms nearer (MacDonald, 2002; Slomp, 2008). This shift in focus seems to be related to the pressure teachers feel to signal their credibility by being able to assess their students in a way that is consistent with the Diploma Exam, so they often use exam-style assignments as their end-of-unit assessments and may explicitly teach and assess in a way that directly connects to the exam (Slomp, 2008). Additionally, Runte (1998) argues that centralized testing threatens teachers' professionalism in a variety of ways: by deskilling the evaluation process; by enforcing a centralized curriculum; by removing the teacher's right to evaluate the outcome of their own instruction; and by introducing a new measure of teacher productivity. According to Resnick and Resnick (1992), assessments must be built toward what educators should teach or any misalignment in the test itself will surely be reflected in classroom practice. Indeed, Crawford and Smolkowski (2008) argue that "if we do not value [a rich, recursive writing process] in our state assessments, we will not see this kind of instruction in our classrooms" (p. 75).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH

Theoretical Framework: Multiple Intrinsic Case Study

My goal for this project was to qualitatively explore the assessment practices of a small group of high school English teachers to better understand the way they approach writing assessment in their classrooms. A case study approach was an appropriate one for this project because my intention was to choose participants based on what insights their particular context and approach to writing assessment could provide about writing assessment. For this reason, this study was conducted using a multiple intrinsic case study approach involving a combination of interviews with high school English teachers in Alberta and an analysis of the writing assessments used by these teachers in their classrooms. Because I was less concerned about the generalizability of my findings about writing assessment practices in Alberta than the way particular cases can illustrate the various approaches to writing assessment in individual classrooms an intrinsic case study allowed me to build understanding of the factors that mitigate and support writing assessment in some Alberta English classrooms. Including multiple case studies in the project allowed for the exploration of the variety of approaches to writing assessment in some Alberta classrooms, even if the generalizability of these findings are somewhat limited. Although the insight I would have gained by conducting observations of the writing assessment practices in the classrooms of the participants would have been valuable, it was not possible to include classroom observations in this research project due to my own workload as a full-time English teacher.

The process for recruiting and choosing the teacher participants for this project ended up being a multi-step process. First, I set out the criteria for what I was looking for in my potential participants. I was exclusively interested in high school English teachers in Alberta both because that is closest to my own teaching experience and because the last years of high school are the

closest link to post-secondary writing and writing in the workplace. I included Grade 9 as “high school” for the purposes of this study because many high schools include grades 9 through 12, so I knew that it was possible that many of my participants would teach Language Arts 9 as well as a variety of English classes at the higher grade levels. For the sake of avoiding potential conflict, tension, or awkwardness with close colleagues, I chose not to recruit from the school district in which I teach and for many of the same reasons it was important to me to protect the relative anonymity of my participants by using first-name pseudonyms in the report, removing all identifying details of their schools or communities and to use generic language such as “the school” or “the district” when referring to their teaching contexts. Finally, I was hoping to end up with three to five participants that would represent a variety of teaching contexts and years of experience to bring breadth to my exploration of my research questions.

With these criteria in mind I set out to begin the recruiting process. A representative from Research and Placement Services in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge sent out a request to conduct research on my behalf to eleven school districts across Southern Alberta. Of those eleven districts that were sent the request, six gave me permission to recruit participants from their district, one district declined, and four did not respond to the request. Once I had permission to recruit participants from six of the eleven districts, I contacted the superintendent of each district to confirm that I had permission to contact the high school English teachers in their districts directly because this seemed like the most likely way to get a response directly from teachers who were interested in participation. Of the six districts I contacted directly, one had already given permission for me to directly contact teachers and three others responded to my request for this permission as well. The remaining two districts did not

respond to my request to contact teachers directly, so I interpreted their lack of response as a denial of permission and did not contact any teachers in those districts.

From there I went through the school websites of each high school in the four districts in which I had permission to contact teachers. From the school websites I was able to contact many of the high school English teachers in Southern Alberta. Occasionally, the school websites did not make it clear what subjects or grade levels the teachers taught, so I only contacted teachers who were explicitly listed as teachers of English Language Arts in Grades 9-12. I received responses from four teachers who volunteered to participate in my research, all of whom fit the criteria I had set out at the beginning of this process. The relatively low response rate left me with a very small pool of teachers who were willing to participate, so there was not much choosing left for me to do. Fortunately, all four teachers turned out to be excellent participants for this research project. One of the initial four participants dropped out of the study after their first interview due to time constraints and their teaching load, but the remaining three remained in the study throughout the project and were able to provide me with deep insight into their writing assessment practices over the course of the research project. In early September I had received full confirmation of participation from all four initial participants. I completed the first round of interviews with all four initial participants by mid-September and had the final interviews completed with each of the three remaining participants by the end of October.

Ontology, Epistemology, and Methodology

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), research practices are chosen based on the research questions being asked, and the questions being asked depend on the context of the study. For my research questions, a constructivist approach was the best fit because it allows for the representation of the experiences of my participants without striving for an exact replication of those experiences. I wanted to hear teachers explain their experiences and then use those

explanations to represent my interpretation of those experiences in a way that captured the experiences accurately, but without striving for the impossible goal of an exact and complete replication. It was particularly important to me to work through my own understanding of the choices my participants were making in their writing assessment practices with their input and with full acknowledgement that my relative distance from being able to observe their actual teaching practices could potentially colour my interpretations. This is why my interviews were the fodder for most of my data interpretation. By talking through my analysis of their writing assessment documents I was able to ascertain, through co-creation of meaning, many of the underlying values, assumptions, and understandings that were impacting the decisions of the teachers in this study.

I was not interested in representing a causal relationship between variables; teaching decisions are influenced by too many factors for this to be a productive approach to my research questions. Rather, I wanted to be aware of and open to the interaction between the researcher and what is studied, as well as the situational constraints that shaped this exploration (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I knew that my position as a colleague, however distant, to each of the participants would undoubtedly influence the way I interpreted the data, so I prioritized reflecting on my own role in the data generation through frequent written reflections on the implications for my own teaching practices, the extent to which I felt aligned or misaligned with the decisions of my participants, and any other potential influences.

Teaching is a socially situated profession, so it was important that I keep the social context of my participants' experiences at the forefront in my goal of increasing my own understanding of their writing assessment practices. Their writing assessment practices could not be separated from the political and social contexts in which they were carrying out these

practices, so I made a concerted effort to deeply understand the context in which their decisions were being made as a means to better understand the decisions themselves. The particularity of each case certainly limits the generalizability of my findings, but given that each teacher, their context, their students, their background and a myriad of other factors are so unique it seems unlikely that widespread generalizability in educational research should necessarily be the goal.

Data Gathering

Once I had confirmed who my participants would be, I went directly into gathering data. I initiated planning for the first interview with each teacher in early September; this is a very busy time for teachers, but it is also a time when they are in the process of planning assessments and making decisions about their plans for the semester, so it felt like a good time to start the data collection process since much of the information I was interested in would already be at the forefront of my participants' minds. Only one of the teachers I worked with taught Language Arts 9 in addition to the rest of her teaching load of Grade 10 and 11 English classes, while the other two teachers exclusively taught Grades 10 through 12 at both the academic (referred to as English 10-1/20-1/30-1) and non-academic (referred to as English 10-2/20-2/30-2) levels. Most of my conclusions and interpretations are based on the courses at the Grades 10 through 12 level, but the additional insight provided by having Language Arts 9 in the mix was interesting as well.

Data gathering proceeded in three phases. In Phase 1, I scheduled and conducted my first interviews with each participant (see Appendix B for the question list). All interviews were recorded for later transcription to assist in analysis. My goal with the first interview was to build an understanding of the backgrounds, teaching contexts, experiences, skill sets, and philosophies of each of my participants. I wanted to know who I was working with and what was important to them as they plan and implement writing assessments in their classroom. Before I started to direct my interview questions toward the elements of my construct for writing assessment in the

second interview, I wanted to gain a sense of how they generally approached writing assessment in their classrooms. What did they feel were their main areas of emphasis? What were their perceived strengths and weaknesses? How did they support students in improving as writers? Although some of the teachers were very organized and had already sent me a variety of samples of their writing assessments before I conducted the first interview, I chose not to look at the documents until after I completed the first interview to try to protect against entering either the interview or the document analysis with pre-conceived notions or assumptions that lacked the important context I was seeking in the first interview.

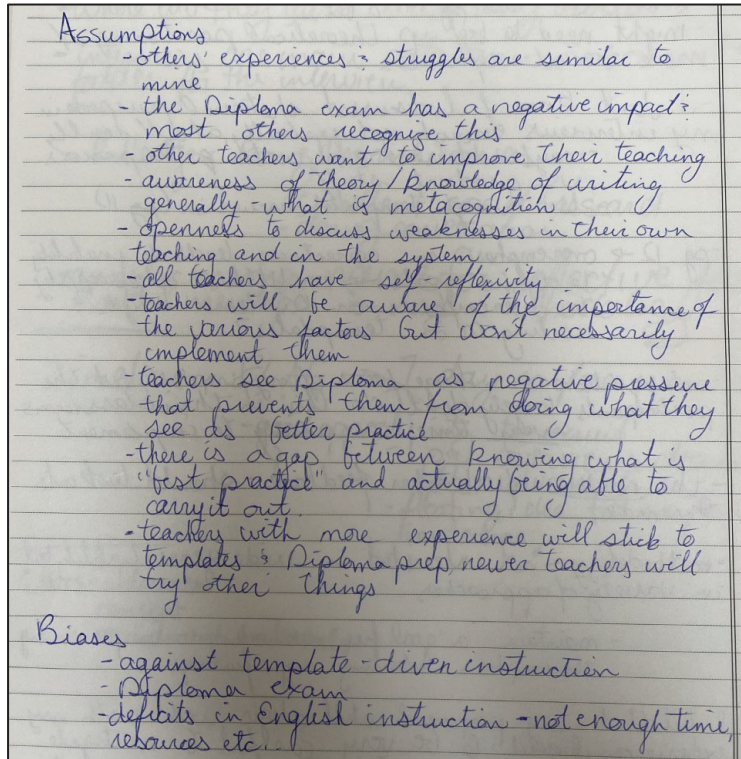
I asked all of my participants the same questions, but I also let the conversation flow organically as various topics of interest came up. When topics I hadn't anticipated arose, I continued the conversation because I felt that if the teacher believed a particular topic was relevant to their writing assessment practices it probably was and I would likely appreciate its insight later in the research process. It was important to me for the teachers to feel that my goal was to describe their practices, not to evaluate or judge them. I feel that allowing the conversations to flow relatively freely within a structure that addressed my research questions helped me find balance in getting the information I was most interested in, but also allowing the participants to have agency in influencing what would become important insights later on. I knew that in-class observations of their teaching were not going to be a part of this project, so it was important to gain as deep an understanding as possible of their approach to writing assessment before beginning to look at the documents they sent to me as samples of their writing assessment for analysis. Armed with this important context I felt much better prepared to closely examine the sample writing assessments I requested from each participant through a lens that was informed by an understanding of what was important to each teacher.

The second phase of data collection involved requesting a sample of between five and eight assessments and supporting documents from each teacher that was representative of the breadth of their writing assessments. I encouraged teachers to submit only what they had already created – I did not want them to feel that they needed to create documents for me. Rather, I was interested in seeing documents that were already in use in their classrooms. I also asked for a variety of assessments at each grade level that they teach to get a sense of how they help students progress as writers. Beyond these stipulations, I allowed the teachers to submit as much or as little as they wanted in terms of the total number of assessments and supporting documents. I ended up with each teacher submitting between seven and eleven documents that included student handouts for assessments, rubrics, scaffolds, planning pages and other supporting documents across Grades 9 through 12 and at both the -1 and -2 levels.

Prior to analyzing the documents and throughout the data gathering and analysis process, I used reflexive journaling to critically examine the assumptions with which I was heading into the document analysis phase. This included considering the areas of emphasis of each teacher based on their first interview, my perceptions of their assessment practices and what I predicted I might see in the documents in terms of the elements of my construct (See Figure 3 for a sample). This reflection process is one that I relied on throughout data gathering and analysis and I found that it helped bring to light my own role in the research process by illuminating my assumptions, biases, judgements and other factors that could colour my analysis.

Figure 3

Sample of Reflective Notes



In order to generate questions for my second round of interviews I completed a very tentative initial coding of each document (see Appendix A for a manual of initial codes and Figure 4 for a sample of a coded document). My initial codes simply used the same terms I used in the writing ability construct diagram in Figure 1 with the goal of seeing the extent to which each element was represented in the documents as far as could be ascertained by simply reading them. It was very important to me to remember that simply looking at the documents divorced from the way they are actually used in the classroom made my interpretations incomplete without input from the teacher who uses the documents. For this reason, while I was coding and exploring the documents I generated a list of questions for each teacher for their second interview (see Appendix B for lists of questions). Questions related to the presence or absence of the writing ability construct elements were asked of all three teachers in their second interviews,

while many of the questions were focused on clarifying my understanding and interpretation of how a particular document is used or its role in their writing assessment program. I wanted to know if my assumptions were correct when it came to how the document was used and to seek specific clarification of my misinterpretations to help me more fully understand how the teacher views and uses their documents in their writing assessment programs. A more detailed discussion of my coding process will follow in the next section.

Figure 4

Sample of Initial Coding of a Kate's Script Project

<p>This project is an opportunity for you to show your understanding of the text through a creative outlet. TA Please read the project options below. You may work with a partner or individually - WC. Choose one of the following to complete. - FWPd.</p> <p>Each project requires the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ details from the reading ❖ careful organization for clarity ❖ creativity of presentation and/or artistic endeavor ❖ use of proper script format
<p>What really happened?</p> <p>Directions: You will write the "missing chapter" for one of two "absent" scenes from the novel, in script formatting. These are scenes Nick <i>knows about</i>, although he does not know the content of the conversation. However, you will be text detectives and based on the previous behavior of the characters, as well as Nick's description of events following these moments, you will write the "missing" scenes. Clearly, important conversations have taken place that we, the readers, haven't witnessed.</p> <p>Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Your chapter must refer to the events that we know have already happened. ✓ Your chapter must be accurate in reference to the character's past and present (consider the quotations below). ✓ Your characters' voices should be true to the text. ✓ You will type out your script. ✓ You must follow correct script formatting. - M <p>OPTION ONE A New Beginning – Daisy and Gatsby – Chapter Five - FWPd Nick sneaks out of the house when he senses that Gatsby wants to be alone with Daisy. He re-enters after several minutes, noting the following: <i>I went in – after making every possible noise in the kitchen short of pushing over the stove – but I don't believe they heard a sound. They were sitting at either end of the couch looking at each other as if some question had been asked or was in the air, and every vestige of embarrassment was gone.</i></p> <p>So what did Daisy and Gatsby say to one another in the 20 minutes Nick waited outside?</p> <p>OPTION TWO is A Quick Reconciliation – Daisy and Tom – Chapter Seven - FWPd Following the car accident, Gatsby drives Daisy to her home. When Tom, Jordan and Nick arrive at the Buchanan home, Nick runs into Gatsby hiding in the dark. Nick checks on Daisy for a moment, noting the following: <i>I came to a small rectangle of light...Daisy and Tom were sitting opposite each other at the kitchen table with a plate of cold fried chicken between them and two bottles of ale. He was talking intently across the table at her....</i></p> <p>So what do Tom and Daisy say to each other that night? Go back and read the rest of Nick's observation</p>

Phase 3 involved conducting second interviews with each participant to wrap up the data gathering process. My goal was to ensure that I had as full an understanding as possible of each

teachers' writing assessment practices as they relate to the documents they submitted to me. I asked questions of all three teachers that related to each element of my construct to ascertain the extent to which each element was present in their writing assessment programs. I sometimes found that although the documents made it seem like a particular element of the construct was absent, it was instead incorporated through the teachers' direct instruction or other lesson elements while the students were engaging in the writing process. For this reason, the interviews served as an essential means to close any gaps between my interpretation of the documents and the way they are actually used in the classroom. I also asked each teacher questions about many of the individual documents to further clarify my understanding of the document, its use in their classroom, and the intentions behind it with the goal of giving each teacher the opportunity to shift my perception of its use in their classroom when my interpretations were incorrect or incomplete.

It was important to me that I didn't come across as judgmental or evaluative in my questioning. To emphasize that my goal was description, not evaluation, I kept my questions open-ended and as free of evaluative language as possible. The second interview also involved quite a bit of free-flowing conversation in addition to my questions. I was happy to follow the thread of the teachers' trains of thought as we discussed the variety of struggles they face in their schools or their experiences over their years as teachers. Many of these seemingly tangential discussions ended up providing important context and insights in the analysis phase of the project.

Following the completion of the second round of interviews, I moved on to more thorough coding and analysis of emergent themes to more deeply explore my research questions.

Coding and Analysis

My approach to data analysis was based on the approach to thematic analysis outlined by Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017), which is broken into 6 phases:

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for Themes
4. Reviewing Themes
5. Defining and Naming Themes
6. Producing the Report

According to Nowell et al. (2017), this approach to thematic analysis is useful for examining the perspectives of multiple participants by highlighting similarities and differences between their experiences and by generating unanticipated highlights. However, I didn't follow this process in a completely linear fashion as it is outlined by Nowell et al., rather I found myself flowing back and forth between the phases throughout both the analysis and writing process as new insights emerged and revisiting the data seemed necessary. However, in my effort to ensure that my conclusions were trustworthy I closely tracked the decisions I made that shifted the course of my coding process or decisions that provoked the emergence of new codes or themes through self-reflection. In this way, I was striving to, as Nowell et al. (2017) described, apply thematic analysis as a means to identify, analyze, organize, describe, and report themes within my data set in a transparent manner.

Data analysis proceeded in seven stages. The first stage involved reflecting on each interview immediately following completion of the interview as well as immediate reflection on my initial coding of each set of documents submitted by my participants. My intention in immediately reflecting on the data as I gathered it was to maintain critical reflexivity in my role

as researcher, but also to look for patterns and repeated ideas in the data set. My reflections following the second interviews focused on the extent to which I felt that there was alignment between what the teachers were saying about their writing assessment practices and what I was seeing in the documents they submitted to me. This was not to evaluate or judge the teachers, but to reflect on the potential blind spots the teacher had in their own ability to reflect on their practices or the blind spots I may have had when I was looking at their documents through the researcher lens. I used these reflections as an opportunity to lightly compare the teachers' practices to each other for the sake of identifying areas of emphasis or priorities that they shared in their writing assessment programs.

The second stage of data analysis involved transcribing all six interviews. I chose to undertake this task myself because I wanted to use the transcription process as a means to become very familiar with my data in a way that using a transcription service and reading the transcriptions cannot replicate. Because my focus was on the content of what the teachers were saying, and not necessarily on the tone, inflection, or other more subtle speech patterns, I chose to eliminate filler words like "um" and "uh" for the sake of clarity in the transcription. In a couple of instances, the quality of the recording was unclear enough that I was unable to make out a word or two that was said. In these few instances I indicated the lack of clarity by marking the transcription with "[unclear]" to replace the missing words. Fortunately, this only affected perhaps three or four words in the entire transcription across all three participants, so I don't feel that it significantly impacted my ability to interpret and analyze the content of the interviews.

Following transcription of all six interviews, I spent some time writing reflections on all of the data I had collected so far before I moved on to coding. I wanted to ensure that I was as familiar as possible with all of my data prior to beginning the coding process to help me analyze

and code my data with some awareness of the content of the entire data set. I re-read all of the interview transcripts and documents that had been submitted to me, as well as all of my previous written reflections and other materials to maintain an awareness of how my initial interpretations may be shifting and evolving as I moved deeper into the analysis process. I ended up referring to these reflections frequently throughout the analysis and writing process as a way to track the assumptions that were informing my analysis and the way my interpretations evolved over the course of the analysis process.

In the fourth stage of data analysis I completed my first round of coding. I used NVivo 12 to code all of my data because it allowed me to upload all of my transcripts and documents and then easily code them within the NVivo 12 platform. I created an initial code hierarchy to work from that adjusted as I drew new conclusions, noticed new patterns, and new themes emerged (see Table 2 for the coding manual per round). As Smagorinsky (2008) points out, codes are not static because they serve to illustrate the stance and interpretive approach the researcher brings to the data. For this reason, I saved each round of coding as a separate file so that I was easily able to “go back in time” to earlier rounds of coding as they existed while I was completing each round. This was helpful in allowing me to see how my interpretations evolved over the course of the analysis process.

I used a top-down approach to coding, as described by Erickson (2004), by generating an initial list of codes based on the elements of my construct as well as the reflections I had done on my data to identify initial patterns, areas of emphasis and repeated ideas. This deductive approach provided a detailed analysis of some aspects of the data, but a less rich description of the data (Erickson, 2004) that fell outside of my construct and other areas of focus. That’s not to say that I ignored outlying codes or patterns. Indeed, I added codes as they came up and adjusted

my coding hierarchies in each round of coding. However, I chose to focus primarily on my construct while maintaining an open mind to seemingly irrelevant elements of my data with the awareness that they may become important later on in the process as their significance became more clear.

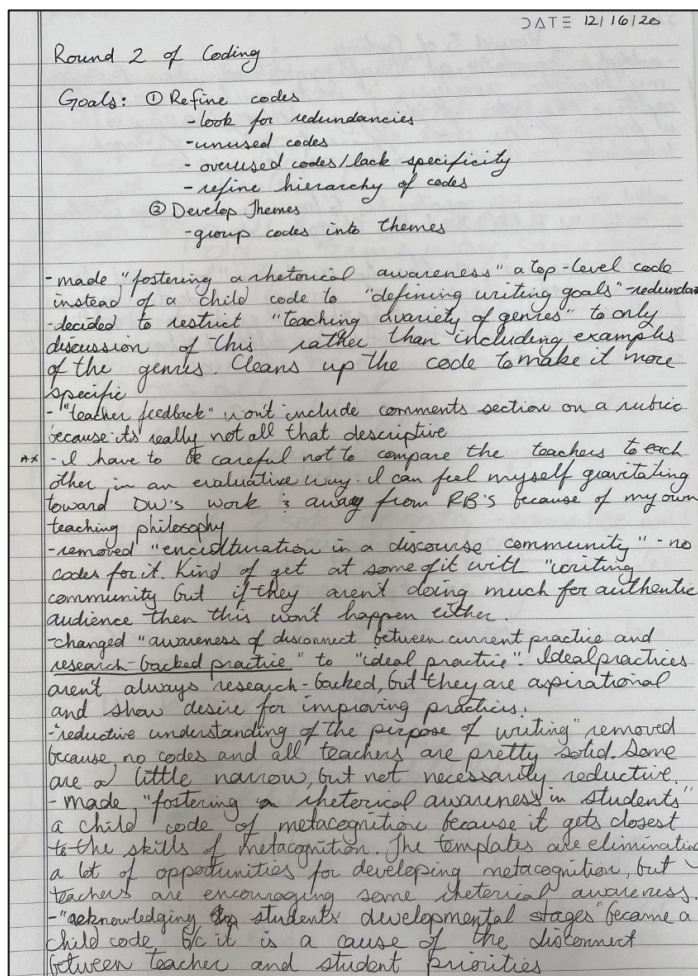
Before moving on to my second round of coding I reflected on the data associated with each participant individually. I listed the most referenced codes related to that participant and made note of any key insights that were coming through at that stage of analysis. I also began an informal list of “big ideas” or insights that I knew I wanted to come back to once I moved further into the analysis process. These were insights or ideas that I felt may become important to the final stages of analysis where I would begin to tie my ideas into a more united and coherent analysis. Many of these “big ideas” did not make it into the final report as they often did not end up being as insightful as I thought, but they were instrumental in helping me reflect on what I was seeing arise from the data and what I was not seeing as I moved through the analysis process.

My goals for my second round of coding were to refine my codes, remedy any redundancies in the coding, reflect on the utility of codes that had gone unused in the first round of coding, adjust codes that seemed overused or that lacked specificity, and refine the hierarchy of my codes as the patterns in the data became clear. I began the coding process with a coding manual that I followed quite closely, but I also added, removed, and refined my codes as I moved through the data. I also made adjustments to the hierarchies of my parent/child codes as I noticed discrepancies between what I assumed the relationship between various codes would be and the reality of the relationships between the codes as represented by the data generated in the interviews.

Recording and reflecting on each of these decisions as I made them became an important part of this fifth stage as it encouraged deeper consideration of the rationale behind each decision and it allowed me to circle back to earlier decisions easily to ensure that they continued to serve the data as I continued the analysis. Table 2 shows the coding hierarchy that emerged by the end of the second round of coding and Figure 5 is a sample of my notes on the decisions I made to change, eliminate, or otherwise adjust my codes and hierarchies as I went through the data.

Figure 5

Notes on Changes to my Coding Manual



The sixth and seventh stages of analysis happened somewhat concurrently. I completed my third round of coding with the goal of generating themes and further refining the codes

themselves and the way I would represent the relationships between them. The process of further refinement of my coding happened in conjunction with analyzing the data for themes. I flowed back and forth between theme identification and analysis and coding the data for a third time as a check-in to the conclusions I was drawing. I generated my themes by re-reading my reflections on each stage of the data gathering and analysis process and interpreting the meaning behind the frequency and coverage of various codes across the data set. Throughout this process I spent ample time on the “big ideas” list I had been generating throughout the process as a starting place to generate codes. The majority of these ideas never made it into the final report, but most of them served an important purpose in clarifying my interpretations of my data as I completed my analysis.

Table 2

Coding Manual Per Round

Parent Codes in First Round of Coding	Child Codes in First Round of Coding	Adjustments in Second Round of Coding	Adjustments in Third Round of Coding	
Articulating clear criteria for assessing writing Authentic Discourse Communities	Teaching rubrics			
	Using exemplars to teach standards			
	Authentic context			
	Aware of importance, but not doing			
	Enculturation in a discourse community			Removed because nothing was coded to it. Overlaps with “participation in a writing community” in this data set.
	Obstacles to incorporation			
Real-world vs. school writing				
Situated writing				
Student engagement				
Teacher-only audience				
			Added “imaginary authentic audience” to capture the use of	

			hypothetical non-teacher audiences in assessments.
Awareness of disconnect between current practice and research-backed practice		Changed wording from “research-backed practice” to “ideal practice” to better represent the breadth of reasons for improving teaching practices.	
Awareness of research-backed practices			
Awareness of writing assessment pitfalls			
Deficit model of assessment			
Defining writing goals	Fostering rhetorical awareness in students	Made “fostering rhetorical awareness” a parent code & eliminated “defining writing goals - redundant	Made “fostering rhetorical awareness” a child code of metacognition as a more accurate representation of the function of this practice in classrooms.
Diploma Exam style assessment			
Disconnect between teacher and student understanding of writing priorities			
Emphasis on progress			
External factors influencing practices	Curricular pressure		
	Demographic challenges		
	Department conformity		
	Diploma pressure		
	Limited instructional time or prep time		
	Teacher experience		
Feedback	Identifying techniques for improving writing		
	Peer feedback		
	Teacher feedback	Does not include “comments” section on rubrics due to lack of specificity.	
Fluidity, flexibility,	Encourages student creativity		

creativity in writing product	Process-oriented teaching	Encourages a multi-step process		
		Providing opportunities for revision		
		Recursive writing process		
Student choice				
Learning how to assess writing	Figuring it out on your own			
	Lack of pre-service training in writing assessment			
	Learning assessment practices from more experienced teachers			
	Marking Diploma Exams			
				Added “accessing PD opportunities”.
Metacognition	Obstacles to incorporation			
	Self-assessment			
	Supporting students in assessing their own work			
			Added “templates as temporary stepping stones” to capture the use of templates as a work around for teaching metacognitive skills directly.	
Modelling writing practices for students				
Participation in a writing community	Obstacles to incorporation			
Product-oriented teaching	Exam environment – surprise topic			
	Limited time for writing			
	Template-driven scaffolding			
Relationship Building				
Teaching a variety of genres	Decided to restrict this code to the discussion of teaching a variety of genres in the interviews instead of including examples of the genres from the documents to			

make the code more specific and useful.

There were, of course, some codes that did not make it into the thematic analysis process and were left as outliers without a home in the final report. These codes have been listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Outlier Codes

Outlier Codes	Description
Reductive understanding of the purpose of writing	Describes the practice of reducing writing assessment to a focus on elements like grammar, spelling, word count and following a template rather than on the content, quality of ideas or skills learned.
Acknowledging Students' developmental stages	Describes teacher awareness of students' abilities to engage or improve their writing skills as a function of their development, rather than their motivation, interest, or underlying skillset.
Situated Writing	Describes a crucial element of addressing authentic discourse communities. Writing tasks that are situated in a real-world context in which they will engage with a pre-existing discourse community.
Deficit Model of Assessment	Describes a tendency of teachers to focus on the mistakes students make or their deficiencies as writers as a means to assign grades or give feedback, rather than focusing on building on the skills students already have to improve their writing.

Accuracy

Throughout this project it was very important to me to ensure that my participants felt that they were represented accurately and fairly. The three teachers I worked with demonstrated considerable vulnerability in that they were willing to openly discuss and share their writing assessment practices even though many of the practices represented in my construct were not present or were only present in a limited way in their current practices. For this reason, it would have been relatively easy to unintentionally position myself as an evaluator of their practices and to express judgment of the practices they use or do not use to assess writing. To avoid this

outcome I had a few checkpoints along the way to help ensure that both myself and my participants felt comfortable with the way they would be represented in the final report.

The first checkpoint was in the question design for my interview questions (see Appendix B for the list of questions). I did my best to write questions that were nonjudgmental or evaluative and that avoided value-based language. For example, rather than asking each teacher, “why don’t you include more strategies to improve the metacognitive capacity of your students?” I would instead ask “what would help you incorporate more self-reflection and more self-assessment?” While the first question both implies a failing on the part of the teacher and assumes a deficit in their students, the second question both implies an acknowledgement of the realities of the challenges of incorporating new or unfamiliar strategies in the classroom and assumes competence and expertise on the part of the teacher in their decision-making process. I also asked follow-up questions throughout all of the interviews to clarify my understanding or to ask for further explanation of a particular idea to help ensure that I was understanding what the teacher was telling me in the way they intended to be understood.

Second, I frequently wrote reflections with the intention of critically examining my own role in the research as it progressed. I wanted to check-in on any assumptions that I seemed to be making or any biases that were emerging as I moved through the data gathering and analysis process. Although my goal was not to remain completely value-free and neutral in my analysis (such a goal is likely impossible), I did want to strive for as complete awareness as possible of what values, assumptions, biases and other potential influences I was bringing to the project as a means to mitigate any unintentional or problematic skewing of the data gathering or analysis.

Finally, following the completion of the bulk of my analysis I emailed each participant complete transcripts of each of the two interviews they did with me as well as a short summary

of my findings and conclusions about their practices as they relate to my research questions. I asked each participant to confirm that they felt comfortable with the way I was interpreting and representing their assessment practices based on the summary I sent them. All three participants replied with expressions of support for how they were represented in the summaries.

Construct Irrelevant Variance

Construct irrelevant variance inevitably influences all research projects, and this one is no exception. The following is a summary of the construct irrelevant variances I have considered throughout the completion of this project:

- Years of teaching experience of each participant: The number of years a teacher has been teaching high school English could have an impact on their priorities and potentially their ability to incorporate elements of my construct into their writing assessment programs. As teachers gain experience and confidence in their writing assessment practices generally, they may be more able and willing to incorporate the practices I have suggested here.
- Teacher education: Teachers with only undergraduate-level of education will likely have a different and potentially more limited awareness of educational research and how to incorporate research-backed practices into their classrooms than teachers with graduate-level education.
- Teaching context: Factors such as school size, restrictive English department policies, class size or classroom makeup, and school community values or cultures could have a significant impact on the extent to which teachers are able or willing to implement or experiment with the practices outlined in my construct.
- Teacher philosophy: It is possible that teachers with a particular professional focus, interest or emphasis tend to be more likely to respond to requests to participate in

research than others. By sampling teachers on a volunteer basis, I could be privileging the voices and experiences of a particular type of teacher over others.

- Permission from school districts: I was given permission to conduct research in 6 school districts out of the 11 that I submitted requests to, but only 4 of those 6 responded to my request to contact teachers directly. Unfortunately, given that I could not contact English teachers directly in all of the districts in which I received approval to conduct research I was functionally denied access to a significant number of potential participants.

Therefore, I ended up with a very limited pool of potential participants from which to choose.

I have designed this research with the goal of capturing the particular contexts, struggles, goals and experiences of each participant with respect to their experiences in navigating the challenges of designing and implementing writing assessment programs within the constraints common to many high school English teachers in Alberta. Although each teacher is influenced by many factors unique to their teaching context and experience as they carry out writing assessment in their classrooms, I found that they also experience many parallels in their experiences despite representing a relatively broad cross-section of school types, teaching contexts, years of experience, and teaching priorities. It is within these parallel factors that the particulars of their experiences take on meaning in illuminating the complexity high school English teachers face as they support their students in developing as writers.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CASE STUDIES

Before analyzing the themes that arose from my analysis of the data, a profile of each case study will provide important context for the thematic analysis and discussion in Chapter Five. First, given the centrality of the two major provincial exams in the decision-making and assessment design of all three participants in this study, I have outlined the format and major components of both the English Language Arts Diploma Exams and the Grade 9 Provincial Achievement Test. Second, a detailed profile of each participants' teaching context, priorities, primary teaching methods, challenges and other factors influencing their writing assessment practices will be presented prior to moving on to an analysis of the emergent themes in the data in the following chapter.

Influence of Provincial Exams on Assessment Practices

Alberta's Diploma Exams exert a very large influence over the teaching and assessment practices of teachers in this province (Slomp, Graves & Broad, 2021; Slomp et al., 2020; Slomp, 2008). The English Language Arts 30-1 Diploma Exam (the exam required for graduation with the English Language Arts course required for admission to university) requires students to write two complete pieces in a maximum of six hours. In the first assignment, the Personal Response to Texts Assignment, students are provided with three texts and a topic to use as the basis for their writing; both the texts and the topics are unknown to the students prior to beginning the exam. The texts are generally some combination of short excerpts from novels, photos, poems, or short essays. Students are then provided with a topic that they must address in a prose form of their choosing that also connects their personal experiences with the topic to one or more of the texts with which they are provided. For example, the January, 2019 English 30-1 Diploma Exam provided students with a poem, an excerpt from a novel, a photo and the following writing

prompt: “What do these texts suggest to you about the interplay between satisfaction and regret in an individual’s life?” (Alberta Education, 2019). This assignment is recommended to be completed in 45-60 minutes and to be approximately 600-1200 words in length, according to the standard instructions that accompany the Diploma Exam. This portion of the exam is worth 20% of the Diploma Exam mark, with the remaining 80% coming from the Critical/Analytical Response to Literary Texts Assignment (30% of the total exam mark) and the multiple choice reading comprehension exam portion of the Diploma Exam (50% of the total exam mark), which is written on a different day.

The second assignment included in the English 30-1 Diploma Exam is the Critical/Analytical Response to Literary Texts Assignment. This assignment is recommended to be completed in 1.5-2 hours and to be approximately 800-1200 words in length. Students are expected to write an essay that critically and analytically examines a text that they studied at some point in their English 30-1 class and that is meaningful to them and is and relevant to the topic they are assigned (a topic they have not seen before opening their exam booklet on exam day). Students are explicitly instructed not to refer to the texts included for the previous assignment (because the topic is often very closely related to the topic of the first assignment), nor are they allowed to have a copy of the text they choose to write about or any other reference material beyond a dictionary and a thesaurus. Although not explicitly stated in the assignment itself (but heavily implied in the rubric used to assess this assignment), students who do well on this portion of the exam demonstrate a detailed and deep understanding of the text they choose to write about by including direct quotes from the text and detailed evidence of events and characters from the text from their memory alone. Although there are likely many strategies used to approach preparing for this challenging assignment, in my experience as an English teacher,

many students tend to try to very deeply review events and memorize quotes from a few different texts that they studied throughout the semester in hopes that those texts will be relevant to the topic they are given on exam day. If students are unable to connect the texts they happened to study in preparation for the exam to the topic they are expected to do the best they can to remember and apply their understanding of a more relevant text to the topic instead. For the January 2019 Diploma Exam, students were provided with the following topic, “Discuss the idea(s) developed by the text creator in your chosen text about the ways in which the feelings of satisfaction and regret influence an individual’s actions” (Alberta Education, 2019). According to the materials provided with the exam, these two writing assignments are designed to be completed in approximately 3 hours, but students are given up to 6 hours to complete both assignments in a tightly controlled exam environment. The fact that there is a strict time limit combined with surprise topics about which students must write makes for a very challenging exam for many Grade 12 English students.

The English Language Arts 30-2 Diploma Exam (the exam required for the completion of the non-academic, college/trades/workplace stream of English) includes three assignments: a Visual Reflection (10% of the total exam mark), a Literary Exploration Essay (25% of the total exam mark), and a Persuasive Writing in Context assignment (15% of the total exam mark), with the remaining 50% of the exam’s value accounted for by the multiple choice reading comprehension exam that is written on a different day. For the visual reflection assignment, students are given a photo that captures some aspect of an experience in the life of a person or a real-life situation of some kind, often with a caption that briefly describes the photo (see Figure 6 for a sample). The photos are not abstract and they tend to leave enough to the imagination that students can imagine the stories behind the experiences of the people in them while still being

concrete and realistic enough for virtually any student to latch on to a relevant or interesting idea to write about. Students are instructed to respond personally, critically, and/or creatively to the photo in a prose form in response to the following prompt: “What ideas and impressions does the photograph suggest to you? Consider the context, and develop your response by referring to the photograph” (Alberta Education, 2017). This assignment is designed to be completed in 30 to 40 minutes and is generally seen as a “warm-up” to the rest of the exam.

Figure 6

Photo Prompt for the Visual Reflection Assignment in the January 2017 English 30-2 Diploma Exam

Children cross a river in the Philippines on their way to school.



AP-Bullit Marquez/The Canadian Press

The second assignment included in the English 30-2 Diploma Exam is the Literary Exploration Essay. For this assignment, students are provided with a short excerpt from a novel or short story or a short personal essay or article to read. They are then instructed to write an essay that addresses the assigned topic that they have not seen before that connects the topic to a character from a text they studied in their English 30-2 class. They are also encouraged to connect the topic to the provided reading or to their own personal experiences, but these are merely suggestions and are not required for the exam. In the January, 2017 English 30-2 Diploma Exam, students were assigned the topic, “What is your opinion of the idea that an individual’s life can be altered by a particular experience?” to address in essay form. Like the English 30-1 Diploma Exam, students are only allowed to access a dictionary and a thesaurus and cannot have a copy of the text they have chosen to write their essay about. Although the standards are lower, to do well on this essay students are expected to demonstrate fairly detailed and accurate evidence from their chosen text in the form of descriptions of events from the text, quotes or other information that they must provide from memory. This assignment is designed to be completed in about 70-80 minutes.

Finally, the English 30-2 Diploma Exam concludes with the Persuasive Writing in Context assignment, worth 15% of the total exam mark and designed to be completed in approximately 40-50 minutes. For this assignment, students are given a proposal for a potential solution to an issue in a hypothetical school or community about which they are expected to express an opinion of acceptance or rejection of the proposal. For example, in the January 2017 Diploma Exam, students were asked to accept or reject a school council proposal to implement a Bring Your Own Device policy (Alberta Education, 2017). To help students formulate an

opinion, a series of sources are provided that express opinions, statistics, anecdotes and other information on both side of the issue. Student are to respond to this prompt persuasively in either a letter or a speech. Although students tend to achieve higher marks when they use information outside of what is provided to them in the exam booklet sources, students can essentially provide a coherent argument supporting one side of the issue exclusively using information provided to them in the exam and still do well on this portion of the exam.

The final provincial exam that is relevant to this project is the Grade 9 Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test (PAT). Donna is the only participant in this study that currently teaches Language Arts 9, but this exam does inform and influence her practice, so a brief summary of the format of this exam is important. Like the Diploma Exam, the PAT is divided into two sections written on two different days: the written portion of the exam and the reading comprehension portion of the exam. For the written portion of the exam, students complete two assignments. The first is worth 65% of the written portion of the exam and it involves writing either an essay or a narrative based on a topic the students have not seen before the day of the exam. The topics tend to be very general and accessible and are accompanied by a variety of materials to help students generate ideas, such as quotes and images that they can choose to refer to in their writing. For example, the topic for the 2019 PAT instructed students to write about the importance of taking personal responsibility in one's life (Alberta Education, 2019). This portion of the exam is designed to be completed in approximately 70 minutes.

The second assignment in the PAT is worth 35% of the written portion of the exam mark and it involves writing a properly formatted business letter and properly addressing an envelope. The assignment requires students to respond to an issue by expressing the assigned opinion about the provided topic. On the 2019 PAT, for example, students were asked to write a letter that

presents arguments in support of the establishment of a school-based mentorship program in order to convince the recipient of the letter that the establishment of such a program would be beneficial to the school community (Alberta Education, 2019). For this assignment, students are not expected to formulate their own opinion, rather they are expected to competently follow business letter format to write a letter that expresses an assigned opinion. This assignment is designed to be completed in approximately 40 minutes. Two key difference between the stakes of the Diploma Exam and the PAT is that the classroom teacher determines the weighting of the exam for their students and these exams are not mandatory for students to write should their parents choose to exempt them from the exam (however, most students in Alberta do write the PAT).

Case Study 1: Donna

Teacher Experience and School Context

Donna works in a small, rural school district in Southern Alberta. According to the web site of Donna's school district, about 3500 students are served across 20 schools and 19 Hutterian Brethren schools. Because most of these schools are located in small towns and tiny rural villages, many of the schools benefit from heavy community involvement and small class sizes. The atmosphere at many of these schools is familial and intimate due to the close relationships built over years of students being taught by the same teachers across many grades and subjects. The district website also emphasizes the relatively high percentage of English Language Learners (ELLs) that make up their student body. Approximately 40% of the students writing the grade three Provincial Achievement Test are ELLs. The vast majority of these students are Low German-speaking Mennonite students who have recently immigrated from Mexico and other South American countries. This influx of ELLs has been an ongoing trend for approximately the last ten years in the district and is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

Another significant source of ELLs in the district is the student population that attends the schools on the Hutterite colonies in the district. These students are also Low German-speakers and the district has experienced a steady increase in the number of Hutterian Brethren schools they serve. The district also emphasizes that they serve a higher-than-average percentage of students with special needs relative to the rest of the province. Finally, the district website emphasizes that despite the potentially complicating factors of having a high percentage of ELLs and special needs students writing Provincial Achievement Tests and Diploma Exams each year, the district as a whole generally meets or exceeds provincial standards on both assessments. This emphasis indicates the high priority placed on academic achievement in this school district despite a relatively academically high-needs student population.

Donna has been teaching English in this district for 13 years, all of which have been spent teaching high school students. She typically teaches Language Arts 9 as well as most of the academic and non-academic stream English Language Arts 10, 20 and 30 courses. Indeed, the only high school English course Donna does not teach is the English 30-1 course. This course is taught by one her colleagues. The school in which Donna teaches is one of the larger schools in the district with a student body of approximately 375 students. Her classes typically include about 24 students and Donna describes her classes, and her school generally, as quite homogenous in that she doesn't normally have a large percentage of students from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds. This makes her school somewhat of an anomaly in a district with a relatively high percentage of ELLs and special needs students.

My interviews with Donna gave me the impression that her teaching is somewhat "out of the box" compared to the rest of her department, who she describes as a group of long-serving teachers nearing the end of their careers. Despite her emphasis on teaching practices that don't

always align pedagogically with her colleagues, she does feel well-supported by her fellow English teachers to teach her classes the way she wants. However, Donna does describe at least some pressure to ensure that her practices align closely enough to those of her colleagues to ensure that her students are well-prepared for success regardless of which English teacher they have. Donna gives the strong impression of a teacher who is both self-assured in teaching practices that are backed by many years of experience and willing to seek professional development opportunities to continue to self-reflect and improve on areas of growth that she has identified.

Areas of Emphasis and Beliefs About Writing

Donna's writing assessment practices are framed by writer's workshop model with a heavy emphasis on student choice and creativity. Donna focuses deeply on the writing process in her classroom by providing students with mentor texts and skills-focused mini-lessons to shore up any gaps she notices in their writing skills. She has found that "having [the students] write like the writer has been really effective, especially getting kids to be more. . .descriptive. [They] really hear . . . a voice in their writing" (Donna, First Interview). In addition to encouraging students to write like writers, Donna encourages a great deal of choice in her assessments to give students ample opportunity to experiment with a wide variety of strategies, genres, and voices within the parameters of her writing assessment program (see Table 4 for a summary of the documents Donna submitted for analysis). Figure 7 shows two excerpts from two of Donna's writing assessments that demonstrate the way she pushes students to tap into their creativity and to experiment widely in their writing.

Table 4*Summary of the Writing Assessments and Supporting Documents Submitted by Donna*

Name of Document	Brief Description	Provincial Exam Genre (Y/N)
Persuasive Writing Notes	A planning scaffold for persuasive essay writing that includes summaries of the major parts of this genre, a chart for planning an argument and a sample of a persuasive essay.	N
Persuasive Writing Topics	A list of yes/no questions designed to elicit opinions as prompts for persuasive essay writing. Accompanies above notes.	N
Persuasive Writing Rubric	The rubric used to assess the completed essays. Includes a “thought and support” category and a “writing skills” category that is borrowed heavily from the Provincial Achievement Test Rubric.	Y
Point of View Writing	A creative writing project in which students are asked to either re-write a story that was read in class from the same point of view but from a different central character or from a different point of view.	N
Personal Essay	Students are to write a personal essay about a central thesis that will immerse the reader in the writer’s experience and convey a lesson of some kind. Includes the Diploma Exam rubric for the Personal Response to Texts Assignment and a planning scaffold.	Y (an optional genre for the Personal Response to Texts Assignment)
Non-fiction Project	Students are to produce both a personal essay and a vlog/podcast with the purpose of informing, persuading or entertaining their audience about a non-fiction topic of their choosing.	N
Script Writing Assignment	Students are to write a four-page screenplay depicting a scene of their own design and choosing. Students are expected to include dialogue and camera angles and to follow screenplay format.	N

Figure 7

Examples of Encouraging Student Choice in Topic in Donna's Writing Assessments

<u>Topics</u>
Will technology reduce or increase human employment opportunities? What age should children be allowed to have mobile phones? Should pets be adopted rather than bought from a breeder? Should libraries be replaced with unlimited access to e-books? Has technology helped connect people or isolate them? Should mobile phone use in public places be regulated? Do violent video games make people more violent? Should recycling be mandatory? Should voting be made compulsory? Should school cafeterias only offer healthy food options? Should all zoos and aquariums be closed?
OR: You can choose (or adapt, of course) one of these more general choices: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A scene from a sports movie• A thinks B is having an affair with his / her wife / husband• Cattlemen rounding up the herd• Family at a dinner table where they each have an announcement to make• Teenage partner meeting girlfriends parents for the first time• Getting up in the morning• A discusses with B that an ex-girl / boyfriend wishes to remain friends with him / her.• Father and Mother arguing over the suitability of a girl / boyfriend with son / daughter in the room• First date.• Policeman interrogating a suspect• Two people in a coffee shop having an argument• Cab driver and customer• Deleted scenes from "Titanic" (or any other well known film)• A couple on a holiday

Note. A list of possible topics for students to choose from for Donna's Persuasive Essay Assignment and Script Writing Assignment, respectively.

From this foundation of strong writing instruction, Donna strives to ensure that her students have a clear sense of what she is looking for in their finished product by spending ample time in her instructional time by having students work with the rubric she will use to assess their work and by guiding students in analyzing exemplars to firmly establish a sense of the standards for which they should be aiming. Donna admits that there have been “a few times, when [she’s] given an assessment and a kid spends a long time doing it and they don’t get the result that they’re looking for and [she realized] that it’s actually the assessment’s fault and not the kid’s fault” (Donna, First Interview), but as a reflective teacher committed to continual improvement these missteps have prompted her to emphasize “making sure the directions are really clear,

having exemplars available, giving rubrics. . . that have descriptors of what [she is assessing]” (Donna, First Interview) to ensure the validity of her assessments. Figure 8 is an example of a list of requirements and a rubric that Donna gives to students to accompany her Script Writing Assignment. The descriptors are quite clear and straightforward, so students have an accurate sense of what she is looking for in their work to accompany the extensive instruction she gives during class to further clarify her expectations for her students.

Figure 8

The Scoring Rubric for Donna’s Script Writing Assignment

Required Elements:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Four page script that includes dialogue, stage directions, appropriate sound, camera angles and shots ▪ Four screenshots from your screenplay (drawn on the following paper) that include the type of shot and angle, along with a description of what is happening in the shot 				
	4	3	2	1
Storyline	Interesting and illuminates human nature	Thoughtful and well established	Clear and complete	Uninteresting, lacking detail or unfinished
Stage directions, appropriate sound, camera angles, and shots X2	Telling, well-chosen and add interest and information to the script. This script could be performed.	Music, shots are angles are used throughout to give direction to the reader.	Some direction, shots and angles are given but the script is lacking control because the direction is minimal	Many places were description is needed is missing, additions aren’t clear or helpful
Screenshots	Correctly drawn, colorful and neat			Incorrectly drawn and/or lacking color
Comments:				/16 marks

Donna also often uses the rubrics provided by the Alberta government for assessing provincial exams as well as the samples released by the government to further align her writing standards with those of the province. She “uses the [Diploma Exam and PAT] rubrics for almost everything” (Donna, First Interview), even adapting rubrics for non-provincial exam genres from the provincial exam rubrics so that there’s “at least some component of some PAT or Diploma [rubric]” (Donna, First Interview) to familiarize students with the language and standards of these exams as core expectations across her writing assessment program. Donna also

occasionally strives to build her students' analytical skills when she is teaching a new genre by providing exemplars for her students to explore in a more open-ended manner than is possible when teaching new genres with templates. She does this by “show[ing her students] an exemplar. . . and [she has] them look at the text, like ‘what do you notice?’” (Donna, First Interview) and guides the students through “pick[ing] apart” (Donna, First Interview) the text to identify the unique features and characteristics of the genre in hopes that they will then use this information to complete their own version of the genre. Although Donna knows that this would be the ideal way to expose students to new genres of writing in her classroom, she also acknowledges that she does not feel she is able to take this approach as often as she'd like due to time constraints imposed by limited instructional time and the pressure of preparing students for provincial exams.

As evidenced both by my interviews with Donna and by the writing assessment documents she shared with me, it is clear that Donna is open to students using the guidelines she communicates in her assignments as starting places for students to use to branch out and experiment from. She values student choice and autonomy in writing as she guides them through the writers' workshop model in her classroom. Donna is a skills-focused teacher. Other than her English 20-1 class, in which she structures her units around pieces of literature to better prepare students for the teacher who will teach them English 30-1, Donna “base[s her] units on a particular skill” and supporting her students in applying the finite skills to larger pieces of writing. For example, in the Language Arts 9 classes she “start[s] with a paragraph” (Donna, First Interview) by asking her students “can you write a descriptive paragraph?” (Donna, First Interview) and “look[ing] at some examples. And then, moving that forwards towards being able to write a story at the end of the first unit” (Donna, First Interview).

Over the course of her career the skills and genres Donna focuses on in her courses have broadened beyond the non-fiction genres emphasized in the Provincial Achievement Test (PAT) and the Diploma exam to include more creative writing that serves the dual purpose of preparing her students for the rigors of the creative portions of the PAT and Diploma exam, while also giving students the opportunity to deepen and broaden their writing skills in a wide variety of genres. The documents that Donna submitted to me included genres like personal essays, scripts, screenplays, and creative writing projects involving personal narratives or adapting existing texts to tell a story from an alternative point of view. Donna also includes non-fiction genres like persuasive essays and multi-media projects that include both digital text creation and written text creation in her assessment programs. She rounds out her assessment program with the genres required by the Diploma Exam and PAT: business letters, narrative storytelling, personal essays based on a given topic, critical analysis of literature essays, visual reflections, and persuasive speech and letter writing.

Donna further supports her students' writing development by providing ample feedback both during the writing process and after the students have submitted an assignment for marking. She encourages students who are seeking guidance during the writing process to ask her to read for help with a particular struggle they are having in their piece to encourage them to develop rhetorical awareness of their motives as writers. She discourages students from asking the broad question, "is this good?" when seeking feedback in favour of more specific questions about organization, sentence structure, content and other elements of their writing that show a deeper reflection on their own goals as writers. She hopes that by taking this approach her students will "eventually figure out what it is they are working on in each moment as they are writing" (Donna, First Interview) thus developing the rhetorical awareness and metacognitive capacity

necessary to deeply develop transferable writing skills as they progress through their high school English classes.

Despite this robust and reflective writing assessment practice that shows a deep understanding of writing development in students, Donna has no trouble identifying areas of opportunity for growth and improvement in her writing assessment practices. For example, Donna is very aware of the myriad benefits of having students write for authentic audiences outside of herself and their fellow students. She has made attempts to organize these opportunities for students in the past because of her belief in their value for student writers. However, she finds that curricular pressure and time constraints make it very difficult to make authentic audiences a core element of her writing assessment program. Donna is evidently a highly reflective teacher. She seeks out professional development opportunities that will challenge and expand her teaching practices even though she is a well-established and experienced teacher. In our interviews she described the massive influence popular professional development writers like Penny Kittle, Kelly Gallagher, and Donnalyn Miller have had on the way she teaches English Language Arts; she has even gone so far as to travel to other provinces to attend professional development sessions hosted by these writers. Donna also described times she has attended professional development sessions hosted by professors at the university near the community where she teaches. Donna's ongoing commitment to self-improvement and seeking high-quality professional development is a testament to her desire to serve the needs of her students to the very best of her ability.

She also described her practice of using student self-reflections as a means to gather feedback about her teaching to support and challenge her own reflections about her strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. She has her students rate themselves on a three-point scale or write

short reflections based on questions like “what part did you have the most trouble with in this assignment? And then how did you deal with it in that way?” (Donna, Second Interview). She sees the purpose of these reflections as two-fold. First, the reflections “show to her that [the students] look at their piece and [she] can kind of see how they deal with it” (Donna, Second Interview) and they “help [her] in [her] practice too because it helps [her] recognize where [she] need[s] to. . .change the assignment. Maybe the wording doesn’t come to them as it does to [her]” (Donna, Second Interview). Donna possesses a clear self-confidence in her teaching while also maintaining a desire to continually improve and grow in her profession by seeking opportunities to learn about current writing assessment research and practices that she eagerly works to incorporate into her classroom.

Themes Emerging from the Data

Donna views both the Grade 9 PAT and the Diploma Exam as professional obligations for which she must prepare students as best she can. Based on my interviews with Donna, my impression is that she may not teach the PAT and Diploma Exam genres at all were it not for the fact that these exams are a requirement for students in Alberta. Based on the variety of genres represented in the documents she sent me, Donna values building the skills of student writers across a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction genres and both personal and creative writing. Additionally, she designs her assessments with student engagement in mind with a focus on incorporating assessments that “the students are going to think is cool” (Donna, Second Interview) in hopes of both maximizing skill development and building students’ enjoyment in the writing process. Donna does not necessarily see the writing genres required in the exams as completely without value for her students, but the requirement to prepare students for these two high-stakes exams pulls her attention, focus, and time away from skills and genres she feels would likely have more value for her students’ development as competent writers. As a result,

Donna must navigate the tension between her awareness of what writing assessment practices would best serve her students based on her own self-reflection and professional development, and the requirement to ensure her students are well-prepared to write these exams at the end of their Grade 9 and Grade 12 years.

Donna uses a variety of strategies to balance preparing students for provincial exams and encouraging her students' growth as writers beyond the requirements of the exam. First, she blocks out time for exam preparation as her first step in planning a course for the semester. This shows that exam preparation is a relatively high priority for Donna, at least in terms of fulfilling professional obligations. Donna also uses this strategy to clearly see exactly how much time she can spend on writing assessments that are not directly related to preparing for the exam. The exam preparation instruction that Donna plans for each semester is scheduled to happen right before the exams are written because "some of the things they are doing, they're not purposeful for [her] necessarily" (First Interview). Donna conceptualizes the provincial exams as "jump[ing] through hoops" (First Interview) to some degree. She acknowledges that there is some value in the standardizing effect of having all students in a grade write the same exam in the sense that this data gives teachers across the province a benchmark against which they can measure their own students to ensure some validity in grade-level skill development. In fact, Donna cited marking the English 30-2 Diploma as a highly valuable professional development opportunity for this exact reason. Despite some trepidation about the overall value of the PAT and the Diploma Exam for student learning, Donna does her best to strike a balance between exam preparation and following her own instincts and experience in developing her students' writing skills.

Even though she fully recognizes the limitations of the provincial exams as a robust, comprehensive assessment of student writing skills, Donna does rely quite heavily on the rubrics and exemplars provided by Alberta Education in her classroom to both teach students how to self-assess and peer-assess writing and as a major component of her own assessment of her students' writing across the variety of genres she teaches. Donna "uses the rubrics for almost everything. There's at least a component of some PAT or Diploma" (Second Interview) rubric in each of the rubrics she uses to assess student writing regardless of whether or not they are writing a Diploma or PAT genre. This demonstrates that the standards, language and priorities put forth by the PAT and the Diploma Exam have been internalized by Donna, at least to some degree, as an effective means of assessing student writing. However, she also recognizes and tries to communicate to students that there are important differences between how a provincial exam would be marked by external examiners and how their writing will be assessed in class. She defines the distinction between assessing "first draft writing" (Second Interview) on the marking floor in Edmonton and assessing a writing project that students had "months to work on" (Second Interview) as two very different lenses through which to view a piece. Although Donna does rely heavily on the rubrics and exemplars provided by the Alberta government, she also encourages her students to understand that the provincial exams create a very specific and limited context for writing that does not necessarily perfectly align with how they write in class; consequently, they should expect that her assessment of their writing will reflect the fact that they have had ample opportunity for self-assessment, peer-assessment, revision and feedback from her.

Barriers to Implementing Ideal Assessment Practices. During our second interview, Donna and I had a conversation about the idea of "received wisdom" for new English Language

Arts teachers. We defined this concept as the practices that more experienced teachers encourage new teachers to use in their English classrooms. These practices are not always supported by the latest research in English Language Arts instruction. Indeed, this “received wisdom” often includes fairly prescriptive and traditional practices like teaching “the canon”, completing chapter worksheets for novel studies, and using templates like the five-paragraph-essay structure to teach writing. Donna’s reflections on this topic revealed a sense of confidence in her teaching practices that balanced her desire for improvement and her self-assured approach to using instructional and assessment techniques that the rest of her colleagues in the English department do not use. As she gathered more and more years of experience in high school English classrooms, Donna settled into her own style and her own priorities as a teacher. She came to realize that the priorities and techniques commonly used by her more experienced colleagues “actually [didn’t] match [her] teaching style” (Donna, Second Interview), which prompted her to break out of the traditional assessment practices used across the English Department at her school to find a way to teach and assess writing that felt more aligned with the teaching style to which she aspired.

Her teaching experiences were bolstered by professional development sessions with popular writers for professional development in reading and writing in the English Language Arts field, like Kelly Gallagher, Penny Kittle, and Donnalyn Miller who gave her what she saw as a really viable alternative to what the rest of her department of more experienced teachers were doing. These professional development opportunities combined with having the experience of marking the English 30-2 Diploma Exam gave her the confidence to abandon practices that she felt were not serving her preferred teaching style or her students’ learning needs. Donna abandoned the widespread practice of using worksheets and chapter questions to teach text

analysis to students in favour of the writers' workshop and process-oriented writing instruction and assessment that she uses now. Donna succinctly captured this sentiment in our second interview: "I would say probably after I started to mark exams, for sure, it was like, it's time to stop with the questions and books – like enough. I hate marking things that I know kids have copied or done together. This is a waste of my time" (Second Interview).

Along with her self-awareness and commitment to career-long learning, Donna also possesses the valuable ability to critically examine both her own assessment practices and the way that external factors influence her assessment decisions. Donna gives frequent verbal and written feedback on all of her students' writing assessments, but, like many English teachers, she struggles with the disconnect between the students' desire to simply receive a mark and move on and her own desire to encourage them to use the feedback to improve their writing skills. Whereas Donna is focused on skill development, many of her students are focused on task completion. Donna sets up the teaching and assessment processes in her classroom to encourage students to use a recursive writing process. Indeed, "if [Donna doesn't] see any process in class [she] gets super suspicious" of whether or not her students have done the work to complete the writing project themselves or if the student "want[s] to get 1000% and they think that they'll do anything to get it" (Second Interview). Donna expresses frustration at the fact that many students are so focused on their grades that they often disregard or minimally consider the feedback she gives them. We discussed the possibility of returning student work with only written feedback and no mark as a means to emphasize the importance of using feedback to improve their writing. Donna is aware of the potential value of these types of practices, but has her doubts about whether "kids [are] really going to internalize those things any more than if we just gave them a mark" (Second Interview). Although the tension between student priorities and her own priorities

will be an ongoing issue in her classroom, Donna has found that allowing students to re-do and re-submit their work for a better mark has made some headway in encouraging students to use teacher feedback to improve their writing skills. Donna acknowledges that “they are only doing it because they get a better grade. They would never do it if it was just for fun” (Second Interview), but she has clear confidence in the potential of this technique to encourage student growth in their writing. The combination of Donna’s self-awareness of her strengths and weaknesses as a teacher, coupled with her commitment to career-long learning and the critical lens through which she evaluates her writing assessment practices layer together to create a sense that Donna’s students greatly benefit from her robust and self-reflective teaching and assessment practices as they progress through their high school English courses at her school.

Case Study 2: Rachel

Teacher Experience and School Context

Rachel’s school district serves approximately 7000 students across 3 high schools, 3 middle schools and 11 elementary schools in a small city in Southern Alberta. According to the school district’s website this district serves families from a variety of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The city in which Rachel teaches was founded on and continues to be primarily supported by blue collar industries and the city enjoys a relatively high socio-economic status. Rachel teaches at one of the high schools in the city. Her school has approximately 1300 students from grades 7-12, but the school website describes the middle school portion of the school as “a small school within a school”, so the younger students are kept quite separate from the high school students that Rachel teaches. The school is also host to the French Immersion Program offered by the school district.

Rachel has been teaching for 16 years total, with 14 of those years spent teaching high school English. She typically teaches English classes of about 30 students in grades 10 through

12 in both the academic and non-academic streams of English 10, 20 and 30. She describes her classes as relatively homogenous in terms of cultural and linguistic background as one of the other high schools in the city hosts the majority of the ELLs in the school district. Rachel is clearly an experienced teacher with well-articulated and systematic plans for how she carries out writing assessment in her classroom. Although she almost exclusively focuses her writing assessment program in all grade levels on the genres of writing included in the Diploma Exam, she also gives students unassessed opportunities to experiment with personal and creative genres as well. Rachel doesn't necessarily place a heavy emphasis on experimentation in her writing assessment practices, but she has a clear commitment to helping her students grow as writers throughout their time in her class.

Areas of Emphasis and Beliefs About Writing

Rachel structures her writing assessment program through all of the classes she teaches as a systematic progression toward success on the Diploma Exam (see Table 5 for a summary of the documents Rachel submitted for analysis). When students enter her English 10-1 class they “learn the Critical [Analytical Response to Literature Essay] and then [they] go over it again in Grade 11 and add the Personal [Response to Text] in Grade 11. And then focus on perfecting them or strengthening them in Grade 12” (Rachel, Second Interview). Rachel's understanding of the standards as outlined by the Diploma Exam is informed by her years of experience marking the exams. She imparts this understanding to her students by relying heavily on the exemplars released by the Alberta government as samples for her students to analyze and internalize using the Diploma Exam rubrics. She front-loads her students' analysis by having them refer to a series of “planners” (Rachel, First Interview) that outline three different organizational methods for the genres: writing about how three different characters in a text relate to the assigned topic, writing about how three different situations in a text relate to the assigned topic, and choosing one

character and tracing their arc throughout the text as it connects to the assigned topic. Rachel explicitly teaches her students these three organizational strategies prior to their analysis of the exemplars, so her students focus on examining the exemplars to see the extent to which the samples fit the planners and to glean what they can about what an “Excellent”, “Proficient” and “Satisfactory” essay looks like. Her goal is to “show [her students] that you can do well with all three options” (Rachel, Second Interview). Exam preparation is further supported in Rachel’s class through ample written feedback on all completed pieces of writing and her encouragement to revise and re-submit their writing based on this feedback for an improvement on their grade.

Table 5

Summary of the Writing Assessments and Supporting Documents Submitted by Rachel

Name of Document	Brief Description	Provincial Exam Genre (Y/N)
Discussion Questions	Students are to use the list of discussion questions as a guide to analyzing the characters of a short story through group discussion in preparation for a character analysis assignment.	N
Sample Character Analysis	Three sample character analysis paragraphs at three different levels of competency are provided as a guide for students when they write their own paragraphs. Also included is a fill-in-the-blank scaffold for writing their own paragraphs on a character of their choosing.	N (intended to scaffold to the Critical/Analytical Response to Texts Assignment)
Character Analysis Rubric	The rubric used to assess the character analysis paragraphs. Features similar emphasis to the Diploma Exam Rubric for the Critical/Analytical Response to Text Assignment.	N
Critical Notes	A detailed summary of how to write the Critical/Analytical Response to Texts assignment for the English 30-1 Diploma Exam. Includes descriptions of major sections to include in the essay and key features including length, number of paragraphs and other elements.	Y
The Critical Essay Format	An outline of each paragraph for the Critical/Analytical Response to Texts Assignment to scaffold planning and writing for students in English 10-1/20-1/30-1.	Y
Student Exemplar	A sample of student planning for the Critical/Analytical Response to Text Assignment as well as a sample essay written based on the planning.	Y

In Rachel's classroom, her students are provided with clear, guided templates, scaffolds and notes that fully outline the various sections, organizational structures, and features of each of the Diploma Exam genres (see Figure 9 for examples). These supports give students the step-by-step guide they need to produce competent versions of the Diploma Exam rubrics. This practice is driven by the efficiency of conveying the expectations students have to fulfill to write the genres they will need to write on their Diploma exam within the confines of large class sizes and limited instructional time. In our interviews, Rachel discussed the difficulty of giving students a "formula" for completing these essays. In her view, "Language Arts [is] not always a science. . . so you can't hand out formulas" (Rachel, First Interview), but her assessments and scaffolds do emphasize set structures and templates for students to use which essentially amount to a formulaic, step-by-step approach to writing the genres she teaches. Indeed, students are left with very few meaningful decisions to make in terms of structure and organization in their writing so long as they follow the templates they are given.

Rachel feels her templates can serve as starting places for students to hopefully move beyond at some future point in their writing development, but she also knows that the structures she encourages will achieve success on the Diploma Exam. However, students are allowed to break away from the templates she provides. This usually happens in the form of experimenting with different argument structures than the ones presented in class or by choosing characters to write about that may not be the most obvious choices based on class instruction. Although she is open to this experimentation, Rachel also expresses frustration or confusion over why students may abandon the templates and scaffolds she provides and then produce a piece of writing that does not approach the standards she taught through exemplars and rubrics in class. She found that "some of [her students] totally broke the mold and they did great because they don't need

that kind of support [to competently reproduce the Diploma Exam genres]. And some kids almost. . . copied [the template] . . . and they really needed that scaffolding support” (Rachel, Second Interview). This seems to indicate that although Rachel’s hope for her students is to build the skills they need to move away from relying on templates, this goal may not be fully supported by the type of scaffolding emphasized by Rachel.

Figure 9

Samples of Rachel’s Planning and Writing Scaffolds for Diploma Exam Genres

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>The Critical Essay Format</u></p> <p>Topic:</p> <p>Introduction <u>Opening Statement (Hook):</u> Thesis: <u>Blueprint Sentence:</u> use title of text, author and name of character</p> <p>Body Paragraph 1 <u>Topic Sentence:</u> <u>Supporting Details</u> – Evidence from the text and explanations <u>Concluding/Transitioning Statement:</u></p> <p>Body Paragraph 2 <u>Topic Sentence:</u> <u>Supporting Details</u> – <u>Concluding/Transitioning Statement:</u></p> <p>Body Paragraph 3 <u>Topic Sentence:</u> <u>Supporting Details</u>– <u>Concluding/Transitioning Statement:</u></p> <p>Conclusion Reiterate Blueprint: Restate Thesis: Closing Statement(s) (relate to Opener):</p>	<p>4) Fill in the planning page.</p> <p>5) Write your composition double-spaced in 12 point easy-to-read font.</p> <p>6) Use powerful, connotative words. Do not be bland! Do not use: nice, bad, good, thing, etc.</p> <p>7) Do not use “I”, “me”, “you”. You may use “one” or “a person” if necessary, but remember the focus of this essay is not on YOU, but on your chosen character and how they fit the topic.</p> <p>8) If you are capable, use a variety of sentence types, lengths and sentence starters: “ly” words, “ing” verbs, prepositions (beneath, toward, etc), descriptive words (tall purple flowers, round bales of hay, etc).</p> <p>9) Write in the PRESENT tense.</p> <p>10) Aim for about 4 pages, 1000 words. Nobody counts.</p> <p>11) Check for spelling and grammar.</p> <p>12) Read it out loud to yourself. Sometimes we don’t catch mistakes on the screen that we will on the page. Did you stay on topic?</p>
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Note. Excerpts from Rachel’s “The Critical Essay Format” student handout and “Critical Essay Notes”, respectively.

Each Diploma exam genre is revisited multiple times per semester to give students ample opportunity to practice writing each genre. For each round of practice students are given class time to write the genre, written feedback from Rachel after they submit it, and an opportunity to revise based on that feedback and re-submit the piece for an improved grade. This means that in

one semester, approximately, 5 months in length, students will spend a significant amount of their class time focused on preparing for their Diploma Exam. These genres define all of the decisions about writing assessment in Rachel's classroom. One of her future goals is to work on incorporating more creative genres, outside of personal and analytical essays, because these genres will provide students with more options for what genres they can write for the Personal Response portion of the Diploma Exam. In this way, the requirements of the Diploma Exam both narrowly define Rachel's writing assessment practices by limiting her focus to Diploma genres, and encourage her to explore teaching a wider variety of genres to her students in hopes that this variety will better prepare them for writing the exam in Grade 12.

Rachel further supports students who are striving for excellence on their Diploma exam by hosting a weekly 30-minute tutorial during which she and a small group of students meet to explore, analyze and talk about Diploma exam samples before practicing writing the genres in this small group setting. The tutorial gives Rachel the opportunity to reach students who are striving to build their skills beyond what Rachel feels she can reasonably provide in class where the skill levels of the students are far more diverse. Giving these high-achieving students the opportunity for more focused instruction on only the higher-end of the Diploma Exam rubric is a testament to Rachel's commitment to her students' success on this provincial exam.

Themes Emerging from the Data

Influence of Provincial Exams on Assessment Practices. As has been established in previous sections of this chapter, Rachel's writing assessment practices are almost entirely focused on preparing students to write for the Diploma Exam. When Rachel and I discussed what proportion of her writing assessments are directly linked to Diploma Exam genres, Rachel admitted that "most of [the] writing pieces are" (Second Interview) and the ones that are not directly linked to the Diploma genres she tends not to mark "but all [the] skills [they develop

when writing these genres] will help them” (Second Interview) do well on the Diploma Exam as well. However, Rachel does see value in having students experience and experiment with creative genres and personal writing genres in her class, but she expresses discomfort in actually marking these pieces because they are so personal to students. This is an understandable hesitation, but it does have the side effect of indirectly communicating to students that the only writing that matters is the writing that will prepare them for their Diploma exam; everything else is simply fun experimentation without the same value as the Diploma Exam genres in their writing lives.

During our second interview, Rachel was careful to point out that approximately “60-70% of what we do is not Diploma-related” (Rachel, Second Interview), but she admits that virtually everything that is actually marked and formally assessed is. Rachel assigned this percentage in an informal, off-the-cuff manner during our second interview, so it is certainly merely an approximation of her perception of her assessment practices. However, there seems to be a significant discrepancy between Rachel’s assertion that the vast majority of the assignments she does in class are not Diploma-related and the fact that 100% of the documents she submitted to me for analysis are completely focused on Diploma Exam genres in some way or another. Granted, I was only looking for teachers to submit writing assessments to me and the English Language Arts curriculum leaves plenty of leeway to include a huge variety of types of assessment that would not have been represented in this study given the parameters that I was looking for. However, given my skepticism about the accuracy of Rachel’s perception of her own assessment practices I probed more deeply into her rationale behind assigning the percentage of 60-70%. Upon further discussion, it became clear that Rachel does not necessarily recognize the ways the Diploma Exam writing genres are exerting a significant influence over

the choices she makes in her assessment practices. For example, Rachel discussed a writing assessment she assigned in her English 30-1 class wherein the students were asked to write a memoir about a childhood story that shaped them in some way either positively or negatively. Rachel was quick to emphasize that this assignment “has nothing to do with the Diploma”, but when I pointed out that memoirs are an acceptable genre for students to write for the Personal Response portion of the Diploma Exam she admitted that “they could write pretty much anything except for a poem for the Personal [Response to Texts Assignment]” (Rachel, Second Interview). Furthermore, Rachel chose not to assign a mark to her students’ memoirs because she “didn’t feel comfortable marking students’ personal stories” (Rachel, Second Interview) and instead chose to simply record whether or not a completed memoir was submitted to her. Although I can appreciate the sensitivity or potential discomfort of assessing personal writing, by treating this assignment as something that is simply “fun to read” (Rachel, Second Interview) and not worthy of assigning a mark Rachel is implicitly communicating to her students what types of writing hold academic value in her classroom. Unfortunately, this practice of privileging Diploma Exam genres as the only genres worth marking and the genres on which students spend the most time and energy practicing and perfecting seems to run counter to her discussion of hoping her students develop into writers that do not need templates to competently write genres.

Rachel does feel some pressure from her school district to ensure her students perform well on their exams. Given the pressure for high achievement, perhaps it is understandable that Rachel’s writing assessment program is so narrowly focused on the Diploma Exam. Although Rachel did not express any reservations about her emphasis on Diploma Exam genres as a cornerstone of her writing assessment practices in our conversations, she did express frustration at the pressures to prepare students to do well on an exam regardless of what skills they enter her

room with. For example, Rachel knows that success should be defined differently for different students. She believes that when a student enters her class and “they are such a weak writer and they pass the Diploma and we need to celebrate [that success]” (Second Interview).

Unfortunately, Rachel feels her district does not recognize this need to celebrate student growth regardless of whether their endpoint is an “Excellent” Diploma Exam result. Indeed, according to policy documents on her school district’s website the school district in which Rachel teaches requires teachers and their Department Heads to write an analysis report of their Diploma Exam results and submit it to their principal who then writes a response to the report and forwards it to the teachers, Department Heads, and the Superintendent. The stated purpose of this analysis report is to use it to improve classroom instruction and assessment practices with the goal of maximizing student opportunities for success. Given this emphasis on the Diploma Exam as such an important measure of her individual success as a teacher in the eyes of her school district and as a source of pressure when she has to analyze and justify her Diploma Exam marks it is understandable that preparation for the Diploma Exam occupies a significant portion of her writing assessment program. Furthermore, her students often enter her classes at a wide variety of reading and writing levels – often testing far below grade level – and Rachel feels that she is under pressure to drag these students through a successful result on their Diploma Exam or she could face criticism or further evaluation of her Diploma Exam results from school administration. For these reasons, Rachel’s emphasis on exam preparation and efficiently improving student results on provincial exams seems quite reasonable when the pressure from her school district is considered.

Over time, the pressures from her school district to achieve high results on the Diploma Exam, combined with the contextual factors of limited class time and students entering her class

with relatively weak writing skills seem to have led Rachel to frame the purpose of high school English writing assessment programs as vehicles for preparation for the Diploma Exam. There is no doubt that Rachel is committed to helping her students grow as writers and to guiding them to improve their writing skills generally; this is a strength that she has developed through her years of experience teaching high school English. Most of her students likely leave her class better writers than they were when they arrived, but they may also leave feeling that the genres they wrote on a one-day exam in Grade 12 were the most important genres of their writing lives.

Barriers to Implementing Ideal Assessment Practices. Although her goals for improving her writing assessment practices tend to center on the Diploma Exam, Rachel is quick to point out areas of weakness that she hopes to improve in her writing assessment. For example, one of the documents Rachel submitted to me to analyze for this project was a very prescriptive, fill-in-the-blank planning sheet for an assignment in which students were to critically analyze a character from a short story they read in class and write a paragraph about their dominant traits. When I asked Rachel to elaborate on how this scaffold was used in class she was quick to admit that it “wasn’t [her] favourite because it felt too prescribed” (Second Interview). Although she did give it to students to use to complete the assignment, she said she heavily encouraged students to only use it as a starting place and to work on formats and organizational structures that were not covered by this document. Rachel also expressed a desire to incorporate more creative genres into her assessment programs, but she feels intimidated by this undertaking because “it’s not a strength of [hers]” (Rachel, First Interview). Regardless she knows that “there are kids in class that love to be creative and love to make up characters” (Rachel, First Interview), so she feels that her lack of emphasis in this area is doing a disservice to some of the students in her class. It is important to note, however, that our conversations about potential areas

for improvement were always linked back to improving her ability to better prepare students for the Diploma Exam. Throughout our two interviews, Rachel never expressed a desire to do less exam preparation, nor did she describe a desire to significantly shift her emphasis away from Diploma Exam genres. It is quite evident that although Rachel is genuinely committed to helping her students improve as writers, her definition of improvement is largely, if not completely, determined by the Diploma Exam.

As many English teachers can attest, limited instructional time is one of the major obstacles facing teachers who are unable to carry out their ideal practices in their classroom; Rachel is no exception. One way that Rachel navigates this tension is by gearing her instruction and assessment not towards achieving excellence on the Diploma Exam, but towards passing the Diploma Exam because that goal serves the majority of her students' needs. However, Rachel does have students who are striving for excellence, so for these students she hosts a weekly 30-minute tutorial where she works with a small group of students who are aiming for only the very highest results on the Diploma Exam. These tutorials are driven by talking about writing strategies, rubrics and exemplars. Rachel has found that they fill the gap between what she feels she can reasonably achieve in class with a large group of students with very diverse learning needs and the loftier goals of her high-achieving students.

Rachel feels she has a small group of very dedicated, high-achieving students across her classes, but she also feels that the majority of her students have priorities that do not necessarily align with her own. For example, her students do not seem to invest in taking her feedback on their work and incorporating it into their future writing projects as a means to improve. Rachel perceives her students to be product-oriented in that they would rather just move on from a completed piece with their mark and not invest the mental energy in deeply considering what

their strengths and weaknesses are as writers. Rachel does her best to place the responsibility for seeking growth and improvement with the students. However, it is possible that a significant factor influencing this lack of engagement could very well be the assessments themselves. Rachel focuses almost exclusively on writing assignments that are explicitly framed as practice for the Diploma Exam, so over the course of their three years of high school English her students write multiple versions of each Diploma Exam genre each semester and each year from Grade 10 through to Grade 12. Given that these genres are not particularly interesting or motivating to write in the first place, it stands to reason that her students may lack the motivation to seek continual improvement on a couple of genres that have no real significance in their lives beyond one exam on one day in Grade 12. Although exam preparation is unavoidable to some degree in high school English classes, it isn't hard to imagine why students might find their intrinsic motivation to improve as writers ebb away over the years as they are asked to write the same genres over and over with only a change in topic to break the monotony.

Rachel is aware of the potential benefits of only giving feedback without assigning a mark to their work to encourage students to engage in a more recursive writing process, but she also feels that her students need to take the initiative to work towards improvement and she only has so much influence over their priorities. She is dedicated to giving her students the tools, feedback and support they need to improve, but she also expects that their ability to take advantage of these opportunities is tied to their maturity and priorities as teenagers. Although this may be an incomplete explanation of why students are not dedicating themselves to using her feedback to re-do and re-submit their work, it isn't an irrelevant factor. However, the myriad factors at play in addition to student maturity, such as access to engaging and meaningful writing assessments, student ability to connect the work they do in class to their lives or future academic

outcomes beyond high school, and the role the teacher plays in building the value of engaging in a recursive writing process for their students are also important factors influencing student motivation.

Rachel is fully committed to help her students improve as writers and as students generally, but her techniques for achieving these improvements are teacher-centred. She teaches her students how to write a genre, the students writes the genre, she provides feedback, and the students choose whether or not they use that feedback to improve their writing. This is a pattern that serves Rachel well and she seems quite confident in its effectiveness as the backbone of her writing instruction and assessment. During our second interview I asked her about the role that metacognition and writing communities play in her classroom to ascertain whether or not her students were given explicit opportunities to reflect on their writing goals and how they might reach them. These two broad categories of teaching strategies are certainly more student-focused than I had the impression that Rachel's classroom tended to be, but I was curious if she had reflected on whether there was space in her teaching practice for incorporating these strategies. Rachel recognizes the potential value of both fostering writing community through collaborative opportunities and the value of having student self-reflect as a means to improve their writing. As of our second interview, however, she had not yet incorporated either into her classroom in a systematic way. She struggles with the logistics of making collaboration or self-reflection meaningful and impactful to students. Rachel designs her instruction and assessment for efficiency and exam preparation. Although both collaboration and metacognitive awareness would improve student writing, both can be time-consuming to incorporate and can take some trial-and-error before a teacher refines the processes to the point of seeing their impact on student writing. Neither of these practices are a current component of Rachel's writing assessment

practices, but “[self-reflection and collaboration are] something that [she] was thinking to add when they get their feedback [on a completed piece of writing] that would force them to read [her] feedback and then to self-reflect on what they thought of [her] feedback” (Second Interview).

Case Study 3: Kate

Teacher Experience and School Context

Kate works in a rural school district that serves approximately 3600 students. Her district has 14 schools and 13 Hutterian Brethren Colony schools scattered across a large swath of Southern Alberta. Additionally, Kate’s school district is home to a very high population of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (FNMI) students, but Kate’s school does not have a high population of FNMI students. Kate has spent the last 6 years of her teaching career as the sole English teacher at her high school. Before her current teaching assignment, Kate taught middle school Language Arts for the first 6 years of her teaching career. Kate’s cumulative 12 years of teaching experience in English Language Arts have allowed her to build a clear sense of the progression of writing development across the older grades and this knowledge continues to serve her in her current teaching assignment. As the only English teacher at her school, Kate is responsible for the full range of high school English courses from grades 10-12 at both the academic and non-academic level. Her classes range from 7 students to 34 students depending on the grade level, which is a testament to the unique context in which she teaches. Kate’s school is located in a very small town and receives students from five small communities in the immediate area. The towns in this region have traditionally relied on natural resource extraction as their main economic driver, but the region has become somewhat economically depressed in recent years due to industry changes and slowdowns. There tends to be relatively low academic achievement in the communities that Kate’s school serves and the vast majority of Kate’s students also work

part-time. The communities that send their children to Kate's school are predominantly Caucasian, making for a relatively homogenous student body of approximately 250 students in Grades 10-12.

Despite the general lack of emphasis on academic achievement in Kate's teaching context, she remains committed to taking full advantage of her position as the sole English teacher at her school. She does this by building deep and meaningful relationships with her students, who she teaches for the full three years of their high school career, and leverages these relationships to help her students grow as writers. A published author herself, Kate has an understanding of the writing process that can only be attained by "walking the walk" of an author; Kate uses her own experiences as a writer to guide students to deeply engage with the writing process in her classes.

Areas of Emphasis and Beliefs About Writing

Kate is both a novelist and a teacher, and her students benefit greatly from her passion for creative writing. A culture of celebration is established early in the semester in Kate's classes by "making a big deal about good writing regardless of which kid it comes from" (Second Interview). In this way, she firmly establishes an atmosphere that is focused on using the writing process to grow as writers. Kate's writing assessment includes a wide variety of creative, non-fiction and analytical genres (see Table 6 for a summary of the documents submitted for analysis), with a balance between preparing students for their Grade 12 Diploma Exam and exposing them to the wider world of writing for life beyond the exam. She tackles this task by carefully planning out her semester with "practicality" (Kate, First Interview) as her highest priority. She strikes a balance between fiction and non-fiction writing genres as well as exam and non-exam genres by planning her units based primarily around writing genres, "so with each major reading topic then [the students] will have a creative writing piece or project and a more

critical or persuasive writing piece to go along with that” (Kate, First Interview). Kate likes to also make sure she paces her classes in a way that ensures there is a “variety [of writing genres] spread throughout the semester” (Kate, First Interview) to avoid heavily emphasizing exam genres for certain sections of the semester and then emphasizing other genres at other times in a way that she feels engages the variety of students in her classroom. For example, she wants to avoid having “students who are more creatively inclined. . . sitting on the back burner for three months until [the class] gets to [writing more creative genres]” (Kate, First Interview). By describing her approach as “trying to do as much [writing] as possible” (Kate, First Interview), Kate shows that she values helping her students to develop writing skills that will serve them in their future high school classes, in their pursuits beyond high school, and in their lives in general.

Table 6

Summary of the Writing Assessments and Supporting Documents Submitted by Kate

Name of Document	Brief Description	Provincial Exam Genre (Y/N)
Critical Essay	Students in English 10-1 write a critical and analytical essay based on characters in <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> by Harper Lee in response to an assigned topic.	Y
Graphic Organizer	A template for a five-paragraph essay provided to Grade 10 students to assist them in writing critical essays.	N, but used to scaffold provincial exam genres.
Opinion Writing	Students are to write a “mini-response” to an assigned topic that expresses their opinion on the topic.	N
Short Story Composition	Students in English 10-2 write a short story related to the topic of survival.	N
Script Project	English 20-1 students write a scene in script format that depicts a scene that was “absent” from the events of <i>The Great Gatsby</i> (i.e. – a scene that is described to the reader, but not one that the reader gets to witness).	N
Literary Analysis Essay	English 20-2 students write a literary analysis essay based on their choice of a list of topics about the characters in <i>Of Mice and Men</i> by John Steinbeck.	Y
Short Answer Assignment	English 30-1 students answer a series of questions about <i>King Lear</i> by William Shakespeare. Responses are expected to be a few sentences each.	N

Visual Reflection Assignment	Students in English 30-2 are to respond to a photo prompt with their ideas and impressions in paragraph form.	Y
Literary Exploration Essay	Students in English 30-2 write an essay based on an assigned topic as it relates to the events and characters of <i>Jurassic Park</i> by Michael Crichton.	Y

According to Kate, “the percentage of adults who have beyond a high school education would be quite low” (Kate, First Interview) in the community served by her school, but her ability to build relationships with her students provides a foundation from which she can nurture her students writing skills through verbal and written feedback, one-on-one conferences and opportunities to explore a deeply recursive writing process for most writing assessments. Unlike most high school English teachers, Kate teaches most of her students for all three years of their high school English classes. This allows her to scaffold and support their writing development over a much longer time than many English teachers have the opportunity to do. Kate works very hard to emphasize the pre-writing and planning phases of the writing process in her classroom – a labour of love in a teaching environment where most students are focused on handing in a finished product and moving on. She does this by ensuring that her students’ first exposure to a new genre is clearly structured and accompanied by graphic organizers and templates (See Figure 10 for examples). She sees these tools as starting places for most of her students and explicitly encourages them to break away from the templates she provides as their confidence and skill grows.

Figure 10

Samples of Kate's Templates

Five-Paragraph Essay Graphic Organizer

Introduction
This will become the first paragraph in your essay; fill this box out with at least three sentences introducing your three main ideas.

Body
Each of these main ideas will become a paragraph in your paper. Express these ideas in complete sentences.

Main Idea #1	Main Idea #2	Main Idea #3
Details that support Main Idea #1	Details that support Main Idea #2	Details that support Main Idea #3

Conclusion
Repeat, using new wording, the most important ideas: the ideas that you really want your reader to remember.

Introduction

1. Sentence rephrasing the question to state your opinion.
2. Brief explanation (1-2 sentences only) stating your main reasons why
3. A thesis statement making your main point (this is often the hardest sentence to write, so you can save it until the end; just leave space)

1-2 body paragraphs

1. Add details to support your opinion. For each detail:
 - a. Make a point
 - b. Provide support/explanation
2. Refute reasons why the opposing argument is incorrect (i.e. Some people may say _____. However, _____.)

Conclusion

1. Restate your thesis in other words.
2. Summarize the main points you made in your response.
3. A "drop-the mic" sentence that leaves your audience with something to think about.

Note. Planning scaffolds for Kate's essay writing assignments and Opinion Writing Assignment, respectively.

Throughout the pre-writing and planning phases of her writing assessments Kate provides frequent verbal and written feedback on student work to guide them closer to the finished product they will eventually hand in. Kate also models the messiness of drafting by typing her own draft of the assignment that her class is working on in real-time on the projector so students can see her narrate her thinking, edit as she goes, and struggle with the process of first-draft writing. When teaching students to write introductory essay paragraphs, for example, she “will write the paragraph with [her students], just so they can see. . . [their teacher] going ‘oh no, that’s the wrong word’, backspace, try to add in [a different word] and like process [how to approach the task] at the same time” (Kate, First Interview). Her modelling provides a basis for

conversations with students about various editing and writing techniques they could experiment with in their own writing.

Once students submit a completed assessment, Kate provides written feedback, offers to conference with her students, and provides the opportunity to re-submit their work for a better grade after they respond to her feedback. Kate does her best to ensure that students are able to maximize their efforts to respond to and revise based on her feedback by requiring students to meet with her with “the original piece with the rubric [to show her] what they’ve changed or improved upon” (Kate, First Interview). Kate admits that relatively few students take full advantage of these opportunities, which Kate attributes to a lack of motivation in her students towards improvement as writers. However, the structure of the assignments themselves and the fact that revision is not built in as a mandatory component of her writing assessments could also be contributing to students perceiving revision as “extra” and not as something that is integral and indivisible from the writing process. By making re-writes and re-do’s optional and contingent on a one-on-one conference, Kate could be inadvertently privileging completing the submitted and marked product over the process of improving writing through revision thus influencing her students to place less value on the revision process.

Themes Emerging from the Data

Influence of Provincial Exams on Assessment Practices. Kate plans her writing assessment program to emphasize a wide variety of genres – including the genres students write on the Diploma Exam. The Diploma Exam genres account for a significant proportion of her overall writing assessment, but she does her best to find balance by scattering the Diploma Exam genres throughout a semester with a variety of other genres occupying the spaces between. She describes the Diploma Exam as “a focus, [but she] wouldn’t say it’s the *only* focus or anything like that” (Second Interview). Kate sees preparation for the Diploma Exam as a professional

obligation to her students' academic success, but she also believes her professional obligations go far beyond that when she considers the types of writers she would like her students to become. As a rule, Kate is very resistant to the idea of teaching to the test, so she makes her best attempt to prepare students well in the time she has while also trying to maximize the time remaining to focus on genres and writing skills that aren't as thoroughly emphasized on the exam. Kate succinctly captured her philosophy here: "you might not teach to the test, but if you pretend it's not there that's not good either" (Second Interview).

Kate takes advantage of the three years of scaffolding she has with each student as they progress through high school to prepare her students as fully as possible for their Diploma Exam. Overall, her approach is to replicate, as closely as possible, the exam conditions for her students for all the Diploma Exam genres they write before the big day in Grade 12. Her reasons for approaching these genres in class this way are to do what she feels will best prepare students to write in the exam environment of the Diploma Exam. According to Kate, she hates the idea of "teach[ing] to the test" (Kate, Second Interview), but she also feels that "if [her students] don't do a bunch of practice of this kind of stuff [she's] setting them up for failure" (Kate, Second Interview). She wants to closely replicate the exam assignments and exam environment so that when her students do arrive on the day they write the Diploma Exam "they sit down to write it [and] it's not out of hand at all. It's just 'oh yeah another one of these'" (Kate, Second Interview). She does this primarily by limiting writing time and withholding the exact topic on which students will write until the day they begin writing their essays. This, too, is scaffolded in the sense that the topics are not fully a surprise for students in Grades 10 and 11. They are usually closely related to concepts and themes that are discussed at length during class time leading up to writing the essay. In fact, Kate's Grade 10 and 11 students typically have a pretty

strong idea of what their topic will be well before they actually write their essay. Grade 10 and 11 students are further supported by being provided with fairly prescriptive structures to follow for their writing, including graphic organizers and templates, as well as time during class with guidance from peers and Kate to plan their essays. In Kate's opinion, she wants her less experienced writers to focus their attention on the content of their essays, rather than the structure and organization of their ideas in hopes that by relieving some of the pressure of structuring their argument without guidance students can instead refine their ability to develop the content of their argument. In later years, Kate's students are explicitly encouraged to break away from the templates she provides in hopes that their experience with writing the content of the essays with guidance will allow them to experiment with a wider variety of argument structures and organizational forms.

By repeatedly exposing her students to the same writing environment for Diploma Exam genres throughout their high school English classes she feels that she is taking the edge off of what can be an intense and stressful exam environment. This strategy may be effective in familiarizing students with the environment in which they will write their exam, but it may also reinforce the perception her students have that writing process is much less important than writing product because limited time, surprise topics, and other trappings of the Diploma Exam tend to eliminate meaningful engagement in the writing process. Given that Kate wants to emphasize the writing process in her writing assessment program, the practice of replicating an exam environment for many of her writing assessments may be counterproductive to her goal.

By the time Kate's students reach Grade 12, her exam preparation focus has narrowed to making students as comfortable as possible with the structure and conditions of the exam in an effort to relieve some of the stress and anxiety they will experience on the day of the exam. She

feels she must prepare her students as best she can for their Diploma Exam by trying to strike a balance between helping her students feel fully prepared and not completely “teaching to the test”, while still devoting enough time and space in her assessment program to non-Diploma genres. Kate expresses frustration that the exam conditions value first-draft writing and almost completely eliminate meaningful engagement in anything except the most basic writing process. This is so different from what she does in her classroom that she feels that it is important to expose students to the exam conditions frequently to help prepare them for such a different style of writing. Kate’s final element of preparation involves familiarizing students with the exam standards as demonstrated in the released documents from the Alberta Government. She has students read and mark sample Diploma Exams using the same rubric used by the exam markers. As of our second interview, Kate had not yet marked Diploma Exams herself, but she uses this common strategy to great effect to help student internalize the standards to which they will be held when they write their Diploma Exams.

Barriers to Implementing Ideal Assessment Practices. Throughout my conversations with Kate, I was left with the distinct impression of a teacher with a deep personal and professional knowledge of the writing process and a clear vision for how she would like to implement her knowledge in her classroom. Unfortunately, like many English teachers, Kate struggles to implement her ideal writing assessment practices due to the limited instructional time she has for each course. In the first half of her career, Kate taught middle school Language Arts and she felt she had much more time and freedom to implement many of the strategies she knows are valuable. She enthusiastically fostered a strong sense of writing community in her classroom, encouraged students to write for authentic audiences as often as possible, and built metacognitive capacity in her students through frequent opportunities for self-reflection and

talking about writing. Now that Kate is responsible for teaching all of the high school English classes at her school she does not feel she has the time to do more than “a little bit of [the practices she used to emphasize when she taught middle school] and not enough to make it impactful” (Second Interview). In fact, Kate found that between the pressures of the marking load she carries and the limits on her instructional time, she has had to systematically re-evaluate her entire writing assessment program to ensure she is fulfilling all of the curricular outcomes. This resulted in her having to cut many of the fun, valuable, and enriching writing activities that she used to do with her classes because she found that she didn’t have time to keep them and fulfill her dual obligations of teaching the curriculum and preparing her students for the Diploma Exam. Such activities like collaborative writing projects, multi-draft creative writing projects, and writing for authentic audiences outside the classroom have been largely removed from Kate’s assessment program in high school to make way for more time to practice Diploma Exam genres.

Kate also struggles with the tension between her passionate emphasis on encouraging students to engage in a long, recursive writing process in class and her students’ equally passionate emphasis on submitting a completed project, getting a mark and moving on to a new assignment. She knows that the culture built in schools to emphasize marks as the goal of taking a course, combined with the “one and done” environment of the Diploma Exam contribute to her students’ perception of writing assessment as a series of steps to complete in order to get a grade. Kate knows that “it’s the same thing when they get tests back and they flip back for the mark before they bother looking through it. And again, it gets to the teaching to the test element. When they sit down to write their Diplomas they don’t have time to do process anymore” (Second Interview). Kate feels that the near elimination of meaningful writing process in the Diploma

exam has an impact on the depth she feels she can encourage her students to achieve in the writing process in class because the reality of limited instructional time and the weight of covering a large curriculum make her feel that she has to continually move students forward through the course, often sacrificing deep engagement in a recursive writing process. Kate has a very clear sense of what she would ideally want to do with her English classes, including having her students write multiple versions of every genre as practice before completing a “best draft” for her to mark, but the reality is “when they’re done with it they’re done with it and as a class we’re moving on to the next thing too” (Second Interview). Kate does what she can to promote a culture of writing process over writing product in her classroom by encouraging students to book conferences with her to discuss their writing and allowing all students to submit their assignments multiple times to improve both their writing and their grade. However, the realities of limited instructional time, a large marking load and student resistance to engaging in this type of work on their writing leave Kate doing her best with the resources she has available to her.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In the following thematic analysis five themes will be analyzed in alignment with the analogy outlined in Chapter 2. I will begin with an in-depth analysis of the extent to which metacognition is present across the three case studies to address both the ends of the analogy: the pre-existing skills and experiences with which students arrive in high school English classrooms and the extent to which teachers incorporate opportunities to foster and build metacognitive capacity in their students. From there, I will discuss what I observed in terms of the presence and/or absence of the various components necessary to build metacognitive capacity in students (i.e. – authentic discourse communities, process-oriented teaching and providing feedback to students). Finally, the analysis will close with a discussion of the extent to which teachers incorporate opportunities for students to demonstrate their metacognitive competence in their writing assessment practices in the form of engaging in writing communities and practicing their collaborative writing skills.

From Seed to Fruit: Building Metacognitive Capacity

Veenman et al. (2006) identified two components of metacognition: metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive skills. With metacognitive knowledge defined as declarative knowledge about the strategies employed to complete a task and metacognitive skills defined as the ability to monitor and self-correct while completing a writing task. Students need the ability to monitor their thoughts and behaviour while completing a writing task in order to modify those thoughts and behaviour to ensure task completion (Veenman et. al, 2006). If students receive a lack of instruction in metacognitive strategies they may experience availability deficiencies (Veenman et. al, 2006) which could encourage teachers to fill in these gaps with supports like templates and fill-in-the-blank scaffolds. If students are unable to use the metacognitive strategies they do have to maximum effect, they are experiencing production deficiencies,

according to Veenman et. al (2006). Through frequent, scaffolded opportunities for self-reflection throughout the writing process, teachers can help students build metacognitive capacity by drawing student attention to the similarities between genres or rhetorical situations (Brent, 2011). When students are experiencing production deficiencies, reflection can draw metacognitive knowledge to the surface by encouraging students to explicitly consider which metacognitive strategies might be most effective in the situation they are experiencing (Brent, 2011). Metacognition and rhetorical awareness underpin a students' ability to write well across a breadth of genres and audiences. Due to a variety of factors, including a lack of instructional time and preparation time, a lack of know-how or awareness of alternatives, and/or the pressures of exam preparation among other factors, some teachers rely heavily on templates in their writing assessment. These templates and other similar strategies will allow students to competently reproduce a final product that resembles the genre their teacher is looking to elicit, but they do not give the student a chance to develop and practice metacognitive strategies that will help them to complete writing tasks that aren't accompanied by a helpful template. These well-meaning teachers do not appear to be making these decisions out of apathy or incompetence. In fact, they are simply doing what so many teachers do; they see a need in their students and they are looking to fill that need in the best way they know how based on their experience, the time they have available and their goals for their students. These decisions are borne out of a desire to help their students succeed, not out of a lack of desire to prepare them for the writing tasks they'll encounter outside of their classrooms.

Overview of the Theme Across All Three Cases

Donna, Kate, and Rachel all expressed that they recognize the value of metacognition as an important part of a writing assessment program in high school, but all three also identified its incorporation as an aspect of their teaching practice that they could improve upon. Kate "totally

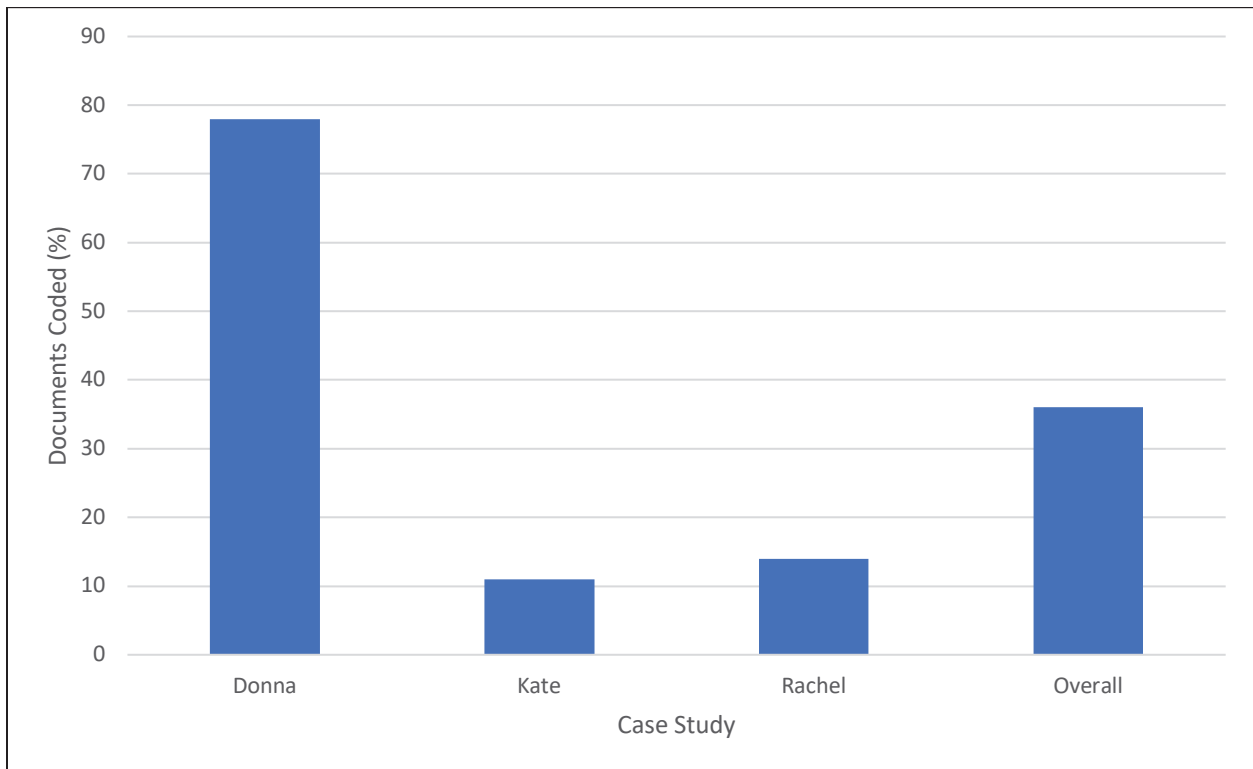
understand[s] the value. . . especially in English classes like, self-reflection is great, but unfortunately it's one of those things that you kind of do a little bit of and not enough to make it impactful actually" (Second Interview). Therein lies the struggle for many teachers who have good intentions of building metacognitive capacity in their students; they recognize the value of these skills but struggle to actually incorporate strategies into their writing assessment programs in a way that will help their students build metacognitive capacity. Rachel sees incorporating self-reflection as "something that [she] was thinking to add to when they get their feedback. That would force them to read [her] feedback and then to self-reflect on what they thought of [her] feedback and their work" (Second Interview). Rachel's intentions are sound in that they would encourage students to reflect more deeply on the extent to which their intentions with the piece align with the feedback from their teacher and how they can reconcile those intentions with the suggestions they've received. Given that Rachel typically gives this feedback at the end of the writing process in her classroom after students have had class time to write and have submitted their work for a grade, the actual impact of this practice on students' developing capacity for metacognitive competence may be limited without the added opportunity to actually revise their piece with the feedback in mind while they are in the midst of the writing process. However, the intentions behind this proposed practice certainly demonstrate that Rachel has considered the potential positive impacts of having students more deeply engage with both their metacognitive knowledge and their metacognitive skills through reflection on her feedback.

Donna has engaged in professional development that has solidified her understanding of the importance of incorporating deliberate, structured opportunities for metacognitive reflection in her writing assessment programs. Her understanding of this importance shows in that, of the three cases, the documents she submitted for analysis have the highest coverage of references to

some form of metacognitive awareness, skills, or knowledge. Conversely, both Kate and Rachel's documents had very infrequent references to addressing any form of metacognitive awareness in students (see Figure 11). While all three teachers unequivocally expressed a desire to increase or improve the opportunities for building metacognitive capacity in their writing assessment programs, only Donna has progressed in this goal to the point of having a formal system that she employs in her classroom. When her students "do editing or revising the checklist [she] gives them has a space for them to do it first before they hand it off to a peer" (Second Interview) and "they do reflect on their own writing in sort of a superficial way. Is it a 1, 2, or 3? . . . What part did you have the most trouble with in this assignment? And then how did you deal with it?" (Interview 2). Although Donna recognizes the limitations and superficiality of her current practices, they do show a clear commitment to helping students develop the ability to both reflect on and employ the metacognitive strategies that will help them across a variety of genres and contexts.

Figure 11

Documents Coded Under “Building Metacognitive Capacity” Theme



Assessing Metacognitive Knowledge and Metacognitive Skills

Even though all three teachers expressed a desire to incorporate more opportunities for self-reflection and other opportunities to develop metacognition, some of their assessments do assess metacognition to some degree. Many of the rubrics that each teacher submitted to me for analysis included assessment of the extent to which students successfully addressed or served their “audience”. Granted, all three teachers admitted that their students virtually always wrote for their teacher as their exclusive audience (authentic audiences will be discussed in more detail in a later section), but even the basic, hypothetical consideration of adjusting tone, formality, diction and other elements of their writing for an audience – whether real or imagined – does require some rhetorical awareness on the part of the student as they work through their writing assignments. Donna’s Persuasive Writing Rubric typifies the way audience appeasement is

addressed in the writing assessments all three teachers submitted (see Figure 12). I have highlighted each explicit mention of audience for clarity.

Figure 12

Donna's Persuasive Writing Rubric

	5	4	3	2	1
Thought and Support X2	A perceptive and thorough understanding of the issue is demonstrated. The arguments are adept and convincing. Support is well defined and purposefully chosen to reinforce the student's ideas in a deliberate and judicious way. A precise awareness of audience is effectively sustained.	A thoughtful and competent understanding of the issue is demonstrated. The arguments are well-considered and sound. Support is accurate and occasionally purposefully chosen to reinforce the student's ideas in a logical and clear way. Awareness of audience is sustained.	A sufficient but generalized understanding of the issue is demonstrated. The arguments are appropriate and straightforward. Support is relevant but general and may be occasionally lacking in persuasiveness and consistency.	An incomplete, vague, or confused understanding of the issue is demonstrated. The arguments are oversimplified and/or inconsistent. Support is superficial, unclear, contradictory, inappropriate, or merely a restatement of what is provided in the question. A precise awareness may be apparent but not sustained.	An inaccurate or minimal understanding of the issue is demonstrated. The arguments are of questionable logic or are unrelated to the issue. Support is irrelevant, over generalized, or lacking. Little awareness of audience is apparent.
Writing Skills	The selection and use of words and structures are effective. The writing demonstrates confident control of correct sentence construction, usage, grammar, and mechanics.	The selection and use of words and structures are frequently effective. The writing demonstrates competent control of correct sentence construction, usage, grammar, and mechanics.	The selection and use of words and structures are occasionally effective. The writing demonstrates basic control of correct sentence construction, usage, grammar, and mechanics.	The selection and use of words and structures are frequently ineffective. The writing demonstrates faltering control of correct sentence construction, usage, grammar, and mechanics.	The selection and use of words and structures are ineffective. The writing demonstrates lack of control of correct sentence construction, usage, grammar, and mechanics.
Total:					/15

The extent to which a student shows “awareness of audience” in their persuasive writing is an indirect means of assessing their ability to deliver on a rhetorical purpose like convincing their reader to agree with their opinion on a particular topic. The student would have to employ a variety of metacognitive skills to deliver on this rhetorical purpose and some of these skills are assessed in this rubric by addressing student choices in argument and support, as well as the writing mechanics the student employed in the piece. In this way, metacognitive knowledge and

skills are being assessed indirectly in the sense that both are necessary for students to land on the higher end of rubrics like these, but neither metacognitive skills or knowledge are being assessed directly in any of the three cases, based on the documents submitted to me.

While some of the rubrics submitted by the teachers assessed student ability to address audience, the assignments tended to explicitly and very specifically outline the writer's purposes and goals as well as the feelings or thoughts they should be trying to elicit from their reader. Although this is no doubt helpful for the students in ensuring that they are fulfilling the requirements of the assignment, providing such a specific and detailed outline of what amounts to the rhetorical purpose of the product the students are being asked to produce does eliminate the need and opportunity to practice the metacognitive skills that would be required for them to figure out these elements themselves. Rather than having students do something like look at exemplars or models of similar pieces and using analysis and inferencing skills to discern the rhetorical moves of the writer and how they can replicate those moves in their own writing, their teacher is filling in these blanks for them. To be clear, this is an ultimately well-meaning decision. By giving students so much information about how to complete a piece well before they start writing, teachers are surely increasing the chances that their students will successfully produce the genre they have been assigned. However, by eliminating an important opportunity to build metacognitive capacity, these teachers are also encouraging students to remain reliant on this level of scaffolding rather than giving them the tools they would need to be able to figure out what is required of them without so much scaffolding.

In Figure 13, Donna's Persuasive Writing Notes document that she gives students before they complete a persuasive essay exemplifies this practice of explicitly outlining the purpose, goals, and strategies her students should focus on when they complete the assignment.

Accompanied by her rubric in Figure 12, Donna then assesses their ability to fulfill the needs of their audience using the techniques she outlines for them. Students will need to employ a series of rhetorical moves to deliver on their intention of persuading their audience, which would necessarily require them to use what metacognitive capacity they possess to do so and then the rubric will tell the tale of their success or lack thereof when it is returned to them with their mark. Students could conceivably produce a version of the genre they have been assigned that addresses the audience in the way they have been asked to while using a wide variety of metacognitive knowledge and skills without explicitly being aware of having done so. If the goal is to re-produce genres successfully then this isn't necessarily a problem, but if the goal is to help students build metacognitive capacity as evidence of the fruit produced by the tree of metacognition then they may be limited in their growth due to the fact that they haven't had the opportunity to bring their metacognitive knowledge to the surface of their consciousness or to reflect on their use of the variety of metacognitive skills they have at their disposal.

Figure 13

Donna's Persuasive Writing Assignment Handout

Persuasive Writing: The Notes

In a persuasive essay, the writer tries to persuade the reader to accept an idea or agree with an opinion. The writer's purpose is to convince the reader that her or his point of view is a reasonable one. The persuasive essay should be written in a style that grabs and holds the reader's attention, and the writer's opinion should be backed up by strong supporting details. You might write a persuasive essay on "Why Our School Library Should Remain Open After School."

Four Parts of an Essay ...All essays have at least four parts.

1) Title
The title should be descriptive and set the tone for the entire essay.

2) Introduction
The introduction is the first paragraph of an essay. Its purpose is to:

- let the reader know the essay's purpose (to persuade)
- introduce the author's opinion and/or purpose
- grab the reader's attention

3) Body
The body explains or supports the main idea. It is usually several paragraphs long. A good number to remember is **three**.

In the body of the essay, you want to develop your ideas. You do this by deciding on three (or more) ideas that will support your claim and making each one of these its own paragraph. In the individual paragraphs, you state your idea, show how it is related to your claim and fully explain it, usually by giving an example.

4) Conclusion
The conclusion repeats the main idea in a new way and brings the essay to a satisfying end.

Note. Donna's students would be provided with this handout prior to beginning their own persuasive essay.

Scaffolding Writing Skills as a "Stepping Stone" to Competence

Across the three cases a commonly held assumption arose when I was interviewing each of the three teachers. All three of them expressed an underlying assumption that whether a student is a "Strong Writer" or a "Weak Writer" can often be determined by how much they need to rely on the templates provided to them by their teacher to competently produce the genres they are assigned to write. As a result, templates are used by all three teachers as a way to expedite the process of eliciting a replication of the assigned genre while bypassing the development of the metacognitive monitoring and control that would allow these students to not need to rely on

templates in future writing tasks. Donna, for example, will tell students “‘if you’re really struggling, use this graphic organizer. Here’s the lesson.’ And then [she] post[s] it in the classroom so kids can reference it and use to the letter if they really need to” (Interview 2). She has found that this increases a struggling student’s chances of successfully completing their assignment by doing much of the heavy lifting involved in employing metacognitive skills, but some students never seem to develop these skills to the extent they need to in order to not have to rely on templates.

Donna, Rachel and Kate all expressed a view that templates, graphic organizers, checklists and other guided supports they provide to their students when writing unfamiliar genres are intended to be a “stepping stone” toward independence from these supports. All three teachers described a similar process for teaching the Critical Response Essay (one of the two genres that students are expected to write on the English 30-1 Diploma Exam) involving an introduction to the genre in Grade 10 using many specific and guided supports and templates, a reduction in the use of these supports in Grade 11 to encourage students to break away from the templates they were given in Grade 10, and culminating in Grade 12 with polishing, refining and perfecting the genre in final preparation for the Diploma Exam at the end of the semester. In Kate’s classroom, “if it’s . . . the first time for that type of writing assignment or something like that, it’s much more structured and then. . .by the time they get to the upper grades they have much more freedom” (Second Interview). She tells her students in Grade 12 that “if [they] need to stick to the five-paragraph structure [they] can but it’s much more wide open” (Second Interview) thus encouraging them to explore a wider variety of structures and organizational styles than the options she gave them when they were first exposed to the genre. Rachel also described more emphasis on holding her students’ hands through the process of writing their first

Critical Response Essay in Grade 10 before encouraging their independence once they had more experience. “In Grade 10 [the scaffolding] is more specific and then it’s a bit freer by Grade 12” (Second Interview) in that she encourages independence in the way students engage in the writing process. For example, “[she doesn’t] grade planning by Grade 12, but in Grade 10 they have to show [her] their planning before they start [writing]” (Second Interview).

When Rachel is introducing the Critical Response Essay to her students she gives them notes with step-by-step instructions to guide their planning and writing (see Figure 14). According to Rachel, “you can’t hand out formulas. . .but we have planners that say. . .here’s a few main ways we plan Criticals” and their purpose is clearly to very specifically outline the various parts of this type of essay and how students can write one themselves by following the planning guide. The planning that results from following this planning guide are what she would check in Grade 10 before her students start writing their Critical Response Essays and what she would expect students to follow or possibly break out of by Grade 12 without her having to check on their work before they start writing.

Figure 14

Rachel's Critical Response Essay Notes

3) Plan your essay. There are three basic ways to plan. The first one follows one character through one situation and how it changed them. Your paragraphs would focus on the character at the beginning, their situation, and how they changed. The second way shows three examples of a character facing three situations that changed them. The third shows 3 characters facing three situations.

Often this format works well:

Introduction- start with your opener (general comments about the topic usually work well, but you may also use an apt quotation, a question, an anecdote, interesting facts, etc). Make sure your opener doesn't feel random; that it is linked to the topic. Include your thesis statement (based on the bold-typed assignment but with your own insight), and name the text and character you've chosen to focus on.

Do not just re-state your topic into a thesis statement. Be sure to think about an angle or a twist to the topic. How can you "marry" the topic with your character? It can help if you ask yourself how/when/why/under what circumstances does the character struggle with the topic? Who or what holds them back? Does the character come to terms with or accept their struggle? Or how/what do they change/learn/understand? Make sure you use your key topic words in your thesis statement.

Ex: Self-preservation is the instinct many people use to maintain their livelihoods and lives. It has been part of the human identity since we began to compete with other organisms in a variety of ways. Eventually, humans took control of their world and self-preservation was replaced with cooperation. But what happens when people's lives are thrust into bitter turmoil and utter conflict? In the memoirs of Elie Wiesel, *Night*, he strives to develop the idea that self-preservation plays an integral role in how people respond to dire situations. When we resort to self-preservation, though, people we once thought allies become burdens.

Body/Development- In the first body paragraph, discuss the opening/initial situation of your chosen character; give pertinent information about your character and their situation, what is going on in the text. Include setting details and other significant characters.

In the second (third/fourth/fifth) paragraph(s), follow the development of your character in the text. Don't include everything, but focus on evidence for the topic: what is motivating them, how they see themselves and their role, their relationships, what conflicts they are facing and what choices they are making. Be sure to follow the order raised in the text as you discuss your character and how they are facing their conflict. You do NOT want to do a plot summary; focus on a few key events from the text that illustrate how your character fits your thesis.

Body/Realization- In the last body paragraph, discuss the outcome, the epiphany or moment of change the character goes through. What is the result? Have they learned about themselves and their situation? How have they changed? What do they now understand that they never understood before? Don't forget to use the key topic words.

Conclusion- In the last paragraph, re-state your thesis in a natural way- this will ensure that you have kept your focus and are using the key topic words in this paragraph as well. Finish by relating what the character has learned or how the character has changed, into something broader, something everyone can understand.

Note. I have highlighted the most explicit references to scaffolded, template-driven planning for clarity.

The appeal of using a planning guide like this one with students who have never written a Critical Response Essay is obvious. With this planner, students would be able to produce a competent version of the Critical Response Essay by simply following the steps outlined for each section of their essay. However, these notes also eliminate the need for students to deploy metacognitive strategies like considering their intentions as they write their introduction, considering what they would like their reader to think or feel when they read what they've written, or experimenting with a few argument structures before determining which one best meets their goals for the piece. By eliminating the opportunities for students to reflect on or practice these and other metacognitive skills, teachers who use templates or heavily scaffolded guides like this one could be ensuring that students continue to rely on these scaffolds rather than building the skills they need to break out of them. Students who do manage to break the mold are likely developing metacognitive skills despite their limited opportunities to do so in the current paradigms of their teachers' writing assessment practices.

To be clear, none of the teachers articulated that they were deliberately attempting to bypass metacognitive development by using templates – their goal is always to help their students succeed within the context of their learning challenges and instructional time. However, given that all three teachers expressed that some students completely rely on templates throughout high school suggests that at least part of that reliance is due to a lack of the metacognitive capacity that could allow them to make decisions about the rhetorical moves they need to make with a piece to successfully complete their writing assessments. This is not a result of lazy or negligent teaching, but a function of a lack of instructional time combined with the pressure that many high school English teachers feel to prepare their students to achieve the highest marks possible on the Grade 12 Diploma Exam. Additionally, given that the Diploma Exam looms large over

many high school English teachers, it is both directly and indirectly fostering an environment that values the production of competent versions of the genres required on the exams in a limited time frame with virtually no opportunity for meaningful engagement in the writing process. This emphasis on production over process naturally leads students and teachers to want to expedite the process of being able to produce the genres that are required with or without developing the underlying metacognitive skills that would serve students beyond a one-day exam in Grade 12.

In this way, rather than being a “stepping stone” on the way to independence from templates, scaffolds that effectively eliminate a need for metacognitive thinking serve as more of a crutch for many students. Based on their eventual success in not needing to rely on templates to engage with writing projects, some students are developing the metacognitive skills and processes they need to be successful writers, but this seems to be happening in spite of the lack of opportunities for scaffolded and guided development of metacognitive skills in English class, not necessarily because the template-driven scaffolds are helping them to build these skills. Without explicit instruction in metacognitive strategies, the vast majority of students will not develop metacognitive capacity (Brent, 2011). As a result, “Weak Writers” continue to need the templates and other prescriptive scaffolds provided by their teachers while “Strong Writers” often eventually do not. Donna observes that “in -1 there are only a few kids who need the template, whereas in -2 most of the kids use the template” (Second Interview) which makes sense given the fact that students in the academic stream of high school English classes (referred to commonly as -1) tend to be stronger students generally and stronger writers specifically, while students in the non-academic stream (referred to commonly as -2) often tend to be weaker students generally and weaker writers specifically. However, due to time constraints, class sizes, exam pressure and other factors all three teachers have expressed that they are not able to teach

metacognitive skills to the level of depth that they feel would be necessary to provoke deep, meaningful engagement with developing metacognitive capacity.

Rachel expressed some frustration with students who unsuccessfully attempt to break out of her templates without the prerequisite writing skills or genre knowledge they need to successfully produce the genres she has assigned. She submitted a document to me that was essentially a fill-in-the-blank template for an assignment in which students were required to write a paragraph analyzing a character from a short story. The template is extremely prescriptive (see Figure 5). It is so prescriptive that Rachel herself has some reservations about using it with her classes. She admits that it “wasn’t [her] favourite because it felt too prescribed. Almost too much like a formula” (Second Interview). However, when I asked her how she feels kids perform when they disregard her templates she described a wide variety of results. She noticed that “some of them totally broke the mold and they did great because they don’t need that kind of support. And some kids almost. . .like took the blanks and filled in their words and they really needed that scaffolding support” (Second Interview). Rachel is clearly aware that students generally need the latitude to make their own decision when they are writing, so she feels that templates with the level of prescription in Figure 15 do not serve her purposes well. At the same time, students clearly do need some kind of support to navigate the complex writing tasks they encounter in high school English. “Strong Writers” and “Weak Writers” alike need scaffolded opportunities to develop metacognitive skills and processes by having the chance to draw their metacognitive knowledge to the surface of their consciousness. By eliminating the need for deep metacognitive reflection on new genres, teachers could be unintentionally removing students’ chances to build the skills they need to move away from the tried-and-true templates their teachers provide. Teachers could find themselves trapped in a conflict similar to Rachel’s in knowing that the

prescriptive templates are not serving their students' writing development as well as they could, but not feeling like they have a viable alternative to use to give students the support they need to find success without removing the opportunity to build important skills.

Figure 15

Rachel's Critical Analysis Paragraph Template

Plan Sheet for Character Analysis Paragraph	
TOPIC SENTENCE:	_____ the protagonist/antagonist (name of character)
in _____	a _____ (title of literary work) (short story, novel, etc.)
by _____	is _____ (name of author) (character trait you are going to prove)
1 st SUPPORTING SENTENCE:	_____ , _____ (transition) (reference to event/quote, etc.)
_____ (FREDS: 1-2 sentences containing facts, reasons, examples, and/or details to enrich your 1 st supporting sentence)	
2 nd SUPPORTING SENTENCE:	_____ , _____ (transition) (reference to event/quote, etc.)
_____ (FREDS: 1-2 sentences containing facts, reasons, examples, and/or details to enrich your 2 nd supporting sentence)	
3 rd SUPPORTING SENTENCE:	_____ , _____ (transition) (reference to event/quote, etc.)
_____ (FREDS: 1-2 sentences containing facts, reasons, examples, and/or details to enrich your 3 rd supporting sentence)	
CONCLUDING SENTENCE:	Therefore, throughout this story, _____ certainly demonstrates _____ (reminder of what you proved—rephrase it)

Donna, Kate, and Rachel have used one-on-one and small group conferencing combined with exemplar-based instruction to help their students build rhetorical awareness and some metacognitive capacity. Donna has found that having her students “write like a writer” (First

Interview) has been an effective way to help students “hear a voice in their writing” (First Interview). Donna pushes her students even further down the path of rhetorical awareness by asking them to specifically outline “what [she is] looking for” (First Interview) when they submit a draft for feedback. She wants them to specify what aspect of their writing she is specifically helping them with. In this way, she is hoping her students eventually “get to the point where they’re like, ‘oh there’s something wrong with this sentence and I know why’ or ‘I don’t know why but I can ask’” (First Interview). For students to be able to monitor their writing for whether or not their individual sentences are fulfilling their goals for the piece takes significant metacognitive knowledge and awareness.

Rachel builds some metacognitive capacity in her students by working with a small group of dedicated, academically-minded students in a weekly tutorial period she hosts outside of class time. During this tutorial she and the students “read a Diploma essay and [they] talk about why it was such a great essay and why this kid got an “E” [Excellent or 100%] on their Diploma” (First Interview). By talking through the rhetorical moves of a successful writer Rachel is supporting these students in both recognizing rhetorical choices made by the writer and potentially helping them to know when to replicate or experiment with these moves in their own writing. Kate takes a similar tactic by having students explore and talk through Diploma Exam exemplars. She encourages them to consider “what does work? What doesn’t work? . . . Why do you think this is successful?” (Second Interview) thus encouraging students to explore the rhetorical moves and choices made by successful writers in the genres they are expected to replicate.

Changes That Would Support Implementation of a Robust Metacognitive Component in Writing Assessment Programs

A shift away from the product-oriented culture created by Diploma Exams toward a process-oriented culture that emphasizes writing skill development. Although not all of the

teachers expressed feeling pressured to improve their students' results on Diploma exams, Rachel admitted that "most of [her] writing instruction is geared to passing [the Diploma Exam]" (Second Interview) in part because when her school division's administration "look[s] at Diploma results and they're like, 'teachers, your Diploma results aren't good'" (Second Interview) she feels like she needs to both serve her students' desires to perform well on this high-stakes exam and do her best to relieve the pressure she feels from above when the exam results of her students do not measure up.

When there are only about five months in a semester to tackle the weighty goal of both preparing students for their Diploma Exams and to help them grow and develop as writers, it's no wonder teachers like Kate feel that she has to make tough choices about what elements of her ideal writing assessment program she needs to cut to make room to accomplish everything that needs to get done in a semester with her class. She knows that "it's not like the other stuff [non-exam genres, collaborative writing, self-reflection etc.] isn't valuable as well. . . but you have X amount of hours and it's not enough" (Second Interview) to deeply engage in the writing process the way she wants her students to. Due to time constraints Kate feels that when students "are done with it, they're done with it and as a class we're moving on to the next thing too" (Second Interview), so she doesn't feel that she is able to encourage students to engage in a recursive writing process the way she would like them to. "When you're actually writing like outside of school you're supposed to walk away from [a piece of writing] for like weeks or a month. . . we either have them beat it to death or we have them walk away period" (Second Interview); this tension isn't helped by the time limits placed on the one-day writing portion of the English Diploma Exam where "students sit down to write their Diplomas they don't have time to do process anymore" (Kate, Second Interview). Between the pressure some teachers feel to prepare

their students as best they can to achieve high marks on the Diploma Exam and the lack of instructional time to find a balance between exam preparation and developing writing skills outside of the Diploma Exam genres, it's no wonder all three teachers I interviewed are struggling with find a way to fulfill their desire to encourage a process-oriented approach to writing assessment in the face of a system wherein students are highly motivated by assignment completion and mark achievement rather than by skill development. If teachers had more time to focus on writing outside of exam preparation they may have a greater ability to develop metacognitive capacity in their students.

How Teachers Learn to Teach Writing. Another factor influencing the extent to which teachers feel able to incorporate scaffolded opportunities to develop metacognitive capacity in their students is related to how many high school English teachers learn to teach and assess writing. Many teachers do access professional development opportunities offered by their school districts or by attending conferences focused on various aspects of English instruction. Donna described the paradigm shift she experienced when she attended a conference to see popular professional development writers Penny Kittle, Kelly Gallagher and Donalyn Miller. After seeing these three speakers speak she knew “we don’t ever need to do a worksheet again. Let’s never do worksheets” (Second Interview).

Being presented with a viable alternative to traditional, template-based writing assessment was a significant experience for Donna as she developed an approach to writing assessment that emphasizes metacognition the most heavily of the three teachers I worked with for this project. Both Donna and Rachel also described marking Diploma Exams as very important experiences in the development of their approach to teaching and assessing student writing. For Donna, her first experience marking Diploma Exams reinforced the realization that

she was introduced to by Penny Kittle, Kelly Gallagher and Donnalyn Miller that she should “stop with the questions and booklets” (Second Interview) she had been using to support her writing assessment program. When I asked Rachel how she developed the templates and planning scaffolds she uses with her students she said that she developed them after “[she] went marking” (Second Interview) and had the opportunity to see hundreds of other students’ essays and to discuss how to prepare students for these exams with the colleagues she went marking with. Interestingly, while Donna walked away from her experiences marking Diplomas with a renewed vigour to encourage students to break out of traditional teaching methods, the same experience encouraged Rachel to rely heavily on traditional strategies like templates and guided scaffolds to prepare her students for exams. This shows that the ways teachers use their professional development experiences to reflect on and change their teaching practices are as individual as the teachers themselves. At the time of our interviews, Kate had not yet had the experience of marking Diploma Exams but was intending to travel to Edmonton to mark during the next marking session a few months after our second interview. She was looking forward to the experience as an important professional development opportunity because so many other teachers had told her it would be.

Learning to design and implement a writing assessment program is no easy task. Many teachers rely on their colleagues for support in this, especially when, as Rachel experienced, they feel that their teacher preparation programs did not adequately prepare them to assess writing. In Rachel’s experience “you don’t have a lot of preparation and the first time you teach 30-1 you know they have to write a Diploma and you have to try to find an old Diploma and you try to figure it out” (Second Interview). Donna even discovered that she was teaching one genre her English 30-2 students had to write on the Diploma Exam incorrectly when she went to mark

Diploma exams. There currently does not seem to be a systematic way to learn to teach these specific genres without either figuring it out on your own or by relying on the advice of colleagues, so mistakes like this are likely quite common.

Donna, Kate, and Rachel all discussed the importance of collaborating with colleagues to learn and develop their writing assessment practices. When I asked Kate where she learned the template she uses to teach the Literary Exploration Essay (an English 30-2 Diploma Exam genre) she said she developed it from “other teachers. Mentor teachers and things like that. And over the years, adjusting it more and more” (Second Interview). Donna relies heavily on the advice of her more experienced colleagues to calibrate her marking to ensure that she isn’t being too harsh or too easy on her students. She feels that they “always give [her] a really good, genuine response” even though her overall teaching and assessment methods diverge significantly from theirs. Rachel uses the long drive to and from Edmonton to mark Diploma Exams to talk to her colleagues to “collaborate and try to come up with strategies for the weaknesses we see in our kids and how we can help them” (Second Interview). Collegial collaboration is integral to helping new and experienced teachers reflect on and adjust their writing assessment practices as they see fit.

One potential downside of this reliance on colleagues as a major source of professional development is that it can contribute to out-dated practices like template-driven instruction being passed on year after year to new teachers as an easy way to help students produce the writing they need to be able to produce to achieve the marks on Diploma Exams that teachers, students, administration and parents hope for. As Donna demonstrates, many teachers would enthusiastically adopt a viable alternative to outdated or ineffective ways of teaching if they are only able to access those alternatives. Professional development opportunities and teacher

preparation programs are both key components to provoking any significant shift in practices in education; perhaps a focus on building metacognitive capacity could be the priority to help teachers help their students to develop the skills they need to write for life beyond high school. Indeed, teachers seem to generally recognize that the fruit of their students' labour is competently producing a wide variety of writing genres, but what may need emphasis is the fact that the fruit itself is only one indicator of writing competence. Without the underlying metacognitive competence to navigate complex rhetorical situations, monitor their own thinking and decision-making while writing, and self-correct when they sense themselves straying from their goals, students may be producing fruit that appears healthy and robust on visual inspection but delivers a muted, flavourless imitation of the platonic ideal.

Putting Down Roots: Process-oriented Assessment in a Product-Oriented Environment

Writing can be a messy process. Contrary to the neat, linear, step-by-step process I was taught in school wherein I progressed from brainstorming to planning and writing a first draft through revision before writing a “final copy” to hand in to my teacher, my experiences with writing in my adult life more closely resemble a tangle of processes that are far from linear. My process involves brainstorming, outlining, drafting, editing, and revising – often simultaneously – before eventually producing a draft that I may never call a “final copy”, but will serve as my best draft until I dive back into this messy process again to try to edge my best draft a little closer to the idealistic goal I set for myself when I began. Although many writing teachers likely do encourage a writing process that more closely resembles the latter, it is still quite common to emphasize the final product of the writing process in high school English classes rather than the process it takes to produce the final product. This emphasis on product over process is influenced by more factors than can be listed here, including Diploma Exam pressure, teacher experience and priorities, marks-driven school environments, and limited instructional time. However, Cope

and Kalantzis (2009) suggested that it is actually the writing process, not the product, that should be the focus of writing teachers because an emphasis on process encourages students to be active designers of meaning in their writing and to remain open to innovation and change as they develop as writers. Flower and Hayes (1981) also emphasize the importance of a writer's awareness of the interplay between themselves and their audience as they flexibly move through the various stages of planning, translating and reviewing their work throughout the writing process. Young writers who are exposed to a non-linear, flexible approach to the writing process are given the opportunity to see themselves as active designers of meaning who can use their writing skills to critically engage with the world (Van Heertum & Share, 2006). It would be difficult for students to see the potential for power that their writing has if they are solely focused on the mark they'll receive on their assignment or how prepared they'll be to write their Diploma Exam. For this reason, a process-oriented approach to writing assessment and instruction is an essential component of writing assessment programs that aim to guide students to writing competence in the world beyond their high school English classrooms.

Overview of the Theme Across All Three Cases

Both Donna and Kate deliberately and widely incorporate writing process into their writing assessments with the full awareness of its importance in the development of writing skills in their students. Indeed, the vast majority of the documents they submitted to me contained a variety of elements related to process-oriented writing assessment, including opportunities for student choice, revision, peer-editing, and extensive planning and brainstorming opportunities. Furthermore, they both described the emphasis they place on having students submit their work to them during the writing process to receive prompt written feedback before they continue moving through the writing process. Additionally, Donna uses her observations of student

process-in-action in her classroom as a means to gather evidence of student learning and to help verify that the work students submit for marking is their own (not plagiarized). Donna knows that “the product is important because that shows [her] whether or not [her students] have mastered the skills” (Second Interview) and “if [she doesn’t] see a lot of process in class then to [her] the product is kind of irrelevant” (Second Interview) because she wants to see clear evidence of students learning throughout the process, not just the end result.

As a published author herself, Kate also places heavy emphasis on the writing process in her class to the best of her ability. In her personal writing process, Kate describes the importance of taking her time with the writing process, including planning and revision, but this isn’t necessarily possible in a typical 5-month semester with limited instructional time. Nevertheless, she “really [tries] to harp on them about planning because [she] doesn’t know if [she’s] had a kid that thinks planning is a good idea” (First Interview). Kate does her best to expose her students to a variety of planning techniques so they can pick and choose which strategies work for them, rather than mandating a particular process for them. She also “doesn’t tell them what [planning strategies] to use” (First Interview), but she tells her students to “try them and if it’s not for [them] then [they can do] it a different way” (First Interview). Her emphasis on student choice and agency throughout the writing process gives her students the opportunity to experiment with a variety of writing strategies that they can apply throughout the writing process and potentially learn to apply to future writing projects as they see fit.

Based on both of my interviews with Rachel and on the documents she submitted to me for analysis, Rachel incorporated the least emphasis on writing process in her writing assessment program (see Figure 16 for a comparison of the three cases). In fact, when I asked her whether she feels she places greater emphasis on product or process in her writing assessments she told

me “[she doesn’t] know if [she’s] even thought of them as separate. So [she wasn’t] really sure how to respond to [the question] because the process creates the product.” Rachel does incorporate some process-oriented strategies into her writing assessment, in that “[her students] have time in class where [they] look at exemplars and [they] plan and [they] actually write in class and there’s time outside of class for extra time and they can access [her for extra help]” (Second Interview), but her description of the use of these strategies appears to be primarily focused on their utility as a means to produce the product she will mark, not necessarily as a learning experience in themselves. When I asked Donna the same question about her relative emphasis on product and process this is how she responded:

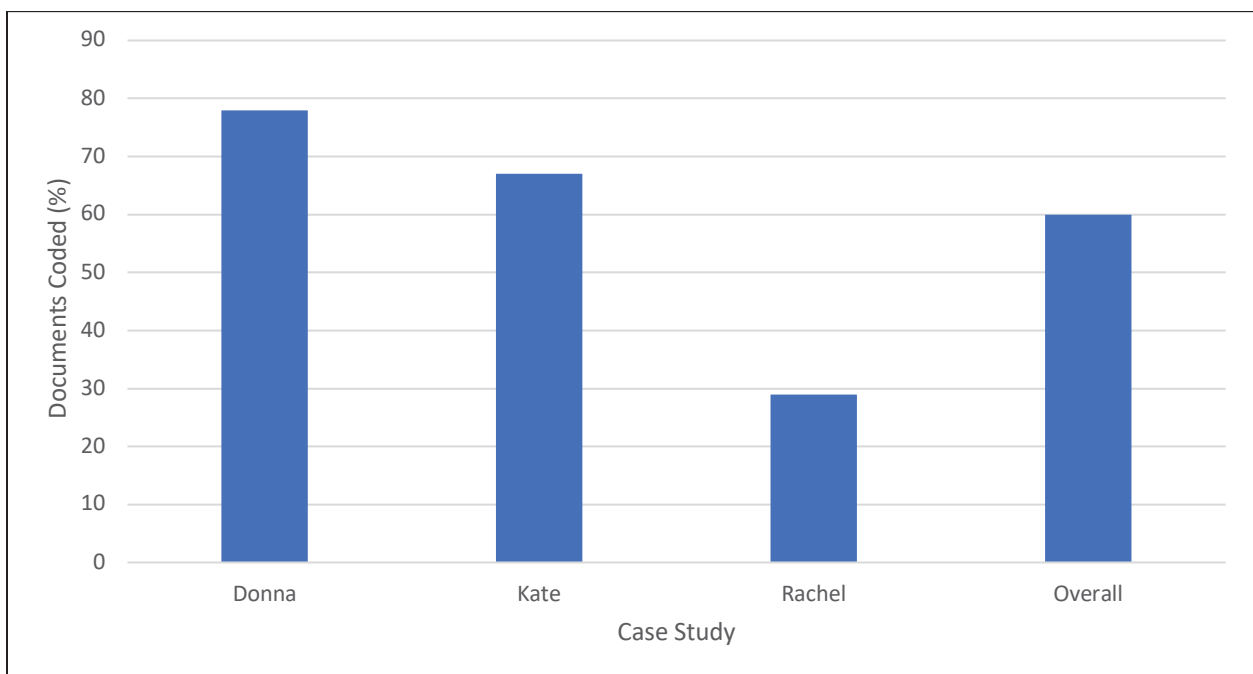
“I would say it’s sort of like 50/50 in my mind. Because I feel like we are really building skills. Like the product is important because that shows me whether or not you’ve mastered the skills. But I wouldn’t say that’s the only thing.” (Second Interview)

In contrast with Rachel’s response, Donna shows a clearer understanding of the skill-building aspect of a process-oriented approach to teaching writing as a complement to the final product she receives for marking. Rachel seems to view the process and the product as inseparable, with the process only serving as a means to produce the product for a mark, not as a learning opportunity in itself whether or not it results in a final marked product. In my interviews I tended to present process-oriented assessment and product-oriented assessment as a dichotomy, which is probably a misrepresentation of the two concepts. However, based on the three teachers I worked with, the teachers who emphasize teaching transferable writing skills as their primary purpose in assigning writing assessments to their classes tended to place greater emphasis on encouraging a recursive, non-linear writing process interspersed with feedback from peers and the teacher as a means to build those skills. By contrast, when a teacher is primarily focused on helping students

refine and perfect a specific genre through repetition the less value is placed on the writing process as valuable in and of itself. This phenomenon seems to be exacerbated by the extent to which preparation for the Diploma Exam was an emphasis in the teachers' writing assessment programs, perhaps because the context of the Diploma Exam itself does not value or allow for engagement in much more than a bare minimum of writing process.

Figure 16

Documents Coded Under “Process-Oriented Instruction” Theme



Influence of Preparation for Provincial Exams on Process-based Assessment

Whereas virtually all of Rachel's writing assessment is focused on perfecting the Diploma Exam genres in preparation for the exam in Grade 12, Kate and Donna both include a wide variety of genres in their writing assessment programs. Kate and Donna place a heavy emphasis on using these non-Diploma genres as the core of their writing assessment with the Diploma genres serving as a professional obligation they feel they need to fulfill to ensure that students are prepared for what is an undeniably important exam. Kate admits that she “hate[s] the

idea of ‘teach to the test’ and stuff like that, but at the same time if [her students] don’t do a bunch of practice of this kind of stuff [she’s] setting them up for failure” (Second Interview).

Donna and Kate have found similar ways to navigate the tension of feeling like they are adequately preparing their students for their provincial exams while not allowing that preparation to completely dominate the writing assessment in their classrooms. Both teachers tend to expedite the process of teaching students to write the exam genres by relying more heavily on a shortened, linear process and template-driven instruction than they do in the rest of their teaching. Donna “uses[s] templates for the writing that is mandated” (Second Interview) because she feels this frees up more of her instructional time for deeper engagement in more meaningful genres and the writing process more generally because it just makes it take less time to teach students to write genres that she feels are not necessarily “purposeful for [her teaching priorities]” (First Interview). Similarly, Kate feels that her students find more value in the non-Diploma genres she teaches, so she also speeds up the process of exam preparation by presenting the Diploma Exam genres in a way that is “much more structured, quite frankly, to get [her students] more used to that. So hopefully it will come through when they actually write those exams” (Second Interview). The contrast between the priority placed on efficiency when teaching Diploma Exam genres and the emphasis on process-oriented writing assessment that both Donna and Kate value in other areas of their writing assessment programs is probably an indication of their recognition of the limited value of the Diploma Exam genres in their students’ writing development. Both teachers tend to see the exams as a professional obligation or a “hoop” they have to jump through that is ultimately a distraction from the teaching they wish they had more time to do.

Unlike the Diploma Exam genres where templates and efficiency are relied upon quite heavily, when Donna and Kate teach non-Diploma Exam genres they do so in a much less structured way. For these genres they tend to use exemplars, rather than templates, to show the wide variety of ways that students can approach the task at hand. They often model writing these genres for their students to illustrate the writing process of a more experienced writer. Donna focuses her modelling on the planning process; “At the beginning of the year, [she] always show[s] them how [she] plans so [she] always does the modelling of what [she] would do if [she] were [her students]” (Second Interview). Kate models the writing process by actually drafting a paragraph of the same genre her students have been assigned on the Smartboard for her students to watch. She finds it particularly valuable in ‘that they see [her] going, ‘oh no, that’s the wrong word’, backspace, try to add in and like process at the same time” (First Interview) to show that revision and drafting are not linear steps but a fluid process that tends to happen simultaneously and messily as they work through the writing process.

Both Donna and Kate also heavily emphasize student choice in topic, format, organization, argument and other aspects of their writing whenever possible. By encouraging open-ended choice both teachers are opening the door for conversations with students about rhetorical purpose and how the students are negotiating fulfilling their goals as they write. As the choices in a writing assessment are narrowed and eliminated, so are many elements of the writing process and the underlying practice of metacognitive skills and processes. When students are prevented from developing a topic, organizational approach, argument and other important elements of a writing piece by being assigned a topic with relatively few choices therein students may be pigeon-holed into a writing process that is essentially comprised of plugging their few choices into a pre-existing template or a set of criteria created by their teacher. In Figure 4,

Rachel's prescriptive notes for how to approach a Critical Analysis Essay limit her students to essentially choose a character to focus on and which argument structure would best support their thesis statement. Unfortunately, her students are not having the important experience of figuring out on their own or with their peers through exploration of exemplars and modelling how to make decisions about argument structure based on rhetorical intention or how to best organize an analytical essay to have the greatest impact on their reader. The more choices a student has when they are tackling a writing task the more opportunities they have to deeply engage in a non-linear, recursive writing process that also allows them to develop and build the underlying metacognitive skills and knowledge they need to hopefully transfer these skills to future writing tasks.

Conversely, when Kate has her students experiment with script writing in her English 20-1 class, she provides ample choice and opportunity for students to experiment with what is likely an unfamiliar genre for most of them (see Figure 17). She provides them with an exemplar to illustrate what script format looks like and then uses one-on-one conferencing, modelling and written feedback to guide her students through a much more fluid writing process than the one she uses to teach Diploma Exam genres. This shift in emphasis and technique seems to indicate both a lack of value in the Diploma Exam genres as a valuable means to teach writing process given that writing process is not valued by the exam itself and a belief that the goal of the Diploma Exam genres is for students to demonstrate replication and mastery of very specific genres under very specific circumstances rather than the more exploratory and fluid approach to writing development applied to other genres. Indeed, Donna and Kate do not seem to expect or strive for mastery in non-Diploma genres. They value the experience of writing something

unfamiliar, picking up skills along the way and hopefully applying and transferring these skills to future genres that they choose to expose their students to.

Figure 17

Kate's "The Great Gatsby" Script Writing Assignment for English 20-1

What really happened?

Directions:
You will write the "missing chapter" for one of two "absent" scenes from the novel, in **script formatting**. These are scenes Nick *knows about*, although he does not know the content of the conversation. However, you will be text detectives and based on the previous behavior of the characters, as well as Nick's description of events following these moments, you will write the "missing" scenes. Clearly, important conversations have taken place that we, the readers, haven't witnessed.

Requirements:

- ✓ Your chapter must refer to the events that we know have already happened
- ✓ Your chapter must be accurate in reference to the character's past and present (consider the quotations below).
- ✓ Your characters' voices should be true to the text.
- ✓ You will **type out your script**.
- ✓ You must follow **correct script formatting**.

OPTION ONE *A New Beginning – Daisy and Gatsby – Chapter Five*
Nick sneaks out of the house when he senses that Gatsby wants to be alone with Daisy. He re-enters after several minutes, noting the following:
I went in – after making every possible noise in the kitchen short of pushing over the stove – but I don't believe they heard a sound. They were sitting at either end of the couch looking at each other as if some question had been asked or was in the air, and every vestige of embarrassment was gone.

So what did Daisy and Gatsby say to one another in the 20 minutes Nick waited outside?

OPTION TWO is *A Quick Reconciliation – Daisy and Tom – Chapter Seven*
Following the car accident, Gatsby drives Daisy to her home. When Tom, Jordan and Nick arrive at the Buchanan home, Nick runs into Gatsby hiding in the dark. Nick checks on Daisy for a moment, noting the following:
I came to a small rectangle of light...Daisy and Tom were sitting opposite each other at the kitchen table with a plate of coldfried chicken between them and two bottles of ale. He was talking intently across the table at her....

So what do Tom and Daisy say to each other that night? Go back and read the rest of Nick's observation

Example of script formatting:

```
INT. COLLEGE CLASSROOM - DAY
George and Nadia pack up their books and file out.
      GEORGE
Tell me why we can't date again?
      NADIA
I'm not attracted to you.

EXT. TENNIS COURT - CONTINUOUS
Nadia serves aggressively to George's backhand.
      GEORGE
Not attracted meaning repulsed? Or
not attracted meaning you've never
considered how hot I am.

INT. NADIA'S STATION WAGON - CONTINUOUS
The care idles in traffic.
      NADIA
"Repulsed" is a little extreme,
George. But so is "hot."
```

What Writing Process Looks Like in the Classroom

All three teachers encourage a multi-step writing process when they support students in completing writing assessments in their classroom. Generally speaking the process used by these

teachers is broadly the same in terms of the steps they move their students through, but with significant differences in the extent to which they also encourage flexibility and flow between the steps of the writing process (as opposed to a step-by-step progression through the steps). In Figure 18, Donna’s planning scaffold seems to encourage a linear progression from brainstorming to planning to drafting to submission, but in our interviews she actually described more fluidity in practice in that she relies heavily on conferencing with students throughout the writing process to help them decide when and how to move between the steps of the progress. According to Donna, she “use[s] the Writer’s Workshop as a framework and [she] just kind of sees what they need” (First Interview) and plans and guides accordingly.

Figure 18

Donna’s Planning Scaffold for a Persuasive Essay

The Process:	
It is very important that you plan your essay before you start writing. To do this, follow this outline:	
1. Your claim: _____ This is what you intend on convincing your reader of.	
2. Your arguments:	
For:	Against:
List all the information that you have. You can always decide not to use it, if you want later.	
3. Decide on your three main arguments. Put a star beside them on you chart. You may also want to choose one or two counterarguments (the arguments the other side would use against you in a debate) so that you can discount them in your essay.	
4. You are ready to write. Follow the outlines above to create you rough copy.	

Kate also encourages a similar basic process involving brainstorming, planning, drafting and submission. She provides “a lot more structured planning time, drafting time, editing time” to her younger students to build the value in engaging in the process so they can navigate moving through these steps in later grades with a less explicit structure and a greater ability to make their own decisions about what they need to do to successfully complete the writing task-at-hand. All three teachers also provide opportunities for re-doing and re-submitting their writing assessments with revisions completed to improve their mark. Students engage in these optional opportunities to varying degrees, and almost always for the sole purpose of improving their marks rather than the underlying skills, but all three teachers also expressed that providing these opportunities to their students has had the effect of helping students see the value in writing as a process wherein the process itself is valuable as a means to improve the final product. Although all three teachers offer optional one-on-one conferencing to help guide students in revising and re-submitting their work, in Kate’s classroom “students are [only] allowed to re-do work after meeting with me, provided they have the original piece with the rubric and can show what they’ve changed or improved upon” (First Interview). Placing this emphasis on talking through the changes they’ve made, reflecting on the improvements they hope to see and accessing their teacher’s guidance in engaging in this part of the writing process is likely very helpful in engaging students in the metacognitive processes involved in deeply engaging in the writing process.

Changes that Would Support Process-oriented Writing Assessment in High School English Classrooms

Many of the obstacles preventing teachers from carrying out their ideal practices in the classroom relate back to structures and cultures that are deeply embedded in the education system in Alberta – process-oriented teaching appears to be no exception. Donna, Kate and Rachel all encourage their students to revise and re-submit their writing assessments to improve

their marks (and hopefully their writing skills), but all three teachers have found that these opportunities are infrequently taken advantage of by students. Donna sees the potential for encouraging a culture of re-submission of completed assessments to encourage a shift in student perception of the importance of the writing process. However, she also fully acknowledges that “they are only [re-submitting assignments] because they get a better grade. They would never do it if it was just for fun” (Second Interview). This indicates that there are limitations to student engagement in this part of the writing process. Rachel has taken to formalizing the process through which students engage in her feedback to help encourage them to re-do and re-submit their assignments by “passing Chromebooks back out and making them read [her comments on their writing assignments] in class” (Second Interview) because she feels that this at least requires students to engage with feedback on some level that will help them improve their writing. Kate has noticed that “[her students] definitely do utilize [opportunities to revise and re-submit their assessments for a better grade] as they get to the upper grades more” (Second Interview). Without talking to the students themselves about why their priorities shift, it is difficult to know exactly what is prompting the change. Based on conversations with the teachers in this study and personal experience it is possible that the looming Diploma Exam is part of the reason or perhaps students start to value their grades more as they progress through high school as they start to see that their grades can be an influential factor in their university admission.

All three teachers cited the time constraints of curricular demands, class size and exam preparation pressure to be important factors in their ability to implement writing process to the extent that they would like to. Rachel estimates that “it’s about 30 hours [of marking] per essay set that [she] puts in” (Second Interview), most of that time is put in outside of school hours, so it is easy to imagine why a teacher would feel the need to limit the number of assessments they can

reasonably give feedback on and mark. Kate “used to be able to have [her classes] do several of each type of piece of writing and pick their best for recording [the mark], whereas just the reality is that [she] can’t mark that much” (First Interview) so she feels she has to make the difficult choice to both limit the number of writing pieces her students do and find a way to efficiently move them through a writing process that will not occupy too much class time but will still provide value for their growth as writers. Donna feels that “when [her school] went from year-long [classes] and now [they] do semestered [classes], there just seems to be a lot less time even though there shouldn’t be” (Second Interview) and this feeling of a lack of time combined with “feel[ing] like [she does] need to focus a bit on the PAT when the writing part comes around” (Second Interview) also pushes her to feel she has to limit the way her students can engage in the writing process. Overall, each teacher has aspirational intentions of helping their students engage meaningfully with the writing process and their feedback in order to improve as writers, but the reality of the time constraints they must teach within make it exceptionally difficult for these teachers to reach their aspirations.

In my second interview with Kate she brought up an exciting opportunity to start a creative writing class as an optional course for students to take. Kate described the course as “based on process” (Second Interview) and she seemed very excited about having the space and time to engage with students who want to grow as writers in the ways that she knows she can help them to grow without many of the constraints she experiences in her English classes. Unfortunately, the class never came to fruition. The fact that the best opportunity Kate could identify for creating a writing environment that would allow students to lay down the deep root system of metacognitive skills and knowledge to support a recursive, fluid writing process was an optional course outside of the mandatory English Language Arts courses all high school

students take is an eye-opening commentary on the challenges teachers face in teaching writing the way they would like to. Without the pressure of preparing students for provincial exams that leave virtually no opportunity for writing process when students write them, without the massive marking load teachers carry when they teach the large classes that have become so common in this province, and without having to navigate the challenges associated with building a process-oriented culture in a marks-oriented environment some teachers can imagine a class where they can design writing assessment programs that value process, and the learning associated with it, rather than the products that represent only a small fraction of the process of learning to be a competent writer.

Space to Grow: Writing for Authentic Discourse Communities

In order for students to develop their metacognitive capacity to the point that they are able to produce the flavourful fruit of competently negotiating the complex tasks involved in the writing process, they need frequent, scaffolded opportunities to write for authentic audiences outside of their classrooms. Students must not be confined to exclusively writing for their teacher and their peers or they will not have the opportunities they need to really be able to treat writing tasks as a rhetorical problem that involves navigating communication with an authentic discourse community (Brady, 1993). According to Salibrici (1999), writing tasks involving real-world audiences require students to learn the characteristics of a variety of genres and the social contexts in which those characteristics are valued and are intended to be used. This represents a deeper understanding of the purpose(s) and underlying processes at work when students write for real-world contexts. Traditionally, authentic discourse communities have not played a significant role in writing assessment despite the fact that writing ability is measured by how well a writer can negotiate, adjust and satisfy the needs of their audience within authentic contexts (Brady, 1993). Instead, many teachers rely on formulaic structures like templates for students to replicate

with more focus on the extent to which the final product fulfills the genre characteristics outlined by the teacher than the extent to which the product could serve a real audience within the context the genre typically is used. Beck and Jeffry (2007) recommend that teachers should instead design assessments that allow students to respond to and work within the social contexts of the genres they want their students to practice as a means to help them build the capacity to satisfy the various discourse communities they will encounter beyond high school English class. Teachers may be unintentionally depriving their students of the opportunities they need to build rhetorical problem-solving skills by eliminating authentic audiences in favour of teacher-only audiences or hypothetical imagined scenarios where students are asked to imagine writing for what could be a real audience, but will just be their teacher reading and assessing their completed product.

Overview of the Theme Across All Three Cases

Donna expressed a deep awareness of the importance of incorporating authentic audiences into her classroom in terms of student engagement in the writing tasks involving real-world audiences and the way her students tended to approach writing tasks in which they were writing for people outside of their classroom. Donna expresses that “it is really important [to incorporate authentic audiences because the students] approach assignments way differently when they know they are writing for someone else with way more seriousness” (Second Interview). Kate and Rachel, on the other hand, did not place the same priority on incorporating authentic audiences into their writing assessment programs. Kate admitted that she incorporated far more real-world writing tasks when she taught middle school English, but in senior high she “almost never” (Second Interview) gives students the chance to address audiences other than her. According to both of my interviews with her and on the documents she submitted for analysis,

Rachel does not incorporate authentic audiences in any capacity in her writing assessment practices.

This lack of emphasis on authentic discourse communities is supported by the fact that none of the documents submitted to me by any of the three teachers included reference to students addressing an audience outside of the classroom. The one near-exception is Donna’s Non-fiction Project in which students are required to produce a podcast or video that can be optionally shared with their classmates (see Figure 19). However, Donna admits that “most groups do not want [her] to share [their projects] because they can’t really be anonymous” (Second Interview), so most students do not even access this level of engaging with an audience beyond Donna. Additionally, the portion of the project that will be shared (the podcast or video) may involve some writing to produce, but the personal essay portion of the project is restricted to a teacher-only audience.

Figure 19

Donna’s Non-Fiction Project Assignment

<u>Non Fiction Project</u>				
Create either a vlog or a podcast on a topic of your choice.				
Required Elements:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Content: either inform, entertain OR persuade (this is not a how-to) - Format: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Initial product: a personal essay (choose a purpose!) o Requires one source of research o Final product: podcast OR vlog (hand in your essay as well) o Final product must be between 4-7 minutes 				
Evaluation				
	4	3	2	1
Content	Information has many specific details, provides at least two sources found in research	Information has a lot of detail, at least one source	Information is basic but provides some detail. One source is offered	Information is lacking
Organization	Ideas are insightfully organized	Ideas are well organized	Ideas are simply organized	Ideas are haphazardly organized
Presentation X2	Speaking is confident, interesting and well-rehearsed	Speaking is rehearsed	Speaking is can be heard but the speaker isn't confident	Rehearsals are clearly lacking

Navigating Audience in the Classroom

Although none of the teachers prioritize authentic audiences as a cornerstone of their writing assessment programs, Donna and Kate have both incorporated some opportunities for students to address audiences outside of the classroom. Donna has had her Grade 9 classes write to people who are in long-term care in the local hospital, but this isn't an initiative she has repeated due to a variety of obstacles that will be discussed in the next section. Kate has found that students "aren't any more interested in [the writing projects involving authentic audiences] than they. . . are in anything else" (Second Interview), but she has found that when she encourages students to pursue such opportunities outside of class their engagement in those projects is drastically higher than anything they do in class. She admits, however, that "students [who engage in writing projects outside of class] only plan to do a project they are already interested in writing" (Second Interview), which is obviously an important factor in their level of engagement. It stands to reason that many students will be more engaged in projects they have invested an interest in than the ones that their teacher has assigned in class. Kate may not prioritize authentic audiences in her writing assessment programs, but she does heavily encourage students who have an extra-curricular interest in writing to pursue their development as writers. For example, "[she has] a student who writes regularly for the local newspaper" (Second Interview) and she works with a group of international exchange students who write and self-publish picture books that they then sell in their community as a fundraiser. Both of these examples exist entirely outside of the walls of her English Language Arts classes, but both likely result in significant development of these writers as they explore and tackle writing tasks for authentic audiences.

Other than their teacher, students in Donna and Kate's classes primarily write for their classmates, if anyone at all. Donna feels "it's important that [her students] write for someone"

(Second Interview), but she also admits that even though they share much of their work in class with their classmates the experience of writing for their peers isn't the same as addressing an audience outside of their classroom. Kate approaches sharing writing in a similar way in her classroom in that her students "at the most, would [share] with other students in the class or other teachers in the class" (Second Interview). Both teachers seem to value the impact an authentic audience can have on their students' development as writers, but struggle to meaningfully incorporate these opportunities into their writing assessment practices.

One workaround that Donna uses in her writing assessments is the idea of the "imaginary audience". There are frequent references to "the reader" in some of Donna's writing assessments (see Figures 2 and 3) that seem to attempt to distance the students from the fact that they are only writing for their teacher by having them imagine the persona of a fictional reader reading their final product. In Figure 3, for example, "the reader" of the persuasive essay the students are to write is looking to be persuaded to accept the idea or opinion being argued by the student. In Figure 2, Donna's rubric, in part, evaluates the students' "awareness of audience" in their persuasive essay. Although this technique possibly does encourage students to consider how they might persuade a reader that isn't their teacher of their opinion on a given topic, the paradox of having to both imagine they are addressing a person whom they are trying to convince of their opinion while keeping in mind the reality that their teacher is the true audience of the piece (someone who is not necessarily interested in having their opinion swayed but is simply looking to assess the extent to which the student theoretically fulfilled this goal with an imaginary audience) puts students in an awkward rhetorical position. The students' navigation of the rhetorical problem at hand could change quite dramatically if they were addressing an authentic audience. The way a student approaches a persuasive essay that is trying to completely change

the opinion of someone who is quite familiar with the topic could be quite different than the way they would approach the essay if they are trying to persuade someone to their opinion who knows almost nothing about the topic. Both scenarios would present a valuable opportunity for a student to reflect on and deploy a variety of strategies to serve the needs of their audience. Unfortunately, the reality is their teacher created the assignment and will be the only one reading it in order to assign a mark, so the student is confined to writing in a suitably persuasive voice to fulfill the requirements of the assignment without the “stakes” of actually using their words to persuade an authentic audience. Without the stakes of navigating the needs of an authentic audience, students are somewhat stunted in their ability to grow in their capacity to satisfy the needs of authentic discourse communities, navigate rhetorical problems in their writing, and build the metacognitive skills and processes they need to be competent writers in the world beyond their high school English classrooms.

Changes that Would Support Opportunities for Addressing Authentic Discourse Communities in High School English Classrooms

Instructional Time and Class Sizes. At the risk of sounding repetitive, both Donna and Kate, once again, sited time constraints and class size as the major obstacles to their ability to incorporate authentic audiences in their classrooms in a way that they feel would be meaningful. Kate admitted that the lack of opportunities for addressing real-world audiences is “a time thing” (Second Interview) and that “smaller class sizes and more class time would be fabulous” when it comes to bringing her ideal practices closer to the realities that she faces in her classroom. Donna also struggles with class time when it comes to incorporating authentic audiences, but she also feels that it takes her longer to plan and implement writing projects that involve authentic discourse communities. She struggles with whether she should “spend a lot of time thinking about [opportunities for real-world audiences] or [should she] do something that [she] knows

students are going to think is cool” (Second Interview), but that may not involve any audience other than her.

Logistical Challenges. In the past, Donna has had her students write letters to people in long-term care in their community, but she “didn’t continue it [because] it was really hard to facilitate with the hospital” (Second Interview). These logistical challenges seem to be common when a teacher tries to facilitate opportunities for students to write to people outside of their classroom. The reality is that it takes a significant amount of time for the teacher to contact an organization like a hospital to set up an opportunity to write to patients. When these teachers are already struggling under the pressure of exam preparation, limited preparation time and curricular pressure these opportunities may not seem worth the amount of effort it takes to organize and implement them in their classrooms. Additionally, the opportunities that are “ready-made” are not always particularly appealing. Submitting writing projects to a contest of some type is a common method of incorporating outside audiences into the classroom, but as Donna points out “they [can’t] submit anything. [The projects] would have to be the same. They would have to be super regimented. And that kind of goes against [her] practice” (Second Interview). Although this may not be true of all writing contexts, it is true of many of them and many teachers simply do not have the time to search for the opportunities that would allow students the freedom and flexibility they need to engage meaningfully in addressing an authentic audience in this format.

The challenges Donna and Kate describe are significant and understandable. Designing writing assessments that allow students to address an authentic discourse community seems to be an aspirational “extra” for both teachers and are understandably not necessarily a high priority when the realities of large classes, limited prep time and instructional time, curricular pressures,

and exam preparation pressure are taken into account. Unfortunately for the students, this reality means that they are infrequently, at best, getting scaffolded opportunities to enculturate into authentic discourse communities. In turn, this could mean that students are not experiencing the opportunities they would ideally have to grow into competent writers who can navigate a myriad of rhetorical situations and satisfy a variety of audiences like they will inevitably have to do once they leave high school for university and the world of work.

Careful Pruning: Providing Quality Feedback to Improve Student Writing

Quality, written feedback from an experienced writing teacher is a crucial element in helping students grow as writers. However, much like pruning a fruit tree in a way that encourages maximum high-quality fruit production relies on careful timing and the skills of an experienced arborist, not all feedback on writing assessments has an equally positive impact on student growth. According to Black et. al (2004), providing both written feedback and a numerical score on a writing assessment tends to prompt students to ignore the feedback and only pay attention to the mark. For teacher feedback to be as impactful as possible for students it should, according to Black and Wiliam (2009), create “cognitive conflict” (p. 19) for students by avoiding simply giving them the answers to encourage students to use metacognition to reflect on their own learning as they complete learning tasks.

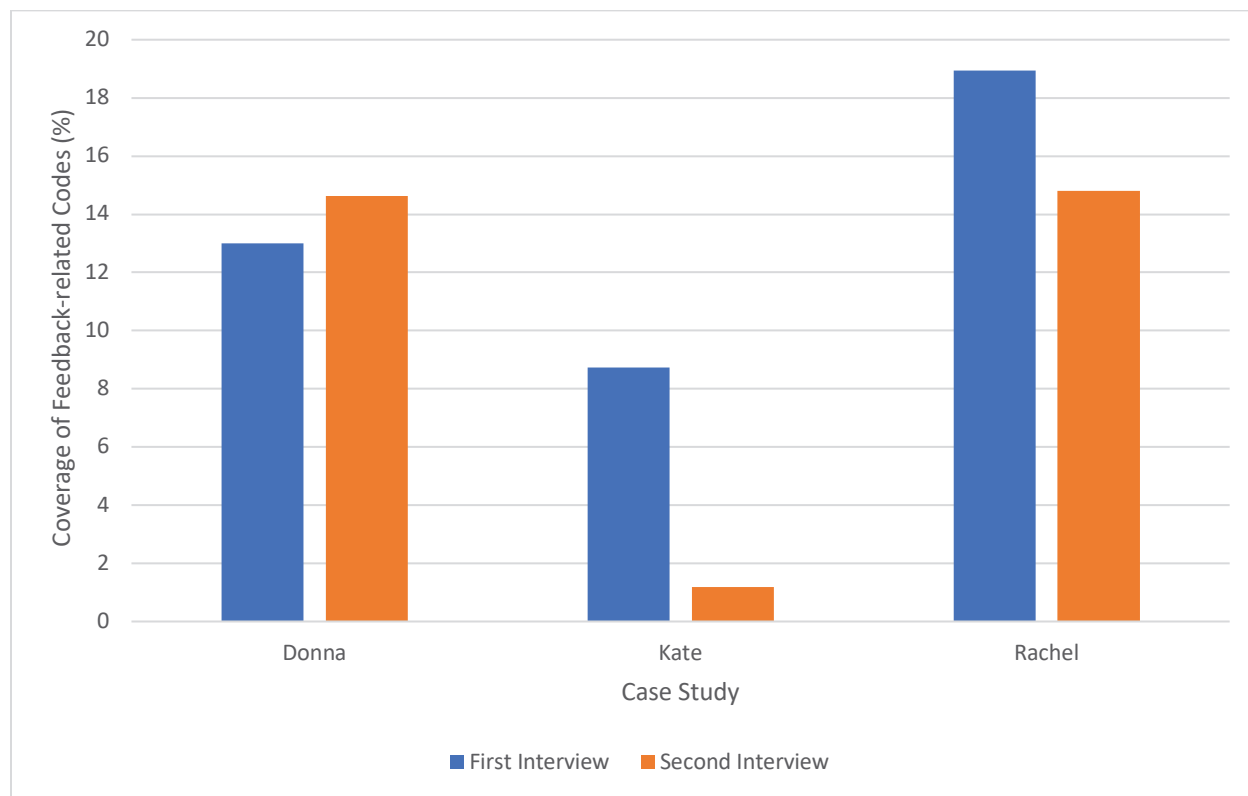
Overview of the Theme Across All Three Cases

Across the three case studies included in this project, providing ample, quality feedback to students on their writing assessments was described as a high priority and an area of strength for all three teachers. Codes relating to teacher feedback had relatively high coverage across both interviews for each teacher (see Figure 20), with the exception of Kate who emphasizes providing feedback to her students to the same extent as the other two teachers but did not

elaborate on her processes for providing feedback to the same degree as the other two teachers in her interviews.

Figure 20

Coverage of Codes Related to Feedback Across All Three Case Studies



Note. Includes parent code for “Feedback” and child codes “Identifying Techniques for Improving Writing” and “Teacher Feedback”

Both Kate and Donna tended to emphasize providing feedback to students throughout the writing process, whereas Rachel’s focus was primarily on providing feedback on the completed assignments that students submitted for marking. Donna’s focus during her students’ writing time in class tends to be on responding their needs or weaknesses in real time by providing “specific mini-lessons around whatever it is that they need” (First Interview), including grammar and writing mechanics lessons, providing exemplars of a variety of writing techniques, and discussing strategies for revision and editing. Similarly, Kate also emphasizes “circulating and

[giving] verbal feedback” (First Interview) to her students while they are writing during class. Kate frequently invites her students to “sit with [her] and go over sentence structure for five, ten minutes” (First Interview) as a means to support their writing development in a very personal, targeted way. Donna also invites her students to sit with her while they work so she can more easily provide feedback right when they need it while they are writing, including encouraging her students to “branch out” (Second Interview) and to attempt “something that’s a little less safe” (Second Interview). Finally, Donna and Kate further support their students in the writing process by encouraging them to submit partially completed drafts for feedback before submitting their final product. Donna “always let[s] them hand in their drafts before [they are marked]” (First Interview) as long as the students specifically “tell [her] what [they] need help with” (First Interview). This is both to improve her ability to efficiently provide the most helpful feedback possible based on the students’ self-identified needs and to encourage them to practice building rhetorical awareness by identifying their goals with a piece and seeking feedback to help them reach those goals. In a similar way, Kate has her students “print off what they ha[ve] and give it to [her] so they could get formative feedback right away” (First Interview) after their first class of working on a piece. Both Donna and Kate expressed that they felt the feedback they provide to students *during* the writing process is crucial to the growth of their students as writers. This is compared to the written feedback they provide on the completed assessments students submit where they both feel that their feedback has a smaller impact on improving student writing due to the fact that many students do not engage with feedback on an assignment they see as “complete” once it has a mark attached.

Rachel, on the other hand, has a somewhat different approach to providing feedback. She primarily focuses on giving written feedback on the completed assignments her students submit

to her for marking. Her feedback is accompanied by a numerical grade using the Diploma Exam Scoring Guides and, like Donna and Kate, she also encourages students to revise their work based on her feedback and re-submit their work to be re-marked for a higher grade. Despite spending less time providing real-time feedback during the writing process, Rachel is equally focused on helping her students improve as writers by encouraging them to engage with her feedback following submission of their assignments. Given that Rachel primarily focuses on assessing Diploma Exam genres in her classroom, her feedback is also focused quite specifically on moving students up the scale of the Diploma Exam Scoring Guides provided by Alberta Education based on her experience marking Diploma Exams and on preparing students for the exams. Rachel relies heavily on Google Docs to provide feedback on student work and she has a fairly specific system for doing so. For example, Rachel “make[s] comments about [her students’] introduction, the body, and the conclusion” (First Interview) as a general structure for her feedback, but she will also give precise feedback about particular elements of their writing, such as “your thesis statement was on topic, but it lacked the depth that is needed. . . or your blueprint was missing and I wasn’t sure what direction you were moving with your piece” (First Interview). She also offers one-on-one help outside of class time if students feel they need additional clarification on her feedback as they work to revise and re-submit their assignment for a better grade. Although Rachel provides feedback from a slightly different angle than Donna and Kate, all three teachers clearly prioritize written and verbal feedback as a cornerstone of their writing assessment practices.

Establishing Clear Assessment Criteria as a Basis for Written Feedback

All three teachers build a foundation on which they base their feedback by providing explicitly clear criteria for how student writing will be assessed prior to having students complete writing assessments. By outlining specific characteristics and features that students should be

aiming to include in their writing, all three teachers then based their feedback on the extent to which students have successfully incorporated this criteria. To start with, each teacher provides some kind of list, notes, or other scaffolds to students prior to writing that essentially comprise a set of suggestions for how to approach their assignment (See Figure 21 for examples). Donna, for example, ensures that prior to having students start writing “the directions are really clear, [students have] exemplars available, [and] giving rubrics is so important that have descriptors of ‘what does that look like in your writing?’” (First Interview).

Figure 21

Examples of Establishing Clear Criteria for Writing Assessments From Each Case Study

Here are some tips on making a personal essay more effective:

Focus on detail – The writer’s job is to show, not tell, what happened. Be sure to use plenty of detail to make this happen and avoid over relying on adjectives; strong verbs are often better. In other words, don’t tell the reader that the sunset was breathtaking, describe it.

Incorporate sensory detail - When describing a particular event, most writers focus on how a place or situation appeared. This is because most of us tend to be sight-dominant when using our senses. However, the reader can be brought further into the essay by incorporating a variety of senses: sound, smell, touch, taste, in addition to sight.

Connect the event/person/place to a larger idea - As you are describing this event, person, place, etc., don’t lose focus on the main idea: how the event changed you. This is the thesis of your personal essay, and it is important that you demonstrate how the details come together to create this thesis. Don’t get so caught up in narrating the actual event that you forget to also **go into detail on the importance of it**.

Note. Excerpt from Donna’s “Personal Essay” assignment.

Each project requires the following:

- ❖ details from the reading
- ❖ careful organization for clarity
- ❖ creativity of presentation and/or artistic endeavor
- ❖ use of proper script format

What really happened?

Directions:

You will write the “missing chapter” for one of two “absent” scenes from the novel, in **script formatting**. These are scenes Nick *knows about*, although he does not know the content of the conversation. However, you will be text detectives and based on the previous behavior of the characters, as well as Nick’s description of events following these moments, you will write the “missing” scenes. Clearly, important conversations have taken place that we, the readers, haven’t witnessed.

Requirements:

- ✓ Your chapter must refer to the events that we know have already happened.
- ✓ Your chapter must be accurate in reference to the character’s past and present (consider the quotations below).
- ✓ Your characters’ voices should be true to the text.
- ✓ You will **type out your script**.
- ✓ You must follow **correct script formatting**.

Note. Excerpt from Kate’s “Script Project” assignment.

- 1) Read the assignment topic carefully, underline key words and use those words throughout your paper to help keep your focus. Make sure you understand the key words; think about what they mean and how you would describe them. Use a dictionary to look them up and a thesaurus for strong synonyms (be careful with the thesaurus).

On the Diploma, you might find slightly different wording from how the personal was written.

EX: Consider how the nature of self-preservation has been reflected and developed in a literary text you have studied. Discuss the idea(s) developed by the text creator about the role that self-preservation plays when individuals respond to competing demands.

- 2) Choose which 30-1 text to use as support. By January, you will have several excellent texts to choose from. Think about using secondary characters (in a novel), not just the main protagonist. Ask yourself what character fits the key words—who has had demands placed on them? Who has tried to preserve themselves? How did they do it?

Note. Excerpt from Rachel’s “Critical Essay Notes”.

In addition to front-loading their writing assessments with specific criteria, notes, scaffolds and other guidance to help students ensure they are meeting the expectations of the writing assessment, all three teachers devote a significant amount of time in class to teaching students how to read and assess using the same rubrics their teachers and provincial exam markers will use to assess their work. Rachel succinctly summarizes the process that all three teachers generally follow when teaching rubrics:

“I always start with exemplars of students who have gotten ‘[Satisfactory]’, ‘[Proficient]’, or ‘[Excellent]’ on this different type of writing. So we go through exemplars and underline thesis statements and we try to point out the strengths or the weaknesses and how they fit in the rubric.” (First Interview)

Both Kate and Donna described following very similar processes when they taught their students how to interpret and use rubrics for their writing assessments, but Donna “didn’t find that it made a whole bunch of difference in [the students’] writing” when she took the time to have them assign marks to exemplars using the rubrics. The reasons for this are beyond the scope of this project, but it is interesting that such a widespread and popular practice in high school English classrooms may not be having the impact that teachers hope. Given how much time pressure many teachers feel they are under, perhaps this is a practice that could be adjusted to more effectively help students develop as writers by identifying effective rhetorical moves and strategies used in the exemplars for use in their own writing without worrying about assigning a mark to the exemplar as they would imagine a teacher would. Presumably, shifting this focus toward rhetorical analysis and away from numerical assessment could help students build their toolkit of strategies to try as they write these genres themselves.

Overall, the goal of establishing criteria with this degree of clarity and specificity seems to help all three teachers frame their feedback in terms of how well their students are aligning with the pre-established criteria. Furthermore, the students are likely able to more closely align their writing to the criteria set out by their teacher when the criteria is communicated to clearly. Unfortunately, by explicitly handing students such a precise guideline for how to write each genre, there is the possibility that opportunities to build metacognitive skills and knowledge are being lost when students don't have to as deeply consider the goals they have for a given piece of writing and how they will achieve those goals.

Changes that Would Support Opportunities for Providing Quality Feedback in High School English Classrooms

Limited Marking Time and Class Size. As with many of the other challenges English teachers face in implementing their idea practices, class sizes and time were cited by Kate and Rachel especially as significant obstacles for them when they considered how they implement feedback in their classrooms. In order to manage her marking load, Kate carefully plans the timing of when her students will submit assignments for marking so “[she] isn’t marking 150 essays at one time” (First Interview). Rachel described a similar planning process in that she takes into account “how many -1 versus -2 classes [she is teaching] because the writing for -2 can be a little bit simpler or a little bit quicker for [her] to go through” when she’s planning the timing of assignments for her writing assessment program. Rachel suggested that dedicated marking time should be built into the timetables of English teachers in addition to the preparation time all teachers are entitled to because the reality of many English teacher’s lives is that the vast majority of the time spent giving written feedback and marking writing assessments happens outside of working hours. To help deal with the overwhelming marking load she encounters, Rachel will “take a sick day when [she’s] not sick, but [she] can’t keep up” (First Interview) with

her marking load, so she takes the day to “literally sit at [her] dining room table and mark” (First Interview). The significant marking load and time pressure of keeping up with giving students quality feedback on their writing has prompted Kate to find ways to balance giving students quality feedback with keeping the amount of time she spends giving feedback manageable for her. The reality of striking this balance is that Kate feels that “the kids just aren’t getting the feedback as quickly as [she wants] to give it to them or as effectively as [she wants] to give it to them” (First Interview).

Student Engagement with Written Feedback. Another obstacle Kate, Donna and Rachel described is the reluctance of many students to meaningfully engage with the feedback they are given. All three teachers noticed that unless they provide the feedback as a means to revise and re-submit the assignment for a better grade, most students will just ignore it outright. This is consistent with the assertion of Black et. al (2004) that students will tend to only pay attention to the numerical score they are given and ignore the written feedback that accompanies it. However, given the fact that many English teachers struggle to find the time to have students hand in an assignment once, provide a numerical score, and give written feedback, the thought of having students hand in an assignment for feedback only and then handing it in a second (or third or fourth) time for a mark can seem understandably daunting for many teachers who already feel that they are drowning in their marking pile. The widespread incorporation of synchronous document editing programs in classrooms, like Google Classroom, seems to be alleviating some of the time pressure of providing feedback, however. Rachel ensures her students “turn [their writing assignments] in on Google Classroom and on Google Classroom [she goes] through and [she makes] comments and suggestions” (First Interview) much more quickly and efficiently than she could if she was giving hand-written feedback on printed submissions. Structural

obstacles, rather than cultural ones, seem to be the most significant challenge for Donna, Kate and Rachel when it comes to their ability to provide feedback the way they want. All three teachers cited their commitment to providing quality feedback as a strength of their writing assessment programs, but all three teachers also expressed, in some form or another, a feeling of inadequacy in their ability to deliver feedback as quickly as they want, as detailed as they want or as impactfully as they want as it relates to helping their students develop as writers.

A Healthy Orchard: Writing Communities and Collaborative Writing in the Classroom

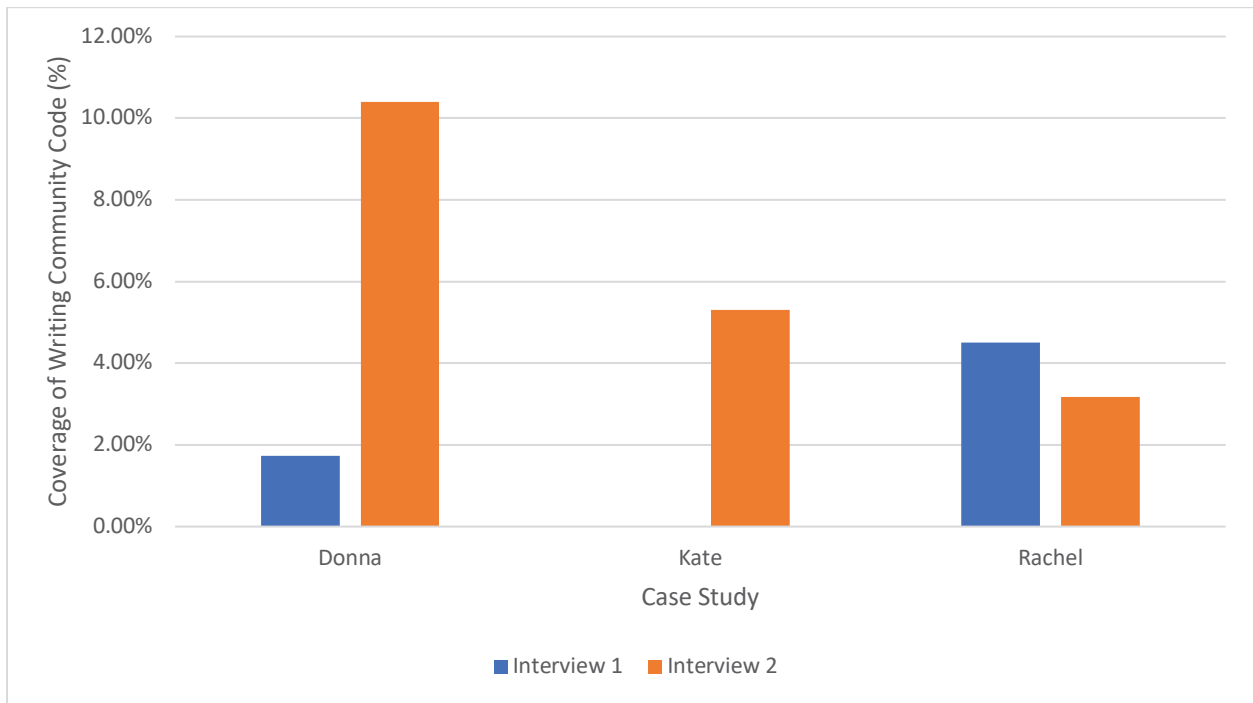
Just as a tree cannot produce fruit without cross-pollination from other trees, participation in writing communities is an essential feature of a well-rounded writing assessment program. As Rodrigues (2012) points out, this is because reading the writing of others allows us to become a part of another writer's context, or to achieve synchrony by having students help each other to participate in a specific writing task. Furthermore, Lea and Street (2006) posit that if students are treated as collaborators in the development of academic literacies in the classroom they are more likely to have greater engagement in Higher Education and in literacy activities generally than they would if they primarily experienced writing as a solitary activity. For this reason, teachers who want to prioritize their students' engagement in future literacy activities should build the expectation that their students will share their writing with their classmates as a means to build understanding of audience, to take ownership of the craft of writing, and to receive affirmation in their roles as writers as they receive responses from their audience (Lacina & Griffith, 2012; Tunks, 2012). An additional benefit of building a culture of community around writing in the classroom is that it can also help students to feel empowered to enact change in their world as individuals who can leverage their writing skills to communicate about issues they care about (Jocson, Burnside & Collins, 2006).

Overview of the Theme Across All Three Cases

Across the three case studies, the code “Participation in a Writing Community” had relatively low coverage in the 6 interviews I conducted (see Figure 22). Donna and Kate, however, did emphasize building community in their classroom as a significant priority. For Donna, this starts with the physical environment of her classroom where students “sit in pods. . . [so they can easily] turn to their partner. . . [and] share [their] best line” (Second Interview). She wants to “encourage that it’s safe and it’s okay for other people to read what you’ve written and you can get feedback from other people that will impact your writing in a positive way” (Second Interview). Kate builds a sense of community in her classroom by “making a big deal about good writing regardless of which kid it comes from” (Second Interview) by reading the best lines her students write as a means to celebrate their growth and skill. Rachel, on the other hand, recognizes that building writing community in her classroom is an area she could improve upon. In her classroom students “are allowed to talk to other people about [their writing], but [she doesn’t] set up a system for that or a way for that to have meaning” (Second Interview). However, outside of class time, during her weekly optional tutorial sessions with students who wish to improve their Diploma Exam writing, Rachel facilitates a talk-based environment in which students explore writing and discuss ways they can improve their own skills by giving each other feedback. The fact that these tutorials are based on the students having conversations about good writing and finding ways to improve their own work is certainly an example of a writing community, even if it happens outside of class time.

Figure 22

Coverage of “Participation in a Writing Community” Code in Each Interview



Peer Editing & Revision as the Primary Representation of Writing Community

The primary manner in which writing community is facilitated in classrooms is through peer editing and revision. In Donna’s classroom her students “always get an opportunity for peer evaluation” (First Interview), which she encourages through “quickwrites and sharing. . .and getting feedback from each other” (Second Interview). Similarly, Kate also encourages “partner or peer editing, particularly when the first big pieces of writing come through” (Second Interview). Rachel does not often systematically incorporate peer editing into her classroom, but during her optional tutorial time she facilitates peer feedback by “shar[ing] thesis statements and [they] all comment on each others’ thesis statements” (Second Interview). Even though its incorporation is relatively limited, all three teachers do regularly make an effort to encourage peer collaboration in some form or fashion as part of their writing assessment programs.

Donna and Kate take their efforts to building writing communities a step beyond peer editing. Donna wants her students to reflect on the feedback they've gotten in the past from her and from peers and identify "how could [they] help someone else with [similar issues]?" (Second Interview). By incorporating a layer of metacognitive reflection and rhetorical awareness, this practice has the potential to have a greater impact on the metacognitive development of both the student providing the feedback and the student receiving feedback. Kate also uses Google Classroom to facilitate opportunities for students to "do a bunch of smaller writing pieces together and their brainstorming and . . . some things they write and then they edit and revise together" (Second Interview), which represents the only example of collaborative writing described across the three case studies.

Changes that Would Support Opportunities for Building Writing Communities in High School English Classrooms

Social Dynamics in the Classroom. The social dynamics of the classroom play a significant role in the success of incorporating writing communities into writing assessment programs. In Rachel's classroom, she has struggled with the fact that "there's these social situations where there's kids that hate each other and I have no idea" (Second Interview) which has led to her devoting significant time and energy into considering the social dynamics of her class in the few instances when she has tried to incorporate activities like peer editing.

Kate and Donna did not express concerns about social dynamics when they were considering the obstacles that are preventing them from devoting more time to writing communities in their classroom. However, Donna did describe the unwillingness of many of her students to be vulnerable enough with their peers to meaningfully engage in peer feedback activities. For example, when Donna encourages students to share their writing projects or other work with peers, anonymity becomes a crucial factor influencing student engagement. Under the

cloak of mystery students are more willing to give and receive feedback than they are when their identities are out in the open. For her academic stream students Donna believes this may be related to the fact that the students “feel like they don’t want the criticism they think they are going to get. They think there’s some kind of competition [with their peers]” (Second Interview). Whereas her non-academic stream students also tend not to welcome peer feedback, but Donna feels this is primarily due to the fact that “they just don’t have the confidence” (Second Interview) to accept feedback from their peers. Both groups of students and both reasons for reluctance stem from a root of a lack of confidence, but they manifest in different ways in the classroom.

Quality of Student Feedback. When left without scaffolding and guidance in how to provide quality feedback to their peers, many students struggle to give quality feedback in a peer revision activity. Rachel has struggled with this aspect of building writing community in her writing assessment practice. “The times that [she has done peer revision have] not worked out well” (Second Interview) because she believes that the success of an activity like peer revision hinges on the specific dynamics of the pairings between students. For example, “it would only be a couple of really strong students who would be able to make suggestions to improve somebody’s thesis” (Second Interview) which indicates an underlying assumption that only “Strong Writers” can give good feedback to each other, while “Weak Writers” lack the skills to provide any suggestions of merit to other writers. Unfortunately, this assumption does not get to the underlying reasons as to why a student may be proficient at providing feedback or not. “Strong Writers” very likely have stronger metacognitive capacity in general, which allows them to more easily identify the underlying goals and strategies of fellow writers. This capacity, in

turn, allows them to better make suggestions about how to draw greater alignment between the writer's goals and their writing in its current state when they are giving feedback.

This issue goes beyond the scope of this project, but perhaps a solution could be a shift in teacher priorities around peer revision activities. Rather than expecting students to suggest revisions that will improve the work of their peers in major ways (something that is difficult even for experienced English teachers), teachers could guide their students to react as readers to their peers' work by pointing out areas that are confusing or impactful to them as they serve as an audience. This may allow the writer to consider whether their intended goals with a particular sentence/paragraph/piece align with the reactions of their audience. And, if not, to consider how they can elicit the response from their audience that they are seeking by deploying metacognitive skills and knowledge to improve their writing. Expecting students to be copy editors or to have the revision skills necessary to really overhaul a piece of writing that isn't working is probably unrealistic, but guiding students to reflect and engage as an audience to their peers is a likely path toward building a sense of writing community in the classroom.

Greater Emphasis on Collaborative Writing Projects. Although Kate frequently incorporates collaborative writing on smaller pieces in her classroom, virtually all writing done across the three case studies is completed individually with peer revision happening at some point close to the end of the writing process or during pre-writing and brainstorming activities. According to Cope and Kalantzis (2009), workplaces increasingly value equity, collaboration and relationships as foundational principles, which creates a greater need to teach literacy skills as a means to fully participate in the collaborative atmosphere of most workplaces. Writing collaboratively certainly presents different challenges than writing alone does and it requires skills of negotiation and compromise as a group of writers work to align their goals and carry out

their intentions in the piece they are creating. Given that workplaces and post-secondary education both value this type of writing, it makes good sense to give students meaningful opportunities to build these skills in high school as a foundation to expand as they encounter more frequent collaborative writing challenges.

As in a healthy orchard, cross-pollination in a writing classroom is an important aspect of supporting students in developing as well-rounded writers capable of receiving constructive criticism, giving helpful suggestions, and generally building their capacity to write in a variety of situations for a variety of audiences. The obstacles faced by teachers who try to incorporate this aspect of a robust writing assessment program are not insignificant, but perhaps with a shift away from student-as-copy-editor toward student-as-helpful-audience could build a culture of community around writing in high school English classrooms that would support students as they enter the writing worlds of post-secondary school and the workplace.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Considering all three case studies together, the most prominent feature of the experiences of the three teachers is the dominance of provincial exams in influencing how they plan and implement their writing assessment programs. My interviews with Donna, Kate, and Rachel all focused heavily on the various challenges associated with Diploma Exam and Provincial Achievement Test pressure and preparation. Even in those instances when the teachers did diverge from exam preparation or from incorporating aspects of Diploma Exam/PAT rubrics into their assessments, I had a distinct sense that there was a feeling of having to justify taking the time to stray away from provincial exam-related activities. This is not something any of the teachers expressed directly, but merely the impression I was left with while I listened to them discuss exam preparation and exam genres as non-negotiable aspects of their writing assessments while other genres or assessments totally unrelated to the exam were treated as optional inclusions when time permitted. This narrowing of focus in high school English classrooms to the genres that appear on the Diploma Exam appears to be quite common amongst teachers who experience the pressure of producing high marks on the exam (Slomp et al., 2021; Slomp, et al., 2020; Slomp, 2008). Indeed, Slomp et al. (2021) found that other teachers in Alberta struggle with the tension between exam preparation and teaching the way they'd like to teach. They found that the relatively high stakes of the Diploma Exam drive teacher priorities towards preparing students for success on the exam.

At one time, the Grade 12 Diploma Exams accounted for 50% of the final course grade – an undeniably daunting and important exam for students to feel well-prepared to write given that their Grade 12 course marks often play a significant role in their admission to post-secondary programs and their general satisfaction with their educational experience. This atmosphere is

where many English teachers in Alberta developed their assessment practices around exam preparation. They understandably felt a great deal of pressure to prepare their students for such an impactful and often stressful exam, so it stands to reason that a significant portion of their instructional time would be devoted to preparing their students for success on this exam. However, as of September, 2015, Alberta Education reduced the weight of the Diploma Exams from 50% of the final course mark to 30% of the final course mark. This is still a significant percentage, but with 70% of a student's grade being determined by in-class work it is likely that many teachers welcomed a reduction in the pressure to adequately prepare their students for the Diploma Exam. With this change in weighting, the writing portion of the Diploma Exam is now only worth 15% of a Grade 12 student's final mark – a significant change from 25% (the reading comprehension portion of the exam comprises the other 15%). However, based on these three case studies, my own experiences as an English teacher, and informal conversations with colleagues outside of this project, it would appear that across Grades 10, 11 and 12 English teachers are devoting far more than 15% of their writing assessment programs to exam preparation. Additionally, Slomp et al. (2020) found that the reduction in weighting from 50% to 30% of the final grade in Grade 12 had a limited influence on teachers changing their classroom practices. For example, Rachel admitted that virtually all of the writing assessments she collects from her students in all courses connect directly or indirectly to exam preparation. This practice remains consistent with her practices when the exam was worth 50% of the final mark in Grade 12.

Slomp et al. (2020) attribute this lack of re-prioritization to a variety of factors, including the fact that Diploma Exam results are still heavily relied upon as a measure of teacher performance and as a measure of school and district performance across the province. Not all

teachers experience intense pressure from administration to perform well on the exams or to justify the marks their students received on the exam, but at least one teacher in this study did express feeling the pressure to push students to high levels of achievement. Whether teachers experience explicit pressure to prepare students to achieve high marks on the Diploma exams or if the implicit pressure of teaching in a context of exam preparation is enough to influence their practices to focus on exam preparation, it is clear from the three case studies in this project that the Diploma Exam looms large over the practices of Donna, Kate, and Rachel.

Beyond the Diploma Exam (although perhaps partially *because* of it), Donna, Kate, and Rachel feel that their ideal writing assessment practices are heavily influenced by limited instructional time, limited preparation time, and large class sizes. For each teacher, efficient and high-impact assessment practices are key to their ability to feel as though they are finding a balance in helping students develop as writers while also fulfilling other curricular demands outside of writing.

Unfortunately, the pieces of their writing assessment programs that are often the first to go when they find themselves in a time crunch are the aspects of writing assessment programs that would most support students in developing the metacognitive capacity they need to be competent writers beyond Grade 12 English Language Arts. Although understandable given the realities of teaching high school English, the focus on efficiency in writing assessment is a relatively short-term solution that contributes to the experience that many post-secondary students have when they enter university: the realization that what worked for them in their high school English class will not work for them in university (Sommers and Saltz, 2004 as cited by Slomp et al., 2021). Writing for authentic audiences, self-reflection, participation in writing communities, and engagement in a recursive writing process are often viewed as “extras” by

Donna, Kate, and Rachel that they strive to include when they have time or then they feel that the value of these activities outweighs the sometimes considerable time they take to implement. The impulse towards efficiency is understandable given the constraints under which these teachers are operating, but the perception of these aspects of writing assessment as aspirational “extras” rather than as foundational to a writing assessment program could be limiting or eliminating opportunities for their students to develop many of the transferable skills and knowledge they need as they enter post-secondary and the world of work where they will need to be able to leverage considerable literacy skills to be successful in these writing environments (Slomp et al., 2021).

There seem to be two major factors at play when it comes to the intense time pressures the three participants in this study experience as they design and implement their writing assessments. First, is the trend toward labour intensification in education, or the expectation of teachers to complete more work in less time (LeBlanc, 2017). Indeed, all three teachers in this study described experiencing a feeling of having to do more with less time, citing classroom complexity, marking load, limited instructional time, and limited preparation time as the main factors at play. Additionally, LeBlanc (2017) attributes labour intensification in the teaching profession to the additional pressures of keeping up with the large amounts of paperwork expected of teachers, including personalized learning plans, supplemental reading assessments, attendance and other bureaucratic paperwork. Although none of the participants in this study directly mentioned paperwork as a factor contributing to their lack of time, it is unlikely that they have escaped the increasing expectation of virtually all teachers in Alberta to keep up with these tasks.

Second, all three of the teachers in this study partially attributed their lack of time to the pressure of feeling accountable to their administration and school board for their provincial exam results. Each teacher varied in the degree to which they felt that their students needed to achieve a certain level of result to appease these pressures, but all three expressed an awareness of the importance of improving results or supporting students in achieving the best results possible. In order to increase, or at least maintain, achievement on the provincial exams, these teachers felt that a significant portion of their instructional time had to be devoted to exam preparation in some form or another at the expense of activities and assessments that are not directly related to exam priorities. While only two of the three participants expressed reservations about the proportion of their time being devoted to exam preparation, all three were evidently aware of the importance of exam preparation as a key element of their writing assessment programs. Their experiences align with those of the teachers who participated in the study run by Slomp et al. (2020), the majority of whom expressed that the weighting and priorities of the Diploma Exam influenced their decision to narrow their instruction and assessment practices to align with exam priorities. This study also found that English Language Arts teachers in the province largely felt that the Diploma Exam did not address all of the outcomes found in the Program of Studies, which was an additional reason why teachers felt they needed to narrow their focus and assessments to align with the curricular areas emphasized by the exams. This finding is supported by the experiences of Donna, Rachel, and Kate, who all expressed that they felt varying degrees of pressure to devote an adequate amount of instructional time to exam preparation to feel that their students were adequately prepared to write the exam.

One important aspect of all three teachers' writing assessment programs that remains foundational and essential for all three teachers regardless of the various limitations they are

navigating is their commitment to providing their students with feedback to improve as writers. All three teachers are highly committed to providing their students with written and verbal feedback on all of their writing assessments. While Rachel focuses most of her energy on providing feedback on completed and submitted assessments, Donna and Kate tend to focus more heavily on providing feedback throughout the writing process. Both approaches represent important support and scaffolding for students as they develop as writers in their high school English classes. Although there are ways to better align these feedback practices with relevant research in the field of writing assessment, such as separating feedback from numerical scores (Black et. al, 2004) or by emphasizing student progress toward their writing goals (Chapuis & Stiggins, 2002), the pre-existing emphasis on the importance of feedback makes the prospect of increasing the impact of teacher feedback in English classrooms seem quite achievable.

Limitations of this Study

First, the three cases included in this this project cover writing assessment across grades 9-12 in English Language Arts classrooms, but writing assessment occurs in Kindergarten through Grade 8 and across other subjects. The writing assessment experiences students have in other courses and in earlier grades have an undeniably influential impact on their experiences with writing in their high school English courses and this project did not take these into account in any systematic way.

Additionally, my focus was on writing assessment practices based on interviews with teachers and analyzing a teacher-chosen sample of documents that illustrate their writing assessment practices. My analysis and findings are based on the teachers' own reflections on their practices in the classroom without the additional perspective that observing their teaching would have brought to the table. Although I feel that the teachers' reflections, observations, and analysis of their own teaching was robust and thoughtful, I know that I would have gained

important context from seeing their writing instruction and assessment in action. My focus was on their assessment practices, but it is difficult to truly separate writing instruction from assessment. For this reason, an exploration of the instructional practices that accompany the assessments could have added depth to the conclusions and findings of this project.

There is another important voice missing from this project: the students themselves. There were many times when I found myself wondering what the students' perceptions of their teacher's assessment practices were. I also frequently considered what the students could have added to my exploration of the reasons for why they may or may not engage with teacher feedback or value the planning phases of the writing process or their own perception of their metacognitive capacity. Donna, Kate, and Rachel all appeared to be very aware and reflective of their students' experiences in their classroom, so I feel that their perceptions of their students' experiences are valuable and insightful. However, including student voices or even samples of their work could have added an additional layer to my analysis.

Areas for Future Research

This project provides a starting place for a variety of areas that would be valuable to the field for future research. As I was working through my analysis and drawing conclusions about the areas of writing assessment that were well-represented in this study, many related questions arose. I found myself wondering a great deal about how writing is taught in the lower grades and how the instruction and assessment of writing prior to high school is influencing the way writing happens in high school English classes. If constraints like the Diploma Exam are limiting many teachers in their ability to incorporate their ideal writing assessment practices, perhaps the environment of the lower grades would be more conducive to the type of teaching that encourages the elements of strong writing assessment practices outlined in this project. Additionally, the challenges some of the teachers in this study faced regarding the deeply

embedded assumptions held by students about the purpose of learning to write or their priorities as writers could begin to shift away from traditional product-oriented writing and toward a wider range of values if students begin their enculturation in a more process-oriented approach to writing when they are younger.

Observations of writing instruction and student work are notably absent from this project. Both of these would provide important context for writing programs in high school English classrooms. The teachers I worked with discussed some of their instructional practices and were able to reflect on students experiences within those practices to some degree, but having the opportunity to see their instruction in action and to actually connect the student experience to their teachers' writing programs would provide a more complete picture of what is happening in English classrooms.

Delving more deeply into the teacher training and professional development aspect of writing assessment practices would also be valuable. To what extent could teachers implement strategies that would support metacognitive development and other aspects of writing development? To what extent would they feel these strategies are effective? Exploring pre-service teacher training programs would also be interesting. How would new teachers approach teaching writing if they left university with a toolkit of strategies to support their students' writing development? Would new teachers rely as heavily on traditional methods passed on to them by more experienced colleagues if their teacher education programs provided a more robust approach to teaching them how to teach writing? Shifts in educational practices of any kind tend to be quite slow, but exploring questions like these could provide a path for guiding a research-backed shift in writing assessment in English classrooms.

Finally, following students as they enter post-secondary and the world of work could be a great way to assess the effectiveness of the various priorities suggested by this study as a means to developing writing competence. What do students experience when they encounter the writing demands of post-secondary? Could the challenges of the transition from high school writing to post-secondary writing be mitigated by a shift in priorities in their high school English classrooms? For students who enter the world of work, what writing demands do they encounter? How well do they feel their high school writing programs helped them feel prepared for these writing demands? For many teachers, a successful result on the Diploma Exam can seem like the ultimate goal of high school English, but in reality, this exam does not necessarily have a significant bearing on the writing experiences students encounter after high school. Consideration of the experiences of students writing in post-secondary and in the workplace would likely provide more insight into the relative effectiveness of various practices of high school English teachers.

Recommendations for Writing Assessment in High School English

Recommendations for Teachers

Although the scope of this project is limited and I cannot claim expertise in many of the areas for which I have recommendations, I do believe that this project has a few important implications for the field of high school English Language Arts in Alberta. For many English teachers it seems a paradigm shift may be necessary. The traditional orientation toward product-oriented writing assessment in Alberta classrooms has produced many students who have gone on to be successful and competent writers in post-secondary education, the workplace and in life in general. However, a shift in focus to a skills-oriented approach to writing assessment that emphasizes teaching transferable writing skills rather than the replication of genres could help more students realize successful writing futures and could help students feel more confident in

their ability to write for a variety of situations once they leave high school. The writing assessment practices of both Donna and Kate have a clearer orientation toward building writing skills through the experience of producing a product, whereas Rachel tends to emphasize mastering the replication of Diploma Exam genres as her primary focus, with related writing skills developing with a less direct emphasis. I do not think either orientation is particularly rare in high school English classrooms, but current literature would suggest that a skills-oriented approach would be a valuable shift to make.

Significant pedagogical changes in education of any kind tend to happen quite slowly and carefully – this cautious approach is likely good thing overall. However, the incorporation of new, research-backed practices, in English Language Arts classes at least, seems to progress at a glacial pace. A glance at the age of many of the citations for this project and the relatively infrequent incorporation of the findings therein by the teachers who participated in this project gives the impression that even for teachers like Donna, who actively pursues and frequently attends professional development opportunities, current academic research in education does not proliferate the field to the extent that it could. I cannot claim the expertise to explain why this apparent disconnect between the academic study of education and pedagogy and actual classroom practices occurs, but I would recommend that closing the gap between the two would be beneficial to teachers and researchers alike. Teachers in Alberta are expected to have a commitment to lifelong learning and professional improvement through the pursuit of professional development opportunities throughout their careers, but this expectation does not directly address the need for professional development opportunities to be back by current research in the field. Greater access to professional development opportunities that expose teachers to current research in their field of expertise and support in implementing new practices

into their classrooms based on this research could go a long way in facilitating the shifts and changes that would benefit students in Alberta classrooms.

Recommendations for School Administrators and School Districts

Given the frequent references to various external pressures that limited Donna, Kate, and Rachel's ability to incorporate many of the practices they aspired to use in their classrooms, it is important to consider how classroom teachers can be supported by their administrators and school districts in taking the risks and having the time necessary to encourage changes to classroom practices. All three teachers cited Diploma Exam pressure as a significant factor in their decision-making for their writing assessment programs. Although only Rachel expressed pressure related to achieving high results on the Diploma Exams, Kate and Donna also felt time-related pressure to ensure that their students were adequately prepared for success on their exams. The weighting of the exams and their purported importance to university admission will, in all likelihood, prevent the elimination of all types of exam pressure, but school administrators and school districts do have the latitude to decide the extent to which they expect teachers to prepare their students to perform to a certain standard on their Diploma Exams. A shift in the perception of the exams as an important (and sometimes exclusive) indicator of student and teacher performance toward the recognition that a one-day exam in Grade 12 can only ever provide an incomplete picture of both teacher and student performance would likely be a great stride toward reducing the pressure many teachers feel to prepare their students for their Diploma Exams.

Second, school and district administration could support their teachers in accessing research-backed professional development and keeping up with current research in the field by bringing in professional development opportunities that fit this criteria. Many schools and school districts very likely already do this, but given my own experiences working in and attending

professional development opportunities in three different school districts and many different schools across Southern Alberta, the prioritization of current, useful and research-backed professional development is inconsistent at best. Additionally, districts and schools could provide time on professional development days for the consumption and discussion of current research in the various fields of expertise of their teachers as a means to build value around this practice. Providing access to subscriptions to academic journals and the time to actually read and digest research with colleagues could go a long way in empowering teachers to build their expertise in their field and incorporate new practices into their classrooms.

Recommendations for Alberta Education

While teachers, school administration, and school districts all have a role to play in supporting writing assessment practices in Alberta classrooms, there are important supports that Alberta Education can put in place to ensure that the obstacles and challenges faced by teachers in classrooms are mitigated. First and perhaps most impactful, is reducing class sizes across Alberta. Marking load and class size were both cited as major obstacles for the participants in this project when they considered incorporating their ideal assessment practices in their classrooms. Although there are certainly much larger class sizes across Alberta than the ones experienced by these teachers, the fact remains that fewer students in a class leaves more time for conferencing, supporting, scaffolding, marking, and providing feedback for each individual student. A reduction in class sizes would have a significant impact on teachers' capacity to support their students the way they want to.

Second, a reconsideration of the necessity, format, weight, and use of Diploma Exams in Alberta with input from students, parents, teachers, administrators and other stakeholders could put forward considerations and adjustments to the Diploma Exam system that could better serve all stakeholders. Based on the interviews with teachers for this project, Diploma Exams are

exerting significant pressure on teachers, which is resulting in some teachers feeling like they need to choose between exam preparation and teaching practices that they feel are more valuable to their students. Given this information, it stands to reason that other stakeholders would have important perspectives about the extent to which the current Diploma Exam system is serving them. With support from Alberta Education, the format and use of the Diploma Exam could be adjusted to better serve the educational community than it does currently.

Recommendations for Teacher Education Programs

The final piece of the puzzle is the education of pre-service teachers before they even enter their first high school English classroom as educators. Although this is a conclusion based largely on anecdotal conversations, personal experience, and the experiences of some of the teachers in this project, it would seem that, by and large, teachers are leaving their education programs feeling under-prepared to teach writing in the classroom. More research is needed to fully define the reasons and mechanisms that underlie this pattern, but it would seem there is a clear need for greater emphasis on writing instruction and assessment, as well as the research behind it, in teacher education programs in Alberta. According to Neamtu (2020), of the three major institutions that offer teacher education programs in Alberta none require their English Education students to take courses in writing. Furthermore, across these three institutions in Alberta, there is a very limited offering of elective courses in writing as well (Neamtu, 2020). This seems like a significant oversight and weakness of all three institutions given the centrality of writing instruction and assessment in the high school English classroom.

Without ample emphasis on how to teach writing, new teachers are left in the difficult position of having to figure it out on their own or having to rely on the support of more experienced colleagues to shore up their skills. There is nothing inherently wrong with either approach to learning writing assessment; indeed, many of the skills and competencies developed

by teachers throughout their career are developed this way. However, without added support from the educational institution that strives to prepare them for their career as teachers, this significant gap in pre-service training could conceivably lead to the perpetuation of traditional writing assessment practices that are outdated and that do not serve the writing needs of today's students as they leave school and enter post-secondary and the workforce.

In conclusion, the teachers who participated in this project are working under enormous pressure to balance their own professional priorities of improving their students' writing abilities with the pressures from administration and students to adequately prepare students to achieve strong results on their Diploma Exams. These often conflicting pressures are, in turn, influenced by the time pressures and structural pressures of teaching increasingly large and complex classes in an environment that prioritizes performance. Teachers prioritize their ability to prepare students to perform well on exams. Students prioritize their ability to perform the ritual of writing and submitting completing writing products for a final mark. School administration prioritizes the achievement of Diploma Exam results that allow them to assess their teachers and make decisions about class assignments and school priorities. School districts prioritize Diploma Exam results as a means to measure themselves against the results of other districts and to apply pressure on school administration and teachers to improve exam results. These myriad performance pressures seem to be having the paradoxical effect on writing assessment programs of encouraging teachers to lessen their focus on building the foundational skills of metacognition through emphasis on writing for authentic audiences, building writing communities, and prioritizing process-oriented writing assessment, by indirectly incentivizing teachers to expedite the path their students take to producing competent versions of writing genres by relying on templates, teacher-only audiences, and product-oriented assessment programs. The unfortunate

irony of lessening the load of many of the complex underlying skills students need to deeply engage in the work of building writing capacity is that the very strategies that some teachers employ to measure up to the many performance pressures they experience are effectively eliminating, or at least greatly lessening, the development of the crucial skills students need to become competent writers after they leave high school. Although the teachers who participated in this study are fully committed to their students' growth and development, the reality is that without significant cultural and structural changes to high school English classrooms it is unlikely that teachers will realistically be able to meaningfully incorporate the recommendations suggested by this study that would have significant impacts on better preparing students for their writing lives after they leave high school. Fortunately, the teachers who participated in this study and most of their colleagues are completely dedicated to the goal of fostering growth in their students. Given the right support, these three teachers and many other will have the tools, time, and space they need to realize their goals of implementing their ideal writing assessment practices in their classrooms.

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APPENDIX A

Coding Key for Initial Coding of Submitted Documents

Domains	Examples of Evidence from Submitted Documents	Code
Metacognition	<p><i>Fulfilling requirements requires rhetorical awareness</i></p> <p>Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your chapter must refer to the events that we know have already happened. - Your chapter must be accurate in reference to the character’s past and present (consider the quotations below). - Your characters’ voices should be true to the text. - You will type out your script. - You must follow correct script formatting. (Kate’s Script Project) 	M
Teacher Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Comment” sections on submitted rubrics 	TF
Authentic Discourse Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Final product: podcast OR vlog between 4-7 minutes” (Donna’s Non-Fiction Project) 	ADC
Teacher-only Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “A precise awareness of audience is effectively sustained.” (Donna’s Persuasive Writing Rubric) 	TA
Participating in a writing community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Fold a sheet of paper into thirds. Rally Robin with characters: Fusi & Emma” (Rachel’s Discussion Questions) 	WC
Fluidity, Flexibility, Creativity in Writing Process	<p>Planning: _____</p> <p>Topic: _____</p> <p>Main Idea: _____</p> <p>Paragraphs: _____</p> <p>(Donna’s Personal Essay Assignment)</p>	FWPc
Fluidity, Flexibility, Creativity in Writing Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Rewrite the story with the same POV but a different central character. OR Rewrite the story using an alternate POV.” (Donna’s Point of View Writing Assignment) - “you can choose any of the topics that we have written about so far.” (Donna’s Personal Essay Assignment) - “Essentially, you can write about anything you like. Just make sure you have a thesis to write about.” (Donna’s Personal Essay Assignment) 	FWPd

<p>Template Driven Scaffolding</p>	<p>- “Four Parts of an Essay ...All essays have at least four parts.” (Donna’s Persuasive Writing Notes)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>The Critical Essay Format</u></p> <p>Topic:</p> <p>Introduction <i>Opening Statement (Hook);</i></p> <p>Thesis:</p> <p>Blueprint Sentence: use title of text, author and name of character</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Rachel’s Critical Essay Format Handout)</p>	<p>TD</p>
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APPENDIX B

First Interview Question List

- How do you approach planning for writing assessments for your English classes?
 - Number? Type? Timing/frequency?
- What supports or scaffolds are in place to help students prepare for and complete the assessments?
 - Before beginning assessments?
 - During the writing process?
- How do you communicate performance to students?
 - During writing process?
 - After submitting assessments for marking?
- What external or contextual factors influence the way you plan and implement assessments?
- What do you feel are the strengths of your assessment practices?
- What areas of your writing assessment practices, if any, do you hope to improve, change, or replace in the future?

Donna's Second Interview Question List

Audience-related questions:

- Implication of teacher-only audience in most assignments. Do students have opportunities to write for audiences outside the classroom? Any audience other than their teacher?
 - If so, how does this impact the students' experience with the project(s)? (engagement, quality etc.)
 - Who is the audience for the LA 9 Non-fiction project (podcast/vlog)?
 - Does anyone other than you read the scripts for the 20-2 script writing assignment? Opportunities for performance?
 - In a perfect world, what would help you incorporate more authentic audiences?
- Has mentioned the idea of writer's workshop. What role does writing community play in your classroom? Is there a large emphasis?
 - Mentioned peer involvement and the idea of writing for someone in the first interview. Is this a consistent thread? What role do peers play in the process? (editing, revision, audience etc.)
 - In a perfect world, what would help you incorporate more emphasis on writing communities?

Writing Process Questions:

- Planning scaffolds are pretty bare bones. How explicitly do you teach planning? Do you use other strategies to encourage planning?
 - Pretty explicit template for the 30-2 personal essay and the 10-2 persuasive writing assignment, but open-ended topics. How heavily do you emphasize following the template? Do the needs of -2 students necessitate more use of templates?

- How do you help them decide how many paragraphs to have (and other writing decisions) when they are working through the planning organizers (rhetorical purpose)?
- Do you emphasize writing PROCESS or writing PRODUCT more? (Product emphasis is implied by assessments)
 - Some flexibility is encouraged in terms of final product for each assignment- how often do students break the mold?
 - If you were to deliberately shift your focus to emphasize process-oriented writing how do you think that would impact your writing assessment? How would it impact student experience?
 - In a perfect world, what would help you incorporate more process-oriented writing?

Instructional Questions:

- How do you use the samples/exemplars? Is there any explicit teaching around them?

Self-reflection & Metacognition Questions:

- Self-reflection/metacognition/self-assessment doesn't seem to appear in the handouts. Is this a part of your classroom practice?
- If you were to deliberately shift your focus to emphasize self-reflection & self-assessment how do you think that would impact your writing assessment? How would it impact student perception of writing?
- In a perfect world, what would help you incorporate more self-reflection & self-assessment?

Rachel's Second Interview Question List

Planning & Process Questions:

- Planning seems to be guided by templates and scaffolded by discussion activities - How explicitly do you teach planning? Do you use other strategies to encourage planning?
- How do you use the samples/exemplars? Is there any explicit teaching around them?
- Plan sheet for character analysis - pretty precise template. How was this developed? Are students required to use it? Do you notice a difference in quality for students who use it vs students who don't?
- Notes for Critical Essay - "three basic ways to plan" - how did these develop? Where did you learn this? How often do students break this mold? How do they choose one of the three?
- Teacher feedback seems to be a strength and emphasis - is it teacher driven or student driven? Do you go through and tell them what they need? Do they ask questions? Combination?
- Do you emphasize writing PROCESS or writing PRODUCT more?
 - If you were to deliberately shift your focus to emphasize process-oriented writing how do you think that would impact your writing assessment? How would it impact student experience?

- In a perfect world, what would help you incorporate more process-oriented writing?

Structure Questions:

- Character Analysis - GINAFI
 - Rubric - “three character traits” - why so specific? Is this a scaffold for a full critical essay?
 - Rubric - “placed in a logical order”/ “keeps interest of the reader” - how is this scaffolded? How do students decide what a logical order is or how to keep the interest of the reader?

Diploma Emphasis Questions:

- Have you gone to mark Diplomas? What impact did this have?
- Both assignments - pretty explicitly diploma related. Do you also include assignments that are unrelated to the diploma? What % of the writing assignments in 30-1 are unrelated to the diploma?

Writing Community/Collaboration Questions:

- Implication of teacher-only audience in most assignments. Do students have opportunities to write for audiences outside the classroom? Any audience other than their teacher?
 - If so, how does this impact the students’ experience with the project(s)? (engagement, quality etc.)
 - In a perfect world, what would help you incorporate more emphasis on writing communities?

Self-reflection/Metacognition Questions:

- Self-reflection/metacognition/self-assessment doesn’t seem to appear in the handouts. Is this a part of your classroom practice?

Kate’s Second Interview Questions

Templates vs Flexibility Questions:

- Both ends are represented – specific templates and complete openness – how do you approach using templates for writing in your classroom?
- “Five well-developed paragraphs” for TKAM essay & the graphic organizer – seems to be directing toward the five paragraph essay. How is this used? Mandatory or optional? How often do students stray from the format suggested here?
- Of Mice & Men Essay – “Layout” is basically a template, but one of the only ones. Is this driven by perceived needs of -2 students? How often do they break the mold?
 - Where did you learn this layout for literary analysis? Marking diplomas? Other teachers? How do you feel about templates for writing?

- 10-2 short story/ OMAM literary analysis – LOTS of choice – how do you help guide or support students through the openness
- 30-2 Literary Analysis essay – More open (no template provided) than the 20-2 version. Is this by design? Is the template a scaffold to flexibility or assumed knowledge by 30-2?
- 30-2 Visual reflection assignment – Diploma genre with the most flexibility. Compared to the relatively strict structure of other 2, how do they handle this openness?
- How much emphasis is placed on prep for diploma writing? Primary focus vs. 1 of many genres?

Instruction Questions:

- 10-1 Opinion writing - What kind of scaffolding goes into this? How much do students know about argument structure? (Could be an opportunity for rhetorical thinking)
- Gatsby Script assignment - How is the script exemplar used? Any explicit teaching around it?

Audience Questions:

- Do students have opportunities to write for people other than you? How often?
- For assignments that involve an audience other than you, how does this change student engagement?
- In a perfect world, what would help you incorporate more authentic audiences?

Writing Process Questions:

- How do you balance encouraging an authentic, recursive writing process with the necessity of collecting a “product” for assessment? How do you think this does/would impact student perception of writing, understanding of writing?
- Process vs. product - is a recursive process supported for writing projects?
- How is planning dealt with? The only assignments that seemed to have explicit planning supports are the TKAM and OMAM essays
- To what extent do you foster a community of writers in your classroom? What role do peers play in writing projects?
- In a perfect world, what would help you incorporate a more recursive writing process?

Self-assessment/reflection & Metacognition Questions:

- Outcomes at the top of each assignment - do you explain these? How are these used? Opportunities for reflection?
- self-reflection/metacognition/self-assessment - doesn't seem to appear in assessments. Is this part of your classroom practice?
- In a perfect world, what would help you incorporate more self-assessment and opportunities for fostering metacognition?