

WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT “WRITER’S IDENTITY”

by

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## ABSTRACT

JESSIE CORTEZ. What we talk about when we talk about “writer’s identity.” (Under the direction of Dr. JOAN MULLIN.)

Although it is used by some first-year writing (FYW) instructors to help students improve their writing, the term “writer’s identity” does not have a clear, agreed-upon definition. This study therefore investigates the use of “writer’s identity” in UNC Charlotte’s University Writing Program. Based on survey results, FYW instructors at UNCC use “writer’s identity” to refer to a student’s self-identification as a writer, a student’s presentation of self in their writing, or a student’s personal process. While not every instructor encourages their students to self-identify as writers, many of them believe that acknowledging the students’ “writer’s identities” helps them improve their rhetorical decision-making. This study is a step toward understanding how “writer’s identity” functions in UNCC’s FYW classrooms, and it raises questions about how effective encouraging the development of a “writer’s identity” is in promoting transfer of writing skills to settings outside FYW.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated first and foremost to my wonderful parents, Rhonda and Lelan Cortez, and to my sister and brother-in-law, Michelle and Scott Buchanan. I would not have had the courage to move a thousand miles from home to pursue a graduate degree if it weren't for you. In spite the homesickness and the lack of boudin, cracklins, and crawfish, it was worth it. Thanks for your love and support during the past two years.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....            | 1  |
| RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....                 | 4  |
| CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....       | 5  |
| THEORETICAL BASIS .....                  | 5  |
| COGNITION AND IDENTITY .....             | 5  |
| IDENTITY AND ACTIVITY THEORY .....       | 8  |
| ACTIVITY THEORY AND COGNITION .....      | 10 |
| LITERATURE REVIEW .....                  | 12 |
| CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....             | 33 |
| RESEARCH CONTEXTS AND PARTICIPANTS ..... | 33 |
| DATA GATHERING AND PROCEDURES .....      | 34 |
| METHOD OF ANALYSIS .....                 | 37 |
| CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION .....  | 40 |
| CODING FOR Q1 .....                      | 40 |
| CODING FOR Q2 .....                      | 41 |
| CODING FOR Q3 .....                      | 42 |
| LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH.....             | 43 |
| DISCUSSION .....                         | 44 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION .....                      | 52 |
| SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH .....            | 52 |
| CONCLUSION .....                                 | 53 |
| REFERENCES .....                                 | 57 |
| APPENDIX A: FACULTY SURVEY .....                 | 64 |
| APPENDIX B: LISTSERV RECRUITMENT .....           | 65 |
| APPENDIX C: SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES ..... | 67 |
| APPENDIX D: CODED SURVEY RESPONSES .....         | 71 |

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

One of the challenges first-year writing (FYW) faces is teaching students enough about writing to last them through the rest of their time in college. Specifically, writing program administrators must figure out how best to prepare students to write in all disciplines. While students may feel that first-year composition courses are irrelevant to their career path, their success in the university depends on their ability to write effectively for their discipline. This means they must understand that they will find themselves in many different writing situations throughout their time in college. As they enter each writing situation, the students must make rhetorical decisions about how they will navigate genre constraints, respond to their audience, and meaningfully contribute to the activity system. To help students incorporate conscious rhetorical decision-making into their writing processes, some composition instructors encourage students to identify and develop their “writer’s identity.” However, the meaning of the term “writer’s identity” is somewhat nebulous and is not used the same way by all theorists and instructors. Therefore, the purpose of the term and what exactly it is meant to do in the FYW course is unclear.

For some, “writer’s identity” is a descriptor of the writer’s presentation of self in their text. Roz Ivanic (1998), for example, uses critical discourse analysis to document how her students construct their identities through writing. Ivanic focuses on what she calls the “discoursal self,” which is “the portrayal of self which writers construct through their deployment of discoursal resources in their own written texts” (p. 328). She notes that writer identity as a concept had been lost in the movement toward a process-based approach to writing, and that “Researchers and teachers were concentrating on the writer,

but on what the writer is *doing*, not on what s/he is *being*” (94). Therefore, she seeks to close that research gap and focus on students’ writing performances rather than student writing process. Throughout *Writing and Identity*, Ivanic focuses on observing how students position themselves as members of a community through their writing. While some FYW instructors may choose to employ “writer’s identity” as a pedagogical tool, the purpose of Ivanic’s work is not to show teachers how to incorporate the term “writer’s identity” into their classrooms. She writes explicitly, “Although I hope this book will be of interest to educators, it is not about pedagogy” (p. 76). Rather, Ivanic is examining how adult students entering the academy construct and face challenges to their individual identities as they attempt to take up the writing style of the academy.

While Ivanic’s use of the term is descriptive, Peter Elbow’s (1995) conception of a writer’s identity is somewhat prescriptive. He writes in exchange with David Bartholomae:

I would like to insist that it’s a reasonable goal for my students to end up saying, “I feel like I *am* a writer: I get deep satisfaction from discovering meanings by writing - figuring out what I think and feel through putting down words; I naturally turn to writing when I am perplexed - even when I am just sad or happy; I love to explore and communicate with others through writing; writing is an important part of my life.” (p. 72)

It is clear that Elbow would like his students to use writing as their first choice when solving problems or processing emotions. This is his definition of a “writer,” and he wants writing to become part of the students’ identity. He further writes that “these are idealistic goals... But I insist on them as reasonable goals for my teaching” (p. 73). It is

difficult to glean from this piece how much he vocalizes these goals in the classroom, but in his choosing “the goal of writer over that of academic,” it would be fair to say that his pedagogy carries with it an encouragement for students to see themselves as writers. Elbow’s goal for the “writer’s identity” is different from Ivanic’s in that Ivanic means to document her students’ construction of their identities, while Elbow hopes that his students will assume a writer’s identity.

Over the years, composition studies has taken up these two uses of “writer’s identity.” Ivanic’s concept of writer’s identity is evident in other scholars’ discussions of how L2 writers construct themselves as English speakers (Lam, 2000; Sun & Chang, 2012; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). Elbow’s use is apparent in first-year composition textbooks: many of them have titles that assume the reader (i.e. the student) is also a writer or wants to become a writer. We have, for example, Elbow’s own (1985) *Everyone Can Write*, Lunsford’s (2009) *The Everyday Writer*, Ballenger’s (2017) *The Curious Writer*, and Lunsford et al.’s (2016) *Everyone’s an Author*. As we’ll see in the responses to the survey presented in this thesis, some instructors use Elbow’s definition and employ the term “writer’s identity” as a pedagogical tool to help students see themselves as writers, regardless of their discipline. However, given that some uses of the term are prescriptive while others are descriptive, it is not clear what purpose “writer’s identity” has in the classroom.

Whatever its purpose, the use of “writer’s identity” has led to discussions in the field about how entering the academy affects students’ established identities. Clark (2017) writes that there is an “ethical question [which concerns] whether the privileging of academic genres, with their inherent ideologies and values constitutes a colonizing

impact on students' cultural identities" (p. 170). Depending on how prescriptive the definition of the term "writer's identity" is, encouraging students to develop an academically based "writer's identity" encourages them to develop an institutional identity that may be different from their established identities. Although attention has been focused on the issue of encouraging students to develop an institutional identity, there is a practical issue of whether "writer's identity" is an effective pedagogical tool, specifically whether it promotes transfer. Therefore, this thesis will examine whether and how instructors in one FYW program use the term "writer's identity."

### **Research Questions**

Because the definition and use of the term "writer's identity" within the larger field of composition is unclear, it is difficult to assess its impact on students in FYW classrooms. To examine the term, we must first understand what it means and how it is used. Therefore, this thesis focuses on the following research questions:

1. How are "writer's identity" and similar terms being defined among FYW instructors at UNCC?
2. What are these instructor's goals for its use?
3. What value do instructors see in using the term "writer's identity"?

While not an all-encompassing study of how "writer's identity" is conceptualized in the broader field of composition, this study lays a foundation for a more in-depth investigation of what instructors mean by "writer's identity" and how useful the term is for helping students improve their writing.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Theoretical Basis**

When responding to a rhetorical situation, such as a class assignment, students want to represent themselves as members of an activity system who engage in the cognitive processes that will help them complete the task at hand. Cognitive theory helps us understand the process by which a writer is representing their writing process, how they understand an assignment (if the writing is done as coursework), how they visualize their audience, and what they think the audience needs to read for the assignment to be fulfilled. Activity theory tells us that writers are representing what they believe to be the conventions and genres of the activity system. Finally, identity theory shows that writers are composing their identities for the audience as they compose texts. At the center of the Venn diagram between theories of cognition, activity theory, and identity theory is representation. As students write for the various discourse communities in which they participate, they must represent what they know, who they are, and how they interact with an activity system.

### **Cognition and Identity**

In their 1981 work, Flower and Hayes described writing “as a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing” (p. 366). These processes include “**Planning, Translating, and Reviewing**, which are under the control of the Monitor” (p. 369, emphasis in original). Using an illustrated model, they provide a visualization of the writing process (Fig. 1, p. 370). Though it opened the door for a discussion of the cognitive processes behind writing, the Hayes-Flower model has undergone some criticism. According to Carillo (2017) the main issue critics pointed

out in the model was its lack of attention to the social contexts in which writing takes place (p. 44). In response, Hayes (2012) revised the model to include working memory, transcription, and motivation as well as removing the monitor, the planning process, and the revision/reviewing process. The 2012 model better reflects the many different processes involved in the composition of a text, and it includes the added influence of motivation and the task environment. Nevertheless, other scholars have taken interest in cognition and cognitive models of writing. Hayes (2017) presents data showing that the 1980 Hayes-Flower model piece grew steadily in number of citations per year from 1980 to 2012. This, he writes, shows that “interest in the model appears to have grown fairly steadily since 1980 with a dip in the late 1990s” (p. viii). Continued interest in cognition as well as in Flower and Hayes’s model has spurred more research in cognition, which includes making connections between cognition and identity.

One factor that connects cognition and identity is the individual’s long-term memory, which has been part of the Flower-Hayes model since its first iteration. For example, in distinguishing between a good writer and a poor writer, Flower and Hayes discuss people who have either had or have not had success in writing. A major part of a student’s identity as they enter a writing class may be their experience as a “poor writer,” which stays with them in their long-term memory. A student may leave high school having rarely or never received positive feedback on their writing. This experience may lead them to construct themselves as a “poor writer,” and they’ll carry this identity beyond graduation. Looking at this through Ivanic’s argument that all writing is self-representation, we can see the relationship between poor writing and the construction of a “poor writer” identity. If a student believes they are a “poor writer,” they will compose

like a “poor writer.” The more a student composes like a “poor writer,” the more they reinforce the identity of a “poor writer.”

Recent developments in the science of neuroplasticity have advanced the link cognition to identity. For example, Clark (2017) uses the work of Sebastian Seung to discuss identity at the neuronal activity level:

The concept of a connectome<sup>1</sup> suggests that identity has a physical manifestation that can be discerned in neuronal activities, and that because these activities are perpetually in flux, the concept of identity should not be viewed as essentialized, permanently etched static construct, but rather as a complex state of being that is subject to change. (p. 169)

Clark discusses identity change as an ethical issue, especially as writing instructors are involved. Scholars such as Bartholomae (1985) and Ivanic (1998) originally stated that students experience identity changes as they adopt the genres and conventions of the academy, but nurturing one identity may cause students to distance themselves from other identities. As Clark puts it, “In genre scholarship, this interconnection between genre and identity has raised the issue of whether students’ engagement with new genres can be perceived as a type of identity threat” (p. 171). Clark’s work suggests that when students enter the university, their identities are changing at the neuronal level, and there are opportunity costs associated with these changes. The potential consequence of taking up an academic identity may be the distancing of the students from their cultural identities. Clark writes that “The problem arises not only because the students may

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<sup>1</sup> the connections between neurons in a nervous system

experience an initial period of alienation but also because they may come to accept unquestioningly the hierarchical values inherent in academic discourse genres” (p. 172).

### **Identity and Activity Theory**

When writers adopt the genres of an activity system, they are attempting to represent themselves as members of that activity system by following the system’s conventions. Russell (1997) writes: “The development (reconstruction) of individual agency and identity means expanding (or refusing to expand) involvement with an activity system by appropriating its object/motive, which requires the appropriation (and sometimes transformation) of certain of its genres” (p. 534). For example, a job applicant’s first attempt to appropriate the genres and goals of an activity system may be a cover letter in which they market their skills as a means to advance the company’s interests. The applicant backgrounds their own needs and foregrounds the company’s objectives in an effort to become part of the potential employer’s activity system.

Even when language is strict, a community will still customize it to suit its needs. Working in the field of software development and coding, Spinuzzi (2003) concludes that software development is a fundamentally collaborative activity that develops differently within different cultural-historical milieus and that reflects the values emergent in those milieus. Genres such as comments [embedded in sections of code], for instance, indicated and shaped the values that their communities had developed over time (p. 115). Although the employees in Spinuzzi’s study worked at the same company, two of the sites, Alpha and Beta, in the study saw the code as an important part of their activity system. Meanwhile, a third site, Charlie, saw the comments as indicative of bad coding (p. 112). The use of comments is understood differently between Sites Alpha and Beta and Site

Charlie, and the use or disregard for the comments demonstrates how each site values the comments. If an employee were to transfer from Site Alpha to Site Charlie, they would likely find themselves changing their understanding and use of comments to fit the values of Site Charlie, in spite of finding comments useful while in Site Alpha.

As students graduate high school and enroll in college, they similarly find themselves needing to change their writing habits to fit their new activity system (see Bartholomae, 2003). By learning and adopting the genres of their majors, the students become members of those activity systems. Citing the work of Graff, Lave, and Wenger, Lindquist (2001) writes, “when people learn, they don’t take on new knowledge so much as a new identity” (p. 267). Illustrating this, Clark and Fischbach (2008) find in their study of Public Health Education students that linking composition courses with other courses in the Public Health Education curriculum allowed the students to take on the identity of professionals in the field. By the end of the semester, “Their writings, as manifested in paragraph development and sentence-level competence, were not flawless, but they were able to read the scene and had begun to perform the role of a Public Health Education professional” (p. 25). Additionally, some students reported “for the first time they believed they had a concrete professional goal to which they could direct their educational efforts” (p. 25). By reproducing the rhetorical situations, genres, and conventions that public health professionals must respond to in the workplace, Clark and Fischbach were able to help students adopt the identity of public health professionals. With this new identity in mind, their writing had purpose and direction, and they were better able to anticipate and address the needs of the public health activity system.

## **Activity Theory and Cognition**

To be an effective member of an activity system, novices must learn to think like established members of the activity system. They then must represent what they know in a way that is useful to the activity system, or their knowledge may not be accepted.

Flower and Hayes (1981) discuss the writer's goals as a guiding factor behind the writer's process. The fourth point of their article states

Writers create their own goals in two key ways: by generating both high-level goals and supporting sub-goals which embody the writer's developing sense of purpose, and then, at times, by changing major goals or even establishing entirely new ones based on what has been learned in the act of writing. (p. 366)

They also explain that writers attend only to the problems they define for themselves, and these problems may or may not be in line with the problems defined by the activity system. When writers define problems that the activity system wishes to solve or goals the activity system wishes to achieve, they are more likely to be perceived by other participants as capable of successfully interacting with the activity system. A successful novice learns to make the same cognitive decisions as a more senior member of an activity system, therefore engaging more meaningfully and effectively with the system.

Gee (2007) makes a similar argument in his discussion of video games and learning. In this work, video games are considered semiotic domains, defined as "an area or set of activities where people think, act, and value in certain ways" (19). Gee argues that video games offer sets of rules and meanings that depend on how the developers created the game. The player must therefore "probe the virtual world" and gather information about the game; then, they must form a hypothesis about how to behave in

the virtual world. The player then “reprobes the world with that hypothesis in mind, seeing what effect he or she gets.” Finally, the player responds to feedback from the game and determines whether to accept or revise their hypothesis (p. 88). If the player does not adapt to the game’s way of thinking and assigning meaning, then the player will find themselves unsure of what to do in the game or their character will die very quickly. As a parallel, a student in FYW may spend too much time focusing on lower-order concerns such as grammatical correctness and under-value the need for logical organization within their paper. This may lead to a poor grade on the final draft because the activity system values the organization of a paper over its grammatical correctness. The consequences for the composition student may not be the same, but the need to think in terms of the activity system is similar.

Eventually, the new member’s effort to reproduce an activity system’s values and goals become second nature. Bazerman (2009) examines this phenomena through a Vygotskian lens. He writes that although learning and reproducing taxonomies may begin as simple repetition,

the internal logics within the taxonomies and distinctions to be comprehended once it has internalized the parts provides the basis for a new disciplined way of seeing and thinking once one has internalized the system - so that one sees and thinks within the systematic relations of the system. (p. 288)

In other words, when a new member of an activity system fully assimilates into the system’s genres and objectives, they will begin to think like a more experienced member of the system. When a student becomes more adept at making the moves of an academic writer, those moves become easier to make with less conscious effort. The student then

begins to think like an academic and becomes more successful in academic writing. As the student increases their interaction with the activity system, they adopt more of the system's goals and values. According to Russell (1997), "as an individual appropriates (learns to use) the ways with words of others, they may (or may not) also appropriate the object/motive and subjectivity (identity) of the collective, of a new activity system" (p. 516). The student therefore thinks more like an academic, and they work toward solving the problems that an academic encounters.

### **Literature Review**

Reflected in the NCTE (1974) position statement "Students' Right to Their Own Language" is the understanding not only that dialects are related to student identities but also that teaching students to write in a new dialect, or in a way different from the communicative means to which they have been previously exposed, is a mission fraught with ethical issues that must be considered. Others in the field have also attended to this issue. According to Ivanic (1998),

Writing is not a neutral 'skill,' but a *socio-political act of identification* in which people are constructed by the discorsal resources on which they are drawing, construct their own 'discorsal identity' in relation to their immediate social context, and contribute to constructing a new configuration of discorsal resources for the future. (p. 345, my emphasis)

Teaching writing cannot be separated from teaching the academy's values. The writing we teach shapes our students. This does not mean that students should be sheltered from learning new dialects and genres, but as the NCTE (1974) writes, "one function of the English teacher is to activate the student's competence, that is, increase the range of his

habitual performance” (p. 6). The question, then, is how composition instructors can increase the range of habitual performance by incorporating rhetorical decision-making into a student’s habitual practices.

As they assume the role of college student, part of the challenge for freshmen is taking on a style of writing as well as a system of values to which they have not been exposed in middle or high school. To fill in this experiential gap, the student must quickly learn how to speak and to whom they are speaking. Bartholomae (2003) argues that “The student has to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and he has to do this as though he were easily and comfortably one with his audience” (p. 624). The transformation from student of a discipline to a colleague in a discipline is not a seamless process, and there are often cracks in the performance. As Bartholomae writes, “[the students] slip, then, into a more immediately available and realizable voice of authority, the voice of a teacher giving a lesson or the voice of a parent lecturing at the dinner table” (p. 625). Although college freshmen are aware that they are in a new setting, they may not be aware that their writing habits must mature along with them. As Henney (2011) puts it:

They are transitioning from a familiar world - where they are at once confident in their ability to learn, but unconfident with the many new expectations, and/or complacently satisfied their pre-college level writing will suffice in this not-so-familiar world of varying discourses within the university. (p. 75)

One of the new expectations that Henney mentions may be writing for an assignment that calls for more than a paragraph. In their 2009 study, Kiuahara, Graham, and Hawken find that thirty-three percent of language arts teachers who participated in their survey

reported that they did not assign multi-paragraph activities (e.g. book reports, five paragraph essays, persuasive essays) at least monthly (p. 143). More broadly, “By far the most common writing activities used by teachers were short answer response to homework, response to material read, completing worksheets, and summary of materials read” (p. 140). Compared with the shorter assignments students are assigned in high school, the extended research papers and other multi-paragraph assignments they encounter in college can be more taxing and potentially intimidating.

When such assignments are so few and far between, it is not surprising that many students have trouble performing sustained writing in college classes. Bartholomae finds that students tend to fall back on the familiar authorial voices of their teachers or the writing that the students did in high school. He argues, however, that these students will become more successful members of the academy if they can write like members of the academy, even if their resulting papers are not as clean and error-free as if they were writing with the same high schooler’s voice that they had nurtured in their secondary education (p. 650). For Bartholomae, the challenge is in convincing students that sacrificing grammatical tidiness in favor of complex ideas, even at the risk of writing “muddier and more confusing prose,” will be more beneficial to the students’ learning than flawlessly reproducing “commonplace” ideas (p. 650). Although the discourse of high school feels safe for the student, they must learn how to engage with the academy’s discourse to have a meaningful college education. Students must learn to take risks with their writing, potentially exposing their perceived writing deficiencies, so they can learn to make meaningful contributions to their disciplines.

Brooke (1988) presents mimicry and modeling as tools students can use as guides to establish their new identities in the academy. While the concept of a model text for students to identify with and a successful writing for students to mimic is not without its merits, choosing only one model text and writer assumes that all students' experiences will draw them toward the same books and the same people. For the purposes of his study, Brooke redefines imitation: "when a student (or any writer) successfully learns something about writing by imitation, it is by imitating another *person*, and not a text or a process. Writers learn to write by imitating other writers, by trying to act like writers they respect" (p. 23, emphasis in original). The distinction that Brooke makes is that students are not imitating actions, they are imitating people. For this imitation to take place, the student must respect the mentor. Brooke uses as a case study an introductory English class in which a model text, Margaret Laurence's *A Bird in the House*, is used to help students identify with a writing style. In this case, the model text is a sequence of semi-autobiographical short stories. Brooke notes:

Of the eight students, two left the course excited about being writers and defended their excitement with explanations of writing and reading which were similar to those Janet [the instructor] had offered. Five other students felt good about the course and about their writing, but felt tense, confused, or uncertain about aspects of what Janet expected of them... The final student claimed to like Janet as a person, but rejected the course as a waste of time because it didn't help her with what she thought "writing" was. (p. 30-31)

The class in Brooke's paper is limited both by its size and type of model text chosen. Additionally, using *A Bird in the House* as a model text is indicative of the class still

being grounded in the field of literature. As the NCTE argued in 1974, “The training of most English teachers has concentrated on the appreciation and analysis of literature, rather than on an understanding of language” (p. 1). Even though the emphasis on literature does seem useful for some students, the efficacy of a literature-centric composition course may have more to do with the student’s intrinsic motivation than the use of the model text. One of the students in Brooke’s piece, Amy, felt that the class was a total success “described herself as a writer who had always liked English courses, particularly courses with literature” (p. 31). This student was predisposed to writing and enjoying the course, and while this student was successful in completing this course, her success does not tell us much about her success with writing in other courses.

Most of the students found that while the class was enjoyable, it did not offer a concrete understanding of what writing is. Brooke writes that “several students felt both excited and threatened” (p. 32). Brooke discusses two of these students but is especially critical of a male student named Clark, citing his resistance to identifying *A Bird in the House* as a model text: “As a reader and writer, Clark seemed unable to handle the kind of thinking about experience Laurence’s book provided” (p. 32). Brooke claims that Clark’s privileged life prevented him from interacting meaningfully with the text. Clark, however, reported enjoying the course, and Brooke interprets the dismissal of the text and approval of Janet as a means of “[protecting] his sense of self while still admitting he liked the course - it keeps elements of the course that prove useful to his ‘planned’ life, and eliminates the elements that challenge it” (p. 33). Unlike Amy, who is more likely to engage fully with a class like this, Clark takes what he needs and dismisses what does not apply to him. While Brooke argues this as a negative response to the course, Clark is

demonstrating an ability to assess what information from the course is useful and what does not apply to him.

While Clark's dismissal of the text does not necessarily show an inability to mimic an author, as the student's own words indicate, it may be that *A Bird in the House* was not the right model for Clark to mimic, though he was able to take what he needed from it. Given their varying backgrounds, it is unlikely that all students will value the same texts in the same way, nor will they all choose the same role models. Although Brooke writes that he draws on Elbow's work, he is nevertheless disappointed with Clark's unwillingness to perfectly reproduce Laurence's writing style. This shows a contradiction between Elbow's and Brooke's teaching styles. In spite of Elbow's encouraging budding writers to experiment with writing, Brooke would prefer that students like Clark rely heavily on what they learned from model texts. However, Clark's resistance is more useful than Brooke presents it within the article. Because Clark does not reproduce Laurence's voice, he is able to produce his own. Brooke is critical of this choice, but it may be that Clark is learning how to adapt to different rhetorical situations and write more skillfully within them.

Within his article, Brooke specifically mentions Elbow's "teacherless" classrooms [which] similarly provide a model of writers motivated to find their own meanings through self-searching and sharing" (p. 39) and this conflict is evident as Elbow points out. Twenty-two years after the publication of *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow (1995) maintains in an exchange with Bartholomae that he wants students to identify themselves as writers and academics by the end of his course (p. 72-73). He does admit, however, these are "idealistic goals; many students will not attain them" (p. 73).

Though he presents both “writer” and “academic” as potential identities for his students, Elbow recognizes a conflict between them and chooses writer over academic as the more important identity. Part of Elbow’s goal for students to “experience themselves as writers” is for them to trust language (p. 78). To illustrate this point, Elbow employs Stafford’s comparison between writers and swimmers appears previously in the paper: “Writers are persons who write; swimmers are... persons who relax in the water, let their heads go down, and reach out with ease and confidence” (p. 78). The argument, then, is that just as a swimmer trusts the water, a writer must trust language, which is exactly what an academic does not do: “Striking benefits usually result when people learn that decidedly *unacademic* capacity to turn off distrust or worry about language and learn instead to forget about it” (p. 78, my emphasis). Elbow does admit that his definition of “writer” is perhaps imperfect: “I suppose the obvious problem is that I define writer in too ‘romantic’ a fashion” (p. 82).

Nevertheless, Elbow continues to privilege being a writer in the introduction to the second edition of *Writing Without Teachers* (1998): “It wasn’t until after I wrote *Writing Without Teachers* [1973] that I discovered something remarkable: everyone in the world wants to write... How amazing to learn that everyone seems to harbor the wish” (p. xi). Elbow assumes that every person he has encountered over the years has some desire to write something, and this may be true. However, he is a writer himself, and he values his own identity as a writer. Additionally, his audience is primarily people who read his books because they actively seek to improve their own writing. This audience is therefore dispositioned to want to write. The idea that everyone wants to write may be a conclusion founded upon confirmation bias, and this is evident in the way

that Elbow dismisses people who have no interest in writing. Elbow claims that such people, “have had bad experiences writing, so they seldom talk about their dream; they often experience their writing as illicit or impossible” (p. xi). Elbow presents a somewhat Freudian view on writing: although most people avoid writing because they had previously been punished for it in the form of bad grades, every person nevertheless experiences a desire to write. Just as in 1995, Elbow does not state what kind of writing helps students achieve the identity of “writer,” though the people with whom he interacts give us some idea. The first two examples Elbow uses for everyone’s desire to write are comments like “I’ve always wanted to write a book” and “Someday I’m going to write the story of my life” (p. xi). Both of these genres assume a certain standard of success - perhaps being published or having a large readership. Further, they are unrelated to most of the genres of writing that students will do on their way to becoming academics. Later, he writes, “Nothing stops you from writing right now, today, words that people will want to read and even want to publish,” indicating that his audience is primarily people who want to write works that others will read and perhaps pay for (p. 304). Elbow does not tell us whether research papers or lab reports will aid students’ journeys toward becoming writers or achieving the dream that everyone, in his view, has of writing. Further, the examples given are literature-based; technical and scientific writing are not represented. Elbow’s admittedly “romantic” definition of a “writer’s identity” leaves out many types of writing.

Bartholomae (1995), on the other hand, argues that students must learn to write for the academy. As far as he is concerned, “there is no writing done in the academy that is not academic writing” (p. 63). Against Elbow’s assertion that student-writers should

trust language, Bartholomae argues that “criticism [of language is] an appropriate point of entry into the college curriculum” and it is “the job of college English to teach students to learn to resist and be suspicious of writing and text” (Bartholomae & Elbow, 1995, p. 85). Now that the Internet allows more opinions to be written, published, and shared than ever before, students need to become critical of language and “facts” in the way that Bartholomae describes. Even when students are dealing only with the language of the academy, they must still respond to the academy as they write within it. Bartholomae argues that “it is better that [academic writing] be done out in the open, where questions can be asked and responsibilities assumed, than to be done in hiding or under another name” (p. 63). Students must, therefore, learn to be academics so they can speak to other academics. To find their place in the academy, they must undergo what Ivanic (1998) calls a “socio-political act of identification in which [they] are constructed by the discursal resources on which they are drawing, construct their own, discursal identity in relation to their immediate social context” (p. 345).

Russell (1997) and Ivanic (1998) argue that students must identify themselves with the academy as they write within it. From an activity theory perspective, Russell emphasizes students’ becoming members of new-to-them activity systems as they enter the university. “Activity systems and individuals in them are pulled between the object/motives of the multiple activity systems with which they interact,” and the difficulty for students is managing the conflict between their established identities and the new identity they are trying to cultivate as they enter the academy (Russell, 1997, p. 519). If they can negotiate these identities successfully, they avoid experiencing “psychological *double binds*,” which result in a feeling of conflict (p. 519). For students to become more

fully involved in a new activity system, they must “appropriate at least some of those routinized tools-in-use (genres) to expand their involvement with others in the activity system” (p. 521). For the interactions between newcomers and established members to be meaningful, the newcomers must learn to use what the activity system has already decided is an appropriate tool for meeting the system’s needs. For FYW students, this means learning the ins and outs of academic writing so they can continue pursuing their major beyond their freshman year. This also means increasing their interaction with their major’s activity system so they can learn its goals and how writing is used to pursue those goals. Once they learn their major’s goals and values, students can better present themselves as members of their chosen discipline.

Ivanic uses critical discourse analysis to examine how the students in the study construct their identity for their readers. Drawing on Goffman’s argument that “people employ complex strategies to manipulate the impression they convey of themselves,” Ivanic discusses how writers construct their image in text (p. 99). Based on this, “writers align themselves with interests (in both senses), values, beliefs, practices and power relations through their discourse choices” (p. 109). Part of writers’ aligning themselves with a discourse community is their choice of literacy practices, which include but are not limited to the act of choosing to write, the type of writing to employ, and the mental processes behind that writing. “Literacy practices” Ivanic writes, “of all these types are both shaped by and shapers of people’s identity: acquiring certain literacy practices involves becoming a certain type of person” (p. 67). In the university context, a student wishing to learn and employ the literacy practices of an academic must become an academic.

Bazerman (2002) describes the all-encompassing, transformative identity change when entering a new activity system and reproducing its genres:

When you start writing in those genres, you begin thinking in actively productive ways that result in utterances that belong in that form of life, and you take on all the feelings, hopes, uncertainties, and anxieties about becoming a visible presence in that world. (p. 14)

Identity change, therefore, is not a matter of blending in; it is a matter of *becoming*. For students whose first language is not English, navigating the identity change that comes with entering an English-speaking university can be especially difficult. For example, Cozart et al. (2016) studied a group of Chinese students attending the University of Michigan to understand “how students identify themselves with L2 writing and what roles students’ individual and collective identities play in L2 writing” (p. 315). They find that “[the students] struggled with... their perceptions of English writing and their established identities” (p. 317). These students, as newcomers to both the United States as well as the English language, are aware that their writing positions them as outsiders. Cozart et al. note that the students’ English writing classes in China “are designed to prepare students for tests on their knowledge of grammatical rules and vocabulary” as well as to improve their performance on standardized tests such as the TOEFL or SAT (p. 323). This acts as a linguistic blending in: the students are able to perform well enough on the exams to matriculate into an American university. However, their writing still carries indications that the writer is an English language learner. To become better speakers of English, the students ultimately “wished to be able to ‘write like a native speaker of English’ and write ‘like an American adult’ - thus, “no more baby sentences”

(p. 322). Although the students' use of English is just one aspect of their being members of an activity system that operates in English, these students' desire to write like established members of the system show that they are, at least in their writing, committed to reproducing the goals, values, and logic of the academic activity system. They therefore wish to align their identities with that of a native English speaker.

Providing more observable evidence for identity change, Clark (2017) addresses the issue by drawing on recent studies the human nervous system. For Clark, student negotiation of identities is an ethical question because when students learn to write for the university, they must take on the university's genres and its values. By employing neuroscience and the physical changes students experience as their identity changes, Clark moves the discussion of identity from the abstract to the concrete: "identity has a physical manifestation that can be discerned in neuronal activities" (p. 169). Because of this, the onus is on composition instructors to help students "learn to 'perform' in ways that will enable them to succeed both academically and professionally and to develop awareness of that performance so that they can gain agency over what they *choose* to do and whom they *choose* to be" (p. 178).

In spite of the agency that instructors are supposed to be imparting to students, Hashimoto's (1987) work shows that not all assessments of writing are based on students' rhetorical decision-making. In his review of the literature, Hashimoto finds that no clear definition of "voice" exists, calling descriptions "vague" and "emotive" (p. 73) and the concept itself "mystical and abstract" (p. 75-76). Elbow (1998, first published in 1981) defines the parallel concept of "juice," a combination of "*magic potion, mother's milk, and electricity*" (p. 286). In spite of providing this definition, Elbow's discussion of

“voice” and “real voice” rests mostly on comparisons: identifying a friend’s voice on the phone, recognizing a friend’s writing in a letter (p. 288). Otherwise, Elbow generally relies on describing writing that lacks voice. Because there are no clear definitions, the practical question with concepts such as “juice” and “voice” is whether they can be taught. If a student cannot be taught to write with “juice,” then a lack of juice cannot be remedied. The student therefore cannot be successful in writing because they are missing the all-important yet undefinable “voice.” If this is the case, then their rhetorical choices may not make a difference in the assessment of their writing.

The other problem with “voice” and “juice” is their similarity to evangelical Christian appeals. Along with the problem of voice being so nebulous a concept that it cannot be taught, Hashimoto points out that “such evangelical exhortation may not be appropriate for all students. Not everyone watches Jimmy Swaggert on Sunday mornings” (p. 74). The use of “voice” in this way assumes that the students will respond to the same kind of emotional appeals offered by such preachers as Swaggert. Hashimoto asserts that “‘voice-as-juice’ ... brings with it a kind of evangelical zeal that may not do us any good at all” (p. 70). Further, “not all students come to composition class stunned, in pain... Not all of them see the power of writing coming from ‘voice’” (p. 74). Although students may want instruction that will help them improve their writing, not all of them want to make an emotional connection with writing, and not all of them accept the concept of “voice” as valid or useful. Not all of them identify with a concept of “writer” whose power comes from “voice” or “juice.”

The evangelical Christian metaphor present in the assessment of qualities such as “juice” or “voice” is a subset of colonialist, even racist, influences on writing instruction

and assessment in general. Students whose dialects differ from traditional academic ways of speaking and writing are more likely to experience institutional pressure to abandon linguistic aspects of their cultural identities to adopt academic discourse. This is true for students from non-white backgrounds as well as students of lower socio-economic status. The push for students to adopt Standardized Edited American English (SEAE) is a result of language prescriptivists' defunct argument that non-dominant discourses are lesser or ungoverned by grammar or the need for communicative effectiveness. Non-dominant discourses are as legitimate, complex, and meaningful as SEAE, but assessment practices stemming from prescriptive grammar still negatively affect students. As Inoue (2015) writes, "[Hawaiian Creole English, Black English Vernacular, Spanglish, etc.] are not degenerate versions of English or 'bad English,' yet they are often seen in a lower position of power than the local variety of SEAE" (p. 29). These dialects are not welcomed in academic writing because they divert from the conventions of SEAE, and the students find themselves having to give up such cultural dialects, which are part of their cultural identities. Although the NCTE argued in 1974 that a standard dialect of English does not truly exist, Inoue is still able to criticize the tendency for writing instructors to assess students' writing based on SEAE in 2015. In spite of the expectation that students conform to SEAE, many of them may not encounter the dialect in their own home. Because children learn most of what they know about grammar before they begin their formal education, they learn the grammar that governs their home dialect. This dialect becomes part of their identity because it is a feature they have in common with their family members.

Educational measures still are clearly in place that punish dialects that do not conform to SEAE. For example, Cushman (2016) uses a decolonialist lens to critique the concept of “validity,” which

has now more than ever been used to routinize inequities as naturalized parts of systems of educational access, predictions of success in school or on the job, psychological and intelligence measures, and as a foundation for knowledge creation in research studies.

“Validity” as an assessment methodology in writing classrooms serves to reproduce the dominant discourse and punish those whose writing is deemed “invalid” because it does not match the dominant discourse. Building on Cushman’s work, Gomes (2018) argues that “If WPAs and institutions consider assessment situations through the lens of decoloniality, they may find that normalized and validated academic processes wind up rationalizing colonial injustices, thus causing harm to some students on campus” (p. 203). While some students find that their home discourse is close to what is considered the dominant discourse, others are asked to change the way they communicate, which includes their use of a home dialect, to avoid being assigned poor grades.

Writing assessors continue to attempt to bring students in line with the standards of a dominant discourse with which the students had little or no experience in their formative years, constituting a potential threat to identity as students attempt to use a dialect that threatens to supplant their established ones. The conflict for students, then, is how to incorporate a new dialect while still respecting and maintaining the established one, and it is part of the struggle between the role of the writer and the role of the academic.

According to LeCourt (2006), students with working-class backgrounds are also in danger of being negatively assessed based on their discourse as they negotiate their working-class identities with the middle-class tenor of the college campus. LeCourt explains that the academy is deadlocked when it comes to helping working-class students acclimate to the academy because “of the premise on which we’ve attempted to construct working-class pedagogies: namely, that working-class and academic discourses function in opposition to, rather than in relationship with, each other” (p. 32). The ocean between these two identities is difficult to cross, but LeCourt insists that the answer is not for both sides to stay on their respective shores:

The proposed solution to such an abyss cannot be to suggest that we don’t help them cross it (i.e. O’Dair’s working-class university). A pedagogy focused only on conflicts with “home” languages sends an equally problematic message: stay on your side, write about the conflict, don’t worry about negotiating it; we’ll take care of you by offering you critical tools we presume you do not possess. (p. 34)

LeCourt argues against the assumption that working-class students are not up to the task of participating in the college activity system. Further, instructors who are not inviting students to fully participate by denying any type of conflict resolution between their class identities and their academic identities are stunting their students’ growth within the new activity system. If this model were to be employed, the students would miss the chance to transfer genres from familiar activity systems to new ones and back again (see Russell, 1997, p. 522). Without this opportunity to negotiate old knowledge and new knowledge, the students would be stuck separating the two, and they would never be able to make the

informed choices about their discourse that they must be able to make to be successful beyond the university.

One of the driving forces behind the separation of old knowledge and new knowledge are the conventions of academic writing. For students who have never encountered academic genres, the limitations on what can be expressed and how it should be written can be difficult to navigate. Because they are not yet part of an activity system, students cannot easily access the logic behind the seemingly nit-picky minutiae of MLA or APA citation style or the CARS method of research paper organization. Noting that “Nobody comes out of her mama’s womb hedging claims and citing precedents,” Gunter (2011) criticizes the overly strict definition of academic writing that FYW instructors often implement (p. 69). For Gunter, such a definition marginalizes already peripheral groups in the university. Specifically, “Academic conventions don’t only empower students to say some things. Their commands disallow students from saying other things” (p. 68). Although the students are empowered to present, for example, the cutting edge scientific research they have done throughout the semester, they are at the same time rendered silent as they attempt to describe that research in terms relevant to their cultural identities. Gunter argues that when some students bow out of the academy to preserve their cultural identities when forced, and the academy loses because voices from countercultures are not represented:

Forcing many students to choose between academic success and home or chosen alternative cultures, we not only sever academia from whole fields of knowledge that marginalized students bring with them, but we end up further marginalizing these students who could be our most fluent rhetorical power players. (p. 71)

While some students value participation in the academy, they also value their cultural identities, and they are forced to decide if they will pursue an academic identity or preserve their established identity.

To avoid assimilation, some students find it necessary to actively resist classroom teachings. In her discussion of the University of Wyoming's version of remedial composition courses, Heaney (2006) writes that many of the students in the Synergy program were suspicious of "teachers who give students even partial control over their grades or ask them to find personal connections with writing assignments" (p. 32). Additionally, when students in Synergy are "presented with material that they find irrelevant to their identities" they "detach, falling back on familiar and rebellious high school roles" (p. 32). Heaney attributes this resistance to the students' awareness that academic discourse was not created with students like them in mind: "Minorities in Synergy, especially Native Americans, struggle with a sense of disenfranchisement from their home communities as they enter a setting where the dominant race is white, and the dominant cultures unfamiliar" (p. 29). Likewise, Gray-Rosendale, Bird, and Bullock (2003) contend that while many Native American students have access to more educational resources in college than before, "we are clearly taking them away from their entire cultures, traditions, rituals, and family structures" (p. 79). These students are keenly aware that they are considered outsiders of the institution. They are additionally aware that adopting the institution's genres will affect their identities. According to Heaney, "On some level, these students understand that learning new discourse - academic writing, for example - changes the way they think and therefore *who they are* in some way" (p. 33). In an effort to avoid the academy's acculturation, these students resist

their teachers as well as the academy's conventions. In the self-assessments Heaney conducted as part of her research, there is "repeated testimony that many students' negative attitudes are founded on anger, a long-standing rebellion against instructional techniques that students felt trampled their "right" to express their often marginalized opinions - in whatever form they chose" (p. 32).

Even if students do not feel that their identities are being threatened by classroom instruction, they still make decisions about what self they want to present to their professors, both in writing and in speech. Students communicate in ways that best represent their chosen identity. As Powell (2003) suggests, "students' identities influence their rhetorical choices. When their identities come in contact (through activity systems) with other institutional/administrative/teacherly identities, this also influences their rhetorical choices" (p.300). Powell's case studies of three different students attending a Catholic university documents three dispositions students illustrate in their writing. The first student, Amy, chooses to mimic the established dominant discourse as it is demonstrated by the professor. Powell refers to this disposition as "reproductive" of the dominant discourse. The next disposition Powell describes is resistance, which describes a student's unwillingness to reproduce the dominant discourse of the class, even if their grade is negatively affected. This type of resistance was not productive for Patrick, the student in the second case study, because he could not show through his writing that he'd learned anything that his professor aimed to teach. Finally, the student who is *knowledgeably* resistant is able to productively challenge the dominant discourse. Layla, the student fitting this description, "[pushes] the genre of the lecture class to include the questions that helped her further understand the philosophical theories" that the professor

was teaching (p. 297). By asking thoughtful questions about the course material, Layla was able to resist the lecture, which she had identified for herself as a less effective teaching model than perhaps a discussion-based model would have been. In doing so, she makes the class work more to her benefit.

Each of the students Powell describes have specific selves they want to reproduce in their courses. Amy reproduces the dominant discourse because she wants to be seen as a successful learner and perhaps even a teacher-pleaser (p. 288). She offers no challenge to the dominant discourse because she sees it as the model from which she is meant to work, not a potential limiter of her learning. Patrick wants to appear as a questioner and a deep thinker, and though Powell notes that his “resistance to the class was critically aware,” he nevertheless is not successful in the course (p. 293). Regardless of his final grade, Patrick does hold onto his questioner identity, and he sticks to it throughout the semester. Layla, as she displays knowledgeable resistance, is also presenting herself as a questioner. Her questions, however, are meant not to challenge the dominant discourse but to help her interact with it. This student’s resistance not only represents the student’s identity as an engaged learner, it also pushes the professor to shift from a lecture-style method of teaching to a more open forum so that students can interact with the course. “Whenever a teacher, a representative of the institution, changes part of the class, and in turn changes part of the system, then the institutional identity is also shifted” (p. 298). It is clear that these students are motivated to establish and defend the identity they want to demonstrate for their professors, and they do this by making making rhetorical choices in their writing assignments that further support those identities.

The question remains how exactly to help students make informed decisions in regards to negotiating their identities without directing them to identities they may not want. Whether students are using model texts, adopting concepts such as “voice,” or developing what their instructor calls a “writer’s identity,” they are taking on values of the academy’s activity system as they learn to write within it. Helping students avoid internal conflict between their identities as well as the double binds Russell describes requires composition instructors to attend to students’ home dialects and cultural identities helping them understand they have rhetorical choices to make if they want to successfully write in the academy and beyond. To accomplish this, scholars, textbooks, and instructors often speak of building a “writer’s identity.” The term “writer’s identity,” however, is not clearly defined. Whether it refers to an identity that the student takes on to connect the act of writing with other aspects of their identity or if it refers to the particular self that a student present through their writing is unclear. A better understanding of what exactly is meant by the term “writer’s identity” and knowing why and how instructors may encourage building one is important if its use as a pedagogical tool is to be continued.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

To better understand if and how instructors are using the term “writer’s identity,” I conducted a short survey (see Appendix A) among the FYW faculty in the University Writing Program (UWP) at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. By examining their responses to the survey questions, I gained a sense of how instructors define the term and how they believe functions in their classroom.

### **Research Context & Participants**

UNCC is a public, four-year institution with an enrollment of about 29,000 students, as of Fall 2017 (UNC Charlotte, 2018). Of those students, approximately 3,000 were classified as new freshmen in Fall 2017. With the exception being those who scored a 4 or 5 on the Advanced Placement Language and Composition exam, most of these students are required to take an FYW course offered by the UWP. During the Spring 2018 semester, three FYW courses were offered: UWRT 1102: Writing and Inquiry in Academic Contexts II, UWRT 1103: Writing and Inquiry in Academic Contexts I & II, and UWRT 1104: Writing and Inquiry in Academic Contexts I & II with Studio (University Writing Program, 2018a).

Participants in this study are full-time FYW instructors. Of the twenty-eight instructors eligible, fourteen responded to the survey. To guide their instruction, the faculty in the UWP use the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), based on the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-year Composition: Rhetorical Knowledge, Critical Reading, Knowledge of Conventions, Composing Processes, and Critical Reflection (University Writing Program, 2018b). Further, all instructors include portfolios of student work as part of the course grading. Though each instructor may employ different methods

in their classroom, each participant is pursuing similar program and institutional goals and is using a common assignment for their students. In order to clarify how “writer’s identity” is used in the UWP, participants were asked to respond to three open-ended survey questions.

### **Data Gathering Procedures**

In addition to literature published in the field, qualitative data collected from surveys can help researchers learn about teaching practices among a specific population, such as the FYW instructors in the UWP. Alreck and Settle (2004) write that surveys conducted in the academy may have theoretical applications, meaning they seek to understand “the propensities and predispositions of people” (p. 5). Further, “This kind of survey information is sought... to enhance the body of theoretical and conceptual knowledge of the discipline” (p. 5). For the purposes of this thesis, I used a grounded theory approach: “The grounded theory method allows researchers to begin a research study without having to test a hypothesis” (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003, p. 16). Rather than investigating specific problems, researchers using grounded theory look for research issues, which are “open and unclear” and “are found by looking for perspectives that are left out, and assumptions that need to be challenged” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 21). In this study, my research issue is the unclear definition and purpose of “writer’s identity” in the FYW classroom. To investigate this issue, I am allowing the instructors and the data they provide to speak for themselves, which allows me to construct a hypothesis based on the responses to the survey.

Within composition studies, survey research has been previously employed to define terms used in the field. According to Anderson et al. (2006), “Composition

researchers have used survey methodologies to answer a range of questions, gathering information about a large population by questioning a smaller sample” (p. 60). As they discuss the historical basis for using surveys in composition, Anderson et al. (2006) note that Hartzog’s (1986) survey is an “act of definition” that reinforces “the idea that Composition, according to survey results (as well as interviews), should be an independent academic discipline” (p. 63). Based on this, Anderson et al. draw parallels to their own work: “Likewise, our survey seeks to define multimodal compositions and their place within composition studies and English departments (survey as an act of definition)” (p. 63). Drawing on the idea of survey as an act of definition, the purpose of the survey component of this thesis is to understand how people in the field of composition understand and use (or do not use) the term “writer’s identity.”

The survey contains three open-ended questions about the term “writer’s identity” (see Appendix A). Open-ended responses allow respondents to define “writer’s identity” for themselves as well as to explain, based on the definition they provide, how they use or do not use the term. Alreck and Settle (2004) note that surveys can be structured so that they investigate people’s attitudes toward an idea or issue (p. 13). To do so, a survey should be composed of the three attitude components that Alreck and Settle (2004) describe: “(1) What the person *knows* or *believes* about the topic, (2) how the person feels about the topic or how it’s *valued*, and (3) the likelihood that the individual will take *action* based on the attitude” (p. 13). In this case, I am structuring the questions so that I can investigate people’s attitudes toward the term “writer’s identity.” In their response to the first question, the survey participants provided their personal definitions of the term “writer’s identity.” The second question asks whether and how instructors encourage

students to identify themselves as writers. The final question asks whether the instructors believe students identify themselves as writers after the course concludes. The responses to these items make up a corpus for analysis, and all responses were included in the analysis.

The survey is kept purposefully short to avoid what Alreck and Settle (2004) call “response fatigue.” Specifically, when respondents are asked to answer a long list of items, “they get tired of the process. If that happens, they may respond carefully to the earlier items and carelessly to the later ones on the list, causing error, bias, or both” (Alreck & Settle, 2004, p. 105). Therefore, the survey is “short enough so that even the least motivated respondents won’t be affected by fatigue when responding” (Alreck & Settle, 2004, p. 105). Because the questions are open-ended, they invite narrative responses, which require more time and greater attention than do multiple choice responses. In this case, the overall length of the survey helps to balance the effort required by the open-ended nature of the items. Although the narrative responses will be open to interpretation, data collected from pre-selected multiple choice responses would limit the range of definitions instructors might use to describe “writer’s identity.” Though it was my hope that the FYW instructors would be thorough in their responses, I did not encourage participants to reach a particular word count. This left the instructors free to compose as much as they wished for each response.

After UNCC’s Institutional Research Board (IRB) approved the survey, the FYW faculty was contacted via the UWP listserv (see Appendix B). Faculty members who were teaching a FYW course during the Spring 2018 semester were invited to participate in the survey, which was conducted via Google Forms. Faculty members were informed

of both the voluntary nature of the survey as well as the complete anonymity of the responses in both the recruitment email and within the survey itself. Once faculty agreed to take the survey by accepting the terms in the first section, they were able to respond to the three survey questions. After the participants responded to the survey items and submitted the completed responses, they were not able to return to the survey to change their responses. The survey was open for one week, after which it was closed for further responses.

### **Method of Analysis**

Once the survey was closed, I began coding the responses using the guided theory approach as described by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003, p. 38). As I read through the responses, I looked for what Auerbach and Silverstein call “repeating ideas” (p. 37). As patterns among the repeating ideas emerged, I grouped them together based on what appeared to be the major theme in each pattern. The theme in each pattern then became the code for the sets of responses. Approaching the data this way allowed me to investigate the instructors’ responses without testing them against a preconceived hypothesis. After the initial coding, responses were quantified.

Once the responses were coded, I used discourse analysis to better understand the latent values and assumed knowledge behind the term “writer’s identity.” Gee and Handford (2012) define discourse analysis as “the study of language in use” (p. 1). Bazerman and Prior (2004) write that “discourse analysis provides a means of examining communicative practice so as to uncover signs of social identities, institutions, and norms as well as the means by which these social formations are established, negotiated, enacted, and changed through communicative practice” (p. 3). Additionally, “discourse

analysis is always, at heart, simultaneously an analysis of language and one of practices in society” (p. 5). Using discourse analysis, therefore, allows me to examine how the term “writer’s identity” relates to the field of composition as it is used in FYW classrooms. As instructors employ such terms as “writer’s identity,” they are reproducing practices already in motion within the field.

Gee and Handford (2012) note that the “utterance-token meaning or situated meaning task,” aids researchers in “discovering the situation-specific or situated meanings of forms used in specific contexts of use” (p. 2). The term “writer’s identity” is situated in how the instructor defines its use and how the instructor uses it in the classroom. Gee and Handford (2012) also discuss the “frame problem,” which is that “Any aspect of context can affect the meaning of an (oral or written) utterance. Context, however, is indefinitely large, ranging from local matters like the positioning of bodies and eye gaze, through people’s beliefs, to historical, institutional, and cultural settings” (p. 4). While this problem affects researchers who use discourse analysis, it also affects the receiver of any message. Each instructor and each student brings with them their own contexts as they each produce and receive messages. The frame problem can, however, be repurposed as a tool when the researcher “can [use] it - by widening the context - to see what information and values are being left unsaid or effaced in a piece of language” (Gee & Handford, p. 5). In this case, the survey responses are generally short and leave a great deal unsaid, but they are informed by the values and goals of individual instructors, the UWP, and the broader field of composition. Discourse analysis is an appropriate tool to examine how these goals affect the message instructors send to students in their classrooms.



## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For ease of reference, I will refer to the survey questions as Q1, Q2, and Q3. See Appendix C for a full report of the survey responses. Appendix D includes a table of coded responses.

### **Coding for Q1: “How would you define the term ‘writer’s identity’?”**

Instructor responses to the first question fell into three different categories: Self-identification, Presentation of Self, and Personal Process. Responses coded into the “Self-identification” category refer to an individual recognizing themselves as a writer. For example, Participant 1 writes, “Writer’s identity means the writer self-identifies as a writer.” Similarly, Participant 5 writes, “How strongly a person (a student in this case) thinks of themselves as a writer.” In total, five participants (36%) mention self-identification in their response to the first question.

The second category, Presentation of Self, refers to the participant’s defining the “writer’s identity” as the way a writer chooses to present themselves in their writing. Participant 3, for example, defines the “writer’s identity” as “The persona a writer takes on due to their writing.” Six participant responses fell into Presentation of Self (43%). Additionally, all responses of this type indicate that “writer’s identity” is fluid and changes with the given rhetorical situation.

Finally, three participants related “writer’s identity” to the third category, Personal Process (21%). Participants whose responses fell into this category write that the writer’s habits when composing become the writer’s identity. For example, Participant 11 refers to “How you shape your writing.” Likewise, Participant 14 notes that the writer’s

identity is defined by “A writer's processes, rituals, likes, dislikes, attitudes, strengths, weaknesses.”

**Coding for Q2: “Do you encourage students to identify themselves as writers?”**

Responses to the second question are coded into two categories: ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ Ten participants (71%) stated that they encourage students to identify themselves as writers. The remaining four (29%) state that they either do not encourage students to identify themselves as writers or that they address student identities in other ways. Although four of the instructors do not necessarily encourage their students to identify as writers, each of them has a different reason why.

Participant 4 states that although they do not directly encourage students to identify as writers as part of the class, they do ask at the end of the semester whether students would identify themselves as writers. Student responses to this question vary: “Some say yes, and some say no. I encourage confidence expressing their ideas, and I think for some students that does mean identifying as writers.”

Participant 6 does not encourage students to identify as writers in their class because it is assumed that they and the students are “all writers all the time.” For this instructor, the writer’s identity is a rhetorical tool that students can “construct or leverage their identity” to address different writing situations. The participant further states:

I don’t want to make ‘writer’ a specialized domain; rather, I want them to recognize it as a basic characteristic of a social being.” For this participant, being a writer is a given, so it is more important to encourage students “to be aware that their identities as writers are highly fluid and change with every text.

Participant 10 writes, “I don’t ask students to identify themselves as writers, but instead ask them to consider what is a writer and ask if they can see themselves falling into that category.” This participant lets students’ definitions of “writer” guide their potential self-identification as writers. This participant also emphasizes individual writing processes as a major component of a writer’s identity.

Participant 13 states that although they “don’t make a big deal” of encouraging students to identify themselves as writers, they do “make a big deal of the fact that writing will be a part of their lives forever.”

In general, the 71% who do encourage students to self-identify as writers mention using either reflective writing assignments or model texts to promote students’ seeing themselves as writers. Participants 1 and 7 mention reading Anne Lamott’s “Shitty First Drafts” as a class assignment. While Participant 9 did not mention a specific formal assignment, they do report “Simply asking [the students] to write down that they have written over the course of the last few months.”

**Coding for Q3: “Do you have reason to believe students continue to identify as writers after completing your class?”**

Responses to the third question are coded into three groups: ‘yes,’ ‘no,’ and ‘unsure.’ Most participants, a total of six (43%), write that they do have reason to believe students continue to identify as writers after completing the class. Participant 3 writes, “I have plenty of students who pursue [writing] as a skill by working at the WRC or writing for online blogs/websites.”

Five participants (36%) write that they don’t know or aren’t sure whether students continue to identify as writers. According to Participant 4, “It’s difficult to know what

happens after they leave first year writing in reference to their identity as writers.”

Similarly, Participant 5 writes that “apart from the longitudinal study we are completing, I don’t have much opportunity to follow up with my students after they have left my class.”

A total of three participants (21%) write that they do not have reason to believe their students continue to identify themselves as writers after the class concludes. Participant 13 writes that while they “believe students leave class feeling more comfortable as writers,” they do not emphasize writer identity in their classroom and therefore has no reason to believe students identify as writers after completing an FYW course. Participant 14 hopes that students continue to identify themselves as writers, though they suspect that “only the top students (a few in each class, maybe) transfer their thinking about writing to other situations.”

### **Limitations of Research**

This study was limited by a few factors. The first was that the open-ended survey, though useful for allowing participants to respond in their own words, could be perceived as time-consuming. The initial invitation for faculty to complete the survey was sent out on May 3rd, 2018. At this point in the semester, instructors are conferencing with students and grading final projects. It is likely that the timing of the study affected the total number of participants able to respond. Of the twenty-eight instructors eligible to respond to the survey, fourteen were able to do so. Had the survey been conducted earlier in the semester, it is possible that more instructors would have been available to respond.

The design of the study as well as its timing may also have affected the depth of responses. Instructors likely did not have enough time to fully explicate their answers to

the survey items. Additionally, surveys do not allow for follow-up questions to be asked, meaning the only data for this study is that which is provided by the participants in the survey responses. While the responses given are good clues about how instructors in the UWP define and value the term “writer’s identity,” more research is needed gain a complete understanding of how “writer’s identity” is used in FYW classes at UNC Charlotte.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this thesis is to understand if and how UNC Charlotte FYW instructors are using the term “writer’s identity” in their classrooms. Based on the survey responses, most instructors encourage their students to identify themselves as writers. Though none of the instructors mentioned a specific definition or type of “writer,” their responses indicate the importance of “writer’s identity” to these instructors.

FYW instructors define “writer’s identity” differently according to their own values and emphases in their classes. While there is overlap in the definitions given in response to the survey, no definition is completely agreed-upon by all instructors. Some instructors, such as Participants 2, 3, and 4, agree that a writer’s identity is “constituted by the discourses s/he adopts,” which include the writing they are asked to do in FYW courses (Ivanic, 1998, p. 86). Others, such as Participants 1, 5, and 8, see the writer’s identity as an identity students should assume so they can make informed rhetorical choices, confidently address their readers, and, as Elbow (1995) would hope, “[say] in their writing ‘Listen to me, I have something important to tell you’ not ‘Is this okay? Will you accept this?’” (p. 82).

While the definitions of the term vary, the instructors' goals for encouraging students to self-identify as writers are generally the same: they believe that it helps students write more effectively. Participant 6, for example, writes that there is a "persistent and implicit focus" in their class "on the fact that [the students] are, of course, writers (now let's just learn how to be more effective writers!)." Because the identity of "writer" is already understood as a common identity for the students in the class, the instructor does not encourage students to formally identify as writers within their class but instead pushes students "to be aware that their identities as writers are highly fluid and change with every text." By using the writer's identity as a starting point for the class, the instructor extends the concept to help students realize that every rhetorical situation will require different rhetorical moves. Learning to successfully satisfy the needs of each rhetorical situation will make them more effective writers. Similar beliefs about self-identification as writers are echoed in other responses. For example, Participant 10, though they do not exactly encourage students to identify themselves as writers, writes that "For those who self-identify as a writer, I do believe they identify as some type of writer, perhaps not a creative writer, but an effective writer once they leave my course."

With the goal of helping students write more effectively, two values emerged as means to achieve this goal: encouraging students' self-identification as writers and establishing a relationship between the student and writing. For example, Participants 5 and 7 both mention that students who self-identify as writers become more conscious of the writing decisions they must make in a given writing situation. Specifically, Participant 5 writes, "By asking students to critically reflect on what they compose, they

become more conscious to the writing decisions they make, which also helps them identify as writers.” Participant 7 reports that their “final ‘wrap up’ comments to [the students] include a statement about the value of seeing themselves as writers when they are faced with having to write in any new context.” For these participants, the students’ self-identification as writers is a pathway toward a greater understanding of the rhetorical tools at their disposal as well as their ability to use those tools. Other respondents indicate that their use of the “writer’s identity” encourages a relationship between the students and writing. Participant 8 encourages students to examine how effective writing will help them: “By articulating who they are and what they value in writing, I believe they are better able to identify with that writing side of themselves.” Participant 11 writes that a student’s identifying as a writer helps them “take ownership of whatever they are working on.” By getting students to see writing as a part of themselves and their identities, instructors are attempting to impart the message that writing is not confined to FYW classes.

While instructors use the term to help FYW students see themselves as members of new activity systems that require different genres of writing, “writer’s identity” does not tell the whole story of student identity change as discussed by Bartholomae (2003), Ivancic (1998), and Russell (1997). Assuming the identity of a writer can be useful for a student to respond to a writing situation in an FYW classroom; however, it is not clear whether the “writer’s identity” is a useful position from which to approach assignments in other disciplines. If students are meant to respond to their writing assignments knowing that they must identify variables such as purpose, occasion, and audience, inventing the university (Bartholomae, 2003) as a writer might may not be the best way

for students to successfully satisfy the needs of their audiences in disciplines outside FYW. A student may be able to write well in the sense that they have command over grammar and style, but without identifying as a member of the discipline for which they are writing, they may not be able to meet the needs of readers in that discipline. Russell (1997) writes that “Activity systems and the individuals in them are pulled between the object/motives of the multiple activity systems with which they interact” (p. 519). If students do not recognize the pushing and pulling they will naturally experience in the different roles they play in the university, they may not be able to effectively manage them or learn from them. For students to invent the university, they must invent themselves within it. Students in general education courses may invent themselves as writers in the morning and then as historians, psychologists, or architects in the afternoon. While a writer’s identity may position the student as a skilled FYW student, it does not position them as experts in any other field; even the best FYW student is not an expert chemist.

While it is useful to employ different identities in different situations, students must be aware that they can do so, and according to Bartholomae (Bartholomae & Elbow, 1995), they must also work against the roles pre-written for them by the culture of the university. For example, ten of the fourteen participants in this survey reported that they encourage their FYW students to identify themselves as writers. While a composition instructor might value a “writer’s identity,” students may perceive the role of “writer” that their FYW instructor encourages as a role to work against; they may decide that their time is better spent pursuing other identities in other activity systems. Russell (1997) writes:

As individuals are pulled in different directions, they experience double binds manifest in their writing, which may be resolved by their coming to appropriate the object/motive of some activity system(s) as they appropriate its genres - as they resist or refuse appropriating others. (p. 534)

As they complete general education courses and work toward upper-level classes in their field, students make decisions about how much they want to stay involved in the activity systems of the courses outside their major. For example, some students choose to expand their involvement with the History activity system by minoring in it, or they may abandon that activity system entirely by never taking another history course. Given that many students see FYW courses as unnecessary or unhelpful, they may decide to distance themselves from activity systems that they perceive to be linked with FYW. Their involvement in it is one of obligation. When they write themselves against the role of the first-year composition student, they are addressing a rhetorical situation that paints them as not yet ready to engage in the discussions held in other disciplines. They do so by making informed rhetorical choices and showing their instructors that their writing is effective enough to merit passing the class.

It is clear that the conflict between the role of the writer and the role of the academic, as described by Elbow (1995) and Bartholomae (1995), persists. Students must choose how they want to identify themselves in the academy, and instructors must decide which educational approach will most benefit their students. Participants in this survey, for example, wrote that encouraging students to self-identify as writers helped them take ownership of their writing and be more aware of the rhetorical tools at their disposal. What remains unclear is whether the development of a writer's identity unintentionally

becomes prescriptive. Because the definition of “writer’s identity” varies, students may have encountered or come up with definitions that are different from their instructor’s. Some students may believe that any “writer’s identity” they have is simply the persona that develops organically from their writing, and formally self-identifying as writers is not particularly appealing. How, then, does their acceptance of this definition interact with an instructor’s whose definition emphasizes self-identification as a writer? This problem is similar to Clark’s resistance to reproducing the writing style of the model text in Brooke’s (1988) work. Clark chose to dismiss some aspects of Laurence’s writing in *A Bird in the House*, and similarly, some students may disagree with a particular definition of writer’s identity. While Clark is able to take what he needs from the model text, Brooke is critical of Clark’s perceived inability to understand Laurence’s writing. Clark is asked to use the model text in a specific way, and he is criticized for not doing so. If students are asked to take on a writer’s identity, there is a question of how closely their definitions should match that of the instructor and how much liberty they have to play with the definition to suit their own needs. There is a question of whether any “writer’s identity” is useful to a student, or if the student must take on an identity that has already been defined for them.

Depending on how much the instructor insists on their definition of “writer’s identity,” they may experience some unintentional bias in their grading. Of the ten instructors who reported that they encourage students to self-identify as writers, five specifically mention that they hope students do so. For these instructors, self-identification as a writer is a part of student success in writing. More tellingly, two participants mention self-identification as a writer as a marker of a successful student.

Participant 8, for example, writes that “For students who work earnestly on their reflective writings, I think they are able to identify as writers capable or [sic] persuasive and effective communication.” Similarly, Participant 14 writes, “I suspect only the top students (a few in each class, maybe) transfer their thinking about writing to other situations.” A student’s refusal to self-identify as a writer does not necessarily mean that the student cannot do well in these instructors’ courses. However, there seems to be a correlation between this definition of “writer’s identity” and student success that may lead instructors, most likely unintentionally, to favor students who do self-identify as writers.

Although some instructors see “writer’s identity” as useful for responding to rhetorical situations in an FYW course, it may not be as effective in encouraging transfer outside FYW as instructors hope. According to Burgess and Ivanic (2010), “For most students, identities in educational contexts are transitory, mediating identities; hence, the practices in which they engage while attending courses may be for extrinsic purposes, not part of the identities to which they aspire for the rest of their lives” (p. 230). Further, Clark (2017) argues that “identity in the context of academic literacy can be viewed as a type of performance... this performance will not result inevitably in a profound identity change over which students have no control” (p. 179). While transient nature of such educational identities may mean that encouraging students to self-identify as writers is not particularly damaging, it may also mean that students do not particularly benefit in the long run from self-identifying as writers in an FYW classroom. Academic disciplines that employ writing also employ genres, meaning communicating with other members of the disciplines requires participants to address genre concerns. Participants must make

decisions about how to write within the given genre so that their work is accepted by senior members of the field. This means every participant in each discipline makes rhetorical choices when responding to a writing situation. If students only see these rhetorical decisions as the actions of a writer, they may not be in a position to transfer their writing experiences and expertise to new writing situations.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

As has been discussed, the sample size for this study is small and is comprised of participants from only one FYW program of many. Due to the number of responses and lack of representation from other institutions, the results within this study are not easily generalizable. Therefore, a more robust survey of multiple programs in light of their educational goals and institutional values would provide a clearer picture of how “writer’s identity” is defined and used across the field. Additionally, selecting participants for in-depth interviews about the term would allow for follow-up questions that clarify instructors’ initial responses. Interviewing a focus group of instructors from different programs would be useful to investigate how institutional values and individual experiences in different academic and cultural settings might change how instructors conceptualize “writer’s identity.”

In this study, student perceptions of the term “writer’s identity” were not addressed. To investigate whether instructors’ intended use of “writer’s identity” is the same by students and is useful to them, a study involving classroom observations, recorded class discussions, and surveys of student attitudes toward the term could be employed. Doing so would allow researchers to examine the following: how students understand their instructor’s use of the term “writer’s identity,” whether the term helps them improve their writing, whether the students see any value in self-identifying as writers, and whether the students consider their instructor’s use of the term to be threatening to their identity.

To measure the efficacy of encouraging students to identify as writers, a study comparing classes that emphasize “writer’s identity” with those that do not would help researchers determine if “writer’s identity” improve students’ transfer of writing concepts outside FYW. This study would depend on the students’ making their writing assignments from other courses available to the researchers, but it would provide a look into the value behind self-identifying as a writer in FYW and whether it improves transfer of skills to other classes. Additionally, such research would also provide new perspectives on Ivanic’s, Bartholomae’s, and Clark’s research.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the responses to the survey, instructors who encourage students to adopt a “writer’s identity” are attempting to help students take ownership of their writing and to transfer what they learn in FYW to other writing situations. While instructors rely on the term to teach students about rhetorical decision-making, it is unclear how effective “writer’s identity” is for helping students address writing situations in other courses or for promoting transfer. Perhaps a more concrete way of improving transfer would be employing concepts that have been more thoroughly researched. Specifically, focusing on student dispositions toward writing and using well-defined terms that retain their meanings outside FYW could be a clearer pathway toward helping students improve their writing. As Driscoll and Wells (2012) argue, student dispositions “are a critical foundation upon which learning is built and potentially transferred.” Instructors who integrate student dispositions into the FYW curricula “may find students to be more willing or even more able to adopt new, successful strategies as they solve ever-more-complex writing problems” (Reid, 2017, p. 310).

Part of what negatively affects student dispositions toward writing in FYW is the sense that they are not in control of the texts they produce or how those texts are assessed. Students perceive FYW writing to be “personal, subjective, creative, and primarily intended ‘not to bore the reader’” (Bergman & Zepernick, 2007, p. 131). In contrast, “students used descriptors such as ‘concise,’ ‘to the point,’ and ‘not a lot of flowery adjectives’” to describe writing done for other courses (Bergman & Zepernick, 2007, p. 125). To many students, writing for FYW and disciplinary writing are completely discrete. Based on these perceived differences, students do not feel motivated to find similarities between the writing done in freshman English courses and the writing done in upper-level courses within their chosen discipline. Perhaps adding to the perceived subjectivity of the writing done in FYW is that the term “writer’s identity,” which, like “voice” (see Hashimoto, 1987), lacks a clear, agreed-upon definition. Determining whether students perceive “writer’s identity” as adding to the subjectivity of their first-year writing courses would be worth investigating.

Students who feel that they are not capable of writing effectively may also experience difficulty transferring concepts outside FYW. Driscoll and Wells (2007) write: “Self-efficacy theory suggests that, in order for students to do the work that successful transfer requires, they first have to hold developmentally generative beliefs about their ability to do that work and to accomplish their goals.” Improving students’ sense of self-efficacy, therefore, would also improve transfer. Discussing advances in social cognitive theory, Khost (2017) writes that one suggestion to improve students’ self-efficacy is to “focus student conferences on short-term rather than long-term goals since [social cognitive theory] research has shown proximal goals to elicit greater student

effort than distal goals do” (p. 278). Teaching students how to use established rhetorical tools to break down large writing assignments gives students the chance to address smaller problems and gradually build their skills.

In general, helping students see that the writing done in FYW is not as subjective as they might think would benefit both the field and the students. This can be done by showing them that writing is a tool and has a clearly defined purpose in every activity system in which it appears. Downs and Wardle (2007) address this idea in their call for retooling FYW courses into Intro to Writing courses: “Instead of teaching situational skills often incorrectly imagined to be generalizable, FYC could teach about the ways writing works in the world and how the ‘tool’ of writing is used to mediate various activities” (p. 558). After learning how different activity systems use writing as a tool to solve a problem, students may be more willing to see that writing is not as subjective or “flowery” as they were led to believe. To accomplish this, Reid (2017) advocates for “identifying a wider range of problems that writers need to solve” to teach students that what they identify as “writer’s block” can be overcome by identifying writing problems, such as addressing audience and adhering to genre conventions, and solving them (p. 294). As students accomplish these smaller goals, they internalize and build upon the skills they need to address more the difficult writing they will encounter later in their coursework.

While “writer’s identity” attempts to improve students’ sense of self-efficacy, it is ill-defined and difficult to grasp. Because “writer’s identity” is defined by individual instructors and is governed by their values, the concept does not necessarily transfer out of FYW in a meaningful way. Once students leave FYW, they may not find the concept

of “writer’s identity” useful as they compose for other courses. However, composition studies has the language to discuss rhetorical choices, student disposition, and transfer. Emphasizing these aspects of the composing process rather than focusing directly on students’ identities may prove more useful for students’ academic careers. By employing objective and clearly defined terms that retain their meanings beyond FYW, we can better equip students for writing in other disciplines.

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## Appendix A

### Faculty Survey: The Use and Pedagogical Value of the Term "Writer's Identity" in the First-year Writing Classroom

#### **Section 1: Consent to Participate**

\*1. ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records. Clicking the “Agree” button indicates that:

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are a first-year writing instructor in UNCC's University Writing Program

#### **Section 2: Student Identity Formation**

1. How would you define the term “writer’s identity”?
2. Do you encourage students to identify themselves as writers?
  - a. If so, name one effective practice (such as an assignment or reading) used to address identity formation. If not, why?
3. Do you have reason to believe students continue to identify as writers after completing your class? Please explain.

## Appendix B

### Listserv Recruitment

Dear First-year Writing Instructors,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jessie Cortez, a UNC Charlotte master's degree candidate. This study involves a web-based survey designed to look at terminology instructors use when and if they address student writing identities. Participation in the study typically takes 20 minutes and is strictly confidential. You are free to take the survey wherever internet access is available.

The purpose of this research is to determine whether and how instructors in the UNCC UWP are using the term "writer's identity" as well as why instructors who do not use the term might choose not to do so.

The research is will be conducted through a Google Forms survey. The survey will be open for a period of one week. You may access the form here:

<https://goo.gl/forms/dkljqNuaguOVloBw2>

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Your survey answers will be stored initially with Google Forms in a password-protected electronic format. The responses will then be stored in a password-protected UNCC Google Drive account.

No identifiers, such as name, email address, IP address, etc., will be accessed or collected. I will not activate the Google Forms feature that collected respondents' email addresses.

Once the survey is closed and the responses are collected, the responses will be analyzed using discourse analysis with the help of Dr. Mullin, who is serving as the committee chair for this thesis. Dr. Mullin will have access only to the responses to the survey, and is acting primarily as an adviser for the principal investigator, Jessie Cortez.

There are no direct benefits to you as a result of participation, though you may be interested in the findings which can be found in my M.A. thesis. The research may result in better understanding of how instructors use the term "writer's identity" and others like it.

Participation is voluntary, refusal to take part in the study involves no penalty or loss of benefits to which participants are otherwise entitled, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled.

If you have further questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, contact the Compliance Office at (704) 687-1871. If you have questions concerning the study, contact the principal investigator, Jessie Cortez, at (337) 302-7485 or by email at [jcortez1@uncc.edu](mailto:jcortez1@uncc.edu).

Thank you for your time and attention,

Jessie Cortez

## Appendix C

### Survey Questions and Responses

|          | <b>1. How would you define the term "writer's identity"?</b>   | <b>2. Do you encourage students to identify themselves as writers? If so, name one effective practice (such as an assignment or reading) used to address identity formation. If not, why?</b>   | <b>3. Do you have reason to believe students continue to identify as writers after completing your class? Please explain.</b>  |
|----------|--|---|--|
| <b>1</b> | Writer's identity means the writer self-identifies as a writer. It has to do with being able to articulate how she works as a writer.  | Absolutely. We read Shitty First Drafts and discuss what it means to be a writer vs an author. Students often talk about how being a "writer" means being published and don't see their writing as evidence that they are "real" writers.   | I have no idea but it would be interesting to know. I hope they are.   |
| <b>2</b> | The particular style and persona that they project on the page.  | a literacy narrative  | yes  |
| <b>3</b> | The persona a writer takes on due to their writing (can be intentional or not). Comes from accepting that one is actually a writer.  | Yes, I have students analyze who they are as people first as who we are determines who we are as writers.   | Definitely. Some of my students realize it is a skill they haven't been cultivating. I have plenty of students after the class who seek to pursue it as a skill by working at the WRC or writing for online blogs/websites.    |
| <b>4</b> | I believe "writer's identity" relates to voice, tone, and style. It's the persona the writer wants to portray in a given writing situation. It also encompasses their attitudes towards writing. | No. While I think every student can be a writer, I know that some of my students have very fixed notions of what writing is, and a 16 week class can't change that. I have a final reflection question for my portfolio that asks if students consider themselves writers...these are always interesting answers. Some say at the beginning of the course they wouldn't identify as writers, but they do by the end of the course. Some say yes, and some say no. I encourage confidence expressing their ideas, and I think for some students that does mean identifying as writers. | I'm not sure. It's difficult to know what happens after they leave first year writing in reference to their identity as writers. I imagine some will continue to identify as writers though.                                   |
| <b>5</b> | How strongly a person (a student in this case) thinks of themselves as a writer.   | Yes. We talk a lot in class about what it means to identify as a writer. One way is by doing a lot of writing. You write, you are a writer. We also look at our non-school writing to pull on our expertise in that area and capitalize on the rhetorical knowledge we bring to the classroom. By asking students to critically reflect on what they compose, they become more conscious to the writing decisions they make, which also helps them identify as writers.   | I'm not sure. I like to think so, but apart from the longitudinal study we are completing (which doesn't ask about writerly identity), I don't have much opportunity to follow up with students after they have left my class. |

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| 6 | <p>I would define a writer's identity as the temporary and situated persona one adopts when creating a text. While certainly there are many constraints that extend across many, or all, such rhetorical moments (for instance, the primary language in which one is writing), a writer's identity is not a stable, permanent persona. A writer takes up an identity by--either consciously or unconsciously--noting his or her relationship with/positionality in regards to the audience, measuring her or his capital and authority, considering his or her familiarity with the genre and comfort with the values embedded in that genre, and evaluating her or his purpose and the odds of achieving that purpose.</p> | <p>As I read this question, no. Because the assumption in my class is that we are all writers all the time. I don't want to make "writer" a specialized domain; rather, I want them to recognize it as a basic characteristic of a social being. What I do encourage students to do, however, is to be aware that their identities as writers are highly fluid and change with every text. They should, therefore, be aware of all of the variables within each rhetorical situation so that they can consciously construct or leverage their identity in that situation. One low-stakes, fun way that we work on this (and I'm sure everyone does some version of this) is to give them a series of writing situations in which all but one or two of the constituents of the situation are different (write an email to a professor asking for an extension on a project b/c you got into a car wreck on the way to campus; write the series of texts in which you explain to your parent that you wrecked their car; write a note to your roommate in which you make clear that he/she has to pay you back that money you lent him/her because now you have to pay for car repairs after a wreck, etc.) and then have them analyze how differently they constructed themselves in each of the texts.</p> | <p>With the persistent and implicit focus--the starting point of the class really--on the fact that they are, of course, writers (now let's just learn how to be more effective writers!), it's hard to imagine that they could ever not think of themselves as writers. In fact, on the first day of class, I never get any push back on the initial understanding that they are already writers.</p> |
| 7 | <p>The awareness a writer has of who they "are" when they write--they see themselves as writers who adapt to writing in different contexts.</p>   | <p>Yes, but probably should do more of this. One reading I assign that helps with this is Anne Lamott's "S---y First Drafts."</p>   | <p>I'm uncertain of this. I think I need to do more to help them with this. But I am hopeful regardless. I think I have referred to them "writers" an awful lot during the course of the semester, and my final "wrap up" comments to them include a statement about the value of seeing themselves as writers when they are faced with having to write in any new context.</p>                        |
| 8 | <p>This is a term I don't use often, though I do often use "identity as a writer." I don't know if they are the same, exactly. I tend to think not. If I heard "writer's identity" I would assume that it referred to the other components of a writer's self-identification in addition to their writing or perhaps that informs their writing self. So identity in terms of race, gender, class. Conversely, for a phrase like "identity as a writer," I tend to think about the particular ways that writing manifests itself for that person. What do they value in effective writing? What role do they see writing playing in their life and careers?</p>   | <p>Yes. One major reflective piece of writing they work on in my class is their Writer's Statement. Basically, I ask that they imagine they ways in which they will be a writer beyond our classroom. I ask them to consider what they value in writing and how they see that impacting their careers How will effective writing help them? What practices will matter? What kind or type of writer are they? By articulating who they are and what they value in writing, I believe they are better able to identify with that writing side of themselves.</p>   | <p>Yes, sometimes. For those that worked earnestly on their reflective writings, I think they are able to identify as writers capable or persuasive and effective communication.</p>   |

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| 9  | The speaker or created of the ideas and context  | Yes. Simply asking them to write down that they have written over the course of the last few months.   | Probably not   |
| 10 | I define writer's identity as the process by which some one composes their pieces.   | Not exactly. I don't ask students to identify themselves as writers, but instead ask them to consider what is a writer and ask if they can see themselves falling into that category. We engage in readings and discussions that speak to what it means to be a "writer." Specifically, I call upon Junot Diaz' piece "Becoming a Writer" where he states "a writer is a writer not because she writes well and easily, because she has amazing talent, because everything she does is golden. In my view a writer is a writer because even when there is no hope, even when nothing you do shows any sign of promise, you keep writing anyway." Because of this quote, throughout the course of the semester we work on writing process. I have students practice different approaches to their writing process to help them identify what works best for them. By concentrating on process, we speak to issues of writer identity. Whatever that process is for them becomes their identity as a writer. | Within their portfolio students are asked to self identify as believing if they are a writer or not. It is my hope that they see themselves as a writer, but some do and some do not. For those that self identify as a writer, I do believe they identify as some type of writer, perhaps not a creative writer, but an effective writer once they leave my course. |
| 11 | How you shape your writing- what is your signature way of writing.   | Write in the first person, express yourself however you want to, just make sure the format addresses the correct audience.   | Yes, they take ownership of whatever they are working on.  |
| 12 | Seeing ones self as a writer.  | We read "How to Read Like a Writer" by Mike Bunn early in the semester.  | I don't for sure, but we address how writing is inextricable from learning.  |
| 13 | who one sees oneself as as a writer--whether that be student, professional writer, teacher-writer. I also associate loosely the "writer's voice" with writer's identity, and everyone who writes has a voice | I don't make a big deal of it. I do make a big deal of the fact that writing will be a part of their lives forever. I make a big deal of their relationship with their writing.  | I believe students leave class feeling more comfortable as writers, realizing that they are more aware of writing situations and expectations, knowing they can more comfortably do what they need to do as writers. I don't stress writer identity, so I don't have reason to believe they see themselves this way  |

|    |  |   |  |
|----|--|---|--|
| 14 | A writer's processes, rituals, likes, dislikes, attitudes, strengths, weaknesses | <p>Yes. Mainly through reflective assignments (low- and high-stakes) throughout the semester. The two high-stakes assignments are the midterm and final essay and e-Portfolio. In the final e-Portfolio, students answer questions like...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What have I learned about myself as a writer?</li> <li>➤ Have I developed a better understanding of the composing process?</li> <li>➤ What kind of writer was I in high school, and what kind of writer am I in college?</li> <li>➤ What are my strengths as a writer? What are my challenges as a writer?</li> <li>➤ How do I think about writing? What is my attitude about writing? How do I talk about Writing?</li> <li>➤ What are my favorite genres to write in?</li> <li>➤ What qualities do I most appreciate in other writers?</li> <li>➤ What writing goals do I have for myself?</li> </ul> | <p>I hope so, but no. I suspect that only the top students (a few in each class, maybe) transfer their thinking about writing to other situations. This is something I have been struggling with recently. When you ask students to discuss how they might use what they learn in my class in future classes, their answers are vague. And that's fair: they have no idea what they don't know or what they'll face in future classes and rhetorical situations.</p> |
|----|--|---|--|

## Appendix D

## Coded Survey Responses

| Q1: How would you define the term 'writer's identity'? |                  |
|--|------------------|
| Code   | Participants     |
| Self-identification                                    | 1, 5, 8, 12, 13  |
| Presentation of Self                                   | 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9 |
| Personal Process                                       | 10, 11, 14       |

| Q2: Do you encourage students to identify themselves as writers? |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Code   | Participants                    |
| Yes  | 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14 |
| No   | 4, 6, 10, 13                    |

| Q3: Do you have reason to believe students continue to identify as writers after completing your class? |                    |
|---|--------------------|
| Code  | Participants       |
| Yes   | 2, 3, 6, 8, 10, 11 |
| No  | 9, 13, 14          |
| Unsure  | 1, 4, 5, 7, 12     |