CONSTRUCTING PRE-SERVICE TEACHER IDENTITY WITHIN THE DISCOURSE OF WRITING ASSESSMENT

By

JONATHAN MARK TORRES

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of JONATHAN MARK TORRES find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

______________________________
Olusola Adesope, Ph.D., Chair

______________________________
John Lupinacci, Ph.D.

______________________________
Ashley Boyd, Ph.D.

______________________________
Zoe Strong, Ph.D.
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CONSTRUCTING PRE-SERVICE TEACHER IDENTITY WITHIN THE DISCOURSE OF WRITING ASSESSMENT

Abstract

by Jonathan Mark Torres, Ph.D.
Washington State University
May 2018

Chair: Olusola Adesope

The practice of writing is increasingly valued across the curriculum as institutions recognize the social and psychological benefits of writing in all contexts. Much of the literature supports reflective writing as a discursive method of identity formation, which is always situated in specific contexts and relationships. When assessing student writing, the instructor’s feedback becomes part of that discursive process, intertextually bound with the student’s identity. The following study situates writing assessment in two teacher education courses to explore how pre-service teacher identity is constructed not just within students’ reflective writing but also within instructors’ assessment of their writing. Informed by sociocultural learning theory, I attend to the belief that teacher education students learn identity through the discursive relationship enacted between writing and feedback.

A total of 41 participants were recruited for the study. These participants are undergraduate students enrolled in their first year in the Teacher Education Program at a land grant institution in the Pacific Northwest. The courses in which these students are enrolled are writing-intensive: both instructors are trained in the practice of personalized reflective feedback and assign many reflective writing assignments. A discourse analysis of student work was
carried out by the researcher to explore traces of identity formation in response to instructor feedback. The results are presented as four distinct cases identified by the pseudonyms Roebuck, Compton, Roberta and Kandler. These individual cases allow the researcher to trace the development of identity as an iterative process that relies on the personal relationship between each student and the instructor. The themes that emerged in this study are: the use of deflection to resist reflection, the performance of an “expert” to be recognized as proficient, and the relationaldialogism that often leads to reflection. The results are discussed and contextualized so that future researchers and practitioners can carry the themes of this study forward into new contexts and situations.
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INTRODUCTION

Before beginning my PhD and career in educational psychological research, I had graduated with an MFA in Creative Writing. In the fiction and nonfiction classes I taught, I encouraged students to take risks with their writing, assuring them that experimentation with language was one of the surest ways to discover and develop an identity as a writer. Of course, I had not yet read Vygotsky, Gee, or Richardson, which meant if a student challenged my claim I wouldn’t have been able to defend it with evidence or theory. Still, I believed whole-heartedly in my teaching, so much so that when I began teaching remedial writing classes in a developmental education program at University of Alaska Anchorage, I borrowed from creative writing practices. Students in those classes learned basic sentence and paragraph skills with the same assurance that risk and creativity were better than formula and routine. During my time with UAA, aggressive budget cuts meant each department had to submit a prioritization packet that demonstrated their worth to the university. It wasn’t enough that students who matriculated through our developmental education program performed better in their course work than students who skipped remediation. It wasn’t enough that Alaska Native students staged their own defense of our program by sharing their writing in public readings on campus. Our department needed concrete evidence that our practice should not be terminated. This time, however, I could not simply rely on my intuition as support for my claims.

For the first time, I began to think seriously about what writing assessment truly meant. How could assessment encourage the risk-taking I championed as a pathway to identity? How could assessment practices help contribute to the developing identity in students? I took part in
the revision of UAA’s placement tests and noticed how students often adopted labels from their placement as a way to describe themselves. For instance, students would self-identify as a “remedial writer” or “barely proficient reader” when asked if they liked to write and read. I also noticed that students who placed in remedial classes were more likely to respond on surveys that they “hate writing.” These small experiences turned me on to the idea of assessment being constituted as a discourse. Rather than thinking about assessment as some objective measure, I began to see it as a discursive practice, shaped by particular ideologies, that provide the boundaries within which students define themselves.

This concept was my motivation for a PhD—I had to learn how to research the construction of identity within discourses of assessment. In order for me to study such a complex interaction, I had to find a way to frame a research design that would engage students enough that they would care about the assessment. One way to accomplish this was to use reflective writing as an instrument. According to the theories on writing that will be discussed in depth below, reflection is an act that is both personal and public, involving the writer as much as the reader. It exposes students’ beliefs, attitudes, and thoughts while also demonstrating their writing skills. For these reasons, teachers often do not evaluate reflective writing from their students, even though assessment still occurs through the practice of feedback. The following dissertation is my attempt to demonstrate how feedback, conceived of as assessment in conversational form, is used by students to construct their identities.

As will be articulated below, identity is not a permanent or static quality that people carry with them from situation to situation. Without stepping too deeply into the theory here, I will briefly introduce identity as a constantly changing self-assertion, which is always situated in a specific context. Who I am at this moment, writing this dissertation, is very different from who I
am at another moment, when I’m watching football with my nephew. Each context presents a confluence of factors that interact in such unique and complex ways that identity becomes a construction of the living moment. Humans adaptability to diverse kinds of interactions depends on the fluidity of identity. Our actions, behaviors, thoughts, and skills are constituted by the conditions of each context. Thus, how I frame my research and contextualize the results are incredibly important. For the following dissertation, I have chosen to explore how reflective writing assessment shapes identity in a teacher education program. Teacher education is currently contested in regards to concerns over “professionalism” and “teacher identity.” Understanding how teacher education students learn to construct identities can help equip programs with strategies for professional development, which can help combat some of the more political criticisms launched at these programs, and provide a model for the use of reflective writing and its assessment. At the very least, I hope the following dissertation demonstrates the power of feedback as a truly formative assessment practice that engages students in conversation not just about their performance but also—and more importantly—about themselves.

The following dissertation contains two studies. Study 1 is a literature review that is a narrative synthesis of themes emergent in the current scholarship. I use the themes as a framework for the design and analysis of the second study. Study 2 is an empirical design that analyzes how students’ change their writing in response to instructor feedback. Because all of the writing assignments used in Study 2 are reflective, I am able to analyze themes in language use that point to how students might construct their teacher identities. By comparing these themes with the feedback provided and the changes in students’ writing, I conclude with a discussion of how assessment is not just a measure of performance, but also a measure of self. Not included in the dissertation is a pilot study carried out by me and a colleague (Carlos
Anguiano) that was published in *Practitioner Research in Higher Education*. The pilot explored interpretations of feedback by students and instructors. The pilot’s results, along with the literature review, aided in the conception of a feedback practice that was used as an intervention in Study 2.
Study 1

Providing Feedback on Students’ Reflective Writing Assignments: A Systematic Narrative Review of Feedback and Student Identity

Abstract

The following review is a narrative synthesis of empirical studies inquiring into processes of identity construction within a discourse of writing assessment. Specifically, the review conceptualizes feedback as a discursive practice of assessment that situates students as reflective practitioners, a feature that is commonly recognized as a crucial element of identity. Four electronic databases were searched up until May 2016: CINAHL, Academic Search Complete, ERIC, and PsycINFO. The initial result was 1,808 hits. After scanning titles and abstracts for relevance, 379 articles remained. Five themes in total were constructed. These themes indicate contexts when feedback provided on reflective writing assignments shapes discipline-specific identities in students. The discursive features of feedback that are most likely to constitute student identity through reflection can be described as: *content situated, dialogic, and empathic*. As a discursive practice, feedback might be most beneficial when it positions students as: *fluid* and/or *vulnerable*. Rather than feedback that seeks to dominate the intimate space of reflective writing with corrections, feedback characterized by the features suggested by the review is recommended.

**Keywords**: Reflection, Identity, feedback, education, discourse, narrative synthesis, systematic review
Introduction

As Ivanič (1998) suggested, college is a crucial space for identity formation, a process that typically emerges through academic writing. What might be the most important mediator in this process is feedback. Ivanič (1998) realized that, in contrast with younger students who tend to view feedback as explicit directions to follow, “multiple and conflicting identity in [college] writing is hard to ignore” (p. 6). Thus, educators face the challenge of responding to student writing that remains sensitive to the “change, difficulty, crises of confidence, conflicts of identity, feelings of strangeness, the need to discover the rules of an unfamiliar world” college students experience (Ivanič, 1998, p. 7). When students begin to view themselves as practitioners within their discipline, they are more likely to engage with writing as a “meaningful life project,” which is the notion that identity is a relational phenomenon emerging through participation in social activities with specific outcomes in mind (Stetsenko, 2010, p. 9).

A typical focus in the large body of research into feedback, however, is on the improvement of academic performance, which often emphasizes the quality of the task over the quality of the student. Nowhere is this more apparent than Hattie and Timperley’s (2007) landmark meta-analysis, which describes several types of feedback practices that are most likely to lead to improved scores. While it is certainly important for feedback to act as a method of formative assessment that improves students’ work, the research begins to thin when one inquires into the discursive practice of feedback (Lee, 2014). In other words, when researchers ask how students engage feedback in generative ways, there is less certainty. This review examines the way feedback functions as a dialogue within particular discourses of assessment. Building off the foundational work by Ivanič (1998), the reviewer seeks to clarify feedback strategies that help shape positive student identities within their reflective writing to offer a
model of formative assessment that prioritizes the development of the student over the development of the student’s work.

With regards to writing assessment, the work of Graham, Harris, and Hebert (2011), Huot (2002) and others illustrate the importance of feedback practices that encourage the development of students as writers—as opposed to the exclusive development of students’ writing. This approach to feedback emphasizes the need to view writing, and its assessment, as a process (Elbow, 2002). Indeed, Graham, Gillespie, and McKeown (2013) call for an environment where “students can be successful and their development can prosper” by instructors showing “enthusiasm for writing” and encouraging students to “act in a self-regulated fashion” (p. 9). One way that feedback can encourage students to dive deeper into the revision process is to promote reflection, especially at the level of self-analysis (Schön, 1983). For writing assessment to have this effect, it seems, feedback should emphasize the student’s personal growth and development in relation to the content or discipline’s discourse. In other words, feedback in a science class that engages students in a dialogue as if the students were developing scientists (and not simply students in a science class) might be more beneficial than simply task-specific feedback.

Rethinking feedback has been a slow process. For instance, Hattie and Temperley’s (2007) landmark meta-analysis initially criticizes “Self Feedback,” which they define as feedback that personally addresses students, but then concludes that it “can assist in enhancing self-efficacy and thus can be converted by students back into impact on the task” (p. 96). As a result, educators aren’t yet certain exactly how to provide feedback in a way that positively shapes student identity through their writing (Beauchamp, 2015; Robinson and McMillan, 2006;
Schepens, Aelterman, and Vlerick, 2009). The current literature review explores this topic by framing feedback as a discursive practice instead of simply a learning tool.

The reviewer seeks to clarify the contexts in which feedback strategies help shape student identities within their reflective writing. The goal is to offer a model of formative assessment that prioritizes the development of the student over the development of the student’s work. While the studies included in this review represent a host of disciplines and content areas, the emerging themes can be interpreted and resituated in specific contexts that might suit particular practitioner needs.

**Theoretical Framework**

Gee (2014) provides a useful framework for thinking about feedback and reflective writing as discursive social interaction. Specifically, the tools of situated meanings and intertextuality allow for research into the construction of identity through discourse to pay close attention to the ways students write reflectively in relation to teacher feedback. Gee (2000) defines identity as being “recognized as a certain kind of person in a given context” (p. 99). His framework provides four ways to view identity: as developed from nature, as authorized by institutional authorities, as recognized in discourse, and as shared in affinity-groups. For the purposes of this study, which explores the discursive construction of teacher identities in teacher education programs, I view identity as recognized in discourse, but also as authorized by the authorities (i.e. instructors) in the institution (i.e., university). This process of recognition and authorization can take many forms, but for now its occurrence will be examined via writing assessment, which is always situated in the specific context of the writing assignment.
Situated meanings arise “because particular language forms take on specific or situated meanings in specific different contexts of use” (Gee, 2014, p. 65). At a basic level, situated meanings are akin to word associations constituted by personal history, social setting, culture, or political intention. Thinking with situated meanings in mind suggests that the connotations of language use have a greater impact on the language’s created meaning than denotations. For example, the statement, “We need to be green,” is very different depending on the participants of the conversation. Imagine how the meaning could change when A) It is said by one roommate to another in the context of turning off the lights and B) It is said by environmental activists to conservative politicians in support of solar energy. Even when the contexts are similar, the meaning of “being green” changes depending on how the language is situated. It is crucial to understand how student writing becomes resituated depending on the expectations of the writing. For instance, an instructor might read student writing with the expectation to “correct” it, or with the expectation to “develop ideas.” Conversely, a student might read an instructor’s feedback with the expectation to “know the grade” or to “improve the writing.” Rarely do these expectations directly align. Previous studies have found that, typically, there is little consistency between the situated meanings of feedback as instructors write it and as students read it (Martens, 2007; Hyland, 2013; Torres & Anguiano, 2016). The shifts in situated meanings will be of interest to the current review, as well as strategies for limiting such shifts. One such possible strategy is the purposeful manipulation of intertextuality.

Intertextuality refers to the “borrowing” of language from one text to contribute to the meaning-making of another text (Gee, 2014, p. 58). That is, when a reader interacts with a particular text, she might be creating meaning from multiple varieties of language as they have been fused. Intertextuality can occur through the use of direct or indirect quotations, allusions,
or other literary devices. This review incorporates elements of intertextuality, creating a play of writing styles, when I cite other scholars or insert moments of personal narrative. Assessment of students’ reflexive writing becomes a complex social interaction, one in which identity is constituted by the intertextuality of instructor feedback: (1) Students create a written essay (one text) that is a reflection of their developing identity as a teacher; (2) The instructor writes feedback (a second text) on top of the students’ essay; and (3) Students interpret the multi-layered texts and come to a conclusion about their identity (Elbow, 2002). Intertextuality allows us to ask how feedback incorporates language from the student’s writing and what effects those incorporations have on students who use the feedback to form an identity. According to Bakhtin (1981), all language is intertextual, a term he called “heteroglossia.” The “voices” we use as speakers and writers are constructed by the multiple “voices” we acquire as we experience life.

Aim

The following review is a narrative synthesis of empirical studies inquiring into processes of identity construction within a discourse of writing assessment. Feedback is conceptualized as a discursive practice of assessment that situates students as reflective practitioners (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; McDermott, 2002; Schön, 1983). With this framework in mind, the review aims to address the following questions:

1. Under what conditions does feedback encourage reflection within formative assessment practices?

2. How does reflective feedback shape the construction of students’ academic identities?
Method

Search Strategy

Three electronic databases were searched from inception to May 2016: CINAHL, Academic Search Complete, ERIC, and PsycINFO. Search terms included: “feedback,” “written comments,” “reflective writing,” “reflection,” “identity,” “discourse analysis,” and “teacher education” in various combinations. The initial search resulted in 1,808 hits. After scanning titles and abstracts for relevance, 379 articles remained. For these articles, the following inclusion criteria were applied:

1. Examines feedback communicated between instructors and college students
2. Includes some form of reflective feedback as a dependent variable
3. Takes place in a college setting
4. Presents empirical data, either through a primary study (e.g., quasi-experimental, discourse analysis, ethnography) or a review (e.g., meta-analysis).
5. Written in English

After scanning abstracts for inclusion, 63 studies remained. Finally, reference lists of the 63 articles were manually searched for other noteworthy publications. This last stage added 9 new studies, resulting in a total of 72 studies.

Data Abstraction and Synthesis
Because the majority of the studies were predominantly qualitative (n=66), which includes reviews, a systematic narrative synthesis of the literature is performed. Of those quantitative studies (n=6), effect sizes or other statistical information is reported and contextualized. Dividing them by their primary purpose helped with the synthesis process by offering clear guidelines for how the study’s findings should be contextualized (e.g., by methodology, by discipline). Table 1 displays the initial organization. Reviews and meta-analyses, while discussed in the Results section, were not initially grouped since their scope tended to transcend the boundaries set for this review. Rather, these reviews were referenced or used as parameters in the construction of themes in the primary studies. They are cited as necessary during the discussion. Of course, there are overlaps in that some studies that focused on feedback strategies treated identity as the dependent variable or used reflective writing as the independent variable. The group labels should be read as designations of the study’s intentional outcome (i.e., it’s dependent variable).

**Table 1. Primary study purpose and reporting**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of Study</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Reporting</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feedback strategies</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Quantitative, Mixed, or Quasi-experimental</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Qualitative (including discourse analysis, ethnography, and narrative inquiry)</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Writing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Quantitative, Mixed, or Quasi-experimental</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Qualitative (including discourse analysis, ethnography, and narrative inquiry)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Identity Formation 17  Quantitative, Mixed, or Quasi-experimental 2  
  Qualitative (including discourse analysis, ethnography, and narrative inquiry) 12

*5 studies were reviews or meta-analyses

Upon the first readings of articles, an open coding scheme based on Saldaña (2015) was developed to identify themes relating to the review’s objectives. These codes paid attention to methodological features that might have contributed to particular outcomes, especially since many of the studies are qualitative in design and theory. On a second read through, codes were translated into themes of feedback’s discursive features and how it positions students, as shown in Table 2. Consistent with research into discursive processes, overlaps and blurred lines emerge; thus, discussion of conclusions drawn are embedded in the analysis of the themes.

### Table 2. Constructed themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discursive features of feedback</td>
<td>Content-situated</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dialog</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empathic</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student positioning</td>
<td>Fluid</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vulnerable</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Results

**Content Situated Feedback**

The first theme that emerged from the (n=18) studies regards situating feedback within the content of the learning. In other words, because identities are always situated in particular
contexts (Gee, 2014), for students to construct a self that is relevant to the discipline’s context feedback should embody discursive features of the discipline. Regardless of the type of writing (e.g., a scientific article, a written reflection), the literature strongly suggests practicing feedback as part of the discipline’s discourse. Parr and Timperley (2010) defined content-situated feedback as feedback given to a student in an assessment for learning context [that] involves knowing what a quality performance looks like (in the particular context); evaluating the extent to which the writing produced meets this; diagnosing the gap or problematic aspects of text given the quality performance or learning aimed for, and then articulating an appropriate solution for the student. (p. 78)

In their study, Parr and Timperley (2010) measured students’ development as writers by their raw score gains and their reflections about writing. Raw scores significantly increased due to feedback that situated the interaction between teachers and students within the conventions and discourse of the content and discipline.

Not all studies agree on how feedback should operate as part of a discipline’s discourse. How much of a discipline’s affective features should be present in feedback? Should feedback be composed more similarly to editors from journals than teachers? These questions remain unanswered in the literature. One study (Brown, Harris, and Harnett, 2012) found that teachers overwhelmingly hold the view that improving learning in the content should take precedence over enhancing student well-being. Accordingly, Gamlem and Smith (2013) evinced that students prefer content-situated feedback so long as it considers students aren’t yet professionals who can stand the harsh criticism typical of a content’s discourse. As will be discussed later,
content-situated feedback that does not centralize the student’s fluidity or vulnerability is likely to have negative effects beyond academic achievement (Ashwell, 2000). This point is a good reminder that many of these themes cannot function in isolation. They are relational, so that even feedback practiced with consistent content-related discursive features might not be helpful if students haven’t been positioned in congruence with the review’s other themes.

One framework that has been particularly helpful in thinking about feedback in relation to discipline and individual needs comes from Voerman, Meijer, Korthagen, and Simons (2012). They categorized feedback as

1. Non-specific positive feedback (e.g., “Well done!” and, “Great!”)

2. Non-specific negative feedback (e.g., “Wrong!” and, “Not quite!”)

3. Specific positive or negative feedback that communicated the performance or level of understanding of the student.

With this final category, they focused on two forms of specific positive feedback: discrepancy feedback, which compares the performance or level of understanding of the student with some predefined goal or desired level of achievement, and progress feedback, which compares the performance or level of understanding of the student with their earlier performance or level of understanding. Their analysis of the feedback categories in relation to factors like subject, grade level, gender, and teacher practice revealed that by and large the majority of teachers provided non-specific positive feedback. In addition, “progress feedback was given by 6.4% of the teachers, and 41.0% of the teachers provided discrepancy feedback” (p. 7). Within these practices, “discrepancy feedback was always negative specific feedback, whereas in all
cases progress feedback was positive specific feedback” (p. 8). These authors, like Tracey, Hutchinson, and Grzebyk (2014), conclude that feedback that promotes reflection, pivotal as it is, is rarely practiced. When it is practiced, though, the effects on identity are promising.

Hyland’s (2013a) study is one example of specific content situated feedback that enhanced identity construction in participants. Hyland (2013a) interviewed faculty about their experiences providing feedback to second language students and collected essays from students that included written feedback. The feedback was coded in regards to its relation to the assignment’s content and discipline. Explicit in the results faculty’s desire for students to write and act in “disciplinary approved ways” by developing a discipline-specific identity. This seems to be so important that much of the data indicate a lack of attention given to “error correction.” Instead, feedback targets discipline-specific conventions and the development of an “academic voice.”

While much of the literature supports this approach to assessment (Alvermann, Rezak, Mallozzi, Boatright, and Jackson 2011; Rahimivand and Kuhi, 2014), there are several potential obstacles. Cultural perspectives that shape how individuals constitute “correctness” as well as shape expectations for “progress” might conflict with shifts in assessment focus. If students aren’t fluent in the assessment discourse being practiced in any educational setting, they are more likely to be confused, discouraged, or unsettled by feedback (Lee, 2008). Managing the complex nature of identity within assessment is mediated, according to Hyland (2013a), by helping students contextualize a discipline-specific practice and the goals of a particular content. Thus, Hyland (2013a) concludes that it is the responsibility of teachers to “make the connections between writing and knowledge explicit to learners” before providing feedback (p. 251).
Ferguson (2011) shifts the context from second language learning to teacher education to further explore perceptions of feedback. Through the use of quantitative and qualitative data (e.g., questionnaires and open-ended questions coded for themes), Ferguson (2011) found that of his 566 participants, feedback that situates students within their field of learning is the most helpful to their development. Moreover, students largely expressed a preference for “personal” feedback that “provides them with comments rather than just interpretation and explanation of criteria or marking schemes” (p. 58). Overwhelmingly, Ferguson’s (2011) data suggest the need for teachers to provide feedback that is particular to the field of learning. These results have been supported by Irwin and Hramiak (2010) and Finnegan, Kauppinen, Wärnsby, and Salih (2012), who show how authentic assessments paired with content situated feedback help students form an identity within their discipline.

Dialogic Feedback

Twelve studies address the importance of feedback being a dialogue, as opposed to a linear provision of information that travels exclusively from the teacher to the student. Dillon (2011) emphasizes that identity formation is made possible through a reflective process embedded in a “dialogical self,” in which students manage multiple perspectives and voices (p. 222). Her study situated her (as researcher) in such a way as to act as a listener while she interviewed participants via email. The email protocol was developed to encourage participants to write reflectively about their experiences constructing an evaluated self. Dillon (2011) responded to the reflections with “empathy,” even as she analyzed the data for interpretive themes pointing to identity formation (p. 223). In many ways, Dillon’s (2011) feedback became part of the reflective process that her participants used to construct an identity relevant to the practice of writing. For instance, she notes times when participants borrowed from her language
to describe their experiences. Related to this point, Dillon’s (2011) study shows the importance of feedback that positions students as “fluid and changeable ‘I’ voices” rather than “fixed or static descriptors” that might permanently categorize students (p. 224).

In support of Dillon’s (2011) approach, Zannini, Cattaneo, Brugnolli, and Saiani (2011) explore the use of dialogic feedback in reflective writing, but this time in the context of healthcare professionals in a mentoring program. The researchers collected (n=27) “letters written to the self” and analyzed them for emergent meanings, finding that mentors who provide opportunities for dialogue, instead of direction, encouraged their growth in the healthcare system. By expanding the dialogic process, MacDougall, Mtika, Reid, and Weir (2013) illustrate the effects of feedback that engage different members related to the process of teacher development, such as mentors, other student-teachers, and program faculty. Unlu and Wharton (2015) demonstrate how these dialogic processes form the necessary relationships for feedback to have meaningful effects. These relationships, though, might require reflections performed by students about the feedback they receive (Whipp, Wesson, and Wiley, 1997). Reflection can enable students to think about the feedback they are receiving and also consider its relevance and use, as opposed to simply following the directions explicit in the feedback without question. This practice, however, might require support and guidance.

Providing a supportive format for reflection can aid teachers who want students to act on received feedback. One way this can be accomplished is through online platforms. Sutherland and Markauskaite’s (2012) study encourages the cycle of feedback and reflection using one such platform. Through an interactive online forum that allowed students to share drafts and provide feedback to one another, Sutherland and Markauskaite (2012) demonstrated the potential of a community of learners structured around reflection. The study concludes that communities are
necessary for the performance and recognition of identity as a discursive process (see also: Ten Dam and Blom, 2006). Establishing a community of learners relies on teachers’ perspectives of feedback that align with growth and fluidity instead of just error correction. In other words, practicing reflective feedback might depend more on theoretical understandings of feedback than practical ones. Fortunately, it appears most educators do value feedback as a dialogue.

Tuck (2012) explored teachers’ perspectives on feedback and found that most teachers understand feedback as a dialogue between several parties—teachers and students, teachers and institution, students and students, etc. Through a robust data collection protocol that included interviews, texts, and observations in undergraduate classes, Tuck (2012) shows how the activity of giving feedback is more than just the words, it is “all the stuff that’s gone on behind the words,” which can only be understood through dialogue (p. 213). Many of Tuck’s (2012) participants discussed student work with them as opposed to delivering feedback in a linear fashion. In an attempt to formally redefine feedback, Tuck (2012) offers two important conditions for providing dialogic feedback: “Feedback-giving as seeking dialogue” and “Carving out spaces and times for dialogue around students’ writing” (p. 218).

In a study that situates feedback in a teacher education program, Lynch, McNamara, and Seery (2012) inquired into the effects of a complex network of dialogic feedback that includes students and teachers as actors in the assessment process. Data consisted of reflective blogs, which “afforded an interesting insight into students’ thinking skills and reflections,” as well as observations that verified “that these reflections went beyond rhetoric to being replicated in students’ interactions, reflections and engagement with the project in the workshop” (p. 184). The researchers then analyzed reflections and feedback engagement using Bloom’s taxonomy as a scale to measure growth. Their findings suggest that reflection paired with dialogic feedback,
which in this case came in the form of a workshop, led to an evolution from lower cognitive complexities to higher order skills. Of note, students in the dialogic feedback cohort demonstrated a correlation with higher scores in the summative exam: 61.8%, compared with the control module’s 55.7% (Lynch, McNamara, and Seery, 2012).

Dowden, Pittaway, Yost, and McCarthy (2013) further demonstrated the effects of dialogic feedback in their narrative inquiry. The majority of their participants expected feedback to be a “two-way communication that encourages progress” by allowing students to engage in dialogues concerning their performance (p. 353). In other words, rather than linear negative comments, which students are likely to view as “personal attacks” (p. 354), by suggesting directions for improvement and inviting students to discuss by way of a feedback that acts as a metatalk, students are likely to feel as though they are collaborating with teachers as a means of progress. With this point in mind, the researchers emphasize one of their most important themes: that feedback is highly likely to be absorbed by students when it forms a positive (“warm”) student-teacher relationship (Dowden, Pittaway, Yost, and McCarthy 2013, p. 355). Similarly, Crichton and Valdera (2015) suggest that feedback is most likely to have an impact on students’ identities when it comes from sources they trust as mentors and peers; that is, when they view their feedback as both emic to the learning setting (as opposed to above and beyond it) and as supportive to their individual growth. Students expressed a desire to be recognized as part of the relationship between students, teachers, and content, which usually entailed opportunities for dialogue and critique.

Finally, Urquhart, Rees, and Ker (2014) illustrated the contrast to dialogic feedback. They show how “monologic” feedback can detract students from reflection (p. 193). They elicited narrative reflections of medical students’ experiences receiving feedback. A discourse
analysis was performed to identity the linguistic features used to story their feedback experiences. Students lamented experiences of a “monologic” process of feedback that “happened ‘to’ them rather than ‘with’ them” (p. 193). Some of these students, through the use of coping mechanisms in their reflections, expressed doubt in their ability and potential due to feedback that ran counter to that offered by, for instance, Dillon (2011). Central to Dillon’s (2011) study, as detailed above, is the relational component to human interactions that instill a desire to reflect and grow. As the review will explore in the next section, critical to a dialogic feedback is an empathic connection between teacher and student.

**Empathic Feedback**

Fourteen studies investigated the effects of feedback when teachers demonstrate empathy for students’ development. As a generative theme, “empathy” was constructed as the alignment of perceptions and interpretations of the purpose and discourse any particular assessment. When these interpretations are aligned between students and teachers, which can be seen as constituting empathy, students are more likely to use feedback effectively (Walkington, 2005; Li and Barnard, 2011; Agius and Wilkinson, 2013). When feedback is specific about its motivating purposes, students are more likely to revise their writing even if the revisions don’t translate to better grades (McGarrell and Verbeem, 2007; Hyland, 2011; Valdez, Shea, Knutsen, and Hoody, 2014).

One way to think of empathy is the correspondence of feedback literacy. Sutton (2012) illustrates the need for a feedback literacy that establishes empathy as a necessary element of feedback. Both students and teachers may benefit from feedback literacy training that develops empathic skills in assessment discourse (Valdez, Shea, Knutsen, and Hoody, 2014). Walker
(2009) found that whether or not students found comments useful directly related to how students and teachers interpreted specific feedback acts. According to Walker’s (2009) findings, in order for students to close the “gap” between their understanding of the content and the desired performance, students and teachers must agree on a discourse that acts as motivating. An example provided by Walker (2009) illustrates that an unelaborated “Good!” might be misconstrued by a student who needs specific commentary on what, exactly, was good. To develop that same example, students might be more motivated not by praise but by skill development comments, so long as their details “make sense” to students (p. 68). Conversely, when feedback is not empathic, students might feel they are given “conflicting information about their performance,” even if this isn’t objectively the case (p. 74). Dependent upon empathic feedback could be educational goals such as self-regulation, metacognition, and self-efficacy.

Fernández-Toro and Furnborough (2014) present findings in support of Walker’s (2009) study. These researchers used screencasts to analyze students’ feedback about teacher feedback they’d recently received. Through their analysis of students’ metacognitive processes in internalizing feedback, Fernández-Toro and Furnborough (2014) are able to inquire into the extent to which empathy is at play in feedback. Students’ appreciation of feedback, and thus their potential to use it or learn from it, largely depends on the depth of explanation provided by teachers in their feedback. In other words, if the feedback relies on codes that need to be unpacked or interpreted solely by the students, such as the ambivalent praise cautioned against by Hattie and Timperely (2007), then students are likely to be confused. Such emotional responses are crucial predictors to the development of teacher identities (Waterman and Scarr, 1982; Bullough, 1991; Lopes and Pereira, 2012). Specific to Fernández-Toro and Furnborough’s (2014) findings is the major theme that for feedback to be empathic, and therefore of positive use
to students’ self-growth, it needs to involve “enough information to elicit active integration or informed acceptance” (p. 43). Some of this “information” might be content-related (e.g., next steps for improvement), but other times “information” should be thought of as affective (e.g., motivating language, relationship building).

While agreeing upon a feedback literacy is helpful in establishing empathy, it is also important that educators provide room for students to change and even falter during their development. Murtagh and Baker (2009) inquired into students’ responses to feedback and found that empathy is likely to lead to improved performance when feedback provides reassurance, improves confidence and self-esteem, addresses problems, encourages students to ask questions, and explains comments in a specific and “personal” manner to individual students. Following Murtagh and Baker’s (2009) recommendations help students feel secure in their range of development experienced in reflection.

**Students as Fluid**

The following two themes refer to contexts when feedback shapes identity by how it positions students. Eighteen studies contributed to this theme. According to Vadeboncoeur et al. (2011), identity, together with knowledge and values, “defines a sociocultural perspective on learning” (p. 224). Expanding upon a Vygotskian perspective on learning, Vadeboncoeur et al. (2011) provides a framework of identity that is “negotiated within a particular context, rather than achieved as a result of a stage or age-related theory,” and identity is discursively constructed “through relationships with others in social practices that partially dialectically constitute a context” (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2011, p. 227). Stetsenko (2010) is also helpful in drawing from Vygotsky to show the fluidity of identity based on particular practices of discourse. Stetsenko &
Arievitch’s (2004) “meaningful life project,” described earlier, illustrates how the process of constructing an identity is never complete; rather, the self is always in a state of becoming, “enacted through what we do in the world” and the qualities attributed to those actions (p. 9). Because such enactments are constituted through discourse, identity is the unfixed, constantly negotiated expression and recognition of the self (Gee, 1990). An understanding of a fluid identity does not punish students for remaining fixed or static in their learning, which is an impossible expectation. This is an especially important consideration during student reflection.

For feedback to be of value to students during the reflective writing process, Lengelle, Meijers, Poell, and Post (2014) find that personalized feedback should prompt moments of reflection to contribute to a dialogical self. They measured this effect by analyzing students’ revisions of written work after receiving feedback. The researchers looked for increases in insight, causal and cognitive words, emotion words, and pronoun switching. They highlight ways feedback encourages these increases by pointing to features of feedback that remain sensitive to students’ emotional and intellectual changes (Straub, 1997; Sutton and Gill, 2010). One way this is done is by emphasizing moments when students reflect in a positive way (e.g., making use of “I” statements or attributing incidents with positive emotions) (Vetter, Meacham, and Schieble, 2013). This conclusion is supported by other studies (Lengelle and Meijers, 2014; Moate and Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2014). A typical format for accomplishing these goals is the use of reflective journals, although the assessment of more personalized writing can be tricky.

One review that has been helpful in addressing the assessment of reflective journals comes from Lindroth (2015). He explores the use and assessment of reflective journals in teacher education programs. Of primary interest are what Lindroth (2015) calls “dialogue journals,” which are reflections of interactions between teachers and students. Such interactions assure
students that uncertainty or contradictory thoughts are a healthy part of the learning process (Otfinowski and Silva-Opp, 2015). Thus, teacher feedback becomes part of the reflective writing for students, a claim similar to that made by Biernat and Danaher (2012) as well as Allard and Santoro (2006).

Feedback provided within this framework does not punish students for changes in experience, thought, or quality; rather, feedback itself is a reflection of those changes, giving students a chance to monitor their fluidity (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2010; Burns and Bell, 2011; Abednia, 2012; Moss and Pittaway, 2013). Lindroth (2015) suggests allowing students to respond to the feedback they receive (i.e., practice dialogic feedback) in a way that encourages students to explore their personal reactions to teachers’ comments and also consider their own next steps instead of following explicit directions provided by the teacher. Of course, this process could expose the uncertainties students feel during assessment practices, but this, too, should be accounted for in feedback.

**Students as Vulnerable**

The final theme opposes feedback originating from a discourse of correction by encouraging interactions that remain sensitive to and supportive of students’ vulnerability. The studies (n=10) that produce this theme explore the effects of a personalized feedback that encourages, motivates, and comforts students on an individual basis. When students revise their writing using the language of their teachers’ feedback, learning becomes interdiscursive. Together, these two processes constitute a “dialogic conversation” in which students are aware of the “social meanings” in both teachers’ responses and their writing helps lead to generative constructions of knowledge and socially situated identities (Lewis & Ketter, 2004, p. 118). To
put it another way, feedback is a text produced by teachers that “plugs into” the students’ “self-as-text” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 263). The identities constructed by students are largely dependent on what teachers say about their writing and how they say it. This idea is both a positive opportunity for feedback and also its danger.

Hong’s (2010) longitudinal study reveals how pre-service teachers who don’t receive the feedback described above carry with them unrealistic identities that directly relate to dropping out of the profession. In a similar study, Trent (2014) investigated how some assessment practices led to identity conflict in students at both the interpersonal and intrapersonal level, causing them to question their decision to become teachers. Pickford (2014) utilizes narrative modalities to present a framework of assessment and reflection that is storied. Similar approaches might become creative opportunities for students to work within and against their vulnerability.

Feedback that safely positions students as vulnerable, creating a safe space for growth, is, according to the literature, the least understood practice. Teachers must bracket their desire to immediately and always correct their students and, instead, empathize with their uncertainty and offer carefully worded guidance (Sockman and Sharma, 2008). According to the literature, this is a difficult task to accomplish. After all, teachers are the experts in their field and should hold high standards for their students. What many forget is the meandering paths these same experts took in their journey to become a teacher. Because of the ambiguity and difficulty surrounding this practice, many of the studies representing this theme demonstrate the effects of feedback that discipline students for their vulnerability.
The most pointed argument for empathic and sympathetic feedback could be the evidence that corrective feedback only seems to work in very specific contexts. Otherwise, as Connor and Lunsford’s (1993) famous study shows, corrective feedback usually does not meet its stated goals. Connor and Lunsford (1993) note how freshmen in the late 20th century committed the same number of “mistakes” per 100 words on national assessments as they did before World War I (p. 407). Despite these findings, the majority of instructor feedback emerges from a dominant discourse that focuses on error and correction. Especially with regards to feedback, it is important for students and instructors to learn that language use is never accurate in any objective sense. Rather, as Gee (2014) reminds us, the meaning of a particular text “is not merely a matter of decoding grammar, it is also (and more importantly) a matter of knowing which of the many inferences that one can draw are relevant” (p. 54). Instead, most educators still operate from the positivistic view that what is “incorrect” in one text is “incorrect” in all texts. Such a feedback practice punishes students rather than supports the inherent vulnerability experienced when forming a new identity (Irwin, Hepplestone, Holden, Parkin, and Thorpe, 2013; Lee, 2014).

Similar claims are also made in the context of teacher education students engaging in reflective writing (Otienoh, 2010; Kurtoglu-Hooton, 2016). Cardelle-Elawar and Sanz de Acedo Lizarraga (2010) show how self-regulatory practices rely on feedback that motivates and enhances self-efficacy. Frick, Carl, and Beets (2010) extend these claims by investigating mentorship relationships that support students during the vulnerable stages of identity formation. Looking particularly at first year experiences of teacher education, Friesen and Besley (2013) study the effects of identity development when feedback interactions nurture the uncertainty of students envisioning a future self. When feedback subsumes the need to correct and instead
encourages trial and error in students, they are more likely to take greater academic risks and surprise themselves.

**Discussion**

Despite the thorough coverage of the literature in the preceding narrative synthesis, there exist a considerable number of caveats. For one, there is the potential for language bias since only studies published in English were included. Second, because this review was synthesized by a single author, there wasn’t a chance for the subjectivities to be intersected by another reviewer; thus, there is no inter-rater reliability to report in the coding and analysis of the included studies. Finally, there is a wide range of methodologies employed by the studies, making a singular quality appraisal difficult to perform. While such a diversity of methodological instruments and designs pose challenges for the synthesis of these studies, the multiplicity of approaches also improves the validity of the synthesized claims, since complimentary conclusions are drawn from sometimes radically different studies.

**Under what conditions does feedback encourage reflection within formative assessment practices?**

As mentioned earlier, the majority of the literature into feedback uses academic performance as a measurement of feedback’s efficacy. From these studies, we know that feedback can empower or disempower students in a way that has direct consequences on achievement (Brookhart, 2008); and we also know that reflective writing can be a mediated action that shapes identity construction (Stenberg, 2010; Walkington, 2005; Wertsch, 1998). This poses a problem for researchers who wish to understand how feedback can promote deeper self-reflection and, thus, identity formation in students (McCarthey and Moje, 2002). Hattie and Timperley (2007), for instance, claim that
[Self Feedback] can have an impact on learning only if it leads to changes in students’ effort, engagement, or feelings of efficacy in relation to the learning or to the strategies they use when attempting to understand tasks. The effects at the self level are too diluted, too often uninformative about performing the task, and too influenced by students’ self-concept to be effective. The information has too little value to result in learning gains. (p. 96)

Their findings come as a result of 1) a conceptualization of self feedback as simply evaluative praise (“Good job!”) and 2) measuring feedback’s success exclusively as it relates to achievement. Again, thinking beyond achievement, at least in the short term, is necessary when we remember Elbow’s (2002) and Graham, Harris, and Hebert’s (2011) recommendations to embrace the sometimes messy process of writing, especially as it occurs in college.

From a pragmatic standpoint, human relations such as the interactions occurring during assessment cannot be easily predicted (Biesta and Burbules, 2003). The implications for researchers is that methodology and conceptualization of feedback might need to be reconsidered to further explore its performance as a discursive act. For practitioners, a synthesis of the themes presented here means they might have to reconsider the function and implementation of feedback. Comments do not mean the same to each student, but are interpreted depending on how students are positioned. Feedback that is likely to positively engage students in ways that would enhance their construction of a discipline-specific identity is personalized, situated in the content, and encourages reflection over correction.

**How does reflective feedback shape the construction of students’ academic identities?**

Academic achievement is not simply an act of acquiring of skills; it is becoming of a self, situated in a particular relationship in which the “acquired” skills are recognized as useful.
Assessment “completes” the vision one has of his or her self in that context. This is potentially what creates the anxiety around assessment—that it defines, positions, even “completes” (albeit in a very temporal way) individuals. Rather than assuming acts of assessment are free from subjectivity, taking responsibility for the ways teachers relate to students during assessment might help Bakhtin’s “unique deed” in creating a virtual surround that empowers students.

Feedback is reflective when it encourages the writer to evaluate their interactions with the social world. In this way, assessment becomes a “social activity involving an implicit or explicit dialogue” and is shaped by audience, the writer’s purpose, culture, society, and history (Graham, Gillespie & McKeown, 2013, p. 4). How one writes constitutes the identity of the writer as recognized by particular audiences, such as how a researcher is identified not only by their writing style but also by their research topics. When assessment practices, specifically feedback, remain sensitive to the “occurrence” of the writing, the student writer is more likely to develop a positive relationship within that very context (Bullough, 1991; Elbow, 2002).

Schön (1991) is helpful in describing how individuals might enact an identity through reflection. One way is a critical awareness “in action,” or in media res, so to speak, and signifies the metacognitive thoughts regulating decisions made in the moment. Our process for making such decisions is shaped by our perceptions of how we will be recognized by other members of our discourse community, in other words, our identity. Schön’s (1991) example can apply to a student reflecting on the decisions they must make in the middle of a lesson, simultaneously acting and considering the consequences of their actions. Any feedback this student might receive is likely to be lost on the student due to cognitive load or disposition (Tuck, 2012). During such moments, feedback would need to act as a guide, constantly supporting the student
to help alleviate the pressure of performing while also thinking about the performance (Valdez, Shea, Knutsen, and Hoody, 2014).

The other way offered by Schön (1991) is contemplation “on action,” which takes place after an event has ended. This mode typically occurs through writing, giving the writer a chance to self-analyze and even project new possibilities of the experience, such as reliving the event, making a difference decision, and imagining the outcome. Building off of Schön’s (1991) example, a student would write about their experience after a performance. Feedback that helps the student analyze the consequences of their decisions and imagining new possible outcomes is far more beneficial than feedback that corrects mistakes evident in the performance (Biernat and Danaher, 2012). Reflection ex post facto allows students to revise and create new identities that could help shape new actions (Gee, 1990).

According to Schultz & Fecho (2000), students are most likely to use writing as an attempt to enact an identity when the genre of writing reflects the social, historical, and political contexts in which it occurs, is sensitive to how the same student writes differently across various contexts, and is shaped by the perceived expectations of audience (e.g., an instructor). Thus, it is important that student writing be assessed with full consideration of the contextual staging of the writing; that is, instructor feedback needs to be sensitive to how students are enacting a self in their writing. Such sensitivity can promote a process of positive transformations in students who work through revisions (re-seeing the writing in always shifting contexts) as an attempt to open up new possibility of the self. This is one reason why writing scholars have long argued for writing as a process (Graham, Harris & Hebert 2011; Park, 2013).

It is within the writing process, especially when assessment is part of that process in any of its forms—peer review, formative assessment, teacher feedback—that
intertextuality/interdiscursivity occurs. Writing never happens in isolation (Graham, Harris & Hebert 2011). The words used by writers are “borrowed” from other speakers (Bakhtin, 1981). They carry with them traces of meanings extending beyond a single reading, in much the same way as learning does not happen in isolation (Werstch, 1998). If all speech is made of borrowed language acquired through various social experiences, then our voices can be thought to “develop” via the incorporation of other voices.

Conclusion

Currently, the literature casts a wide net into feedback’s relationship with identity. Conclusions and findings might appear to tell different, and sometimes competing, stories (Walker, 2009; Unlu and Warton, 2015; Sopina and McNeil, 2015). Because of the nature of this review, which sought to synthesize diverse contexts in which the feedback interactions between students and teachers led to constructions of identity, there are some limitations that need to be noted. For one, the review does not discriminate based on methodological features, especially in terms of measuring feedback’s efficacy. Thus, the process of synthesizing the studies remained sensitive to, but did not directly control for, contexts in which feedback was measured in terms of academic success, student preference, or a host of other dependent variables. Additionally, the review does not limit itself to a single operationalization of feedback, nor does it intend to funnel the various operationalizations into singular categories, as is the case with other notable reviews (see: Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008). As a result, the review does not prescribe strategies of feedback; rather, the purpose is to illuminate how feedback interactions are dependent upon the relationships constituted by particular contexts.
These limitations are important when analyzing the above themes. For instance, despite the themes pointing to a more personalized feedback, there are times when corrective feedback is indeed effective. Kang and Han’s (2015) meta-analysis found that “corrective feedback,” which targets normalized writing conventions, can improve grammatical accuracy for English Language Learners; however, “improvement” also depended on several moderating variables, such as proficiency level, setting, genre of the writing task, and students’ predilection towards various types of corrective feedback (Kang and Han, 2015, p. 14). Thus, the review cannot offer a model of feedback that will “improve outcomes” in all cases. Based on this review, however, future research can examine the precise effects of particular feedback discourses or strategies in specific contexts. Perhaps a study empirically validates the use of content-situated feedback paired with feedback that positions students as vulnerable in a lecture-based Biology class. Or, perhaps a study quantifies the effects of dialogic feedback with international students visiting the writing center. While previous reviews sought to establish a taxonomy of feedback, so to speak, this review extends the field by situating such taxonomies in particular context that constitute the discursive practice of feedback. While this shift presents the aforementioned limitations, researchers are now equipped to analyze feedback’s effects through the discourse that delivers it.

It is the ultimate goal of this review to redirect the way we think about feedback: not exclusively a tool for improvement, but also a conversation that builds a relationship. By thinking about feedback as a feature of a much larger discourse of assessment, researchers and teachers alike can explore new ways to support identity development in students (Barnard, 2015). In the past few years, several researchers have expressed the need for a clearer understanding of the discourse of feedback (Brookhart, 2008; Shute, 2008; Walker, 2009;
Barnard, 2015). Such an understanding will strengthen recommendations for ways to think about how feedback operates as a discourse that shapes identity.

The above review illustrates how feedback is an interdiscursive process that often sees students incorporating language from the teacher’s discourse in their writing, ultimately shaping their identity. Lewis & Ketter (2004) clarify that interdiscursivity occurs when there is a “generative reconstruction of a discourse rather than a recapitulation or imitation. It is a process that we associate with learning” (p. 117). For instance, students might directly borrow language from the instructor’s feedback to revise their writing. If these students are conscious of the meanings they adopt in order to improve their writing, they are constructing a new identity. Any feedback that is overtly corrective might be internalized on a personal level. On the other hand, when teachers practice feedback as conversational assessment, using content related language and signaling empathy for students’ uncertainty, students are more likely to use feedback in the construction of a more confident and determined writing self.
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Study 2

I Am Who You Say I Am: The Impact of Instructor Feedback on Pre-Service Teacher Identity

Abstract

When assessing student writing, the instructor’s feedback becomes part of that discursive process, intertextually bound with the student’s identity. The following study situates writing assessment in two teacher education courses to explore how pre-service teacher identity is constructed not just within students’ reflective writing but also within instructors’ assessment of their writing. Informed by sociocultural learning theory, I attend to the belief that teacher education students learn identity through the discursive relationship enacted between writing and feedback. I ask the following research questions: What do the feedback interactions occurring between students and teachers reveal about pre-service teacher identity? How do students use feedback to shape their teacher identities?

A total of 41 participants were recruited for the study. These participants are undergraduate students enrolled in their first year in the Teacher Education Program at a land grant institution in the Pacific Northwest. The courses in which these students are enrolled are writing-intensive: both instructors are trained in the practice of personalized reflective feedback and assign many reflective writing assignments. A discourse analysis of student work was carried out by the researcher to explore traces of identity formation in response to instructor feedback. The results are presented as four distinct cases identified by the pseudonyms Roebuck,
Compton, Roberta and Kandler. These individual cases allow the researcher to trace the development of identity as an iterative process that relies on the personal relationship between each student and the instructor. The themes that emerged from the study are: the use of deflection to resist reflection, the performance of an “expert” identity to be recognized as proficient, and the relational dialogism that most reliably leads to reflection. The results are discussed and contextualized so that future researchers and practitioners can carry the themes of this study forward into new contexts and situations.

**Keywords:** Discourse analysis, feedback, reflective writing, student identity
Introduction

Through others we become ourselves.


Bakhtin’s (1993) suggestion that identities are collectively created through dialogic interaction acts as an apt analogy for the practice of writing assessment. His metaphor of how social relationships constitute individual identities is as follows. Consider two individuals who sit facing one another and picture their conical visions intersecting. Each one can see the other, including everything that the other cannot see. For either of the individuals, the vision is incomplete—everything beyond each cone of vision remains unperceived. When their visions intersect, however, they create a visual surround that encompasses all possible blind spots. The effect is an existential dependency on social interactions, which Bakhtin (1993) calls a “productive, unique deed” that “only I can do for him at the given moment” (p. 42).

When students write, especially at the request of a teacher, they inject their selves into their text, using language to shape their beliefs, thoughts, and ideas. At the moment students hand in their writing to be graded, all they can “see” is what they wrote. Teachers are similarly limited by their conical vision when they provide feedback. Only when students combine the texts and read the teacher’s feedback on their writing are they able to constitute their shaped beliefs, thoughts, and ideas in relation to the teacher’s beliefs, thoughts, and ideas. Of course, the students’ writing before the feedback wasn’t necessarily their own, but had been shaped by the intentions, appropriations, and mediations of previous relationships (Wertsch, 1998). Thus, each interaction is a transformative moment in the ongoing process of identity formation.
Assessment is one of those crucial moments, during which particular practices, like feedback, provide seemingly stable categories for identities that are in constant movement.

In the case of teacher education, by treating individual students as units of analyses, I will be able to explore how they construct an identity within the interactions occurring within feedback, and through analysis I will also interrogate how such constructions shape the larger concept of identity as it is recognized by the teacher education program. Specifically, the research question asks how interdiscursivity contributes to the ways students position themselves in their writing. Stated directly: how do students rely on discursive features of feedback to reflect on and write their identities as future teachers? In the following sections, I will review the literature into identity formation, reflective writing, and feedback, bringing together studies of discourse and educational psychology. Next, I will situate the study within the theoretical landscape of sociocultural learning and discourse analysis. Finally, a description of the study’s methodology and its results will be presented and discussed.

Review of the Literature

A strong body of research into feedback types and their effects on academic performance provides a clear foundation of when and how formative feedback works best. With regards to writing assessment, the work of Graham, Harris, & Hebert (2011), Ivanič, (1998), Huot (2002) and others illustrate the importance of feedback practices that encourage the development of students as writers—as opposed to the exclusive development of students’ writing. Emphasizing the student over the work allows teachers to view writing, and its assessment, as a process (Elbow, 2002). Indeed, Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown (2013) call for an environment where
“students can be successful and their development can prosper” by teachers showing “enthusiasm for writing” and encouraging students to “act in a self-regulated fashion” (p. 9).

One way that feedback can encourage students to dive deeper into the revision process is to promote reflection, especially at the level of self-analysis (Schön, 1983). For writing assessment to have this effect, it seems, feedback should emphasize the student’s personal growth and development in relation to the content or discipline’s discourse (Voerman, Meijer, Korthagen, & Simons, 2012). To provide an example, feedback in a science class that engages students in a reflective dialogue (e.g., using open-ended questions as if the students were developing scientists) might be more beneficial than task-specific feedback that promises to correct student work (Otfinowski & Silva-Opps, 2015). Historically, however, feedback practices have had correction as its ultimate goal, and very little attention has been paid to the ways in which feedback operates as a discursive process shaping identity.

For the past several decades, feedback formed within a discourse of correction (e.g., current-traditionalism) has dominated “thinking about writing instruction” (Berlin, 1982, p. 769). The ideology underscoring this discourse is that a writer needs to be free from the biases of language, and written texts arranged without the writer’s bias provide “a clear and distinct image of the world” (p. 770). A prominent example of this ideology is apparent in current APA guidelines, which denigrate the use of first-person language or personal narrative styles. The goal is to remove the writer as a possible contaminant of the meaning unearthed in the text (Berlin, 1982). To accomplish this objective representation of truth through language, teachers must mediate differences in writing style, diction, and personal expression. Thus, writing assessment under this ideology emphasizes depersonalization by focusing almost exclusively on grammar.
Thinking about discourses of correction through a poststructural lens opens up some interesting contradictions concerning writing assessment. Anson (2000), for one, laments the fact that the majority of writing instructors “continue to focus on fragments and comma faults or to give students multiple-choice tests of standard written English” (p. 6). He documents the extent to which the underlying rules that define error in English usage have changed depending on social circumstances, such as when it was “correct” to say “you was” rather than “you were” (p. 14). Because “correctness” is not a static construct, Anson (2000) contends that understanding error from a positivist perspective limits the potential of feedback practices. Rather than thinking about error and correctness as fixed phenomena, Anson (2000) encourages us to think about their changing nature and how feedback operates as a conversation that is always situated in particular contexts, such as an academic discipline. How teachers construct the student-author “affects the role and strength of the errors in our reading, leading to an admittedly contextualized response” (p. 10). In other words, even when “correctness” is the goal, feedback won’t be effective unless it considers how the student is contextually situated and the identity being shaped.

Building from Anson and moving to Lewis & Ketter (2004), I propose thinking of feedback as an intertextual and interdiscursive process. It is intertextual in that students’ writing layered with teachers’ feedback presents multiple texts that reference one another. When students revise their writing using the language of their teachers’ feedback, learning becomes interdiscursive. Together, these two processes constitute a “dialogic conversation” in which students are aware of the “social meanings” in both teachers’ responses and their writing helps lead to generative constructions of knowledge and socially situated identities (Lewis & Ketter, 2004, p. 118). To put it another way, feedback is a text produced by teachers that “plugs into”
the students’ “self-as-text” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 263). The identities constructed by students are largely dependent on what teachers say about their writing and how they say it. This idea is both a positive opportunity for feedback and also its danger.

As a discursive process, feedback relies on the ideology of the educator. This creates a power dynamic that upholds the discourse of the educator and could exclude students who do not identify within such a discourse (Foucault, 1972). This point will be made clearer in the following sections. The dangers of misusing or ignoring the implicit power structures of feedback have been researched for several years. Sommers (1982) inquired into how students perceived feedback and found that a majority of the feedback received from instructors made students feel frustrated, discouraged, and confused. Similarly, LaFontana (1996) learned that her own written comments were “indecipherable” and did not lead to students taking responsibility for improvement (p. 71). Other researchers, like Wyatt-Smith (1999), observed how often instructor feedback subjugated the “cultural logic” of particular student subsets. This is why Brookhart (2008) warns that “because students feelings of self-efficacy are involved, even well-intentioned feedback can be very destructive if the student reads the script in an unintended way (‘See, I knew I was stupid!’)” (p. 54). Feedback is itself a rhetorical composition, meaning that its signification functions within specific writer-audience relationships. Conceptualizing feedback not so much as a learning tool but as a discursive act of rhetoric helps understand how the audience (i.e., students) are constituted by the writer’s use of feedback.

The Interdiscursive Self

If identity is theoretically understood as an act that is constructed through discursive interactions (Wertsch, 1998), then one possibility for assessing it can occur through reflective
writing (Ivanič, 1998; Parks, 2013; Schön, 1983; Sfard and Prusak, 2005). Vygotsky (1980) describes written language as the “culmination of a long process of development of complex behavioral functions” and the long “history of sign development” (p. 87). As a psychological act, writing signifies one’s skills acquired through experience; but as a cultural act, writing “contains the rudiments of representation” (Vygotsky, 1980, p. 97). These representations spiral outward into complex social contexts and inward towards the writer, who is constituted by those very same social contexts. How these representations might change is the purpose of writing instruction, and the opportunity occurs during feedback (Dillon, 2011; Parks, 2013). When teachers provide feedback onto student writing meant to guide them to new behaviors, to encourage them to rethink current signs, or to challenge their present ideas of representations, identity is being shaped and learning occurs. Feedback that accomplishes these goals is crucial to the development of students in teacher education programs. Chong, Low, and Goh’s (2011) study demonstrates the “need to challenge pre-service teachers’ existing beliefs about teaching throughout the programme so that the realities of teaching do not strike them as a rude shock leading them to be disillusioned” (p. 59). The assessment of writing, even if it is focused on grammar, is more than just a “matter of hand and finger habits” (Vygotsky, 1980, p. 100). It is a mediation of the self, of the writer a student becomes (Graham, Harris, and Hebert, 2011).

As Richardson and St Pierre (2008) put it, writing is a “constitutive force, creating a particular view of reality and of the self” (p. 960). They go on to state how significations of writing are always bound to particular ideologies and discourse, meaning that writing is “a sociohistorical construction and, therefore, is mutable” (p. 960). What this means is that any study of identity, especially as it occurs through writing, needs clear definitions into the contexts constructing the writing acts. Bruner (2004) makes a similar argument, calling for research into
the ways identity is constructed through narratives, and how those ways change depending on cultural factors.

Accordingly, individual identity, which are the stories each person tells about his or her life, is largely a concept shaped by the broader social discourses in which the storyteller is a member. Culture shapes the discourse that produces the concept of identity, and at the same time individuals’ stories enact an identity within those very same discourses. The interaction works in multiple directions and cannot be thought of as a linear transaction. Bruner (2004) summarizes his argument:

Eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very "events" of a life. In the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we "tell about" our lives. And given the cultural shaping to which I referred, we also become variants of the culture's canonical forms. (p. 694)

In terms of instruction, Bruner’s argument would mean that writing is not merely a tool or skill to be mastered. It is a means of defining one’s identity within a social context (Gee, 2014; Ivanić, 1998).

Learning is embedded with identity. Disregarding their relationship can lead to educational experiences producing undesirable identities (e.g., Brookhart’s example of how students might view themselves as stupid). Expecting students to assume “professional” identities without considering the impact instructors have in constructing those identities during assessment can shut down learning (Elbow, 2002; Martens, 2007). This is why it is crucial to
acknowledge the possibility that feedback plays an instrumental role in shaping students’ identities as writers. Because it is a text that communicates more than assessment information, embedded within feedback are the metaphors that students use to gauge their capabilities, plan their next actions, and therefore construct who they are within particular figured worlds (Gee, 2014).

**Methodology**

Informed by a sociocultural learning theory perspective, students enact an identity when they position themselves in a particular way, then one way students’ identities become visible is when they write reflectively (Ivanič, 1998). Such writing challenges them to make decisions about their “meaningful life project” (Stetsenko, 2004). When students shift in their positioning throughout the writing process, they are continuing the never-ending process of identity formation (Stetsenko, 2004). The goal of this study is to examine how the process of assessment, specifically feedback, shapes and redirects students’ positioning. Echoing the research question stated above, this study investigates how students use teacher feedback to (re)shape their identity.

This was accomplished through a close analysis of how students’ writing changes during a single semester. Analysis focused on shifts in discursive features (e.g., sentence patterns, writing style), discoursal features (e.g., ideologies, conceptual metaphors), and psychological features (e.g., self-perception, interest). Discursive patterns and themes were constructed through a discourse analysis of student writing and teacher feedback. Arranging the data as individual student cases emphasized the complex process of reflectively writing one’s identity.
These individual cases are situated in the specific courses from which participants were recruited. These courses are Curriculum, Instruction, and Content Literacy Methods (for secondary students) and Reading and Writing in Grades 4-8 (for elementary students). The instructors were selected because their courses occur during the first year of the Teacher Education Program at a large public university in the Pacific Northwest and, more importantly, because they rely on reflective writing as a pedagogical strategy. Both instructors provide personalized reflective feedback, allowing the researcher to analyze its effects on student identity. Typically, the feedback they provide contains affirmation and questions rather than explicit directions. Students are largely responsible for the decisions they make in improving their performance. As one of the instructors stated, her role as the assessor is “simply someone in the ‘middle’ of a process of growth and reorientation.”

**Method**

**Participants.** A total of 41 participants from both classes were invited to participate in the study. Out of the 41, 38 individuals (30 from the elementary class and 8 from the secondary class) consented to participate in the study. These numbers are proportional to the number of students in each class. 34 students are enrolled in the elementary class and 12 are enrolled in the secondary class, so participation was high in both recruited classes. For the most part, students who enroll in the teacher education program tend to identify as white, middle-class, female. Even those who come from small, rural towns tend to have families with economic stability and privilege. A large percentage of them are members of sororities and fraternities. Over the past few years, student populations at this university have slowly become more diverse, but the large majority currently remains as described here.
The process for recruiting the instructors was complex. It was important that the instructors with whom I worked practiced a model of feedback that could be operationalized as “personalized” or “reflective” based on the body of literature informing the study. That is, the feedback needed to contain features of content-situated language, dialogic interactions in which students had a chance to reflect on the feedback, and was empathic to the student’s cultural-logic (Ratcliffe, 1999). Also, the feedback provided by the instructors throughout the study needed to position students as vulnerable and fluid, remaining consistent with literature that suggests feedback should recognize the flexibility of a negotiating identity during assessment.

To ensure the instructors met these requirements, invited instructors submitted examples of feedback as well as written rationales for their feedback use. In these rationales, invited instructors provided their theoretical approach to feedback as well as described the student-teacher interactions they most commonly experience as a result of their feedback. After narrowing down the selection to the two instructors with whom I finally worked, we spent two sessions before the semester debriefing on the model of feedback I was most interested in examining. These sessions involved discussing select relevant literature on personalized feedback as well as discussing possibilities for building in time for students to reflect on and respond to their feedback—this final stage offering data for the study as well as fulfilling course writing requirements.

**Instruments.** The reflective writing assignments varied throughout the semester for both classes. In the elementary class, a Writing in the Majors course, students took a piece of writing through a simulation of the publishing process. Typically, students composed a memoir narrating the reasons they decided to become a teacher. Each assignment required students to reflect on each stage of the process: experience, prewriting, drafting, sharing, revising, editing,
publishing, and assessing. Students scored their own writing and reflected on what they learned from this process. In the secondary class, students wrote a series of article reflections that tasked them with reflecting on the ways a journal article selected by each student related to their pedagogical interests. Secondary students also composed reflections on the intersection between learning and teaching, during which they were required to make connections with course readings and philosophies of education. In both courses, students developed their capabilities as reflective practitioners throughout multiple assignments that required them to revisit ideas and approach them from different perspectives after receiving feedback.

Data collection. The researcher collected student essays immediately after instructors provided feedback. Scanned or copied essays were retained by the researcher so that each instructor could return the original drafts to students. These essays were coded both in terms of students’ language used to construct their selves and in terms of the feedback that might mediate such constructions. Several of these essays were handwritten during the beginning stages of the semester but became more formalized typed essays later in the semester. The form of the essay was considered as a mediator for students’ language use and identity formation.

Member check interviews were conducted near the end of the semester to interrogate uses of interdiscursivity. The purpose of these interviews was to probe teachers’ and students’ intentionality in their construction of identities in reflective writing assignments. Conceptually, the interviews focused on questions like: Did students intentionally use instructors’ discourse when revising their writing or ideas? Did instructors’ discourse (e.g., patterns of speech, expressed ideologies) have an effect on students’ identities?
Analysis. Following Gee (2014), a discourse analysis is used to explore the complex processes of students’ uses of instructors’ discourse in the construction of teacher identities. From Gee’s (2014) toolbox, the researcher primarily analyzed the situated meanings constituted by students’ writing and instructors’ feedback and the uses of intertextuality in the composition of students’ reflections. Following Lewis and Ketter (2014), the researcher also paid close attention to acts of interdiscursivity. First, the researcher followed Saldaña’s (2015) open coding, in which students’ essays were analyzed for uses of language that designated identity. These codes highlighted features like sentence patterns, stylistic choices, metaphorical constructions, and narrative choices. Table 1 provides a sample of the open coding scheme.

Table 1. Sample open coding of Journal Article 1 (Secondary Class)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Text</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Instructor Feedback</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This article, though it is based on a lot of family and consumer science in Hong Kong, is one of the only documents out there to accurately describe what we do as FCS teachers and what our goals are as a profession</td>
<td>Claiming membership as FCS teacher. Claiming FCS is misunderstood.</td>
<td>Wow! This is something to talk about. Let's play with searches--Though! I can see why this might be.</td>
<td>Impressed. Suggesting strategies for student to rethink claims.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The topic of educational reform and altering pedagogies to cater to new ties and technologies is a common theme in the article. Collaborative learning is also talked about a lot as a valuable teaching approach in combination with this computer-based instruction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Describing article in detached academic voice</th>
<th>I can see how these two strands shape both content/CURRIC.</th>
<th>Providing connections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a need for new teachers to be savvy with technology and be able to create change around the stigma of technology when relevant to our youth.</td>
<td>Positioning new teachers in opposition to teachers who resist change around tech.</td>
<td>This is a great awareness--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is a great awareness--</td>
<td>Self Feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because so much technology is relatively new, it is often hard to keep teachers up to date on current practices for technology in the classroom.</td>
<td>Critique of teachers who don't use tech</td>
<td>and may I suggest that the foundation for knowing how to integrate tech comes from both pedagogy (yours) and learning goals for the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging student to rethink position.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This article is one of many movements to educate teachers on how to implement technology into their curriculum and relate it to their content areas.</td>
<td>Framing teachers who don't use tech as pedagogically deficient</td>
<td>I have some ideas for you to ponder!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinting there are other ideas not yet considered.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continuing to follow Saldaña (2015), the researcher constructed themes from the codes. The researcher expected to encounter some a priori themes, especially when analyzing the instructors’ feedback for recognizable features supported from the literature. For example, one
set of a priori themes came from Voerman, Meijer, Korthagen, and Simons (2012): discrepancy feedback, comparing the performance or level of understanding of the student with some predefined goal or desired level of achievement and progress feedback, comparing the performance or level of understanding of the student with their earlier performance or level of understanding. Coding in regards to student writing and reflective responses to their writing/feedback followed a more open process. Open codes began with descriptions of the actions students were taking with language. Following Charmaz (2013), these open codes were critically compared within students’ processes, across students within the same class, and across the two classes. This way, themes were constructed on both a micro (individual student-teacher interaction) and a macro (class and program interaction) level. Themes that emerged at the macro level were superimposed over individual themes to facilitate the constant comparison necessary to uncover those interactions that were shaped ideologically from an institutional or pedagogical perspective. Table 2 provides a list of themes that were generated from the codes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes (Examples)</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting, questioning</td>
<td>Encourages reflection in student</td>
<td>Personalized Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing</td>
<td>Tells student what to do</td>
<td>Corrective feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praising</td>
<td>Praises student without specific points</td>
<td>Self Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting, reminding</td>
<td>Cues students to other related assignments</td>
<td>Signaling Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowing, Using</td>
<td>Integrates one discourse into another</td>
<td>Interdiscursivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referencing</td>
<td>References other texts, assignments, courses, etc.</td>
<td>Intertextuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing (self or pedagogy)</td>
<td>Descriptions of self as teacher</td>
<td>Self-reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style, grammar, form Aligning self with program expectations</td>
<td>Enactments of voice (e.g., academic, personal)</td>
<td>Content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting, questioning</td>
<td>Shifts in beliefs, perspectives, thoughts, etc.</td>
<td>Recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critiquing, diverting</td>
<td>Deflecting criticism out to others</td>
<td>Deflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, the data were arranged as individual student cases. The following criteria guided the arrangement of the cases:

1. Maintained 100% completion rate of their assignments throughout the semester.
2. Demonstrated diverse academic disciplines that help situate analysis so that the illustrated themes might be transferred to different content areas (Family/Consumer Sciences, Music, English, Special Education).
3. Most clearly exemplified the prominence of particular themes regarding how identity is formed in relation to teacher feedback.

This final criterion required a crucial decision. Arranged this way, the cases presented insightful data but did not always address the research questions. Some of the cases could potentially direct the study down promising but unplanned paths. For instance, some of the potential cases included strong themes of racial identification, competition with peers, and posturing as an expert. While these themes are important for this field of research, the agency required to follow them through a cycle of analysis would require a different kind of preparation based on a critical theoretical framework and an adequate review of the literature that could shift the perspective from reflective identity to relational discourses shaped by unequal power distributions. It was ultimately decided that such directions should be reserved for future studies with appropriate literature and coding schema to support the analysis of such directions. At this point, finally, only the cases that provided a clear response to the research questions were selected for the writing and presentation of data.
Based on this context, four cases were selected. This presentation allowed research to trace each student’s individual story of identity formation as it occurred throughout the writing assessment process in each class. Both macro and micro level themes were interrogated as they emerged within these individual interactions. As the literature into feedback has repeatedly suggested, there is no panacea when it comes to best practices for feedback giving. Therefore, the study pays close attention to individual students’ processes interacting with particular features of feedback by providing as much context as possible and analyzing the unique effects of personalized reflective feedback on each of the study’s cases. Rather than aiming for one-size-fits-all generalizable results, the study promotes generalizability as an interpretive act. Findings would need to be resituated in each practitioner’s unique social dynamics.

Results

As stated in the previous paragraph, the results will be provided as individual cases that allow analysis to focus on each particular student’s development of identity within the iterative process of feedback and reflective writing. The cases will be identified by pseudonyms and narrated individually in their respective sections. The cases are Roebuck, Compton, Roberta and Kandler. Roebuck is a female Family and Consumer Science major. Compton is a female Music major. Roberta and Kandler are both female elementary majors. Their journeys of the self are detailed in their own sections.

Roebuck

When the semester began, Roebuck found herself as the only Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) student. In the secondary program at the university where this study occurred, students major in content areas (e.g., English) and in the final two years of their degree complete
the requirements for the teacher education program. It is typical for the secondary program to contain cohorts consisting of no more than a single student. Math and English are the pillars with steady high enrollment, but Music, History, Agricultural Education, and FCS vary in their student populations and can sometimes have low student numbers. Cohorts become fairly exclusive communities. At the secondary level, cohorts have averaged 30 students for the past five years. Within these cohorts, students form smaller, more intimate social groups, and these groups are likely to be determined by content area. Not only might students already be familiar with one another from previous coursework, but the shared content area also provides them with an immediate common discourse. Initially, Roebuck did not have easy access to this kind of community membership.

This was not an experience Roebuck was used to having. She grew up in a small homogeneous town in the Inland Northwest. She shared the demographic characteristics of the majority of the people in this town in terms of economic status, racial identity, and politics. These characteristics remained constant even when she began college. Up to the moment she began the teacher education program, Roebuck’s identity had been constituted by communities with similar value systems and significations.

In her first essays, Roebuck enacted an explicit identity within FCS. This is evident from her first article review, in which she claimed that “this article, though it is based on a lot of family and consumer science in Hong Kong, is one of the only documents out there to accurately describe what we do as FCS teachers and what our goals are as a profession.” Despite the inaccuracy of this statement—certainly there are other articles that describe FCS pedagogy—this use of language seems to serve a larger purpose of establishing Roebuck’s identity as unique to the dynamics of her class. Her attempt to establish herself as an island, so to speak, was not lost
on the teacher, who provided the following feedback: “Wow! This is something to talk about. Let's play with searches--Though! I can see why this might be.” Here, the teacher first uses feedback to praise Roebuck’s attempt at an identity within the class composition (“Wow!”); after this brief praise, the teacher gently suggests that Roebuck’s claim might not be completely true without explicitly challenging her veracity.

Furthermore, Roebuck defined FCS as a somewhat superior community when compared with other content areas. In one essay, she wrote that she has “noticed that the language we use as Family and Consumer Sciences teachers is very forward-thinking and not offensive to anyone.” Not only does her pronoun use include her in FCS, but she also asserts that, by virtue of this inclusion, she is “forward-thinking” and “not offensive to anyone.” By positioning herself (and FCS) this way, it is no fault of hers or any FCS teacher if someone becomes offended.

Rather than responding to Roebuck’s claims through the use of corrective feedback (i.e., that there is always the potential that language might offend someone), the teacher employed discursive elements of personalized feedback. Specifically, she remained empathic to the student’s sense of alienation and offered dialogic prompts: “How do you accomplish this? Perhaps every perspective has its limitations?” These questions, if answered, offered steps for Roebuck to reflect on her perspective as opposed to the implicit criticism of other teachers who might not be as “forward-thinking.”

The teacher largely employed empathic feedback that remained very sensitive to Roebuck’s identity while also encouraging her to view herself as fluid, able to define herself and others in terms besides content area. As the semester progressed, Roebuck continued to separate herself from the cohort. According to what her teacher revealed during interviews, she often
disengaged from group work and grew defensive of the fact FCS was not fairly representing in instructional materials. Her identity began to depend on the association between her alienation and her perceived superiority. In one of her reflections, Roebuck wrote how “Other people are now using the term ‘community well-being,’ which has been valued by FCS professionals for years.” Her use of “other people” continues to position herself, which Roebuck seems to have conflated with her content area, at a rhetorical distance from her peers. This is especially interesting considering her claims that she is an expert in “community well-being.” Despite these claims, the teacher remained consistent with her calls for Roebuck to self-reflect: “Okay--so what might this mean for your teaching? What connections can you make when you imagine teaching and teaching kids, say, about ‘well-being.’”

What Roebuck provides as a case is her use of deflection as a way to continue her isolation and resist reflection. Previous studies suggest when it comes to negative feedback that students interpret as “attacking [their] writing” (Torres & Anguiano, 2016, p. 7), the student writer defaults to deflection. In other words, they become more likely to resist reflection and instead critique external factors over which they have no control (McGarrell & Verbeem, 2007). On the surface, Roebuck’s teacher is not aggressive or corrective, but instead conforms to the model of feedback the literature suggests as leading to reflection. As Gee (2014) reminds us, however, language is situated and contextually bound. Roebuck’s positioning of herself as an expert and superior to her peers did not warrant the expected recognition from her teacher; rather, she was constantly being asked questions that complicated the identity she was attempting to construct.

As the semester progressed, and Roebuck continued developing an identity through writing that separated her from the class composition, her deflections became more explicit. At
one point, she wrote in a review that the articles she read failed to describe “how we should do (teach culturally responsive pedagogy).” At this point, the teacher’s feedback also became more explicit. In it, the teacher began the reflection process for Roebuck by highlighting personal details about her life as well as providing very specific steps for reflecting:

I’d say (knowing you're from ______) that looking back at how you say you were taught might open some paths. With that what are some things that were avoided surrounding race, class, gender [...] Happy to talk anytime!

It appears as though the teacher spent most of the early months of the semester nudging Roebuck to reflect on her experiences, specifically how those experiences shaped her as an FCS teacher in a class where she was now the minority, but refrained from providing explicit instructions for how to do that. The teacher justified her strategy in feedback by writing to Roebuck, “open, scholarly work doesn't lay it out; the concepts are there and the how is so context specific. It requires some critical reflection.”

Roebuck began meeting with her teacher outside of class. They spoke at first about the feedback Roebuck had been receiving. Roebuck’s concern was that she was not doing something right, even though her grades, while not perfect, were still passing. Eventually, their conversations focused on Roebuck’s sense of isolation within the cohort. Once her teacher felt she had Roebuck’s trust, she began assigning specific articles for Roebuck that offered more diverse perspectives of pedagogical experience.

Alongside these assigned journal articles, her teacher made clear her expectations for a positive teacher identity: that of a social activist who considers all perspectives and identities. The standard, her teacher communicated, was to full endorse a culturally responsive pedagogy
that sees difference not as a threat, but as valuable. In Roebuck’s response to one of the assigned articles, she wrote: “I had no idea that the population had become so diverse. I came from such a small town where there was mostly Caucasians and that was because of our location and did not reflect the greater population of Washington or the United States.” Once Roebuck and her teacher established, through assessment, trust, she repositioned herself from being an expert to being a vulnerable learner, someone who might even be out of touch. For instance, rather than the collective pronoun use that grammatically conflated her identity with FCS, Roebuck shifted to the singular “I,” separating her identification from any group. Even this subtle shift presented a unique change in voice and persona, in which Roebuck for the first time spoke for herself instead of trying to represent an entire field. With this repositioning, Roebuck’s teacher was able to redirect Roebuck’s criticisms inward, so that she explored her own experiences for a sense of identity.

**Compton**

Compton was in the same cohort as Roebuck. As a music major, she had the support of six other music education students. As a content area, Music has experienced a steady increase in student enrollment in the past five years. In the past, music students have enacted the kind of identity Roebuck attempted for herself—that of a marginalized community, although inhabited by mostly white individuals, that needs aggressive defending. With the steady increase, students in this community as a whole have tended to be more receptive and open to the interactions experienced in the teacher education program. That said, Compton still seemed to embody the typical perspective that “teacher education does not understand music education” and, therefore, “music students have our own misunderstood teaching and assessment practices (emphasis added).”
Compton began writing from the position of an expert. Her rhetorical constructions of language situated herself as someone providing advice to other educators. In Compton’s first journal article, she wrote about her desire to infuse her pedagogy with a broader cultural representation, specifically by bringing in “Chinese musical culture.” As detailed earlier, the teacher of the secondary class made clear the standards for a positive pre-service teacher identity: someone engaged in activism and culturally responsive pedagogy. Compton’s early attempt to be recognized as such seemed to rely on the strategy of rhetorically referencing “other” musical cultures. From Compton’s privileged position—identifying as a white female from a high SES community in the same state as her university—her claim could have been read by her teacher as objectifying, or even capitalizing on, cultural capital. In other words, the intertextuality of referencing international “texts” in the attempt of being recognized as culturally responsive at first appeared to operate only on a superficial level.

In this first assignment, Compton constructed a rhetorical distance between her and her audience. She did this by relying on the pronoun “you,” as if addressing other teachers instead of reflecting on her personal aspirations. In one passage, she wrote that it is important “to listen to the music to your students.” Constructions of language such as this position Compton as someone giving advice to another teacher who might be interested in this approach, despite the fact that other passages clearly communicate that this is a personal goal of Compton’s, such as the sentence, “I would use this technique not only with Chinese classical ensembles but also all world and Western music.” Here, again, the claim that “all world and Western music” will have representation in her classes signifies a more corporate brand of diversity that is “checked off” instead of “immersed in.”
The teacher, who holds critical pedagogy as tantamount to teacher identity, was aware of the semantic meaning of Compton’s shifting pronoun use, which seemed to have prevented her from reflecting on specific details of her strategy. In an attempt to redirect Compton’s attention inward, the teacher’s feedback asked Compton, “What or how might Chinese classical be contextualized in a Western music-repertoire? Why is this best?” This feedback clearly attempts to shift Compton from her position as advice-giver to reflective-practitioner. In a follow-up to the teacher’s feedback, Compton began describing steps of her vision, but still relied on the “you” pronoun, continuing to construct herself more as an expert than a learner: “[Once students] have an understanding of what that culture's music sounds like, then you can teach them and discuss with them the history that led to that particular instrumentation or use of melodies and rhythms.” The teacher praised Compton’s specificity but continued to challenge her to embody a writing voice that positioned her as a reflective student of music pedagogy rather than an expert:

Nice extension, Compton. I ask the above question to pick your brain on blends, and how a multicultural, global context might share, mix, borrow, blend. This would be interesting to play with perhaps, from students' cultural identities […] I look forward to more.

What the teacher’s feedback also accomplishes here is a deeper interrogation of Compton’s attempt at intertextuality. Because Compton’s initial strategy was to achieve recognition as a culturally responsive teacher by referencing international music, the teacher responds by challenging Compton to think about and reflect on the pedagogical use of intertextuality. In some way, the teacher encourages Compton to continue this strategy, but to move deeper than surface reference and actually “mix, borrow, blend” so that her future students’ identities, like Compton’s, might be interdiscursively formed.
Later in the semester, Compton’s writing, in response to her teacher’s feedback, changed in ways that transformed her identity from an apparent expert to an activist for more culturally inclusive pedagogies in music education. Not only did her pronoun use change from “you” to “I,” but she also began challenging some of her previously held conceptions about what it meant to teach in culturally responsive ways. In a later article review, Compton demonstrated the capacity for reflection for which her teacher had been encouraging through feedback. When confronted with stories of musicians identified by personal markers, such as sexual orientation or gender, she admitted to incorrectly thinking that diversity largely meant geographical differences. In her words, “Before this article, I never thought about this, I considered music from other countries, genres, and from a variety of composers, but never specifically thought to identify those relating to the LGBTQ community.” After previously providing feedback that encouraged reflection, by asking the above questions and redirecting Compton’s focus inward, the teacher then responded to this latest identity construction by suggesting a concrete term (“advocate”) with which the student could move forward: “Teachers then become advocates--in change agents just by the curricular choices we make--what and ‘who’ we choose to render.”

Compton adopted this label for herself. Her final reflections at the end of the semester declared herself as an “advocate for underrepresented traditions” that have “silenced important composers and their word.” She extended this role as advocate to her students, who “might find composers and compositions with which they can relate” if the possibilities for texts were made more open and diverse. The success of the feedback in this interaction relied on content-situated language—the teacher demonstrated their capacity to discuss in contextually-bound ways music education as well as provide specific language from the content of teacher education (e.g., “advocate”). It also relied on the use of dialogic feedback that invited responses from Compton
to think through her early attempts at cultural responsiveness. The teacher’s feedback asked questions as guidelines for reflection, but never corrected Compton or told her explicitly what to do. Throughout the process, the agency remained with Compton. Despite her initial construction of an expert identity, the freedom to make reflection choices, paired with the critical questions offered in her teacher’s feedback, repositioned Compton in ways that allowed her to self-reflect on how her history as a privileged human presented personal challenges for her desire to construct a critical pre-service teacher identity.

**Roberta**

In the elementary course, the established model for a positive pre-service teacher identity is one who actively engages in process writing. Students in this course are afforded the ability to write as creatively as they want; they can produce a poem, short story, photograph autobiography, graphic narrative, dramatic script, etc. The requirement is that students must stick with their single idea throughout a series of workshops, revisions, and reflections. The goal is for students to construct an identity throughout a semester-long process of developing their voices as writers. In this course, not only do students receive feedback from the teacher, but also from one another. Interdiscursivity appeared to emerge more apparently in this course due to the dual roles in which students were placed. Not only are they students training to become teachers, but they are also tasked with immediately performing as teachers on these frequent workshops and peer reviews. Often, students borrowed from the discourse of their teacher when providing feedback, creating a pantomime of teaching identity that seemed to rely on modeling and imitation (Lewis & Ketter, 2013).
Another difference between the secondary and elementary course is the absence of discipline-driven cohorts. Elementary students might specialize in or receive an endorsement from specific content areas, but they directly major in elementary education, creating a stronger sense of community membership. On the other hand, the elementary program sees much higher enrollment than secondary, sometimes doubling the size of a single class. The large population also contributes to the creation of smaller discourse communities within the larger community, but these, unlike the secondary program, are determined by social factors other than academic discipline.

As the first case in the elementary course, Roberta offers insight into how reflective feedback can guide students to critical self-assessment and possibly even self-regulation, though this latter possibility was not the focus of the study and would require future empirical research to support such a claim. Roberta began her Writer’s Workshop project writing about the loss of an uncle. However, she did not intend for her writing to read as a “eulogy,” as some of the feedback she received suggested. She therefore reflected that the feedback she received, while praising her constructions of “genuine emotion,” ultimately “influenced me to alter my draft to allow people to understand that although this poem is about losing my uncle, it is also about reaching my goal of completing a half marathon.” Apparent in Roberta’s writing is the fact that the feedback she received, despite its positivity and clear indication that she met the performance standards, failed to meet her own personal vision.

Roberta enacted an identity driven by high intrinsic motivation and the desire to constantly “improve my performance.” Not only is she an athlete with a steep competitive side, but she also takes on frequent leadership roles. In her class, Roberta often leads workshops and volunteers to collate drafts from students and deliver those to the teacher. Roberta is also a
member of a number of student organizations on campus. These aspects of her identity most likely contribute to the self-regulation apparent in her identity formation, but they were also clearly facilitated by the interactions she had with her teacher through feedback.

Specifically, her teacher provided the following feedback: “You have referred to this tough time in your life before, and I appreciate your being willing to share such a personal experience with me and others through your writing.” Here, the teacher uses feedback to comfort and relate to Roberta. Through member check interviews, the teacher revealed her concern that Roberta would “burn out” or “crash” if she felt she was not meeting her exceptionally high standard for herself. In cases like Roberta’s, in which students enact a perfectionist identity, the teacher resorts to feedback that comforts and calms the student. Roberta, however, remained critical in her self-assessment and reflected on ways to revise her writing beyond meeting the course outcomes.

As Roberta continued to develop her memoir/poem of running a marathon with her late uncle, she received feedback from her teacher that read, “Your piece hints at what was going on but doesn't come out and say it or reveal the unhappy ending of losing someone in this way, and that seems effective. Was this a deliberate choice? Did you consider other ways to tell this story?” The teacher, while still praising Roberta’s writing, pushes her to think about the choices she made in the composition, asking her to reflect on the balance she wished to achieve between mourning and redemption. This way, rather than challenging Roberta to constantly improve, as is a typical quality for formative feedback (Chappuis, 2009), the teacher implies Roberta has met the standard and should therefore reflect on her process—what got her to succeed. Once the project was complete—to Roberta’s satisfaction, which again surpassed the course standards—she answered her teacher in a reflective essay about the process: “I ended my poem with a strong
main point of describing how running helped me cope with my loss. I displayed this by stating my favorite part of the half marathon was ‘running with [my uncle]’. This gives a reader a chance to interpret the poem and reflect on the storyline.”

In this case, the standards for success superseded the typical performance standards and challenged Roberta to set her own standards and meet them. Considering the fact that this particular student is a marathon runner, there is a good chance that this case exhibits some inherently high level of self-regulation, for which the current study did not control for nor assess. With that said, however, the feedback provided by her teacher, which combined praise with thoughtful questions that invited Roberta to continue revising, might have similar effects across individuals with varying levels of motivation, as might be illustrated in the following case from the same course.

**Kandler**

Kandler provides the clearest case of a student learning to write by constructing herself as a writer. In one of Kandler’s early drafts, she struggled focusing on a single idea and received feedback from her peers that her voice was inconsistent and that the story needed “direction.” In a reflective assignment that asked her to think about her writing process, she wrote, “In all honesty, I never completed the writing process entirely while I was in school. I usually could get away with skipping steps, such as prewriting, or drafting and revising. For me, prewriting and using things like webs or organizers to arrange my writing never worked.” Here, Kandler worried that she wasn’t following the correct protocol in creating writing. Because her early drafts felt disjointed to her and her peers and she did not outline or “web” like other students, she assumed her process was what prevented her from being identified as a writer.
The feedback she received from her teacher, however, stated, “I also skip many of the steps, and I think we do tend to do that as adults or as good writers, but taking one piece all the way through the steps has its benefits as you noted.” The teacher relied on empathic feedback that identifies with the student and also communicates that she, who is recognized as a writing teacher, similarly skips prewriting steps despite teaching them. This seemed to have an effect on Kandler as she continued developing her story and constructing an identity as a teacher of writing. In a later reflective assignment, Kandler wrote,

In my future classroom, I think I am going to require students to explain why they changed things during their revisions in writing workshop, so they can see this as well. I think it is beneficial because they can see how intentional our words need to be in order to get certain messages across. I also think it is a great way to show how writing traits are interconnected, and work off one another because some revisions can change more than one trait.

This is an example of interdiscursivity, where Kandler initially assumed she would not positively construct an identity as a writing teacher because she struggled with the writing process. After receiving empathic feedback from her teacher that combined praise with the teacher’s own reflections that she “skips the same steps,” Kandler wrote that she plans on adopting her teacher’s strategies. What might be a clearer example of interdiscursivity is when Kandler created an image of “pleading eyes” in her story after receiving feedback from her teacher that powerful images usually include language “we don’t normally associate with” the object being described.
What might be the most important aspect of Kandler’s case is the relationship between empathic feedback and interdiscursivity. For students to learn meaningfully, Lewis and Ketter (2013) suggest that teachers should strategize to provide moments for students to use the discourse either of the relative field or the teachers themselves. Not only did Kandler begin describing images (e.g., “pleading eyes”) using the discursive strategy of her teacher, but she also began constructing an identity aligned with her teacher’s discourse of presenting prewriting stages that she personally doesn’t use. Her teacher’s empathy, embedded in her feedback, created a relationship in which Kandler could identify with her teacher, thus becoming encouraged to borrow from her discourse in a way similar to Bakhtin’s (1981) “ventriloquation.”

According to Bahktin (1981), interdiscursivity occurs when one voice speaks through another voice:

The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s concrete contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own. (pp. 293-294)

The following discussion will examine this relationship more closely.

Discussion
In analyzing the above data, it is important to acknowledge my own relationship with the research process. Before I began this study, I had been a professor of writing. I taught courses in creative writing, composition, and developmental writing. My experience in an MFA program initially positioned me to question assessment as a standardized practice. I had been trained to view a writer’s “voice,” which I define similarly to Bakhtin (1981) as the consciousness or persona of the writer, as unique to the situatedness of a writer. In other words, I doubted the ability of assessment practices to capture the nuanced idiosyncrasies of writing processes. The doubt I carried with me motivated me to research how assessment can become a more formative practice that shapes not just the writing task but also the writer. I was never an assessment nihilist, per se, but a poststructuralist who believed that a reframing of assessment can constitute formative discourses in which students can begin shaping their identities through writing.

At the same institution where this research was conducted, I taught Secondary Assessment with the Teacher Education program. During this time, I fostered positive relationships with the faculty who made this study possible and also began realizing what was meant by “teacher identity,” particularly as to how the program situated such a concept. Because of the situated meanings inherent in the use of “teacher identity,” I analyzed the data as they were constructed in their particular contexts, as those contexts have been shaped by the specific student-teacher interactions (Gee, 2014). Stated clearly, what constituted a positive “teacher identity” in one class did not necessarily mean that “teacher identity” in the other class would be identically defined. As a whole, the teacher education program values identity as a negotiation influenced by students’ diverse social experiences combined with exposure to a critical pedagogy that promotes reflection (Hooley, 2007; Stetsenko, 2010). The curriculum of the program in its entirety has made a conscious effort as of late to teach students critical perspectives aligned with
a social justice mission. This kind of curriculum has invited several opportunities for students to reflect on how they have been shaped by potentially racist, sexist, classist, and/or otherwise dangerous discourses.

What do the feedback interactions occurring between students and teachers reveal about pre-service teacher identity?

The focus of this current study, again, is on the processes used by students to incorporate their instructors’ feedback into constructions of their situated identities (Lewis & Ketter, 2013). What might be left out of this focus is an interrogation of relations of power that might also contribute to identity formation in students. This limitation is not a flaw in design, but a phase of research that requires deeper understandings of student-teacher interactions before applying a more critical lens (Huber, Murphy, Nelson, & Young, 2014). Once a framework is in place that details the discursive practices of students’ use of instructor feedback to construct an identity, future studies can further question how interactions within a discourse of assessment are rooted in unequal distributions of power. Remembering that there is no one approach to feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Sutton & Gill, 2010), following a research agenda that continues to interrogate the discursive—and often interdiscursive—processes of feedback will help guide educators as they develop assessment strategies to support student growth.

The most prominent themes in this discussion are the use of deflection to resist reflection, the positioning of oneself as an expert to create rhetorical distance between self and other, and the process of relationship building inherent in all assessment practice, which can ultimately lead to interdiscursivity as a powerful learning process (Lewis & Ketter, 2013). As stated earlier, the two faculty members ultimately used feedback to construct a “teacher-identity” in very different
ways. The secondary class instructor upheld an ideology of teacher-identity that included cultural responsiveness and advocacy while the elementary class instructor upheld engagement with the writing process as the central ideology of teacher-identity. Of course, measurable skills, knowledges, acts, and representations of information used by students (all of which are characteristics of identity) are not value-neutral. There are some educators, to offer an example, who claim that learning how to write computer code is more important than learning a foreign language (Buncome, 2016). What students learn and how they learn it are socially defined constructions; thus, social interactions aren’t the means of acquiring knowledge, but instead constitute the conditions under which knowledge is created (Van Dijk, 1997). Sociocultural learning theory allows us to move beyond conceptualizing development as a phenomenon occurring within the individual and instead encourages us to understand learning (an identity) as a process of socialization always situated within particular discursive practices (Lester, 2014; Van Dijk, 1997). Thus, the relationship formed between instructor and students is somewhat unique to each of the two courses. The acts of discourse used by students to shape a positive situated identity depend upon the context of the course. For the secondary instructor, critical literacy, as a content, dictated the types of teachers the students should aspire to become. In the elementary section, the identity was bounded by the content of writing studies.

**How do students use feedback to shape their teacher identities?**

The content of the course and the students’ responses to feedback created interesting points of tension in the included cases. Roebuck, for instance, struggled mostly with the concept of diversity education. Her previous experiences in a small, homogeneous town and in a content area that felt minoritized presented challenges for her construction of an identity related to social justice and cultural responsiveness. Despite the fact that her writing mechanics, as objectively
conceived as possible (even writing skills are situated in specific contexts, such as genres), met
the standards of the course, Roebuck experienced conflict in her writing and in her response to
feedback, especially as it asked her to critically reflect on her positions. In cases like Roebuck,
perhaps educators should consider how to engage students on an ideological level so that what is
presented as the “standard” in identity formation becomes very clear in assessment terms. In
other words, it might help if students are immediately introduced to the instructor’s ideological
reasons for their assessment practices. This would remain consistent with literature (see:
Alvermann et al., 2011; Crichton & Valdera, 2015; Sutton & Gill, 2010) that recommends
students and instructors engage in a “norming” session that standardizes the situated assessment
practices of a given class so that students clearly know how to read and interpret feedback.
While these studies focus on the literacy aspect of feedback, like how to “decode” instructor
comments, an ideological “norming” might engage students on a relational level so that from the
very beginning they can begin to see the self being expected of them.

A similar challenge emerged in the elementary class when students who didn’t see the
value in revising their writing struggled realizing the situated identity that equated a positive
“teacher-identity.” Kandler, as an example, expressed personal struggles with pre-writing,
writing, and revising. Her early revisions were largely relegated to word-choice and other minor
edits, until her instructor used feedback to ask her about her intentions. Her instructor moved the
focus of assessment away from the quality of the work itself to the processes undertaken by
Kandler. Faced with this kind of metareflection, in which she was asked to reflect on the steps
taken for her to write reflectively, Kandler began to make the kind of structural changes to her
writing illustrated by Embuena and Amorós (2012) when they situated identity within a dialogic
process of assessment. As uncomfortable as the process was for her, she still enacted a positive
teacher-identity, as recognized in the elementary class, when she began conceiving ways to teach process writing, even if she still personally struggled with it.

**Limitations and Future Research Directions**

As mentioned throughout the study, these effects are specifically situated not just within the context of teacher education but also within the context of each class. This is arguably the most apparent theoretical limitation. If we remember Gee’s (2014) statement, that “particular language forms take on specific or situated meanings in specific different contexts of use,” then we must also remember that the results discussed above cannot be easily generalized (Gee, 2014, p. 65). Therefore, it is important for practitioners and future researchers to carefully resituate these findings in new contexts to continue developing our understanding of the discursive interactions that occur during writing assessment. For instance, although the current results suggest empathic feedback can encourage interdiscursivity, thus positively impacting student identity, such a suggestion depends almost entirely on the relationship formed between the student and teacher. Empathy, in general, is not something that can be strategized or implemented as an intervention; rather, it is a construct that emerges based on humanistic qualities like trust, familiarity, and feelings of compassion (Carson & Johnston, 2001). The positive effects illustrated in the study, however, might not come as a direct result of feedback, for empathy was a point of emphasis in the course itself. In fact, the syllabus for the course included a section emphasizing the importance of fostering empathy, so this was established as a structural focal point. In other words, practitioners might not benefit from attempting to implement the strategies listed in this study without being mindful of the relationships they are forming with students. In terms of research, theories of discourse could be developed by future studies that continue examining the effects of particular student-teacher interactions.
From a purely educational psychological perspective, one of the more interesting potentials of future studies would be to inquire into the role of reflective feedback in motivating self-regulation in students. While several studies examine how feedback might motivate revisions (see for example: Hoska, 1993; McGarrell, Hedy, & Verbeem, 2007; Otienoh, 2010), the current study suggests that this relationship might reveal new considerations of self-regulation if removed from a motivational lens and situated in an affective framework. Perhaps students’ expressions of self-regulation in their reflections due to the perceived empathy in feedback suggests that students are more likely to self-regulate when they are led to feel empowered by feedback, despite the errors and mistakes apparent in their writing (Brookhart, 2008; Shute, 2008).

While generalizability is extremely limited by a discourse analysis, there are opportunities to extrapolate themes from this study into other non-related contexts. The most obvious opportunity is regarding the theme of assessment as relationship building. Perhaps, what might be most useful in assessment is upholding students to particular standards relating to identity as opposed to task-specific performance. A student might be able to “perform” at a high level while never internalizing their performance as a future “advocate” or “facilitator.” Borrowing bravely from (Carson & Johnston, 2001), practitioners might be better served asking what is the ideal identity students should aspire to embody and what does such a performance of identity look like. It needs to be clarified that by this we are talking about content-related identity, not cultural identity markers such as gender, race, or class. Hopefully, no one would read this as taking Butler so literally that we are asking students to perform their gender or race, for example. Rather, it might be beneficial to ask students to perform their content-specific
identity (e.g., critical biologist, activist music educator, culturally responsive FCS teacher) by
upholding standards that point directly to the discourse practiced in such contexts.

Conclusion

It is important to understand how students learn to construct identities within the
discourse of writing assessment, particularly the feedback received from instructors. My interest
is in feedback as a practice of particular forms of discourse situated within social interaction.
Because I understand feedback to be a discursive practice (Gee, 2014), I assume that instructor
feedback is determined, along with a variety of other factors that are contextually bound and
oriented within the action of providing feedback (Hepburn & Wiggins, 2005). As a writing
instructor, I hold strong views that writing is a way to know and understand. Rather than “write
what you know,” for example, “writing a way into knowing” leads to learning itself (Richardson
& St. Pierre, 2008). This ideology influences my understanding of feedback, which speaks of
writing as a process of “discovery,” “revision,” and “uncertainty.” Feedback, then, encourages
students to take chances with impunity in their writing. A student’s writing sample is a starting
point for a journey of self-discovery, where conversation has the potential to open up a shared
understanding of how to construct an identity that is positive in an educational setting.

As a researcher who identifies with poststructural frameworks, I am aware that the ways
identity may be constructed through writing are bound to the discourses that produce and
recognize certain identities (Pickford, 2014). When analyzing how identity is constructed by
individual students through writing, what is likely to be revealed is the broader concept of
identity recognized by the student’s program. In short, the student as individual can only be
understood through the larger institutional structures in which the student is a subject. Any
results from the study will require a deep sensitivity to context. On the other hand, studies such as this one can still supply educators with strategies for using reflective writing and feedback in contexts other than teacher education.
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