Tutoring writing, transmitting culture: Investigating tutors’ and students’ beliefs about good writing and a writer’s voice in an afterschool literacy program

by

Robert Alfred Kohls

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning
Ontario Institute for the Study of Education
University of Toronto

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Abstract

Using an ethnographic case study approach, this thesis investigates what multilingual adolescent writers and their adult tutors in an afterschool literacy program believe about good writing and a writer’s voice, and how their beliefs about writing and voice both reflect particular linguistic and cultural values and shape attitudes towards language use, the writer, and writing development. Grounding the research in social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1980, 1986) and theories of language socialization (Duff, 2007a; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991, 2006), I addressed the following three questions: 1) What do tutors and students believe about good writing and a writer’s voice? 2) How do tutors conceptualize their identities, purposes, and actions in responding to students’ writing and voice in this context? and 3) In what ways do students see their tutoring sessions contributing to their overall development as writers? I observed 4 writing tutors and 5 of their students for 4 months, triangulating data that included observing and digitally recording the
tutoring sessions; conducting semi-structured interviews and stimulated recalls with the participants; and collecting print-based materials produced by the participants. The findings show (a) that participants considered good writing as a moral imperative and that they saw good writing and voice both as interconnected and as something that produced writer capital; (b) that volunteers constructed an ad hoc tutoring identity marshaled from personal and professional experiences to tutor effectively; (c) that learning to write was a transformative, bidirectional undertaking with experts (tutors) being affected as much as novices (students); and (d) that students exhibited strong convictions over what makes an ideal writing tutor. These four observations suggest that writing and tutoring writing transmit cultural knowledge, language values, and principles of appropriate verbal and physical conduct.
Acknowledgements

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Toronto, we might call it, *From Timothy’s to Second Cup: Queering post-structuralist conversations on life, romance, and data*. I deeply cherish our time together especially those many times when we laughed ourselves to tears. We became more than friends. We became family. Thank you for being in my life and for never again asking that dreadful question, “How are you advancing in your chapters?”!

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Dedicated to struggling writers everywhere
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Chapter 1

Answering the Call: Investigating the Aliveness of a Writer’s Voice in L2 Adolescent Writing Research

As I look at our journals, our classrooms, and the larger world, I see a kind of stalemate about voice in writing. The concept is alive and well, yet no one comes forward anymore in our field to argue for it or even to explore very seriously why it’s so alive.

(Elbow, 2007, p. 171)

What do multilingual adolescent writers and their adult tutors in an afterschool literacy program believe about good writing and a writer’s voice, and how do their beliefs about writing and voice both reflect particular linguistic and cultural values, and shape attitudes towards language use, the writer, and writing development? In this thesis, I answer Elbow’s call to explore the aliveness of a writer’s voice by answering this fundamental question about language, education, culture, and identity. Much can be gained from learning how students and their tutors grasp a concept that is not only reflected, valued, and promoted in the larger culture, but also on which they are regularly assessed in assignment rubrics and high-stakes exams (Llosa, Beck, & Zhao, 2011; Matsuda & Jeffery, 2012). Addressing the general lack of research on adolescent second language (L2) writing (Harklau, 2011; Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008), I have investigated a sample of tutors and their adolescent students to establish what they know about a writer’s voice and learn if they value it and see it as something that needs to be developed in their writing, as many educators assume. Using research tools grounded in an ethnographic case study approach (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Duff, 1995; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999a; Séror, 2008, 2009), and drawing on theories of first and second language socialization (Duff & Talmy, 2011; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984), legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger,
1991), and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991, 2006), I have sought to understand how a small yet vocal group of multilingual adolescent writers and their literacy tutors attending an afterschool tutoring program in the basement of a local church made sense of voice and the cultural expectation of good writing.

**Tutoring in a Church Basement**

My desire to understand good writing and voice from the perspective of multilingual adolescent writers and their writing tutors emerged from one of the most important teaching experiences of my life. In 2008, I worked as a research assistant along with six other graduate students on the Adolescent Literacy in Three Urban Regions (ALTUR) project led by Drs. Alister Cumming, my supervisor, and Esther Geva (see Cumming, 2012). For six months, my colleagues and I filed into the basement of two damp and noisy Orthodox churches to tutor reading and writing skills to 21 high school students identified by the program as at-risk for literacy achievement. The church basements were rented by Pathways to Education (hereafter, Pathways, described in Rowan, 2012), a local literacy program, located in a poor and largely immigrant neighborhood in downtown Toronto.

That year I worked with Acer, Lala, Hodan, and K-9 (their self-selected pseudonyms). Even though I remember the stories the students told me about their families, school life, and friends, it was their struggles to write that I remember the most. While Acer and Lala eagerly shared their writing with me, Hodan and K-9 resisted, especially K-9. Curious to understand their experiences and attitudes about writing, I asked each student to draw a picture for me of what writing meant to them and to describe in a couple of sentences what the picture symbolized. K-9's drawing stood out: He drew a large mountain featuring jagged rocks, cliffs, and precipices. There were no streams, brooks, or creeks; there were no animals, trees or flowers. There were no
signs of life. But what he wrote told a different story: “Writing to me means to be creative and
different because you get to write your own way you feel about something and it can also help
you out at alot [sic] of stuff” (see Figure 1.1).

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Figure 1.1. What writing means to K-9

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K-9’s response was complex, detailed, and insightful. His positive thoughts and feelings towards writing contrasted with the austerity of his picture. He was being different. For K-9, creativity and writing about how he felt connected him to writing. Writing included engaging his imagination, distinguishing himself from friends, peers, and siblings, and exploring his emotions. Writing was more than producing a paper for a teacher; it had the potential to be useful in other areas of life beyond high school. His assumptions about writing speak directly to his own voice that involves emotions, perspectives, uniqueness, and potential—traits that a standard writing curriculum could easily see as inconsequential to the process of writer development. What struck me was that his thoughts and feelings about writing contrasted sharply with attitudes exemplified by the remarks of David Coleman, a well-known education and assessment consultant in the U.S., and major contributor to the Common Core of State Standards (CCSS). Speaking to an audience of educators, Coleman quipped, “As you grow up in this world, you realize that people don’t give a shit about what you think or what you feel” (Tyre, 2012, p. 28).

The ALTUR study identified the complex ways the students were socialized into the reading and writing practices of home, school, and community and identified how parents, siblings, cousins, friends, and teachers played a central role in their development as readers and writers. While the students were learning, changing, and adapting through our weekly tutoring sessions with them (see Knouzi, 2012), we were learning, changing, and adapting to our conversations with them. Our interaction with students redefined us from seasoned teachers to novice tutors. Tutoring taught us not to be afraid to learn from our students; encouraged us to explore new ways to engage students in academic practices; inspired us to develop materials that fit the students’ needs; and showed us how to come together as a team to learn from each other.

Reflecting on my own process, I quickly learned that the first heuristic to writing with the students in the literacy program was not necessarily free writing, mind mapping, and
brainstorming as Peter Elbow (1998) had taught me in *Writing Without Teachers*, but rather showing up, asking students about their day, listening to conflicts with bullies or friends in the schoolyard, and, most of all, respecting their process as writers. While each of our students taught us something different about learning and about ourselves as tutors, as a group we learned that trust, patience, negotiation, and persistence were as important to learning as learning about the subjects themselves (Cumming, 2012).

The ALTUR project changed me. My experiences with Acer, Lala, Hodan, and K-9 not only pushed me to reflect on my practice as a tutor but also prompted me to ask new questions about writing, voice, and tutoring and about their roles in helping students become successful writers and volunteers to become successful writing tutors. Sitting in the basement of these churches week after week, I observed other tutors and students solve math problems, draft essays, and discuss history. I wondered how they talked to students about their writing and if they faced similar challenges as my colleagues and I faced. Similarly, I wondered if writing captured the students’ imagination and allowed them to discover themselves and their voices as it had for K-9. In short, what were the beliefs that other students and volunteers brought to tutoring about writing, voice, and the writing process? And how did those values surface in the tutors’ approach to help (or hinder) students with their writing?

**Researching a Writer’s Voice: Expanding Opportunities in Adolescent L2 Writing Research**

Serving as an entry point, tutoring writing in the basement of these churches inspired me to take a fresh perspective on an old subject to see how seriously alive writing and voice really were by listening to those marginalized voices of the students and tutors I had come to know so well. The ALTUR project taught me that while much is known about the writing practices of children and adults, surprisingly little research has explored mainstream adolescent writing
practices (Graham & Perin, 2007; Juzwik, et al., 2006). Even less has been done to understand L2 adolescent writers and their writing development in or out of school (Harklau & Pinnnow, 2008; Leki, Cumming & Silva, 2008). Adolescent L2 writing research is just in its infancy and more work has yet to be done.

Like Elbow’s (2007) call to explore the aliveness of voice, L2 writing scholars have called out to writing researchers to explore the successes and struggles of adolescent L2 writers in the face of rapidly changing classroom demographics (Harklau, 2011). Included among the research agenda, Ortmeier-Hooper and Enright (2011) identified adolescent L2 writer identity, the impact of educational policy and planning, and readiness to succeed both in school and in future academic and career endeavors as fruitful areas for L2 writing scholars to explore. More importantly, research in adolescent L2 writing needs to provide language teacher education programs with a better understanding of the unique challenges that adolescents face in the classroom and how to respond to adolescent L2 writers’ linguistics, cultural, and education needs (de Oliveira & Silva, 2013).

The mandate to explore identity, policy, and career gives L2 writing researchers interested in attitudes towards good writing and voice a fresh start. Elbow’s claim of the ubiquity of voice—in journals, in classrooms, and in the larger world—inspired me to look more deeply at those writing resources that had first influenced me. One need only to look around at the larger world of articles, books, and style guides to observe how evangelizing and moralizing authors are—and continue to be!—especially when talking about good writing and how condescending and dismissive they are towards struggling writers in particular. I realized much of the advice I received from these popular writing guides throughout my life resembled those more explosive voices of 19th century revivalist preachers than they did the disinterested, sensible, and nuanced voices of scholars. The tutors I interviewed quoted the advice of these authors, reciting their
hard-hitting revivalist rhetoric, confirming, at least to me, the impact of their authoritarian advice on writing and their affect in shaping the moralizing tone of Anglophone attitudes towards acceptable writing.

I was equally surprised at the conceptually uninspiring descriptions of a writer’s voice and the highly inadequate ways in which voice has been operationalized in writing curricula in Ontario. In the following sections, I review how good writing and voice have been broadly defined, discussed, and represented. Specifically, I discuss how pervasive and problematic some attitudes are among style writers and other so called experts on writing, and also how these attitudes might cultivate an aversion to writing among novice writers.

Less of an Art, more of a Science: Shifting Attitudes and Popular Views towards Good Writing and Voice

“What is good writing—?” is the one question writing teachers need to ask themselves when they start teaching, and it is the one question they must revisit with each draft they read. Yet, sadly, it is the one question to which they may never receive a satisfactory answer. It is also a question that writing researchers rarely ask. As a seasoned writing teacher, my own beliefs about good writing emerged from feedback from writing teachers, advice from countless stylebooks, conversations with students and colleagues on writing, and empirical data published in refereed literature in L1 and L2 writing. I was not surprised to learn that the academics Leki (1995) interviewed described good writing with a rather clumsy, epistemologically shortsighted claim, “good writing: I know it when I see it” (p. 24). Readers’ intuitions about writing form a subjective collectivity (Li, 1996) in which personal biases reflect larger and commonly held socio-historical assumptions produced by the culture. In short, beliefs about good writing come down to what has been taught (e.g., values passed down from high school English teachers) and are embraced as a form of universal truth.
Parading as a form of universal truth, stylebooks preach clear, concise, and coherent writing as laudable and something novice writers are encouraged to emulate (e.g., Glaser, 1999; Williams, 2005). Clarity, concision, and comprehensibility have influenced my own views about good writing, as they have for practically everyone I know. Lucile Vaughan Payne (1965)—a former high school and college writing teacher who chided any writer for writing before thinking and censured the use of the first person—best illustrates this belief in the introduction to her book, *The Lively Art of Writing*. Payne reminded students that good essay writing reflects clarity of thought, economy of words, and grace of expression. She sometimes framed her advice as “commandments” reflecting the all-too-familiar attitudes of other well-known style writers. Zinsser (2006) claimed verbose or cluttered sentences were a “disease” (p.6), Orwell (1984/1946) stressed bad writing was degenerative and reflected a corrupt mind, and Strunk and White (2000) argued that writers must exercise self-restraint; eschewing verbal excess was a moral imperative. For these stylists, Lang (1991) and Cameron (2012) argued that good writing reflected the moral, judicious, and democratic character of the writer.

Elbow (2007) named Plato as the source of the idea that good writing reflects moral integrity: “Plato […] argued the power of language derived, to some real extent, from the nature of the rhetor’s self: only a good rhetor can create really good words. To learn to speak or write better, we need also to work on *being* better persons” (p.169). It is perhaps not surprising that Strunk and White also claimed that a writer’s prose reflects their extra-textual identity (i.e., identity as a person): “Style is the writer and therefore what you are, rather than what you know, will at last determine your style” (p. 84). Aristotle, Elbow noted, rejected Plato’s idea, claiming that readers can be duped by clever, sure-handed writers into believing they are legitimate, principled, and of good character. Again, it is perhaps not surprising that Strunk and White cautioned novice writers about engaging in any artifice: “The beginner should approach style warily,” adding,
“realizing that it is an expression of self, and should turn resolutely away from all devices that are popularly believed to indicate style—all mannerism, tricks, adornments. The approach to style is by way of plainness, simplicity, orderliness, sincerity” (p.69).

In his recent book, *A Sense of Style*, psycholinguist Steven Pinker (2014) dismissed the advice advanced by prominent editors and authors such as Strunk and White and Orwell as misguided folklore. Pinker replaced their suppositional and ideological understanding of good writing with one grounded in cognitive science. Namely, he argued research in working memory explains why certain stylistic formulas work better than others in creating cohesion (e.g., the principle of organizing paragraphs following patterns of old/new information). Pinker has employed, somewhat adventurously, terms such as “reverse engineering” (p. 11) to describe his unique approach to reading, analyzing, and emulating good writing and to note the ontological implications of good writing on the reader. “Good writing,” Pinker argued, “can flip the way the world is perceived” (p.14). Unlike Payne, Strunk and White, or Orwell, Pinker claimed his book is not for “badly educated students who have yet to master the mechanics of a sentence” (p. 7), but for informed, curious intellects who are already strong writers and who seek answers to nagging style questions from scientifically driven explanations. Employing the concept of reverse engineering to their manuscripts, white papers, or proposals, the ‘intelligent writer’, according to Pinker, recognizes a priori that style is less of Payne’s lively art and more of Pinker’s hard science.

Despite the paradigm shift, the stylist’s message remains unmistakable: Bad writing is the absence of self-restraint and reflects a mind that is sloppy and incapable of involved thought and a character that is immoral, lazy, and untrustworthy. As Milroy (1999) noted, these ideas once written down, published, and circulated have become part of the standard myth of right ways to write: “Whatever the education or social status, people will generally claim to share the overt
perspective attitudes that are enshrined in the handbook in the belief that these constitute ‘common’ sense and are desirable” (p. 22). Whether writers are influenced by Strunk and White’s Calvinist homily of clean prose reflecting a clean mind, or Pinker’s lecture of clean prose reflecting a scientific mind, their desire to be taken as legitimate and credible depends on their ability to write in such a way as to be perceived as sober, rational, and skeptical thinkers. Looking at good writing, style, or voice from a cognitive science perspective has the hope of displacing monolingual ideologies of social and linguistic conformity, but it does not remove the stigma society associates with alternative voices or discourses—sadly, it may just end up pathologizing them. Further, if style, for example, operates exclusively in the brain, important questions about how writing mediates language and power in society can no longer be asked. The stakes are high. To fail to follow standard conventions of written English is not simply a matter of making a mistake, but rather reflects on a writer’s competency and value as a human being. Iconic stylists such as Payne, Orwell, Strunk and White, and Pinker tell struggling writers, like Acer, Lala, Hodan, and K-9, and every other student studying in the basement of the church, that they are poorly educated and that their faulty prose is the result either of an innate bad character or weak irrational thinking.

If writing reflects the qualities of the writer, as Strunk and White believe, what does voice reflect if not a manifestation of those qualities? As a writing teacher, I have never assumed that people know what a writer’s voice means, or that they believe it even exists. I do believe, however, most people assume writing carries with it the intentions, experiences, and perspectives of the writer, qualities people might associate with a writer’s voice. While many popular books on writing style talk about voice (Clark, 2006; Edgerton, 2003; Kidder & Todd, 2013; Sword, 2012; Zinsser, 2006), it appears that voice has not made the shift from an art to a science in the same way style has.
The problem with voice is that despite concerted, systematic attempts in high school curricula, in writing classroom assessment rubrics, and composition textbooks to teach students to develop a discernable and assessable voice, educators, policy makers, or scholars still do not have a clear, agreed upon, or shared understanding of what voice means (Elbow, 2007; Petric, 2010), nor do they appear to be aware of what voice means to those working directly with it: students who are expected to demonstrate voice in their writing and teachers and tutors who must teach it. Thinking about voice required me to reflect more on how it has been conceptualized, defined, and presented in classrooms and in curricula. The following section addresses the conceptually inadequate and contradictory ways voice has been discussed and represented.

The Culture of Voice: Misunderstanding the Big Picture

As an art, voice sells. Teaching materials and textbooks market voice as an essential trait to good writing (e.g., Culham, 2005; Dean, 2000, 2006). Educational policy makers include voice among the broader desired learning outcomes for both primary and secondary students, feature it along with grammar and spelling in classroom writing assignment rubrics, and list it as a criterion of assessment in high-stakes writing exams. Voice features in most standard school writing curricula in the U.S. (Matsuda & Jeffery, 2012) as well as Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a). Voice seems ubiquitous and gives teachers and students alike the idea that all writers are unique, exceptional, and exclusive.

In North America, there is an assumption students have an inner voice that they need to discover, cultivate, and express (Elbow, 1981). Students are taught from an early age that they are individuals—that they are special and unique and different. In school, this message is reinforced in the stories and books they read and in the essays, poems, and reports they write. Once while visiting a primary school writing classroom in Toronto, I noticed six laminated
posters tacked up on a bulletin board broadcasting Culham’s (2005) six+1 traits of good writing: Ideas, Organization, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, Conventions, Presentation, and Voice. In one corner of the bulletin board, tucked behind a plume of peacock feathers, a cartoon pencil, with megaphone in hand, shouts the four questions peer readers must ask themselves to determine the strength, quality, and intensity of a writer’s voice: “Does the writer clearly express his or her thoughts?” “Is the writer’s point of view clear?” “Does the writing address its audience?” and “Has the writer added a unique personal touch to the piece?” (see Figure 1.2). The questions guide students, reminding them each day that as readers they have the right to expect clear, authentic prose and warning them as writers of their obligations to their readers.

Figure 1.2. Voice poster from an Ontario classroom
Looking at the bulletin board, I wondered if the students I observed engaging in peer-feedback saw voice to be equally as important as content, organization, grammar, spelling, and punctuation. I imagined that just as the students checked their sentences for subject verb agreement, they cultivated voice by checking for clarity and point of view. Breeching any of these traits likely brings censure from classmates and lowered marks and warnings to do better from teachers. Being told your writing lacks a voice—that it lacks you—would likely produce confusion and distress in the same way being told you spell poorly or write ungrammatically produces shame, embarrassment, and humiliation. To lack voice is to be weak, vulnerable, and at risk.

**Voice: Multiple Definitions, Contradictory Applications**

Writing scholars, writers, and educational policy makers have tried to define voice in countless ways; these definitions often contradict each other and contrast with how voice is conceptualized in school policies and curricula. Below, I present a few of the better-known definitions drawn from literature, literacy, L1 composition, and L2 writing. Definitions are presented chronologically, rather than by importance. In contrast to how voice has been conceptualized among writing scholars, I have also included the Ontario Ministry of Education’s definition of voice as an example of how Ontario policy makers and educators understand this illusive concept.

**Literature Studies:**

“The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accents, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 293).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Composition</td>
<td>“Voice in writing implies words that capture the sound of an individual on the page” (Elbow, 1981, p. 287).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2 Writing</td>
<td>“The amalgamative effect of the use of discursive and non-discursive features that language users choose, deliberately or otherwise, from socially available yet ever-changing repertoires” (Matsuda, 2001, p. 41).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Studies</td>
<td>“Voice is a language performance—always social, mediated by experience, and culturally embedded” (Sperling &amp; Appleman, 2011, p. 71).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario Ministry of Education</td>
<td>“The style or character of a piece of writing conveyed through the author’s use of vocabulary, sentence structure, imagery, rhythm, and other elements that contribute to the mood of the piece as a whole” (Ontario Ministry of Education: Ontario Curriculum for Grades 11 and 12: English, 2007b, p. 120).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among all these definitions the author or writer figures prominently while the reader, oddly enough, is largely implied. In his analysis of voice in L2 writing, Atkinson (2001) observed, “voice—to the degree that it really is a useful concept in the teaching of writing at all […]—is if anything at least co-owned” (p. 121), a concept that belongs to both the writer and the reader. Where the idea of co-ownership seems to run afoul is in how voice is operationalized for high school students in writing assessment rubrics. As I have noted elsewhere (Kohls, 2013), for each grade in the writing strand of the Ontario English Curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education,
2007b), voice is defined in different ways and varies according to the student’s future academic trajectory: workplace, college, or university (see Table 1.1 for Grade 12). For example, students in Grade 12 who are planning on going to university are required to write with “a distinctive and original voice, modifying language and tone skillfully and effectively to suit the form, audience, and purpose for writing” (p. 101). Conversely, Grade 12 students who are planning to go to college are required to write with just “a distinctive voice, modifying language and tone skillfully and effectively to suit the form, audience, and purpose for writing” (p.119). Finally, Grade 12 students who are planning to join the workforce after high school are simply asked to write with a “distinctive voice, modifying language and tone skillfully to suit the form, audience, and purpose for writing” (p.136). Unlike their university and college bound peers, students joining the workforce are not expected to write “effectively,” but just “skillfully.” Interestingly, the category “identifiable” does not apply to Grade 12 students. It applies to all students in Grade 9, but only to certain students in Grades 10 and 11. The difference between an “identifiable,” original,” and “distinctive” voice remains a mystery, as does language use that is “skillful” and “effective.” Why a student would be asked to write skillfully, but not effectively remains as mysterious as asking a student to write with a distinctive voice but not with an original or identifiable one.

Table 1.1
*Writing with Voice for Grade 12* (Kohls, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 12</th>
<th>Voice</th>
<th>Language use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifiable</td>
<td>Distinctive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Preparation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Preparation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Preparation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The degree to which a writer’s voice is identifiable, distinctive, or original as well as skillful and effective in language use also varies in Grades 9, 10, and 11 (for further discussion see Kohls, 2013). While the definition of voice is applied to L1 and L2 writers, the operationalization of voice only applies to L1 writers, or those writers not considered English Language Learners (ELLs). It would seem that L2 writers have no voice.

Elbow might be right that voice is alive in classrooms, in rubrics, and curricula and that it appears to be widely celebrated across institutions, but it stands out as one of the most poorly defined, arbitrary, and least understood concepts among writing scholars, writers, and educational policy makers. If there is this much confusion and tension among experts about a writer’s voice, what do non-experts—tutors and students—believe about this concept? I wanted to know.

**Research Questions**

Cumming (1998) proposed that any theoretical approach to research on L2 writing research needs to look at “what particular teachers and students, do, think and accomplish in and through writing in relation to the settings in which they live” (p. 62). I believe to understand good writing and a writer’s voice, and what it means to those learning how to write and to those who teach them, researchers must go to the sites where writing happens, speak with novice writers, and observe how they interact with texts, generate ideas, and compose their thoughts. It also requires talking to those who are teaching them to write, discovering what their beliefs are about writing, teaching, and learning.

My driving ambition in this thesis is to learn where attitudes, values, and beliefs about good writing and voice come from and why those beliefs appear to have become so natural to so many. If my experience teaching writing taught me anything it was that language socializes novice writers into valuing the power and importance and permanence of writing; and in turn
learning to write socializes students into valuing the permanence, power, and recognition that comes from advancing a standard language. The students and volunteer tutors in the Pathways program provided a unique glimpse into understanding how these concepts are understood by those who are often overlooked.

My initial question asked how these volunteer tutors helped students develop voice in their academic writing. Asking this question also meant asking about the tutors’ attitudes towards good writing and voice, their approach to feedback, and the possible effect of the literacy program or the location (the basement of a church) on their approach towards feedback, if any.

Over the course of data collection and analysis, I refined my questions into three central questions that took into account beliefs, attitudes, and reactions to writing and tutoring:

1. What do tutors and their students believe about good writing and a writer’s voice?
2. How do tutors conceptualize their identities, purposes, and actions in responding to students’ writing and voice in this context?
3. In what ways do students see their tutoring sessions contributing to their overall development as writers?

Based on my previous experience tutoring in the program and collecting data as a graduate research assistant for the ALTUR project, I knew I needed a robust method that aligned with a qualitative, interpretivist orientation to research (Mason, 2009; J. Willis, 2007) and that would best represent the unique setting of the church basement and diversity of the tutors and students. Taking an ethnographic case study approach (Duff, 2007a) allowed me to represent the neighborhood and church, document the writing practices underway in the tutorials, conduct multiple interviews over time, and reflect on my observations. To interpret the data, I needed a complex framework to make sense of the emergent findings that involve beliefs, values, and attitudes towards language, culture, and identity in an ad hoc academic setting among volunteers.
and students. Language socialization theory (Duff, 1995; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Séror, 2008, 2009) provided the most conceptually nuanced framework to understand the complex process of how writing and discussions about learning how to write socializes individuals into becoming members of a new community and how those individuals and communities change in the process. The theory is enriched both by the metaphor of linguistic and cultural apprenticeship drawn from legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and by Bourdieu’s (1991) idea of symbolic capital in which access to and knowledge of complex linguistic and literacy resources produces and reifies forms of power. Combined, these frameworks provided a robust lens to understand and reflect on the significance of my findings.

**Organization**

I organized this thesis into seven chapters. Each chapter begins with a brief introduction, which establishes the purpose, scope, and major themes presented, then ends with a brief summary identifying the salient points presented and links those points to themes in the next chapter. Chapter 2 introduces language socialization theory, reviews studies on language socialization in L2 writing, and presents theoretical and empirical perspectives on good writing and a writer’s voice. Chapter 3 includes my rationale for using an ethnographic case study approach and how I used it to collect, analyze, and write up my data. In Chapters 4 and 5 are my case studies. Each case introduces the participants and outlines their beliefs about writing and a writer’s voice and highlights aspects from their tutoring sessions together and recommendations for working with future tutors. In Chapter 6, I present my findings about good writing and a writer’s voice drawn from across all four cases and among the nine participants. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes with a discussion of the findings and identifies the implications for writing studies, writing teachers, and pedagogical approaches to teaching writing and developing voice.
Chapter 2

Theoretical Perspectives on Second Language Socialization, Good Writing, and Voice

This chapter introduces relevant theoretical and empirical scholarship on L2 socialization theory, good writing, and voice. Recurrent themes of individualism, self-reliance as well as legitimacy, authenticity, and morality provide a lens through which to understand the case studies presented later in the thesis (in Chapters 4 and 5) and to interpret the findings, discussion and implications (in Chapters 6 and 7). No prior L2 writing scholarship (that I am aware of) has looked at good writing and voice from the perspective of linguistic anthropology. I believe that L2 language socialization theory provides a fresh way to conceptualize tutors’ and students’ beliefs, attitudes, and values about good writing and voice as part of the process of academic discourse socialization while highlighting the role that language ideology plays in that process.

The Promise of L2 Socialization Theory:
A Compelling Framework for Understanding L2 Writing, Writers, and Writing Processes

The social-turn in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory (Firth & Wagner, 1997) significantly advanced researchers’ understanding of language development by theorizing language learning beyond the isolated internal mental processes of a language learner (Ellis, 1994) to one that acknowledges the complex social nature of language learning, recognizing the effect that context, culture, ideologies, resources, experts, and novices have on the development of language learners and language learning. A socioculturally oriented epistemology (Vygotsky, 1980, 1986) rooted in developmental psychology has introduced compelling new approaches to understanding the psychosocial nature of first (Wertsch, 1991, 1998) and second language acquisition (Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Lantolf & Poehner, 2014; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000) by reconceptualizing language learning as a complex dialectical activity between experts and
novices emergent through a process of mediation, interaction, and internalization (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Coterminous with sociocultural theory (SCT) are pioneering social theories of language learning that include diverse, complex, and rigorous theoretical orientations that represent second language learning from nuanced perspectives. These social theories of language learning have been enriched by feminist poststructuralist theory to understand learner identity (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000, 2013); complexity theory from the physical and natural sciences to understand the changing adaptive nature of learning (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008); ethnomethodology and conversation analysis to trace learning through verbal interaction (Kasper & Wagner, 2011); and theories drawn from linguistic anthropology to understand the social, yet unpredictable and transformative, nature of language and its users, a theory applied linguists refer to as (second) language socialization (Duff, 2007b; Duff & Talmy, 2011).

**What are the Assumptions behind L2 Socialization Theory?**

L2 socialization is defined as “a broad framework for understanding the development of linguistic, cultural, and communicative competence through interaction with others who are more knowledgeable or proficient” (Duff & Talmy, 2011, p. 95). It shares many of the same assumptions about the nature of language learning with sociocultural theory. Both recognize language learning as social and emphasize the ecological or situated orientation toward learning, the learning environment, and the learner (Kramsch, 2002). Both acknowledge the roles of experts and novices in the learning process and recognize cognitive development as part of the learning process. While SCT aligns itself more with research in human consciousness and psycholinguistics (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014) research in L2 language socialization emphasizes socialization as a cultural process (Baquedano-Lopez & Kattan, 2008) by stressing how
“interactions—taken collectively, not in isolated stances—shape the developmental trajectories of individuals, how they fit into larger systems of cultural meaning and practice, and how they are reproduced and transformed over the course of time” (Garrett, 2008, p. 189). These interactions “project historically contingent dispositions” (Baquedano-Lopez & Kattan, p. 161) that Kulick and Schieffelin (2004) identified as a form of habitus, or ways of being and acting in the world (Bourdieu, 1991; Gee, 2008).

Lastly, L2 socialization theory recognizes the complex role of apprenticeship into group membership, stresses the contingency or bidirectionality of apprenticeship between expert and novice (Duff & Talmy, 2011), acknowledges that socialization is not a linear (or even a guaranteed) process, and takes a constructivist and ethnographic orientation to studying and analyzing second language development (Duff, 2007b). As a lens to understanding multilingual writers and writing development, L2 language socialization theory is well equipped to provide a useful framework and method for describing how writing, conversations about writing, and those learning how to write as well as those teaching them adapt or resist values, beliefs, and practices inherent in larger cultural, political, and ideological bodies.

The Ethnographic Origins of L2 Socialization Theory

To appreciate the richness of L2 socialization theory, it is important to recognize the pioneering fieldwork of linguistic anthropologists Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) in the formation of L1 socialization. Ochs and Schieffelin believed that the social function of language was to impart, receive, and process cultural knowledge of the world. In their three developmental stories of caretaking practices among mothers in Samoa, Papua New Guinea, and white middle class mothers in the United States, Ochs and Schieffelin found children were largely socialized into culturally and situationally appropriate ways of communicating, interacting, and behaving in the
community. For example, Western Samoan mothers rarely addressed their infants directly and refrained from modifying their speech to produce “baby-talk,” a common practice observed among white middle class mothers in the U.S. Heath (1991) made a similar observation. In her reflection on her own ethnographic work among working and middle class families in the Carolinas, Heath noted that white middle class American mothers see their newborns “as individuals and orient them to see themselves as individuals who have the right and obligations to voice their judgments against those of others, as long as they respect the rules and roles in doing so” (p. 12).

Ochs and Schieffelin also stressed that the onus was on the young Samoan child to adapt to the situation and speech of interlocutors, and not the other way around. In comparison, they reported that white middle class mothers maintained eye contact with the infant, taking the child’s perspective on situations, modifying speech directed to the child, and making assumptions about what the child was thinking or communicating to meet their needs. Ochs and Schieffelin (2001) noted, “the process of language acquisition is part of the larger process of socialization, this is acquiring social competence” (p. 292). They argued that these micro, or moment-to-moment instances of interacting reflected macro ideologies about the values, attitudes, expectations, and beliefs of the parents and the greater community, which are key features of socialization theory (Kulick & Schieffelin, 2004; Riley, 2010).

Influenced by Sapir’s belief in the socializing effect of language, Ochs and Schieffelin (2008) conceptualized language socialization as “socialization through language and socialization into language” (p. 5) whereby learning a language entails acquiring knowledge about culture and learning how culture organizes reality through language. In a move to emphasize the dialectic nature of this premise, Watson-Gegeo and Nielson (2003) improved on Ochs and Schieffelin’s definition by reframing it as “linguistic and cultural knowledge are constructed through each
other, and that language-acquiring children or adults are active and selective agents in both processes” (p.157). Fundamental to language socialization is the premise that learning a language and adopting the shared values, beliefs, attitudes of a culture, society or group through language is ongoing throughout life (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2014) and that an individual’s identity as either a seasoned member or novice is contingent on the groups, communities, and institutions into which membership is sought. Seen as a learning process involving novices who are apprenticing into ways of behaving, thinking, and doing, language socialization represents a social practice and a situated activity (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in which learning is connected to and influenced by the context (a particular community, space, or circumstances).

Traditionally, this practice implies a process of becoming a full participant or member in that community by developing relevant or situated kinds of knowledge, skill, and expertise valued by that community and instilled, exhibited, or demonstrated by experts or “old-timers.” This concept of cultural apprenticeship, better known as Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LLP), advances the transformational nature of participation between novice and expert that is a key characteristic that distinguishes LLP from views of learning as only an outcome of internalization (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Watson-Gegeo, 2004). In other words, the “relational interdependency of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning, and knowing” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 50) characterizes any form of social practice. It is important to note, however, that while LS draws on LLP, it does not limit or reduce learning to unidirectional interactions from old-timer to newcomer. Rather, for LS theory, interaction can be reciprocal, and novices can school experts (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2008) especially in technology (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2014). Unfortunately, aside from conjecture, L1 language socialization theory has done little to explore reciprocal or bidirectional learning between expert and novice (Garrett, 2008).
Another important influence in LS theory is the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his idea of “habitus,” those socially, culturally, and historically acquired dispositions (Bourdieu & Passseron 1990) that reflect power, status, and social class. While recognizing that context is not without differences, Kulick and Schieffelin (2004) asserted that language socialization is both a theory and method to conceptualize habitus, or a way to understand how individuals come to know how to act in the world (thinking, interacting, positioning, expecting, behaving) and how those actions and interactions shape an individual’s place in the community over time to “becoming a culturally intelligible subject” (p. 351; emphasis mine). Vital to language socialization is the role of the “bad subject,” a metaphor of the transgressive subject adopted from Althusser (1971). Bad subjects describe those novices who fail to act or resist taking up subject positions that experts or more seasoned members of the community want them to. Kulick and Schieffelin documented the creation of bad subjects in the socialization of Kaluli by Protestant Christian missionaries in 1970s. The Kaluli’s traditional practice of privacy and keeping their thoughts to themselves was challenged by the traditional Christian practices of public prayer and confession before witnesses. Resisting these acts created a social rift. “Traditional forms of subjection were explicitly devalued and resolutely replaced with different forms of knowledge, experience, and language. And in producing new, ‘good’ subjects, these missionary practices simultaneously actively materialized new, ‘bad subjects’” (p. 364).

Becoming a “good subject” is embedded in public recognition of an erstwhile novice as a legitimate member of a community and someone with cultural and symbolic capital. In his forward to Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation, Hanks (1991) noted, “the challenge for a community that seeks to reproduce itself would be to regiment the interaction in which learning is likely to occur, as well as the outcomes to which it may lead” (in Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.19). Kulick and Schieffelin noted that the missionaries were not successful at
producing their culture, or habitus; rather they changed a community, caused fracture, and disruption.

**What Makes L2 Socialization Distinctive from L1 Socialization?**

While L2 socialization theory draws on the theoretical orientation of L1 socialization—micro instances of interaction, the reciprocal nature of instruction, feedback or correction reflect larger macro social beliefs, practices, and policies, and long-term ethnographic data—it distinguishes itself from L1 socialization in three important ways (Duff, 2007b; Duff & Talmy, 2011). First, whereas L1 socialization is concerned largely with monolingual children, L2 socialization explores both bilingual and multilingual children, adolescents, and adults who already speak and have cultural knowledge of one or more languages. Second, L1 socialization usually results in full acceptance of the learner or novice into the community, while L2 socialization theory recognizes that limited or partial acceptance is common among language learners (Norton-Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). Third, while L1 socialization has tended to foreground novice socialization, studies in L2 socialization have often stressed more the complex, reciprocal nature of teaching and learning between so-called experts and novices (Duff, 1995, 1996, 2010; Duff & Talmy, 2011; Morita, 2004; Rymes, 2003a, 2003b; Talmy, 2008).

The premises behind language socialization theory provide a useful lens through which to understand beliefs about writing and the attitudes that can shape interactions between more experienced writers (tutors) and those with less experience (students). In the next section, I will introduce the important empirical work on academic socialization in educational settings that foregrounds the characteristics of accommodation, resistance, and bidirectionality. These characteristics play a critical role in developing forms of symbolic capital, legitimacy, and morality in ideas of good writing and voice.
L2 Socialization in Classroom Contexts

Although no scholarship (that I am aware of) has looked at language socialization in afterschool tutoring programs, ethnographic and case study research has explored how students are socialized into academic discourses in various other educational contexts. In her study of teacher and student interaction in two introductory English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, Poole (1992) argued that sociocultural practices were inherent in classroom interactions. Similar to findings about L1 socialization (Heath, 1983; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984), Poole observed that white middle class American ESL teachers engaged in a form of cultural practice that supported students’ language development. The two female teachers in her study used teacher-talk to accommodate students’ limited proficiency, scaffolded language, gave students full credit for accomplishing tasks even when helped, and downplayed differences in power by inviting the students to call their teachers by their first name.

This “ideology of accommodation” (Duff, 2014) contrasts with Byon’s (2006) study of Korean foreign language teachers in the U.S. Byon observed that unlike Poole’s American teachers, Korean teachers sought to distance and differentiate themselves from students by introducing and reinforcing forms of Korean honorifics, linguistic markers that distinguish a speaker’s rank and reflect a hierarchical social practice of Korean culture. Although Byon’s data set was limited to six observations over the course of a year and did not include any interviews with teachers or students, his findings underscore different approaches teachers adopt when teaching. In a similar study, He (2000) looked at heritage language learners of Chinese in the United States. He discovered that teachers endeavored to bring about a cultural consciousness that reinforced notions of heritage, ethnicity, and national origin in classroom interactions.

The concept of the “bad” or resistant subject (Kulick & Schieffelin, 2004) has been documented in language socialization studies of adolescent learners who resisted instruction and
failed to conform to standard classroom practices. For example, Wortham (2005) observed how Tyisha, an African-American high school student, who, despite a widespread school belief that as a girl she would outperform her male classmates, resisted instruction and became characterized by teachers as a problem student. Tyisha contradicted her teachers, did not pay attention, and made random and tangential contributions to the frustration of her teachers and classmates. The language her teachers used to socialize Tyisha had the opposite effect of compliance to the teacher’s authority. One of the limitations of this potentially important study is the absence of interviews with Tyisha or her parents to understand her perspective or whether she was even aware of how her teachers viewed her over the course of the term. Similar to Wortham (2005), Cole and Zuengler (2003) looked at how teachers constructed their own and their students’ identities in a science project in a high school biology class with Latino students. At various points in the project students aligned with or resisted the scientific identities expected of them by teachers or outside institutions. Students created a range of identities during the process of a science project: good and bad student, scientist-researcher, high school identity, and a child laborer identity.

To demonstrate how schools reproduce social inequalities, Solis, Katten, and Baquedano-Lopez (2009) critiqued a new teacher education manual and its implementation in a Grade 3 classroom. Drawing on critical discourse analysis and classroom observation, they discovered how the manual and the teacher’s application of the manual actually promoted traditional institutional hierarchies rather than autonomous and egalitarian forms of learning. The researchers noted how language was used to socialize students into obeying, behaving, and respecting the teacher’s authority.

Resistance among adolescents has been documented in classrooms in which expert and novice roles reversed in contexts in which English is a foreign language (EFL) (Duff, 1995,
1996) as well as a second, dominant language in society (ESL) (Talmy, 2008, 2009). In her ethnography of an English immersion classrooms in Hungary, Duff explored how larger political, ideological, and cultural shifts were taken up in practices and approaches to EFL education among Hungarian high school teachers and students. Duff observed Hungarian students openly challenging their teacher by correcting her English and content knowledge, a change of classroom behavior that Friedman (2010b) noted had been documented in related studies of former Soviet bloc high school classrooms in transition (e.g., Vogel, 2008). While this incident might be isolated, it does suggest changes in students’ expectations of teachers’ knowledge and their apparent entitlement to vocalize them. Similarly, the reversal of expert and novice roles were also observed in language classrooms in the U.S. Observing three ESL classrooms at one high school in Hawaii, Talmy (2008) described how ESL students who had been in the program for several years resisted new classroom policies and requirements for testing and homework by the new ESL teachers. As “old timers,” the ESL students constructed their new teachers as novices to the school and to their classroom. By resisting deadlines and negotiating extensions on homework assignments, the students initiated teachers into the classroom culture. This reversal of veteran and novice demonstrates how roles are often situated and underscores the bidirectionality of learning between expert and novice. While new teachers accommodated students, expert teachers resisted (Talmy, 2008), and in one case (Talmy, 2009), a veteran teacher resorted to humiliation rather than accommodation to keep one student compliant and to create a classroom atmosphere of discipline and obedience. How writing teachers identify and the degree to which they are socialized into those identities is what I turn to next.
Socialization and L2 Writing Teacher Identity

While research has investigated how students are socialized into writing (e.g., Rockwell, 2012; Séror, 2008) and the various identities they take up in the process (Casanave, 2002; Ivanič, 1998), little research has looked at how writing teachers are socialized into their roles or how they develop a professional identity as L2 writing teachers. Investigating how writing teachers develop these identities from the perspective of language socialization provides important information about how beliefs and behaviors about language shape attitudes about writing and writing instruction and how these attitudes are passed not only from teacher to student, but also from student to teacher (Duff 2007a, 2008a).

Identity construction in applied linguistics has largely been accepted as multiple, fluid, and contradictory (Block, 2007; Hall, 2006; Norton Pierce, 1995; Norton, 2000). A review of research on teacher identity reported that, among other things, teachers’ identities are constantly forming and changing; they are shaped by context and culture, influenced by other aspects or characteristics of self, and defined through investment to students and to the profession (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2003). Ochs (1993) introduced the concept of “social identity” to refer to “the range of social personae, including social statuses, roles, positions, relationships, and institutional and other relevant community identities one may attempt to claim or assign in the course of social life […] and in which] linguistic construction at all levels of grammar and discourse are crucial indicators of social identity for members as they regularly interact with each other” (p. 288). Entering new and unfamiliar space requires individuals to draw on various parts of their life experience to perform. In her study of volunteer tutors in an adult literacy program, Belzer (2006) noted that tutors needed to draw extensively on various areas and parts of their lives outside of tutoring to be able to tutor effectively:
Tutors reported drawing on their instincts, previous experiences with learning, and their own creativity. In other words, their own resources were called into play when the training failed [...] to provide practical strategies for instruction. (p. 570)

In peer tutoring situations, tutors are sometimes positioned as language experts and asked to take on the role of an editor and fix the text. Taking on an editor role over a non-specialist tutor role is largely discouraged because pedagogically-informed writing practice supports a process approach to working with students including connecting, listening, questioning, and guiding over a product oriented regime of correcting, appropriating, and dictating (Gillespie & Lerner, 2004).

Most research in language socialization has focused on the development of novice and not expert identities. A few studies drawing on L2 socialization, however, have looked at the bidirectional nature of experts who struggle to take up new identities when they appear unknowledgeable or face resistance (see Duff, 1995; Talmy, 2008). Further, growing research in language teacher identity (Cheung, Said, & Park, 2015) has foregrounded emotions (Reis, 2015), race and gender in EFL contexts (Nagatomo, 2015), and conceptions of legitimacy (Zhang & Zhang, 2015), among other issues. Legitimacy is a prominent theme in both ESL and EFL teacher identity. For example, in their case study of two pre-service ESL teachers, Kanno and Stuart (2011) reported that pre-service ESL teachers struggled to see themselves as legitimate language teachers and not simply as students acting as teachers. Accounts of insecurity, lack of confidence, and student resistance shaped this early period of research on pre-service teacher identity development. Researchers noted that with time, preparation, and feedback, pre-service teachers grew in confidence and were able to navigate the shifting and uncertain nature of language teaching. In their ethnography, Duff and Uchida (1997) investigated how the sociocultural identities of four EFL teachers influenced the teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, and values.
towards classroom instruction and how their identities as teachers were in turn challenged by the cultural and institutional context in which they were teaching.

Despite growing scholarship in language teacher identity, research on L2 writing teacher identity remains understudied (Hirvela & Belcher, 2007; Racelis & Matsuda, 2015). Pioneering work by Shi and Cumming (1995) reported that the experienced ESL teachers they interviewed were largely disposed toward writing that reflected standard practices such as process writing, reader-centered texts, and one-to-one writing conferences with the instructor. Unlike the novice teachers in Kanno and Stuart’s study, these seasoned ESL teachers saw their pedagogical approaches as reflecting how they saw themselves as teachers, that is, as confident writing coaches or facilitators.

Research on L2 writing teacher identity in EFL contexts has given further support to the importance of teacher training in writing theory and pedagogy. In her case study of four EFL high school teachers in Hong Kong, Lee (2013) showed that pre-service writing teachers shifted from seeing themselves as general language teachers to writing teachers who appreciated the critical connection between extensive reading and better writing and who gained a more nuanced and informed understanding of writing theory and its pedagogical implication (e.g., teaching writing vs. teaching writing through grammar). Casanave (2009) noted that Japanese EFL teachers looked to writing practices that were situated into the Japanese cultural context. Teachers questioned the practicality of Western-oriented communicative approaches to teaching writing in contexts in which class size made extensive feedback and conferencing unfeasible and a rigorous testing culture made expository writing impractical.

In a recent study of L2 writing teacher identity, Racelis and Matsuda (2015) reported that writing teachers self-identified in interviews as one of three kinds of writing teachers (general writing teacher, language teacher, and L2 writing teacher) based on their classroom practices,
and educational backgrounds, and program affiliations (e.g., PhDs in Literature, Rhetoric and Composition, or Linguistics). While all experienced multilingual writing teachers chose readings that were culturally balanced, those instructors who identified more as L2 writing teachers put more emphasis on developing ideas and the writing process and less on grammar and correctness. They valued the students’ writing regardless of errors and were aware of the struggles to write and make fewer cultural assumptions. In contrast to Lee’s (2013) findings, several of the teachers did not see language teaching and teaching writing as a source of conflict and felt well equipped to navigate those identities without difficulty. One of the more interesting findings involved the writing teacher with an English literature background. Despite years of teaching, she was a novice at teaching multilingual writers. Her experience with her class compelled her to change her pedagogical approach, for example, by selecting more culturally relevant textbooks and course readings. She also shifted her attitudes way from insisting on an English-only speaking environment.

While L2 writing teacher identity remains conspicuously absent in recent textbooks in how to develop L2 writing courses (e.g., Hinkel, 2015), textbooks for L1 writing specialists encourage L1 writing teachers to develop a writer-identity (Locke, 2015) and university writing tutors new ways to develop a tutor identity (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016) by encouraging tutors to reflect on their own writing processes and their own experiences as writers, tutors, and students. In all these studies, L2 writing teacher identities are seen to evolve over time, and teacher-training programs can support ESL or EFL writing teachers through training that is comprehensive and situated to writing contexts.

**L2 Socialization into Ways of Speaking**

Recent studies have looked at the role that language has played in creating a unified national identity. For example, teaching linguistic forms of respect and politeness reinforce the idea that
to belong to the language, nation, and people is to be polite (Howard, 2009) or retelling of national legends that draw on ethnicity, legend, and language create a transnational identity for immigrants (Baquedano-Lopez, 2000). Overt language correction has also been studied as a way to re-socialize students (back) into a national identity. For example, in her ethnographic study of two primary classrooms in Ukraine, Friedman (2010b) observed how Ukrainian language teachers systematically corrected their students whenever they used Russian loan words in their spoken Ukrainian and instead offered a more desirable Ukrainian alternative. Language policing as a form of nation building defined speech that was legitimate and accepted and speech that was foreign and rejected. Friedman observed,

> While serving the pedagogical goal of teaching children to speak Ukrainian ‘correctly,’

these practices were also socializing children into a particular understanding of what ‘speaking correctly’ means. As children participated in corrective feedback routines, whether by taking up a teacher’s replacement word, correcting themselves, or correcting classmates, they displayed allegiance to ideologically mediated standards of correctness that proscribe language mixing as a violation of the natural boundaries between languages, thereby reifying and naturalizing pure Ukrainian as the standard upon which all Ukrainian language practices can be evaluated. (p. 364)

In addition to work in language correction as means to reshape national identity, scholarship has also looked at what scholars know about oral academic discourse socialization in high school and universities settings in both EFL and ESL settings (e.g., Duff, 2007c, 2010, 2014). In addition to certain shifts in authority between teacher and student (Duff, 1995, 1996), Duff observed the changing attitudes and perspectives among teachers and students toward the *Felelés*, a longstanding classroom practice in Hungary of reciting the previous day’s lesson.

Changes in instructional materials and access to Western (or North American) ways of teaching
reframed the *Felelés* as useless and pedagogically unsound. Students instead learned how to prepare speeches, choose their own topics, do group work, and think critically.

Oral presentations as a means to academic socialization among international students in Canada have also been explored by Kobayashi (2006), Morita (2000), and Zappa-Hollman (2007). Unlike previous classroom research (Byon, 2006; Poole, 1992; Willett, 1995), these studies employed rigorous research methods that were long-term and included participant interviews and participant input. Their findings highlight how cultural or institutional attitudes and expectations are reflected in students’ preparation and response to the feedback they receive from professors and peers that shape their experiences.

In his study of Japanese ESL undergraduates at a Canadian university, Kobayashi (2006) documented students collaborating successfully on an oral presentation for a content-based ESL course. He discovered that the three focal students analyzed their experiences by integrating theory and personal reflection and by drawing on linguistic features such as pronouns that communicated personal stance (e.g., “I” or “we”) and verbs that showed commitment, attitude, and reflection. The students exhibited not only an understanding of the purpose of oral presentations but the language in which to deliver it, something that Kobayashi noted other groups with a similar experience and access to course materials failed to do.

In her eight-month ethnography of two graduate courses in second language education, Morita (2000) noted that graduate students drew on their identities as experienced language teachers when faced with the unfamiliar challenge of presenting a critique of empirical research as a seasoned researcher. Students learned from each other in the process by meeting and collaborating, speaking with the professor, and developing an authorial voice (or epistemic stance) towards the research.
In a similar study, Zappa-Hollman (2007) looked at how the practice of oral presentations socialized students into adopting stances respective to their discipline. She observed six graduate students from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds as they prepared, discussed, and delivered a critical analysis on a journal article. Common among her findings were speaking to satisfy expectations of professors and classmates, the ability to be concise and relevant, and importance of situating oneself in the research by including personal voice. Zappa-Hollman noted students exhibited moments of resistance to presentation requirements, although she did not provide any detailed examples of resistance except with one student who did not situate herself in her critical summary. Zappa-Hollman reported on the negative impact that lack of voice had for one student giving an oral presentation. She noted that the professor interrupted the student who was just summarizing the research, asking, “where is your voice?” reinforcing the point that authorial voice is as essential to speaking as it is to writing (Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Ivanič & Camps, 2001). While it was clear how the graduate students changed from the process (i.e., what they learned and adapted), it was not clear how the professor or other students in the class were transformed by the experience other than by showing sympathy.

**L2 Socialization into Ways of Writing**

A body of research targeting L2 writing socialization has grown over the past decade. Rockwell (2012) looked at appropriation of written French among 26, Grade 5 students in Paris. The teacher’s beliefs about students’ abilities to participate fully in French society depended on the extent to which they became proficient in spelling, grammar, and handwriting and exhibited rational thinking. In other words, Rockwell found that a skilled command of French augured membership into the French nation and culture.
Modest but compelling scholarship has begun to look seriously at writing practices among adolescent L2 writers from a language socialization perspective (Enright & Gilliland, 2011; Gilliland, 2014; Huang, 2004; Kibler, 2011). Huang (2004) looked at how adolescent L2 writers were socialized into scientific academic writing by observing how the teacher demonstrated ways of talking, writing, and critical thinking by modeling questions that taught students ways a scientist might look at a text and scaffolded tasks that involved peer feedback and using literacy resources (e.g., dictionaries and periodicals). Huang found that over the course of drafting, students integrated scientific language to describe, interpret, and explore. While Huang’s study is insightful, she noted she was both the teacher and the researcher, which reduced the credibility of the findings. Kibler (2011) looked at four students and their teachers in humanities and sciences courses to see how they negotiated content area writing expectations. Kibler learned that adolescent L2 writers’ knowledge of writing was a mismatch with those of their content area teachers, and so genre-based writing instruction would be necessary to support these students’ development. For example, teachers asked for concise writing when students did not know how to be more concise or they expected students to write like scientists, which made one student anxious to try out vocabulary that would make her appear to be someone other than herself.

Taking a broad prospective, Enright and Gilliland (2011) looked at how educational policies (i.e., No Child Left Behind) affected adolescent L2 writers in mainstream content-based courses in a California high school. The findings revealed that multilingual students were at the mercy of systematic compliance to meet writing standards. The authors reported that educational policies determined what topics students chose to write about rather than allowing them to write on topics of interest and relevance to them. Writing rubrics mediated students’ relationships to writing in conservative ways.
Finally, feedback and verbal commentary play pivotal roles in socializing students into academic writing. Séror (2008) looked at how professors positioned international students as nonnative writers in their feedback, a position that did little to help the students adopt the subject positions of university students they strove to acquire. In her study on adolescents in one-on-one writing conferences, Gilliand (2014) discovered that while two teachers’ verbal commentary (e.g., pausing, validating, scaffolding) during conferences can help support student academic socialization and development, lack of interaction can impede it (e.g., monopolize the conversation, not checking for comprehension, ignored students input). Teacher training that builds teachers’ awareness in providing careful commentary is needed as much as providing students with the linguistic resources to engage a teacher when needs are not being met.

While these empirically-based studies foregrounded the role of language in socializing students into their classroom environment and have suggested the role that accommodation, resistance, and reciprocity placed in those everyday situations, it is critical to acknowledge the role of ideology—or the beliefs, principles, and assumptions—that is often at the root of those actions (Duff & Talmy, 2011). This next section will speak directly to the theoretical underpinning of ideology in creating legitimate forms of speaking and writing that mediate so much of a writer’s everyday experiences with language.

1.2 Socialization and Language Ideologies

What constitutes legitimate forms of spoken and written language are rooted in prevailing cultural attitudes, beliefs, and values (Bex & Watts, 1999), or language ideologies, in which people are socialized to see certain forms as standard, correct, and valuable and others as non-standard, incorrect, and worthless. Such beliefs frame an individual’s sense of belonging to a community or national identity (Anderson, 2006; Billig, 1995) and evolve to structure a person’s
understanding of what it means to be a literate, productive citizen (Wan, 2014). These legitimate forms of language (i.e., standards) are theorized (Bourdieu, 1991, 1993; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) as symbolic (or linguistic) capital that reflects the status, class, power, education, and knowledge of the speaker or writer. Those who lack the right way of speaking or writing are ignored. As Bourdieu (1991) wrote, “speakers lacking the legitimate competence are de facto excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required, or are condemned to silence” (p. 55). In language socialization theory, language ideology is understood as “the moral and political dimension of beliefs individuals and groups hold about their language, how it should be used, and to what ends” (Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002, p. 169). In short, good speakers and writers make good, moral, upright citizens.

How language should be used is codified, circulated, and canonized (i.e., standardized) is largely decided by the written, not spoken, form and happens over time (Milroy, 1999). Writing as a ubiquitous, systemized form of language eclipses spoken language, flattens out its divergence (Lippi-Green, 2012), and becomes the primary means by which desirable language is sanctioned, legitimatized, and made public. Social class and institutions play an important role in sanctioning the written form and passing it down from one generation to the next. Cameron (2012) argued that people’s beliefs about language regulate its use and become normalized over time. She observed that “right” ways of writing and speaking index middle class beliefs on following standards, rules, and prescriptions. She argued that good writing in English is the product, and a reflection, of a deeply rooted belief in universal stability and uncorrupted lucidity. “To be unable to use Standard English or to use its spoken form in appropriate public context,” observed McCabe (1990), “is to be disenfranchised, to be deprived of citizenship (p. 11). Debates about nonstandard forms of English in the classroom have set off debates as to whether nonstandard dialects (e.g., Ebonics) should be used in the classroom (Baugh, 2000) and whether
or not students should be able to write (or integrate) their first languages in classroom writing assignments (Bean, et al., 2003) as first mandated under students’ rights to their own language by the committee on language policy for the Conference on College Composition and Communication (College Composition and Communication, 1974).

Success—a successful student, speaker, writer, or professional—is often defined as someone who can access the standard and use it effectively, and thereby reproducing standards and codifying notions of correctness provided by language manuals. Milroy and Milroy (2012) observed that standards are “accepted by influential people, and then diffused geographically and socially by various means (official papers, the educational system, the writing system, discrimination of various kinds, both direct and indirect, against non-standard speakers)” ([emphasis in original], p. 22). In his cultural account of the English language, Knowles (1997) argued that the push towards standardization started in the fourteenth century by those in power, the “schoolmasters, Anglicans, scholars, pedants, and gentleman” (p. 17), and continues to this day by educators, publishers, and policy makers. Then as now, “people’s intelligence, personality, and employability are often assessed by their linguistic conformity” (Knowles, 1997, p.17).

In sum, breeching accepted conventions of writing draws ire and suspicion—a break with a kind of social language contract—and calls into question someone’s behavior, character, and agreeability. Lang (1991) keenly observed that public outcry about the decline in writing in society is regarded as a decline in cultural values. Bad writing is evidence of waning morality and corruption in the individual and deterioration of values. Evidence of grammatical perturbation, Lippi-Green (2012) pointed out, abounds in the everyday letters to the editor of language pedants alerting readers when the rules have been violated. Strunk and White’s (2000) claim that style reflects the writer (i.e., who you are, is how you write) has found wide support.
“Corrections in punctuation and spelling,” Lang argued, “are simply disguises for moral education” (p.13). In short, beliefs about good writing—and those features commonly associated with them (e.g., grammar, spelling, punctuation, clarity, concision)—“are not self-evident truths about language but value judgments upon them” (Cameron, 2012, p. 76).

Writing teachers are often expected to enforce prescriptive language standards. McBee Orzuluk (2013) asserted that writing teacher education programs need to raise pre-service teachers’ awareness about language ideology prevalent in teachers’ attitudes, classroom pedagogy, and writing resources. She stressed that novice and in-service teachers need to develop a nuanced understanding of nonnative varieties of English and to avoid developing the deficit mentality toward nonstandard varieties of English.

In the next section, I will draw on these prevailing themes in language ideology to show how conceptions of good writing reflect deep-seated cultural values of legitimacy, morality, and authenticity as well as extra-textual identities of writers that are constructed as self-reliant, independent, and judicious in thought and writing.

**L2 Socialization and Attitudes towards Good Writing**

Socializing students into academic writing presupposes what good writing entails and what a writer needs to know and do to meet those assumptions. In his comments at the American Association of Applied Linguistics, 2015, Alan Hirvela recognized that L2 writing researchers know too little about what “good writing” is or what it means for adolescent L2 writers. Good writing under new policy initiatives, namely in the U.S., encourages scholars to look again at teachers’ and students’ assumptions about what makes a piece of writing successful (Hinkel, 2015). Twenty years ago, Li (1996) reported that composition researchers had advised against research on understanding good writing among teachers and students, as it was either intuitive
(Clark, 1980) or overly complicated to pin down (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982). And yet, to assess a piece of writing requires teachers, students, and raters to make certain assumptions about the characteristics of successful writing or at least to have expectations of what successful pieces of writing should reflect (Weigle, 2002). While some have pointed out that readers’ preferences are often subject to genre or disciplinary expectations of writing quality (Hyland, 2004, 2008; Swales, 1990; Tardy, 2009), others have argued that writing styles are often culturally situated (Connor, 2011). Teacher resource manuals such as 6+1 Traits of Writing (Culham, 2005) have identified good writing as a collection of traits including ideas, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, presentation, and voice. Commercially available style guides abound pronouncing the elements of good, successful writing to eager consumers that showcase various combinations of stylistics, including simple words, concise sentences, and coherent paragraphs (e.g., Clark, 2002; Glaser, 1999; Williams, 2005).

In his book, Style: An Anti-Textbook, Lanham (2007) asserted that good writing in North America (i.e., the U.S.) combines a pragmatic appeal for simple and direct expression and a puritanical aversion and distrust of any writing that evokes pleasure. He captured this orientation towards writing as,

American pragmatism insists that words are for use, not enjoyment; American Puritanism insists that expression is a duty, not a pleasure. We dislike learning foreign languages because such learning requires taking pleasure in words for themselves. Let all the world learn one language (English, lucky for us), so that we can do away with verbal misunderstandings and get down to brass tacks. (p.17)

Lanham poignantly observed, as have others (Wen, 2015), that good writing reflects responsible citizenship. Equating directness, clarity, and concision with a national character is something that McCool (2009), a writing teacher and contrastive rhetorician, teaches L2 writers in his book on
intercultural writing. He asserted that clarity along with directness and succinctness are uniquely Anglophone, as they form “the hallmark of good writing in native English speaking countries and cultures,” (McCool, 2009, p. 48) and that good writing through the pursuit of clarity, directness, and concision is a source of national pride and part of the national heritage.

With the rise of the nation state, the importance of promoting standard rules of grammar and spelling promoted not only national identity, but also ensured the text’s legitimacy in the absence of an actual author. Bowden (1999) noted that the importance of systematizing language has existed for centuries as a way to ensure the authenticity of legal documents: “Writing as a rule-governed form served a social function and was intended to be a manifestation of its human writers only for contractual obligations and in the preservation of social status and propriety. Texts carried authority by virtue of their adherence to correct form” (Bowden, 1999, p. 29).

Here, the authors’ authenticity became present in their adherence to correct usage. Bowden explained further that in the United States, language standardization and a discourse of dogged individualism produced a new national dictionary (e.g., Samuel Webster’s new dictionary of the American language) and in the assertive, self-possessed poetry of Emerson and Whitman.

**Empirical Studies of Good Writing in L2 Writing Research**

In L2 writing, research on good writing has been limited to three seminal studies: Leki (1995); Li (1996); and Reichelt (2003). These studies provide relevant accounts of how beliefs about good writing are largely situated, and no one universal idea of good writing exists—either among students or their teachers. The researchers reported that while teachers agree about sentence-level concerns (e.g., grammar, spelling, and vocabulary), they tend to read with different sets of expectations and to privilege certain characteristics of writing over others. For example, Leki (1995) offered the earliest account of attitudes, assumptions, and reactions about
good writing among undergraduate ESL students and their ESL and content area teachers in the U.S. Using a set of four ESL student essays, Leki asked students to rank the essays based on their own preferences, and then on the preferences of what they thought their teachers were looking for in a good piece of writing. Similarly, she asked the teachers to rank each of the four essays by quality of writing and to justify those rankings.

She learned that students largely failed to predict accurately what their ESL and content area teachers looked for in a piece of good writing. For example, while ESL students assumed that expressing their point of view was not valued in academic writing, their content area teachers saw it as a critical part of academic development. ESL writing teachers and content area teachers also varied in their own beliefs about good writing. Leki noted that while teachers might have agreed on the need for an essay to be organized, logical, and clear, they differed in how they identified these features and how they prioritized them. Leki stressed that good writing is largely confined to assumptions based on personal preference. “Although these groups,” she wrote, “may well be able to agree on certain criteria for ‘good writing’ and may even use the same words to describe those criteria, behind explicit standards of clear organization, appropriate vocabulary, effective introductions, and strong conclusions lie implicit understandings of those terms” (p. 40).

Implicit understandings are far from neutral and are ideology driven. The most comprehensive and perhaps best-known work on implicit understandings about good writing is Li’s (1996) qualitative study on Chinese and American high school composition teachers’ reactions towards adolescent writing. Li learned that good writing is “a splice of multiple linguistic and non-linguistic, cultural and historical strands; of what is written in a piece and the manner in which the piece is written; of ideology and aesthetic; of society and individuals” (p. 111). Not only do students and teachers bring their own values, preferences, and beliefs to
judging writing quality, but also their tastes are largely the result of “historical, social, and cultural forces that are beyond the individuals’ control and influence” (p. 3).

In her study, Li interviewed four writing teachers (two American and two Chinese) and asked them to rank and respond to six pieces of narrative writing (three essays written by American high school students and three essays written by Chinese high school students). Following this, she asked 45 Chinese and American writing teachers to respond to four (of the original six) personal narrative essays.

Similar to Leki, Li reported that while the teachers may look for certain characteristics, they defined and prioritized them differently. Although she warned against essentializing student writing as culturally fixed, she argued that culture, time, and location do influence reader values and expectations. “Forces of the language and society,” she argued, “manifested themselves prominently in shaping the concepts of ‘good writing’ in American and China” (p.112). Influenced by Confucian thought, poetry, Maoism, and Marxist dialectal materialism, Chinese teachers appeared to value writing that is more utilitarian: writing that benefits the social good over individual fulfillment. Conversely, American teachers, influenced by realism, pragmatism, and capitalism, foregrounded the need to develop the individual writer. The Chinese writing teachers in her study valued teaching rhetorical patterns, whereas American teachers valued less formulaic writing and more exploratory styles. The Chinese teachers saw learning an authentic voice as unimportant, whereas American teachers saw it as critical. Lastly, Chinese teachers valued conveying cultural knowledge from teacher to student, whereas American teachers preferred self-discovery.

Li reported that American writing teachers agreed on the need for writing to be credible, logical, and concrete. Writing also needed to explore the self and needed to “show and not tell” (i.e., to exemplify and not simply describe). Good writing for American writing teachers, she
noted, “is the exploration and expression of ‘self’” (p. 91). Li quoted Jane, one of the American teachers she interviewed, who explained the entire purpose of writing was to reflect the inner struggle of the individual: “It is very important for writers to deal with life, to reflect, to look into themselves and the meaning of their lives. That’s the whole purpose of writing as far as I am concerned” (p. 91).

Building on the approach taken by both Leki (1995) and Li (1996), Reichelt (2003) looked at good written English cross-culturally from the perspective of six high school German teachers of English and six English teachers in the U.S. Reichelt asked the teachers to read, rank, and respond to three essays written by Grade 9 students from the U.S. Unlike Leki and Li, however, Reichelt did not correct grammar, punctuation, spelling, or vocabulary. She found that while both sets of teachers agreed on the importance of grammar, lexicon, and reasoning skills, she observed that German teachers of English stressed more literary analysis in student writing than did the American teachers who stressed essay structure (introduction, body, conclusion), visibility of thesis statements, originality, and inventiveness. Drawing on Clyne’s (1987) study of cultural differences in U.S. and German academic writing, Reichelt argued that teachers have different sets of expectations that are largely culturally constructed between reader- and writer-centered texts. German teachers, seeing writing as reader-centered, permit ambiguity, whereas American teachers, stressing more writer-centered texts, foreground clarity, concision, and directness.

Lastly, while not specifically an example of an L2 writing class, Sperling and Freedman’s (1987) case study, “A Good Girl Writes Like a Good Girl,” made an important contribution to the connection between good writing and voice in a high school writing class. In their study, Sperling and Freedman observed feedback and revision process between a high school student and her writing teacher. They noted that the student dutifully corrected everything her writing
teacher pointed out, but failed to produce the kind of revisions her teacher expected of her because she fundamentally failed to understand her teacher’s belief that “writing well has to do with developing personal voice” (p. 358). The teacher believed that students should never blindly fix their teacher’s corrections, but rather come to voice by learning to decide what corrections or suggestions to accept and which to reject.

Looking across these studies, North American teachers all valued the writer’s textual presence through personal expression, point of view, unique contribution, or critical reflection on the revision process. The writer’s presence plays a central role in the quality of writing, as Stewart (1992) observed, “the fundamental quality of good writing was the presence of the individual writer, a presence made visible by what I choose to call an authentic voice” (p. 283). These expectations—both new and old—suggest an overall connection between good writing and the presence of a writer’s voice, which is where I turn next.

**L2 Socialization and Voice**

As I noted in Chapter 1, socialization into academic discourses involves not only learning about good writing skills, but also includes “developing one’s voice, identity, and agency in a new language/culture (Duff, 2007c, p.4). To find that academic identity (Cumming, 2013; Ivanič, 1998; Park, 2013) and develop the requisite voice and style successfully is a struggle for many writers, especially multilingual writers, and requires years of continuous effort (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Just as learning to write has been identified as instrumental in socializing graduate students into disciplinary discourse (Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Hyland, 2004; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Prior, 1998; Tardy, 2009) and the masses into becoming upstanding citizens (Lanham, 2007; Wan, 2014), developing voice in writing has been identified as central to producing students with a critical awareness of democracy (Easton, 2005; McHaney, 2004) and in helping
newcomers to connect with and share their pride in their distinctive identities as immigrants (Stewart, 2010).

In the most recent comprehensive treatment of voice in academic writing, Sancho Guinda and Hyland (2012) distinguished “voice” from “stance.” They described voice as something more associated with the humanities, as a marker of individual expression in a piece of writing. Stance, on the other hand, is more associated with the social sciences and reflects personal opinion, contribution, and self-mention. The key distinction is that voice is emergent (as it reflects a process) while stance is something that is realized or taken by the authors. Sancho Guinda and Hyland see voice and stance not just as text-based features of writing, but also as processes in which the writer engages the reader and facilitates meaning making. As my purpose is to investigate voice in adolescent writing, I have chosen largely to exclude studies on stance as 1) much of the writing research that investigates stance focuses on adult professional writers, not adolescent writers and 2) studies in language socialization or sociolinguistics investigate stance in mostly spoken discourse (e.g., Cook, 2014; Ochs, 1992) rather than in written expression. A notable exception is Jaffe (2009) who looked at oral and written stance in a bilingual classroom.

As Elbow (2007) rightly observed, scholarship on voice in first language (L1) composition studies has reached an impasse. Except for a few case studies on voice in undergraduate writing (Bryant, 2005) and multi-voicedness in high school classroom discussions (Knoeller, 1998), serious longitudinal research on voice seems to have been largely abandoned, consumed instead by decades-long polemics that have attempted to define, defend, or derail voice. In literacy studies, work on voice has been enriched through numerous qualitative studies that have looked at the development of a writer’s voice in primary (Kesler, 2012; Monahan, 2013) and secondary classrooms (Samuelson, 2009) using sociocultural theory of mind (Vygotsky, 1980) to analyze the processes of students coming to voice. Unfortunately, most literacy research on voice has
been largely carried out within monolingual classrooms and with little or no engagement with L2 writers in multilingual writing classrooms.

Scholarship on voice and stance in L2 writing research, however, has fared far better and has been enriched over the past decade with case studies (Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Ivanič, 1998; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Matsuda, 2001), correlational research (Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003), and corpus-based studies (Biber & Finegan, 2001; Biber & Gray, 2010) contributing to L2 writing scholars’ understanding of the concept. Recent studies have begun to explore approaches to assessing impressions of adolescent L2 voice on high-stakes language exams (e.g., Jeffery, 2009, 2010; Zhao & Llosa, 2008; Zhao, 2012).

Voice as social practice

Research has provided numerous accounts of how students are socialized into literacy practices at home and at school (Anyon, 1979; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000; Cumming, 2012; Finn, 1999; Gee, 2008; Heath, 1983, 1986; Purcell-Gates, 1995, 2007; Street, 1984, 2001) showing that forms of writing that foreground reader-centeredness (Flower, 1979) including awareness of audience and voice are central to that socialization process in North American cultures. In their critique of 10 undergraduate composition textbooks, Ramanathan and Kaplan (1996) discovered that audience and voice ranked among the top requirements that all writers must adopt to meet the expectations of their readers. Here, they argued, voice emerges through the writer’s process of engaging with imagined and anticipated audiences: writers come to voice by discovering their own beliefs vis-à-vis the scholarship of others, and they must present those newly formed beliefs to a class of readers with whom they already share a common culture and understanding of how knowledge is written up and presented. Ramanathan and Kaplan astutely observed, “audience and voice are largely culturally
constrained notions, relatively inaccessible to student who are not fully participants in the culture within which they are asked to write” ([my emphasis] p.22). They sought to replace traditional culturally nuanced progressivist writing pedagogies (e.g., Elbow 1981, Murray, 1982) with the more practical, discipline-based genre approach in which linguistic and rhetorical conventions appraised by the discipline are more relevant and within reach to L2 writers.

Audience and voice along with other highly prized cultural values such as critical thinking and textual ownership (and plagiarism) are conspicuous reflections of individualism (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999b). Individualism is an ideological orientation that promotes the creation of a self-reliant, confident, and assertive ‘self’ and is reflected in writing pedagogy and attitudes towards good writing (see examples in Leki, 1995; Li, 1996; Reichelt, 2003). Elbow (1999) argued that L2 writers need to know about the concept of individualism if they are ever to adjust to writing in North American contexts.

**Locating Voice: Authenticity, Legitimacy, and Credibility**

The idea that voice is authentic, legitimate, and credible can be traced to Aristotle’s concept of “ethos,” one of the three rhetorical modes of persuasion: “ethos,” “pathos,” and “logos.” Ethos, appeal to ethics or character of the author conveys how the author styles language to appear credible and legitimate to readers, as opposed to pathos (appeal to emotion) and logos (appeal to reason) (see Corbett & Connors, 1999). Authenticity, credibility, and legitimacy are three qualities of voice most often associated with expressivist writing pedagogy, which emphasizes the unique personal characteristics of a writer and locates voice in the individual. In contrast, socially constructed orientations towards voice emphasize the social aspect of voice (or voice of the field/discipline) or voice that is dialogically constructed between reader and writer. Comprehensive discussions about a writer’s voice have been reviewed in L1 composition theory.
(Bowden, 1999), in L2 writing (Tardy, 2012b), and in literacy studies (Sperling & Appleman, 2011). The following sections highlight these different conceptualizations of voice.

**Voice and the body**

For expressivists voice is associated with the body. Voice “implies words that capture the sound of an individual on the page” (Elbow, 1981, p. 287). Expressivism foregrounded individual voice as the ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ voice of the writer, often defined metaphorically as “juice,” “mother’s milk,” and “electricity” (Elbow, 1981, p. 286). The prevailing assumption was that individual voice is an important part of successful writing, but it can never be taught outright (Elbow, 1998); rather, it emerges through extensive practice (e.g., free writing). The role of reader became marginalized, inconsequential, and even something to be ignored (see Elbow, 1987). Elbow’s uniquely expressionist conceptualization of voice in composition theory has had a strong following (Blake Yancy, 1994; Bryant, 2005; Macrorie, 1985; Murray, 1982, 1985), but it has also been the subject of much censure (Bowden, 1999; Bowden 2012; Hashimoto, 1987; Kamler, 2001) for what is often seen as a concept fraught with assumptions, overly romantic and metaphorical, and conceptually static. Among L2 writing critics, expressivism, by basing itself in individualism, was seen as ethnocentric and as endorsing a Western notion of good writing and writing practices that often were at odds with what critical theorists saw as the multiple, shifting identities of second language writers (Atkinson, 1997; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999b; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996).

**Voice and the mind**

Like expressivism, cognitivism also cultivated the idea that writing is a uniquely individual process, but with a slight twist. Whereas expressivism drew upon metaphors of the body to describe voice, cognitive theory centered the writing process squarely in the mind of the writer.
Emig (1971) first introduced the concept by using think alouds to document the cognitive processes of adolescent writers when composing. Seen as revolutionary at the time (see Hairston, 1982), Emig’s work later developed into a process-approach (Flower, 1979) in which the novice writer’s composing practices could be tracked and measured and pedagogical implications could be drawn. Attempts to quantify individual voice could now be attempted, something that would have later applications in L2 writing assessment (e.g., Dressen-Hammouda, 2014; Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Hyland, 2002; Jeffery, 2009, 2010; Spalding, Wang, Lin, & Hu, 2009; Tang & John, 1999; Tardy, 2012b; Zhao & Llosa, 2008; Zhao, 2012) with varying results.

To cognitivists, what counted as individual voice was not something that was an end in itself (i.e., the authentic self to be discovered from within), but rather something that could be seen as an early stage in the cognitive development of the writer. Flower and Hayes (1981) and Flower (1987) drew on Vygotsky’s concept of inner speech to explain that writer-based prose was a developmental process towards a more mature awareness of audience (or reader-based prose), something that expressivists had outright dismissed. Unlike the expressivist model, the heart of the process-centered approach was analytic and driven towards problem solving and planning through an exhausting regime of prewriting, multiple drafting, and peer reviewing and even regular conferencing with the teacher.

**Voice and the discipline**

While acknowledging a strong cultural preference in North America for writing that conveys personal expression, opinion, and point of view (Bartholomae, 2003; Elbow, 1981; Kamler, 2001; Newkirk, 1997; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999b; Shen, 1989), scholars, teachers, and writing specialists now recognize the limitations of locating voice squarely in the individual writer (Lensmire & Satanovsky, 1998; Prior, 2001), the perspective now commonly associated
with expressivism (Brinton, 1970; Elbow, 1981; Murray, 1982) and cognitivism (Emig, 1971; Flower & Hayes, 1981). A social constructivist perspective of voice sees it either as social or something that emerges dialectically between reader and writer.

The social voice is the voice of the field or discipline, as is represented in the popular genre-based approach (Swales, 1990). An example of the genre-based approach is English for Academic Purposes (EAP), in which curricula, textbooks, and classroom instruction techniques were developed to help L2 writers mimic the content, language, style, and voice of the target genre (see Hyland, 2002, 2004, 2008; Swales & Feak, 2012; Tardy, 2009). Personal voice was reinvented; it did not “emerge” as it had under expressivists, but rather drew on the lexicon, syntax, and style followed in the field. In that sense, not the individual voice, but the voice of the field became a teachable concept. Many scholars have started to acknowledge that teaching the voice of the field does not begin in university. Rather, it starts in high school, where students are exposed to both the fundamentals of academic discourse and disciplinary literacies (Franquiz & Salinas, 2011; Jeffery & Wilcox, 2014; Moje & Dillon, 2006).

**Voice and the reader and the writer**

The primary limitation with seeing voice as social is that the writer is lost in the process. Many scholars argue that voice should be seen as dialectical (Atkinson, 2001; Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Lensmire, 1998; Lensmire & Beals, 1994; Matsuda, 2001; Prior, 2001; Tardy, 2012) involving both the reader and writer in their process of making meaning and shaping voice (Tardy, 2012a). In other words, lived experience, culture, and external circumstances play critical roles in the development of voice. As Sperling and Appleman (2011) noted, “voice is inevitably shaped, informed, and mediated by social and cultural factors […] voice is essentially the result of a social and cultural mediation with the individual” (p.73).
This dialectic is rooted in the work of Bakhtin (1981, 1986) whose fresh articulation of thought and language captures both the social constructivist’s orientation to writing and voice and provides neo-Vygotskians as well as language socialization theorists nuanced ways to conceptualize the complex and reciprocal aspects of the social, cultural, and historical nature of language and its connection to the development of human thought (Wertsch, 1991) and social and cultural development. Bakhtin theorized that meaning articulated in the utterance is not inherently unique to an individual (as expressivists would argue), but rather individuals claim it through dialogue (or what sociocultural theorists call “interaction”) with other voices (or other speakers). As Bakhtin (1981) observed, “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 a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions” (pp. 293-294). Speaking or writing is an act of re-purposing those utterances or words to continue to create meaning for speaker and listener, writer and reader.

Drawing on Bakhtin to explore voice development among writers, Kamberelis and Scott (1992) aptly asserted,

All writers and all texts anticipate responses from future writers and future texts. From this perspective, any given communicative exchange is a product of reciprocal (though not necessarily conflict-free) relationships among speakers and listeners, readers and writers. It is this reciprocity that regulates and orders communication, structuring otherwise uncoordinated, solipsistic monologues. (p. 363)
In keeping with theories of language socialization, it is this reciprocity that allows for the bidirectionality of voice across writers. Definitions of voice that have been influenced by Bakhtin in L2 writing include Matsuda’s (2001), “the amalgamative effect of the use of discursive and non-discursive features that language users choose, deliberately or otherwise, from socially available yet ever-changing repertoires” (Matsuda, 2001, p. 41). Here, voice is co-constructed between the writer and the reader. In L2 writing, voice is often conceptualized in terms of writer identity (Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008). Influences of perceived extra-textual identity of the writer (i.e., author’s age, ethnicity, education, class, and gender indexed in textual voice) on evaluations of writing have been identified (Cumming, Kantor & Powers, 2002; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Tardy, 2012).

Ivanič (1998) documented four forms of writer identity distinct to students’ development and processes of writing: autobiographical self (i.e., the experiences, history, and dispositions writers draw on when they write), discoursal self (i.e., voice as identified by reader), self as author (i.e., voice as constructed through stance or position), and possibilities of selfhood (i.e., who the writer may become given context and situation). Ivanič and Camps (2001) envisaged writing as a process of identity construction and voice as an essential role in developing that identity. They argued writers position themselves vis-à-vis their ontological and epistemological representations as ideational, interpersonal, and textual, in other words by their worldview, sense of authority, and approach to text construction, respectively. In literacy studies, Sperling and Appleman (2011) foreground the social nature of voice: “Voice is a language performance—always social, mediated by experience, and culturally embedded” (p. 71).

**Voice and power**

Theoretical orientations towards a writer’s voice have come under fire from critical
perspectives that see voice as conceptually static and no longer relevant in a world in which classrooms are becoming ethnically and linguistically diverse and in which technology provides students with multiple ways to represent themselves in their writing (Bowden, 1999). Critical writing theory seeks answers to questions about whose voices are being taught in classrooms, which voices are privileged and which are silenced, and how pedagogical actions reproduce privileged notions of voice. Inspired by the work of Gilbert (1990), poststructuralist feminist scholars such as Kamler (2001) have rejected the term “voice” altogether, labeling it a misnomer, replacing it with “story,” a term she claims frees the writer from older ideological representation of a single self to open up nuanced ways to show the multi-dimensionality of the author.

Scholars such as Benesch (1993, 1999) and Pennycook (1996, 1997) challenged many of the assumptions underlying the genre approach—namely, EAP. Proponents of the genre approach (Reid, 1989; Swales, 1990) were accused of reinforcing the hegemonic discourses of post-colonialism by forcing L2 writers to adopt rhetorical norms of writing (including academic voice) that had been developed in the West for the benefit of the West. Drawing on the work of Paulo Freire (1970), L2 critical theorists saw writing (and individual voice) becoming the colonial voice repackaged and sold to unwary language students, in effect forcing these students to write like native speakers and perpetuating their own subjugation to the ruling ‘native’ discourses (camouflaged as the discourse of their field). Like Bowden (1999), Benesch (2001) went so far as to claim that in critical EAP individual voice, per se, does not exist and students should not be encouraged to explore it; rather, writing tasks that draw on students’ abilities to think of their socially constructed collective subjectivities lead to a greater awareness of themselves and of the community in which they live. For Benesch, writing topics must be assigned by the teacher, thus leading the entire class to understand together the ways in which they are positioned by institutional forces. In short, individual voice is not a relevant or teachable
concept in critical EAP, for example, since it draws the student’s attention away from personal empowerment and towards reproducing the prevailing institutional discourses of disempowerment.

**Voice and translingualism**

Translanguaging, a nuanced form of code switching, offers new ways to imagine voice that is both co-constructed but also critical. Translanguaging has largely been used to analyze how bilingual writers use voice to explore bilingual Spanish and English writers’ identities (Velasco & Garcia, 2014) and has been enthusiastically embraced by certain figures in L1 composition who have integrated a World Englishes perspective into first-year composition courses for university undergraduates in the U.S. (M. Lee, 2013). Many L1 and L2 compositionists have come to support the translingual approach (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011) in writing classrooms. This highly political conversation about using nonstandard varieties continues the conversation about students’ rights to their own language first articulated by the College Conference on Composition and Communication in 1974.

As a proponent of translanguaging, Canagarajah (1993, 1997, 2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2013a, 2013b) has worked tirelessly for greater awareness of and visibility of critical perspectives in L2 writing by striving to disrupt what he sees as a monolingual hold on legitimate forms of writing that limit and stigmatize multilingual writers by introducing terms such as ‘code meshing’ and looking at L2 writing from a translingual perspective. Responding to Tardy’s (in press) call for developing a more grounded understanding of voice from teachers and students, Canagarajah (2015) used literacy autobiographies in his class to analyze how one graduate student developed academic voice through journaling and ongoing feedback from classmates and the course instructor (Canagarajah himself). Canagarajah introduced the terms identity, role, awareness, and
subjectivity to capture how voice is produced through the negotiation or amalgamation of writers’ and readers’ intertextual identities that produce meaning and shape and change both reader and writer in the process. This co-constructed voice leads Canagarajah to argue that a dialogical pedagogy of voice is possible if the students are shown how to “[turn] ecological resources into positive affordances” (p. 137). In line with language socialization theory, Canagarajah observed how writing is not transmitted top down from teacher to student. He observed how his own attitudes shifted and grew over the course of the student’s drafts.

**Voice and assessment**

Lastly, L2 writing has distinguished itself from L1 composition and literacy through its pioneering work with voice and assessment. Given that voice features prominently on U.S. state and national writing exams (Matsuda & Jeffery, 2012), Ontario English Curriculum for secondary school students (Kohls, 2013), and classroom assessment rubrics (Llosa, Beck, & Zhao, 2011), researchers have been curious to understand if voice is a measurable quality along with content, organization, and grammar. How voice has been operationalized in rubrics and assessment has been the subject of interest over the past decade. Research has attempted to assess authorial identity (Hyland, 2002; Tang & John, 1999) and look at markers of voice (Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Jeffery, 2011; Zhao & Llosa, 2008; Zhao, 2012).

Studies of authorial identity in undergraduate writing showed a lack of first-person pronouns, which suggested a strong reluctance to assert point of view or make claims (Hyland, 2002; Tang & John, 1999). Hyland speculated that this was in part due to different cultural attitudes towards inserting point of view (cf. Li, 1996) as well as differences in disciplinary style.

An early study of voice in L2 writing, Helms-Park and Stapleton (2003) developed their own rubric that measured strength of assertiveness, self-identification, reiteration of the central point,
and authorial presence. They found no correlation between the presence of voice and quality of L2 student writing, leading the authors to conclude that voice should not be something that L2 writing classrooms should be spent developing. Using Helms-Park and Stapleton’s rubric to assess voice in L1 writing samples, Zhao and Llosa (2008) found the opposite. They reported a high correlation between strength of writing and presence of voice among writing samples of L1 writers. Zhao and Llosa argued that as L2 writers are often assessed by the same criteria as L1 writers, instruction in voice is L2 writing needs to be addressed.

In a recent study, Zhao (2012) noted that one of the limitations of Helms-Park and Stapleton’s (2003) study was that it only measured voice from the perspective of the writer and that a scale for voice needs to consider both writer stance and reader engagement. Based on analytical and holistic data, she developed and successfully tested a new rubric to measure voice in multilingual writers that included reader reaction. For example, rater responses indicated that it was not the frequency of specific rhetorical devices (cf. Helms Park & Stapleton, 2003), but how the writer employed them to create meaning. The raters noted that texts that were ranked highly for voice engaged readers in a number of ways—clarity and development of ideas, complexity of thought, and use of arresting examples. In short, readers felt the writers were engaging them, including them in the discussion. Zhao found that analytic rubrics can be valuable teaching tools to help students better understand the concept of voice in writing. Zhao recommended that students could be engaged in voice through analytical and holistic approaches that allow them to explore use of first person.

With a few exceptions (e.g., Petric, 2010; Jeffery, 2011), little consideration has been paid to students’ or teachers’ conceptions of voice (e.g., Beck, McKeown & Worthy, 1995; Bryant, 2005; Garfield & Brockman, 2000; Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Kesler, 2012; McHaney, 2004; Monahan, 2013; Read, Francis, & Robson, 2001; Saunders, 2014;
Spalding, Wang, Lin, & Hu, 2009; Stewart, 2010; Tardy, 2012b). The richness offered by participant reactions to voice provides persuasive arguments for the utility and appeal of voice.

Petric (2010) interviewed 30 postgraduate L2 writers to find out what voice meant to them and how they identified voice in their writing. Petric learned that the students were aware of voice and that their program faculty had always encouraged them to discover their own writer’s voice. Most students felt that voice was an important part of academic writing and believed their writing reflected their own personal voice. Although Petric noted that students reported struggling to develop their voice, a few felt their voices were not assertive, but rather were buried, muted, or restrained. While most students identified voice with something personal or unique to the individual writer, others spoke of voice as something identifiable with linguistic signifiers (e.g., pronouns), or as a personal experience. Petric noted in a few cases, certain students saw voice as social, as being influenced by other authors as well as by research participants in their own studies.

Like Petric’s participants, Jeffery’s (2011) 19 high school teachers saw voice as personal and something specific to the writer. Like others (Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Tardy, 2012b), Jeffery also reported that most teachers described the extra-textual identity of sample student essays they rated. For example, most teachers attributed writing style to the writer’s gender (i.e., girls were identified as having more essays with voice than boys). Voice was also something that was associated with literacy and rhetorical techniques, evaluative language, adolescent language, and certain structural features. Jeffery’s teachers were not bothered by the same rhetorical artifice that disturbed Li’s (1996) American teachers. Rather, they tended to see this manufactured prose as indicative of teenage writers experimenting with adult language and register. Most importantly, Jeffery asserted that successful voices were rooted in the teacher’s assessment of the intentionality of the writing. Teachers saw authenticity as “affective expression, judgment, and
reflection” (p. 114) in the writer’s prose. What is significant here is that what teachers identified as voice was not something contained on a rubric, per se. They were the teacher’s emotional responses to the writing that the lists of devices and features on a rubric cannot capture.

In conclusion, the epistemological shifts in writing scholarship have brought a fresh and renewed excitement about the role of voice. First, it allows researchers to ask different questions about the nature of writing and empowers them to look beyond writing as a quantifiable and isolated cognitive process to something that is part of a dynamic web of sociocultural, historical, and situational processes (Hillocks, 2005; Nickoson & Sheridan, 2012; Williamson & Huot, 2012). Second, questions of voice also progress from simply counting pronouns and qualifiers (see Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003), for example, to exploring the intersections of a writer’s voice in identity, gender, race, sexuality, and class (e.g., Canagarajah, 2015; Easton, 2005; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; McHaney, 2004; Stewart, 2010; Tardy, 2012b). Third, in terms of assessing writing, a sociocultural orientation replaces a static, de-contextual, and largely linguistically driven understanding of voice with a dynamic approach that takes teachers’ attitudes about writers’ intentions and motivations into account when reacting to a writer’s paper (Jeffery, 2011) to learning about what those involved in voice believe about it.
Chapter 3

Research Methods

This chapter outlines my approach to collecting and analyzing the data for this thesis. It includes my beliefs about writing and the nature of writing-based research and the benefits of an ethnographic case study to understand writing practices. The chapter details my connection to the literacy program and describes the research site, program, and participants; how I collected, recorded, and stored my data (interviews, observations, field notes); the approach to analysis (coding); and the validity and reliability of my interpretations. I also reflect on my role as a researcher within the program, noting how I overcame particular challenges.

What I Believe about Writing and Writing Research: An Interpretivist Inquiry

Over the past twenty-five years, L2 writing research has emerged as an independent discipline within applied linguistics. It has departed from traditional SLA research and its tendency to conceptualize writing as a means only to analyze and treat student errors (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012) to become a separate discipline that values writing as situated (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000), as reflecting both a process (Leki, 1992) and post-process (Casanave, 2003; Matsuda, 2003) perspective, and as a practice inseparable from race, power, and social class (Canagarajah, 2002; Kamler, 2001; Kubota, 2003). Further, the emergence of the social in SLA research (Block, 2003) justified the emergence of learner identity as a new research area (Block, 2007; Canagarajah, 2002; Kubota & Lin, 2009; Norton, 2000). L2 writing research has successfully advanced research on writer identity (Cox, et al., 2010; Ivanič, 1998) and the role of a multilingual writer’s voice in writing (Hirvela & Belcher, 2001; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Matsuda, 2001; Prior, 2001). I believe these studies represent an important epistemological shift in mainstream beliefs about writing and in what is knowable about writers and writing processes.
More specifically, they encourage new ways both to understand the process of L2 writing and to appreciate multilingual writers in the process of constructing themselves and the world around them.

On the nature of language and writing, Charles Darwin wrote human beings have “the instinctive tendency to speak, as we see in the babble of our young children; whilst no child has an instinctive tendency to bake, brew or write” (2010/1871, p. 30). As I wrote in earlier chapters, writing is a learned practice and the ability to write is often seen as critical to fulfilling the responsibilities of citizenship (Wan, 2014). Writing also carries the presumption of legitimacy, and writing following an accepted standard (i.e., linguistic and rhetorical conventions) that reflects positively on the author’s character, authority, and integrity (Lang, 1991). As a writing teacher and researcher, I view writing as socially constructed (Bruffee, 1986; Cumming, 1998), a practice embedded and reflected in the values, attitudes, and beliefs of a culture. I take an interpretivist stance on my approach to writing research (Creswell, 2007; Willis, 2007). Simply put, rather than trying to uncover some great truths about writing, I believe research is best served by understanding writing in the rich and varied contexts in which people write.

Having developed over nearly 20 years of teaching, my beliefs about writing and writing research align with the basic assumptions of language socialization theory (Ochs, 1986; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984) and its application to L2 academic speaking and writing (Duff, 2010). I believe that learning a language is coterminous with learning culture, including the values, attitudes, and beliefs of its speakers and writers (Garrett, 2008); that language and writing development emerges over time; that writing develops through human interactions; and that learning to write and teaching writing are bidirectional, reciprocal, and dialectic processes (Duff & Talmy, 2011) in which values, beliefs, and attitudes of one shape the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the other. Lastly, experience has taught me that students may resist or reject certain
types of academic writing, finding instead that they struggle to develop an authoritative voice (Ivanič, 1998) and that being socialized into adopting a writing standard or apprenticeship into a discipline is not always successful (Casanave, 2002).

As a social and cultural practice (Gee, 2008) and therefore a learned practice (Emig, 1977), writing can be explored ethnographically (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999a) in the varied places in which writing occurs (Moss, 1992). In my study, an afterschool-tutoring program located in a program office and a church basement contributed to the broader “ecological validity” (Duff, 2008b, p. 125) of writing instruction by offering an existing context to understand how writing is practiced, learned, and discussed outside of a mainstream high school classroom and among those who are frequently overlooked as potential writing informants. In this study, the tutoring sites reflected the cultural, social, and linguistic complexity of Pratt’s (1991) “contact zone” and were staffed by volunteer tutors who each served as a so-called “contact zone contact person” (Severino, 2005, p. 41). These contact zone contact persons were white, monolingual, multigenerational Canadian adults from Judeo-Christian backgrounds. The program office and church basement were where they came face to face with an altogether different local culture made up of multilingual adolescents of color who were mostly Muslim and newcomers to Canada or the children of newcomers.

Ethnographic research, by definition, “generates or builds theories of culture—or explanations of how people think, believe, and behave—that are situated in local time and space” (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010, p. 12). In education, well-known ethnographies (e.g., Eckert, 1989; Health, 1983; Rampton, 1995; Willis, 1977), have contributed to scholars’ understanding of home and school literacy practices and the production of social class and educational institutions, for example. Ethnographies in L2 education are critical to helping scholars to understand peoples’ attitudes about the teaching and learning of language (Toohey, 2008)
especially in areas such as bilingual education (Goldstein, 2003; Jaffe, 2001, 2009b) or English language immersion (Duff, 1995). In L2 writing research, for example, pioneering studies have been used to understand writing from within a larger social and institutional context such as writing in university settings (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995), English language classrooms in Sri Lanka (Canagarajah, 1993), and peer feedback practices among multilingual classrooms in the U.S. (Carson & Nelson, 1996). In L2 writing research, an ethnographic perspective acknowledges the inherent complexity of culture in any context in which writing happens (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999a) and serves as a useful lens to understanding how learning how to write is both personal and social.

Along with ethnographies, case studies have also enriched writing researchers’ theoretical and conceptual understanding of individual student writers by foregrounding their personal histories, experiences, and struggles as learners within the diverse contexts in which they are learning to write. In qualitative research, a case study is defined as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40) and is often undertaken to gain more insight into a particular entity, person, or place (Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009). In education, researchers often define a case as consisting of a single or multiple sets of schools, classrooms, policies, programs, students, or families (e.g., Lightfoot, 1983; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Purcell-Gates, 1995). In L2 writing research, for example, case studies have provided in-depth accounts of adolescent L2 writers in high school (M. Kibler, 2011; A. Kibler, 2014; Leki, 1995), afterschool tutoring programs (Cumming, 2012), and adult L2 writers in university (Casanave, 2010; Gentil, 2005; Spack, 1997a) to name just a few. When multiple cases are used, researchers may attempt to conduct a cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006) to identify common themes or patterns emerging from a set of cases (e.g., Cumming, 2012; Lightfoot, 1983) to help strengthen findings and contribute to theory building (Yin, 2009).
Although originating from different disciplinary traditions, ethnographies and case studies both are compatible and complementary qualitative approaches to writing research. Duff (2008b) observed that the primary difference between these two paradigms is that a case study “focuses on the behaviors or attributes of individual learners or other individual/entities, [while ethnography] aims to understand and interpret the behaviors, values, and structures of collectivities, or social groups with particular reference to the cultural basis for those behavior and values” (p. 34). For educational researchers interested in ethnographic case studies, Merriam (2009) explained, “ethnographic case studies are quite common, for example, wherein the culture of a particular social group is studied in depth” (p. 42). Their combined strength lies in their comprehensive, in-depth descriptions, privileging the informant’s (or emic) perspective, acknowledging the role of the researcher’s reflexivity, allowing for simultaneous collection and analysis, and employing a theoretical orientation to help the researcher situate, analyze, and interpret the approach, data, and findings.

I believe writing is a deeply personal practice, and research methodologies that strive for depth and understanding of the writer provide readers with a greater appreciation of the writing process. Language socialization-based studies, for example, draw on—and are enriched by—critical elements common to both ethnography and case study research. As Garrett (2008) observed, language socialization research tends to be longitudinal, typically over a year, and involves focused observations of up to six participants or a small group; includes around 75-100 hours of transcribed audio or video recordings; takes a holistic perspective, observing participants interacting with others across multiple contexts and sites; and documents, traces, and demonstrates how broader socio-cultural, political, ideological issues are reflected in everyday practices, interactions, and situations.
By combining paradigms, I was better positioned to understand the “culture of a particular social group” described by Merriam (2009, p. 42). Ethnographic case studies contribute to writing research by foregrounding the writer as a language learner who is writing and learning within a complex cultural web of attitudes, policies, and beliefs (see Harklau, 1994, 2000; Séror 2009; Yi, 2010). Blending these approaches allowed me to observe, talk, and interact with novices and experts and understand their relationship to writing while at the same time attending to the paradoxical and shifting nature of the tutoring space from sacred and private to secular and public.

Ethnographic case studies are also especially well suited for writing-based research because this approach privileges a detailed or “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of a case, context, or culture over statistical procedures (Mackey & Gass, 2005) using observations, interviews, and document analysis, for example. To produce a richly detailed description, I strove to show my experience by recording events specifically, rather than simply tell about them generally (Clark, 2006; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). For example, I sketched the floor plan of the tutoring room located in the basement of St. Basil’s church. I also photographed the tutoring room, the Pathways office, and the surrounding neighborhood to understand the spatial configuration. I took field notes to account for verbal and nonverbal interaction between tutors and students and interviewed participants at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the study to gather information about their beliefs, reactions, and attitudes to writing and tutoring. Lastly, I collected and archived writing samples; observed the clothing, habits, and gestures of the participants; and detailed the sights, sounds, and smells of the church basement and Pathways office.

These detailed steps furthered the authority of the findings to produce a well-documented and trustworthy account of my experience, observing, talking to, and interacting with the participants. Drawing on Van Maanen’s (2011) approach to writing up qualitative research, I
attempted to create an experience for the reader, a collection of tales that account for my understanding, reflections, and interpretations. The depth of the content and richness of the description invites readers to identify with the participants, relate to their struggles and success, and find authenticity and plausibility in the findings.

Ethnographies and case studies also face potential challenges. Creswell (2007) stressed that ethnographies demand extensive time in the field and are writing intensive; case studies require researchers to identify, define, and frame the ‘boundedness’ of the case(s). Moreover, as ethnographies and case studies are situated, small in scale, and focus on a few informants, they are often seen as lacking methodological rigor and generalizability of findings (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). While member checking strives to verify a researcher’s interpretations, the informants may forget events or ask that certain information be removed.

While these challenges may potentially limit the impact of the research, they do not necessarily prevent writing researchers from establishing findings that are valid and reliable. I believe that the trustworthiness of my findings and interpretations gain purchase from using methodologies with a firm theoretical footing (Heath & Street, 2008) and from employing a rigorous iterative process of triangulating data, including extensive time in the field, detailed observations, comprehensive interviews, and member checking interpretations with participants (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Wolcott, 2009). Further, in language socialization-based studies, triangulating data points substantiates the complexity undertaken by experts to apprentice novices into the new discourse communities (Duff, 2007a). Universal generalizability of findings is not the intent of ethnographies or case studies, but rather the findings gain strength and exact influence in their transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to similar contexts and gain authority in number through comparable studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the remaining sections of this chapter, I introduce the program,
site, and participants, outline the step-by-step procedure about how I approached fieldwork, coded and analyzed my data, wrote up my findings, and address the unique challenges I faced along the way.

The Social Setting: Neighborhood, Program, and Church

To understand the students and tutors, their conversations, struggles, and accomplishments, it is important to understand the context in which they met, wrote, and worked. This section introduces the social setting: The Regent Park neighborhood; the Pathways to Education Program including its history, mission, and success; and the tutoring site, St. Basil’s Eastern Orthodox Church (pseudonym).

The neighborhood

In his novel Cabbagetown, Hugh Garner (1968) provided a descriptively poignant historical introduction to old Regent Park. Garner recounted that before WWII, Regent Park, then known as Cabbagetown, was an oddity among Canada’s impoverished immigrant neighborhoods. Located no more than a mile from downtown Toronto, it was “the home of the social majority,” Garner wrote, “white Protestant English and Scots. It was a sociological phenomenon, the largest Anglo-Saxon slum in North America” (p. vii).

Following WWII, city officials and local residents sought to invest and improve the so-called Anglo-Saxon slum known for years for high crime and squalid living conditions. By the late 1940s, the tiny houses that packed the fetid, narrow streets south of Gerrard and north of Queen and the side streets, lanes, and alleys running east of Parliament to the Don River were razed and replaced with spacious “government-built-and controlled apparent blocks, maisonettes and row houses.” (p.vii). A change in the landscape quickly brought a change in the place name: ‘Cabbagetown’ was unanimously renamed ‘Regent Park,’ and ‘Don Vale,’ the neighborhood to
the north of Gerrard street, was later renamed, oddly enough, ‘Cabbagetown.’ Writing 20 years after the urban renewal of the postwar years, Garner observed that although old Cabbagetown disappeared, traces of it could still be seen in how the neighborhood women continued to arrange their hair in the traditional Cabbagetown manner of curlers and scarves.

After 60 years, Regent Park is now regarded as Canada’s oldest and largest public housing project. Notwithstanding the postwar improvements, the neighborhood continued to face challenges over the coming decades. The signature urban landscape of clustered low rise apartments with interconnecting footpaths soon isolated and marginalized the community from its surrounding neighborhoods. Regent Park’s prewar reputation for crime persisted, as did reports of gang activity and drug offenses. In 1995, the police and residents clashed in a small riot (Oziewicz & Abbate, 1995, September 1). By 2001 Regent Park was characterized as a neighborhood of “low income, high unemployment rates, low educational attainments, and a large proportion of single-parent families” (Rowen & Gosine, 2006, p. 278).

In 2006, the Toronto Community Housing Corporation launched a one billion dollar urban renewal and rezoning project for Regent Park. Like in 1948, the neighborhood was to be razed and rebuilt, undoing the mistakes of the past. I witnessed much of the bulldozing, remapping, and rebuilding first hand (see Figure 3.1). The postwar community housing projects that defined Regent Park family living for half a century are being slowly replaced by affordable mixed income high- and low-rise housing units that often resemble the sleek upscale condominiums going up in more affluent sections of the city. The Regent Park redevelopment project is in the process of replacing the original 2,053 social housing units, which accommodated approximately 7,500 occupants, with 5,115 new units, making room for up to 12,500 residents (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2008). Where there were no banks, coffee shops, or supermarkets, the Royal Bank of Canada, Tim Horton’s, and FreshCo supermarket have set up
shop in the heart of Regent Park. Sparklingly new recreational amenities—a public pool, athletic field, and new arts and culture centre—have opened to much fanfare, steps away from St. Basil’s, where local high school students go for academic tutoring. Not surprisingly, the changes in the neighborhood are not always welcomed. “Our Stories,” a page on Pathways to Education’s website, included selected audio clips of local students’ reactions to changes to Regent Park. “It really sucks beans how they are planning to tear down my community,” one anonymous Pathways student commented on the urban renewal. “Not everyone who lives here is bad or is uneducated” another student commented, responding to how the neighborhood has been unfairly portrayed (Pathways to Education, 2010a).

Figure 3.1. Public housing being demolished adjacent to St. Basil’s Parish Hall (far right)
Linguistically, ethnically, and culturally, Regent Park today is a far cry from Garner’s Anglo-Saxon Cabbagetown. Although the yellow brick Anglican Churches built for those first British immigrants continue to dot the landscape, as do the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches of later immigrant groups, Hindu temples and Muslim mosques of the recent newcomers appear along Parliament Street, tucked away behind storefronts or in cellars beneath halal restaurants. Many women in Regent Park still cover their hair, but the curlers and scarves of Garner’s Anglo-Saxon women have been replaced over the decades by the hijabs, al-almiras, and niqabs of the grandmothers, mothers, and daughters with roots and culture ties to Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia.

In 2011, the population of Regent Park was approximately 10,007 (City of Toronto, 2014). Around 75% of Regent Park residents identified as persons of color; approximately 50% identified as immigrants (City of Toronto, 2014). Among the many languages spoken in Regent Park, Bengali, Tamil, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Chinese, Somali, Spanish, Arabic, and Urdu account for the top 10 (City of Toronto, 2014). Fifty-six percent of residents speak English as an additional or second language. While 42% speak a language other than English at home, 8% speak multiple languages at home (City of Toronto, 2011a). Despite the richness in languages and cultures in just a few square city blocks, most families remain poor. In 2011, 16% of the population remained unemployed, compared to 9% for the rest of Toronto. Of those working, 30% of residents earned less than $20,000/year with 42% making between $20,000 and $49,999/year after tax (City of Toronto, 2014), making Regent Park the neighborhood in Toronto with the highest percentage of low-income families at 65% (City of Toronto, 2011b).

The program

Pathways was created amidst a crisis. In 2001, cutbacks in social assistance, drastic
educational restructuring, and a spate of homicides had left the neighborhood shaken, tense, and desperate (Rowen, 2012). Education of the neighborhood’s teenage population had also reached a critical point. While the dropout rate among Toronto’s high school aged students averaged 29%, in Regent Park it had soared to almost twice that at 56% and was as high as 70% among high school students who came from non-traditional families (i.e., single parent) or from newcomer households (Rowen, 2012). Believing strongly in the power of community action, the Regent Park Community Health Centre intervened to create Pathways to Education to bring about long-term positive change in Regent Park by focusing on the academic and social needs of neighborhood youth. By supporting students’ needs while in school, the program strove to curb the decline in high school graduation rates and increase the number of students seeking a post-secondary education (Rowen, 2012). The long-term effect would be a healthier and more sustainable neighborhood and a reduced financial burden on the Canadian economy and Ontario taxpayers (Pathways to Education, 2010b).

Pathways identified absenteeism and low credit accumulation as the two factors that make a student at-risk of dropping out of high school. To keep Regent Park students in school and off the streets, the program welcomes all high school youth regardless of grades, ethnicity, language or family income who live in the community (or catchment area). The program actively recruits neighborhood students starting in Grades 8 and 9 and supports students in four key areas: academic, social, financial, and student advocacy. To support students academically, the program provides free tutoring every Monday through Thursday evenings in all core curriculum subjects including English, French, Mathematics, Science, History, and Geography (Rowen, 2012). While students in good academic standing may attend tutoring as often as they like, students who fail to maintain passing grades are required to attend tutoring a minimum of two evenings a week until they have improved their grades (Pathways to Education, 2010c). A second form of support
targets developing the personal and social wellbeing of youth by providing ongoing group activities and career mentoring throughout high school. During mentoring, students map out career opportunities, develop social skills, and enhance self-esteem, which will serve them in future professional and academic endeavors.

The third form of support includes financial assistance. As Regent Park does not have a high school within the immediate area, families are saddled with covering transportation costs for their high school-aged children to attend one of 60 different high schools throughout Toronto. To offset these costs, the program finances transportation expenses, school supplies, and lunch vouchers for any student who commits to the program, attends school, maintains good grades, and participates in tutoring and mentoring activities. Pathways estimated that in 2004-2005, transportation vouchers alone totaled $35,000 (Rowen & Gosine, 2006). An additional financial incentive includes a $4,000 scholarship towards college or university tuition if students stay in the program for the entire four years of high school.

Finally, the program supports students by providing them with an individual caseworker. Referred to as Student Parent Support Workers (SPSW), these counselors advocate on the students’ behalf, acting as a liaison between them, their parents, and teachers. SPSWs ensure students attend classes, keep their grades up, and attend tutoring and mentoring activities. In many ways, SPSWs help both students and their parents better understand how to navigate a new educational culture and school system. The combined approach of tutors, mentors, financial assistance, and caseworkers keeps students and their siblings returning year after year. Approximately 90% of neighborhood students in Regent Park attend Pathways even though enrollment is voluntary (Rowen, 2012).

Volunteers are an essential component of the program. In 2010-2011, Pathways Regent Park attracted 144 volunteer tutors and 49 mentors to help meet the academic and social needs of 936
local students (Pathways to Education, 2012). Pathways employs various strategies to recruit volunteers from community outreach initiatives to special corporate or university partnerships. While tutors with any area of expertise, age, and profession are welcomed, tutors in the sciences and mathematics are particularly desirable as are tutors from the same ethnic or cultural backgrounds as the students. Volunteer tutors receive a tutor training orientation that covers the program mission and goals, tutoring strategies, and working with students with special needs including ELLs. The average ratio for students to tutors is 4:1 (Pathways to Education, 2010c). The semester I collected data, the program organized an anti-racist and anti-oppression workshop for volunteers to raise awareness about racism that many of the students in the program face in society and education. This workshop has now become part of standard orientation for new volunteers.

Over the past decade, student attendance has remained strong and the program has reported overwhelming success in meeting their goal of high attendance, reduced dropout rates, successful graduation, and advancement to post-secondary educational opportunities (Rowen, 2012). The year before I collected my data, the drop out rate fell from 56% in 2001 to 11.7% in 2010 and students pursuing a postsecondary education went from 20% to 80% (Pathways to Education, 2010b). In 2012, Pathways reported that the community was graduating 87% of local students from high school, compared with only 44% before 2001, an increase of 98% (Pathways to Education, 2012). The program estimates that 80% of those students who successfully completed the program have entered college or university (Rowen, 2012) and 90% of these students represent the first generation in their families to pursue a college or university education.

Pathways has also tracked students after graduation. They found that the dropout rate among former Pathways students in college is 8.8% and 1.7% for university students compared to the national average of 25% and 16%, respectively (Pathways to Education, 2010b). As siblings,
cousins, and friends from the community attend Pathways over the years, the program has become “a rite of passage” for many local youth (Pathways to Education, 2012, p. 5).

From 2001 to 2010, Pathways to Education Canada grew, replicating its Regent Park model in 12 different sites in Ontario, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Quebec. In 2011, Pathways to Education Canada started “Graduation Nation,” an initiative to continue replicating the Regent Park model in additional provinces across Canada. The program now serves 15 sites in four provinces. To fund the program, Pathways receives financial backing from a combination of individual, corporate, and private donors as well as contributions from both the provincial and federal governments (Rowen, 2012). In 2008, Pathways received $19 million from the province of Ontario. Speaking on behalf of the government of Ontario, former premier Dalton McGuinty affirmed, “We need every one of our students at their best, so they can succeed and continue to move Ontario forward. Pathways to Education has been achieving outstanding results for young people in Regent Park. We’re proud to work with them to engage more youth in more communities” (Pathways to Education, 2009, p.14). In 2011, Pathways received another $28.5 million from Ontario to be distributed over several years (Howlett, 2011).

The church basement

The basement of St. Basil’s Orthodox Church is one of three locations Pathways-Regent Park uses for tutoring. It was also the primary location where I recruited, observed, and interviewed participants for my study. My years of tutoring at St. Basil’s has taught me that in North America church basements are complex sites of socialization for members both in and outside of the community. In her early work with adolescents, Harklau (1994) observed that high schools, for example, were complex sites of socialization, providing both academic and cultural socialization of youth. Schools not only served to instruct students’ core subjects, she argued, but also
functioned as places where students learn how to form friendships, cultivate athleticism, and prepare for university. I recognize that the basement of St Basil’s, like most church basements, serves as a place not only to transmit biblical stories to Christian youth and socialize them in the beliefs, practices, and rituals of the Church on Sunday mornings, but also extended beyond the needs of the congregation to meet the needs of the local community by supporting other socialization functions such as tutoring academics, developing art and creativity awareness, and learning ethnic dances. Church basements across North America often extend beyond their intended religious functions and serve as places for recovering alcoholics to meet to keep sober, sites for immigrants to study English, locations for new mothers to talk about parenting, venues for young troops of boys and girls to learn about scouting, and places citizens go to vote. More than the sanctuary, church basements appear to play a decisive role in bringing people together to socialize, learn, reflect, and reform.

Shortly before I started data collection, St. Basil’s celebrated its 100th anniversary. The original church was built in the early 1900s near the Distillery district (a former industrial quarter) to serve the Orthodox Christian immigrants arriving from Eastern Europe. To commemorate the anniversary, the church published a commemorative centennial booklet heralding the founders of the church in Toronto and their efforts to keep the community together and to maintain the language, culture, and religious values of the parishioners. The current church was built in the late 1940s and the church hall was added by the mid 1950s. The church hall could accommodate more than 1,000 people and had spaces for Sunday school and social events, including a stage and a bowling alley, located in the basement. St. Basil’s is a church that serves both the cultural and literacy needs of its parishioners and the needs of the Regent Park community.
Pathways has used the church basements at St. Basil’s and St. Dmitry’s (a second, nearby church) for almost a decade. Initially, the basements were free of charge as part of the churches’ community outreach and support. Today, Pathways rents the basement for a fee, as heat, electricity, and general upkeep and maintenance are expensive. Tanja (a pseudonym), one of the program administrators of Pathways Regent Park, disliked the church sites, finding them uninviting places for young people to study and limited in their access to technology. For example, Pathways had to bring their own laptops and portable printers to the sites for students to research topics and write their assignments. Wireless Internet was also limited and slow, often taking students and tutors longer than necessary to complete homework assignments requiring online research.

The program was interested in alternative sites, Tanja explained, but with the recent development underway in Regent Park, available space was scarce and expensive. Moreover, she added that many businesses are reluctant to have 150 teenagers using their facility each evening. Unfortunately, an ideal site such as the public library did not have enough space for all the students. Instead, Pathways used it on Wednesday nights for tutoring in advanced mathematics. The local primary schools, although close, were not liked by students who preferred not to spend their evenings back in a school, and especially not in a school setting where chairs and tables were a quarter of their size. Even though they had limitations, church basements were spacious and the churches were flexible with tutoring hours and days of the week.

As the church basements are part of faith-based organizations, there have been some concerns among students, parents, and staff from time to time as to whether churches are appropriate places to study. In previous years, a Grade 9 student, a practicing Jehovah’s Witness, refused to attend tutoring at the church, even though his parents did not object. Tanja explained alternative arrangements were made for him to study at the local library with a few of the older students. To
assuage any parental concerns, Pathways invites parents to come to tutoring and observe. Tanja explained to me that a number of on-site support staff, referred to as “Program Facilitators” (PFs), were former graduates of the program and that a few parents were regularly involved in the program, two factors that have helped reduce concerns among parents of new students about using the church basement as a tutoring space.

In 2011, certain staff objected to graduation being held at St. Basil’s parish hall. The parish hall is the space directly above the tutoring room, adjacent to the sanctuary. “They didn’t feel comfortable,” Tanja said. “They didn’t want to be in the place where the services were held.” She explained that the parish hall was not in the church proper, or, rather, not part of the sanctuary. “It’s in a ‘functions’ space,” she explained. She added that “there are no pews and they are historical sites now, so it was ok” and pointed out that the doors to the basement and the doors to the sanctuary are separate, a difference which made those who objected more comfortable in attending the graduation ceremony.

Special considerations are also made for staff or students who wish to pray during tutoring hours. Designated areas of the basement or non-sanctuary spaces are free for prayer. Muslim students, for example, are welcome to use the designated prayer spaces or may be excused from tutoring to attend the local Mosque for prayers.

For Tanja, accessibility for those with physical exceptionalities was a greater concern. Both church basements involved steps and staircases, making them impossible to enter or exit with ease. As a result, a number of parents and students are not able to use these spaces, she told me. St. Basil’s intended to install an elevator in the upcoming year.
Selecting the Site, Recruiting Participants, and Observing the Field

This section introduces my approach to recruiting the tutors and students and details my approach to observing, interviewing, and documenting my experience collecting data.

Gaining access to the program

My choice of site was intentional and based on my previous experience working alongside my supervisor, Dr. Alister Cumming, and six fellow doctoral research assistants on the Adolescent Literacy in Three Urban Regions (ALTUR) project. Between 2008-2009, we explored the reading and writing practices of 21 high school students at Pathways who had been identified as at-risk for literacy development (see Cumming, 2012). My experience tutoring and observing tutors and students collaborating on writing at Pathways served as my “point of entry” (Smith, 2005) into wanting to know more about what tutors and students thought about writing and voice and how they developed it. Program administrators and staff knew me and of my interest in doing research in the program well in advance of data collection.

Recruiting the participants

As Pathways academic coordinator for Regent Park, Tanja was my initial point of contact and go-to person throughout the study. She had recently replaced a seconded public school teacher whom I had previously met and worked with during the ALTUR project. Tanja welcomed me to Pathways, helped arrange the tutoring sessions, and spoke to me about program administrative issues during a one-to-one interview.

Recruiting tutors. In January 2011, I met with Tanja and the program’s full-time researcher to discuss the purpose of the project, duration, and number of tutors and students I would like to recruit. My intention was to pre-select pairs of tutors and students so I could document tutors’ and tutees’ interactions and writing development over the long term. Pre-selection also had the
advantage of obtaining participants’ consent once rather than for every separate observation with
different tutors and students. After explaining the purpose and scope of the project, clarifying the
benefits for Pathways, and fielding questions and concerns, they agreed to my research proposal
and we set about to determine the best way to recruit tutors and students.

Tanja suggested that we recruit tutors first. I had hoped to secure at least five tutors, but
strove for seven, anticipating attrition over the course of the study. Recruiting tutors took
multiple forms (Hennick, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011), including prearranged pairings, advertising,
and approaching tutors on site. I was open to any tutor interested in participating as long as he or
she would be willing to work with a student on his or her writing. While most tutor-student
pairing at the church sites are ad hoc, Tanja explained that she would be able to pair me up with
tutors and students working together in their new one-to-one literacy component held in the
program office. This special program was designed for students who had been identified as
struggling with reading and writing and who might be better served by meeting with their tutors
in one of the main office’s quiet conference rooms far away from the noise and distractions of
the church basements. I recruited two tutors, Nigel and Caroline (pseudonyms), and two
students, Chris and Samantha (pseudonyms), from the literacy component.

I was also encouraged to recruit tutors from the church sites themselves. The second week, I
joined Tanja on a week of site visits as she solicited feedback from tutors about the program.
Each evening for one week, I visited St. Basil’s and St. Dmitry’s and listened to the praise,
concerns, and suggestions of the tutors about the program, the students, and their roles as tutors.
Although I was already well acquainted with the sites and knew some of the tutors, my
accompanying Tanja served as a form of “community walk through” (Hennick, Hutter, &
Bailey, 2011) that (re)introduced me officially in my role as a researcher to the tutoring
community. I recruited one participant, Ralph (pseudonym), from those site visits.
In addition to visiting the church sites, I also put out a call for volunteers in Pathways’ weekly e-bulletin “Short Cuts.” Although a number of volunteers were interested, I managed to secure just one tutor, Stuart (pseudonym), using this approach. My last strategy was posting recruitment flyers in both basement sites (see Appendix A) and asking the program facilitators to direct any interested tutors to me. I was able to secure three more tutors, Franny, her boyfriend, Alex, and Margareta (pseudonyms). Taking these three approaches—the one-on-one literacy component, attending the tutor feedback groups, advertising in the program bulletin *Short Cuts*, and asking interested tutors at sites if they would be interested—I was able to secure seven tutors. I provided tutors with a detailed letter covering the purpose, scope, and timeline of the project (see Appendix B). I reminded all tutors that they could withdraw at any time for any reason and provided my contact information should they have any questions. Each could choose (or be assigned) a pseudonym, and a gift certificate of $25 was promised upon completion. Once each tutor agreed, I asked them to sign a consent form (see Appendix C), and we set a date for the first interview usually within a week of their agreeing to participate.

**Tutor attrition.** Among the original seven, Alex and Ralph (pseudonyms), the two tutors of color, dropped out within a month. Alex left tutoring because he got a new job far from downtown and Ralph was assigned by the program to work exclusively one-to-one as a math tutor. The fifth tutor, Margareta, continued to participate throughout, but her student, Farshad (pseudonym), dropped out within the first month because of a work conflict. As I was only able to observe their sessions once, I did not include her data in this project. The tutors whose observations and interviews I included were Stuart, Nigel, Caroline, and Franny (see Table 3.1).
Table 3.1
Four Tutor Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutor pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Subjects tutored</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stuart</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Anglo-Saxon-Canadian</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Retired editor</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigel</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>European-Canadian</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Paralegal; Studying Special Education</td>
<td>English; specialized in students with special needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Canadian of Anglo-Irish &amp; United Empire Loyalist (UEL) heritage</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Public relations; writer for Ontario government</td>
<td>English; History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franny</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Irish-Canadian</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Bar tender</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recruiting students.** Following tutor recruitment, I enlisted interested students. Tanja had already paired me with Nigel and Chris, and a month later she matched me up with Caroline and Samantha. If I wanted more students, I would need to recruit on my own. Initially, my preferred criteria for selecting eligible student participants included students between the ages of 14 to 18, the age group that Pathways serves, newcomers, and multilinguals (with English as their second or third language). Lastly, students needed to be enrolled in some kind of academic writing course (e.g., composition and English literature) in high school in which they received weekly writing assignments. Although a number of students fell into several of these categories, none fell into all of them.

Within the first four weeks, I recruited four students in addition to the two students that Tanja enlisted from the one-to-one literacy program. To identify students, I first asked the program
facilitators and then the participating tutors which students regularly came to tutoring for English writing assistance. I also spoke to students whom I had tutored once or twice in the previous semester to see if they were interested. When I approached students, I routinely introduced myself as a tutor and PhD student at the University of Toronto. I explained my project, the duration, requirements, and issue of a gift certificate upon completion. For those students who were interested, I provided a letter explaining the project for their parents and included a consent form. I also provided a similar letter for the students and included an assent form if they were under the age of 18 (see Appendices D and E for student letter and assent form). I encouraged them to ask any questions and reminded them that they could withdraw at any time for any reason. I also provided parents with my contact information should they have any questions. Parents knew that my research had received approval from the University of Toronto and Pathways. Lastly, in all my letters, I detailed the purpose of the research and how it would benefit the program and their child. Usually students returned the following week with both their parents’ consent and assent forms completed. Once students agreed, I informed the program facilitators and contacted the student’s SPSW to notify them about my project and their students’ involvement.

Student profiles. Three of the six students (Natasha, Scrapy, Samantha) had immigrated to Canada. Natasha and Scrapy spoke English as their second language. Samantha spoke Jamaican English as her first language. The fourth participant, Joy, was born in Canada to immigrant parents and spoke a language other than English at home. Chris was born in Toronto and spoke English at home.

Student attrition. When Farshad dropped out, I was able to find another student, Nir, to replace him. But, Nir also dropped out after only one session claiming he had more homework in
math than in English. Thus, the students whose observations and interviews I included were Natasha, Scrapy, Chris, Samantha, and Joy, as described in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2
Five Student Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Languages Spoken</th>
<th>Tutor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Afghani</td>
<td>Pashto; Urdu English</td>
<td>Stuart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrapy</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>Bengali; English</td>
<td>Stuart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bengali-Canadian</td>
<td>Bengali; English</td>
<td>Franny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Jamaican-Canadian</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Nigel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Jamaican</td>
<td>Patois; English</td>
<td>Caroline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Matching tutors and students. Once tutors and students had been identified and each had agreed to participate, I formed tutoring pairs. The program had already matched four participants from the one-to-one literacy component and set their meeting times: On Tuesday evenings, Nigel tutored Chris, and on Thursday afternoons, Caroline tutored Samantha. I matched the remaining pairs based on availability. As Natasha and Scrapy preferred to attend Monday nights, I paired them with Stuart who was willing to switch from Wednesday to Monday nights. Both Franny and Joy attended tutoring on Thursday evenings. They had worked together in the past and each felt comfortable working with the other.
Data collection

I collected data using different processes and procedures common in ethnographic fieldwork (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) including observing and carefully recording the weekly tutoring sessions, interviewing participants, and photographing and archiving the documents they produced. Field notes in ethnographically-oriented studies (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) must show the observations rather than simply tell about them, as they must “convey something about the world […] to] those who are unfamiliar with that world” (p. 45). I approached my field notes both as a researcher and as a writer: I strove to document the sights, sounds, smells, actions, speech, movement, and body language of participants and of the tutoring space to enable me to write up my case studies with greater clarity and coherence (see Van Maanen, 2011).

I used semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Merriam, 1998) to discover participants’ beliefs about good writing and voice as well as to document their reactions to their tutoring sessions. Semi-structured interviews are widely used in L2 writing research (e.g., Hyland, 2013; Kibler, 2011; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2013; Lee, 2013; Petric, 2012; Polio, 2012; Yi, 2010) and are ideal for qualitative-based studies in education as they allow researchers to “[ask] all informants the same core questions [while allowing the researcher] the freedom to ask follow-up questions that build on the response received” (Brenner, 2006, p. 362). I found semi-structured interviews critical to my study as they gave both the tutors and students the opportunity to add, clarify, or comment on tutoring sessions to enrich and strengthen the findings. Lastly, to support my observations and interviews, I systematically photographed, labeled, and archived artifacts (e.g., essays) produced by participants and by the literacy program (e.g., flyers).
Triangulating data

Participant interviews. One-third of the data collected and analyzed in this study were drawn from three sets of digitally recorded interviews collected from nine participants. I am a seasoned second-language interviewer with years of experience interviewing ELLs both for oral placement exams and for general language proficiency. I see interviews as a co-constructive process between the researcher and participant (Duff, 2008b; Duff & Talmy, 2011), and, in this study, interviews served as a principal means of obtaining the tutors’ and students’ understanding and their interpretations (Warren, 2001) about writing and tutoring writing. Multiple interviews allowed for a rich data sample that increased the trustworthiness of the findings and permitted comparisons across interviews and between observations and interviews (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Weiss, 1994).

Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and totaled nearly 30 hours of recorded conversation. Participants were interviewed at times and locations convenient to them (e.g., the church basement, the Pathways office, or a local coffee shop). All participants knew they were being recorded by two miniature digital voice recorders: an iPod touch and a Phillips handheld digital recorder. Two recorders were precautionary measures to ensure that no data would be lost due to a technical malfunction (Duff, 2008b). They were also compact and inconspicuous, blending in with the participants’ iPhones, iPods, and cell phones already present on the table. Professional interview etiquette was observed at all times. For example, each set of instructions was read aloud to confirm that participants knew the purpose of the interview, the kinds of questions they would be asked to answer, and the duration of the interview. I spoke little, never interrupted, clarified when prompted, and paraphrased responses from time to time to ensure I understood and could confirm accuracy of my notes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I took notes by hand during each interview to support the recordings. Before the first interview, I reviewed the
purpose of the research project (based on my initial letters of invitation to participate in the study) and asked participants if they had any questions, concerns, or comments before starting. Once all questions were answered and the participants agreed, I collected the consent/assent forms and began the first interview.

**Interview 1.** The first interview included three parts: (a) participant demographics, (b) writing beliefs, and (c) reader feedback on student-generated essays.

A demographic questionnaire was adapted from a student questionnaire that had been used successfully with 22 student participants from the ALTUR project in 2008 (Cumming, 2012). For tutors, questions included name, age, ethnicity, profession, education, number of years tutoring, subject areas tutored, and the most rewarding/challenging aspects of tutoring (see Appendix F). Similarly, students were asked their name, age, ethnicity, courses taken and grades from previous semester, and about their experiences writing (see Appendix G). Pseudonyms were later obtained from (or assigned to) each participant and individual dossiers created, logged, stored, and updated as necessary on an Excel spreadsheet.

Following the demographic questionnaire, questions focused on good writing and a writer’s voice. For example, tutors were asked what good writing meant to them, about how they usually approached giving feedback on student writing, how they helped a student to develop voice, and in what ways they thought their background influenced their feedback (see Appendix H). Students were asked similar questions about writing and voice but were also asked to discuss writing that they had done recently that they thought captured their voice and to describe the different ways tutors helped them with their written English (see Appendix I). Like Petric (2010), I did not provide a definition of voice, but rather asked the participants to define it and or describe their understanding of it. Yes-no questions were avoided and, instead, open-ended questions that invited students to reflect, consider, and respond were developed (Merriam,
The questions for this first interview were developed over months and over multiple revisions based on discussions with other doctoral candidates specializing in L2 writing, professional writers, and my supervisor.

Lastly, in addition to reflecting on elements of good writing and voice, participants were asked to read and comment on the writing and voice in two short (1-2 paragraph) authentic student writing samples, a persuasive letter in response to a candy bar competition (“Yummy Yummy Candy Bar”) and a creative short story about a young boy who faces discrimination because of his clothing (“King Clothes”). These writing samples were produced for the ALTUR project by two Grade 9 students in 2008 and reflected the kind of writing students in Grades 9 and 10 might be expected to produce based on similar writing prompts in the Ontario Grade 10 literacy exam (see Cumming, 2012). All participants read each essay and commented on the quality of the writing, identified the writer’s voice, and provided suggestions for improvement.

**Interviews 2 and 3.** Data analysis, reflection, and review continue throughout a qualitative study (Merriam, 2009). Interviews 2 and 3 reflected this ongoing analysis as these interview questions were not designed in advance of the study, but rather emerged based on observations, field notes, and artifact documentation and included questions pertaining to scheduled events offered by the program, such as the anti-racism and oppression workshop offered for tutors in March 2011. Interview questions were again semi-structured and included follow up questions from the previous interview, probing questions that delved into beliefs about writing and voice, and direct questions about the writing produced in the sessions. While certain questions were asked to both tutors and students (e.g., quality of the sessions, beliefs about voice, and recommendations to future tutors), other questions targeted individual experiences. Scheduling three semi-structured interviews that drew both on a standard set of questions and a set of participant-specific questions allowed for the interviews not only to be tailored to each case to
capture more details and bring greater depth, but also allowed for comparisons across the four cases (Friedman, 2012).

**Interview 2.** The second interview was scheduled four to six weeks following the first interview to ensure that both tutor and student had worked together enough times to feel prepared to discuss their sessions. Tutors and students were each interviewed separately (see Appendices J & K for interview questions). Both tutors and students were asked to comment on their impressions of the tutoring sessions to date, discuss the student’s writing they had been working on using stimulated recalls (Friedman, 2012; Mackey & Gass, 2005), and reflect on the development of a writer’s voice in their sessions, for example. Stimulated recalls provide key information to the researcher on a writer’s thoughts, attitudes, and reactions to the writing (DiPardo, 1994) and were used successfully in the ALTUR study (Cumming, 2012). To stimulate reflections, for example, I asked the tutors and students to examine selected writing samples they had produced together and encouraged them to talk about the successes and challenges of that particular draft and what they revised and why. In the second interview, I reminded participants of their definition of voice from the first interview and asked if it had changed. I also introduced the Ontario English Curriculum’s definition of voice and asked the participants to share their impressions.

**Interview 3.** The final interview took place one month following the last tutoring session. Questions for the third interview were drawn from the observations, field notes, and documents obtained from all sessions (see Appendices L & M). Both tutors and students were asked to reflect on their sessions, about the writing they had done together, and the ways in which voice had or had not been developed over the term. I also reminded participants of their original definitions of voice and their impressions of the Ontario English Curriculum’s definition before asking them to reflect on two well-known definitions of voice described by Elbow (1981) and
Ede (1989). These definitions describe voice in a concrete, visual way that would likely resonate with tutors and students more than more technical definitions might (e.g., Matsuda, 2001).

Finally, I asked participants to offer recommendations for future tutors and to provide their impressions of the church basements as places for community tutoring. Interview 3 completed the three sets of interviews. To complete the process, participants signed an acknowledgment of completion form (see Appendix N) and received a $25 gift certificate to a local bookstore.

Observations. While collecting data, I took on a role as observer as participant (Merriam 2009) in which the “researcher’s observer activities are known to the group [and] participation in the group is definitely secondary to the role of information gatherer” (p. 124). This was not as difficult as I thought it might be given that I had been tutoring at Pathways for several years and that certain staff, students, and other tutors recognized me as both a graduate-student researcher from the ALTUR project and as an English tutor. When I was observing participants, I did not tutor other students, even if asked. In those cases, I politely declined, explained that I was conducting research, and if possible suggested another tutor whose expertise or subject knowledge might match the student’s needs. I asked the participants if my presence distracted them. Tutors and students both noted that after a few weeks they forgot that I was even there. Stuart explained, “[Robert] you’re easy to work with […] you’re just the furniture there.” He added reassuringly, “I’ve tried to be respectful of the fact that you’re not really participating in it, you’re just the observer of it.”

Over the four months, I observed approximately 60 hours of one-to-one tutoring. The sessions were recorded digitally and supported by approximately 280 pages (two standard-sized spiral notebooks) of field notes taken by hand. Similar to the interview, participants knew and agreed to be audio recorded during their lessons. Following observations, the recorded sessions were labeled and uploaded directly to my home computer. During data collection, I missed one day
(two tutoring sessions) in order to attend the American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL) Conference in Chicago, USA. The tutor agreed to tape-record the sessions in my absence. I also left a note with the tutor to share with the students explaining my absence.

My field notes documented the tutoring session (including topics, dialogue, and type of interaction), captured the tutoring space, summarized conversations, and included short reflections and annotations. I noted everything from sounds, smells, and temperature to coughs, body language, and clothing (see Pink, 2009). My notes captured the look and feel of the rooms, including how the space was used and how the furniture was arranged. During the tutorials, I sat opposite the participants with my body often turned at an angle. I recorded when the participants arrived, what they were wearing, and where and how they sat at the table, making a rough sketch of the seating arrangements, objects on the tables, and how participants used those objects. These details represent the thick description advanced by Geertz (1973) for any ethnography. Observations included in situ analysis as I highlighted, starred, and annotated events, dialogues, comments, or situations that piqued my curiosity and warranted further discussion during the follow-up interviews.

Documents. Following each session, I documented everything the tutor and tutee produced together. This included notes made on scratch paper, assignment guidelines, and writing rubrics. I also photographed the essays, poems, reports, and sections of books they were reading together. In addition to the primary methods of triangulation of data outlined above, I archived the weekly bulletin, Short Cuts, I received from Pathways, emails from tutor participants, and newspaper clippings about Pathways from January to June 2011. I attended the anti-racist and oppression focus group in March 2011 and attended Pathway’s graduation ceremony for Grade 12 students. These additional points of triangulation also included my involvement in the ALTUR project and discourse analyses of Pathways’ websites I completed for course projects over a two-year period.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tutor interviews</strong></td>
<td>▪ Collected 15 semi-structured interviews with five tutors (four used in the study).</td>
<td>▪ Recorded and transcribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Scheduled pre-observation interview before first session</td>
<td>▪ Ran between 60 to 120 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Scheduled mid-observation interview partway through (weeks 4-6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Scheduled post-observation interview after final session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observations</strong></td>
<td>▪ Volunteered since 2008 (starting with ALTUR project)</td>
<td>▪ Included photographs of the neighborhood, church basement and Pathways office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Visited sites on a weekly basis from January to June</td>
<td>▪ Consisted of field notes and digital recordings of around 60 hours of tutoring observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Observed tutoring for four months (March to June)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student interviews</strong></td>
<td>▪ Collected 15 semi-structured interviews with five students</td>
<td>▪ Recorded and transcribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Scheduled pre-observation interview before first session</td>
<td>▪ Ran between 30-60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Scheduled mid-observation interview partway through (weeks 4-6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Scheduled post-observation interview after final session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Artifact collection</strong></td>
<td>▪ Collected throughout the study</td>
<td>▪ Program flyers and bulletins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Drafts of students’ papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Course assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Grading rubrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Tutor scratch notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

I began annotating my field notes during participant interviews and weekly observations of tutoring sessions. When I observed, I noted particular pedagogical situations or comments on writing or beliefs about writing that I wanted to follow up on during the interviews. Similarly, during the interviews I often highlighted, starred, or annotated comments, reflections, or beliefs on writing that invited a follow up question or clarification (see Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) and were suggestive of potential categories (Delamont, 2002).

Transcribing. Participant interviews were transcribed, labeled, and stored on a secure hard drive in my home. Interviews were transcribed by a seasoned transcriptionist (see Appendix O for conventions). Duff (2008b) noted that the approach to transcription depends on the researcher’s objectives in representing speech. My approach to transcribing reflected my interest in what the tutors and students said and not how they said it. For example, pauses were noted, but pause length was not. I wanted to represent participants’ speech as might be used in fiction or nonfiction as opposed to speech conventions commonly used by conversation analysis (CA). I reviewed and corrected each transcription for accuracy. I also transcribed short excerpts from selected writing observations that were discussed in the interviews. Acknowledging that transcripts are a situated and interpretive process (Green, Franquiz, & Dixon, 1997), I received participants’ approval to use their transcribed speech from their interviews and observations in their case studies.

Coding. Systematic coding began with Saldaña’s (2012) recommendation for coding beliefs, values, and attitudes, features that had emerged from my ongoing annotations. I attempted coding for these on the first set of tutor interviews but soon found it difficult to distinguish among a belief, value, and attitude. I stopped and instead proceeded with open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), but this approach did not sort out categories or themes in any transparent or
systematic way that I found helpful. I decided instead to devise my own scheme for organizing the data by interview (e.g., 1, 2, or 3) and interview questions rather than by codes. Using Microsoft Excel, I created two separate spreadsheets (one for tutors and one for students) for each of the three interviews and mined the transcripts for the answers. This approach immediately opened up the data and allowed for easier comparison across interviews, questions, and among participants.

**Creating the case studies.** Creating the cases (that appear in Chapters 4 and 5) was straightforward. I wanted cases both that represented a comprehensive and cohesive picture of each tutoring pair and their work together and that allowed for easier cross-case analysis, similar to the ALTUR case studies (see Cumming, 2012). As case studies in educational research average between two and four cases (Chapelle & Duff, 2003; Duff, 2012), I prepared four cases for each of the four tutoring pairs and named each case after the day of the week the pairs met (e.g., Monday, Tuesday, Thursday afternoon, and Thursday evening). As my initial interests focused around writing, voice, and pedagogical approach, I decided to divide the content within each case study into two sections. The first section included an introduction to each participant, their beliefs about good writing and voice, and tutors’ views on writing and voice that contributed to their pedagogical approach. The second section included the tutoring sessions, participant reflections on the success of those sessions, and their recommendations for future tutors. Finally, I separated the four cases into two chapters based on tutoring location: Chapter 4 included the two case studies at St. Basil’s and Chapter 5 included the two case studies at the Pathways’ program office.

**Cross-case analysis: Showing rather than telling.** I carried out a cross-case analysis to identify the common characteristics in beliefs, values, and attitudes about good writing and voice among the tutors and the students and the various approaches they took towards tutoring and
learning, respectively (see Chapter 6). Cross-case analysis has been used successfully in ethnographic and qualitative educational research as “a way to find what is common across the [case studies], not what is unique to each” (Stake, 2006, p. 39). Identifying salient themes, reoccurring patterns, and common concepts contribute not only to the overall understanding of the data, but also speak to their “relevance or applicability” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.173) when compared to other similar cases. In the ALTUR project, a cross-case analysis provided comparative insights from multiple perspectives (see Cumming, Al-Alawi, & Watanabe, 2012) that enriched our understanding of the complex socialization processes influencing the students’ academic development.

I approached the cross-case analysis in a unique way that reflected my interpretivist orientation to understanding and presenting my data. What made it unique was that the process of writing up the analysis itself became part of the research methods. Qualitative researchers have observed what writing scholars (Elbow, 1998; Zinnser, 1983) have known for years: that the process of writing itself serves as a method of analysis (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) and reflects the author’s epistemological orientation to the research findings (Van Maanen, 2011). To me, as a writing teacher and researcher, this meant showing my process of making sense of my data rather than simply telling about it. Chapter 6 represents both a narrative approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and a “confessional tale” (Van Maanen, 2011) of how I analyzed, made sense of, and reported my findings. It serves as an essential step to answering my research questions in Chapter 7.

How did I achieve this? Developing Chapter 6 was a long, recursive process of annotating the cases and noting patterns and themes, first across tutors, then across students, and then across the cases. I condensed and sorted the findings into four broad thematic categories, or observations: identity, writer capital, good writing, and voice. As I wrote, I introduced each of the four
observations by commenting on the significance of that theme and then followed up by drawing on specific examples from across the cases, comparing and contrasting the various beliefs, approaches, and practices. I connected examples of tutoring practices and approaches (i.e., micro instances) with larger (i.e., macro) beliefs, attitudes, and values identified by the tutors and students that reflected cultural and national practices.

In short, Chapter 6 reflects a “tale” of both process and product. The reader arrives at the findings with me after participating in the process of analyzing the interviews and observations. This approach has two strengths: (a) it reinforces the internal validity between chapters and allows readers to observe firsthand my process of analysis and to determine the transferability of the findings (Creswell, 2007) before I relate them to existing theoretical and empirical research (in Chapter 7); and (b) it allows other writing scholars to draw on it for the purposes of replication. Other education-based case studies using cross-comparative analysis have employed a similar interpretivist approach of discussing the findings (Alexander, 2001; Heath, 1983; Li, 1996; Lightfoot, 1983; White, 2012).

**Member checking.** Following other ethnographically-oriented writing studies (Brice, 2005; Gilliland, 2014), I chose not to pursue inter-rater coding of my data (Miles & Huberman, 1994), an external audit of my coding, organization, interpretations performed by an outside researcher. Rather, I sought to establish validity and reliability by triangulating the data and using a constant comparative review of the data—systematic and ongoing checking of transcripts, observations, and documents—during and after data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) followed by completing a member check of the individual cases with tutors and students (Carspecken 1996; Duff, 2008b; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To complete the member checks, I met with each participant in person, or, if meeting face-to-face was not possible, I attached their case in an email to receive their feedback electronically. These member checks were completed with all but
Stuart and Franny. Stuart declined a member check, and, regrettably, passed away three months following the final interview. Although Franny received her case and agreed to read and review it, she never responded with her feedback. I notified my supervisory committee and considered her non-response as a tacit approval (see Lincoln & Guba, 2013). The participants said they enjoyed reading the cases. For example, after reading his case, Scrappy told me I had “nailed” his Grade 9 experience. Caroline approved of her case study and showed her appreciation by removing her red Remembrance Day poppy from her overcoat and pinning it to the lapel of my coat. Lastly, the tutors and students signed an acknowledgement of member check completion (see Appendix P) to affirm that they had read their case study and that they approved of how they had been represented.

Limitations

All research has limitations. In this study, the primary limitations include the length of study and the finite number of written products students produced and shared. While these limitations potentially curtailed the scope of my findings, I do not believe that they reduced the depth or quality of my work or prevented me from answering my research questions.

Garrett (2008) recommended that ethnographically-oriented research engaging language socialization theory include data up to at least one year and that data be collected in more than one venue to observe socialization in varied and diverse contexts (e.g., school or home). Even though my observations of the tutoring sessions were limited to four months, I was involved with the program (and in the field) for a total of five years. My participation in the ALTUR project and my continued volunteering in the program underscored my commitment to building trust, becoming acquainted with staff, tutors, and students, and giving back to a program that had given me so much. While observing participants over an entire year would have been ideal, I am
confident that I obtained a substantial amount of data to capture participants’ beliefs about writing and voice and their approaches to writing development.

I also recognize that my study would have been enriched by observing students in their high school classrooms and by talking with their teachers about their writing development. To offset this limitation, I drew on the approach we took for the ALTUR project and interviewed students about language and literacy practices at home and school and to share their homework assignments, rubrics, and teachers’ feedback. This approach helped me to capture some of the complexity without further imposing on the private lives of my participants, something I wanted to maintain.

Another potential limitation I needed to address was the limited number of drafts of their writing that students shared with me. While students wrote something with their tutor each week, they seldom returned the following week with a second draft or showed a paper they had gotten feedback on from their teacher. This upset certain tutors like Stuart who wanted to know how Natasha and Scrapy were doing in school. Drafting in tutoring programs and following up with a tutor was not part of tutoring in this context.

Making my Experiences in the Field Visible: Decisions, Choices, and Reflections on Writing, Race, Sexuality, and Death

While researcher reflexivity might be an indispensable part of qualitative fieldwork (Clifford, 1986), it has not always been a common practice in L2 writing research (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). As a writing teacher and researcher, I recognize I am not a neutral, detached observer of tutors and students as they meet to discuss, develop, or debate writing, but rather I am an involved observer (Friedman, 2012) who brings biases, attitudes, and values that influence the environment and that transform my interactions with people. I acknowledge that being a white, middle-aged, able-bodied male are visible markers of my identity that follow me and are
intertwined with less visible, but no less important markers, such as being middle class, gay, American, a teacher, and a PhD student. In the context of this study, these aspects of my own socio-historic identity, as well as previous research experience in the literacy program and my ongoing interactions with staff, tutors, and students potentially influenced my gaze, shaped my interviews, and guided my approach to writing up my observations and findings in ways about which I may not always be aware.

Long before I started my own research at Pathways, my experience serving on the ALTUR project—working with students, observing the other tutors, and watching the activities in the basement of the churches—helped shape my initial research questions and predisposed me to looking at writing practices from a more ethnographic perspective. Moreover, my decision to observe tutoring from the standpoint of language socialization is rooted in my own experience being schooled in the standard rhetorical conventions of essay writing; in my experience as a teacher socializing graduate students into academic and discipline-specific writing; in the findings of the ALTUR project which identified home, school, and community socialization as influencing students relationship with literacy (Cumming, Al-Alawi, & Watanabe, 2012); and in the mission of the literacy program which aimed to socialize students academically and behaviorally through group mentorship activities.

When I started my data collection in 2011, I had already accrued 170 hours of onsite tutoring and observation and had produced two co-authored chapters (Al-Alawi & Kohls, 2012; Kohls & Wilson, 2012) and a case study (Kohls, 2012) in an edited monograph on adolescent literacy practices at Pathways (Cumming, 2012). I knew the goals and mission of the program, how the tutoring space was used, and the demographics of the students and tutors. Most importantly, I knew people and they knew me. I was on a first-name basis with program counselors, on-site support staff, and tutors. Without having first built a trusting relationship with the program, it is
unlikely that I would have been as successful in getting program support to recruit tutors and students. I continued to tutor at Pathways even after the ALTUR project and my data collection ended. My personal commitment to the program and long-term field experience reinforces the validity and reliability of my findings and repudiates the kind of ‘blitzkrieg ethnography’ (Rist, 1980) that Watson-Gegeo (1988) argued can potentially limit the impact of qualitative applied linguistic research.

The same attention I took to establish trust and connection with the literacy program I also took to triangulate all parts of my study to strengthen the validity of my findings, but also to vet, check, and reflect on my own interpretations as I progressed. In addition to spending extensive time in the field, I conducted three sets of interviews with my informants over the length of my study, vetted my cases by member checking, and consulted with peers and committee members during and after data collection. Writing up my study, I drew on Van Maanen’s (2011) combination of narrative conventions and accounts to produce a narrative that integrates participants’ voices, impressions, and attitudes with my own struggles, questions, and concerns framed within impressionistic descriptions of space, place, and people. This produces my own authorial voice that is personal, reflective, and rich in examples.

While trust and longevity helped to build my rapport with the program, they also gave me the time and space and clarity to reflect on how I responded to writing, race, sexuality, and death—four issues that emerged while collecting, analyzing, and writing up my data, which I explore below.

As a returning researcher, I knew the vulnerability involved in sharing writing with a complete stranger. My work with K-9, the ALTUR participant I introduced in Chapter 1, taught me how to talk to students in the program about their writing (Kohls, 2012). For our first six months, K-9 was reluctant to share his writing with me. Although he never told me, I suspected
he felt judged and evaluated by sharing his work with someone he did not know well. After many months of working together, he finally shared some of his writing with me. Trust and respect had been established by being present, talking, drawing, and playing trivia games.

Returning to do research at Pathways a second time, I realized my role as a researcher in my own thesis would be no different: I was there to listen and observe and ask questions, but not to evaluate, assess, or comment on the student’s writing or the tutor’s teaching.

Shortly after I started data collection, my belief was put to the test when I felt that Stuart was overly antagonistic with Scrapy by calling him “lazy” during their sessions. I considered intervening. My supervisor suggested I hold back, reminding me that different tutoring styles resonate with different students. He was right. During subsequent interviews, Scrapy praised Stuart and revered his tutoring style: “He motivates me,” Scrapy said, “[He] tells me to like not to be lazy.” Toohey (2008) noted that observing bad language teaching is an opportunity for language ethnographers to consider the ethics and potential impact of intervening in a classroom situation. My experience contrasts with Talmy’s (2009), who intervened between a teacher and a student in his ethnography of an ESL classroom. While I sympathize with Talmy’s attempt to defuse the tension in the classroom, he nevertheless altered his findings and lost potentially valuable insights into how the student might have handled the situation on his own.

Based on my experience with the ALTUR project, I knew firsthand how issues of race affected ALTUR participants like 14-year-old K-9 who had been racially profiled by the police in Regent Park and who had rebuffed schoolyard bullies who tried to pick a fight with him because of where he lived. I also vividly recall the time K-9 schooled me in race while reading a creation story in world mythology. “This story is racist!” he called out one evening while we read *Fire Children* (Bailey, McLeish, & Spearman, 1981), a West African creation myth that recounts human creation. According to the myth, humans were first shaped out of clay and then
baked in a kiln to bring them to life. Those humans who were left in the kiln too long were black; those who did not make it into the kiln were white.

The myth unsettled us. I apologized to K-9 for not vetting the story more carefully ahead of time. K-9 loved mythology and *Fire Children* appeared in a collection of world myths I borrowed from the library at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education (OISE). I felt tense, uneasy, and embarrassed. K-9 looked at me relaxed but puzzled. “Why should you be sorry?” he asked. “You didn’t write it. You should be offended ‘cuz you’re uncooked! You’re raw!” He laughed. He turned to his brother, who was sitting across the table from us, and quipped, “and you’ve been left in too long!” I sat stunned, relieved, and bewildered. This episode was significant in many ways. I left thinking how comfortable K-9 was talking about race and racism and how uncomfortable I was. My reaction was to protect him from the racism of the story and to take responsibility for the author’s words; after all I was the adult and the tutor and a researcher. He taught me that he did not need my protection. I learned that in attempting to protect him I was really protecting myself from talking about a subject I felt ill equipped to discuss. I began to see my response as part of the larger problem that prevents discussion around race that leads many white educators into denial or silence or to feign color blindness (Applebaum, 2010; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Frankenberg, 1993; Leonardo, 2009; Marx, 2006; Modica, 2015; Sleeter, 1993). I was reminded yet again that teaching is not a neutral endeavor; it is bidirectional and students school their tutors.

Tanja told me during the first few weeks of data collection that the program was cautious about outsiders conducting research without giving back to the students or to the program. Similarly, Caroline, Samantha’s tutor, announced that tutors should not approach tutoring with “the great white hope of academics,” a slogan she said the program stressed in her new tutor orientation. Being mindful of the intersection among race, research, and tutoring was clearly
important to the program. They also became important to me. I wanted to show the program that I was in for the long haul and would support the program in ways that were relevant to them. In addition to extensive ongoing tutoring, I also met with Pathways’ new literacy consultant to talk about the ALTUR findings and participated in a literacy development workshop for Pathways Canada. I delivered an academic writing workshop for interested writing tutors to share strategies for working with writers. Pathways recognized my years of involvement in an unsolicited and gracious acknowledgment that appeared in the 2013 University of Toronto alumni newsletter about Regent Park and Pathways to Education (Lorinc, 2013).

The vast majority of tutors in the program were white. I cannot say with certainty how my being white influenced my interactions with them, other than I believe the tutors were perhaps more open and less censored about issues around race, ethnicity, and immigration than they otherwise might have been if I were a researcher of color. As Berger (2015) discovered from her own study of immigrant women to the U.S., sharing a common background and experiences with the researcher invited her participants to open up and share more about themselves.

While we might have shared similar racial and ethnic backgrounds, the tutors and I did not share a common nationality. At times Stuart made comments about the U.S. to me or to a student while tutoring. While I silently agreed with some comments and disagreed with others, I never intervened. On discovering that I was American, a program facilitator told me how well I had integrated into society and how Canadian I had become. The subtext was clear: Being friendly, polite, and respectful to staff, tutors, and students were clearly not qualities Americans possess, but were considered to be exclusively Canadian virtues that I could have only acquired once I moved to Toronto. This idea that all Canadians share a common set of customs, habits, and traits, reflects Anderson’s (2006) “imagined community.” It reminded me that socialization had the
power to nationalize forms of politeness as it does language standards, forms of writing, and a
writer’s voice.

While sexuality was not the focus of this thesis, sexual orientation became a point of
reflection. Stuart came out to me within a few weeks of our meeting. I believe our shared sexual
orientation influenced how he and I related to each other—cultural references, life events, and
shared sense of humor—and opened up a safe space to express our experiences of being gay
men. When Stuart took his own life a few months after our final interview, I was shocked. I
grieved. I knew Stuart better than any of the other participants and felt guilty for not observing
signs of any emotional distress during the study. How well did I really know him after all, I
wondered. Aside from the loss I felt, Stuart’s death also presented a problem for the research:
What do I do with his data? Without his member check, would my discussion of his experience
be valid or trustworthy? Stuart had declined a member check during our last interview, telling me
it was unnecessary. He said he trusted me to tell his story and acknowledged the care I took in
my approach, asserting, “[Robert, you’re] very diligent about your work, your methodology,
your materials.”

Even though researchers are encouraged to consider possible ethical dilemmas before starting
research (Taylor, 1987), I could not have anticipated this incident. I turned to qualitative research
literature (e.g., Merriam, 1998; Rhodes & Weiss, 2013; Schwant, 2007) to understand more
about the ethics of member checking in light of participant death. I found nothing. I realized that
Stuart was the participant who shared the most with me and from whom I learned the most. He
struggled as a tutor and I learned through his struggles. He was also one of the most committed
tutors I had ever met. He cared. It became clear that Stuart had left his legacy with me. I realized
it would be unethical not to report his experiences, successes, and struggles as they influenced
and shaped so much of this study.
Stuart was unapologetic in his advice about writing: “You can do anything with me, but please don’t bore me!” Van Maanen (2011) expressed that writers choose the shape and texture of the ethnography through their words, sentences, quotes, and structure. Stuart inspired my writing and his words permitted me to write up the cases as well as all chapters in this thesis in a way that would engage, inform, and inspire. His advice about writing lives on in this thesis. It is advice that I continue to share with students to this very day.
Chapter 4

Case Studies in the Church Basement

The four case studies presented in Chapters 4 and 5 include the beliefs and reflections of volunteer writing tutors and their students. The cases are based on data gathered from 30 hours of one-to-one interviews, four months (or 60 hours) of tutoring observations, and the documents, artifacts, and materials participants produced, shared, or brought to tutoring between February and June 2011. For ease of readability, the case reports are named after the day of the week the tutoring pairs met (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday afternoon, and Thursday evening) and organized by the tutoring site where they met (the Church basement or the Pathways office). The two cases that took place in the church basement (Monday and Thursday evening) are included in Chapter 4; the two that took place in the Pathways office (Tuesday and Thursday afternoon) are included in Chapter 5. Each chapter begins with a description of the site, detailing the sites, sounds, and smells.

Mondays and Thursdays in the Church Basement

It is a Monday night in March. Streetcars packed with anxious commuters yield at a crosswalk. High school students dash to the other side of the busy street. They regroup at the corner and then head towards a small church on the corner. The workday is ending for most people, but tutoring is just beginning for the volunteer tutors and students sitting in the basement of St Basil’s church. Tonight, Natasha, a Grade 12 student, sits with Stuart, her tutor, in the corner of the noisy basement and summarizes a short story about marital infidelity between two characters, Steven and Anne.

“Cuz you know how Steven he sleeps with Anne?” Natasha asks expectantly. Stuart hesitates. He never remembered reading about two characters named Steven and Anne or that they had slept together. He pauses. Perhaps he had never read Sinclair Ross’s *The Painted Door* after all.
“Remind me of this story because I may be thinking of another door,” he asks. Natasha plunges headlong into a full recounting of a Saskatchewan farmer, his wife, her lover, a blizzard, and the Canadian prairie in the dead of winter. In her eagerness to tell the story, she forgets what Stuart had told her last week about not using “like” when she speaks: “There’s a huge storm, like, and then the snow is like,” “He’s like, ‘I’ll send for a friend,’” “She gets all like weird.” The minutes pass. The “likes” snowball. Stuart grows impatient. Her summary is too long. The drumming from the parish hall pounds, rumbles, and hammers overhead as she forges onward, “the animals are like…”

Enough is enough. Stuart knows he has to teach Natasha how to summarize. He waits for her to finish. Once he secures the floor, he wastes no time in reminding Natasha that English teachers are not impressed with longwinded summaries and he is not impressed with her cascade of “likes.” He flares his nostrils and scans the basement and looks back at Natasha.

“What is this room about? he asks. “What is this space and room about? Give me one word.” “Tutoring”? She guesses.

“Right! Absolutely! It’s not about so many tutors and so many tutees and pupils and staff, and things (like that?) and what not.” Stuart pauses, adding, “What is that story about?


* * *

St. Basil’s sits on a corner surrounded by mostly vacant lots waiting impatiently to be developed. Across the street, tinted windows from a new condominium reflect St. Basil’s red brick and grey stone façade. A bell tower in front is capped with a green dome. A gold cross sits on top like a birthday candle in a child’s cupcake. A flight of steps leads up to the sanctuary. In the warmer months, students congregate on the church steps and swap stories. On the north side of the sanctuary is the parish hall, a square building three times the size of the church. The doors
to the parish hall lead directly to the church basement. Unlike the sanctuary doors, the doors to the parish hall are at street level and are unlocked.

The basement of St. Basil’s always bustles. Each evening between 4:30pm and 7:30pm Monday through Thursday, students, tutors, program facilitators, staff, and university researchers stream in and out of the tutoring room located at the end of a long hallway in a far corner of the basement. By 4:30, dusk sets in and the florescent lights pour out from the cellar windows. Girls in blue, black, and beige hijabs usually pass me on the way in. They hold the door open for me and I follow them down a flight of stairs. At the foot of the stairs is the community art centre. Each evening I am greeted by the same smell of finger paint, glue, clay, and crayons coming from the open doorway. It smells like Sunday school. On certain nights of the week, directly across the hallway from the art centre, feet pound, tap, and stomp to the rhythm of Macedonian folk music. And, wedged into an alcove between the smell of finger paint and the sound of stomping folk dancers, Hani (Pseudonym), a Somali woman sits facing a black laptop and checks off names of tutors and students as they arrive. She smiles, nods, and says, “Hi,” and “Ok.”

Caroline, one of the tutors in my study, told me that church basements brought communities together. They were the great “leveler,” she said. She recounted the story about the Scottish dancing that happened upstairs in the parish hall on the evenings she tutored. She recognized that the Highland fling as a dance she had to learn in school when she was the students’ age. “We had to learn the highland dance in school because it was so WASP. We all had to learn how to do whatever it is that you learn how to do.” Reflecting on what she observed at St. Basil’s, she said, “You know, there were girls in veils. There were black kids. There were Chinese kids doing the Highland fling. And it’s still in the curriculum.” She said that today, just like when she was a girl, “not a Scotchman amongst any of us, ever.” She added, “to have this incredible diversity of people learning how to get along together was really delicious.”
The tutoring room sits down the hall from Hani. The room forms a square. It is perhaps two or three times the size of a standard high school classroom. The walls are plywood, knotted with burls. They are stained toffee brown. The floor is exposed hardwood, the kind used in bowling alleys. It has since lost its luster and is now covered in scuffmarks, although I can spot traces of its former identity in the foul lines, rows of dowels and dots, and a sequence of elongated arrows. With no carpet to absorb the noise, the floor planks creak, buckle, and moan whenever students or tutors walk, stand up, or sit down. By 7:30 when the last student heads for the door, candy wrappers, scraps of paper, and the plastic rings off water bottles litter the floor.

Four cellar windows run the length of the tutoring room. Each window is barred and covered with a layer of wire mesh. Four empty bookcases stand like tombstones between each of the four windows. Row after row of banquet chairs, stacked five to six feet high, cluster in corners like forgotten luggage. Two worn oak pews long retired from the sanctuary sit empty against a far wall. They give the basement the appearance of an exhausted train depot.

A snack table is set up by the doorway. Industrial size aluminum tins with orange slices, muffin halves, and junior-size fruit juice boxes fill the table. Within reach of the snacks is the program facilitator’s desk. Program facilitators, or “PFs” as they are called, greet the students as they arrive, scan the room for available tutors, and match up a tutor with a student needing help on an essay, a math problem, or science project. They are the first ones to arrive and the last ones to leave. There are at least two PFs on any given night; sometimes there were three to four on busy nights.

Crammed in behind the PFs’ desk are several large cupboards stocked with paper, pens, pencils, and markers. Next to the cupboards is the library: bookcases filled with extra physics and chemistry textbooks, a complete set of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and tattered paperbacks
of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *Of Mice and Men* among other used copies of plays, novels, and short stories.

Four rectangular banquet tables are located in opposite corners of the room. Tabletops sag; students’ pens and pencils roll towards the center like water to a drain. Initials and names scrawled into the wood decorate the tables along with doodles and sketches of action figures, stars, and faces. Above the tables, large posters that read Science, Math, Humanities, or English direct tutors to their subject areas and students to their tutors. In the remaining space, school desks cluster together in fours and fives to form small independent study pods.

On the average, 50 to 60 students come and go from St. Basil’s each night. There are usually 25 students at any one time. Some students study with their noses in their textbooks. Others sit in front of books and text on their cell phones. Boys high-five their friends as they come in the room. Girls cluster around their friends when they walk through the door. A few loners sit quietly off in the corner with ear buds connected to their iPods and draw. Students speak in English to their friends, but answer their cell phones in Somali, Bengali, Farsi, Pashto, Urdu, or Tamil, languages of parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. There are about a dozen tutors, both men and women, on any given night. Tutors are mostly white and appear to range in age from mid 20s to early 70s. Some tutors sit alone and wait for a student to approach them. They read, work crossword puzzles, or text on their cell phones. Other tutors roam from table-to-table asking students, “What are you working on?” Tutors help solve math problems, develop thesis statements, or locate countries, rivers, and lakes on the map. Tutoring is in English. The program facilitators circulate reminding the students to keep the noise down.

A few feet away from the English table a teenage boy wears a cardboard crown, the kind Burger King used to give away with every double Whopper Jr. and large fry. He sits in front of two boys and a researcher. He tries to guess the word written on an index card stuck to his
forehead. The other boys help him. They shout out descriptions, provide examples, and act out details for words such as “coverage,” “billfold,” and “conjure.” One boy accidentally shouts out the word printed on the card. The other boys laugh. The researcher smiles and silently draws a fresh vocabulary card from the deck. Across the room four teenage girls play the same word game with a different researcher, a woman. One of the girls wears a green crown over a colorful hijab.

Upstairs in the parish hall musicians pound on their drums, and next-door folk dancers jump, jig, and gyrate. The ceiling heaves, the walls rattle, and the floor shakes. From across the room a voice cries out, “Oh my God!” Stuart, startled, looks up from a geography lesson. He cranes his neck and scans the room. He spots a girl in hijab talking with her friends. Satisfied, he turns his attention back to the table and looks at me. “When a Muslim woman screams, ‘Oh my God,’” he says, flaring his nostrils, “either we’re in trouble or she’s very confused.” He clears his throat and looks at the young Muslim boy he has been quizzing on a map of Montreal. He asks him what Muslims say for God. The boy laughs and replies, “Allah!”

Although heating units line the outside wall, the basement is often chilly, constantly damp, and always stinks of “potato,” one tutor later jokes. The smell of potato chokes the room for many months until one of the program facilitators appeals to the church to investigate. Armed with electric jackhammers and shovels, workers break up layers of cement and scoop out piles of earth before reaching the smell. They discover that the pipes underneath the floor are leaking raw sewage. Worse, they find 20-30 rodents in various stages of decomposition. The tutoring room is pronounced a biohazard and for two weeks while repairs are underway students, tutors, program facilitators, staff, and the university researchers move to the room reserved for folk dancing.
Case Study One

Monday Nights with Stuart, Natasha, and Scrapy

This first case gives an account of Stuart, a semi-retired editor, and his two students, Natasha and Scrapy. Stuart tutored Natasha, age 18, about to graduate from high school and begin her undergraduate studies at a local university, and Scrapy, age 14, just finishing up his first year of high school. Stuart met with these students back-to-back every Monday evening for an hour, sometimes longer depending on what they were working on and when an assignment was due. His relationship with each of these students seemed to be shaped by three things—the kind of writing they brought in, how organized they were, and how attentive he perceived they were to his instruction: “If I had to pick two students who were poles apart in terms of their skills, their attention, their sense of involvement, organization […] The rewards and challenges were really, you know, quite separate.”

Stuart

I first met Stuart in 2008 when I attended Pathways to Education’s new tutor orientation with my supervisor and fellow graduate research assistants from the University of Toronto. He tutored at Pathways because his friend, Francis (pseudonym), an engineer who tutored math, told him he might enjoy it.

Stuart stood well over six feet. He had short salt and pepper hair and a full beard. A hip replacement left him with a slight limp. His walking cane, fashioned with a signature tortoiseshell palm grip, supported him as he went up and down the basements steps and aided him on his way out for a cigarette break and on his trip to the snack table for water, juice, or half a sandwich. Each week he dressed from head to toe in faded blue denim. His backpack and its contents—New Yorker magazines, library books, and Metro crosswords—smelled of cigarettes.
He flared his nostrils when he got excited, gave advice, or overheard something with which he disagreed.

Stuart was born in Ontario in the summer of 1938. His father had an undergraduate degree in engineering and his mother had finished high school. Stuart lived out his entire life in Toronto except for a time when he lived in rural New Brunswick. When I knew him, he lived in a neighborhood adjacent to the University of Toronto on the other side of town. Although he identified as Canadian, he added, “that means nothing except in my context, which is Anglo-Saxon.” His friends shared the same English heritage. He attended public school and later a private high school until Grade 13. He received his BA and later MA in English literature from an academically respected Ontario University.

Years ago he tried his hand at pottery and even ran a photography school with an ex-lover. Deep down, however, Stuart was an editor. He had been a freelance editor for over 30 years. He mostly edited adult nonfiction, but also had edited for the Canadian Lawyer and the Royal Commission on Learning. Although he did not consider himself a teacher, he had taught a few literature and writing courses at various colleges around Ontario. The last writing class he taught was to a group of pipefitters, truckers, welders, and ex-cons.

He traveled some in his life. He had been to New York to see My Fair Lady on Broadway. He had been to Paris. He spoke enough French and German to get by. He never mentioned a wife, or children, or grandchildren. Stuart, as I discovered later, was gay. He came out to me one evening by asking me what I thought might happen if he and I masqueraded through Regent Park in drag, wearing nuns’ habits, the kind Sally Field wore in the Flying Nun. He puffed out his chest, extended his arms like a Condor, wrists bent back like claws, and flapped his arms uttering, “whoosh, whoosh, whoosh.” He winked. I laughed.
Politically, he sided with the Liberal party, and philosophically, he sided against social constructionists, postmodernists, and feminists, opting instead for a more Universalist worldview. Early in the project, he frequently sought my advice about working with students who seemed unreceptive to his pedagogy, something that worried and frustrated him. Throughout the entire project he gave generously—books and textbooks from his personal library to his students and novels and old *New Yorker* magazines to me. He adored Mae West’s movies, savored Julie Andrews’ singing, and treasured Eleanor Wachtel’s Sunday afternoon interviews on CBC radio’s *Writers and Company*.

He claimed he did not see race or ethnicity. “I think I’m colorblind,” he said. “Whether they’re Chinese, Japanese, African, Bangladeshi, Latin American […], I don’t read baggage into it.” He recognized that people have prejudices, but he had worked to overcome or at least to be aware of his own. He was open to working with all students, although it made him slightly uncomfortable to tutor girls wearing the hijab and the niqāb, finding the traditional practice among Muslim women of covering the head, neck, or face disturbing. “I'll be quite honest,” he told me, “I can’t stand women who, who veil themselves.” His disregard for the hijab or niqab did not seem to rest in the belief that these women were in any way oppressed, but rather that these particular headscarves obstructed human communication. He read somewhere that 80% of daily communication is through physical gestures and facial expressions. If he had to interact with veiled women (e.g., wearing a niqab), he claimed, “I would probably talk to them, but I probably wouldn’t communicate with them.” Communicating involved the body, an important aspect of writing that resurfaced in our later conversations when we discussed good writing and teaching students to write with voice.

As for the Pathways organization, he valued their mission, but never concealed his disdain of the program’s administration. Their tutoring policies were unhelpful. They did not listen to his
complaints about the excessive noise and rampant socializing. Their tutor meetings were “just bullshit,” “hideous,” and “an exercise in yawn.” He tutored mostly English, but also some Geography, History, and Business. His biggest challenge was getting students to organize their “personal habits” and “materials.” He explained,

[The students] come in with this dung pile that looks like recycling materials. And they have binders that look like they are designed as, I don’t know, recycling bins. And it drives you crazy. And they don’t know where their pencils and pens are, much less where their assignment is. Let alone where their relevant materials are and how to get organized. But then when they’re faced with a subject, they don’t know how to begin. They don’t know how to begin thinking about how to organize.

The image of cluttered binders reminded him of George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*. He sang a line from *My Fair Lady*, “…straighten up their hair is all they ever do, why don’t they straighten up the mess that’s inside.” He believed, “careless behavior is careless writing; it’s going to show.”

**Stuart’s stance on good writing and a writer’s voice**

According to Stuart, good writing includes two ingredients: clarity and voice. “[Clarity] leads you in a singular way into […] the writing,” he said. Clarity shows the thinking and reasoning of the writer, demonstrated in cohesive sentence structure, coherent organization, and above all cogent word choice. “If there are sloppy word choices, there’s not going to be clarity,” he explained. To illustrate the importance of word choice, he shared a hypothetical dialogue with a student: “My father was angry? You mean furious? You mean irate? Where on the scale of angry did his anger lie?” He felt this line of questioning invites the students to reflect on the experience of an angry father and to introduce detail of that experience: “Show me,” he explained, “don't tell
me,” adding, “I hate writers that tell.” He believed writers must engage readers. Good writers have certain qualities: disciplined, care about words, and want to write well. Good writers do not write well because they want better grades or to get a better job. “You have to want to be able to write something that’s […] elegant, persuasive, coherent,” he said. Although he did not seem to support hard and fast rules of writing, Stuart appreciated Strunk and White’s contribution to helping writers improve the quality of their writing. “It’s that wonderful dictum from Strunk and White: Omit needless words,” he said. “And it’s one of the great rules of writing, if there has to be rules about writing, for which I rarely think there are. But that’s a brilliant rule.”

Voice was intuitive. It does not exactly include choice. It is not something you think about consciously. “It’s a whole growth process,” he said. Voice refers to the personality of the writer and emerges from a combination of the writer’s age, education, family, heritage, and experience. “There is not a sort of measurable quality of skills: age, maturity, information, awareness—it just comes when you’ve practiced. The voice grows as things grow.” He continued, “It’s not a kind of you get this far, you’ll begin to have a voice. I mean some kids can write with voice, and some adults couldn’t write with it if they tried.” Students need to master the basics of language first and have been exposed to good literature and have a solid grasp of how to write before voice should be introduced. “I think this thing about voice is just such a side issue,” he said, implying that there might be too much emphasis placed on voice in school, at least in the earlier grades. He felt Grades 11 or 12 might be the right time to introduce it.

He believed that written voice correlates directly with the spoken voice—those who know how to debate, he thought, can probably write well, too. “We cut ourselves a lot of slack when we speak.” Stuart believed good writing did not include the messiness of spoken English. He told me that voice emerges when the writer has mastered certain skills: “You’ve gotta have the
vocabulary; you’ve gotta have the grammar; you’ve gotta have a sense of organization […] Yes!
You can have voice, but not an interesting one.”

If a teacher wrote on a student’s paper that she or he could hear the voice, it meant, “they have an opinion that sounds theirs. It just, it doesn't sound like it’s manufactured. It doesn’t sound like they’re repeating somebody else’s blah blah blah. It sounds genuine. It sounds authentic,” he said. Authenticity was a key characteristic of voice. He claimed a teenager could never play Lear just as he could no longer write as if he were a teenager: “Neither would be convincing!” However, he told me he would never make the mistake of writing on a student’s essay that he could hear his or her voice. “I wouldn't write it because I wouldn’t presume they would understand what I meant. If I said it, then I could look in their eyes and know whether they understood what I meant [emphasis added].” Voice was something that cannot be communicated in writing to a student; it must be communicated verbally and only in person.

The Ontario English Curriculum’s definition of voice was not perfect. In addition to vocabulary, sentence structure, imagery, and rhythm, he said, “You also have--. I don’t know, a pretty good, fairly good--. A sense of the writer.” Voice captures the reader and gives the reader something beyond the content, something that gives them a deeper sense of the author. “I think it tells you something about the writer. And not a biological tell-you-something. It […] says something about the personality.”

George Orwell’s writing resounded with his own personal voice. Never theoretical, Orwell’s writing exposed the reader to his lived experience: “you know he lived it; thought about it; and reflected on it.” He explained, “I don’t expect [students] to write a George Orwell level essay before they are introduced to the ideas of voice,” he said. Other writers Stuart believed wrote with a strong command of voice included W.G. Sebald, Virginia Wolf, and James Joyce. Finding their own voice is something that writers must arrive at; if they cannot, “better they take up
waiting because it ain’t gonna happen unless they become an academic. It’s amazing how many academics think (...) just by the fact that they’re academic, they’re writers.”

A tutor can approach good writing—clarity and voice—by having two resources at hand: a dictionary and thesaurus. He always kept the Dictionary of Canadian English at his table whenever he tutored. Whereas voice and style are often seen as the same, Stuart saw them as two decidedly different constructs. Voice expands like an umbrella under which writers can practice and develop their style. Style plays a rather large role in developing the voice. It is part of voice, but it is not voice. Stuart explains that style is more the love of language writers have that emerges in the intricacies, melodies, rhymes, sounds, and metaphors employed by writers. “Style is, is words, word choice, sentence structure, metaphors, literacy devices of all sorts that are appropriate to the character speaking, or the subject being spoken about, of the purpose of it,” he said.

Although somewhat resistant to the idea that voice could be taught outright, Stuart suggested that voice could be introduced by teaching letter writing. Stuart said he never gave much thought to developing voice with Natasha or Scrapy, but he did narrate a hypothetical scenario of how he might teach voice to them:

Think [of] something you want very, very, very much. But you need your parents’ permission. Now, there’s a third person you might involve. And I want you, now, to write a letter to your father, to your mother, and to a favorite aunt or uncle. Now from your father, you absolutely expect that this is going to be a tough call. Your chances ain’t good. From your mom? OK. She cuts you a little bit more slack. But, I don’t know. Your favorite aunt or uncle--. Now remember, you really, really want this. […] It’s important. You invent it, you invent the problem, question, whatever and each write a letter. Write three letters. Now, having written the three letters, do you think--., do you predict that
each one, each letter will have a different voice? Now each of those letters is from you. There’s no question. They’re addressed to your mother, your father, the favorite aunt or uncle. And they’re signed by you. So there’s no question about who the audience is or who the writer is. Now, (pause) each letter will differ in tone […] And I would ask the student, “what do I mean by tone? […] now this clearly, this is your, your letter, so what do I mean by your voice?”

If a writer wants to hear their own voice from the perspective of the reader, he suggested they get a friend to read their work aloud to them. It was something he has suggested to students and novice authors. “I think it’s a way of opening a writer’s ears to something in their writing that they may not otherwise ever be aware of,” he said. Another way to capture voice was to observe people having a conversation. “Try to capture it,” he said. “Try and write it down. See if you can capture the voice.” It was difficult writing activity but worth the effort.

**Stuart’s approach to tutoring writing**

Stuart said that his identity as an editor influenced one hundred percent of how he viewed and responded to a piece of writing. In reflecting back to his public school education he added,

I think that what I was taught and the way I was taught--. Well, it produced me. Like it or not, it produced me […]. I think I’m a pretty good writer. […] I know I’m a damn good editor. I love books. Adore them. Good books. I love discussing, discussing good ideas with people who care about ideas. And I think those are not shoddy skills to have. And I don’t think that the new learning, the new literacy is gonna improve on those.

Although he loved books growing up, he was not a strong writer in school, earning Cs and Bs on his essays and compositions. He was never taught outright to write with voice in school, at least not until Grade 13 English, when he was taught by a retired University of Chicago English
professor with decided opinions about good writing. Frustrated with his attempts to improve his writing, Stuart mustered the courage to approach her desk after class. Reading punctuation into her advice, Stuart repeated from memory the maxim of his former teacher: ‘Stuart,’ “comma. Or colon,” he added. ‘You do not, you do not write so that you can be understood. […] You write so that you cannot be misunderstood.’ This advice passed down to him nearly 60 years ago not only served as his guiding principle as an editor for the past 30 years, but also is the exact same advice he passes on to his writing students today.

Not surprisingly, Stuart’s approach towards feedback was linked to his beliefs about effective copyediting, about being a competent editor, and about being a successful writer, “I don’t separate what I believe from what I tutor,” he remarked. His litmus test to determine a good editor: Know when to leave a piece of writing alone. “Start with the bloody opening sentence […] If the opening sentence works, as editors are wont to say, leave it alone.” Some editors insisted on “invading” everything, however. In his job as an editor, Stuart told me he paused, reflected, and, if necessary, consulted another editor before attempting trespass on another writer’s words. Once he was asked to edit a letter written by a child for a children’s anthology. Early on, he consulted the in-house editor to determine if he should fix the countless misspellings. Unquestionably, the spelling marked the writer’s voice. “It was a kid, a relatively uneducated kid in a school, or in the business of learning spelling, but learning spelling wasn’t on the agenda,” but said, adding, “the letter had a completely authentic voice.” Even as an editor, he had his own editing voice, “I’m picky without being anal retentive,” he said. His editor’s voice changed depending on the client (or audience) he was editing for and the material. As a writer, he felt he had far less experience than as an editor, however. As a matter of good practice, he always had someone copyedit his work. He admitted that he had difficulty editing his own prose, adding, “trust yourself that far can be a tad arrogant.” He acknowledged that writers do
have a sense of pride in their work and do not shy away from rejecting comments from editors who are too invasive: “God knows enough writers have told editors to ‘fuck off, nobody is touching my pearls!’”

His experience copyediting for a Canadian politician, for example, was not the same as working with an adolescent on an essay, poem, or book report. When a student sought his help, Stuart claimed he had no fixed approach to giving feedback. He was unsure how to go about prioritizing feedback to those students. His first intuition was to start with the larger issues such as organization and then address sentence-level concerns. “If something’s not organized then you're […] dressing up a disaster. You’re rearranging the, the chairs on the Titanic,” he said, “focus on the ship.” Nevertheless, faulty grammar still annoyed him. “If they don’t get the grammar one right, then […] they’re not able to shape the ideas.”

Stuart felt that he tried to keep first to positive comments, something he thinks he could do more of, however. Encouraging good writing meant acknowledging a student’s contribution to making the writing better. If he could not find anything positive to say about the writing, he fell back on complimenting a student’s spelling or handwriting, if legible. He tried to keep an open mind when he read students’ papers, but recognized that being objective and gentle is unrealistic and not always possible: “It’s a load of horseshit. I don't hide anything; but I will try to spare [the students] the worst of my vocabulary.”

“What do you think—? The emphasis on you,” Stuart told me, ranked as the most important question he has learned to ask while tutoring. He and his friend, Francis, asked this simple question as a matter of routine to determine their students’ levels of engagement. The responses varied:

If they were really unengaged, they would first of all look at you as if it was the weirdest question they ever heard in their lives. And they’d never heard it before. And they didn’t
have the vaguest idea how to answer it. And then when you kept looking at them, they might escalate to the next level, which is to mouth some platitude that maybe their chums say. Maybe their teachers have said. And they’re just the mouthpiece for this other opinion. Or their parents—

Stuart believed that because students are rarely asked what they think they are unprepared to provide a cogent response. Getting students to read a text and to understand, reflect, and think about it needs to be done both in and out of school. “I’m more interested in curiosity, attentiveness—thinking! Thinking! Show me what you’re thinking or tell me what you’re thinking,” he said. “In order to give them some kind of grounding so that they can really bring something to the essay. Because there’s a fundamental lack of understanding.”

How well Stuart knows a student often influences the direction his feedback takes. If he has worked with the student before, he usually reads their draft by himself, instructing them to work on something else while he’s editing. He finds it more effective that way. “I would never do that with a student I didn’t know,” he admits. When giving feedback he distinguished between strategies and tactics. Strategies were on the spot suggestions; tactics were “big picture” or the “step-by-step-by step” planning for improving writing. Although when he got frustrated he often neglected this distinction and did not always take the best approach.

Stuart said that the writing he sees at Pathways is either in one of three stages of drafting: students have not begun and need help developing ideas, or they have begun, but barely, or they are well on their way, having completed five pages. As a matter of practice, he tries to read the entire essay before correcting it, but if there is not enough time he starts editing on the first read. He told me he often verbalizes his edits under his breath and finds that it can be useful for students to watch him doing this. He might say, “Are you following me or is this, is this connecting? Is this helping?” Students need to have the skills to follow him, however, as he
usually works fast. His intention in giving feedback is for students to see their writing “in the eyes of the other.” If he were working with an advanced student he might even encourage them to edit the next paragraph as he watched. One way he thought he could teach students to be critical of their own writing would be to get them to read it as if someone else wrote it.

Natasha

I met Natasha when she was 18 years old and in her last semester of high school. She had been attending Pathways for two years and had recently been accepted to a local university and was looking forward to studying criminology. Natasha was tall. She had long auburn hair that she sometimes pulled back into a hair clip. She wore a necklace and small pearl earrings. She painted her nails a bright pink. She had a warm smile and a soft laugh.

Natasha told me her parents were originally from Afghanistan but had relocated to Pakistan, where she was born and spent her early childhood. The family later uprooted to Dubai, and four years later they settled in Canada. She has four siblings: three brothers and a sister. At home, she and her family speak Pashto, Urdu, and English. Although English was not her first language, she spoke and wrote English fluently before moving to Canada; thus, she never took ESL classes in school. She was raised Muslim. Her father had a degree in law and electrical engineering and was an aeronautical engineer. He worked as a security guard at a local bank. Her mother finished high school. She was a housewife.

That semester Natasha took a range of upper-division courses to prepare for university: English, Law, Philosophy, and Sociology. Natasha’s course work focused heavily on reading and writing. She read plays, essays, and textbook chapters. She wrote argumentative papers, drafted speeches, and summarized and critiqued the arguments of famous philosophers. She felt she was an average writer: “I can write good if I want to write good. If I don’t want to write, then I just
get it over with,” she said. Her favorite subject in school was English; her favorite author, Shakespeare. He made for good reading. “They’re dramatic,” she said about his plays. She also enjoyed writing about Shakespeare. She liked writing about conflicts, exaggeration, and foreshadowing in his plays. “I like taking it in my own meaning [...] or giving it a better meaning than what it really means sometimes.”

**Natasha’s stance on good writing and a writer’s voice**

Natasha believed that good writing communicated a purpose and got the audience to identify with that purpose. Good writing was also about good structure. She explained that good structure referred to ordering ideas and arguments: weak points first followed by strong points that were recognizable and accessible to the reader. She had recently written a paper for her philosophy class on the nature of good and evil, which she felt met the conditions of good writing: well structured with convincing counter-arguments.

Good structure was not universal for all subjects, however. She told me that philosophy papers and English literature papers require different structures. Philosophy requires the strongest argument first; conversely, English literature requires the weaker arguments first, followed by stronger arguments. “I think the English one kind of makes more sense,” she said.

Responding to the Ontario English Curriculum’s definition of voice, Natasha said it was “the way that person uses, like the words he chooses to put, his imagination, his thoughts, his ideas, his, basically his ability of writing an essay.” She added, “I think for the most part it’s how he structures it and the words he puts in and his thoughts and ideas. It’s his voice.”

Natasha believed that voice in writing refers to a writer’s personality, something that “always has your own personal background in it, even if it’s formal. The way you put down your words would be different from any other writer.” If a teacher told her that her writing resonated with
her personal voice, she would see it as either a compliment or that she is perhaps being biased and not objective. Overall, she thought voice was a positive aspect of someone’s writing. If someone wrote a speech with a strong personal voice, another person could deliver it without compromising the personality or vigor or intent of the original author. Natasha could easily identify voice in the plays and essays she had been reading over the past year. She drew on the writing styles of Shakespeare, Bertrand Russell, and the Confucian philosopher Mengzi (or Mencius) to illustrate her point: “Shakespeare uses slang, while Bertrand Russell is more formal. Mengzi is calm, a calm personality.” She felt that whereas Bertrand Russell writes with a choleric, angry voice, Mengzi writes with a tempered, positive voice. However, she also added that an author’s voice could vary depending on the nature and purpose of the writing. Again, drawing on the work of Bertrand Russell, she explained, “it depends on the writing, too. So it’s not like I could read a Bertrand Russell essay, like two different essays, and it doesn’t have to sound like they are both his, but they could be his.”

Speaking of her own writer’s voice, Natasha said, “I explain too much; like I elaborate. Every little detail. I’m not a person who keeps it short.” She thought her teacher could identify her written voice not only by her grammatical mistakes and handwriting, but also by what she refers to as “heavy words,” words that invigorate her writing. “My essays are not plain and boring. I usually put words that mean something, like I usually put heavy words. I wouldn’t just say that [human beings] are good, I would say human beings have an innate sense of goodness, or are innately good.” She also felt that her writer’s voice had improved since coming to Pathways. “My voice has changed,” she said. “I get help from tutors and they give me new words and new vocabulary, new sentences structure to work with.” She explained, “I think my teachers would say that my voice is different than teachers from last semester. Before, I used to write on and on,
and now I have the skill to cut down sentences and only get to the point.” For example, “If it’s a like five sentences, I could cut it down to two, two and a half.”

**Stuart and Natasha Writing Together: Putting the Writer into her Writing**

Stuart and Natasha met every Monday afternoon from 4:30 to 5:30pm from March to May. They sat in beige banquet chairs at a wobbly rectangular table, stretching some 10 feet long and including graffiti that announced among other things: “Sabbir + Qaiyum + forever and ever”; “live life, quit bitchin’”; and “Yonis was here” but with the epithet “fag” and an arrow tagged in a different handwriting pointing to his name.

Stuart sat at the head of the table. Natasha sat to his right, and I sat to his left. The table stood in the back of the large room, alongside the outer wall and a few feet away from one of four cellar windows. Adjacent to the table was a tall plywood bookcase. Missing its shelves and empty of textbooks, dictionaries, and novels, the bookcase displayed a laminated yellow poster taped to the front side. The letters E-N-G-L-I-S-H formed a fat letter “V” across the front. Someone had decorated it with the names of Robert Frost, Virginia Wolfe, and Rudyard Kipling, book covers from Penguin paperbacks, and a picture of a middle-aged William Shakespeare.

In their sessions, Stuart spoke most of the time. He led their conversations, discussions, and reflections. He always asked her what she knew about the topic, frequently provided her with detailed historical information on the topic, and unfailingly helped her to broaden her understanding of the topic. He furnished her with ways to reword her academic English, reminded her to paraphrase in her own English, chided her when she spoke in colloquial English, corrected her when she spoke in ungrammatical English, and reminded her of how to spell in Canadian English. He encouraged her to take down notes and to think aloud. To get Natasha to think more deeply about her topic, Stuart wove stories, anecdotes, and examples from current
events, politics, literature, history, and his own life experience at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of their sessions. Although Natasha told me his stories were tangential, Stuart felt they were educational: he taught her about Aesop’s fable of the raven and the fox when exploring animal rights, told her about his tungsten hip replacement when discussing microchip technology and the meaning of being human, and the recent actions of the U.S. Congress to stop funding American history for a debate on tuition increase at Canadian universities.

Natasha sought Stuart’s help preparing speeches and on a variety of papers. Among them was a journal entry about her stand on marital infidelity based on Sinclair Ross’s *The Painted Door* and a farewell letter she wrote in the voice of a dying father to his daughter called “Dear Daisy.” These papers required varying degrees of personal opinion, creativity, reflection, argumentation, and persuasion. Recurrent among Stuart’s approach to helping Natasha compose the journal entry, essay, and letter was getting her to put more of herself into her writing. This meant thinking for herself, taking notes, thinking aloud, using her own words and not his, and not hiding behind opaque generalizations.

“I think”

For example, responding to her journal entry about *The Painted Door* (see Figure 4.1), Stuart taught Natasha to state her opinion directly, rather than to conceal her beliefs behind “as they say,” a form of academic hedging and frequent cliché:

*Stuart:* So, maybe you could add the sentence: “I believe the only person you can change is yourself.” How does that sound to you?

*Natasha:* Should I start, “As they say”?

*Stuart:* No, no, “I think,” “I believe.”

*Natasha:* Ok
Stuart: It’s really strong.

He also encouraged Natasha to use her own words and not to copy him as he spoke. Writing was her enterprise; he was not willing to appropriate her voice:

Stuart: And this is your job; I can’t put words in your mouth.

Figure 4.1. Natasha’s journal entry for The Painted Door
Finding the voice of Lear

Natasha left school early. A family trip to Pakistan meant leaving school a month before the term ended. Natasha came to tutoring at least twice a week to complete her final essays and finish her personal response journals. In English class, they had been reading *King Lear* and Natasha had chosen to tackle a creative journal assignment focusing on voice and stance. The assignment was a modern-day take on Shakespeare’s tragedy that required students to imagine themselves as a Lear-type figure, who, now confined to a nursing home, writes an 800-word farewell letter to his children.

Natasha and Stuart devoted their last two meetings to completing Lear’s farewell letter, which she called “Dear Daisy.” In the first session they answered the 20 questions Natasha would need to answer about Lear in her letter such as how Lear ended up in the nursing home, how many children he had, and whether he believed in God. Stuart led the brainstorm. Natasha wrote as Stuart spoke. And, although he mostly spoke during their sessions and often at great length, Stuart reminded Natasha that it was her story and not his; that it was her responsibility to construct a feasible story line and not his; that it was her job to supply the answers and not his.

The following week, Natasha returned with the first three hand-written paragraphs of Lear’s letter to his children. She disliked what she had written, claiming it was plain and not what she wanted to say. Without wasting a moment, Stuart reached for his clip board and suggested she break the 800 word letter up into 200 word segments, target a different point of discussion, and establish a chronology of family events and relationships. He noted the potential loss of authorial credibility if events, dates, and actions fail to match. He wanted Natasha to develop plausible names for her characters and use them to convey subtleties in attitudes. He said she needed to consider voice by getting into the heads of her characters to determine their attitudes, values, and beliefs.
The original letter she brought in started to be transformed with Stuart’s advice.

Stuart began to narrate a version of the story out loud, an account that combined words from her version with his version; Natasha copied down his ideas. He chided her for it.

Stuart: No no no -- just just think about it. I don't want to give you the words, just think about it.

When Natasha suggested rephrasing his word “interestingly,” “surprisingly,” Stuart reminded her that it was her letter. “I don’t oppose a good idea though,” she replied, prompting Stuart to say, “Well, you phrase it in your own way.” Next, Stuart and Natasha discussed introducing the metaphor of blindness in her letter:

Stuart: Perhaps, my dreams didn't include enough reality.
    Perhaps, my-

Natasha: Perhaps, I was blinded by--

Stuart: I was thinking about vision, too. Seeing, seeing, seeing in the metaphorical way. Because how does, what happens to Gloucester?

Natasha: He was blinded.

Stuart: Yes! Yes! That's so important! That metaphor of blindness and seeing.

Natasha: Perhaps, “I was blinded by the reality.”

Stuart: “By the reality?” Or “by my dreams?” Or “my hopes?” Perhaps, perhaps “I was a businessman, too much of a businessman, and not enough of a father.”

Natasha continued to write. There was silence for 30 seconds. Then, Natasha spoke:

Natasha: Would these two go together, though? “Perhaps, I was
blinded by my dreams; I was too much a businessman than a father.” Do you think they’ll go together?

Stuart: Sounds good. Does it not make sense to you?

Stuart and Natasha Reflect on Writing Together

Both Stuart and Natasha had vastly different impressions of their tutoring sessions. Stuart adored Natasha. She was a delight and the best student a tutor could ever hope to work with. He likened their sessions to a tennis match: he contributed; she contributed. Natasha was bright. She was organized. She wrote strong arguments. She took a firm position. She listened. Above all, she had a sense of purpose as a writer. Describing her academic and professional future, Stuart was unequivocal, “no moss is going to gather under that lady.”

Natasha acknowledged Stuart was helpful and knowledgeable. He helped her formulate thoughts, write concisely, and use better words. Not only did he help her use better words, but, as she said, “he explains what they mean so I can use them properly.” She also borrowed some of his words. “I’ve used his words,” she said. “When I was doing my essay […] and I said, ‘born,’ and then he said, ‘write innate.’” He also helped her to stop saying the word, “like.” When I asked her how he helped her improve her own writer’s voice, she explained that his feedback was instrumental:

It was really helpful because now I know like if I have to write an essay, I don’t just sit there and like think that what am I gonna do. I, I take down notes, like rough notes. Then I kind of put, I have a structure outline thesis, three points. I search on my vocab, like words that I would, I go to--. I get a dictionary, search a better word to change those with. I know how to make my paragraphs shorter. I know how to use my semi-colons, commas.
Despite these improvements, Natasha still found their sessions largely unproductive. She had more fruitful tutorials with other tutors who got down to work, helped her draft her thesis, and did not provide tangential information on the history or context. She recognized the benefits of learning more about the history of a topic, but Stuart spent too much time on it. “He’s really helpful and everything. But every time like I give him a topic, he goes to like the background of it. And then he talks more about like stuff relating to it instead of like the main point. But other tutors, they just like get to the main point and they help me out with the assignment, which is both helpful, but like I usually don’t get my assignment done on time than when I’m like doing it with Stuart,” she said. After she finished working with Stuart, Natasha moved to another table and worked with other tutors on her English essays.

Stuart was unclear if his own voice influenced Natasha’s writing, but felt that her writer’s voice certainly reflected her personality and those qualities of a good student. “I haven’t really thought about voice at all. But in reflection, Natasha’s been terrific at that. I mean […] on several of her projects, it’s very much her own opinion. And I love the way she’s strong about it.” He added that when she wrote, “when she expressed her arguments, her ideas for arguments, she articulated them as if they weren’t academic. They were real to her,” he said. He described Natasha’s writer’s voice as “straightforward. She takes a position. She holds an opinion.” He liked that about her. He added, “she’s ready to work on voice. She’s focused and organized.” He felt he encouraged her voice by supporting her to develop her ideas. “I think that support […] tells her that what she thinks and what she believes and what she argues is, is fine,” he said.

Her only challenge: She might be too focused, too determined. Stuart worried Natasha did not reflect deeply enough on her subjects. As a writer, Natasha simply needed to trust herself more and not rely on him for ideas. Stuart felt that each session he had to spend energy to get her to think, or “crank up the engine,” as he called it. He admitted he did not know how to help her to
think critically on her own. “I don’t know how to do that. That’s perhaps a fault of mine.” He added, “Without supplying the answer, how do you get—prompt a student to think about other aspects to a subject?” He said, “if she had a broader field of curiosity, that helps that kind of way of thinking.”

He agreed brainstorming was ideal for Natasha, but not on lined paper. Brainstorming on lined paper was a limitation. It locked a writer into a specific way of thinking or organizing or seeing the world, unlike brainstorming on a blank piece of paper might. Stuart complained that he only once got to see her returned paper with her teacher’s feedback. Throughout their sessions he wished he could have seen her revised drafts to know how she was doing and read her teacher’s feedback. On several occasions, he asked her to bring them, but she said her teachers had not returned her papers yet.

Looking at the texts they worked on together, Stuart commented that her voice in *The Painted Door* piece illustrated a mature teenager not willing to negotiate. “I would not be able to forgive one transgression,” he read. “That’s a line in the sand, I would say.” I brought up “I believe” vs. “as they,” a point they discussed. “It’s not unlike me to say to her—and to students of that kind of brightness—what do you believe?” Her journal was about her, not an “academic they.” Stuart observed that Natasha tried to employ an academic register (i.e., to hedge her beliefs) to please her teachers. In a different essay she wrote, “Generally, people would agree that animal research is productive and extremely important in order to save human beings from diseases.” Stuart looked at the sentence. “It was not her voice,” he said. “She would never say that.”

Reflecting on *The Painted Door*, Natasha said she just wrote down everything she felt about the topic. Stuart had helped her cut the number of clichés. “I believe” was one way of rewording a very wordy “As they say.” She also recognized that using “they” was inappropriate, as readers have no idea to whom the pronoun refers. “Who are they?” she said, adding, “when there’s like a
specific person, then you know who you’re talking about. But when you’re saying ‘they’ or ‘he’ or ‘she’ then there’s always that question like--., who, who is that […] it creates problems cuz then you don’t know.”

She added that Stuart and other tutors had been helpful in getting her to improve her punctuation, and that Stuart taught her to make her writing more descriptive. For example, in her journal response to *The Painted Door*, Stuart encouraged her to replace the phrase, “He did discuss our relationships” with “He did not express any doubt about our relationship.” She said Stuart told her, “It would sound better if you make it more descriptive by saying: express any doubt about a relation--.” She added, “Because ‘discussion’ could be about anything, right? So it’s making it more specific and to the point.”

When she reflected on “Dear Daisy,” Natasha felt she wrote like a kid. She did not feel she captured the voice of an older man. Looking over her piece, she identified “ups and downs” and “keep your eyes open for bad people” as examples of an adolescent voice. She said an older person “would write more deeply because they’ve experienced more.” In order to know what it is like to be a male, she interviewed her father and brother, and received guidance from Stuart. It was still a challenge. “I have to feel like a father, I’m not even like […] a male. I’m not even rich, so I couldn’t feel like as a man in power if I lost that power, how would I feel?” she said. What made her write in the voice of an older man was when Stuart, her father, and brother shared their ideas and life experiences with her. When I asked Stuart to reflect on “Dear Daisy,” he said she was open to, and capable of imagining herself as, the “other,” something he would never try with Scrapy.
Scrapy

Scrapy was 14 years old and at least a foot shorter than Stuart. He had short black hair, emerging side burns and traces of stubble. He usually wore black: black t-shirts, a black digital watch, black backpack, and black wool socks with Reebok shoes. He was born in Bangladesh into a Muslim family. He came to Canada when he was three months old, and returned to Bangladesh six months later. He and his family went back and forth between Canada and Bangladesh four times over the next thirteen years. Notwithstanding the many moves, Scrapy felt completely Canadian. He proudly announced: “I’m living your average Canadian life. I belong in Canada.” Like Natasha, and like many students attending the tutoring program, Scrapy lived in a multilingual household. He spoke Bengali with his parents, Urdu with his dad’s friend, and English with his brother. His father and mother had finished Grades 5 and 6, respectively. His father worked in the garment industry. His mother was a housewife.

When he grows up, Scrapy wants to be “an aerospace engineer slash DJ.” Among the music he enjoys, his top three favorite artists include David Guetta (from the Black Eyed Peas), Deadmau5, and DJ Tiësto. He takes DJ-ing seriously, practicing up to four hours a day mixing songs with the goal of redoing these artists’ music with his own musician’s voice. Academically, Scrapy had been doing well in his first year of high school. That semester he took English, French, Media, Business, Math, Science, Geography, and Gym. He reported his average was around 80%. He took advanced academic, or what he called “enriched,” courses and regular academic courses. Among the enriched courses, he was enrolled in the Talented Offerings of Programs in the Sciences (TOPS), an accelerated academic program in Ontario that allowed him to advance to Grade 10 Math and Science, two of his favorite subjects. English was among his regular academic courses and it ranked as his least favorite subject. He struggled with English grammar. “It sucks,” he said. He told me he was a horrible writer: “I make a mistakes,” he said,
“like, ‘I done it,’ like, I should say, ‘I did it.’” Mistakes notwithstanding, he still enjoyed writing creative stories, and he loved to write essays even though he told me he “doesn’t look like the essay type.” Next year, he wanted to enroll in all enriched courses, including English.

**Scrapy’s stance on good writing and a writer’s voice**

According to Scrap, good writing was engaging prose; it was writing that made reading enjoyable. Good writing included twisted plots and identified the main points. Good writing was also grammatical. He mentioned two Canadian authors of young adult fiction who write well: Eric Walter, author of *Shatter*, and Richard Scarsbrook, author of *The Monkey Face Chronicles*. These authors engage him by developing interesting characters and staying on topic and by avoiding sudden script changes, two things Shakespeare, who he was reading at the time, failed to accomplish in *Romeo and Juliet*. He recognized that Shakespeare draws a particular audience who is receptive to his style of writing, but he does not number himself among them.

“A writer’s voice should be expressing himself,” he said. “It’s using my own words.” Voice is “what you say, what you believe in, and what you interpret.” Scrap had recently written an essay on video games in class. He believed video games were harmless to society. “I strongly agree with my argument,” he said proudly. Writers express ideas “by showing examples that manifest [themselves].” His writer’s voice included using words such as “damn it,” and “games and shit’ in his essay. He said he had an argumentative voice and characterized himself as “an expressivist writer.” He explained that as an expressivist writer he does not censor or “bleep the word.” Seeing profanity as a part of his writer’s voice came down to the reality of living in the 21st century, hearing his teacher swear, and recognizing that profanity “[is] like pornography, you’re eventually going to know it.”
When he read the Ontario English Curriculum’s definition of voice, he explained that to him it meant, “to actually catch a reader’s attention for Grades 9 to 12 you need rhythm, imagery, and, and elements that will change the mood.” He believed his English teacher would recognize his voice not simply by his grammatical and punctuation mistakes, which he admitted are numerous, but also by his ability to express himself, by his use of examples, and by his explanations to support his opinions, views, and beliefs. If his teacher told him that his writing had voice, he would feel understood. His teacher grasped what he’s “trying to write; what [he’s] trying to accomplish.”

Scrappy shared his best piece of writing, a short story he entitled “My Creatures.” His teacher had given the class specific instructions: “My teacher told that like use your inner voice, not use your like – don’t like copy from people.” He explained what inner voice meant to him:

Inner voice is just, just--, see how people write, but you do it in your own version cuz like writing is an art, too, right? Like for, for a long time, I didn’t know writing was an art. Like it, I thought writing is some people, nerdy people, they write and they just go on and they keep reading every day. Writing is also an art. Where you can establish skill […] I see people who are gifted, right? But there’s some way you can actually get into that level.

Inspired by creatures from *Dragon Ball Z*, a Japanese manga series, “My Creatures” is about the three sides of himself mirrored in three mythological characters he created: Majin BUU, Scrapy (the source of his pseudonym), and Shamron (see Figure 4.2). Majin BUU is an alien who resembles a wad of “chewed pink bubble gum.” This reflects the depressed, bullied, lost side of Scrapy; Scrapy, the character, is only visible as a dark shadow. He reflected the cruel, vindictive, and rapacious side; and Shamron, the eight-spiked dragon, reflects the inner hero, the motivator, the helper, the guy everyone wants to know. Shamron is his favorite character, the
persona he likes to project. But deep down he felt more like Majin Buu and Scrapy. “My Creatures” is “a story that tells you a lot about myself. I’m not all perfect, but I have a mean and a greedy sides of myself.”

Figure 4.2. Scrapy’s pictures from “My Creatures”

**Stuart and Scrapy Writing Together: Focusing, Thinking, and Uncluttering**

Between March and June, Stuart tutored Scrapy on Monday evenings from 5:30 to 6:30, immediately following his sessions with Natasha. They sat in the same beige banquet chairs at the same end of the collapsible plywood table tucked away in a corner of the basement.

As with Natasha, Stuart led their sessions and attempted to talk throughout, but, unlike Natasha, Scrapy frequently interrupted Stuart to clarify ideas, ask questions, change the topic, comment on assignments, crack a joke, or talk about the bedbugs that kept him awake at night.
As with Natasha, Stuart provided historical background in subjects, coached him through the writing process, taught him how to summarize, edited his writing, and scolded him for overusing “like.” However, unlike his work with Natasha, Stuart provided Scrapy with several meta-pedagogical interventions to train his body and mind for studying, thinking, and writing effectively. These interventions included teaching him how to listen, assigning him an ad hoc essay on ball bearings, and advising him how to be an ‘A’ student. Stuart also taught Scrapy strategies for taking in-class exams, gave him a book on how to write well, and instructed him on how to read it. He encouraged Scrapy to read good literature to improve his thinking and told him to be critical of his own writing. Stuart rebuked him frequently for lacking focus and reproached him for not proofreading his work more carefully.

Preparing Scrapy to write

At their first meeting, Stuart presented Scrapy with a copy of William Zinsser’s book *On Writing Well* (see Figure 4.3). Stuart told him that he might not understand everything at first, but to give it a try. He reminded him to take notes, look up unfamiliar words, and to get the gist of Zinsser’s ideas. “I think it will help you to better writing, but it’s not easy,” he told him. Scrapy returned the following week having read at least the first three or four chapters on simplicity, clutter, and style. It was the third chapter, on “Clutter,” that confused him the most and one he asked Stuart to teach him about. Stuart defined clutter for him—the clutter on the table or the clutter in Scrapy’s mind—but he did not connect it to Zinsser’s chapter on reducing excessive wordiness. Zinsser’s concept of “cluttering,” however, became a part of Scrapy’s metalanguage. He used the word “cluttering” in future lessons whenever unnecessary words, phrases, or sentences choked his writing.
Stuart helped Scrapy write a letter, a transliteration exercise from Romeo and Juliet, an argumentative essay, and a scholarship application essay. Whereas Stuart’s approach with Natasha included getting her to put more of her thoughts, words, and beliefs into her writing, his approach to working with Scrapy was getting him to focus simply on the writing task at hand, something he felt Scrapy struggled with.

Figure 4.3. Scrapy’s copy of Zinsser’s book *On Writing Well*

**Getting Scrapy to focus**

Stuart lost his temper with Scrapy when he misunderstood his directions while helping him to list the relevant courses to include in his scholarship application essay:

**Stuart:** Not business! What’s the after hours bloody course you just told me about?!

**Scrapy:** Oh! Oh, that’s uh what do you call it, uh sound engineering and Dj-ing
Stuart: Yes! Sorry for losing my temper but, boy, sometimes you -- need to stay focused! [sings the word]

Scrapy: I am focused!

**Getting Scrapy to think**

In addition to reminding him to focus, Stuart was interested in getting Scrapy to think for himself. “If you don’t know what to think about, how do you know how to think about it?” he asked him. He asked his opinion about a topic or situation. He also asked how he might introduce an idea into an essay. Moreover, when Scrapy asked Stuart a question, such as, what an essay was, Stuart made sure to ask Scrapy what he thought an essay was. Stuart invited Scrapy to think about larger writing issues, such as how he would improve his writing if Stuart was not there to help him. Scrapy told him by listening to him (now) and by thinking critically, which he explained meant “thinking hard” and “thinking smart.”

Stuart insisted Scrapy never write anything down without first thinking the idea through. He cautioned him never to write aloud, something Scrapy tended to do. Writing aloud annoyed Stuart. “Think about what you want to say before you write it,” Stuart often said. During one lesson Stuart put his hand over Scrapy’s paper and asked him to articulate this thoughts before he wrote, not during. Scrapy asked Stuart what he thought about simultaneously talking and writing:

Scrapy: Is it a good idea to actually talk it when you write?

Stuart: It’s a good idea to think it. Don’t talk it out loud because when you talk it out loud you seem to get more confused.

Scrapy: Ok

Stuart: So try just thinking about it and see what comes
out of the pencil.

After this exchange, Stuart excused himself, stood up, and headed for the snack table to grab some water. As Stuart made his way across the room, Scrapy mumbled, “In Beat Production, we learned lopping [sic] sounds, counting beats, and a structures of a song,” under his breath as he wrote.

Stuart preferred Scrapy to proofread his writing aloud and listen carefully to his own words as he read them. This would help him spot his countless mistakes. He noticed that Scrapy did not always read what was written on the page. For example, he pointed out that he had read “subatomic” as “subatomical” and “defend” as “defined,” among many other words. Scrapy’s tendency to misread words eventually prompted Stuart to ask Scrapy if he was dyslexic.

**Choosing the right word**

Building an academic vocabulary was key to improving Scrapy’s writing skills. Among the words Stuart taught included “pandering,” “elaborate,” “transpose,” “clutter,” and “platitude;” how to spell “upon” and “intermediate;” and how to distinguish “there,” “their,” and “they’re.” Vocabulary development was not one way, however. Scrapy taught Stuart the contemporary meaning of “pimp” (a lady’s man) when he described Romeo’s character during a lesson on Romeo and Juliet.

Choosing the right word was more than just learning to write and becoming a writer. It was more than just paraphrasing Shakespeare accurately. Choosing the right word was also about understanding register, formality, and learning respectful ways to refer to women. For example, in his paraphrase of the prologue in Act II of Romeo and Juliet, Scrapy had to rewrite a 14-line stanza using his own words (see Figure 4.4, p. 144). “I was like cutting this stuff and putting in better words,” Scrapy told Stuart, “making them my own.” Stuart helped Scrapy go line-by-line, checking his draft and his understanding of Shakespeare’s language, comparing what he wrote
with what Shakespeare wrote, improving his register, and capturing the meaning of the passage.

“I’m just determined,” Stuart said, “to get you through this.” At one point, Stuart chided Scrapy for describing a woman as “hot” or “sexy.” He prodded him to find a more respectful word:

Stuart: But what’s a nicer word? I mean Romeo is in love with her!

Scrapy: Yeah

Stuart: So, what’s a nice word? You don’t describe your girlfriend as hot or sexy.

Scrapy: (laugh)

Stuart: It’s a bit rude, isn’t it?

Scrapy: (laugh) that’s true, but, I don’t know.

Stuart: Well, think about it. What do you think –

Scrapy: Beautiful?

Stuart: Sure

Describing Juliet as beautiful went through another revision several minutes later as they both looked back at the original.

Scrapy: “with Jul-, oh, with, uh, tender Juliet match’d,

is now, now not fair”

Stuart: It’s not fair to compare! “For whom I ached, do not compare with Juliet”

Scrapy: Juliet. So, I can just cut this line?

Stuart: Yeah. Yeah. It replaces it.

Scrapy: Yeah. Oh! I should have done that!

Stuart: Do you see what I mean?

Scrapy: Yeah! It’s more, more understanding
Although he insisted Scrapy choose his words more carefully, Stuart still fixed his sentences and untangled his paragraphs. In his argumentative paper called *Of Mice and Men*, Scrapy, with elbows on the table and hands clasped together, watched as Stuart moved his thesis, cut his conclusion, revised the order of his paragraphs, inserted words and phrases into his sentences, and added commas, periods, and quotation marks all over his essay. Stuart edited aloud and asked questions when he did not understand what Scrapy had written. Scrapy asked Stuart to spell out his copyedits, to clarify quoting conventions, and to explain how to write a solid...
conclusion. Stuart apologized at the end of their session for all the endless fixing, revising, and editing he had done and the rewriting Scrapy had ahead of him. “I know that’s a lot of work, he said, “and after what I have done with it—it looks like—well, I’m sorry, but sometimes things happen. They need work. But that’s what writing needs!”

Writing from scratch

Scrapy usually arrived with a copy ready to be edited; there were times, however, when he arrived with just the assignment and a handful of ideas. Two papers, his letter to his parents and his application essay for a DJ scholarship, for example, needed drafting from scratch and under a tight deadline. Stuart was used to deadlines; he immediately got Scrapy organized listing ideas. “Don’t block out the organization of it,” he said about the letter to his parents, “Just write it down. Don’t worry about even erasing it. Just write down some notes as they come to you.” He offered similar advice several months later when Scrapy wanted to enter a music competition to win a DJ-scholarship worth almost $3,000. Scrapy needed to highlight all of his accomplishments: “Don’t hide your light under the basket,” Stuart beckoned, “now is the time to let your stars shine!”

In both these assignments, Stuart helped Scrapy tease out his ideas, consider the needs of his audience, generate relevant examples, and use the appropriate register to address his parents and the scholarship committee. Several times Scrapy mixed registers. He was curious about audience needs and expectations and was unsure how to adjust language accordingly. This first appeared in his letter to his parents when he ended with “in conclusion, mother and father.”

Stuart: “in conclusion, mother and father.” That’s so formal. You don’t want this to be formal.

Scrapy: But, what happens if you’re actually writing it a—

Stuart: No, no, but you are writing it to your mum and dad.
Scrapy: What happens if it’s a different audience, like
Stuart: Then then then a whole other question.
Scrapy: Oh.
Stuart: Let’s just focus on this letter. How would you
Scrapy: “Dear mom and dad,”
Stuart: How would you conclude this? Think about it
before you write.

Stuart edited more heavily under time pressure, especially in the scholarship essay which was
due by midnight. He reluctantly found himself supplying key wording. “I knew I would end up
writing this!” he muttered as he crafted linking phrases such as “a program called Uforchange.’
‘As part of this program, I and five other students were accepted into two courses,’ and ‘as a
result of my participation in the UforChange program, I have volunteered for several community
events.’”

Stuart verbalized as he wrote and as he edited. Sometimes, he insisted Scrapy watch him edit
and observe him write. Scrapy would have to revise later and Stuart wanted to make sure Scrapy
knew what to do. He would say, “Keep alert with me. This ain’t easy,” adding, “I’m not doing
this for myself.” Another time he uttered, “Watch me, here! Watch me, here!” and “Now look,
here! Scrapy watched.

**Stuart and Scrapy Reflect on Writing Together**

Stuart thought Scrapy was agreeable, friendly, energetic, and bright, but disorganized,
unfocused, and careless. “And I mean that in it’s original sense—care less,” he said. After their
second session, Stuart told me that his main priority was to help Scrapy get organized. “That
covers a lot of things,” he told me, including, “How he sits down, what he does with this
backpack, with his stuff. The state of his binder, and the assignment he is planning to work on with me today.” Searching for an idiom, he added, “You can’t make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear.” Concerned that his own “tactics” failed, Stuart was desperate. He even contacted Pathways’ volunteer tutor coordinator to find out how he could get Scrapy to quite doodling and start focusing (see Figure, 4.5).

Figure 4.5. Stuart’s message to the volunteer coordinator about Scrapy’s behavior

At the end of the term, I asked him how he would characterize their sessions. “Guerilla warfare,” he answered. “You know, what the hell,” he later told me, “I’ll go with anything with Scrapy. And by God I had to […] What’s on the agenda? […] And God only knows? […] Something from outer space. But--You just go with it.” Scrapy was “a rocket going off in all directions” and his writing was “on the verge of being unrescuable.” He felt Scrapy did not have the skills to be objective and critical of his own work. He described Scrapy’s academic future: “I think he’s going to just get by.”
Stuart felt he failed Scrapy. “I don’t know if I helped him or not. I really don’t,” he said. The only time he found him engaged in the lesson was during a geometry lesson when his friend, Francis, tutored him on velocity, slope, and acceleration and again when Scrapy was applying for a scholarship to attend a DJ workshop. He was unsure if he taught him good writing skills. Brainstorming would not work with Scrapy, unlike Natasha. He was too distracted. Free writing, too, was a waste of time for “someone of his level of learning, attention, and groundings.” Stuart encouraged him to read his papers aloud to catch errors, but he realized that Scrapy reads what is not on the page.

Stuart claimed he did not work with Scrapy on developing his writer’s voice and was unsure whether his own writer’s voice influenced Scrapy’s writing. Voice was something that took care of itself once content, organization, and grammar were intact. Stuart described Scrapy’s writing as “all voice with no content.” He explained, “can’t do voice until you’ve got some coherent content,” he said. “No point in talking about voice with [Scrapy], he wouldn’t know what you’re talking about.” He conceded that Scrapy’s voice surfaced in the letter, in which he urged his parents to change their diet. His voice, which Stuart characterized as “careless but concerned,” only emerged if you ignored his copyedits. In another piece, he described Scrapy’s voice: “it’s there only in the dyslexic aspects of it.” Scrapy’s “[writer’s] voice is so much like his personality,” Stuart said, adding “his inability to listen for longer than a nanosecond shows up in his writing.” Overall, Scrapy was full of energy and his writing did have a way of drawing you in, “as there are a few good ideas amongst the drek.” Stuart knew there were times he had written, told, and dictated things to Scrapy. It made him feel “awful” and “full of shame” because “he’s taking down the words,” he said, “but he’s not understanding.”

Scrapy admired Stuart. “He’s actually a really good mentor,” he said, “even if he’s mean like a lot of people say. But he’s actually a really smart guy […] I learned a lot.” Scrapy
complimented Stuart beginning with their first lesson. “This is actually helping me to become a better writer!” he announced after Stuart helped him to draft a letter to his parents for health class. Stuart engaged Scrapy by getting him to brainstorm ideas, reminding him to think before he wrote, and reading his writing aloud. He told me later that his English tutors at Pathways had largely been knowledgeable and helpful. They helped make his writing more “authentic,” “good looking,” and “fabulous.” Stuart was different. He was a cut above the rest. His experience taught him that tutors come in two types: “Automatic leaders” and those who just “explain.” Automatic leaders “are always by your side, they tell you how to do it; they will give you ideas. And, if there is something wrong, they will actually help you fix it.” Stuart was an automatic leader. Scrapy explained, “[Stuart] gave me an idea and I was thinking to myself, and I wrote it down. Right? But he didn’t told me like, ‘Scrapy, write every single word I say.’ That’s it.” Scrapy credited Stuart for his higher marks in English that term.

Scrapy said Stuart helped him improve his writing also by getting him to stop saying “like.” He employed Stuart’s advice at school where he tried to convince his classmates to stop saying “like” when they spoke. “I was like, stop saying the word ‘like’ now. I’m getting annoyed, too,” he said laughing. Stuart also helped him by improving his use of tenses and by not cluttering. Cluttering he explained was “this voice coming from your brain and saying unnecessary stuff, like the word ‘like.’” His remedy to reduce clutter: “I just cross it off, and I just like put a better word, like short sentences and more sophisticated words.” For example, instead of saying, “I am very mad” he told me he would now write, “I am mad.” He felt Stuart also helped him improve his writer’s voice by improving his editing skills and his grammar. “He made me become a better writer,” he said, “not made me a better writer.” The difference: Stuart motivated Scrapy by telling him to “suck it up” and by getting him to listen. Getting him to listen and think before he
wrote helped. “I just realized that, if you think for a sec, you can actually write really good writing,” he said.

Stuart’s feedback on his writing helped him to develop his feeling and experience about writing. He drew on his use of “sexy” from the *Romeo and Juliet* transliteration assignment to explain. Contrasting “sexy” to “she does not compare with Juliet” was something he revised with Stuart’s help. “It means Juliet is better than her (Roselyn) in a lot of stuff—even in bed! You get it? This is actually really stronger than that. Compare sexy, not sexy enough. And you say ‘compare,’ there’s a lot of categories for it, right?” When he reflected on his use of the word sexy he felt that he had exercised poor judgment. “It’s un-appropriate,” he added, “and I have learned something from him. You have to be appropriate in your language.”

Although Scrapy felt the transliteration exercise was successful, Stuart did not. He felt frustrated because Scrapy had failed to grasp his belief that Romeo was simply in love with the idea of being in love. He wondered if his teacher prepared the class to understand what love meant in the 16th century as opposed to today with “skin mags all over the place.” His use of sexy to describe Juliet was “just teenage male cliché,” he admitted. “He’s not serious about it […] He’s not trying to be offensive. He’s just using teenage male jargon.”

Stuart believed that Scrapy’s voice shifted from his original draft to the revised draft, and that his paraphrase captured more of the sonnet’s intended meaning. His expression was still closer to his (Scrapy’s) own way of writing, evidenced by a struggle with form. He noted that at times Scrapy was just replacing synonyms (e.g., writing “dangerous hooks” for “fearful hooks”). Stuart reckoned, “When you’re faced with Shakespeare and you’re not from an Anglo culture and have no history at all with it, what do you do with it when you’re asked to paraphrase?” Even though he had helped Scrapy paraphrase the chorus, he did not see much of himself in the transliteration rewrite except for possibly the final line, “Making hardship easier to bear.” Prioritizing what to
help Scrapy with first puzzled him. “I mean there’s this grammatical problem you’ve gotta clear up early. And so do you pay attention to that? Or do you pay attention to the idea? Let the writing go? It just drives me crazy. If they don’t get the grammar one right, then they’re not ---. They’re not able to shape the ideas.”

Scrapy told me about his argumentative paper, “Of Mice and Men.” They cut repetitive phrases and Stuart wrote the topic sentence, which Scrapy retyped, but edited at home, commenting that the phrase Stuart contributed, “his doing so is an act of mercy,” simply did not make any sense to him and he rewrote it as, “George’s doing is an act of mercy.” Although Stuart had crossed out the conclusion, Scrapy kept it with various revisions to the original. He also changed the title from “Of Mice and Men” to “Compassionate George: the Merciful Relationship.” Stuart was pleased with the essay, “In Grade 9,” he said, “this ain’t bad.” Stuart was surprised to see Scrapy’s clever new title. “That’s better than anything I would ever expect from Scrapy. I’m almost ashamed to say, because it just—[…] I had to read it three times to connect it with Scrapy.” His use of language and style had exceeded his expectations, although there were the usual omissions, missing words that were a signature of Scrapy’s writing. When he compared the drafts, he admitted, “I may have had a heavy hand in it,” explaining, “I fixed up and crossed out […] inserted and obliterated.” He laughed and made the sounds of dynamite exploding.

When Stuart reflected backed on his session with Scrapy he recognized his frustration. “When I get frustrated sometimes, I don’t do the right thing […] I’m a little careless about it.” Nevertheless, he was unwavering in his belief that talking aloud while writing was not useful. It would never lead to becoming a good writer, especially not for Scrapy. “That question about talking to oneself while you write,” he said, “No. I don’t think that’s a helpful tactic for him.”
Stuart’s, Natasha’s, and Scrapy’s Suggestions for Future Writing Tutors

Stuart’s advice to new tutors: “they should read all the comments I gave you.” He added, “You have to be just listening and watching all the time. Don’t assume anything. It’s almost number one.” When it came to writing, Stuart learned early on that it is best to ask students what they think about what they just read or how they might write something, rather than simply to supply the interpretation for them. He also learned to ask for the assignment guidelines before anything else. He thought it was a good idea for the tutor to work with the same student and for the student to work with the same tutor over time. Tutoring pairs get to know each other and feel comfortable working together. “You’re getting to know […] their strengths, their weaknesses, what they need, what they think they need. What they really need. And how much they like being challenged or not.”

Natasha advised new tutors to listen to their students when they ask questions. She said she tends to keep repeating what she does not understand. Unobservant tutors ignore her requests. For example, she explained that sometimes tutors provide more background information than what is necessary to understand the assignment. She gave an example of trying to write a thesis statement, a common problem she had when writing her essays. Prompting her by asking, “what would you say?” would be an effective and efficient way to get her to think for herself.

Scrapy felt that tutors should “monitor” their students by guiding them and not by doing the work for them. “Start motivating them, like -- don't do their work too much, right? That's what happened to me. I became lazy when like, early in my life, tutors used to do all my work, right? So, I became more lazier, lazy. Not lazier. So, I recommend tutors not doing most of the work. But helping kids like go through the process like how [my tutor] did.” He described the process of Stuart’s pedagogy as providing the idea(s) and allowing him to reflect and write.
Case Study Two

Thursday Nights with Franny and Joy

The second case study gives an account of Franny, a bartender, and her student, Joy, aged 16 in Grade 10. From March until June, Franny and Joy met every Thursday evening from about 5:30 to 6:30 a table away from where Stuart, Natasha, and Scrapy sat.

Franny

Born in Toronto in 1983, Franny soon moved with her parents to a small town in rural Ontario where she spent her childhood and adolescence. Franny had long blonde hair, a nose piercing, and red nail polish. She wore a t-shirt under a sweater or sweatshirt, jeans, and tennis shoes. She often wore scarves. She had a blue scarf with zebras. It was winter and the basement of St. Basil’s was damp.

She described her background as “very white—kinda Irish.” Franny did not participate in events or activities that were culturally Irish. She claimed no formal affiliation with any religion. Rather, growing up in a small town shaped Franny’s experience of the world and identity as a writer. She looked back on high school with unease rather with than nostalgia. She explained that her own experience made her sympathetic to the teenagers in the literacy program who might feel the way she felt at their age—shy, awkward, lacking confidence in their writing and looking for approval. Helping students to be themselves when they wrote was something she wanted to do.

Franny was not the first in her family to go to university. Although her father did not complete high school, her mother earned a Bachelor’s degree in hospitality from a local university. When she was an undergraduate, Franny had a passion for writing and majored in professional writing and minored in creative writing. She learned about all facets of the business—copyediting, book making, and publishing—and attended guest lectures from
publicists about the field. After graduation she taught for a time in Tanzania, but since she returned home she has been bartending not editing. It paid the bills, editing did not. She explained that the Canadian publishing industry was small and editing jobs were few and poorly paid. Looking for career alternatives, she became interested in teaching, and with the help of her aunt she had been volunteering as a teaching assistant in a local Grade 4 classroom three hours a week. Volunteering one night a week in the literacy program was an opportunity for Franny to gain more teaching experience, particularly with adolescents. Her experience volunteering had been so rewarding that she applied to teacher’s college for the following year.

Aside from gaining teaching experience, volunteering was also an opportunity for her to get outside of her own neighborhood and explore other aspects, venues, and spaces of Toronto. She lived in the same neighborhood as Stuart. It was a neighborhood of old houses, steps away from the University of Toronto and a world away from Regent Park. Her neighborhood was populated mostly by young adults, Regent Park by young children, middle-aged mothers, fathers, and grandparents; her neighborhood was mostly white, Regent Park was mostly Caribbean, African, and South Asian; her neighborhood was mostly singles, Regent Park was mostly families.

When I met Franny, she and her boyfriend had already been tutoring in the program for about four months. She taught English, Civics, History, and, if necessary, Grade 9 Math. Like all new tutors, Franny and her boyfriend took a new tutor orientation workshop that covered broad aspects of tutoring and working with students. The orientation did not address writing, however. She had to draw on her editing experience and creative writing courses from university when it came to helping students with a writing assignment.

Tutoring reading and writing had been successful. She enjoyed reading Shakespeare alongside the students and seeing the relationship between Romeo and Juliet through their eyes.
“When I was their age I thought Romeo was the most romantic hero of all time,” she said. She enjoyed challenging the students to see these characters from a less romantic perspective.

Tutoring writing presented its share of challenges, too. Appropriating students’ writing, replacing their words and phrases with her own stylistic preferences, could be a challenge, but “I try not to alter what they’re trying to say, or how they’re trying to say it,” she told me. Franny frequently had to reign what she called her rather “domineering editing style,” adding that the students need to develop their own writing style that reflects their choices and their experiences, not hers.

I’m a white girl from a small town. And they don’t have the same experiences as I do. I don’t want to make my experience [more] important than theirs—[my] knowledge more important than theirs.

**Franny’s stance on good writing and a writer’s voice**

Good writing makes Franny forget that she is reading. Good writing is visual and concrete and direct. Strong and well-chosen verbs are indispensible. Verbs create an experience of the writing. Good writing is grammatical, savvy, and concise. Good writing excludes artifice and avoids clichés, tropes, and tired expressions. Good writing is fresh, clean, and crisp and excludes the unnecessary, ornate, and opaque. “If you can get someone to see something or feel something,” she told me, “you should do it.” Writers such as Kurt Vonnegut and John Irving were among her favorites. When I interviewed her she was reading Danbisa Moyo’s *Dead AID*. She explained that Moyo’s language was forceful, clear, balanced and made no use of the passive voice. Apart from Moyo’s brisk writing style, his book weighed all sides of the argument, something she felt is important in good writing. “The difference between creative
writing and academic writing.” she told me, “shouldn’t be that great. Everyone should aspire to be as concrete as possible.”

Franny believed that voice is something each writer brings to a piece of writing and what makes the writing unique. Voice is similar to style and includes sentence structure and vocabulary, but it also includes subject matter. Voice shows the experience of the writer, including the writer’s biases and knowledge. Voice was something that was learnable and teachable. Franny believed that when people write they do not have different voices for different occasions; rather, they have different aspects of the same voice. They have to “suppress and exaggerate, depending on what you’re writing,” she said.

If she were to explain voice to a student, she would stress that the words people chose when they write, the sentences they craft, and the metaphors they use unite to shape their voice along with their unique experience of the world. “It’s not so much what you’re writing about, but just the way it informs how you write. The things you’re sensitive to; the things you aren’t sensitive to,” she explained. Developing voice was about developing awareness of language. She explained, “Just make sure that they’re aware of why they’ve chosen certain words, why they’ve chosen certain structures, why they’ve chosen certain metaphors.” She agreed, albeit reluctantly, with the Ontario English Curriculum’s definition of voice. It seemed incomplete. It seemed to have all the necessary components like vocabulary, imagery, and structure. However, she felt Grades 9 and 10 students would not understand what imagery and rhythm were. It was not accessible to them. “Voice is vague. The definition is vague,” she said. “I think you only learn by doing—like voice.”
Franny’s approach to tutoring writing

“Adverbs were for lazy people,” Franny said, quoting her high school English teacher. She told me this advice had shaped not only how she edits her own writing and produces her own voice, but she passes this advice along to students in the literacy program. Editing faulty grammar and incorrect punctuation and florid style takes priority. Her English teacher taught her that knowing how to use grammar and punctuation to communicate clearly and effectively comes first. “You can screw around with grammar, with punctuation,” she said quoting her teacher, “but only if you understand it completely. If you don’t, then you’re just wrong. And people won’t understand what you’re saying.”

Franny defined herself as a prescriptivist; she believed in following the standard conventions of grammar, punctuation, and style. “No sentence splices, proper punctuation, spelling, proper pronouns,” she said. She felt that the Ontario English Curriculum no longer stressed the value of grammar and the importance of writing correctly. She stressed them in her teaching, however. Franny also emphasized writing in concrete, lucid prose over florid embellishments. Hemingway’s tangible writing style influenced her own writer’s voice. “I try very hard to be as concrete as possible. Never use adverbs. And so my idea of what a good writer is has definitely influenced my own stuff.” Adding that what identifies her as a writer is creating a unique style, “I’m very interested in creating [...] a complex but really easy-to-follow sentence structure.” Her friends did not always appreciate her approach, however. One friend criticized her for “dumbing down” her paper after she gave it to Franny to edit. Franny considered her friend’s writing style as turgid and superfluous. Her friend, a graduate student, felt that Franny’s revisions had stripped the complexity of thought she had striven to create, making her ideas sound elementary. Franny felt that everyone should strive to write concretely without unnecessary embellishments: “I feel like anybody with literacy should be able to read something and get something from it.”
Franny’s approach to helping students started by reading their paper and asking them questions. She wanted students to be involved in the process of revising and to understand what they are writing about. She told me that students sometimes do not know what they are writing about and struggle to explain their ideas to her. If it is an academic essay, she gets students to identify the thesis statement and supporting examples, organization, and structure. “At the age they’re at,” she said, “it’s important for them to just get that down before they try more complicated things.” When it comes to giving feedback on the writing itself, Franny identified strongly with her role and background as an editor. “I know that for sure my eye always first goes to editing,” she said. She likes to help students with grammar, punctuation, and style. “It’s always number one,” she said. If she copyedits, she explained, “I’ll just do it and then I’ll explain to them what I did and how I changed things and why I changed things.”

Modeling writing on the writing of others is how she learned how to write. “That’s really the only way I think you can learn to write,” Franny said. Being a confident creative or academic writer, she believed, comes from drawing on what you know and what you have experienced in your life.

**Joy**

“I could write before I could read,” Joy told me. When she was two years old, her mother taught her the alphabet. By the time she started school, Joy was arranging and combining letters to spell out the words she heard on television or saw in print. Writing was part of Joy’s passion and it figured strongly in her identity as a writer both in and out of school.

Joy was tall. She stood around 5'9”. She often wore a purple sweatshirt under a black coat. She pierced her ears and painted her nails black. She pulled her long black hair back into a ponytail. When I met Joy she had been attending the tutoring program since September. She lived in a small apartment in Regent Park with her mother, father, and younger brother. She was
born in Canada, the daughter of Bengali immigrants. She identified as Bengali-Canadian and Muslim. She and her family participated in Bengali cultural activities like attending Bengali New Year’s celebrations. At home she spoke Bengali with her mother and father and English with her brother. “My parents […] want me to speak Bengali so I don’t forget the language,” she said. Her parents left most of their Bengali books behind when they immigrated to Canada in the 1990s, but one of books they did bring was her mother’s old Bengali/English dictionary. The bilingual dictionary played an important role at the kitchen table, figuring prominently in Joy’s early literacy development. Sitting side by side with her daughter, Joy’s mother helped her with her homework each night even though she did not read or write in English. When Joy came across an unknown word, her mother reached for the bilingual dictionary, thumbed through the pages, and scanned down the columns of terms and expressions until she found the word she was looking for. Her eyes went from the English word to the Bengali translation. She read it and then explained to Joy in Bengali what the English word meant. Joy now helped her younger brother at the kitchen table with his English homework but without the need for their mother’s bilingual dictionary.

Her parents had completed high school. When they first arrived in Canada, they took ESL classes. In addition to Bengali and English, her father also spoke German. Joy said he studied in Germany for about five years when he was 18. She did not remember what he studied. In Canada, her parents work in the restaurant industry: her father works as a cook, her mother works in a fast food restaurant. She would like to share her writing with her parents, but her father was too busy and her mother did not have the fluency to read her short stories, essays, and reports.

Joy liked school and saw herself as a good student and a good public speaker. Like many students at her high school, Joy took a full schedule of academic classes. The semester she
participated in my study, she took Science, English, Math, Architectural Design, Drama, and History. Several of her courses required writing. In English, she wrote persuasive and opinion essays; in Drama, she composed monologues; and in History, she wrote news articles. She was also busy writing practice essays, summaries, and short answer responses in preparation for the Grade 10 literacy exam.

Her favorite subject was English, and her least favorite subject was Math. Her favorite pastime was creative writing. In elementary school, she belonged to a writer’s club, wrote for the school newspaper, and met distinguished politicians and authors. She published a travel piece about her first trip to Bangladesh with her parents; shook Nelson Mandela’s hand when he visited her school on a state visit to Canada in 2001, met celebrity authors J.K. Rowling and Becca Fitzpatrick; and was nominated as one of two valedictorians of her graduating class. She and her fellow valedictorian co-authored their acceptance speech, which she archived and read aloud to me. Out of school, Joy had volunteered both at her local library reading to young children and at a newcomer resettlement agency where she tutored ESL and showed newcomers how to use the subway. She even participated in a Kiwanis club where she learned how to write cover letters and resumes. Like most girls her age, she tweeted. She liked to follow Lady Gaga and Barak Obama on twitter. Joy also had become interested in Korean language and culture. She watched Korean dramas and listened to Korean music. She learned how to say, “I love you,” and “My name is Joy. I'm from Canada. I know a little Korean. Do you understand English?”

After high school, Joy wanted to go to university to become a pharmacist to help people understand their prescriptions, or to teach English in Japan.

Now that she was in high school and had a lot more homework, Joy still got involved in clubs and activities. The high school’s literacy club introduced her to creative writing and taught her how to hone her writing skills for the upcoming literacy exam, for example.
Joy was not a novice writer and seized the opportunity to share her passion for writing with me. One Thursday evening, Joy arrived with a complete archive of her poems, letters, news articles, short stories, and essays that she had saved since childhood. She explained she archived all of her writing to track her improvement and to keep papers for future reference:

When I have an assignment, like for example, like social justice assignment, and I have a bunch of pieces of writing I already did on social justice, so I kind of read back in my writing and see [...] how much I’ve changed and I’ve improved. And also I like keeping my stuff so when I have a similar topic on that topic, I already have like pieces of my writing and kind of put it together to create even more stronger piece of writing.

She handled each paper, story, and script—a complete dossier of her life’s work from Grade 6 to Grade 10—like a rare collections archivist handles priceless manuscripts. One by one she removed each piece from a canary yellow folder marked “Book Lits and Note Books” [sic] and set it down on the table. She explained where she wrote each piece and what inspired her to write it before turning it over and removing the next piece from the yellow folder. Among her collected writings, she showed me two pieces and the rubrics that her teachers used to evaluate her writing, including her writer’s voice. In “Ancient Egyptians,” a piece about the class structure of ancient Egypt, her teacher praised Joy’s voice, jotting down “The voice formal! Super report!” This praise contrasted sharply with an international trade report, “Trading with Canada, South Africa, and the United States,” in which her teacher chided her for her informal, colloquial voice and numerous typos.

Joy had little time to pursue creative writing since starting high school. She liked to create her own stories and enjoyed coming up with catchy titles. Her last creative piece was “The Case of the Mysterious Scream” written in Grade 7. She submitted this piece to a fan fiction website where she got helpful peer feedback from anonymous teen readers. Despite her passion for
writing and her involvement in writing clubs, she considered herself an average writer. She liked to write more than she liked to read because writing allowed her to make up her own ideas. If she disliked a book, she put it down and wrote her own ending. She critiqued the author’s way of developing characters, and in her rewrites, she changed the script to make the characters do what she wanted them to do. She believed that the writing she did outside of school helped her build her vocabulary in school. One of her favorite writing resources was the thesaurus. She never used a word indiscriminately. “I make sure what a word means,” she said. After discovering a new word in the thesaurus, Joy confirmed the meaning by consulting the dictionary. She avoided using words that she felt her teacher thinks she does not know.

As a matter of good practice, Joy told me she proofread her work on the computer five to six times before turning it in. Out-of-school peer feedback played an important role in her development as a writer. She, three other girls, and one boy read each other’s drafts to develop their ideas and to proofread for grammar and typos. The group had been meeting over the past year both in and out of class. Joy told me they never circulate their writing online to each other; they always print it out and then meet before school to swap their essays. Her girlfriends usually commented on spelling and grammar or clarity, while Devon (a pseudonym), the only boy in the group, edited the way Ms. Mason (a pseudonym), their English teacher, does. They both know her expectations for writing and work to meet them.

Even though they brainstorm topics and ideas together, Joy was careful to point out that their written voices are very different. “Devon’s voice seems like you’re reading from a textbook with information. It’s really formal and like has lots of good points in it. He follows the structure.” Dissatisfied with her own vocabulary, Joy told me she finds herself soliciting better words from Devon: “What’s another word for this? Or how do I put this into a sentence to make it strong?”
Joy’s stance on good writing and a writer’s voice

Joy distinguished between good writing and a good writer. She believed that good writing was independent of the writer’s level or experience of the writer. Good writing does not stray. Good writing is focused; it cuts useless information and superfluous description. Good writing was neither defined by a rich and varied vocabulary nor by simple and plain words; rather, what defined good writing was its clarity and accessibility. A good writer could produce good writing by focusing on the needs of the reader: “If you have an idea and you can make the idea clear to the reader, so they understand what why you’re saying, I think that’s a good writer.” When I asked Joy what kind of writer she thought she was, she explained,

I think I'm the kind of writer [...] who wants to motivate people. [...] like when I was a kid, like I wanted to be a motivative [sic] speaker and motivate people. But now I kind of changed it [...] one would be a pharmacist. [...] So like basically a pharmacist, basically they help people and make them understand the prescription and drugs.

She agreed with the Ontario English Curriculum’s definition of voice. She knew the meanings of the words used to describe voice, gave examples of them, and explained why they were important. For example, Joy knew using an enriched vocabulary was important as it tells you about the character and whether they use “slang” or “big words” tells you about “your personality.” If her teacher said she could hear her voice in her writing she would take it as a compliment: “She would probably understand what I’m trying to tell the audience,” adding, “[she] probably thinks it’s strong because it’s believable.” How voice is defined depended on the situation. In nonfiction, voice meant power. If an author is able to persuade readers to change their perspective on stereotypes or world issues then they can be said to have a strong and influential voice. In creative writing, voice helps readers to connect with the characters. “If you understand what a character is going through. It emphasizes feelings,” she said. Readers may feel
a bond or attachment with a character because they see something of themselves in the character. Voice was also about the author and how the author seeps into the writing through vocabulary, rhetoric, and knowledge of the audience:

Voice is a way you express yourself through writing […] It’s the mood you set for the audience, the readers. So, if you’re going to write a funny story, you’re going to use like humor voice. If you’re going to write something scary, use a scary tone. And depending on the theme or mood you want to go with, then you kinda stick with that.

Voice was not something unique to fiction or creative writing. Academic writing was also a form of writing in which “you can still input your own personality,” she said. Joy explained that although writing genres may vary, a writer’s voice remains the same. “It’s still you no matter what you’re writing about,” she said, but how writers “display […] voice will probably be different depending on whether it’s creative writing or academic.”

Recently, she read After the First Death, a teen thriller by Robert Cormier (1979). She thought it was well written because each chapter captured the voice or the point of view of a different character. As a reader, she could experience multiple voices; “it’s not like a narrator’s voice,” she said. While discussing the Grade 10 literacy exam, Ms. Mason talked to the class about a writer’s voice and writing with voice for the exam. Joy said Ms. Mason told the class, “a voice is how the, the way, the tone the author speaks. So first of all, it could be like hilarious, humor, or sarcasm. And the tone they speak that sets the mood of the story.” Curious to know more about her own writer’s voice, Joy approached Ms. Mason after class. She asked, “how would you know this is my writing and I didn’t plagiarize it or something?” Ms. Mason explained to her that she could identify her writing because her ideas were always good; her examples ample; and her grasp of her topic complete. Ms. Mason told her that she “had deep thought in her writing,” and that even though Joy tended to digress a bit and sometimes her thesis
was not as strong as the rest of her paper, she always understood what she was trying to say. “I didn’t realize I do that,” she told me, a hint of curious surprise in her voice. The comment had caught her off guard. She had been unaware of how she came across in her writing. After talking with her teacher about voice, she was convinced that voice existed in a piece of writing without the writer knowing it.

In primary school, teachers seemed more concerned about voice and included it on their evaluation rubrics, Joy explained. In high school, however, Ms. Mason did not include voice on the rubric, but that she still encouraged it or included it in activities. Eager to improve, Joy went to Ms. Mason after class to get more feedback on her writing. “You’re writing too informal,” Ms. Mason said, “change your voice to formal.”

Joy thought of her writer’s voice as adventurous, her experience vicarious. “I’m an adventurous person,” she said, “I like to live through the characters I’m writing about.” This adventurous spirit in her writing surfaced even in how she completed writing assignments. Although she liked to have assignments that include writing guidelines and a framework, Joy often said she resisted putting her ideas in the topic sentence like other writers do, preferring to delay them until later. She said she can always determine the identity of a person from his or her writing—it’s either “too nerdy, or too wordy.” Joy walked a fine line between the two. If something does not sound right to her, she changes it to make it sound more like her. Her voice is a mix of a geek and an average person. “The way I add my personality to my writing is basically, I keep it the way I talk with someone but keep it formal.” When she works with a tutor she refrains from copying their words verbatim, paraphrasing the suggestions into her own language.

Recently, she had to write an advice letter in the voice of Benvolio, Romeo’s friend in Romeo and Juliet. To appropriate his voice, Joy read his lines out loud to see how he spoke and to note
the words he used. “He speaks like posh and like proper manners and stuff,” she said. Next, she analyzed how Shakespeare depicted Benvolio by observing the reactions of other characters towards him and by noting any parenthetical annotations about him. Finally, Joy pictured herself as Benvolio and began to write. His voice took form and shape through her words.

**Franny and Joy Writing Together: Finding a Balance between Nerdy and Wordy**

Franny and Joy sat side-by-side along one of the long folding tables in the back of the tutoring room. I observed from across the table. Each week, Joy removed something new from her backpack: an essay, a brochure, or a letter. She briefed Franny about what she was working on in class, told her what she did not understand, and explained to her what she needed help with. They reviewed the assignment guidelines, prioritized their time, and discussed the teacher’s comments (if provided). The book and the assignment were always on the table. Franny and Joy never went off topic; neither dominated the session.

Franny never wrote on Joy’s papers. Instead, she helped her write and revise by answering her questions, responding to her concerns, reassuring her when she was on the right track, and telling her when she was not. Although Joy always came with her own opinions, ideas, and reactions, she was still always interested in getting Franny’s input. Ms. Mason encouraged feedback. “In order to improve one’s writing,” Joy said quoting Ms. Mason, “it’s better to have different feedback and criticism.”

Any changes Joy made to her essays came after discussing, negotiating, and reflecting on what she was writing. She sometimes countered Franny’s opinion with her own interpretation. Sometimes she followed Franny’s recommendations only to change her mind when she got home. Joy was adamant about not copying Franny’s words as they worked together defining the thesis statement, revising the structure, clarifying ideas, and sorting out phrasing. She had
learned about plagiarism in class and about the importance of not taking other’s words. “My English teacher, Ms. Mason, she always told us like—nobody owns an idea. Even if you have a thought, it always comes from somewhere. And then I really took that seriously. All these ideas are never mine.” To make them hers, Joy labored to phrase ideas, concepts, and Franny’s sentences into her own words.

Joy’s conversation with Ms. Mason about her personal voice reinforced the idea that everyone writes differently and that she needed to make sure her voice, and not Franny’s, came through in her writing: “When Ms. Mason told me about voice and how she knows when it’s me writing and not someone else that’s why I decided to take Franny’s input and make them my own.” This approach was consistent in Joy’s belief never to use words she felt her teacher would suspect she did not know.

As a rule, Joy usually wrote drafts in pencil, edited in red pen (or erased and revised on the spot), and typed the final copy. The only time I saw Franny copyedit a piece of Joy’s writing was when Joy brought in a mock cover letter for a hypothetical job waiting tables at Swiss Chalet. Franny fixed her punctuation, corrected her spelling, and supplied her with better words. She explained her corrections to Joy when she was done.

In addition to writing, Franny worked with Joy on her vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation. For example, she defined words such as “batty” and “cynicism,” clarified the difference between “affect” and “effect,” helped her spell “spiritual,” “genre,” “figurine,” “lose,” “loose,” and “lost,” “there,” “then,” and “than,” taught her that “fundraising” was one word, not two, and explained when to use a semi-colon and when to use a colon. Aside from helping Joy find the right words that conveyed what she felt, that supported her thesis, and that made her writing easy to follow, Franny also helped Joy understand the culture and beliefs of the topics she was writing about.
For example, while writing about *Romeo and Juliet*, Franny helped Joy understand more about
the Catholic Church and its position on sex before marriage and suicide.

In the following examples, Franny and Joy discuss, negotiate, reflect on two papers,
“Destined for Doom” and “Two Parallel Worlds,” that Joy needed to submit for Ms. Mason’s
English class.

**Getting Joy to cut to the chase**

Although Joy had ideas, notes, and an outline to work from, she was often unsure about the
best way to phrase her ideas or how to connect them in a coherent way. She frequently asked
Franny, “Should I say – ?” or “Could I write – ?” or “Do I have to mention – ?” In one instance,
Joy was unsure how to order examples around what she called “bad timing,” a series of
unfortunate events that led Romeo and Juliet to commit suicide in her paper called “Destined for
Doom.” Franny helped her focus, reduce repetition, and get to the point:

**Joy:** I don’t know which order to put them in [...] Right
after they get married […] Romeo kills Tybalt, Romeo
gets banished. And, then Juliet finds out how Tybalt
dies, her husband’s banished, and now she has to
marry, forced to be married another guy. That’s kinda
all happens too fast. And that’s kinda timing

**Franny:** I think for bad timing maybe forget about Romeo’s
perspective like forget about that he’s been banished,
forget about […] how he killed Tybalt. Because you
already talked about it right?

**Joy:** Yeah
Franny: in a different, in a different context, so I would say focus on Juliet. Focus on all the bad timing surrounding Juliet. Like the fact that

Joy: So, should I mention that after they got, so – “Bad timing also played a big role. Soon after Juliet gets married to Romeo

Franny: Yes

Joy: Things started to move really quick for her. She soon finds out how –“

Franny: You don’t even need “things move really quick.” All you have to say is soon after Juliet marries Romeo, she – this happens, this happens, and this happens

Joy: Ok

Franny: Right? You don’t really need to cuz it’s just a lot words that you don’t necessarily need. You might as well just get to the – cut to the chase.

Getting Joy from outline to essay

Joy usually brought an outline of her essays complete with thesis and supporting points. She needed Franny to help her turn her outlines into five-paragraph essays. Her thesis statement and supporting examples needed to be cohesive; her themes needed to be coherent. In her opening paragraph from “Two Parallel Worlds,” an essay comparing and contrasting Romeo and Juliet with Lord of the Flies, Joy stated her thesis about the similarities and differences between the play and the novel and identified the theme of love versus hate (see excerpt in Figure 4.6).
Franny suggested Joy cut unnecessary prepositional phrases and passive constructions in her opening sentence to keep the writing tight, concrete, and active. When Joy worried about word choice and voiced her concern that her “wording is off,” Franny reassured her and told her to keep writing. “Don’t worry about the individual words,” she said, “get the main idea.” And, when Joy considered hedging ideas by using qualifiers such as “seems worlds apart” and “may seem like worlds apart,” Franny encouraged her to be direct and just write, “they are worlds apart.” Joy second-guessed her own wording and double-checked with Franny when she was unsure how to phrase her idea or how her ideas sounded. She asked her if she should write, “However they also have a common theme, loss of innocence,” and if she should put a comma after “theme,” for example. When Joy finished, her introduction, thesis statement, and theme had evolved. Her sentences were shorter, her pace quicker, and her ideas clearer (see Figure 4.7).
Franny and Joy Reflect on Writing Together

“I think she’s got a lot invested in making sure everything is perfect,” Franny told me about Joy. “She’s a serious writer.” Eager to improve, quick to learn, Joy was unlike the other students Franny had worked with in the Pathways program. Joy was determined, motivated, focused, and reasonably confident. Franny found that she was doing more “fine tuning” with Joy, whereas she needed to take a more directive approach with other students.

Franny believed encouraging good writing habits (e.g., editing) and developing a writer’s voice were the same. For example, when giving feedback to Joy, Franny often had to consider how much of Joy’s writing was actually “her voice and how much of it is actually things that need to be improved.” Franny noted that Joy’s lack of proofreading produced most of her

William Golding’s novel, Lord of the Flies, and William Shakespeare’s play, Romeo and Juliet, are worlds apart but they also have a few similarities. The themes of the two stories contrast each other; one focuses on love while the other focuses on hate. However they also have a common theme, loss of innocence. The characters of each story have similar character traits as well.

Figure 4.7. Joy’s revised draft of “Two Parallel Worlds” with Franny’s help
mistakes such as adding an apostrophe “s” when it was not needed, using the wrong pronouns, and over relying on cohesive devices such as “therefore,” “firstly,” and “because of” to connect her sentences. Franny told me her strategy to foster good writing practice and voice included reminding Joy to slow down and contextualize her ideas by introducing them. “I think that just helps with being consistent which helps with voice,” she said. Improving her vocabulary by getting Joy to use the dictionary and by providing her with positive reinforcement were also important.

Joy valued Franny’s help and praised her tutoring skills. “Franny,” Joy said, “was kinda helping me better see myself as a writer.” Franny refrained from imposing her own way of writing, her own style, and her own voice on Joy. “She still lets me have my own voice,” she told me, adding, “Franny knows the way I write and how I word things.” Joy explained that Ms. Mason said her writing had improved with Franny’s help and that she could better understand what points she was trying to make in her essays. More importantly, Ms. Mason could see that it was still Joy’s voice in the paper. Ms. Mason told her, “I can tell it’s still you. It’s just that you improved stronger.” Knowing the student and how he or she writes was important to Franny. “Being comfortable with the person,” Franny explained, “if you know where they are coming from, that helps with voice; helps you develop their voice with them.” She felt she had helped Joy develop her voice by getting her to pause and slow down, improving her vocabulary, by being aware of the words she’s choosing, and by knowing why she has chosen certain structures.

Developing writing and voice: “It’s not just a natural process, these are things you need to consider. You need to choose your words,” she told me.
Reflecting on “Destined for Doom”

In “Destined for Doom,” Joy said Franny helped her transform her outline into a complete essay. When Joy was unsure how to support her thesis about fate being responsible for the tragedy, Franny simply asked her what examples she had and then helped her put those examples into sentences, expand on the sentences developing her ideas, and finally link them back to the thesis. Franny reminded her to make sure that her readers can understand her argument and follow her train of thought. She pointed out the following sentence:

How the Montagues had one only son and the Capulet had one only daughter and fell in love with each other.

With Franny's help, she revised it to this:

It is a coincidence that the Montague's one son, Romeo, and the Capulet's one daughter, Juliet, ended up falling in love with each other.

Joy explained her revisions and Franny’s feedback:

It was my idea, but like she helps me make the sentence much stronger by rewording it or rephrasing it. She'd be like: ‘Your idea is good, but it seems like you randomly added it. You want it to flow with the rest of your ideas. So try putting it this way’ and then I'll write it down. And if I like it, I keep it. If not, I'll ask her, ‘It's good, but--. I wanna do something like this.’ And she'll be like, ‘OK. Well, then try this.’ And so on.

She commented that most tutors just edit it once, whereas with Franny they go over it several times. Franny lets her know when she does not understand something. She asks her to tell her in her own words what she wants to say. Once Franny understands, she gives her suggestions.

Franny found working on “Destined for Doom” to be challenging. “I had problems from the start because I didn’t necessarily understand what she was trying to get across. But I also didn’t want to change her essay on her. So, I was having a hard time trying to get her to explain to me
exactly what she wanted to say.” She noted that this essay was due the next day. “I also realized that it was kind of the eleventh hour. And I didn’t want to be like, “none of this makes sense. You need to start again.” You know? I tried to work with what she had, in the best way I could. It was a difficult essay.”

Franny characterized Joy’s overall writer’s voice as formal—perhaps even a bit formulaic. She hoped she would get her to “loosen up,” to realize that an essay can be cohesive without relying on transitional phrases to connect her ideas, link her sentences, and join her paragraphs. She paused. She suddenly remembered what her high school English teacher told her about learning the rules first before you break them: “Model this style,” she started to say, “and then model this style. And then you can start to play with it once you fully grasp the concept of each.” She thought that perhaps it was best that Joy strove to be as formal as she could be—for now. Later she could experiment once she knew the rules. Looking at Joy’s essay, she saw her influence and a bit of her own voice in the attempt at more advanced punctuation by adding a semi-colon; the shot at brevity by removing transitions; the stab at clarity by using concrete verbs; and the aim at shifting from past to present tense when discussing the plot. “Maybe a little bit,” Franny said, acknowledging that her own writer’s voice had some effect on Joy.

Reflecting on “Two Parallel Worlds”

“It was difficult,” Franny said, her eyes skimming the paper. She recalled the essay was due the following morning. She remembered Joy had to develop stronger arguments and fix sentence-level errors—but there was not enough time. Franny helped Joy to get her ideas down on paper, develop the bullet points on her outline, and flesh out her point in her introduction and the conclusion. She resisted the urge to make Joy’s essay sound more sophisticated and less shallow and broad. “The hardest thing about doing the essays is trying to bring it back down to
like a Grade 10 level,” she told me. She felt supporting quotations and a few well-chosen examples would have been improved the paper.

Franny tried to introduce Joy to the idea that there were more similarities between *Romeo and Juliet* and *Lord of the Flies* than differences, but Joy disagreed. Franny suggested to Joy that her theme of love and hate was not as black and white as Joy perceived them to be. Joy resisted her input. “If that’s what she decides,” Franny said looking at her final draft, “that’s what she decides. It’s her piece, not mine.” Franny also said Joy was not a “say-it-again” type of student, meticulously writing down everything that came out of her mouth. “I think she was pretty strong in her own voice,” she told me. Joy was not a student who qualified or hedged her position, stance, or opinion on a topic.

Joy explained that she had brainstormed most of her ideas for developing the essay at school. Franny helped her generate more specific similarities and differences between the two books and let her direct the course of the lesson. “She asked me, ‘what do you want to focus on first?’” Joy said. She explained that Franny helped to identify those ideas from her outline she wanted to use in her paper. Once completed, Franny told her to start writing: “So I was just typing, like introduction. I wrote the first thing that comes into my head. And then afterwards I got--. So I did it basically paragraph by paragraph,” she explained, adding, “then she'll just help me like make it more clear cuz my sentences are very choppy.”

Joy said that Franny recommended she put the differences first and similarities second. She did this. But once she got home she continued to revise. The original sentence on which she sought Franny’s advice still did not flow very well to her: “However, they also have a common theme, loss of innocence. The characters of these stories have similar character traits as well.” After further reflection at home, Joy restored her qualifiers, hedges, and phrases and submitted the following revised version to Ms. Mason (see Figure 4.8).
Franny’s and Joy’s Suggestions for Future Writing Tutors

Franny suggested that future tutors come prepared and always get the student to do their own thinking and their own writing. “It can be very tempting to do the work for them,” Franny said, “cuz it’s easier.” They could prepare by reading the material or at least passages from the plays, novels, or short stories in advance to make it less stressful when it comes to helping a student who is struggling to talk about and writing about these topics. She also suggested that tutors limit what they work on with a student during a session so as not to overwhelm themselves or the student.

Joy appreciated the opinions of tutors and welcomed feedback on her writing. “I felt like criticism, whether it’s bad or good, I could always learn from them—it kinda helps me grow as a person,” she said. She believed it was important that tutors understand the needs of their student and how to work with them. “When you’re helping a student you should help them, but allow
them to have their own freedom in their writing before you jump on it and tell them, ‘oh, you should do this, this, this.’”

Joy thought there are two kinds of tutors: those who edit and those who read along. She resisted bossy tutors who told her that their way of phrasing something was better than hers. Some tutors, she explained, “inflict all these rules that I don’t need to know yet at my level.” She acknowledged that a tutor’s edits often made her papers stronger, but editing was largely made at her expense. She looked at the revisions and realized, “if I hand this in I’m going to get a good mark for sure, but this isn’t me, so do I want to take credit for something I didn’t do? And I’m just not like that […] I’d rather get a lower mark but then have the paper be my own work cuz I know that’s the mark I deserve.”

Joy appreciated tutors like Franny who told her why an idea does not belong or why it does not make sense. “What do you think you could put instead of this?” she said quoting Franny. Whereas most tutors tell her, “just put this instead.” Joy said, “[Franny] gets me thinking on my own.”

Joy’s attitude towards a tutor’s feedback and that of her teacher’s was similar. “When I was younger, I always assumed that what the teacher says or how the teacher told me to write was the right way, but as I got older, and started writing as my own person not following the teacher’s guideline, I realized that that’s not always true and everyone has different opinions.” Tutors have different opinions, too. She solicits feedback from tutors but she decides what to change, add, omit, and revise, not the tutor. If a tutor becomes too officious she thanks them, excuses herself and moves to another table. “I read over their advice, and the thing I like, I keep,” she said, adding, “If I don’t like it, I’m like I don’t care what the tutor says, I just change it and write it my own.”
Chapter 5

Case Studies in the Pathways’ Office

The two cases discussed in this chapter were held in the Pathways Regent Park office. Tutoring sessions held at the office were for students who were part of the one-to-one tutoring program. These private tutorials were long-term and served students who typically read or wrote well below their grade level. For example, candidates for the one-to-one tutorial included ELLs, students with significant gaps in their literacy education, students with Individual Educational Plans (IEP), or students with learning exceptionalities. The tutorials guaranteed students a tutor who could meet with them each week in the privacy of one of the available program offices and away from the noise and constant distraction from activity in the church basements.

Tuesdays and Thursdays in the Pathways Office

Located above a local variety store, the program office sits on the border of two urban communities—Cabbagetown, an affluent neighborhood of slender redbrick Victorian homes and Regent Park, an historically working class neighborhood with community housing. The border, a street, ran east to west. South of the street was Regent Park. North was Cabbagetown. Pathways was on the north side.

To gain access, visitors, tutors, and students need to be buzzed in. “Come on up!” the muffled voice on the intercom announces. The door clicks and I walk in and climb the flight of stairs to the second floor. Artwork hangs in the stairwell. I pass students rushing down. They are likely headed to St. Basil’s. Anytime after 4:00, shouts, laughs, and smiles of students and staff might greet visitors as they enter the lobby. The office includes a dozen staff offices, two consultation rooms, a staff meeting room, a multipurpose room, and an employee lunchroom. The multipurpose room has a white board and is used for new tutor training. The staff meeting room,
located in the back corner, is used for an antiracism and oppression workshop midway through the semester. About ten tutors, all white, attended including myself.

Walking down the hallways, girls in hijabs pass by boys in t-shirts and jeans. The mission statement of the program hangs on one side of the lobby while the rainbow flag hangs on the other. A painting of a student deciding which high school hall way to walk down—one with guns or one with books—hangs behind the receptionist desk. The lobby’s placards, flags, and pictures reflect diversity, decisions, and dedication. I feel that everyone is welcome here. The program staff appears to mirror the diversity of the student body. With the exception of a few white staff members, most of the staff are people of color who appear to be from some of the same ethnic and religious backgrounds as the students—Jamaican, Sri Lankan, and Bengali.

After school, high school students head to the office to meet up with their support workers or to pick up the free subway tokens the program dispenses to help them get from home to school and back again.

By 4:15, program facilitators gather up supplies before heading down to one of the two church sites to prepare the room before the tutors and students arrive. They chat in doorways with each other, shout to students to remember to pick up their transportation tickets, and text or talk on cell phones with other staff already down at the church site.

The one-to-one tutoring takes place in whichever room is available. Although sessions meet in any number of empty rooms, one-to-one tutors and their students frequently meet in two particular rooms, the program facilitators’ office and a consultation room.

The program facilitator’s office is an airless, windowless room off the front lobby that is used by five or six support staff. The office runs four desks deep with no more than a foot between each desk. Black-framed PCs dwarf the desktops making them appear almost pocket size. The various personal effects of the support staff—family pictures, mugs stuffed with pens and
pencils, Vaseline hand lotion, Kleenex boxes, miniature calendars, and a black desk phone—are tucked, wedged, and crammed together in the remaining unclaimed surface space. Black metal cabinets packed with lined paper, graph paper, pens, and pencils stand tall against the back wall.

The office walls are painted alternating shades of sea foam green and sky blue, colors that contrast with the canary yellow of the lobby. Pictures of Mos Def, the Dalai Lama, Barak Obama, Steve Nash, Charles Darwin, and a young Maya Angelou decorate cabinet doors and walls; their words of inspiration to work hard—treat people with respect, and recognize personal potential—are taped up at eye-level. Standing shoulder to shoulder with the storage cabinets are several bookcases packed with copies of the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, Grade 9 Science books, Algebra and Geometry books, and a set of Dominos. By 4:30, the program facilitators have left, and the room is ready for tutoring.

The color of the consultation room, a crisp sugar-cube white, contrasts with the colorful walls of the program facilitator’s office. The lighting—recessed, florescent, and bright—fills the room. A map of the world hangs on the wall facing the door; the remaining walls are bare. In the middle of the room stands a small round table surrounded by three chairs with black vinyl backs and seats. A half-size Kleenex box rests on the edge of the table and industrial size boxes packed with reams of Xerox paper rest one atop the other, lined up single file against the wall. In the corner, a Compaq PC monitor sits detached from its body; its screen covered in dust. Excluding the white noise of the copy machine outside, the consultation room is quiet.
Case Study Three

Tuesday Evenings with Nigel and Chris

Nigel

Nigel described his background as European-Canadian. His hair was silver, buzzed cut, and receding. He wore gold-rimmed glasses. His clothes were warm earth tones. His shirts and sweaters were brown, grey, green, and olive. He wore khakis or jeans. He reminded me of a traditional university professor.

His parents had emigrated from Europe. Nigel was born in the spring of 1949. He was raised in Canada and had lived most his life in Toronto. As a young man he lived for a year on a Kibbutz during the Arab-Israeli war in 1967 and later spent four years in Greece. He loved the Mediterranean climate, culture, and people. He was married and had two adult children. Although he spoke a little German, he did not claim to be fluent in any other language other than English. He and his wife lived on the eastside of Toronto. He identified as a Tibetan Buddhist.

Nigel had an undergraduate degree in history and a minor in writing and rhetoric from an academically respected university in Ontario. He worked as a paralegal for most of his career, drafting legal briefs and memos for the government of Ontario. When I met him, Nigel had again returned to school. He was in teacher’s college working towards his Bachelor’s of Education with a concentration in special education. He wanted to be a teacher full time. His reasons for returning to school to pursue special education included having two children with learning disabilities and his rewarding experiences tutoring students at Pathways. That semester he was taking additional courses in the autism spectrum.

Nigel was interested in gender and literacy, especially ways to engage adolescent boys in reading and writing. When we first met he gave me a copy of The Atlantic Monthly and told me to read Hanna Rosin’s article, “The End of Men.” Rosin reported that the number of males
entering university was dropping; the number of females was increasing. Women were entering the labor force in greater numbers than men for the first time in U.S. history. Nigel was concerned about this decline.

Nigel wanted to work with boys who had been identified with some form of learning disability. “The majority of special ed kids are males,” he said, “and increasingly males are falling through the education cracks.” At Pathways he had taught different kinds of students and had taught all subjects except Mathematics and Chemistry. Targeting special needs students, however, was his primary interest and focus, and he had already worked with students across a wide spectrum of learning exceptionalities. In previous years, Nigel also had some experience working with ELLs at another volunteer organization called Youth, Inc.; it was something he never fully explored. Aside from his teaching and tutoring experiences in Toronto, Nigel had taught for little over a year in a small school in a farming community in rural Ontario. The experience had been positive for him and the education approach enriching for students. “The environment had been very accommodating to special needs kids,” he explained. Nigel felt that schools in large metropolitan areas like Toronto have lost the unique sense of community that is important in teaching and learning.

Nigel’s stance on good writing and a writer’s voice

“Good writing is persuasive,” Nigel said. “Sometimes,” he added, “good writing can be quite personal.” Good writing was also logical and ideas were supported with relevant evidence. Good writing was thorough and complete. “If your writing is going to tell a story,” he said, “the reader has to be left with the sense that the writer has told the whole story.” Although higher forms of writing can take more liberties with style, getting students to write well included having them “learn proper form, structure, completeness, [and] a sense of focus.” Most importantly, Nigel
believed good writing connects with the reader. Nigel considered the articles in *The Atlantic Monthly* well written. “They are not flowery,” he said, “they come to the point.” Coming to the point, succinctness, and brevity were also key indications of successful, admirable, and superb writing.

“To me, [voice] – it’s a kind of intimate portrait of who the person is. I think of Mark Twain, you know. I think of *Huckleberry Finn* when I think of voice. I don’t know what the rhetorical definition for voice is, but something that comes across with the personality of the writer.” He added, “you get a true sense of who the person is.” A writer’s voice does not always appear, however. Readers are able to “tell a lot about a writer’s voice by what they don’t say and start to fill in the pictures,” he said. Aside from Mark Twain, Nigel also thought of his mother when he thought of voice. Trying to capture the true sense of someone reminded him of his mother, who at 87 wanted to document her youth. Nigel prompted her memory by inviting her to revisit, reflect, and narrate the stories of her youth on tape.

He also considered writing that drew on personal experience and writing that used the first person to be key characteristics of voice. For example, asking students to reflect on how they spent their summers required using the first person. Nigel said he had taught Drama once to Grade 8 boys and girls and that he felt they addressed voice when they discussed point of view. When he thought about helping students develop voice he thought specifically of his student, Chris. Helping Chris achieve voice in his writing included encouraging self-reflection. “Chris, I believe, was somebody who needed to write very personally,” he said, adding, “That was a strategy I used with [him].” Overall, he stressed that for students to discover their own writer’s voice they needed to get “in touch with who they are.”

Nigel believed voice played a decisive role in fiction. Content and context were important in the construction of voice. He cited the Bible, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Jane Austen as books or
authors with a distinct voice(s). He felt voice tells you something of the time period in which the literature was written. Voice plays less of a role in academic writing, however. For example, Nigel believed that developing a writer’s voice in primary school children was not as important as their learning more fundamental aspects of writing such as how to put their names on the page. “I know that sounds absurd, but I can’t tell you how true that is!” he said, laughing. Learning to write with voice was something for older students, such as high school students who had more experience writing. Nevertheless, he believed that voice still does not play as critical a role in academic writing. He cited an example of a university student writing a paper: “In some instances it may be that their personal reflection and voice may be useful, but in many instances it’s not what the professor wants. It’s not what the assignment requires.”

Nigel thought the Ontario English Curriculum’s definition of voice for adolescent writers was not comprehensive enough. It had been boiled down to a regrettable “list of rhetorical and stylistic techniques.” He saw these as limited techniques and not representative of “one’s personal experience and how one expresses oneself.” Voice emerges from personal experience. How people define themselves, he told me, was missing from the curriculum.

**Nigel’s approach to tutoring writing**

Nigel strove to write clear, concise, and comprehensive prose. “I like succinctness,” he said. “I encourage my students to be succinct.” He explained that his approach to writing and to teaching writing was a result of his work as a paralegal. “A very great deal of what I’ve learned from writing comes from my training as a paralegal. And I owe so much to that training and the work that I did at the Ministry […] in which you are forced to write succinct legal briefs and memos.” He added, “I sort of fancy myself as writing a pretty good memo.” Nigel’s beliefs about writing not only came from his training in the legal field, but also by essayists, such as George
Orwell. Years ago Nigel read Orwell’s essay, “On the Politics of the English Language.” Orwell’s beliefs about English writing—that it was too elaborate, overly metaphorical, and relied on the passive voice—resonated with him. Passive voice, for example, reminded him of some 19th and early 20th century authors whose writing he did not enjoy and had difficulty wading through as a student. “I’m not fond of passive voice in writing,” he said, “because you have to work a lot harder.”

Nigel did not limit himself to writing memos and contracts. He also explored writing creatively. He wrote poems. He had recently written a poem about puffins in Newfoundland. He was inspired to write about this endangered bird after a friend was visiting an environmental reserve to study them. “I was thinking about my voice in the poem,” he said. It was “gentle” and different from how he normally sounded in a governmental memo: businesslike. Whether he wrote memos, or contracts, or poems he underscored the importance of communicating, connecting, and conveying his message to his reader. “Connecting with the reader […] is something that I really really stress with people,” he said. “That’s very much part of classical rhetoric, which says, ‘Who is your audience?’ ‘Who is your reader?’” adding, “that’s so basic.” He explained that sometimes he is both the author and the audience. When he writes in his journal, for example, he is connecting with the writer within. It is his way of exploring his own writer’s voice. Nigel characterized his own writer’s voice as something shaped by his intellectual curiosities and pursuits—history, science, literature, gender issues, and agriculture. “I grew up loving literature,” he told me. “I grew up loving history.” He used his personal interests in these subjects to connect with students. “I ask students what their interests are. If I don’t know much about what they are writing about, I try to inform myself.”

His approach to teaching writing to special education students depended on the student’s abilities, needs, and interests. “Students come in all shapes and sizes and all kinds of abilities,”
he said. Efficient teachers, he believed, set achievable goals. Gaining the students’ trust took precedence. “I usually take a bit of time to get to know the student,” he remarked, adding, “and usually I am able to find out sufficient information about them and their skills—so that we can find something that they’re quite good at.” Taking the time to get to know students also involved pointing out their strengths rather than their weaknesses as writers.

His views of teaching were shaped by his experience teaching, taking classes, working with the Ontario Curriculum, and receiving guidance from former professors and principals. For example, tutoring writing involved setting achievable goals. The first goal was to help the student understand the assignment. The second goal was to make sure the writing made sense, that it was straightforward, persuasive, and logical. When he taught writing to high school students he often used various visual means such as illustrating a subject, mind maps, and graphic organizers—ways to break down the writing process using shapes, diagrams, and charts. He made homework assignments accessible by “chunking” information, or breaking the process down for the student, defining terminology, prioritizing steps, and interpreting the teacher’s expectations, and conveying the assignment’s goals.

To help students connect to their academic assignments, Nigel tried to connect that subject to the student’s own interests and experiences. “If a student has some experience with basketball I try to draw analogies between things they can relate to on a personal experiential level with the work that they are doing.” He continued, “Often students will have an assignment that is wholly abstract, ‘What has that got to do with my experience in life?’” he said voicing a common complaint. Nigel brought his interests and experience into the lesson as a further way to connect. “If I can bring some examples for analysis from my background and my tastes, I’ll do so,” Nigel said. But, he emphasized, “I try to bring it down to their level of experience rather than my—mine is not that important.”
Nigel wanted to make learning accessible to students, but he strongly objected to the practice of “dumbing things down,” an approach that makes learning overly simplistic. To counteract this, he said, “I think increasingly I find it’s important to really make things quite challenging and throw a bunch of words that [the students] just don’t understand. And inevitably, they’re going to say, ‘What does that mean?’ And then you create this situation, where they’re forced to find out.” This was a teaching concept he had learned in teacher’s college. “You have to keep pushing the envelope,” he said.

His approach to feedback on students’ writing followed a particular algorithm. “I usually start going from the micro to the macro,” Nigel said. Going from micro meant starting with individual words in a sentence. He made sure words were in their correct context. With special needs students, he explained, words are often “out of line.” After making sure words were used correctly, Nigel addresses grammar and punctuation and ends with ideas (the thesis statement, for example, in an essay). He felt this approach was particularly suited for special needs students whose vocabulary seemed to be the most problematic followed by their grammar. “It’s important to start with something simple,” he said. Giving feedback on writing included asking students whether what they wrote makes sense to them. He looked at the writing to determine if it was logical, persuasive, straightforward, organized, and grammatical. His feedback started with these points.

Chris

Chris was 15 years old. He was tall, around six feet. He wore black t-shirts, a hoodie with the word Akademiks written in Gothic letters across the front, and black Nikes with white laces. He always arrived with a black backpack clinging to his shoulders. He was born in Toronto to Jamaican parents. Chris said he believed his mother finished high school; he was unsure about his father’s education. His mother was not working at the time he participated in the study. She
was a stay-at-home mom. Chris’s older brother attended Pathways a number of years ago and had since graduated from high school.

That semester Chris took Drama, Woodshop, Math, and Religion. Drama was Chris’s favorite subject. “I love to act,” he said. “I enjoy it all.” Comedy was his favorite. Acting gave him the opportunity to take on multiple character roles and to showcase his specialty—making dramatic facial expressions like scowling, smiling, and frowning to show anger, happiness, and disapproval. Showing anger was his favorite expression. “I just go wild, do my faces,” he said. He welcomed me one afternoon to watch him rehearse a monologue he wrote at school. His monologue was a reaction to an American classmate who bragged about how much cheaper McDonald’s was in the U.S. I watched Tanja, the academic coordinator, encourage, cheer, and support Chris as he delivered his lines. Chris’s faces, dramatic pauses, rising intonation, and furrowed brows ignited as he read aloud the following lines off a piece of notebook paper:

“What? What is this? I go into McDonald’s and they’re trying to make me pay $1.46 for this small burger?! Are you serious? And they’re paying one dollar for this big burger in the States? Ah, hell no! This can’t be. This ain’t fair! I can’t being doing this! They’re selling fruit smoothies? Fruit smoothies?! Oh, hell no. It ain’t our fault you’re trying to lose some weight. Jenny can help you. But you guys don’t want it. Forget this! I’m going to Popeye’s.”

Chris smiled and laughed as he reflected on his recitations with Tanja between takes. In contrast to Drama, his least favorite subjects were Religion and History. They were boring and did not inspire much enthusiasm; the readings were difficult to connect with. “I’d rather act than […] read a book or write something out,” he told me. The homework assignments he usually
brought to tutoring did not involve any acting but rather reflecting and writing about God, morality, the Church, and historical reports on popular medieval narratives such as the Shroud of Turin. “It sucks being a Catholic,” Chris said during one of his sessions. “There are a lot of stories.”

Chris loved to play video games, especially Grand Theft Auto. Although he said that he does not read outside of what is assigned in school, he does read the instruction manuals for video games. “If I think I don’t know what I’m doing, I read the instructions,” he said. Sometimes a game required a mission and a special set of skills. “If I have a mission,” he said, “and get to read it and do it, then you have to read to understand what you’re doing.” If he has difficulty with the instructions, he enlists the help of his brother or his mother. As a reader, Chris told me, “I can read some stuff, but I still need help […] I’m still not a hundred percent.”

The previous semester he had taken English, Canadian History, Art, and Credit Recovery, a course that offered Ontario students the opportunity to make up for a failed class. He told me that his teachers had largely given up on him and let him do what he wanted in class. In Science, his teacher looked on as he talked, played cards, and relaxed. In History, they turned a blind eye as he slept. While working with Nigel on a report about the history of the Shroud of Turin, he reorganized his notebook as Nigel read about the holy relic off Wikipedia. When Nigel asked him what he thought about what he had just read to him, Chris replied, “I wasn’t paying attention to tell you the truth.” Nigel asked him if he was bored. “I don’t like History,” Chris said. “I don’t know why I’m studying it.” Although he did not enjoy studying history, he realized it was important to know about key figures in history including Tupac, the Queen, and Hitler.

Chris never saw himself as a poor student. When I asked Chris about school he told me school simply confused him, which he concealed by making his peers in elementary school laugh by doing what he called, “dumb stuff.” The same pranks that brought him applause, appreciation,
and recognition from his classmates also got him into trouble with his teachers. He told me actions have consequences and everyone needs to learn “not to go over the limit” especially in school. In high school, he decided to change his attitude. He realized that if he did not learn to read and write he would not have a bright future, and if he needed to write essays, reports, and take notes in class to pass, he would need help. Sometimes, he told me, the school would give him special accommodations, such as extra time to take tests. He explained that these special accommodations depended on particular circumstances or the class. When he reflected on his teachers, he said that they were boring. And once when Nigel asked him to clarify the teacher’s expectations, he answered, “I told you, sir, I don’t pay attention in class!”

**Chris’s stance on good writing and a writer’s voice**

Good writing for Chris was “writing that’s neat. Writing that you could read.” For example, “every time you finish a sentence,” he said, “you put a period.” He added, “you’re not going to call it good writing if somebody writes something and you can’t read it.” When I first met Chris he told me that on a scale of 1 to 10, with ten being an excellent writer, and one being the worst, he was 3; and he later changed it to a 7. At our last interview, he amended that, settling finally on a 5.

To Chris, the Ontario English Curriculum’s definition of voice describes, “how […] students from Grade 9 to 12 feel about writing.” Chris said that if his teacher told him that she could hear his voice in his writing, then “she thinks, like the way (I’m) explaining it and stuff, explaining what you’re talking about, and she think you have a good voice.” He added, “your voice is like like your mouth, like what’s coming out of your mouth, or it’s what you’re saying.” He told me that writing could not have (a metaphorical) voice, that speaking and writing are two different things. However, he conceded that his teacher could distinguish his writing from a classmate’s
by the personality emerging in the writing. “Say, if she knows that the kid’s an A+ student, she’s gonna, the one that sounds better, it’s gonna be obvious he is and like the one that slack off, probably like he wrote like two sentences.” Compared to a friend, he felt his teacher might see his writing as not as strong. “How can I put this? I don’t know,” he kissed his teeth, “tsk—like I would be […] the immature one.” He admitted that his prose is often unclear even to himself. “Honestly,” he told me, “sometimes, when I write, I don’t think I make much sense.”

Prayers, statements of belief, and reflections on the divinity of Christ surfaced in his school writing. In a report, “10 Commandments for the Environment,” Chris added a sentence about how Jesus Christ gave his life for humankind. This phrase was not a requirement, but something that came to mind based on his daily exposure to the teachings of the Church. “When you’re a Catholic, you hear a lot of that,” Chris said. “They just keep saying that—how he gave up his life for us. How he died on the cross and all that. And, yah, trust me, if you’re a Catholic and you don’t know that, you’re a really bad Catholic.”

Chris also shared another piece called “My Creed,” a single-sided, nine-point statement of belief, which he had composed on the computer at Pathways with the help of Tanja who typed as he dictated his thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes. He chose the pictures to include. In “My Creed,” Chris itemized his beliefs (see Figure 5.2). He upholds his belief in Christianity in words adopted from the Nicene Creed—God the father, Jesus Christ his son, and the Virgin Mary. He points out why learning to read and write is important: They can get you a job and provide for a better future. He notes that he likes Chris Tucker and the late rapper, Tupac. He ended his tribute by a sober warning: “If you scar me for life, I’ll never forgive you. For life. By Chris.”
Chris was not aware of anything he had written lately that had his personality in it, however. The best piece of writing he did was a tribute to movie actor and comedian Chris Tucker called, “The Fun one a Tribute to Chris Tucker.” “Every time I seen him act,” Chris told me about

Figure 5.2. “My Creed”
Tucker, “I was like wow! This guy’s good.” He wrote his tribute to Chris Tucker not only because he thought he was cool, but also because, “there’s a lot of colored actors and stuff, but like he acts funny. He’s funny, wears good clothes and stuff.”

**Nigel and Chris Writing Together: Scribing, Spelling, and Searching for Words**

Chris usually arrived early. He sat chatting with Tanja, the director of academic support, until Nigel showed up. Tanja had also been tutoring Chris on the side for a couple of months. They had a strong rapport. Once Nigel arrived at the office, he and Chris headed off down the hall to get to work in one of the tutoring rooms. As they got settled, Tanja would often dash to the corner grocery store or pizza parlor to pick up a coke for Nigel and a slice of pizza or hamburger for Chris. When they were at the computer in the staff office, I sat behind them. When they were using one of the consultation rooms, I sat at the other end of the table.

Chris was more comfortable completing his writing assignments using a keyboard than by longhand, and so he and Nigel usually worked at one of the computers in the staff office where Nigel and Chris read chapters from *Christ and Culture*, a textbook on Catholic teachings of faith, researched the Shroud of Turin, wrote in his journal for Drama class, and paraphrased the Ten Commandments in writing and pictographs. They also discussed the meanings of “hetaireia,” “eros,” “storge,” “philia,” and “agape,” Greek words denoting recognized forms of love such as companion love, romantic love, family love, brotherly love, and charitable or Christian love, respectively. They drew or played chess on the days Chris did not have any homework. When they played chess, Chris was completely engaged: thinking, planning, and strategizing his next move. He would make his move, utter “check,” and bite down on a slice of pizza. Those were the only times they sat directly across from each other.
**Spelling together**

Chris sat close to the computer screen; sometimes he increased the font size on the word document by 120 or 130 percent. Nigel also sat close to the computer screen. He had bad eyesight. Chris always sat with both hands poised over the keys. He typed out, deleted, and retyped letter-by-letter, word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence answers to the homework questions about God, the Church, or his experience acting in Drama class. Nigel would guide him, encourage him, scaffold research strategies for him, often spelling words as they went, and sometimes typing for him, acting as his scribe when Chris was tired. As Chris wrote, he always stopped to spell. Red lines squiggly and narrow alerted him to misspellings. If he were unsure how a word was spelled, he would ask Nigel or look around the page to see if he had used that word before and copy the spelling. Other times he would try a combination of different letters before consulting spell check. For example, one evening, Chris was summarizing a short passage on the ways in which humans are called to happiness and holiness for his religion class. Nigel asked him what made him happy. “Relaxing,” Chris said. With Nigel’s help in phrasing and spelling, Chris typed out the following:

> God wants us to be happy. For example, relaxing makes me happy. God want

[sic] us to be happy so we can be clor to him.

Before he could finish his sentence, the thin red squiggle appeared under “clor.” He tried to recombine and replace it with “cosl.” No luck. He tried again, this time typing “cosr,” but again the red squiggle did not budge. Nigel interjected between attempts, praising him for trying out different combinations of letters and sounds. Chris paused and consulted spell check. He scanned the suggested options and compared them with his own version. “Oh, no ‘e’,” he said looking back to the screen. He scrolled down and accepted “closer” and the wavy red line vanished. If Microsoft failed to recognize a word or to provide the accepted spelling alternative, Nigel
jumped in with the correct spelling. Nigel helped Chris untangle words such as “stuff” which Chris first spelled as “sof,” then “soft,” then “sotf,” and then “stof” until finally he arrived at “stuff.” He untwisted “ratilonal” to form “rational” and finally to make “rational.” He spelled out verbs such as “believes” and “found,” nouns such has “statue,” “town,” “France,” “teacher,” “year,” and adverbs and adjectives such as “there,” “white,” and “small.” Nigel taught him contractions such as “doesn’t” is one word, not two. Chris learned “enjoy” was spelled with an “e” not an “i,” and that he had accidently spelled “can” as “ken.” Nigel prompted Chris to add an apostrophe when forming a possessive, to begin each sentence with a capital letter and to end the last word in each sentence with a period. After completing a sentence or two, Nigel always reminded Chris to save his work to ensure his ideas as well as his sentences, periods, apostrophes, and his spelling would not be lost. Chris hit the save button and moved on to the next sentence.

**Keeping words**

For Drama class, Chris was required to submit a final journal on what he had been learning during the course (see Figure 5.3). He needed to write in complete sentences and connecting paragraphs and to include thoughts and reflections from previous journal logs. His teacher would evaluate Chris’s work based on his vocabulary, grammar and spelling, but also his ability to connect with the material, to appreciate the experience of journaling, and share how drama helps us to learn about ourselves. Nigel read the teacher’s directions with Chris, stopping to define, clarify, and exemplify concepts such as “character development” and pausing to check Chris’s comprehension of questions and understanding of the teacher’s expectations. Nigel encouraged Chris as he talked about how he creates a character, his experience working with his classmates, and how he changed as an actor.
Discuss what you have learned about character. How can you create a character? What things need to be considered?

You want to know how they are in real life so you can get in to character. For example, say I was playing hockey, I would need a hockey stick. That would help me get in to character. You also need emotions so you can act it out.

Describe your reactions to the activities you participated in.

I get a scene and then I get it done. And I also in enjoy it. Sometimes the teacher give us the scene and sometimes she doesn’t, but it doesn’t make a difference.

Discuss your experience working with others thus far in the course.

A group is a group, it all depends how you communicate with others.

Discuss the importance of character development? How can you deepen characters?

A person’s character changes through the play by a character development. Sad scenes or surprise scenes change characters.

How have you developed as an actor? What other skills do you need to develop in future units?

I have not changed as an actor.
As they wrote, Nigel helped him edit grammar, spelling, and punctuation and praised Chris when he wanted to organize his journal by inserting the teacher’s questions before each of his responses and commended him when he generated his own words and sentences without help.

Chris welcomed Nigel’s suggestions on improving his writing beyond adapting orthography and adding apostrophes, including permitting him to insert a rationale for doing a particular activity, for example. There were limits, however. When Chris preferred his own word to Nigel’s, he resisted as he did when he rebuffed Nigel’s word “them” instead preferring his word “others.”

Chris: A group’s a group, it’s how you work with others.

Nigel: Good. That’s fine. “A group is a group.” It all
depends. (Clears throat) Depends. D-E-P-E-N-D-S. “It all
depends.” No, it’s one word. Just take out that space. Depends. There’s no ‘e’ at the end. Good. “It all depends on how you” -- actually you said ‘communicate,’ it’s a good word. Do you wanna say that? Or how do you want to say it?

Chris: (Typing)

Nigel: Uh-huh. Good

Chris: Spell it!

Nigel: Communicate?

Chris: Yeah

**Chris:** (Stops typing)

**Nigel:** t-h-e-m.

**Chris:** (inaudible)

**Nigel:** Them. Huh?

**Chris:** Others. How do you spell others?

**Nigel:** Huh? Ok. O-t-h. O-t-h-e-r-s. Ok. Period. Save it!

**Forgetting words**

On the day Chris brought in another drama assignment to complete, the usual tutoring room was occupied. He and Nigel would have to work in one of the smaller counseling rooms without any computer. Chris would have to write his assignment by hand—an option he dreaded. His assignment was to reflect in a couple of typed pages on the process of making his drama mask. His mask was a foot-high disguise of papier-mâché painted with long horizontal strips of blue, red, and black stripes.

Chris told Nigel he was feeling tired and was not up to reading the assignment directions. He sat with his head cradled in the palm of his hand, his backpack on his lap. Nigel promised to scribe for him if he wanted him to. He coached him line-by-line, helping him to read the directions, eliciting from him the process by which he made the mask, and describing the tools used and steps taken from cutting and pasting to painting and drying. As they read, they defined the concept of “process,” and Chris asked Nigel to spell key verbs he used in the process such as “used,” “mix,” and “spray” and nouns like “step,” “paper,” “glue,” “water,” and “paint.” Nigel praised Chris when he spelled “because” on his own, complimented him when he tried to spell “scene” on his own by scanning for other examples of the word, and lauded him for coming up with the words “represents,” “disappointment,” and “character” on his own.
When Chris was tired and did not want to spell the word “make” in his sentence, “I used news paper, glue, paint, and scissors to make my mask,” he told Nigel to spell it. Nigel reminded him that it is important to be respectful. Chris replied, “Can you please?” he said. Nigel thanked him and spelled out “m-a-k-e,” Chris copied each letter down. Although Chris sought Nigel’s help in spelling, he sometimes reproached him for helping too much as he did when Nigel spelled words he already knew like “king” or when Nigel told him to put a period before he had even finished his sentence.

For the remainder of the lesson, Nigel helped Chris identify the tools and to verbalize the steps of how he made the mask before writing them down in order to help him with the composing process. Step by step, Chris described the process of making the mask and Nigel paraphrased the steps back to him. By step 4, Nigel was silent as Chris wrote out, “Put the paper on the mold.” “See,” Nigel uttered, “you don’t need me.” Chris required less of Nigel’s help until he had to describe what donning a mask does to change the movement, actions, and gestures of an actor.

“What does an actor need to do differently when they [sic] are wearing a mask?” Nigel read the teacher’s instructions aloud. Chris sighed and sucked air through his teeth. He was not sure how to put into words what he was thinking. For 20 minutes, they discussed the sentence and brainstormed phrases and verbs to describe an actor’s movement. Chris had a word on the tip of his tongue, “What’s the word I’m looking for?” He asked Nigel, “What do you call acting with your body?” and “If you didn’t use the word walk, what would you use?” To help him think of the word, Nigel told him to stand up and walk around the room. As Chris walked, Nigel suggested words as he moved, “movement,” “activity,” and “action.” Action was the word that resonated with Chris and he tried to assemble a new sentence but none captured quite what he was looking for. Unsatisfied, Chris left the room to ask Tanja the word he could not think of.
“He’s on a mission,” Nigel chuckled to himself. He returned a few minutes later without the word.

Nigel encouraged him to write anything down. Chris asked Nigel again to read the instructions, including the prompt. He listened. “To express the body and not the face,” he said adding, “No, to express the actions without face expressions, yeah, yeah yeah!” he shouted.

“Write it down, I’ll help you,” Nigel said. Chris copied as Nigel spelled out “express” and “actions.” Nigel continued, rephrasing the sentence, “To express actions without showing the face.” Chris stopped. “That’s not what I said!” In his haste to spell “express” and “action,” Chris had forgotten the rest of the sentence including the word he had worked hard to produce.

Disappointed, he asked Nigel to read the prompt a fourth time. “To express actions body,” he said. “B-o-d-y,” Nigel spelled. Chris exhaled, dropped his pen, and kissed his teeth, “Tsk tsk.” He asked Nigel to repeat the teacher’s directions three more times. Nigel reminded Chris that when he came up with his own expression he was walking around the room. He asked him to think back to what he was thinking about. Chris did not remember. Nigel encouraged him and told him not to worry about the missing word. “I know the word, I just don’t remember it!” Chris said.

**Nigel and Chris Reflect on Writing Together**

Nigel admired Chris. He respected him. He was an honest kid and felt they had a good working relationship. Nigel was conscious of his own responsibilities as a tutor and of Chris’s development as a learner—namely, he was aware that he had to earn Chris’s trust and Chris had to learn to accept his help. Chris, he told me, had considerable pride and was a bit stubborn. He was someone who did not easily trust. Chris was a “serious person.” He confided that Chris was adroit at “sorting through [Nigel’s] bullshit.” Sorting through bullshit meant that Chris was able
to see when Nigel was not being “genuine,” or when he was in a hurry to move on, or when he advanced his own agenda for the lesson. Working with Chris taught him to pay more attention to body language, for example, and not to joke around. “Adolescents,” he told me, “take things very seriously and they want you to be serious. They want teachers to be serious but not angry.” There had been a couple of times when Chris did not appreciate Nigel’s jokes or sense of humor and let him know he did not appreciate it. Resistance was also something Nigel felt recurred throughout their lessons. “His resistance and sometimes him giving up resistance and sometimes him not giving up resistance. That sort of dance I found really interesting,” Nigel remarked. “He certainly has agency and I like the fact that he gets a little bit pissed off at me sometimes. He makes it very clear when he doesn't want me to help him. You can use a bit of that anger to step things up,” Nigel said.

Nigel also noted that Chris did not have any problems communicating and that his short-term memory was good, but that he had difficulty generalizing and that he learned slowly. “He does something called in teacher talk – perseverates,” Nigel said. “He perseverates in the sense that he’s repetitive in the way that he learns. He’s not lazy,” he told me, “that’s for sure. He’s a hard worker.” He saw Chris as stubborn and reluctant to express himself more than anything else.

To make their sessions effective, Nigel believed that a tutor must engage students, and he employed what he referred to as his four strategies: chunking, repetition, scaffolding, and momentum. He broke reading and writing down into key ideas, repeated those ideas within a framework of steps and connected to Chris’s interests, couched within positive and ongoing support and praise, and delivered at a pace that was commensurate with Chris’s learning style and mood. “For example, I’ve noticed moments where he--,” Nigel paused, “he kind of relaxes. He gets quiet. He may tilt his head back a little bit. And you step in and kind of, seems like reboot-- I try to reboot. But I try to establish a kind of momentum.” Effective sessions were not
unidirectional, from tutor to student. Nigel believed that the student also must try to connect with
the tutor or teacher and to show respect, including showing appropriate physical posture during a
tutorial. For example, Nigel asked Chris several times over their sessions to sit up straight. Nigel
interrupted one session when he felt disrespected by Chris, reminding him to say “please” when
asking him for something. Nigel, said, “I want to know that someone is paying attention.”

Nigel knew that academic writing exercises were challenging for Chris. Writing that required
him to reflect or analyze the “Drama Journal” were especially demanding. “He’s quite reluctant
to self-reflect. But, I really enjoy some things that he says and the way he says them. So, I think
Chris is capable of having a really individual voice. And a really unique voice, but it’s buried.”
Nigel was disappointed that the “Drama Journal,” for example, was a lost opportunity for Chris
to express himself. There was no real trace of his own voice as he felt Chris just wanted to finish
up and go home. Moreover, he thought Chris was rather reserved during that lesson, believing
that using the journal to reflect on the experience of being in a classroom (even one he liked such
as Drama) made him uncomfortable. That session he saw his reflections on the assignment as
superficial. Chris had “refused to reflect on the different experiences he had; different
relationships that he had.” Chris’s superficial approach to writing and reflecting, of his not
“digging deep,” was his way of managing complex or threatening learning situations, Nigel told
me. Not reflecting was his way of coping.

Nigel helped Chris develop his keyboarding skills such as remembering to save his drafts.
When it came to teaching writing, Nigel’s goal was always to help the student “answer the
question.” Aside from completing this task, he felt that he tried to help students see that writing
is a “creative process, not as a fixed process.” He explained, “by creative, I mean, you don’t need
to be perfect. But, you do have to take chances. You have to put yourself out there.” Writing was
also a process of moving, shifting, flowing. “And you’re coming, and you’re arriving at a place
that you didn’t really anticipate in the beginning,” he said. Although he felt he tried to introduce Chris to this idea of writing as a process, Nigel was unsure if he grasped it, citing that school systems teach students to see writing as fixed, as a product with immutable components like structure and thesis statements. “Kids aren’t taught to write, because they aren’t taught to think,” Nigel said.

Part of the writing process included students learning to trust their own words. Nigel told me he actively encouraged Chris to use his own words whenever they wrote. He preferred Chris’s words and phrases to his own, as they were “fresh, and so much of his own voice.” After Chris explained his understanding of a passage or explained what he thought about something, Nigel always praised him and uttered, “Write that down!” He believed that teachers and tutors could often get in the way of this process, preferring instead to infuse the student’s writing with their own words. There were times in the process of talking ideas out and paraphrasing complex concepts of God, religion, and morality that Chris typed out what Nigel verbalized aloud. Other times, Chris worked through an idea and preferred his own words to Nigel’s. Nigel recognized that the Drama Journal was one such moment. When Chris chose to use “others” over “them,” for example, he saw it as reflective of “[Chris’s] place in the environment, that classrooms were places where he is not comfortable.” By his using “others,” Nigel explained, Chris was clearly separating himself from his classmates, “making a distinction between himself and the rest of the group.” Nigel said he had suggested Chris write, “them,” instead to mitigate the distinction between Chris and his classmates, but realized he should not have done that, “it’s not my place,” he said.

“He’s reminded me to remember to just get to the point, which I really believe in,” Nigel said in response to how Chris helped to reinforce his own beliefs about good writing. Although he could not identify a specific moment, Nigel felt that there were times when Chris found his
voice. In the mask assignment, for example, Chris’s voice came through in the colors used to paint the face: blue and black represented sorrow and disappointment towards the character.

“That was evidence of voice,” he remarked, adding, “he used the word ‘sorrow’. He used the word ‘disappointment’ […] they came right out of the blue […] I mean who uses words like that? Kids do not use words like that.” He told me, “there were certain times when he was emphatic. That’s one characteristic of having a voice. There’s no hesitancy.” Nigel saw Chris’s voice as “frank.” He told it like it was. Chris was not like other students. He does not “search his voice through the teacher. He’s not aiming to please […] he has his own thoughts, his own ideas, his own voice.”

“It’s Ok,” Chris said about his tutoring sessions with Nigel. “But,” he added, “it’s kind of boring […] no disrespect. Like how he talks—long sentences and stuff. That makes him boring.” Working on the computer also had its frustrations. “It’s kind of annoying when he keeps on telling me that keep on saving [my work]. Like you know how we are always on the computer most of the time. It’s kind of annoying.”

Chris felt that Nigel contributed to his own writer’s voice, to his own uniqueness as a writer by helping him develop his vocabulary. Sometimes Nigel gave him examples that allowed him to reflect and then come up with his own words. Other times, he waited and wrote down the first word he thought of or he may wait for Nigel to provide an example and then wrote it down. Still other times he might combine adding what he called “his own stuff” after Nigel said something. Chris told me that using “others” instead of Nigel’s “them” was an example of his using his own stuff.

When I asked him about the mask assignment, Chris told me he disliked his handwriting and told me he preferred to write on the computer. “I have nothing against writing, “he said, “but like my writing’s [i.e., handwriting] not all that good.” He told me that Nigel or Tanja provided the
words for him for a subject that he does not know well. The exception is Drama, “If I’m doing a subject I like, say Drama, I will know what I want to say.” While he was working with Nigel on the mask he had forgotten what he wanted to say. He had a word in mind and thought he had remembered telling it to Nigel, but Nigel forgot. “I swear I said the word. And then when I told him, ‘what was the word’? He forgot. And then I got mad, like I got upset and then got frustrated and stuff and then like I wasn't trying to snap on him so I just said, ‘whatever,’ just do that cuz I wanted Tanja.” When Chris later revised his handwritten draft he did it with Tanja’s help. Even though Nigel provided him with a similar sentence, “Deep down that wasn’t what I was trying to write,” he said. He asked her for another way to express yourself with your body she told him “more dramatic.” Although “dramatic” never surfaced in his lesson with Nigel, it was the word Chris was searching for and the word he used in the final draft of his journal.

**Nigel’s and Chris’s Suggestions for Future Writing Tutors**

Nigel’s advice to new tutors included being flexible, patient, consistent, and willing to reset and reassess learning goals on an ongoing basis. Establishing routines with students was key and getting to know the student was fundamental. “A simple routine that most tutors do is just ‘what’s the assignment?’” he told me.

“You can only learn if you want to learn,” Chris said. “I learned that through years like --. You may need help, you may need help. Sometimes you don’t need help. But if you need help, you – like it’s not only in school but like in other places. The only way you’re gonna get help is if you need it. Cuz if you don’t, then you’re just hurting yourself.” He urged tutors to “learn how they [the students] write and read and stuff. And then through the process, you’ll learn how to work with them better.” To the students, he told me, “if you want to learn to read, you have to want to read.” I asked him how he learned and how his tutor could make learning less boring. He
said, “If I knew those answers, I would have had them all, I would have asked him a long time ago. I honestly don’t know. A tutor’s a tutor, but sometimes, I found you, all right, I’m going to fall asleep on you. Sometimes, most of the time, it’s just, I’m at – [Nigel] just really talks too much. I have to just try to turn off, fall asleep on you.”

Case Study Four

Thursday Afternoons with Caroline and Samantha

This fourth case study tells of Caroline, a freelance writer promoting local travel and tourism, and her student, Samantha, age 17 and in Grade 11. The pair worked together on and off from March until June in a small conference room in the main office. Samantha, like Chris, was in the program’s one-to-one literacy tutorial.

Caroline

“I’m Upper Canadian,” Caroline told me during our first interview. Being Upper Canadian was “one of those rolling traditions unto itself,” she said. Born in Ontario in the mid-1950s, Caroline was from an old Ontario family. Her father’s family, Anglo-Irish from Cork, Ireland, arrived in British North America in 1796. Her mother’s family descended from the first United Empire Loyalists who left for Upper Canada following the American Revolution at the end of the 18th Century. Caroline was tall and slender. She frequently wore black: black skirts, black jacket, and black shoes. She covered her long red hair with a stylish black fedora. She wore a small silver pendant around her neck. She spoke in full sentences and never mixed her metaphors.

Caroline was raised in Toronto. Her father had been a university professor, her mother a dental nurse. Caroline attended a private boarding school for girls run by the Church of England.
She received her bachelor’s degree in History. She lived in Toronto where she worked as a writer in media relations. “I have over 20 years of freelance writing as a background,” she told me. “I have one handicap on Trivial Pursuit – and that’s sports, and it’s not even that much of a handicap. My job is to be able to talk about anything at all times.”

Caroline had already been tutoring at Pathways for about four months when I met her. New to tutoring, Caroline told me that volunteering at the literacy program was something she had wanted to do for over a decade. She made it clear that she was not part of the “great white hope of academics,” a patronizing practice among white scholars who parachute into marginalized communities to conduct research. Volunteering was her gift to herself and a way for her to give back to the community. She and her husband lived in Cabbagetown, the adjacent neighborhood lined with slender red brick Victorian homes opposite the public housing complex of Regent Park.

Caroline told me that given the changing identity of Canadian society, it was important that newcomers know about the country, culture, and language to which they now belong. The ethnic divide between the neighborhoods was something she noticed reflected in the demographics of the church basement. “All the tutors are white,” she said. “Except for one guy. And, he’s a mixed race. But all of the tutors are white. And none of the students are. So there is definitely—there is a divide.” Reflecting on this divide between white and black, old and young, she remarked, “But on the other hand one of the things I thought was --, that I could bring was a connection to old Toronto and their Toronto. Because they are the future. So that they understood, that that was a piece of their city.” Seeing herself as an older tutor, she embodied the historical Toronto; she and her family were a trace of the city’s British past that students could see and understand and learn from. She felt it was important for students she tutored to understand the genealogy of the city and its people and to recognize that a civilization does not start when you arrive in a place; there
is always something there before, “everybody, you know—there are layers and everybody thinks it started when they came.”

Her experiences tutoring in the literacy program had been nothing short of rewarding. The students were bright and curious. Since she started at Pathways, Caroline tended to work mostly with more advanced students, usually Grades 11 and 12, who were hoping to enter college or university. She tutored English literature, Poetry, History, and Writing; she avoided Math, Physics, Chemistry, and French. Her best tutoring memory happened a few weeks before we met. She had been helping a student write a paper on Alexander Pope’s, “Essay to a Critic.” She remembered stressing the importance Pope put on individual taste, rather than on custom, in response to what is beautiful, an important distinction Caroline felt her student needed to know about England in the 18th Century. Caroline noted that her student’s cultural background emphasized the opposite, that custom dictated what beauty is and what it is not, and not individual opinion. The young woman was intelligent, picking up quickly on Pope’s use of metaphor and irony, which she cited as two unique features of English poetry. “Probably Arabic has very flowing metaphor,” Caroline said, reflecting on the student’s first language, “but it’s different.”

Caroline observed that the bookshelves and cupboards in the basement were not well stocked with paper for doodling, brainstorming, and composing. She also observed that students did not come to tutoring with enough writing paper in their binders, and the paper they did bring was not put to waste doodling ideas. “They’re very careful with their piece of paper,” she said. “They have one chance to make their paper look neat.” Not wasting paper made students “think in a very conservative way,” she thought, as they were “not going out of the box.” Some writing assignments required creativity, but without sufficient paper for composing, the students only “parroted” ideas rather than become “autodidactic.” Conservative thinking also led students to
squeeze their answers into narrow margins and tight boxes on homework assignments. Caroline observed they took the space limitations on activity sheets literally. “Maybe whatever I have to say is worth exactly that depth of space on the page,” she reckoned. Rather than seeing writing as a process of “rewriting, revising, and crunching down,” the students try to get it right in their first attempt. This general approach to writing, she supposed, was a possible combination of lack of resources and a lack of encouragement from their teachers to write more. Caroline wanted to change this. “There’s no marginalia in their lives,” she said. Using paper to brainstorm ideas would be something she would teach them.

Aside from the difficulty that limited resources posed, Caroline found it challenging to work with students who are often required to read a book that they have no connection to or to a story that they cannot see the relevance in relation to their own lives. She worked with a Grade 9 student, a boy, who had difficulty sitting still during their session. He was reading Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*. To engage him she had to challenge him, she told me. She told him to put the book away and asked him what he thought about the book and about the characters. “What do you think about that Lenny?” she laughed. She told me the boy did not want his friends to know that he had been reading the book and that he was trying to save face. When the book was put away and he could describe what he read, she knew he had read the book and could confidently display his knowledge.

**Caroline’s stance on good writing and voice**

When I asked Caroline what good writing was, she had come prepared to answer:

> I actually made a note of this. I had four different points on it. I think literacy is the receptor of good writing. You have people’s ability to read, but what they read is what’s, hopefully, well-written. It’s what feeds literacy. And secondly, to write well enables people to think clearly. So that if they can be articulate, especially in written form, it’s
very empowering. And so although it may not be flowery, it will get you a job. You’ll always be able to pass your reports. Great writing is a human, a human good. It’s a human enrichment. Great writing and Umberto Eco had a wonderful line, he said, ‘Poetry begins where philosophy ends.’ And indeed that’s true.

Writing was about communicating. Good writing reflected an author’s passion for the craft and for love of words: “You have to love it,” she said. “You have to love words. Love the sound of them. All the dimensions of them. The onomatopoeia, the intellectual associations. You know, the sensuousness of them. The joy that they can bring you. The shading of power that can give you.” Caroline loved Yeats. She treasured Celine. They were poets, however. In terms of prose, she had recently read an article in the National Post by Senator Hugh Segal on the United Empire Loyalists’ contribution to shaping Canadian identity. Segal wrote well. His prose was clear and firm. He had drawn on classical forms—thesis, antithesis, and synthesis—to shape the structure of his argument.

As for a writer’s voice, Caroline agreed with the Ontario English Curriculum’s definition of voice. She saw it as “very good because it’s completely accurate.” In response to what it meant if a teacher could hear a student’s voice in a paper, she said it would be a “high compliment.” She understood voice, here, as largely narrative voice. She explained,

It would be that’s your personality. So, rather than being the uh – just assemblage of bits and pieces of other fine writers, you take on your own voice. Assemble the information and give it a different cast. If I knew a student who could pull off a stunt like that, I’d be entering them in every competition available.

Unlike speaking, in which the listener constructs the speaker by their voice, among other things, writing is altogether different. Good writers, for example, construct the voice that they want readers to hear. But to capture “the sounds, the music of voice in somebody’s ear as they’re
reading it, rather than when they hear it,” she said was “one of the most difficult things to achieve in writing.” Writers such as the French poet Louis-Ferdinand Celine, who influenced the beat poets like Jack Kerouac and who drew the admiration of novelist Henry Miller, had a voice of exceptional complexity. She described Celine’s voice as “a little demon sitting on your shoulder whispering in your ear.” Saturating his writing with ellipsis, or his little dots, as she called them, Celine created voice in the reader’s mind. “You’d think Celine was talking to you,” she said, adding, “the writer controls the voice,” not the reader.

Caroline agreed that readers are always part of the “the fleshing out” of voice, but the difference between good writers and poor writers is that good writers can play off the assumptions readers bring to text. Good writers can get readers to see ideas in the way they want them to be understood. For example, she explained Jane Austen involved her readers in fleshing out the voice and character of Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*. Austen developed Fanny’s voice by playing with her readers’ “assumptions and interpretations of Fanny Price.” The readers are as much involved in creating the character and voice of Fanny Price as Austen is.

Caroline believed that an author’s voice is also influenced by the mandates of the particular genre. Personal narratives, essays, and reports follow different criteria, meet different expectations, and come with different assumptions. Professional writers are skilled at creating different voices – all authentic, but not necessarily the actual personal voice of the author. She cited Arthur Golden’s *Memoirs of a Geisha* and his ability to appropriate the voice of a 20th century Japanese Geisha. Less skilled writers are not able to do this because they are not crafting a voice. Students she has worked with are not accomplished enough essayists to claim a voice in the way that Celine claimed his voice. Caroline believed that identifying a student’s writing by vocabulary alone, for example, is not the same as identifying their voice.
Up until now, voice was something Caroline had not had the opportunity to develop with her students: She had never spent enough time with one student to give it any attention. She told me that she would explain voice to a student by saying how it is the way “the writers establish personality of the words. And maybe the actual person, personality. It’s the breathing voice. It’s the human communication in there.”

Academic voice was altogether different, however. She believed that many academics, grounded in empirical research (i.e., truth is objective, verifiable, and evidence-based), erased personal voice to reach a detached, neutral stance in their writing. She observed that for the past 40 years there has been a conscious trend in academic writing to produce unappealing and tedious prose. Even philosophers, namely those connected with the analytic school such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, worked to “excoriate voice” and removed personal choice (i.e., interpretation) from a text. The text now absent of nuance produced what she referred to as a “blasted landscape” of concrete words, clauses, and sentences. In the end it was all a linguistic exercise that even Wittgenstein repudiated.

Developing students’ critical thinking skills was also a fundamental part of the writing process and a way to develop their writer’s voice. Getting students to grasp and write with meaning, rather than simply transposing ideas, challenged Caroline. Caroline defined critical thinking:

It’s not the antithesis of an emotional reaction to language and words, but it's an intellectual reaction to language and words. And out of that, you could say that on the simplest level you have this—the different cast or the different shades of meanings like you'd find in a dictionary. And she [Samantha] could get more complex. Think about the semiotic, plasticity of language and then all the way into linguistics and philosophies around linguistics, to me, are part of daily language. But a lot of people don't dignify
communication with that. Or actually, we don't dignify language with that because communication is something you can do with a cat.

Critical thought applied to tutoring writing meant simply, “you understand what it is that you’re writing, first of all. And that’s why I like to encourage them and say, ‘tell me what it is that you’re doing.’ So, I know they understand what they’re talking about.” Caroline identified the absence of questioning authority as a barrier to developing critical thinking skills among the students. She noted that many students she tutored report that they are taught not to question authority—namely, adults. “Respect is one thing,” she told me. “You need to be respectful. But you’ve got to stand up for yourself. I don’t care whatever, whatever else you were—, you’re here now.”

**Caroline’s approach to tutoring writing**

Caroline knew that her beliefs about language and writing shaped her approach to tutoring writing:

> When I compose—no matter what it is, between my inner ear and the page—I have to find that, that voice that connects rational thought with creativity. And put it out as something that is not only something that I’d like other people to read, but I like to read myself.

Describing herself as old school, Caroline explained her approach to feedback as “learn the rules before you break them. That’s what I said to them all the time.” Knowing the rules of good grammar and style and breaking them was a form of empowerment. It was also an aspect of developing voice. Not knowing the rules and breaking them confined a writer. It suggested only a lack of awareness of the power of language, words, and usage.

Recently, she had been asked to write an article describing the Toronto of her youth for an article that would be translated into Mandarin for a Chinese audience. She was curious how her
own personal voice would come through in a non-European language. Having had her articles translated into other European languages before, she knew she had to give her writing a personality.

When working with students, she added, “I’m a writer, so when they are asked to do something that’s one of the tricks of the trade, I know it,” Caroline said confidently. Experience gave her insight into how to provide feedback. She knew what to look for. “One of the most important things that anybody ever has to be told as a writer is to describe something. You know. Just stop saying there were five boats. That’s just not interesting. And within that kind of example, you can show them how they can find voice,” she said.

Caroline saw herself as a “rank amateur” when it came to tutoring. She was not a teacher; she was a writer. She refrained from contradicting what students were learning in class or what the teacher said. However, she would occasionally point out if she disagreed with a position the student had taken. Caroline believed students needed to be aware that there are multiple points of view and that their teacher’s point of view is often “what they’re being taught.”

Her role was to identify and address the gaps in their knowledge and to address them. “I need to grasp what I think they need to know,” she said. With no formal pedagogical training, she drew on classical philosophy to engage students, using Socrates’ dialectic to draw out what they already know about a topic. “What do you think you need to say,” she would ask them. “Pretend I’m stupid,” she said. “They love the opportunity to tell an adult something the adult doesn’t know.” She believed this approach helped students to realize they had the knowledge all along; it was only a matter of drawing it out.
Samantha

Samantha was new to Pathways. She started attending in February, just a month before participating in the study. She was 17 and in Grade 11. She emigrated from Jamaica with her mother and two younger siblings when she was around 13. Her parents were divorced; her mother was looking for a new start and a better life for her family. Samantha’s father had been employed as a tradesman in Jamaica; she was unsure about how much schooling he had. Her mother finished high school. Since they moved to Canada, her mother had worked on and off. For a time, she had been working in a bread factory or cleaning offices. Samantha told me she was a Seventh Day Adventist. Sometimes they went to church. When she attended Pathways, Samantha wore jeans and a t-shirt or tank tops with tights. Her hair came slightly below her shoulder. Sometimes she wore her hair back, revealing multiple piercings on her ears. She painted her fingernails different colors: pink, red, or black. She wore a black ring on the middle finger of her right hand and moccasins on her feet.

Towards the end of the semester, Samantha and her mother moved out of Regent Park to a neighborhood on the eastern edge of the city, about one hour from Regent Park by public transit. Before school ended she got a job working for the City of Toronto housing office, cleaning up the neighborhood.

After moving to Canada, Samantha attended a vocational school about 30 minutes by streetcar from her house located in the public housing around the literacy program. That academic year, Samantha took courses in English, Art, Hospitality, Math, Cosmetology, and Gym. Although she was from Jamaica, the school enrolled her in Science for ELLs, a course designed to provide her with additional literacy support and to excuse her from taking a province wide literacy exam required for graduation. Samantha told me she went to school off and on in
Jamaica and that there were gaps in her education. When she arrived in Canada her teachers saw that she was not reading or writing at grade level and that she needed more support.

Samantha liked school in Canada and that there were more opportunities here (than in Jamaica) to receive an education. She said that she wrote a lot in her journal for English class such as what she did over the weekend, the importance of the Education Quality Accountability Office’s (EQAO) literacy exam, and why she was proud to be Canadian. She also wrote her own stories, newspaper articles, and recipes and read and responded to comprehension questions based on assigned readings. She did not consider herself to be a good writer because she was not a good speller. “I write the way I talk,” she told me. “In Canada,” she said, “You gotta write properly. You gotta make sense.” Her teachers told her that if she wanted to be a good writer she would need to improve her spelling. Even though she knows she makes mistakes, Samantha told me “they understand what I’m trying to say.” She added, “and I gotta stop going into English and “coming out” like, you know.” “Coming out” was Samantha’s term for the Jamaican patois that would seep into her journal writing, mixing standard Canadian English with Jamaican English. An example of her “coming out” was in her using the masculine pronoun to refer to either gender in spoken and written English.

Like because if like I try to wrote something as I said, as far as I talk, I write like how I talk. ‘Cuz something I will be talking about a girl, I will like describe him as a guy, like say, ‘he.’

She described her first awareness of “coming out” when she arrived in Canada:

When I came they were talking about it, that—. When I write, like a little bit of English, I start writing in my language. So—, yeah. They were like ‘you first starting off with English. But, after you get like deep down in it you change to patois.’
She remembered writing about her family and calling everyone “he” and greeting her friends with “weygan?” for “how’s it going?”

A few years and many journal entries later, Samantha has striven with the help of her teachers to write in Standard Canadian English. When we looked at some of her recent journal entries she told me, “I think it’s better ‘cuz I don’t see no patois in this—either of them. I finding myself don’t know how to spell patois anymore. I can speak it very good, but spelling it and reading it—and when I read it, it come like it doesn’t make no sense to me anymore.”

**Samantha’s stance on good writing and a writer’s voice**

“Good writing,” Samantha told me, “is when you can write something and give the next person to read it, and they understand everything you said. And it makes sense to them.” The previous week she and Caroline read about the first solar-powered Canadian car, the Midnight Sun VII, in the reading section of the EQAO’s practice booklet. She liked it. She learned something new. She also thought it was well written as all the words were spelled correctly and the author provided detailed descriptions about the car including how it was powered. “They make you understand,” she said.

Samantha liked to write journal entries for her English class. She wrote a lot. “I can’t write properly, but I like to talk about the things that I do. I like to put it on paper to see,” she said. Journals freed her to express herself and ideas without self-censure and allowed her teachers to hear her. “Everything just pop up in my head. I didn't have to like sit there for like an hour, think about it. When I wrote it, they understand even when I have spelling errors, the teacher understand.” She knows her teacher sees that she puts effort into her writing and that she takes the extra effort to use “big words” in her journal entries.
To Samantha, the Ontario English Curriculum’s definition of voice meant, “good writing, using all that they’re saying.” She clarified what “image” meant. “It’s like a picture, right? What do you think?” She added, “while you’re reading it, it's the picture you are seeing.” She thought that voice meant good writing and good writing includes the elements of voice. “A voice in writing is when you understand it, and when you have a flow to it.” Having voice meant being herself. To write with voice was to “talk the truth.” If her teacher told Samantha that she could hear her voice in her writing she said, “I think she means she really hear what I’m saying. Whatever I’m saying, it’s like touch her.” She thought readers could probably hear a writer’s voice when writers talk about themselves and share their experiences. She gave a hypothetical scenario of going through a bad situation such as skipping school, then writing about it and sharing it with another student. “The next kid can read it and [say], ‘OK I guess it’s similar to what I’m going through.’” In one journal entry, she wrote about her friend being bullied. Samantha harassed the bully in return. She regretted this afterwards and wished she had responded differently. She felt her journal entry about bullying reflected her writer’s voice, quiet and unassuming:

It’s like it would start out sad then get happy in the end, I guess. When I write, I’m kinda quiet. In my writing, like I always write like – I don’t really trouble no one, but like if something is happening out there I will go and talk about it. Like go and talk to the person that is doing it. But it’s for me to go and pick trouble or do something bad. It wouldn’t be me.

Samantha said that as she grows older so will her writer’s voice. “I’ll be looking at things differently,” she said.
Caroline and Samantha Writing Together: Writing with Metaphor

Caroline and Samantha met every Thursday afternoon from 4:30 to 5:30 in the consultation room with the large map. They sat adjacent to each other around the small round table. I faced them on the other side of the table. Samantha answered comprehension questions about cars from a sample EQAO booklet provided by the program, read short stories about bullying and completed fill-in-the-blank, short answer responses on the environment, read and talked about poems by Rita Joe and R.W. Rodriguez or stories by Katie Rook or Cynthia Leitich Smith. Samantha read phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs aloud, carefully sounding out letters, stretching out sounds, and feeling out syllables. Whenever Samantha came upon a clump of letters she was unsure how to break down or an unfamiliar word she hesitated to put together, Caroline would cover up the half the word with her fingertip and slowly reveal the word phoneme by phoneme. Caroline never interrupted Samantha as she sounded out letters or read her words. She waited to speak until after Samantha was done sounding out or if a long pause suggested she needed some help.

Sometimes Caroline would jot troublesome words down in her fat pocket-sized spiral notebook, and together they would say the word, define the word, and compare it to similar sounding words: “no,” “know,” and “knowledge,” and “now” and “knife” and “to,” “too,” and “two.” Pages were filled with new vocabulary: “potent,” “propelled,” “precipitate,” “hue,” and “hence”; and correct spelling “electricity,” “laboratory,” “specific,” and “dessert.” Samantha was surprised to learn “ph” was pronounced like an /f/ as in “photos.” She discovered various ways to pronounce /gh/ in words such as “enough” and “tough,” “dough” and “through.” And, she learned how to punctuate contractions: “do not,” but “don’t.”
**Coming out**

Samantha also learned about dialect differences between standard Canadian English and Jamaican English while selecting among multiple-choice options in the grammar and punctuation section of the EQAO. She read the sample sentence. “My friend axed me, have you ever been to Quebec City?” Caroline listened and wrote, “asked” and “axed” down in her notebook (see Figure 5.4). They started to discuss the differences.

Caroline: Which way is the difference between axe and --

Samantha: This is

Caroline: and ask? Axe is another word. Axe is -- when you write axe, it’s a-x-e

Samantha: That’s the axe that you use

Caroline: Exactly. And ask is ask.

Samantha: Like you as’ a question.

Caroline: Exactly. Ask. So, it’s always good to try and go With the correct pronunciation. Even if that’s the sort of thing your mother would tell you what to do.

*Figure 5.4. The difference between “axe” and “asked”*
Samantha discovers metaphor

Samantha was assigned to write a poem. In English class she had been reading poetry that talked about struggle, inequity, injustice, and racism. She was drawn to composing poems about love, however. Caroline adored poetry. It was among her favorite genres to discuss, explore, and ponder with students. Samantha sat down, unzipped her bag, and removed her composition booklet. She opened to the page with a half-finished poem and set it out on the table. Caroline reassured her they would look at it shortly. She discreetly turned the slim booklet upside down and asked, “Could you tell me what a poem is?” “A poem is a piece of writing that have rhymes. It rhymes,” Samantha said. “It could do,” Caroline said, nodding. “And have you read any poetry? Have you had a chance to ever read some?” “Yeah,” Samantha replied. “I have one in my bag.” She pulled two poems out of her backpack. “‘Justice’ by Rita Joe!” cried Caroline. “Oh, that's a good one. So--. So shall we read this together?”

They read “Justice,” Rita Joe’s poem of three stanzas and no rhyme followed by R.W. Rodriguez’s poem also called “Justice,” written in one single flowing paragraph with no punctuation, no capitalization, and no rhyme. In the absence of rhyme, Caroline taught Samantha to mine the text instead for metaphor: “Justice is like an open field,” “a broken stride,” and “a purse fat with tissues and aspirin.” She defined words like “sundries,” “visceral,” and “stride.” Caroline told her word choice reflected power and what poetry must have is metaphor. She used her hands when she talked about metaphors. “Poetry begins where philosophy stops,” she said and reminded Samantha of their first conversation: “So remember the first time we sat down and talked and I said that writing was really, really a good thing because it allows you to get deeper inside yourself.” Samantha remembered. She added that writing helped to get her thoughts out. “That is one of the key things that poetry does in any language. And English is really interesting to use with poetry because so much of English has metaphor in it,” Caroline added.
Now it was Samantha’s turn to write a poem with metaphors (see Figure 5.5). Keeping to the theme of love, Caroline prompted her: “My mother loves me like butter loves waffles,” she said laughing. Samantha paused, thought, and responded, “My mother loves me like the moon loves the sky.” Caroline smiled. Samantha held her pencil tight in her left hand as she wrote in her composition book. Her right hand rested on her purse. Her nails long, slender, the color of cotton candy. Caroline said, “the sky stretches out like arms.” Samantha copied it down. Caroline encouraged her to continue with the firmamental metaphor. Samantha obliged: “Shining like the

![Handwritten poem](image)

*Figure 5.5. Samantha’s “Love” poems (The poem on the left is Samantha’s original. The poem on the right is the version she produced with Caroline’s help.)*
stars above the night.” Lastly, Samantha wanted to add something about clouds. She came up with “Clouds drifting away.” Caroline smiled again and directed her to start on the next line. She spelled aloud: c-l-o-u-d and d-r-i-f-t. Caroline asked Samantha to read her poem from beginning to end and to identify all the metaphors. Samantha pointed out each one: “Clouds drifting away. Shining like the stars above the night. Everything is…!” she exclaimed. “Correct,” Caroline added, “Now you know what a metaphor is and you’ve written a beautiful one.”

Next, they turned to the poem Samantha brought with her from school. Samantha read her poem out loud. Caroline instructed her to recopy it; one sentence per line. She taught her to write the title at the top and not to include it in the opening sentence. This lesson was the only piece of writing the pair did together that was not spelling out words, or filling in blanks, or responding to short answer questions.

**Caroline and Samantha Reflect on Writing Together**

Caroline was fond of Samantha and enjoyed their tutoring sessions. She often told me how bright and capable she thought Samantha was and what a good memory she had for learning new words:

> It’s really been illuminating for me because she’s so smart. And the thing is she can’t read. So, it’s been really interesting to work with a person who is really bright but functionally illiterate. You never have to say anything twice to that girl. She figures it out the first time, and remembers everything, but that may also [be] because of her memory is so tuned up from having to remember everything.

She hoped to read more complex texts with Samantha, as it would increase her vocabulary. On their last day together, Samantha told Caroline that her mother had bought her a dictionary. Caroline was delighted. She knew how much Samantha wanted a dictionary. She remembered
telling Samantha that Malcolm X studied the dictionary from cover to cover. “He learned every word,” Caroline said, “how to spell it, and what it meant.” As a result, he had become a fluent, articulate, and powerful speaker.

Caroline also applauded the program for its mission and goal to help the students from the community, but recognized that without sustained daily practice, students like Samantha would not get far. “If she had to play a musical instrument she would have to practice at least an hour a day. And I think the same principle should be applied if you have to learn to read,” she told me. She added that they worked well together and Samantha became more “sophisticated and eloquent” because of tutoring. “She certainly was able to – her, use of language extended much further beyond what it had been when we met,” she said. Samantha’s spelling troubled Caroline, however; it remained an obstacle to her success as a writer. “She can spell like a 13th century scholar if she wants,” Caroline quipped. Samantha’s creative spelling would certainly hold her back. Caroline thought Samantha might be dyslexic as she often transposed words. For example, Samantha had recently read, “aspire” as “aspirin.” Caroline hoped that Samantha could improve her spelling through more one-on-one lessons and that eventually she could “express herself concisely and accurately.” Writing needs to be concise and accurate, she told me, so that readers “can’t think of things any other way.”

Improving students’ spoken and written English was one of the most important parts of tutoring Samantha. Caroline said:

The most important thing I wanted to accomplish with [her] was that she would have a grasp of how to use spoken and written English, so that she will be able to function with it and have an ability to improve her life.

Opportunities to improve her life came in different forms and were connected to their lessons. When Samantha had difficulty decoding the word “Queen” for an assignment for school,
Caroline gave Samantha a notebook with the Queen’s University logo printed on the cover. It was an opportunity to develop her reading skills and to introduce her to future educational opportunities. Caroline said, “So it was like you can read it, you can be it, you can do it, you are it. (laughter) You know, go!”

Other opportunities came in the form of improving her spoken English. Caroline told me that Samantha was trying to “shed her Patois,” but was picking up the “bling talk” of her friends instead of the Standard English of school. Samantha needed to know the difference of when to speak which kind of English to whom and in which context. She felt that mixing dialects in a formal setting where language expectations were different would only set her back. Caroline brought up the example of “axed” versus “asked” from their lesson. “I’d never let her say ‘axe’ with me,” she said. Not only was knowing the difference between the noun and the verb essential for good speaking and writing, but it was also empowering. “[Choosing] to say ‘axe’ that’s one thing,” she said. “That is empowerment. If she says ‘axe’ for ‘ask’ because she doesn’t know any better, it will hold her back. So it’s a question of being able to give her the choice of doing something that feels that what she wants is to express herself that way, or being left in a box.”

Drawing on a metaphor to express the limitations of certain ways of speaking, Caroline told me something her mother often told her: “If you have good table manners, then you’re going to eat at more tables.”

Caroline assumed that high school teachers do not necessarily correct students’ language, fearing cultural reprisal. She explained:

Some teachers feel it would be culturally biased to insist that black students not use ‘axe,’ but I think that’s bogus as well. You know what I mean? She can use it if she wants, but we’re in an academic environment. And she needs to pass along with everyone else who’s—coming from all over the world. And they’re all going to be using the same
-coded book. So she needs to be in there. She got that, which I appreciated. She had a very
delicate sensibility.

Caroline felt her role with Samantha was to be more “formal” than her schoolteachers and felt
she had encouraged her voice by introducing her to rules of language. Caroline felt that the more
Samantha wrote, the more she could share her ideas. Similarly, she said that reading good
writing improves the writer. They learn new things. It was a “two-way street,” she said.

When she reflected on the poetry lesson, Caroline said, “It was an incredibly difficult
assignment to give her.” She felt Samantha limited herself by thinking that poetry was restricted
to rhyme scheme and that poems were only about romantic love. She could see that Samantha
struggled with her poem evidenced by heavy erasing and smudged words. Her first poem did not
have voice, rhythm, or metaphor. Poetry writing is not like writing an essay she told me. Poetry
is developing what she called the “third thought”:

Poetry is something that takes you deeper than any other conversation will go. Something
that you have to use metaphor for. All poetry involves metaphor, so that you can take
different ideas and put them together creatively to lead you to a third thought. And that’s
why her metaphor is so evident here. We talked about that just before she chose to talk
about sun, the moon, the stars.

Caroline saved the discussion of the first poem on romantic love until after they talked about
poems and composed a new poem together. “We were saving it, but I didn’t want to talk to her
about what was wrong with all of the stuff. Because the other one was a mess.” Teaching poetry
required the Socratic method to draw out what was already within her: “How can we take what
you don’t know you have in you out?” she asked. She evaluated the final product as an excellent
poem to her mother. “I would have corrected some of these grammatical inconsistencies,” she
explained, “but it’s closer to her own voice.” A Socratic dialogue—a conversation—allowed
Samantha to write the second poem with Caroline.

Caroline felt that she and Samantha had touched on voice in their sessions, but that it was
challenging as Samantha had a limited vocabulary to work with. She thought Samantha was able
to grasp the concept of voice when they discussed the Jamaican-Canadian storyteller, Louise
Bennett-Coverley, or simply “Miss Lou.” Miss Lou mixed patois and Standard English to create
the many animal voices—like foxes and rabbits—that permeated her stories. She said that this
explanation resonated with Samantha, as she knew about Miss Lou. At this point in their
sessions, helping Samantha to write with voice meant helping to become a confident and
competent writer. Giving her the means to access her own voice meant giving her grammar,
vocabulary, and the self-assuredness to use words. “Like it or not,” Caroline said, “they’re not
any good unless she makes them hers, Right? She has to take ownership.”

On their last day together, Caroline presented Samantha with a picture book by Elizabeth
Cotton called Hats. Colorful photos of 40 famous people including Fredrick the Great of Prussia,
Vivien Leigh, Queen Victoria, Mae West, Jackie Kennedy, Dorothy Parker, Gore Vidal, James
Dean, Fred Astaire, Woody Allen, Malcolm X, and Jimmy Hendrix, among others, were featured
wearing their signature hats. Under each is a famous quote or description about hats or clothing.
The people and their hats carried a metaphor of all being different but having something in
common: hats. Caroline explained later that Samantha “is able to take her book on hats and
figure out there’s a lot of crazy people but they speak English (laugh). They do it with their hats
on.”

Samantha liked Caroline. She described her as a nice woman who explained things in detail to
help her understand what she was reading. Caroline helped her sound out, rewrite, understand,
and remember. She told me that pronouncing a-s-k-e-d as axed was another example of her
coming out and that if she were in Jamaica she would not pronounce it the Canadian way.

Caroline also helped her learn to write without using too many conjunctions and pronouns like “ifs,” “ands,” and “its.” She said she had never written using metaphors before and had no idea of how to combine words together to express her ideas figuratively. Now she could. She was able to write what she feels. Caroline helped her to become a better writer.

The poem to her mother was an example of something she had written that she “talked the truth.” She loved her mom. Metaphor was not literal or “real,” as she described it. Metaphor was another way to describe her mother’s love for her. Being able to describe love figuratively was similar enough to the closeness she felt to her mother. “I guess that’s true, right?” she said. “‘Cuz the moon always in the sky.” She described her voice in her love poem to her mother as “quiet.” She said that it “doesn't have too much rugged words.” Rugged words were Samantha’s term for violent words. Later, she pointed out a couple of lines, for example, “the sky stretches out like arms,” as something that had more of Caroline’s voice than her own. “It sound more like her,” she said. She read the poem she composed with Caroline, and the one she composed by herself. They were both quiet poems. Her first poem did not contain a metaphor, she told me. “It doesn't have no metaphor ‘cuz everything is like real.”

**Caroline’s and Samantha’s Suggestions for Future Writing Tutors**

Caroline recommended that new tutors bring their own resources and use those resources to let students explore the writing process. “I would say definitely bring extra papers and pens […] let them doodle and let them make notes. Let them learn […] to tease out the thoughts and to hone down words, and to feel for a word,” she said. Much of what she had done with Samantha included working on process, she told me. “A lot of the things I’d have Samantha write over and
over again was so that she could spell it. Because if she didn’t write it down, if she was only reading it. Me saying: Don’t pronounce it like that. It would never stick in her head.”

Samantha believed that tutors could engage students by asking them what they think, how they might say something, or how they would make their writing more cohesive. “Ask [your students] what they think of it […] ask them how would you say it, or how you would put a flow to it,” she said. These were strategies that Caroline employed and that Samantha acknowledged helped her. In addition to getting her to use the dictionary, “Every little thing she made me write down,” Samantha said. “She explained stuff to me. Like writing down words and it, when I write it down, I sound it out better more than I’m looking at it.”
Chapter 6

Themes across the Cases: Identity, Writer Capital, Good Writing, and Voice

Chapter 6 identifies the key findings from the case studies presented in Chapters 4 and 5 and serves as a preliminary step towards answering my research questions (addressed in Chapter 7). Informed by L2 language socialization theory (Duff & Talmy, 2011), I looked across the cases and identified reoccurring patterns involving identity, beliefs about writing and voice, pedagogy, resistance, and bidirectionality.

Chapter 6 represents my attempt to make sense of the cases by synthesizing the specific instances of tutoring practices and approaches (micro-moments) and connecting them to larger (macro) beliefs, attitudes, and values identified by the tutors and students and attributed by them to cultural or national practices. Along with the case studies, the cross-case analysis allows readers to determine the transferability of the findings (Creswell, 2007) before being situated within the exiting theoretical and empirical research (Chapter 7). Inspired by other successful cross-case analyses from education (Cumming, Al-Alawi, & Watanabe, 2012; Lightfoot, 1983), I organized the findings in this chapter into four central observations—identities, writer capital, good writing, and voice. Each of these observations begins with a short overview of the main points and a reflection on the uniqueness of these findings. Table 6.1 summarizes the main findings from across the four cases.
Table 6.1
*Summary of Cross-Case Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Tutor</th>
<th>Student</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Identities</strong></td>
<td>Professional identities intersected with tutors’ ethnic, racial, linguistic, and regional identities. Resistance and reactions to students and the tutoring experience also shaped roles and purpose for tutoring.</td>
<td>Students’ writer identities were influenced by and sometimes clashed with standardized voices advanced by school and tutors. Resistance during tutoring or to tutors often shaped students’ perceptions of successful and unsuccessful tutors.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Writer Capital</strong></td>
<td>Tutors advocated using various writing resources to develop their students’ language awareness and to get them to imagine themselves as successful and capable writers. Writer capital was a form of investment in the writer that fostered good writing and produced a principled writer.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Good Writing</strong></td>
<td>Good writers produced good writing. Good writers displayed a set of behaviors (such as industriousness and integrity) that reflected a moral side to writing. Further, tutors and students believed that sentence mechanics (grammar, spelling, and punctuation) were important to good writing and that reader-rather than writer-centered writing was essential. A good writer was someone the participants believed followed the conventions of writing and who had (or created) a distinct voice. The participants also saw writing as benefiting the writer by improving cognitive abilities and possibly helping to build a secure future.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Voice</strong></td>
<td>Tutors and students saw voice as authentic, legitimizing, and offering future possibilities to be heard. Voice captured the personality of the writer. Tutors often emphasized more of the writer’s voice in their tutorials than they claimed or were aware of.</td>
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Observation I. Identities

As I combed through the data it became clear to me that (a) the tutors’ ethnic identities as Anglophone Canadians and professional identities as editors, writers, and teachers shaped their beliefs about good writing and influenced their interactions with students and their feedback on student writing and (b) students’ identities as writers (e.g., strong, quiet, adventurous, weak, expressivist) either aligned or conflicted with the language standards expected by their teachers and tutors. This section consolidates the key findings on tutor and student identity and on how issues of resistance and bidirectional or reciprocal learning played a role in identity construction.

Tutors’ identities. The cases showed that tutors’ professional identities intersected with their ethnic, racial, linguistic, and regional identities in shaping a weekly, situated tutoring identity. Tutors’ views on good English and their beliefs about how to talk to students about their writing and how to approach feedback were rooted in prescriptive attitudes about how English ought to be spoken and written, in specific values that were passed down from high school teachers, and in writing practices learned on the job. For example, Stuart claimed that one hundred percent of his identity as a copy editor shaped his feedback; it conflicted with his identity as a tutor. The tension between the two frustrated him and left him feeling guilty when he over-edited a student’s paper or appropriated an essay and wrote for the student. Similarly, Franny admitted that her degree in professional writing predisposed her to look at sentence-level concerns first, but unlike Stuart, she suppressed this urge to correct the grammar letting the student guide the session instead. This pedagogical approach contributed to her success with Joy. Caroline identified as a professional writer and not as a teacher. To engage students, she drew on her knowledge of Western philosophy, using the Socratic method, for example, to get students talking about their reading and writing. Lastly, Nigel’s background writing memos as a paralegal
shaped his preference for succinct writing. He praised George Orwell’s advice for concise writing in his essay “On the Politics of the English Language.”

But just as the interviews and observations showed me how tutors’ identities as professionals influenced how they conceptualized writing and their approach to providing feedback to students, they also showed me that the tutors’ professional identities meshed with their ethnic, linguistic, and regional identities. I observed as these identities resurfaced in their opinions about working with particular students, in their approaches for coaching students through the writing process, or in their tips for improvement. It became clear to me that these larger cultural, historical, and professional identities served as points of reference from which to socialize students into becoming Canadian. For example, while Franny strove not to let her white, rural small-town Ontarian identity speak for the experience of her students, Caroline tutored precisely to impart Canada’s loyalist heritage to her students. I was intrigued by her motivation to serve as a bridge by teaching new Canadians about old Canadians, passing on the traditional Upper Canadian culture that she felt was slowly being displaced by multiculturalism.

Although he did not identify as Upper Canadian or as a United Empire Loyalist, Stuart did identify as Anglo-Saxon. Broadcasting his identity as an Anglo-Saxon male to his students was just as important to Stuart as imparting a loyalist heritage was to Caroline. For example, I observed Stuart teach one L2 writer about gender equality from his perspective. He had been helping the student brainstorm questions for her essay about the history of women’s rights in Canada. As they discussed the topic, Stuart instructed the girl to add the question, “How is women’s equality measured?” to her list of perspectives on the subject. He then told her to be sure to show the question to her teacher at school the next day. “She’ll think you’re really smart,” he said, “but you can tell her your tutor is an Anglo-Saxon male. That you got it from your tutor—and your tutor is an Anglo-Saxon male,” he repeated. On the topic of women’s
rights, Stuart’s identity as a tutor teaching an L2 writer became a safe and uncontested space to assert his Anglo-Saxon Canadian male identity and an opportunity to respond simultaneously to a conversation about women’s rights to an imaginary (and possibly female) high school teacher. It did not seem to matter to Stuart whether the teacher thought the girl was smart, but whether the teacher thought he was smart. It also gave him the opportunity to assert an ethnic identity his student likely had never heard of before. Stuart’s identity as an Anglo Saxon male and as an editor emerged and comingled in his tutoring. Again, as for an emergent tutoring identity, Stuart said it best: “I don’t separate what I believe from what I tutor.”

**Students’ identities.** The cases also showed that student-writer identities and their development of written voice were influenced by and sometimes clashed with the social, religious, national, and standardized voices advanced by curricula, teachers, and tutors. Except for Samantha, the students never claimed explicitly that their first language or home language/dialect or ethnic background influenced how they wrote in or out of school. While interviewing the students about their experiences in school, their attitudes about learning to write, and their feelings about their writing, I realized the complex and often unanticipated ways students responded to institutional demands placed on them by teachers or tutors to write in a particular way. The examples below summarize how students self-identified and highlight how I saw their complex and evolving relationship with language, culture, and writing.

Natasha and Joy, for example, identified as advanced academic writers and were unique among many of the students I encountered in the Pathways program. I was impressed with how they talked about writing, especially voice. They were high achievers, demonstrated an impressive meta-awareness of the writing process, and appeared to exceed the expectations of high school teachers and tutors alike. I also noticed that being multilingual did not impede their ability to excel. Natasha took university preparation courses, read and wrote essays on
philosophers, and could compare and contrast the voice of playwrights and philosophers. Joy loved to write, and her archive of past papers, out-of-class feedback groups, and awareness of voice testified to how seriously she identified as a writer.

Scrappy was an altogether different kind of writer, although no less impressive. Even though he told me that he moved a lot between Canada and Bangladesh, learned his English from television, and spoke multiple languages, Scrappy saw himself as completely Canadian. I could easily see, however, that identifying as a proud Canadian and as an expressivist writer conflicted with the style of Canadian English Stuart wanted for him. Samantha was another student whose English conflicted with the expectations of both her teachers and Caroline. In one of her journal entries, Samantha also identified as a proud Canadian, but she told me her Jamaican English was not accepted in school. Samantha let me leaf through her journal. I was surprised to see her teacher’s feedback. Rather than responding to the content of Samantha’s ideas such as about her feeling about becoming Canadian or her experience with bullying, her teacher used her red pen to correct Samantha’s grammar and spelling errors. As I turned the pages, I began to see that it really did not matter what Samantha wrote, but rather how she wrote it. Samantha believed that with the help of her English teachers and her tutor, Caroline, she was becoming more fluent in Canadian English and less able to communicate in her native patois. One striking difference I noticed was that while maintaining an adolescent voice was a mark of authenticity for Joy and something she strove to develop and project, ‘coming out’ was a mark of shame for Samantha and something she struggled to conceal. She identified as a quiet writer of Canadian English.

Chris was the student who seemed to struggle the most with the image others had of him. Chris had been the class clown in primary school, but he was trying to change that perception in high school. He self-identified as a weak writer and told me that some of his teachers would recognize his writing by his immature writer’s voice. In “My Creed,” for example, he reflected
on both his transition from an apologetic class clown to a serious but struggling student writer who now saw literacy as his way to secure a good job and a better future.

In examining their identities, what struck me is how seriously students thought about writing and how much their own sense of self was reflected in the kind of writer they wanted to be. To what degree tutors or students identified as successful writers reflected their familiarity and comfort with larger social and cultural issues such as Canadian (or Anglo-Saxon) culture, the English language, and advanced literacy skills and provided compelling evidence for the various people, institutions, and experiences that played a role in socializing them into adopting particular preferences and tastes.

**Resistance.** Looking across the cases, I identified patterns of resistance to completing assignments, to certain tutors, and to particular tutoring approaches. While good tutoring sessions produced positive experiences, unsuccessful tutoring sessions left students discouraged and tutors either frustrated or questioning their pedagogy. This struggle was especially true of Nigel and Stuart. It became clear to me that beliefs about what made a tutoring session successful or unsuccessful shaped tutors’ expectations of students and students’ expectations of tutors. The data suggested that certain situations prompted reflections, produced changes in behavior, or triggered reactions that underscored the complex and bidirectional nature of tutoring in which both tutors and students learned from each other.

I was not surprised to learn that students liked certain tutors and disliked others. What did surprise me, however, was how easily students articulated the purpose of tutoring and described the ideal characteristics and approaches of successful tutors. It was clear that the students saw tutoring writing as a student- and not tutor-centered undertaking and that they saw the purpose of tutoring as developing a writer’s thoughts, respecting a writer’s voice, and guiding a writer through the writing process. Although improving the mechanics of writing (grammar, spelling,
and punctuation) were important, students wanted tutors to listen to them and understand who they were as individual learners and writers. The following briefly juxtaposes the students’ beliefs about successful and unsuccessful tutors.

Scrappy and Joy, for example, were the only students to profile tutor types: there were strong tutors and weak tutors. Scrappy saw strong tutors as “automatic leaders” who guided, modeled, and helped with the writing process. Joy saw strong tutors as “readers” who let the student facilitate the lessons as they followed along and responded to her questions. On the other hand, Scrappy saw weak tutors as “explainers,” tutors who provided no scaffolding and structure for learning. Joy saw weak tutors as “editors” who appropriated her writing with their own ideas, phrases, and words. Scrappy liked tutors who monitored their students by keeping them on track, helped them with the writing process, and provided enough time for reflection. Joy valued tutors who asked her what she thought, gave her the freedom to write, and provided the appropriate support. Other students also highly valued tutors who were focused and who asked students to articulate their points of view. Natasha valued tutors who kept on topic. Like Samantha, she thought tutors should ask her what she thinks about a topic. She felt ignored when tutors did not answer her questions, imposing instead their own agenda for the lesson on her and not helping her develop her thesis statements. Lastly, Chris believed that tutors could only help a student who wants to be helped. Good tutors were also the ones who tried to understand their students and how they learned.

As with the ALTUR study, there were episodes of student resistance to tutors and to tutoring strategies. Intrusive tutoring clearly incited resistance. As I described in the cases, Natasha, Joy, and Chris had strategies to oppose ineffective tutors. When Stuart urged Natasha to write using her own words, she often continued to write using his. When he suggested that she develop the characters in her “Dear Daisy” letter in a particular way, Natasha resisted and followed her own
imagination. If Natasha felt unheard, she sought out help from other tutors. Many times, I watched Natasha relocate to another table to work with a female tutor after she finished her hour with Stuart. Surprisingly, Stuart never seemed to notice. Similarly, if Joy felt a tutor was too officious and pushed for their own interpretation, or their way of phrasing an idea, or provided her with unfamiliar vocabulary, she thanked them, took what advice she liked, and disregarded suggestions that took her away from what she wanted to say or from what she believed. Chris resisted by falling asleep. I learned from Tanja that Chris did not necessarily like working with male tutors; he preferred female tutors instead. One afternoon, Tanja invited me to observe her and Chris practice his McDonald’s dialogue (see “Thursday afternoons” in Chapter 5). He was animated, motivated, and alert. In the four months I had been observing him and Nigel, I had never seen Chris this engaged while completing an assignment.

Respectful resistance, however, was expected and even admired among tutors and reflected larger cultural values. Caroline, for example, explained that she taught students to form their own opinions even if it meant standing up to adults, contradicting them, and questioning traditional values. Respectful resistance was part of becoming Canadian, she believed. Similarly, Nigel appreciated it when Chris called him on his “bullshit,” which reminded him to adjust his tutoring approach to meet Chris’s learning style. Finally, Stuart seemed to admire writers who resisted the corrections of intrusive editors.

To varying degrees, resistance to ineffective tutoring played a role in how students interacted with their tutors and how their tutors responded. I began to see how resistance pushed tutors and students to grow, change, and develop over the course of their sessions and how it revealed how identities and roles shift and evolve through interaction and exchange. As an important social practice, resisting, confronting, or challenging authority appeared to reflect a unique Canadian
value, especially for tutors like Caroline, and served as an important step to socializing students into acting Canadian. The idea of reciprocal learning is what I investigate next.

**Bidirectionality.** Reciprocal learning was common and influenced the tutors’ approaches to tutoring and enriched their experience as tutors. I watched Nigel and Stuart develop as tutors as they struggled with resistant students. For example, when Chris resisted Nigel’s tutoring style by falling asleep, or when he ordered Nigel to write down the answers because he was too tired to write, Nigel stopped the session and demanded respect. These moments were tense, and I was interested in how Nigel always addressed them in a way that was both respectful to Chris and himself. Even though Stuart thought of himself as an excellent editor and writer, well read, and a progressive Anglo-Saxon male, he also believed he failed Scrapy, as he was not successful in getting him to tidy up his notebook binder, sit still, read accurately, and proofread his writing. What surprised me is that he saw these as moments of resistance and not as examples of development.

These interactions forced Nigel and Stuart to define what it meant to be a tutor at Pathways. For Nigel, this meant establishing boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behavior, while for Stuart this meant reproaching careless and negligent behavior. Unlike Nigel who had some training in working with adolescents, Stuart did not. Instead, he sought advice from the volunteer coordinator on how to handle a so-called disruptive student. In addition to setting boundaries with Chris, Nigel realized he needed to curtail his jokes, observing that Chris was a serious student who did not like it when Nigel joked around. Nigel also appreciated Chris’s short, pithy sentences, which reminded him to be more concise in his own writing.

Franny and Caroline did not face resistance from students in the way the Nigel or Stuart did, but it would be disingenuous to suggest that they were not somehow changed by their experiences working with students. For example, Franny admitted that her own identity as a rural
white girl became more pronounced in the urban multicultural context of the church basement. She was sensitive to this difference and curtailed her pedagogical approach, ensuring that her own experiences, opinions, or interpretations did not displace those of her students. Franny’s experience tutoring was positive and likely figured into her decision to pursue teaching as a career, as she entered a teacher education program at a local university the following year. While Caroline initially volunteered as “a gift” to herself, she felt that working with students enriched her life and that they gave her more than what she could give them: “I realized that, of course, I was, you know, being given a lot more than I was handing out […] The kids were amazing. And it was much, much more than I could have imparted to them.”

In sum, identities the tutors and students brought with them to tutoring were further shaped by the specific instances of resistance that often led to reciprocal learning. Tutoring was not unidirectional, but served as a way for tutors to socialize students into becoming new Canadians, adults, or literate citizens, but also served as a way for students to socialize volunteers into becoming capable writing tutors.

**Observation II. Building Writer Capital**

As I looked across the cases, and reviewed interviews and fieldnotes, I began to see examples of how students were socialized into becoming better writers. These examples were reflected in the interviews and in weekly observations. In this section, I introduce the term “writer capital” to show that tutors socialized students into becoming better writers by modeling how to access and use writing resources, appreciate good literature, and acknowledge the benefits of writing. When combined, these elements created a conscientious, industrious, and principled writer.

**Materials as resources.** The cases showed that tutors advocated using various writing resources to develop their students’ language awareness and to get them to imagine themselves
as successful and capable writers. I was especially interested to learn that tutors saw access to material resources as something that mediated the intellectual, cultural, and literate development of a student into a successful (albeit imagined) writer.

For example, both Stuart and Caroline championed the use of literacy resources—literature, dictionaries, thesauruses, paper, and pens—as important both inside and outside of tutoring. It became apparent that knowing how to think and access writing resources influenced the quality of writing and played a role in developing a writer identity. Caroline felt that lack of resources at home affected how students were socialized or trained in how to use resources in school and in the tutoring program. Stuart claimed that access to good literature had produced his abilities, and the same access and appreciation of literature could produce better writing in his students. For example, Stuart stopped Scrapy from reaching for his iPhone instead of the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* to look up a word. I got the sense Scrapy wanted to teach Stuart how quick and easy it was to learn new words using an app on a smart phone. Stuart was not interested. Stuart explained that reading and holding a book has cognitive benefits, staring at a (computer) screen does not. I could see a clear generational struggle between these two in the role that technology played in their approach to writing. Stuart, it seemed to me, lost an opportunity to connect with and learn from Scrapy.

Building writer capital, as a way to socialize student into developing better writing habits, also included using scratch paper to stimulate thinking skills. Both Stuart and Caroline were concerned about conservative thinking, believing that brainstorming on scratch paper was an effective way to get students to think in less predictable, conventional, and uncritical ways about what they were reading and writing in school. Brainstorming ideas before writing was seen as something a good writer always does. As Caroline noted, Pathways students tended not to develop drafts or brainstorm on scratch paper. The first draft was always the final draft.
Whenever they made a mistake, students did not cross out words or insert a missing word with a caret, as an editor or more seasoned writer might. Instead, students erased answers, sentences, and ideas and rewrote new ideas over the smudged out words and smeared sentences. I noticed in my own experiences tutoring at Pathways that erasing and rewriting was a very common practice among students in the program. Caroline believed the program’s lack of adequate paper supplies curbed the students’ ability to think and write critically.

While using paper to brainstorm was important to the tutors, I never imagined that paper type (lined or blank) mattered. Stuart felt that lined paper encouraged conservative thinking. He preferred blank paper as it promoted creative, original, and inventive thinking. Stuart brought a blank writing tablet attached to a clipboard to all his sessions, whereas Caroline, indifferent to this distinction, brought a simple pocket-size spiral notebook to write down new vocabulary, sound out words, or reinforce spelling.

Interestingly, Stuart and Caroline were also the only two tutors who supplied their students with additional literacy resources to support their writing development and to help them see themselves (or imagine future identities) as successful university students. Stuart provided books to Natasha and Scrapy on writing and literature while Caroline brought Samantha a Queen’s University binder and a coffee table book on hats. I had no doubt that Caroline saw herself as shaping an imagined identity for Samantha. By carrying around a Queen’s University binder everyday she thought Samantha might see herself attending Queen’s one day. Caroline explained, “So it was like you can read it [i.e., the word Queen’s], you can be it, you can do it, you are it.” Caroline told Samantha that one day she will be reading the plays of Samuel Beckett and essays by Dorothy Parker, authors she learned about from Caroline’s coffee table book on hats. The book on hats was not a neutral literacy resource, but a resource that carried the hidden message of social conformity through language standardization. Caroline explained that
Samantha would soon “figure out there’s a lot of crazy people, but they speak English (… and) they do it with their hats on.” For Caroline, hats became a metaphor for rules, standards, and common practices. Wearing a hat, metaphorically speaking, was a speaker’s tacit acceptance of these rules. Rejecting Standard English would leave Samantha in a “box,” she explained. Building writer capital becomes the ladder that allows students to climb up and out of the metaphorical box. In sum, tutors like Stuart and Caroline loved books and were skilled writers. They attempted to socialize students into valuing, accessing, and using material resources to read, write, and revise in much the same way as they had been taught.

**Engaging thinking.** One of the most encouraging findings was the tutors’ beliefs that developing thinking skills was an essential part of developing stronger writing skills and essential to developing any competent writer. From my weekly observations, it became apparent that tutors distinguished between developing the writer (i.e., intellectual, behavioral) and developing the writing (i.e., structure, grammar, spelling). From the interviews, thinking largely meant critical thinking or the ability to analyze, reflect, and synthesize in a coherent way. Tutors remarked on the poor quality of students’ writing (e.g., organization, grammar, lack of clarity), noticed the gaps in their knowledge of academic subjects (e.g., history), and witnessed their inability to reflect on what they were reading or to form their own opinions.

For example, I described earlier that Stuart, Nigel, Caroline, and Franny supported their students’ intellectual development as writers by providing cultural and historical information on topics and taught their students to ask questions, reflect, and challenge assumptions. Again, Stuart and Nigel also concerned themselves with how a student sat, the tidiness of a backpack and binder, the ability to focus on the lesson, or how to show the proper respect to adults or to women. These concrete lessons helped students develop their writer capital as they reinforced
larger social beliefs about how to be successful students, good citizens, and autonomous writers. The following examples highlight tutors' attempt to developing thinking skills in their students.

Stuart engaged thinking by helping Natasha organize her ideas and by teaching Scrapy to organize his body by sitting still, listening, and focusing. Key instructional approaches included getting him to quiet his body as a prerequisite for engaging the mind, improving listening skills by maintaining eye contact, and getting him to watch while he edited his writing. Lastly, thinking before writing was critical, as writing before thinking produced nonsense, and talking aloud while writing only led to confusion. I was surprised he felt that pre-writing heuristics like brainstorming would not work with Scrapy, as Stuart had already successfully taught Scrapy how to brainstorm during their first meeting. That piece of writing (a letter to Scrapy’s parents) Stuart considered one of Scrapy’s best pieces of writing and one which he admitted contained Scrapy’s own voice, “careless, but concerned.”

Nigel encouraged Chris’s intellectual development by getting him to reflect on his assignments by asking questions. He encouraged him to think about what he wanted to say. Once Chris verbalized his answer, Nigel instructed Chris to write it down before he forgot. Any answer was better than no answer. When Chris forgot an important vocabulary word related to acting, his favorite activity, Nigel asked him to stand up and move about the room. By retracing his steps, Chris might be able to retrieve the word.

Critical thinking also became important to building writer capital. Caroline championed critical thinking. “You never know what the kids don’t know. So to me, the most interesting thing is what the gaps are,” she said. She found that sometimes students with whom she worked resisted thinking critically because they resisted contradicting or challenging adults. Critical thinking was a consequence of living in Canada she implied. She reinforced this attitude by reminding newcomers that they live in Canada now and in Canada critical thinking and
challenging authority, albeit respectfully, were accepted, encouraged, and expected. Caroline encouraged Samantha to think by asking her questions about the readings or the poems to get her to articulate her point of view, thoughts, and most importantly her understanding of what she was reading. This was the Socratic approach: to draw out what the student knows. She also provided background information about poetry and poets and introduced her to famous political, theatrical, and historical people. Caroline also helped her spell and build her vocabulary by writing words down so Samantha could read and recite.

Franny’s approach to supporting Joy’s intellectual development involved listening to Joy as she articulated her understanding of what she was reading and by asking her questions. Joy arrived with her own thoughts and a clear sense of herself as a writer. She just needed direction. Franny refrained from imposing herself on Joy, and Joy saw this gesture as Franny’s way of respecting her as a writer. Franny also helped Joy think aloud by responding to the questions she had about how to phrase an idea or whether to use a particular example.

In short, while using dictionaries and writing on paper socialized students into becoming resourceful writers, developing critical thinking skills socialized them into becoming independent thinkers. Exhibiting these behaviors reflected larger social values and expectations seen as important in Canada.

**Envisioning benefits.** The cases also showed that developing writer capital provided novice writers with future possibilities and that writing benefited the individual writer, society, and even humanity. Caroline was the only tutor to label good writing as a human good, suggesting that good writing has a higher moral value and that writing is a utilitarian act from which society can profit. While Stuart disagreed that the impetus to improve writing is to secure a job, Caroline, like Chris, felt that being literate and writing well had a pragmatic and material advantage: it gets students jobs. Caroline, Stuart, Franny, and Nigel all believed that one of the benefits of writing
was the impact it had on cognitive development. Writing teaches people how to think. For example, Stuart encouraged Scrapy to think silently before he wrote. Scrapy later acknowledged that thinking before writing was beneficial. “I just realized that, if you think for a sec,” he said, “you can actually write really good writing.” Stuart also reported that he learned to ask students what they thought about a topic, problem, or subject to stimulate thought. Nigel, too, believed that students are not taught to think. Both Stuart and Nigel agreed that if students cannot write well it is because they cannot think clearly, coherently, or succinctly. For Franny, the benefits of good writing allowed writers to communicate and to get their point of view across.

I was surprised that even though the students explained the characteristics of good writing, they did not identify how writing played a role in teaching them to think more critically, in assisting them in their course work, or in making them better readers. Interestingly, among the students, only Chris stated unequivocally that he believed that being literate guaranteed employment. No other student explicitly connected the benefits of literacy with their future or with getting a job. Samantha and Joy did allude to what they thought were the long-term benefits of writing or learning to write well. For example, Samantha wanted to improve her spelling and pronunciation so she could fit in better and no longer “come out” when she spoke. Acquiring Standard English brought a necessary amount of linguistic capital to adjust comfortably. Joy noted, retrospectively, the benefits that archiving her writing had in helping her to produce better papers. She also wanted to be a pharmacist so she could help her customers understand their prescriptions. It is likely that she thought developing good writing skills could assist her in improving public literacy.

In conclusion, writer capital was produced by accessing resources, engaging in critical thinking, and imagining future benefits as literate adults. Writer capital was both the process and the product of socializing students into becoming autonomous writers with the competence and
inspiration to write. Writer capital helped writers to shed bad behaviors in exchange for good ones. In many ways, writing capital reflected a set of behaviors that produced a way of living, being, and acting.

**Observation III. Good Writing**

As I indicated in Chapter 1, good writing is something that seems intuitive to many, but it can be difficult to pinpoint what exactly readers consider good writing. The cases showed that perceptions of good writing reflected writer capital and included writing that was clear, concise, and coherent. Good writing considered audience needs and expectations, which included adhering to prescriptive language standards. Following standards was highly valued and reflected a writer’s integrity, authenticity, legitimacy, and sophistication. Interestingly, these standards also indexed a moral dimension that linked language use and behavior to upholding particular social and cultural values. Bad writing resulted from bad habits and improper instruction.

Traditionally, writing that centers on comprehensibility and on meeting the readers’ needs, rather than indulging the writers’ interests and impulses, has been the hallmark of English writing and writing instruction. Not surprisingly, the tutors and students saw good writing to be reader-centered. What made this finding even more noteworthy was that tutors and students valued reader-centered prose from opposite points of view. Students talked about good writing from a reader’s perspective (i.e., what the writer needs to do to fulfill them); tutors talked about it from a writer’s perspective (i.e., what they need to know and do to satisfy the readers’ needs and expectations). Both tutors and students agreed that if writers failed to keep the reader’s attention, they were bad writers.

For example, Nigel believed writers are responsible for communicating their ideas clearly and coherently to the reader. Stuart’s advice that writers should, “write to avoid being misunderstood” clearly situates responsibility with the writer not the reader. Caroline echoed this
sentiment, reporting that writers need to control the reader’s interpretation to the point that readers cannot think of an idea, description, or illustration in any other way but what the writer intended. Franny reported that good writing should be accessible to everyone; readers should be able to learn something from any piece of writing. While these tutors would agree that readers might struggle with the complexity of an idea, struggling should not be because of poorly chosen words, rambling prose, or incoherent ideas. Unintelligible prose was often seen as a result of negligent behavior such as laziness or untidy binders. Well-crafted prose reflected a conscientious writer and contributed to bettering humanity. A conscientious writer maintained standards.

The cases showed students’ needs, expectations, and sense of fulfillment as readers were satisfied by writers and writing that made ideas, descriptions, and point of view accessible, understandable, and enjoyable. Student believed good writing did not challenge the readers’ patience by poor structure or weak examples. Good writing did not digress or go off topic. Students believed that bad writers failed to make their ideas accessible or engaging to readers.

Although tutors and students agreed on the value of audience in writing (albeit from different perspectives), they disagreed on the specific qualities of good writing. For tutors, good writing included various stylistic, rhetorical, and structural preferences, choices, and effects. Writing was about communicating (Caroline, Nigel) and the elements of good writing included voice (Stuart), clarity (Stuart, Nigel), succinctness (Nigel and Franny), concision (Franny), word choice (Stuart), relevance (Nigel), grammaticality (Franny), feeling and forgetting (Franny), and knowing the rules (Franny and Caroline). Caroline spoke in terms of good writing and good writers. She situated good writing in terms of the beliefs and literacy practices of the writer rather than about acquiring sentence-level skills. Good writers had a passion for words, they strove to read good literature (the receptor of good writing), and they knew the rules of good
writing. Knowing the rules and breaking them was about empowerment. Breaking the rules without knowing them was about disenfranchisement, subjugation, and exploitation.

Joy, like Caroline, distinguished between good writing and good writers. While she felt good writing depends on and always considers the needs of the reader, Joy believed that the ability to write well is not age dependent. Anyone at any age could learn to write well. The students believed good writing depended on particular features of the writing such as effective organization (Natasha), clarity (Joy), and grammaticality (Scrapy) as well as excitement (Scrapy), descriptiveness (Samantha), and focus (Scrapy, Joy). For one student, Chris, good writing specifically included neatness and legibility of handwriting. Poor writing was the absence of these characteristics and reflected a weak writer who gave little thought to the needs of the reader, spelled poorly, and wrote unintelligibly. In short, the quality of the writing reflected the character of the writer.

Tutors socialized students into developing good writing habits by giving direct feedback, asking students questions, and reprimanding bad behavior (i.e., calling a student “lazy” or “careless”). What fascinated me was how ideas about good writing reflected so much of the moral character of the writer and suggested the importance of legitimate and authoritative forms of voice. Good writing was valued because it connected both the reader and the writer in the making of meaning. It was the product of a careful, competent writer who exhibited the characteristics of writer capital (i.e., someone who knew how to access resources, think critically, and make their ideas accessible).

**Observation IV. Voice**

Voice is the final theme I investigated. Looking across the cases, voice was ubiquitous in tutor feedback, assignment guidelines, and participant attitudes. I could easily see that voice
became the glue that bound identity, writer capital, and good writing together in unique and unexpected ways.

Much to my surprise, most of the students seemed to know about voice, suggesting that voice had been part of these students’ academic socialization. For example, students shared writing assignments that called for developing or exploring voice (Natasha, Scrapy, Joy), that showed feedback on voice (Joy), and that included voice as an assessment criterion (Joy). Students also reported that they were lectured on a writer’s voice (Scrapy) or that they were briefed on voice in regards to the province-wide literacy exam (Joy). Unique among the students, Joy approached her teacher about her writer’s voice. From their discussions, Joy realized a writer’s voice exists in a piece of writing even without the writer knowing it. She was amazed to learn that her teacher’s interpretation of her writer’s voice was different from her own. The observations from across the cases showed that writing instruction and voice development are not necessarily separate and distinctive practices.

Tutors and students saw voice as deeply personal, authentic, legitimating. Voice was shaped from experience and created by vocabulary. From the interviews, tutors and students not only grasped the concept of voice, but their beliefs about a writer’s voice often meshed with their beliefs about good writing. Except for Franny who described voice as what a writer brings to a piece of writing, both tutors and students associated voice with the “personality” of a writer and something authentic. For students, this meant no two writers wrote in exactly the same way and voice was something that readers could hear in the author’s style, examples, and in the emotion the author used to connect to the audience. Voice was influenced by a writer’s background (Natasha) and by his or her personal beliefs and intentions (Scrapy). Voice was also something that crystallized in self-expression (Joy). Although the metaphor of voice initially confused Chris, he grasped the deeper concept of voice once he started to speak about his own struggle
with writing. Writing showed the personality of the writer, and a teacher could distinguish the effort and time a writer spent composing by the readability of a piece. Samantha saw voice as “talking the truth” and as a way to connect with the reader. Scrapy felt that voice was a skill that could be taught. Joy saw it as something that matures as the writer changes and grows.

For tutors, personality also entailed authenticity. Nigel saw voice as an “intimate” portrait of the writer. Stuart claimed that voice was “intuitive” and even claimed that it, along with clarity, were the two most important elements of good writing. He asserted that voice also includes the writer’s opinion. He strove to discover his students’ opinions and thoughts and not the opinions or thoughts of their parents, teachers, or peers, which both he and Caroline felt students so often expressed as their own. Caroline believed helping students develop voice—getting students to think critically and teaching them to understand what they are doing—was a fundamental aspect of writing. Authenticity was also associated with maintaining language standards. Combining authenticity and language standards produce legitimacy: writers who have the power to command a reader’s attention. The students recognized the need to comply with language standards. The tutors felt that when writers complied with assumptions about standard language conventions, readers recognized them as legitimate writers.

Tutors also claimed that a writer’s voice was influenced by various conditions, phenomena, and circumstances. Family background, age, experience (Stuart), subject matter, genre and style (Franny, Stuart, Nigel, and Caroline), instruction (Stuart, Nigel, Caroline, and Franny), and responsibility taken by the author to fashion language in a conscious way (Caroline) all contributed to the development of voice. Stuart also recognized that a writer’s disability (e.g., Scrapy’s presumed dyslexia) might play a role in shaping, limiting, or obstructing voice. The tutors largely believed that voice no matter how creative or academic was always present (a view
shared also by Joy), but different degrees of voice can surface depending on the purpose of the writing and genre.

The connection between personality, authenticity, and legitimacy was strong and included both writing and speaking. I was intrigued to learn that being a legitimate writer with the authority to command attention also included being a better speaker. In short, a spoken voice was considered as important as a clear, resonant written voice. Both Stuart and Caroline connected good spoken English with good written English and assumed that correcting one necessitated correcting the other. Providing corrections became their labor as tutors and something that contributed to building writer capital in the students. Caroline justified her approach to correcting pronunciation and writing as teaching “good table manners.” They needed to be taught to enable access to more tables (or more opportunities to speak and to be heard). Caroline always spoke in metaphors. Interviewing her was both engaging and challenging. “Tables” seemed to be her metaphor for upward mobility and for recognizing someone as a legitimate speaker and writer. Teaching Samantha the spoken and written rules of Canadian English was giving her access to a better life.

Lastly, vocabulary appeared to be the single most important aspect of developing an authentic and legitimate voice, and both tutors and students stressed the importance of having a strong vocabulary with developing a writer’s voice. Natasha identified her “heavy words” as part of her writer’s voice. Caroline noted that good writers love words and poets are masters at vocabulary, but she stressed that voice, however, could not be reduced to vocabulary alone. Stuart, Franny, and Nigel stressed the importance of developing a robust vocabulary for developing writing. For students, a rich vocabulary showed evidence of sophistication (Natasha), revealed an authentic self and a connection to a home culture (Samantha) and demonstrated knowledge of how not to
plagiarize (Scrapy, Joy). Loss of vocabulary by forgetting words produced alarm and frustration (Chris). Vocabulary also presented opportunities for resistance to officious tutors (Chris, Joy).

In short, voice was an important quality a writer should demonstrate and suggested the credibility and trustworthiness of a writer. Next, I pinpoint the ways in which voice surfaced in writing tutorials and highlight how tutors socialized students into developing voice.

**Working with voice.** Although tutors saw voice as an essential quality of good writing, it was not necessarily something they thought was available to, or appropriate for, all students, especially those who struggled with critical thinking, limited vocabulary, and an inability to focus. My observations showed that despite their impressions that voice played a limited role in their tutoring, Stuart, Caroline, Nigel, and Franny actively taught their students to engage with voice. For example, not only did they help them write letters, compose poetry, and complete journal entries, writing genres that they associated with and claimed exemplified voice, but also they taught them to complete these assignments by exploring their own thoughts and beliefs, thinking about what words, phrases, and metaphors they were using, and considering how their audience might interpret their image, argument, or ideas. These were all strategies they identified as ways to scaffold a writer’s voice. Moreover, developing the writer by stimulating thought, reflection, and interaction helped to construct their writer’s voice.

Establishing eye contact, for example, was Stuart’s way of explaining the concept of voice to a student. Caroline claimed that she encouraged Samantha’s voice by being “formal” (that it was actually her job) and by introducing her to the rules of English. Reexamining Caroline and Samantha’s case, I could see that knowing the rules became synonymous to teaching writing. She supported the development of Samantha’s written voice by teaching her to read her homework assignments, the Grade 10 literacy practice test, and giving her a picture book on hats. She also helped her develop voice by teaching Samantha to spell, sound out words on her own,
state her opinions, and reflect on her answers. It became clear that reading, thinking, and spelling were not isolated activities; they intermingled. Caroline took Samantha beyond fill-in-the blank activity sheets and introduced her to metaphor, poetry, and Queen’s University. Not surprisingly, when she reflected on her sessions, Caroline felt that Samantha had become more cultured and sophisticated as a result of her instruction.

Franny claimed teaching voice included teaching language awareness, vocabulary, sentences, and metaphor. Nigel felt that Chris’s writer’s voice was “buried,” but that he had potential to have a strong voice. Unlike other students who “search out their voice through their teacher,” Chris always spoke for himself. Nigel explained, “There were definitely moments when he found his voice,” he said, “there were times when he was emphatic. That’s one characteristic of having a voice.” Nigel defined ‘emphatic,’ as “there’s no hesitancy.”

In sum, voice brought identity, good writing, and writer capital together to produce a legitimate writer with the authority to command the attention of the reader. Having a legitimate voice became synonymous with someone who knew the rules of Canadian English usage. Writers who were unaware of standard language use were deemed voiceless.

**Summary Thoughts**

The purpose of this chapter was not only to sort, condense, and describe the major themes across the cases, but also to convey the significance of those themes and how I arrived at my understanding of them. Each theme—identity, writer capital, good writing, and voice—highlighted how large-scale (or macro) social and cultural values such as the human good, literacy, success, morality, and being a proper citizen, for example, were reflected in the everyday (or micro) interactions, decisions, comments, reprimands, corrections, and exchanges between a tutor and student. The cross-case analysis brought to light how tutors socialized
students into adopting certain attitudes towards writing and highlighted the connection between good writing and the perceived (or expected) moral character of the writer and singled out the importance of aligning and assimilating oneself to the dominant culture including adhering to accepted linguistic standards. Finally, this chapter described not only how writing became a way to socialize students into both learning the culture and learning to write in that culture, but also how volunteers were socialized into becoming writing tutors.

In Chapter 7, I draw on these key findings to answer my research questions and to reflect on the theoretical and pedagogical implications of the findings to suggest alternative ways to think about concepts such as good writing and voice in writing education and ways in which to support literacy volunteers interested in writing instruction.
Chapter 7
Discussion and Implications

I set out in this study to see if Peter Elbow (2007) was right when he claimed that voice was alive. His claim was fraught with assumptions about voice and its ubiquitous presence in composition journals, writing classrooms, and in the world. These assumptions notwithstanding, the resurgence of voice in L2 writing, its popularity in writing style guides, and its inclusion in writing curriculum guidelines (such as in Ontario) indicated its importance as a valued writing practice among authors, researchers, educators, and educational policy makers. But these were all experts who conceptualized voice a priori and whose research disproportionately focused on undergraduate and graduate students’ experiences with writing and voice. Up until now, most writing research seems to have had little interest in hearing from non-experts such as literacy volunteers and adolescents.

From my experience tutoring in the Pathways program, I wanted a fresh perspective about good writing and a writer’s voice. I wanted to hear from the marginalized voices of those multilingual and immigrant adolescent writers who were developing their writing skills and the volunteer writing tutors who were working with them. I wanted to know what multilingual adolescent writers and their adult tutors in an afterschool literacy program believed about good writing and a writer’s voice, and to what extent those beliefs about writing and voice both reflected particular linguistic and cultural values and shaped particular attitudes towards language use, the writer, and writing development.

In this final chapter, I begin by drawing on the findings in Chapter 6 to answer and reflect on the three main research questions I asked about good writing and voice, about volunteers’ purposes and strategies towards responding to students’ writing, and about students’ attitudes
towards tutoring. In the second half of the chapter, I introduce the salient theoretical implications of these findings on writing and voice research and explore the pedagogical implications of these concepts on tutoring writing and training writing tutors. The chapter ends with a call for future research to explore the aliveness of voice among primary and secondary school writers and their writing teachers, tutors, and mentors.

**Research Question 1:**

**What do Tutors and Students Believe about Good Writing and a Writer’s Voice?**

My first question asked what tutors and students believe about good writing and a writer’s voice. I wondered if voice were as ubiquitous as Elbow (2007) suggested, would not these tutors and students know about it and if so what would it mean to them? More importantly, what do their beliefs convey about how good writing and voice are constructed at a larger, social and cultural level?

The findings indicated that regardless of class, age, profession, language background, ethnicity, education, or level of literacy, the tutors and students were familiar with concepts such as good writing and a writer’s voice and could speak about them with ease. This finding was particularly significant as there was a possibility that students might be confused by the voice metaphor and would have nothing to say. As the cases clearly demonstrated, nothing could have been further from the truth. The students’ and tutors’ familiarity with both the elements of good writing and voice corroborates Elbow’s (2007) observation that voice is alive. It also suggests that the tutors and students have been socialized to think about writing and building academic literacy in these terms. In short, the importance schools place on knowing and using these terms appears to be a critical part of a building a literate citizenry (e.g., Wan, 2014). The relative ease with which both tutors and students discussed good writing and voice contrasts with previous findings (Leki, 1995) that good writing was something intuitive and difficult to specify. The
tutors and students demonstrated to me, with little difficulty, the elements of good writing and characteristics of good writers. They also expressed the meaning of voice, cited examples of voice in writing, spoke of their own writer’s voice, and identified the times voice had been discussed in class.

With some minor differences, the findings complemented previous empirical research on teachers’ beliefs about good writing (e.g., Leki, 1995; Li, 1996; Reichelt, 2003). Like Li’s (1996) American teachers, the Pathways tutors and students believed that the purpose of writing (and a characteristic of good writing) is to communicate clearly, persuasively, and logically all thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Their responses also reflected criteria articulated in the writing strand of the Ontario English Curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a) and directives from popular style guides (e.g., Orwell, 1984; Payne, 1965; Strunk & White, 2000) that assert that to communicate effectively and produce good writing, writers must know and follow the rules of Standard English, use good grammar, accurate spelling, proper punctuation, and diverse vocabulary. Meeting the readers’ needs (Flower, 1979), using resources effectively, and thinking critically (Atkinson, 1997) were also essential.

Good writing was also a human good, something that improved society. Interestingly, discussions of good writing always led to characterizing the qualities and behavior of the writer. Good writers were intelligent, industrious, and well-read, qualities that reflected the trustworthiness and suggested moral character and integrity of the writer. Participants’ definitions of good writing remained largely constant throughout the study.

I was not surprised that the tutors and students identified features that can be assessed—grammar, spelling, lexicon, and punctuation—but I was surprised to learn that their perceptions of good writing were nearly synonymous with those features. Unlike the teachers in Li (1996), however, tutors rarely discussed creativity or imagination as part of good writing or voice.
Exceptions include Caroline’s teaching Samantha to use metaphors in her love poem and Stuart’s helping Natasha to imagine writing from the perspective (or in the voice) of King Lear. Similar to Reichelt’s (2003) German teachers, intellectual analysis was seldom addressed across the tutorials. Pathways tutors had very similar attitudes about writing that Li (1996) and Reichelt’s (2003) found in the attitudes of American teachers.

The tutors’ and students’ beliefs about voice and their descriptions of a writer’s voice were complex and became entwined with their beliefs about good writing. Like the 30 graduate students in Petric’s (2010) study, the tutors and students also saw voice largely as the writer’s personality (Elbow, 1981), stressing the importance of its authenticity and legitimacy. The idea that voice is equivalent to personality has been contested by Culham (2005), who argued that teachers often mistake these two concepts, noting that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between personality and voice; rather, she asserted voice is “the writer’s ability to express personality in language, for a particular purpose and audience” (p. 138). While Culham’s assertion that voice is not a fixed personality, her explanation of voice to writing teachers failed to address the role that the readers play in co-constructing voice (e.g., Bahktin, 1981, 1986; Kamberelis & Scott, 1992; Matsuda, 2001) that tutors like Caroline recognized. While writers are expected to be in control of voice, the audience, as Caroline noted, is part of “fleshing out” voice. What this suggests is that non-experts recognize that readers play a role in constructing the extra-textual identity of the writer (see Tardy, 2012b).

Overall, what was surprising to me was that while they claimed voice was important to writing, tutors never saw it as central to their tutoring. Voice seemed largely ornamental to the process even though voice figured into their students’ homework assignments (e.g., epistolary genres, expository essays, and poetry), assessment rubrics, and written feedback from teachers (and even when developing voice was specified in the assignment guidelines!). As I pointed out
in the cross-case analysis, the tutors acknowledged that they might have helped teach voice by introducing vocabulary, getting ideas down on paper, building confidence, or limiting their interventions, but they did not recognize that teaching students to state their opinion, frame their ideas in Standard English, and abandon alternative pronunciation and spelling were part of developing a particular kind of voice. It appeared that the tutors and students engaged with voice so frequently in assignment requirements, in their attitudes or positions taken towards a topic, and in their beliefs about the right way to speak or write that it had become almost entirely invisible to them. I realized that teaching writing is teaching voice.

Socializing the students to develop a ‘voiced identity’ (Bartholomae, 2003; Bryant, 2005; Ivanič, 1998; Zawacki & Habib, 2010) in their papers and homework assignments was part of the writing process and reinforced individuality, being oneself, and independent thinking (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1996b). Speaking from his own experience of learning to write in the U.S., Shen (1989) recalled, “the values behind this rule [(i.e., be yourself)] are based on the principle of protecting and promoting individuality (and private property)” (p. 460). Academic socialization includes introducing the concept of private property by teaching students not to plagiarize others’ words and ideas, a practice that has been critiqued in L2 contexts (see Bloch, 2012; Casanave, 2004; Pennycook, 1996). Looking across the student responses, I observed that developing voice appeared to reinforce ideas about writing as private property, as all writers were expected to use their own words and distinguish their ideas from others so as not to plagiarize. “Good writers,” Billig (2013) astutely observed, “are notable because they have their individual voices which others cannot properly copy. Sadly, it is easier to copy really poor writers, than really good ones” (p.9). Teaching students about the importance of voice, it would seem, might be another way to socialize them into accepting complex culture practices about ownership, copyright, and plagiarism.
Beyond simple personality and style, good writing and good writers produced a legitimate voice (see Figure 7.1) that reflected someone who signified full membership in an educated, literate society in English-dominant Canada. While voice may exist both in good and in bad writing (Elbow, 2007), a legitimate voice is the one voice worth listening to. It reflects a knowledgeable writer who adheres to Standard English, considers audience needs and expectations, and employs a rich vocabulary. A paradox exists between being encouraged to develop a robust vocabulary and being mindful to always sound one’s age, however. Joy, for example, hesitated to use a more adult vocabulary in her writing (e.g., that she learned from her tutors), as she knew that teenagers are not expected to know sophisticated words. Using them would not only cause her teacher to suspect plagiarism, but also it would challenge the extra-textual identity her teacher created for her as an adolescent writer. This finding is rather significant as it suggests students may not always be using the words they know for fear of being accused of plagiarizing or being inauthentic.

In short, writing well and writing with voice reflects prestige, confidence, resourcefulness, and intelligence, forming what I called “writer capital” in Chapter 6. A voice that does not reflect these desirable characteristics, as Stuart noted, “is not going to be an interesting one,” and is ignored and silenced (e.g., Bourdieu, 1991; 1993; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), and, as Caroline observed, can trap the writer in a “box.”
Figure 7.1. Good writing and good writers produce a legitimate voice
Research Question 2:
How do Tutors Conceptualize their Identities, Purposes, and Actions in Responding to Students’ Writing and Voice in this Context?

Following what the tutors and students identified as good writing and voice, I was curious to know how tutors actually got students to write well and potentially develop a voice in their writing. As both a writing teacher and tutor, I have always been curious to observe how other writing teachers talk about writing and approach giving feedback on writing. Responding to student writing is one of the most taxing parts of teaching writing (Ferris, 2007) and under the stress of a face-to-face writing tutorial, even the most experienced teachers and tutors face challenges to respond effectively (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). After working on the ALTUR project, I was interested in looking at how tutors in my study approached writing with their students, and how those approaches reflected what they believed about writing and tutoring.

Ad hoc tutor identity and the right to speak and act

The cross-case findings indicated that tutors drew on various combinations of five distinct areas of their lives that gave them a sense of purpose to act and the authority to speak, respond, and tutor: (a) profession; (b) consulting other tutors or resources; (c) advice from their former high school teachers; (d) ethnicity; and (e), at times, resistance from their students. Drawing randomly from their backgrounds, professional expertise, and tutoring experience produced a kind of pedagogical miscellany of ideas, approaches, and strategies that when combined with their official volunteer status produced an “ad hoc tutor identity.”

Just as time, preparation, and feedback helped practicum students see themselves as legitimate ESL teachers (Kanno & Stuart, 2011), this new identity gave volunteers the authority to see themselves as legitimate writing tutors (see Figure 7.2) armed with an arsenal of methods to teach, correct, challenge, hypothesize, and reproach. Assuming an ad hoc identity gave the
tutors the confidence of seasoned writing teachers (Shi and Cumming, 1996) and the strong preference for grammar instruction of more linguistic oriented writing teachers (RaceIlis and Matsuda, 2015).

Figure 7.2. Tutor identity, purpose, and action
(This figure reflects tutor identity, purpose, and action in responding to tutoring. The volunteers’ sense of being a tutor was drawn from careers, consulting other tutors or resources, advice from former high school teachers, ethnicity, and student resistance. The ad hoc tutoring identity provided tutors a purpose or a platform from which they could discuss, advise, and respond to their students’ writing. Their purposes led to tangible forms of action.)
Their new identity empowered the tutors to make certain claims about why students fell short of being successful learners (e.g., lazy, illiterate, and dyslexic) and how best to teach them (e.g., using the Socratic method or using direct observation as a form of apprenticeship). As the cross-case analysis showed, it also offered them a purpose to volunteer: to reinforce Standard English, critical thinking skills, and knowledge of Canadian culture and customs. Volunteering also served as a platform to criticize public education and transmit values through a form of intellectual and cultural apprenticeship (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991).

For example, Franny was dissatisfied with the lack of grammar instruction in schools, Stuart actively corrected Natasha’s and Scrapy’s use of “like” in reported speech, and Caroline corrected Samantha’s pronunciation because she wanted to stop the “bling talk” of the schoolyard from mixing with or displacing the Standard Canadian English of the classroom. Their efforts to control English mirrored those attempts undertaken by Ukrainian language teachers to purge Russian words from the spoken language of Ukrainian school children (Friedman, 2009).

These ideas appealed to a broader notion of cultural membership and reflected the desired characteristics of good citizenship. Caroline asserted that teaching students to think critically, for example, involves teaching them to question authority even if it means confronting adults and repudiating traditional values of parents or home cultures (cf. Fader, 2006). Fear of appearing disrespectful prevented students from thinking for themselves. “Respect is one thing,” Caroline observed, “You need to be respectful. But you’ve got to stand up for yourself. I don’t care whatever, whatever else you were --, you’re here now” [emphasis added]. In short, standing up for oneself, having a voice, and challenging authority were clear expectations for newcomers to Canada and part of developing a Canadian identity.
This attempt to draw on other parts of one’s life is consistent with similar findings among adult literacy volunteers (Belzer, 2006) who relied on “instincts, previous experiences with learning, and creativity” (p. 570) to tutor with legitimate authority. What made this ad hoc tutoring identity particularly unusual, however, was that unlike the volunteers in Belzer’s study, ethnicity or linguistic background and reacting to student resistance became part of forming a tutor identity. In the case of Caroline, she likely felt well suited to socialize newcomers into Canadian life and culture, introducing them to that “imagined community” (see Anderson, 2006; Billig, 1995) to which she belonged. Coming from an old loyalist family, Caroline taught what she considered the right way to speak and write and promoted the right university to attend (i.e., Queen’s). Second, tutors’ reactions to student resistance (e.g., frustration, reflection, or reprimand) also contributed to constructing this ad hoc tutoring identity and led to a form of reciprocal or bidirectional learning, especially for Nigel and Stuart. Unlike the novice teachers in Talmy’s (2008) study, Nigel and Stuart did not easily accommodate the students. For example, Nigel set boundaries with Chris, especially when he felt disrespected; Stuart struggled over whether he was an effective tutor, pushing him to reflect on his approach with Scrapy. While Franny and Caroline never reported encountering real (or perceived) resistance from students, the cases showed that they too learned about themselves from their experiences of working in the program and from the different students they tutored.

Ironically, the tutors reflected the “great white hope of academics” that the program sought to discourage, during new tutor orientation, in volunteers. Stuart’s pithy reflection aptly captured the point: “I think that what I was taught and the way I was taught--. Well, it produced me. Like it or not, it produced me […]” adding later, “I don’t separate what I believe from what I tutor.”
Research Question 3:
In What Ways do Students See their Tutoring Sessions Contributing to their Overall Development as Writers?

My third question investigated the students’ impressions of their sessions with the tutors. How effective were their tutors in helping them to improve their writing and what characteristics did the students value in a tutor and which did they censure? I asked myself this same question when I tutored in the ALTUR project, wondering if the students we worked with valued the tutoring sessions. To answer this question, I distinguished between what students saw as effective and ineffective tutoring. As the literature on tutoring high school writers is limited, I have also discussed these findings in relation to case studies and ethnographies of tutoring in undergraduate writing centers.

Effective tutoring

As reported in other studies of tutoring (Chandler-Olcott & Hinchman, 2005), the present students valued the role that tutors played in the development of their academic writing skills. Across all cases, students liked tutors who were student-centered (see McAndrew & Reigstand, 2001). Effective tutors focused on students’ needs and guided them, but did not do their work for them. Good tutors also did not waste time. Similar findings have been reported in university-level writing tutorials (Henning, 2001; Weigle & Nelson, 2004) in which students felt the success of a writing tutorial often hinged on the relationship created between the tutor and the student. Specifically, Henning (2001) found that students valued tutors who were flexible in setting and meeting objectives, provided useful information, and maintained a good working rapport. Likewise, Weigle and Nelson (2004) found successful tutors communicated clearly and effectively, answering students’ questions and providing them with the skills to become more autonomous writers. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, as tutors in the ALTUR project (Cumming,
2012), my colleagues and I learned that we needed to maintain a positive rapport with our students. In my own case, I found that showing up on time each week, listening to students share stories of their day at school, and respecting their writing process were ways in which I maintained a good rapport while re-negotiating the session objectives.

Not all students saw focusing on the needs of the writer in exactly the same way, however. While Scrapy saw effective tutors as those who lead and not just explain, Joy saw effective tutors as those who set the pace of the session, acting to encourage and answer her questions. Joy valued Franny because she let her have her own voice and encouraged her to see herself as a writer by not telling her what to write. Students relish the satisfaction of knowing how to resolve writing problems on their own (Harris, 1995). Natasha, Joy, and Samantha appreciated being asked what they thought, and Chris valued a tutor who had insight into how he learned.

**Ineffective tutoring and resistance**

Ineffective tutoring meant time was being wasted or a tutor took too much or too little control. These tendencies frequently led to resentment and resistance. Students employed a variety of strategies to resist ineffective tutoring (e.g., sought help from other tutors or disregarded feedback). Natasha felt Stuart spent too much time talking about irrelevant topics and did not help her develop her thesis statements. After working with him, she sought help from a female tutor who did not go off on tangents and helped her develop her thesis statements. Similar findings were reported by Gilliand (2014), who observed that socializing students to develop academic writing skills could be obstructed by teachers (or tutors) who monopolize conversations, neglect to check for comprehension, and ignore student’s input. These “lecturettes” (p. 313), as Newkirk (2001) referred to tutor talk, can sabotage a writing session. Although documented in university-level studies, Rodby (2002) and Warning (2005) reported
similar cases in which a student disregarded the tutor’s advice because it was irrelevant (Warning, 2005) or because the student disagreed with the tutor’s advice (Rodby, 2002).

Chris resisted tutors in the same way he resisted teachers or teaching he disliked: he fell asleep. One time, he began organizing his school binder rather than finishing the homework assignment that Nigel was helping him to complete. Scrapy felt that tutors who simply explained and did not lead by taking control and guiding him made ineffective tutors. Finally, Joy disliked tutors who commandeered the writing process, over-edited her writing, used words she did not know, or claimed their way of phrasing an idea was better than hers. If she felt a tutor was hijacking the lesson, she would listen but not take notes, and then excuse herself as soon as possible to work with another tutor. Joy was an engaged high school writer and served as a counter-example to the dutiful, but unreflective writer in Sperling and Freedman’s (1987) case study, “A Good Girl Writes like a Good Girl.”

What the students expected of an ideal writing tutor significantly differed from what the volunteers considered an ideal writing tutor. As I reported in answering Research Question 2, the tutors saw tutoring writing as a kind of intellectual and cultural apprenticeship. They valued knowledge, culture, and access to resources and sought to instill the same appreciation for these perceived higher forms of cultural capital in their students (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The degree to which they showcased forms of cultural capital in interviews or tutoring sessions (e.g., the magazines and books they read, the books they gifted, the authors they quoted) served to reinforce their class identity and validate their decision to become a tutor. The students, however, did not seem to care about the tutor’s heritage or how much knowledge they possessed; although Scrapy was impressed with how smart he thought Stuart was. He told Stuart that he could make a lot of extra money by answering trivia questions on the game show “Cash Cab.”
Particular views on tutors’ expertise, however, seem more prevalent in peer tutoring situations among undergraduates (Mackiewicz, 2004; Thonus, 2001) than among high school students working with adults. I suspect adolescent writers in this study assumed that adult tutors were knowledgeable about high school subjects and about basic essay writing. Natasha and Joy recognized that having tutors who were multilingual might help English language learners especially. Multilingual writing tutors bring linguistic, pedagogical, and cultural insight to writing centers (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Kilborn, 2001; Raforth, 2015; Thonus, 2014). Students valued the tutors’ approaches; they needed tutors who could listen, guide, respond, and trust in meaningful and respectful ways. For students, tutoring was about connecting and fostering relationships as much as it was about learning.

**Summary of main points in response to research questions**

Good writing and voice were concepts familiar to participants and part of their general literacy. Good writing referred to clear, concise, and coherent prose and reflected the integrity and morality of the writer. Voice is the personality of the writer. Legitimate voice is what appears in good writing. Voice follows the standard rules of English, engages the reader, and draws on a rich vocabulary.

Volunteers developed an ad hoc tutoring identity to inform their pedagogy and give them a reasoned justification to tutor and create a position from which to respond with authority. Learning was not limited to unidirectional processes but was rather reciprocal, in which tutors were transformed by the experience.

Students saw tutors as effective or ineffective. Effective tutors were student-centered, nonintrusive, and helpful. Ineffective tutors were boring, commandeered the lesson, and gave officious advice.
Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications: Towards a Nuanced Understanding of Good Writing and a Writer's Voice in Adolescent L2 Writing

Where do I want to go with the concept of adolescent L2 writer voice— theoretically or pedagogically—as a characteristic of good writing? How can it serve to support tutoring and creating stronger, more autonomous student writers? These questions help to put the findings to good use in developing new ways to understand what tutors and students value in good writing and address the current limitations of voice both conceptually and practically. Voice cannot be simply brushed aside or seen as unimportant to the writer or the qualities of good writing, as others have suggested (Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Stapleton, 2002). Voice is integral to writing (Elbow, 1981, 2007; Murray, 1985; Ramanathan & Atkinson 1999b); developing voice is part of learning to write and building an identity as a writer (Newkirk, 1997) and provides a way for a reader to engage with the writer and the writing in meaningful ways (Zhao, 2012).

Theoretical Implications

As noted in Chapter 1, the major problem I see with concepts of good writing and voice is that they are two of the most poorly defined, arbitrary, and least understood concepts in writing studies. While teachers, scholars, and stylists often promote unproblematically the need for clarity in writing (Barnard, 2010) and require it of novice writers, they do not seem to demand clarity when it comes to understanding, conceptualizing, or discussing good writing and voice. Vagueness has produced uncertainty and distrust around these terms, especially voice and how it is used in educational policies like the Ontario English Curriculum (see Chapter 1). If writing researchers intend to promote voice as part of good writing, a new way is needed to re-imagine voice for adolescent L2 writers, who arguably bring the richest and most diverse voices to their writing classrooms and tutoring halls.
**Contributions to L2 socialization theory and cultural reproduction**

The findings contribute to theories of L2 socialization in academic contexts. The tutors’ attitudes towards cultivating good writing, developing voice, and engaging the students into each step of the writing process (Flower & Hayes, 1981) indicate that they took the need to socialize adolescent (both L1 and L2) writers into the writing process seriously and that they valued what their students thought, wrote, and believed. How the tutors defined good writing and voice reflected the larger (macro) social, cultural, and educational values. The way in which they engaged with these beliefs suggests that voice (as part of good writing) has the potential to cultivate the intellectual, behavioral, social, and perhaps even emotional aspects of adolescent L2 writers and prepare them for adulthood and the responsibilities expected of educated citizens. This potential allowed the tutors to invest in their students’ writing and to help students develop their thoughts, attitudes, and opinions as they engage with more advanced forms of writing and personal expression (Canagarajah, 2015).

The physical body as object of socialization (Solis, et al., 2009; Talmy, 2009) and the physical space of the church basement, community, and country as sites of socialization (see Leander & Sheehy, 2004) influenced how writers’ identities were fashioned into a larger national identity (Anderson, 2006). First, tidy backpacks and organized binders reflected a sound mind and organized writing. Ideal candidates for full membership sat still and did not fidget. They were students who could focus, listen, read silently, write without mouthing the words under their breath, and converse without using “like” or using street slang. They were students who could refrain from texting or using cell phones, and they respected the tutors by not talking back, making demands, or falling asleep. Those who failed to conduct themselves properly, Stuart noted, simply had bad manners regardless of racial or ethnic background: “I mean, I know I’m arrogant in a way. But I really do think I’m mostly colorblind […] what annoys me are people’s
bad manners. Whether it’s car drivers or people […] with cell phones […] or girls gossiping in tutoring sessions.”

Second, learning how to write and how to regulate the body and manage resources during writing took place in the physical space of a church. As previously noted in Chapter 3, the site of the church basement itself served the needs of this local, largely non-Christian (or Orthodox) community, as many church basements in North America do. The church did not attempt to proselytize the volunteers, students, or staff, but their visibility in the neighborhood and openness to community service helped reinforce the larger national and cultural values of Canada such as volunteerism. Neighbors see the church as integral to the identity of the greater community. For example, when I asked the students what they thought church basements symbolized to the community, they felt that Regent Park parents and students would see it as a place to study and learn. As tutoring was held in a church basement, Natasha thought that learning must have been as important to Christianity as it was to Islam. She sensed that some parents might have objected to their children going into a church, but she felt they largely saw it as a place of learning. Joy added that students from the neighborhood come to the church basement because it was “somewhere where they could get help and get the work done.”

Lastly, the findings also support the bidirectional nature of tutoring in L2 studies of adolescent learners (Duff, 1995; Talmy, 2008, 2009), in which tutors learn from the students. As pointed out in Chapter 1, my colleagues and I in the ALTUR project were experienced language teachers, but were novice tutors in this context. Our experience taught us new ways to approach working with students identified as at risk, ways that fundamentally involved trust, negotiation, creativity, and patience (see Knouzi, 2012). Previous research (e.g., Belzer, 2006) has shown tutors draw from various areas of and experiences in their lives to be able to tutor effectively. While the tutors in the present study drew on advice from previous teachers, careers, and
personal experiences to tutor, they were also challenged by students—pedagogically, emotionally, and culturally. These interactions challenged and pushed them to reflect on their beliefs about tutoring, their roles as tutors (including how a tutor should be treated), and their approaches to meeting students’ needs to affect some positive transformation in themselves.

Similarly, Canagarajah (2015) observed how he became less rigid and more open to the expressive writing style of Kyoko, an L2 writer, by reading her peers’ positive reactions to her writing and by reflecting on her composing process through her drafts. In the ALTUR study, our students taught us that rather than imposing goals on them, we needed to start with where they were at and set goals together. For example, Jun (2012), a fellow ALTUR researcher, did not resist when his student redirected their lessons always from reading and writing and more towards mathematics. He discovered that the practice of reading and writing emerged through the process of reading, decoding, understanding, and solving the math problems. Similarly, Watanabe (2012) reported being able to connect with her student after developing materials that reflected her student’s interests.

Had the tutors received some training in writing instruction, they may have become more like Racelis and Matsuda’s (2015) L2 writing teachers. These instructors focused on developing ideas, made fewer cultural assumptions, and refrained from stressing grammar over content. For example, training in writing pedagogy may have given Stuart the opportunity to develop an alternative social identity other than the one ascribed to him (as a “mean tutor”). Furthermore, he might have even seen himself as a successful tutor to Scrapy rather than as a failed one. Training may also have helped him avoid the sense of helplessness that led him to email the volunteer coordinator for advice.

The present findings are not limited to cultural reproduction through writing instruction. They also speak to the complex ways in which public education has been seen to fail to reproduce
highly valued cultural standards (cf. Anyon, 1979; Willis, 1977). The tutors complained that reproduction of cultural and linguistic knowledge in public schools was somehow at risk and in need of fixing. For example, the tutors voiced their dissatisfaction with perceived weaknesses in the curriculum—that current thinking around literacy instruction was ill conceived and inadequate, that the educational needs of adolescent boys were not being properly supported, that proper grammar instruction was neglected, or that political correctness prevented teachers from correcting nonstandard English. Volunteer tutoring carried with it the right of noblesse oblige; part moral obligation, part cultural imperative. They tutored to help Pathways youth, whom they envisioned as having an impoverished future, as receiving a bad public education, and as putting the cultural and linguistic legacy of Canada in jeopardy.

**Contributions to theoretical perspectives on good writing and voice**

The findings also contribute to new ways of conceptualizing good writing and voice in L2 adolescent writers and open up opportunities for further research. The findings support previous research that participants believe good writing is clear, succinct, organized, and grammatical (Leki, 1995; Li, 1996; Reichelt, 2003). Like the teachers in these studies, the tutors and students all valued the writer’s textual presence and like Stewart (1992) valued writing with an authentic voice. While their definitions of voice varied slightly, the tutors’ and students’ descriptions of voice as something experienced by the reader supports earlier findings that voice appeals to the reader’s emotions and that it engages readers on a personal level (Jeffery, 2011; Zhao, 2012).

**Morality and control.** A problem seems to arise when voice is included as an integral part of good writing. Once framed within perceptions, standards, or writing rubrics, voice becomes ensnared with grammar, spelling, and punctuation and flattens out. It also becomes enmeshed with old narratives of morality—unique cultural attitudes that readers hold about legitimate and
illegitimate ways of living, writing, and speaking. In *Writing and Morality*, Lang (1991) argued that morality is instantiated at the sentence level. Violating simple rules of grammar, punctuation, and spelling suggests that more egregious violations are becoming committed elsewhere. In short, writers who cannot make their sentences behave cannot behave themselves:

Bad writing […] is bad not only as writing but because bad writing itself is bad, a force of wrong doing, related to other and more lurid ethical faults. Corporate and white-collar crime, lying in government, possibly the overt acts of social violence as well: these almost always involved deception, evasion, the will to get something for nothing, and they are usually committed by people who present to be what they are not and who do not know how to become it—precisely the conditions under which bad writing flourishes.

(Lang, 1991, pp. 11-12)

Studies in language socialization have documented how language serves to reinforce and regulate morality in language use, conduct, and attire among certain religious groups (see Fader, 2014). Similarly, in this study, seeing writing and writers through the lens of morality produced narratives about Standard English as the only legitimate version that is allowed to be transmitted from textbook to teacher to tutor. Writing is seen to reflect the intellectual, social, and moral standing of the individual writer. Again, the idea that writing is a bellwether for moral conduct is certainly not new (Cameron, 2012; Lang, 1991) and that maintaining the standard “is not likely to benefit the underprivileged, but to maintain the authority of the canon of correct English” is widespread (Milroy, 1999, p. 21).

Moral integrity was unquestionably part of the tutors’ and students’ attitudes towards good writing and featured prominently throughout the tutoring sessions. Writing became a way to teach students to mind their manners and behave, which included controlling their language as well as controlling their bodies (e.g., Stuart was agitated by “bad manners”). Caroline’s “proper
table manners” and her idea that literacy and writing was “a human good” can again be found in the words of Lanham (2007), “good prose […] is a duty […] and] is utilitarian and moral. Good prose, like cleanliness, must stand next to Godliness” (p. 22). Milroy (1999) observed, “language does not live in a moral universe, but speakers and writers do” (p. 21). The tutors and students believed that adhering to Standard English reflected honesty, being a good person, and a coherent thinker. Again, these moralizing pronouncements speak directly to Strunk and White (2000) who equated the quality of the writing with the quality of the person: “Style is the writer and therefore what you are, rather than what you know, will at last determine your style” (p.84).

Similarly, voice reflected the writer: his or her authenticity and truthfulness (Elbow, 1981). While Samantha saw voice as “talking the truth,” Joy recognized that her authenticity as a writer was at stake when she wrote for her teachers. Joy wanted to develop her vocabulary, but she knew too well that her teachers, like those in Li’s (1996) study, would see evidence of an erudite vocabulary as contrived and interfering with their idea of a teenage voice. Joy’s awareness of her extra-textual identity (Tardy, 2012b) mediated her decision to monitor her language and not to experiment with language, something Jeffery (2011) discovered high school teachers in her study knew was part of a teenage writer’s developmental process. As the idea of linguistic hegemony, or the dominance of one language or dialect over another, produces boundaries, deficient speakers, and badly educated students, I am reminded once again of authors like Payne, Orwell, and Strunk and White who assumed prescriptive language was common sense. When students come to see their English as substandard, as most did in the present research, they have accepted a deficit model of language promoted by the school, curriculum, principal, teachers, and tutors (see Cummins, 2003).

Voice also points to the extra-textual identity and produces anxiety. While many white teachers and tutors would like to think they are colorblind to race and ethnicity (Herrera &
Rodriguez, 2009; Marx, 2006; Sleeter, 1993) and may appear to take pride in multiculturalism and in the cache of ethnic and linguistic diversity of classrooms, they draw the line at multicultural ways of writing (Canagarajah, 2002; Kubota, 2003). For example, although he claimed he was colorblind, Stuart clearly had a bias when it came to voice and the sound of varied Englishes. He insisted, “Talking about bananas, using bananas as an example […] for a meal or something, just because you happen to be from Jamaica […], doesn’t mean you have a Jamaican voice,” adding, “God help me, we write in Ebonics!” Non-standard writing is an affront and interrupts the dream of the “imagined community” (Anderson, 2006), in which speakers and writers share one nation, one language, and, in this case, one way of writing. By connecting their Toronto to their students’ Toronto, as Caroline had aspired to do, the tutors’ language standards could be maintained and passed on intact. Language standardization suppresses diversity to yield conformity (Milroy & Milroy, 2012).

Transgressive usage and the bad subject. As contact zones (Pratt, 1991), St. Basil’s basement and the Pathways office became sites where tutors and students negotiated their beliefs about language and writing and their practical application of those beliefs. Voice emerged in the negotiations, tensions, and struggles around language, suggesting that voice potentially plays a role in defining and developing relationships between tutors and students. In other words, voice reflected the tutors’ relationships to the larger culture, history, social groups, and communities to which they belong, and at the same time it marked a boundary to others who want to join the culture, history, social group, and community in which membership is claimed. As a social construct, voice represents the interests of linguistic stakeholders. If language, Fairclough (2015) argued, “contributes to the domination of some people by others” (p. 46) without their knowing it, then voice is one way in which domination is mediated.
Again, adhering to standard language use reflects honesty, being a good person, and a coherent thinker. The application of voice and its role in socializing novice writers might be re-imagined as an institutionalized form of ‘symbolic revalorization’ (Woodard & Schieffelin, 1994) in which the way a person speaks or writes becomes the target of discrimination rather than, for example, their race or ethnicity. Taken one step further, in the interaction between expert and novice, voice is both an instance of symbolic revalorization and a form of symbolic violence, Bourdieu and Wacquant’s (1992) term for “violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (p. 167).

Symbolic violence was exercised whenever students tacitly accepted that their English was broken or inferior to their tutors’ English. Samantha’s experience learning Canadian English serves as a prime example of this form of violence. While she might have gained a new way of speaking and spelling since she arrived in Canada, Samantha lost some part of her home language and identity in the process. Standardization taught her to recognize her own English as bad, corrupt, and illegitimate. She sought to suppress her Jamaican English, labeling those unintentional lapses of code switching as “coming out.” She was not unlike Kulick and Schieffelin’s (2004) “bad subject” in those transgressive moments of coming out. Violence exists in the Ontario English Curriculum’s definition of voice and its assessment criteria (see Chapter 1). It serves less as a pedagogical guide and more of an ideological mandate to enforce linguistic conformity while simultaneously giving the writer the impression of freedom and flexibility to be distinctive, identifiable, or original. In some sense, voice gets caught in that boundary between recognizing and celebrating the language that students already bring to tutoring (Moll, et al., 1992) and seeing them as deficient—or difference-as-deficit (Canagarajah, 2002)—and in need of an infusion of the ‘right’ culture and ‘right’ language.
**Teaching writing is teaching voice.** An important contribution of this research is the conclusion that teaching writing is teaching voice. They are coterminous, not separate processes. To answer Elbow more succinctly, the nation, the larger culture, and institutions are more than just alive with voice; they are clearly saturated with it. Just as Duff and Uchida (1997) reported that the EFL teachers they interviewed were unaware of the extent to which they actually taught and engaged with culture, the tutors in this study were unaware of the extent to which they actually taught and engaged with voice. To support their findings, Duff and Uchida cited Kramsch (1993), who keenly observed, “Language teachers are so much teachers of culture that culture has often become invisible to them” (in Duff & Uchida, p. 472). By substituting “culture” with “voice,” the same may be said about the tutors as well. Voice permeated so much of what tutors did when they discussed writing and when they helped students develop their essays, reports, and poems that it became commonplace, familiar, and inconspicuous. It became clear that writing tutors and novice writers bring voice to their conversations with each other and that their voices are changed and reshaped by those conversations (Bakhtin, 1986; Ivanič, 1998; Ivanič & Camps, 2001). The widespread popularity of voice in education suggests that voice captures the imagination and reflects something of human psychology—of an individual’s desire to speak and be heard by others.

I am more than inclined to agree with Li (1996) that good writing “is a splice of multiple linguistic and nonlinguistic, cultural and historical strands; of what is written in a piece and the manner in which the piece is written; of ideology and aesthetic; of society and individuals” (p. 111). Embedded within that mess of ideology and aesthetic of manners and morals is the writer’s voice. Voice cannot be removed from the writing process anymore than grammar, punctuation, or spelling can be discarded from writing instruction or than developing claims, defining terms, or asserting a point of view can be removed from an essay. Writing instruction is inherently
ideological, and values, attitudes, and beliefs—those qualities so much associated with the idea of voice—emerge when people gather to read, talk, and write. In much the same way that language is used to socialize children into family, culture, and community (Fader, 2006; Howard, 2009; Kulick & Schieffelin, 2004; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984, 2014; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Schecter & Bailey, 1997), or students into academic ways of speaking (Duff, 1995) or writing (Casanave, 2002; Séror, 2009), voice is used to socialize students into including their opinion when speaking publically (Zappa-Hollman, 2007) or writing academically (Hyland, 2008).

I believe voice operates within a monolingual epistemology and has not lived up to its potential in an increasingly pluralingual world. As long as there is a controversy about language, power, and who has the authority to speak and be heard (Bourdieu, 1977), there will always be debates about voice. Writing is a political act (Clark & Ivanič, 1997; Orwell, 1945/1984) for which the current definitions of voice in commercial textbooks, curriculum guidelines, and in most scholarship have been largely inadequate. Voice has been sanitized; the ideological and political aspects of the concept have removed and replaced it with turgid or anodyne simplifications. I offer my own new definition of voice, one that acknowledges ideology and recognizes the power of the writer in creating text and of the reader in assigning meaning to a piece of writing: voice is a well-meaning, but purely ideological tool that is born out of constant and creative tension with other voices. It mediates a writer’s ability to speak and to be heard based on access to linguistic, cultural, or material resources, and it shifts and changes as access to resources shift. Voice exists only as long as the reader can claim to be engaged, connected, and enriched.

**Pedagogical Implications**

The idea that teaching writing is teaching voice offers teachers and tutors creative, engaging, and critical ways to explore voice—the intentions, attitudes, perspectives, and beliefs of the
writer and reader—in reading and writing and speaking. Seen as the primary responsibility of classroom writing teachers, voice is often overlooked in tutoring manuals, especially for L2 writers, which focus disproportionately on grammar. Reynolds (2009) is an exception, however. He addressed the use of voice in writing tutorials that provide L2 writing tutors with ways to address voice by helping students distinguish between the perspective of the author and the language that the author uses to convey perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs. In addition to helping tutors to identify perspective, tone, and style, Reynolds advised tutors to introduce students to voice at the sentence level by developing an awareness of words that convey a writer’s attitude such as using modal verbs, adverbials, evaluative words, and using first, second, or third person in writing. Reynolds suggested that having students compare and contrast articles from the editorial section in a newspaper is one way to examine shifts in voice.

While I see these as effective ways for tutors to engage students in developing an awareness of voice, I believe the process of addressing voice begins the first day a tutor and a student meet. That initial meeting represents a student’s first step towards developing a writer identity (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016). The cases in Chapters 4 and 5 showed that tutors and students engaged with voice each time they clashed with language, or struggled to argue their point, or silently accepted a correction. Tutors and students can turn these moments into learning opportunities and use them to reflect on what is important in helping the writer develop. Building this awareness of writing involves connecting with course materials, reflecting on past writing, teaching prewriting to develop ideas, and engaging the student in the editing process.

In his own study of voice in L2 writing, Canagarajah (2015) argued, “Teachers should think of themselves as facilitators of types of the negotiations students should undertake for their voice, not models or authorities. Teachers should also devise dialogical pedagogies that will make students more engaged in voice construction, turning ecological resources into positive
affordances” (p.137). I strongly believe building writer capital begins by helping the writer to engage with these affordances, that is, with the specific resources and materials including the assignments, rubrics, drafts, or ideas they bring with them to tutoring. To build critical reflection, novice writers benefit when tutors ask them to share their past experiences with writing, describe what they enjoy about writing, and clarify those areas of writing with which they struggle (Chandler-Olcott & Hinchman, 2005; Graves, 1983; Meyer & Smith, 1987). These processes create opportunities to discuss what good writing means to a student and what it means to develop a writer’s voice. For example, students like Joy would have the opportunity to share the importance of writing in their lives. Joy eagerly shared with me her classroom experiences with Ms. Mason and her tutoring sessions with Franny. The project even prompted Joy to return to class to ask Ms. Mason about her writer’s voice. She learned that she and Ms. Mason had different impressions of her writer’s voice. This moment was an epiphany for Joy as she realized for the first time that others also play a role in “fleshing out” her voice and that she did not always sound the way she thought she did. For students like Chris, talking about writing gave him the chance to explain what he is proud of and what he would like to develop further.

Helping writers develop independent writing skills also includes giving them the strategies and resources to generate their own ideas, approaches that have proven to be highly effective for adolescent writers (Applebee & Langer, 2013). The present tutors and students engaged in many of the same activities that Graham and Perin (2007) recommended for effective writing instruction. These activities included helping students to understand their writing assignments, plan their ideas, draw on their course readings, and practice their summarizing skills as well as revise and edit their writing. One of the more interesting examples of effective writing instruction, documented in Chapter 4, occurred when Stuart taught Natasha how to summarize *The Painted Door* by getting her first to describe in one word the purpose and function of the
tutoring room. In situations in which resources are scarce, using the tutoring space to teach writing was not only creative, but proved highly effective.

Tutors can also support classroom writing teachers by helping students understand the assignment. Stuart learned that asking a student to show him the assignment guidelines in advance makes for a more productive tutoring session. Caroline liked to reverse roles and get students to explain essay topics and concepts to her. For beginning writers, tutors might ask students to read the assignment guidelines aloud to check reading skills and then summarize or paraphrase the purpose of the assignment to check reading comprehension. Reading and discussing the assignment also gives tutors the opportunity to ask students about what kind of writing they have been doing in class and how students have been performing on previous writing assignments. Lastly, if available, tutors may also ask to see the assessment rubric to determine if students know how they are going to be evaluated.

The benefits of prewriting have also been advanced in L1 composition theory (Elbow, 1981; Graves, 1994) and in adult ESL writing (Shi, 1998); it is an effective tool to engage high school writers in structured collaborative writing (Morris, 2012) and one-on-one writing conferences (McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001; Reynolds, 2009). In a writing tutorial, tutors can engage students in seasoned writing practices such as brainstorming or free writing (Elbow, 1981) in which students take a few minutes to write continuously about anything that comes to mind without worrying about grammar, spelling, or punctuation (for a review of empirical studies on the effects of free writing see Hayes, 2006). Although no research exists (that I am aware of) to establish the benefits of prewriting on lined versus unlined paper, Stuart argued that lined paper limits thought by forcing writers to produce a final product, while unlined paper frees writers up to write, create, and explore their thoughts without being distracted by lines and margins. Tutors
may wish first to demonstrate to students how to brainstorm, mind map, or free write, and later they might even join the student in prewriting so they both can share in the experience of writing.

In this study, students shared with me their past and current writing samples—essays, reports, or papers that their teachers marked. In one case, I was able to share with Stuart the feedback Natasha’s teacher gave her on an essay he had helped her write. Stuart enjoyed reading Natasha’s final draft and appreciated the opportunity to read the teacher’s comments, something he often complained about being unable to do with other students. If students are able to share their writing with their teacher’s feedback, tutors can better grasp the kind of challenges their students are having with writing and observe how their classroom teacher is using the assessment rubric. Further, asking the student to reflect on past and current assignments (e.g., what they did well and why and what they might do differently) is a necessary step toward writer autonomy and is what Ferris and Hedgcock (2014) argued is a critical component in helping writers develop greater awareness of their composing processes.

Implications for Tutor Identity and Tutor Training

In addition to contributing to implications for working with students, the findings yield practical implications for understanding what it could potentially mean to develop a writing tutor identity and to become effective writing tutors through volunteer training. While recent publications have recognized that tutors and students bring disparate identities to writing sessions—use of Standard English, learning styles, ethnicity, class, and sexuality (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016)—others have focused on the various roles volunteer tutors can be expected to fulfill—form mentoring relationships, manage resistance, and build confidence (Chandler-Olcott & Hinchman, 2005; Cumming, 2012; Meyer & Smith, 1987).
Unfortunately, unlike for classroom teachers, there is no officially mandated list of qualifications or credentials for afterschool volunteer writing tutors and no prerequisite subject area knowledge requirements of which I am aware. The only specific expectation (or assumption) I came across was that writing tutors should be readers and writers themselves (Chandler-Olcott & Hinchman, 2005). These authors encouraged writing tutors to reinforce the importance of reading and writing with their students and to share how they themselves use reading and writing in their everyday lives. The findings from the present case studies showed that Stuart, Franny, Nigel, and Caroline were all avid readers and writers and that they discussed literature, movies, and writing with their students. The present findings also suggested that tutoring sessions might be more productive if tutors bring strong interpersonal skills such as listening attentively and praising students and strong analytical skills, as they are more likely to facilitate successful sessions, than exhibiting a thorough knowledge of grammar alone (Gillespie & Lerner, 2004).

It very important to note that as most volunteer writing tutors are not trained writing teachers, literacy programs cannot expect their volunteers to have extensive knowledge of rhetoric and composition, learning styles and strategies, and linguistics that seasoned L1 or L2 writing teachers would be expected to have when entering the classroom. Instead, afterschool tutoring programs like Pathways often leave it up to the individual volunteer to self-identify relevant skill sets. Even then, tutors are frequently called on to assist in subject areas that are not in their area of expertise. Given the nature of volunteer tutoring, I hesitate to generalize as to the specific qualifications a writing tutor should bring to tutoring adolescents. Other than having an interest in working with students, having previous experience writing essays, poems, and reports and having a positive attitude towards writing can make for a productive session for both the tutor and the student.
In their position statement on writing, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) outlined what it believes are the social, pedagogical, and cognitive benefits of writing and writing instruction (see NCTE, 2015). I believe that these principles not only serve as useful (and accessible!) guidelines for training pre- and in-service writing teachers, but also for training writing tutors. Similar to Graham and Perin’s (2007) study, many of NCTE’s beliefs about writing were reflected not only in the present tutors’ beliefs about writing and in their approaches to working with the students, but also in students’ beliefs about working with the tutors. Some of those beliefs and values included understanding that writing is a process (Murray, 2009; Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006), that it is a tool for developing thought (Flower & Hayes, 1980; McCutchen, Teske, & Bankson, 2008), and that it can be successfully taught (Graham, 2006; Graham & Perin, 2007). Perhaps most importantly, NCTE observed that writing is a complex social practice involving relationships between writers and the contexts in which they write and between writers and the audience for whom they write. Their belief that writing involves building and respecting social relationships clearly highlights the students’ perspective about tutoring. As tutors spend a considerable amount of direct face time with students and occupy a special place between the teacher and student (Harris, 1995), they are in an ideal position to build a supportive, caring environment to help students become autonomous writers (Cumming, 2012). This relationship includes getting students to talk about their ideas, helping them to reflect on their struggles with writing, and assisting them to develop awareness of audience expectations beyond the classroom teacher. It also includes respecting the students’ uses of language (including home dialect) and teaching students that they can move between different languages without giving up either one of them.

Tutoring writing across the curriculum, in the workplace, and at home have been given scholarly attention (McAndrew & Reigstad, 2001) and the advantages well established for
improving literacy among children (Ritter, Barnett, Denny, & Albin, 2009) and adolescents (Jun, Ramirez, & Cumming, 2010). Afterschool tutoring programs can indeed be ideal places for students to develop their writing and to mature into autonomous writers—provided that tutors, like classroom teachers, receive adequate and sustained program support and opportunities for professional development throughout the duration of their tutoring engagement (Graham & Perin, 2007). Based on the present findings, I would recommend supporting tutor training by helping volunteers to (a) view tutoring as a dialogical practice; (b) receive ongoing support; (c) be informed about useful writing resources; (d) know about language ideology and cultural orientations towards writing (McBee Orzulak, 2013; Severino, 1993); and (e) approach feedback from an informed perspective (Goldstein, 2005).

First, it is important to help new volunteers see tutoring writing not as a top-down exercise from expert to novice (Duff & Talmy, 2011), but rather as a dialectical and transformative enterprise in which both tutors and students learn from each other (e.g., Canagarajah, 2015; Cumming, 2012). Recognizing the benefits of this form of bidirectionality to both volunteers and students requires an effective tutor orientation and ongoing commitment to tutor development, especially in demanding areas of tutoring such as L2 writing. In the present study, students learned about history, brainstorming, metaphors, and editing from their tutors, among other things; tutors learned about different languages, cultures, and traditions by working with the students. More importantly, they also learned about themselves as tutors—namely, their assumptions about learning, their expectations about how a student should act, sit, and speak during tutoring, and how their strategies helped their students to become stronger more independent writers. In addition, the moments of frustration were learning opportunities for volunteers to grow into becoming more effective writing tutors to handle more complex situations.
A second way to support tutors’ ongoing training is to marshal tutors’ input through periodic questionnaires, focus groups, and online discussion forums, for example. This approach could bring together tutors’ expertise, experience, and input in a systematic way to document struggles, challenges, and successful tutoring events. Documented examples could prepare future volunteers who might be first-time tutors or tutors unfamiliar with the high school curriculum, tutoring writing, working with ELLs, or helping students with special needs. Moreover, this knowledge could also help current tutors work more effectively with students and build stronger connections with fellow tutors over time.

For example, Franny noted one of the best ways tutors could prepare for tutoring at Pathways would be to reread some of the classic texts students usually encounter in school (e.g., *Romeo and Juliet*, *Of Mice and Men*, *King Lear*, *Lord of the Flies*). Supporting volunteers by providing them with the required reading lists and typical writing assignments (e.g., argumentative essays, poems, transliterations, term papers) ahead of time would give tutors the opportunity to prepare for the types of questions, problems, and situations they and their students might encounter.

Third, promote resource support. Although many tutors may be strong writers, theories of process writing (Emig, 1971; Murray, 2009) are likely unfamiliar to them as are effective ways to generate topics such as free writing, prioritizing feedback, or discussing grammar. Introducing tutors to online writing sites (e.g., Purdue Online Writing Lab) and education-based writing materials would help to improve their understanding of the writing process and give them new resources to share with their students. Raimes and Miller-Cochran (2015) authored one such text that, although written for undergraduates, targets both L1 and L2 writers. Raimes and Miller-Cochran introduce novice writers to the research process, expose them to various forms of academic writing, and, most importantly, foreground a writer’s voice as part of building critical thinking. Stuart, Caroline, and Joy addressed the importance of dictionaries in reading and
writing development. Access to dictionaries and thesauruses, and practice with using them effectively, could support writing development by helping students to learn academic vocabulary, check spelling, and verify word meanings (Folse, 2004; Nation, 2001). In addition to learning how to use monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, bilingualized dictionaries (i.e., hybrid dictionaries with lexical entries in the L2 and clarifications and descriptions in the L1) may also be helpful for some students (see Folse, 2004).

Fourth, introduce tutors to language ideologies and ways students might struggle with orientations toward writing. During this study, I attended a two-hour workshop for Pathways volunteers on anti-racism and anti-oppression. While meant to give an overview of critical issues on oppression and race, the facilitator, an outside consultant, managed to touch on issues in equity, social justice, and whiteness in Canada. The most important thing she asked our group to remember was that oppression is not bound by time and space; it exists in all contexts. While the workshop was informative, it was not geared towards tutoring, or to the tutoring sites (“the contact zone”) where volunteers spent their time. There was also a missed opportunity to address issues in standard written English and language ideologies (McBee Orzulak, 2013), which is important for writing tutors working with ELLs as well as with students who may speak or write varieties of English not recognized in school (e.g., African American Vernacular, Caribbean English, and other forms of International English usage).

Tutors should be given the opportunity to reflect on how culture influences their own beliefs, attitudes, and values about language (Duff & Uchida, 1994) and writing and to realize that feedback can be political (Severino, 1993; Séror, 2008, 2009). Introducing tutors to concepts about alternative forms of English, such as Kubota (2001) did when she introduced a high school class in North Carolina to World Englishes, can give tutors a greater understanding of the varieties of English both spoken and written. While I agree with Delpit (2006) that introducing
standard language is important, explicit correction of second-dialect speakers’ spoken English should be approached cautiously. For example, rather than telling students that there is only one “correct” or “right” way of pronouncing a word, tutors can ask students instead if they have heard that particular word pronounced in another way, and, if so, in which contexts. This approach invites tutors and students to explore register and to “use the new code in an unthreatening, real communicative context” (Delpit, 2006, p. 53) and encourages them to consider which contexts (e.g., school, home, and community) might be best suited for particular ways of speaking. It is an effective way to explore linguistic differences and a respectful way to address pronunciation. I believe that teaching students to add to their linguistic repertoire, rather than subtract from it, is far more empowering.

Introducing tutors to the struggles that newcomers face in learning to write essays gives them much needed insight into different epistemological and cultural ways of viewing knowledge, ownership, and voice in writing. As I noted earlier, Shen’s (1989) struggle to shift voice—from “We” to “I” in his academic writing—captured the struggle many novice writers have in developing an opinion that is their own, that is “just write what you think” (p. 460). While tutors like Stuart encouraged students to write what they think and believe, this can be a struggle for L1 and L2 writers alike.

Lastly, supporting L2 writers through written feedback is one of the most important areas of writing and one of the most extensively researched (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Ferris, 1997, 1999, 2003, 2011; Goldstein, 2001, 2005; Hyland, 2000). The tutors at Pathways often faced students who waited to write a paper until the night before the assignment was due. Students were frustrated and anxious, and tutors felt pressured to edit for the student to save time. Tutors need to read with their pencils down (Linville, 2009; Reynolds, 2009) and instead ask the students to read their papers aloud (Ferris, 2008). Tutors need to comment when the text stops
making sense: “Where a student’s meaning is not clear, either at the sentence or text level, is where we need to begin our commentary” (Goldstein, 2005, p. 74). Tutors should learn to address global errors (e.g., purpose, thesis, structure, and organization) first, followed by sentence level errors (grammar, word choice, and punctuation). Teaching students to identify their own errors (for strategies see Ferris, 2007) and indirect forms of error correction (e.g., underlining the error) keep the student in control of the writing and keep the tutor from getting overly invested in the draft (Severino, 2009). Recent textbooks for teaching adolescent writers how to revise, including how to revise for voice, are Gilmore (2007) and Borgese, Heyler, & Romano (2012). Similar to Stuart’s cautionary advice to write to avoid being misunderstood, these authors raise adolescent writers’ awareness about their rhetorical choices and encourage them to reflect on the reader’s needs and expectations.

**Opportunities for Future Research**

In discussions about teaching or tutoring writing, scholars and educators need to address what good writing means. Of course, a writer’s voice needs to be part of that discussion because writers and readers create voice in their struggle to produce and reconstruct meaning. As writing classrooms and tutoring halls become more diverse and technological resources more common, scholars have renewed opportunities to understand voice, including tutors’ and students’ attitudes towards it, its role as a criterion in writing assessment, and its use among raters in language proficiency exams (Matsuda & Jeffery, 2012). Arguments that suggest that voice is unnecessary or useless in L1 or L2 writing (Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Stapleton, 2002) fail to understand the complexities involved in writing processes in afterschool tutoring programs, writing centers, and writing classrooms. In her comments at the American Association of Applied Linguistics in 2015, Lourdes Ortega stressed, “writing is ferociously situated” and that writing researchers must “look at writing in unusual places” in order to understand what happens
when people write. There is nothing more ferociously situated than learning to write in the basement of a church. Qualitative methods used to understand L2 writing practices (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999a) have provided researchers with a more nuanced understanding of writer identity (Casanave, 2003), student-teacher writing conferences (Gilliand, 2014), curriculum and placement (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995), and professors’ written feedback (Séror, 2009) than have traditional intervention-based studies. Based on the findings from this project, I have identified some future areas for voice research in tutoring programs and high school writing classrooms.

**Tutoring programs**

Afterschool tutoring programs provide ideal contexts to observe how novice writers collaborate with tutors to develop their writing skills. Future research investigating how writing tutors at other sites around Toronto and elsewhere understand good writing and voice could provide intelligent ways of analyzing how the concept is realized in different contexts. Pathways to Education Canada started “Graduation Nation,” an initiative to continue replicating the Regent Park model in additional provinces across Canada. The program now serves 15 sites in four provinces. Looking at how good writing and voice are conceptualized in these different sites would provide insights into the similarities in which language standards are viewed, but also highlight differences among sites, as to how tutors see their roles and how students understand their own writing. Research from these sites could also provide possible comparisons with research in writing-center studies among undergraduates and peer tutors at colleges and universities.
**High school writing classrooms**

Future research on good writing and voice could include both survey and classroom-based research to appreciate better how teachers and tutors and their students understand voice. First, conducting survey-based research across Ontario among secondary school teachers would provide insights into what good writing and voice mean to English educators as well as how their teacher education programs prepared them to teach and assess the elements of good writing and voice. The results would also identify teachers, schools, and programs that engage this concept in meaningful ways to allow in-depth, qualitative studies to explore how teachers and students define, discuss, and look for good writing and voice in readings and in students’ writing. These findings would provide educational policy makers in Ontario with a better informed and more grounded understanding of how those who are teaching writing and those who are expected to write with voice understand and act on this concept.

Looking at voice across Ontario provides opportunities to look at how voice is conceptualized in other provinces across Canada. Reviewing the English curriculum guidelines across Canada, I found that Ontario is the only province to identify, define, and operationalize voice. Further research into how English language educators in western Canada, the prairies, Quebec, and the Maritimes might address this concept in their students’ writing would further enrich how this concept is understood among English teachers across the country. In addition, given the global circulation of English textbooks and writing resources, studies that look at voice from an international, comparative perspective would bring together different points of view to help educators and writing specialists engage with voice in more dynamic ways in their classroom pedagogy and would contribute enormously to researchers’ understanding of this complex and illusive concept.
**L2 writing tutor identity**

Lastly, given the limited research in L2 writing teacher identity, future research into how adult volunteers develop a writing tutor identity would help researchers and literacy program directors understand why people decide to volunteer to teach writing and how they can be trained to become more effective writing tutors. I am interested in looking further at the beliefs about language and writing that volunteer tutors bring with them to tutoring and how their experiences have shaped their attitudes towards writing and writing development. Interview-based research, case studies, or longitudinal ethnographies of specific tutoring sites would complement work in L2 writing teacher identity (Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Lee, 2013; Racelis & Matsuda, 2015) or peer tutoring identities (Gillespie & Lerner, 2004; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016).

**Concluding Remarks**

This research started with a drawing by K-9—a barren mountain and a description of how writing allowed him to be creative and made him feel good. It sparked a curiosity in me to ask what good writing and a writer’s voice meant to the Pathways tutors and students and to see how ‘alive’ Elbow had claimed voice is in everyday practice. The tutor and students taught me a lot about these concepts and gave me new inspiration for future research. I learned that behind their answers socialization was alive in the need to control language, affirm the standard dialect, and secure a cultural legacy for the future. After all, why would it be so important for Caroline to want to connect her “old Toronto and their (future) Toronto”? Jacques Barzun cleverly remarked, “The state of the mother tongue is in fact the index of our control over destiny” (in Lanham, 2007, p. 169).

Aside from the practice of enforcing standards and leaving linguistic legacies, beliefs about good writing and voice exist for another purpose. I believe that writers want an audience and
readers want to know they are connecting with someone behind the words on the page. I strongly disagree with David Coleman’s remark that students must recognize that “people don’t give a shit about what [they] think or what [they] feel” (Tyre, 2012, p. 28). If this were true, there would be no editorial, op-eds, blogs, or research articles. Asking students what they thought was the tutors way to build trust and to teach students to think independently. It was critical to connecting as well. Further, for students like Joy, finding voice was her way to connect to reading and writing; it helped her to understand, engage, and develop her own ideas, reactions, and perspectives. It was this attitude, for example, that compelled her to rewrite a story’s ending if she did not like it and insert her own version. Scrappy remarked that Stuart did more than make him a writer; rather, he helped him to become a writer by striving to connect with him and by never giving up on him.

Writing begins as a reaction to thought and as a response to other voices. Writers grow in the process of writing. Readers grow in reaction to reading. Voice is there precisely to keep what writers think and feel alive. Good writing and voice are, after all, about connecting to one another. Without it, writers will have nothing to say; readers nothing to hear.
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Appendix A

Tutors wanted for Writing study!

Have you ever helped students with their writing, grammar, or vocabulary?

If yes, then this study might interest you!

I am a Pathways tutor and a PhD student in Second Language Education at UT. I am doing my thesis research on student writing. My focus will be on the process through which students at Pathways, with the help of their tutors, develop good writing skills.

Volunteers who participate in this study will be given a $25 gift card to a local bookstore and an opportunity to attend a free workshop on teaching writing to multilingual writers in autumn of 2011.

To learn more, please contact me at [Email address1] or [Email address2] or [Phone number] or [Name] at [Phone number], or by email at [Email address]

Robert Kohls, PhD Candidate
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Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6

Google Images 2011
January 25, 2011

Greetings fellow literacy tutors!

My name is Robert Kohls and I am a tutor at Pathways to Education and a PhD student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. I am writing to you because I would like to invite you to participate in a research project I am conducting on adolescent writing.

**Description of the research project**

Understanding how high school students develop their writing skills is an important part of schooling and a primary concern of afterschool tutoring programs. This is especially true as students prepare for high stakes exams (e.g., the grade 10 Ontario literacy test) or for the writing that is expected of them in college or university.

I am interested in learning about how students at Pathways develop good writing skills with the help of their literacy tutors and how their own unique identities are reflected in what they write. The name of my project is “Sacred Spaces and Socialization: Tutoring Writing and Appropriating Voice in an Inner City Church Basement,” and it will fulfill part of my requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). I am conducting my research under the supervision of [name], a professor in Second Language Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). My research topic has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Toronto and by the administration of Pathways to Education, Canada.

**My background**

I am a PhD student in Second Language Education at OISE/UT and a teacher with over ten years of experience teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) from around the world. I have been involved with Pathways since 2008 as a tutor and materials developer. I have helped to create a manual of tutoring activities for new tutors and co-produced a video on reading and
writing strategies for tutors. I have also taught an academic writing workshop for Pathways’ students in grades 9 through 11, so some of your students may know me already.

**What participation in this study involves**

I understand that you will be paired with one or two students over the academic year. With your consent and the consent of the student and his or her parents, I would like to observe you and one or two of your students work on various writing assignments (e.g., essays, book reports) at one of Pathways’ tutoring sites in Regent Park. By observing these sessions, I will be able to see how writing instruction unfolds and how the student’s writing develops over the semester as a result of that instruction. These observations will be audio recorded. I would also like to photograph the writing samples your student brings to the tutoring session as well as any additional notes that you use to help your student understand any aspect of writing (e.g., essay writing, English grammar, or vocabulary development).

In addition, I would like to interview you three separate times over the semester (in January, March, and May) about tutoring writing. These interviews will take around 45-60 minutes each. I will arrange the times with you at your convenience. Interviews will be held at the Pathways to Education—Regent Park office [address].

**What are the benefits and risks to participating?**

By participating in this study, you will have the opportunity to help students think deeply about their writing process. You will also have the opportunity to reflect on and share your own practices as a writing tutor and your beliefs about writing and teaching writing. Also, by participating you will further our knowledge of how adolescents develop their writing skills outside of school and what tutors can do to facilitate learning. You will also be helping Pathways determine better ways to support tutors’ needs and help students achieve academic success.

To show my appreciation for your full participation in this study, I will offer you a $25 gift card to a local bookstore (awarded at the end of the study) and an opportunity to attend a free workshop on teaching writing to multilingual writers in autumn 2011.

There are no particular risks associated with this study other than what you would normally experience during an evening of tutoring at Pathways. Although I will write about these interviews in my doctoral thesis and perhaps in some articles published in scholarly journals, I will keep all information about you private and confidential. Pseudonyms will be used instead of real names in storing and reporting the data. This research is not part of a school program. What you communicate to me will not be shared with your student(s), their parents, or with Pathways to Education. Information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and on a password-protected computer in my home office in Toronto for ten years and then destroyed.

If you feel uncomfortable being recorded during your tutoring sessions, please let me know and I will turn the recorder off. If you feel uncomfortable during the interviews, please let me know and we will stop.

You do not have to participate in this research; participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the research for any reason at any time or refuse to answer any of my questions. I will offer you, your students, their parents, and Pathways a report of my research in January 2012.
How can you give consent?

If you agree to participate in this research, please sign and date the consent form on the next page and return to [name], the Academic Support Coordinator, at Pathways. Keep this page and the previous page for your personal information. If you do not agree to participate, then you do not have to do anything.

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me directly or my supervisor, [name] or at [phone number]. Should you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto at [phone number] or [email address]. You may also contact [name], Academic Support Coordinator, at Pathways to Education, Canada, [address]. [Phone number], or by email at [email address]. Your participation in this research would be greatly valued and appreciated!

Kindest regards,

Robert Kohls, PhD Candidate
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6
Email: [Email address1]
Phone: [Phone number]
Consent form for tutors

I have read and understood Robert Kohls’ letter of January 25, 2011, and I agree to participate in his research study in adolescent writing. He has explained in writing the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do and how much time it will take. I have had the opportunity to get additional information regarding the study. My questions have been answered and I know I can ask more questions about the research later. I understand that I can say no and that I may withdraw from the research study at any time without any negative consequences.

Your name: ____________________________________________________________

__________________________________________

Signature                                                                                                     Today’s date

Would you like a written report of my research in January 2012? ___ Yes ___ No
January 25, 2011

Greetings Pathways Student!

My name is Robert Kohls and I am a tutor at Pathways to Education and a PhD student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. I am writing to you because I would like to invite you to participate in a research project I am conducting on adolescent writing.

Description of the research project

You’ve probably learned from your high school teachers that knowing how to write well is important both to succeed in school and in life. This is especially true as you enter high school and prepare for the writing section of the Ontario literacy exams (grade 10) or as you prepare for the writing you will be expected to do in college or university. I am interested in learning about how your writing develops with the help of your tutor from Pathways to Education.

The name of my project is “Sacred Spaces and Socialization: Tutoring Writing and Appropriating Voice in an Inner City Church Basement,” and it will fulfill part of my requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). I am conducting my research under the supervision of [Name], a professor in Second Language Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). My research topic has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Toronto and by the administration of Pathways to Education, Canada.

What participation in this study involves

I will ask you and about six other students from Pathways to be involved in my study. I would like to observe you and your tutor work on your writing assignments (e.g., essays, book reports) at Pathways from January 2011 to June 2011. By observing these sessions, I will be able to see the kind of writing instruction you receive and how your writing develops over the semester as a result of that instruction. These observations will be audio recorded. I would also like to photograph the writing samples that you bring to the tutoring session as well as any additional notes that the tutor uses to help you explain essay writing, English grammar, or vocabulary development, for example.
In addition, at certain times over the semester, I will interview you about your writing (e.g., changes and revisions made) and about the feedback you have received from your tutor. These interviews will take place three times (in January, March, and May) at the Pathways to Education—Regent Park office [address] in sessions of about 45-60 minutes each. I will arrange the times with you at your convenience.

**What are the benefits and risks to participating?**

By participating in this study, you will have the opportunity to think deeply about your writing process and to ask questions about writing and about becoming a better writer. Also, you will further our knowledge of how adolescents develop their writing skills outside of school and what tutors can do to facilitate learning. You will also be helping Pathways determine better ways to support tutors’ needs and help students achieve academic success. If you complete the full research study, you will also receive a $25 gift card to a local bookstore (awarded following the research study) and an opportunity to attend free writing workshops in autumn 2011.

Please be assured that there are no particular risks associated with this research other than what you usually experience at tutoring. This research is not part of a school program, so no teachers will know about your participation, and school grades will not be affected. The results of this study will not be used to evaluate you. Information about you will be private and confidential. Pseudonyms (or made-up names) will be used instead of real names in storing and reporting the data. Information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and on a password-protected computer in my home office in Toronto for ten years and then destroyed.

Remember, if you feel uncomfortable being recorded during your tutoring sessions, please let me know and I will turn the recorder off. If you feel uncomfortable during the interviews, please let me know and we will stop.

Although I will write about these interviews in my doctoral thesis and perhaps in some articles published in scholarly journals, I will keep all information about you private and confidential. I will not tell any teachers about your involvement in the research, so your participation will not affect your grades in school. Similarly, your parents or guardians will not know what you tell me. You do not have to participate in this research; participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the research for any reason at any time or refuse to answer any of my questions. I will offer you, your parents, and Pathways a report of my research in January 2012.

If you agree to participate in this research, please sign and date the consent form on the next page and return to [name], the Academic Support Coordinator, at Pathways. Keep this page and the previous page for your personal information. If you do not agree to participate, then you do not have to do anything.

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me directly or my supervisor, [name] or at [phone number]. Should you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto at [phone number] or [email address]. You may also contact [name], Academic Support Coordinator, at Pathways to Education, Canada, [address]. [Phone number], or by email at [email address]. Your participation in this research would be greatly valued and appreciated!

Kindest regards,
Robert Kohls, PhD Candidate
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6
Email: [Email address1]
Phone: [Phone number]
Appendix E

Assent form for students

I have read and understood Robert Kohls’ letter of January 25, 2011, and I agree to participate in his research study on adolescent writing. He has explained in writing the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and how much time it will take. I have had the opportunity to get additional information regarding the study. My questions have been answered and I know I can ask more questions about the research later. I understand that I can say no and that I may withdraw from the research study at any time without any negative consequences.

Your name:
__________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________                                          ________________________
Signature                                                                                                        Today’s date

Would you like a written report of my research in January 2012? ___ Yes ___ No
Appendix F

Tutor Questionnaire

Instructions [Robert]: Please provide the following information, which I will use to analyze the results of my research. I will keep this information confidential and not report your name or identity. I will read the questions and will write down your answers as we speak.

1. Name

2. Date of birth

3. What language(s) do you usually speak, read or write at home?
   Language 1
   Language 2
   Language 3

4. People in Canada come from a lot of different racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic groups. Which particular group or groups do you feel you belong to?
   [Follow up: Are you involved in this community? What kind of activities are you involved in? Is this very important to you? Why do you feel an affinity for this group? Can you give me some examples?]

5. Do you live or have you lived in Regent Park?

6. What is your educational background (college, university, postgraduate)?

7. Can you tell me about your parents’ education?
   Did your mother complete elementary school?_____ high school?_______college or university?_______
   Did your mother complete elementary school?_____ high school?_______college or university?_______

8. What is your profession?
9. How long have you been tutoring at Pathways? Which subjects?

10. Have you tutored or taught anywhere else?

11. What has been one of the most challenging aspects of tutoring writing?

12. Describe a time when you were working with a student on his or her writing that you felt went particularly well.

   [Follow up: What made it successful? Similarly, describe a time that you felt did not go so well. What made it challenging? How did you resolve the situation?]
Appendix G

Student Questionnaire

Instructions [Robert]: Please provide the following information, which I will use to analyze the results of my research. I will keep this information confidential and not report your name or identity. I will read the questions and will write down your answers as we speak.

1. Your name is

2. Your date of birth was

3. What languages do people usually speak, read, or write at home?
   Language 1
   Language 2
   Language 3

4. People in Canada come from a lot of different racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic groups. Which particular group or groups do you feel you belong to?
   [Follow up: Are you involved in this community? What kind of activities are you involved in? Is this very important to you? Why do you feel an affinity (a liking/closeness) for this group? Can you give me some examples?]

5. Do you live or have you lived in Regent Park?

6. Which school are you going to now? What grade are you now in?

7. Can you tell me about your parents’ education?
   Did your mother complete elementary school?_____ high school?_______college or university?_______
   Did your mother complete elementary school?_____ high school?_______college or university?_______
8. Which classes did you take this past autumn? One you last report card, what grades did you get for each of these courses?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Your grade</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>a.</td>
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9. Please describe for me what kind of writing you do in school.

10. In general, how good a writer do you think you are?
Appendix H

Tutor Interview 1

Instructions [Robert]: Thank you for participating in this interview. First, I am going to ask you a few questions about good writing and a writer’s voice. Next, I want to ask you to read a couple of student essays and answer some questions about them.

1. What is good writing?

   [Alternatively/Follow up: Can you give me two or three examples of what a piece of writing has to have to be well written? Describe something (book, article, short story) that you think is well written.]

2. How do you help a student improve a piece of writing?

3. If a teacher writes on a student’s paper, “I can hear your voice in this piece of writing,” what do you think s/he means?

4. How do you know who wrote what you’re reading (if the author’s name is not on the page)? For example, how do you know if something was written by Alice Munro and not by Michael Ondaatje?

   [Follow up question: What does voice consist of?]

5. What are some ways you can help a student develop his or her writing voice?

6. In what ways do you think your identity influences how you respond to or comment on a piece of student writing? Give examples.

7. How would you describe your approach to giving feedback to students on their writing (e.g., what do you look for or comment on first)?

8. In what ways has Pathways to Education or your previous experience prepared you to work with students on their writing?
Appendix I

Student Interview 1
Instructions [Robert]: Thank you for participating in this interview. First, I am going to ask you a few questions about good writing and a writer’s voice. Next, I want to ask you to read a couple of student essays and answer some questions about them.

1. **What is good writing?**
   [Follow up: Name something you read that you thought was well written. Tell me what made it well written.]

2. **Describe your best piece of writing. What made it “the best”?**

3. **If your teacher says to you, “I can really hear your voice in this piece of writing,” what do you think s/he means?**

4. **In what ways can you hear a writer’s voice in a piece of writing?**
   [Follow up questions: What does voice sound like? Is it important to write with a voice? What do you think it is?]

5. **Describe a piece of writing you’ve done recently that had your own voice?**
   [Follow up: What aspects of your own personality come out in your writing? or How can your teacher or friend identify that a particular essay was written by you?]

6. **Different tutors comment on your writing in different ways. Gives examples of how this happened to you.**

7. **How are your tutor’s comments on your writing at Pathways similar to or different from your teacher’s comments at school?**
Appendix J

Tutor Interview 2

Instructions [Robert]: Thank you for participating in this second interview. First, I am going to ask you a few questions about your tutoring sessions so far, about writing, and about a writer’s voice. Next, I want to ask you to read a couple of student essays and answer some questions about them.

1. What are your impressions of your tutoring sessions with _______ so far?

2. Name three ways have you encouraged good writing practices with your student(s)?

3. In our first interview, you defined (or described) voice as

__________________________________________________________________________

You also said you can help a student develop voice by

__________________________________________________________________________

Has your definition changed? (If so, how would you describe it? If not, why not?)

4. Name three ways you have encouraged your student(s) to develop voice.

5. In what ways do you think your own beliefs about language and good writing have contributed to your own writer’s voice?

(Alternatively: How is your writer’s voice (or how you write) a product of your own values about language?)

6. The Ontario writing curriculum defines ‘voice’ for Grades 9-12 as “the style or character of a piece of writing conveyed through the author's use of
vocabulary, sentence structure, imagery, rhythm, and other elements that contribute to the mood of the piece as a whole."

[Provide sample text and (Robert) read aloud; check comprehension]

Let's look at a student's piece of writing. What would you describe as the voice in this piece?

7. Your student produced this piece of writing while working with you. What did you comment on?

(Follow up: What would you say the voice is in this piece?)

8. What would you describe as your student's voice (as it appears in the writing you've seen or in the pieces they have shared with you)?

9. Are there ways in which your own voice has contributed to your student's voice (e.g., through discussions on language, content or feedback on writing)?
Appendix K

Tutee Interview 2

Instructions [Robert]: Thank you for participating in this second interview. First, I am going to ask you a few questions about your tutoring sessions so far, about writing, and about your writer’s voice. Next, I want to ask you some questions about one or two pieces of your writing. And, finally I want you to read a student essay and answer some questions about it.

1. What are your impressions of your tutoring sessions so far?

[Follow up: What’s good? What’s bad?]

2. Name three ways your tutor has encouraged good writing practices with you.

3. In our first interview, you described voice (or your own voice) as

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Has your definition changed? If so, how would you describe it? If not, why not?

4. The Ontario writing curriculum defines ‘voice’ for grades 9-12 as "the style or character of a piece of writing conveyed through the author’s use of vocabulary, sentence structure, imagery, rhythm, and other elements that contribute to the mood of the piece as a whole."

[Provide sample text and (Robert) read aloud; check comprehension]

Look at this student sample. What would you describe as the voice in this piece?
5. **Next, let’s look at a writing sample you produced. What would you describe as your voice in this piece of writing?** (Alternatively, how would someone know this is something you wrote rather than your tutor, or you friend?)

(If difficult try other possible options: Are there words that only you would have chosen? Many people have favorite vocabulary words that they use a lot (e.g., all my sentences begin with “it is”).

6. **Did your tutor comment on this piece? What did he or she write or say?**

7. **In which way has your tutor’s feedback on your writing contributed to your own voice?**
Appendix L

Tutor Interview #3

Instructions [Robert]: Thank you for participating in this third and final interview. First, I am going to ask you about your overall impression of your tutoring sessions with your student. Second, I am going to read a few definitions of a writer’s voice and ask you some questions about them. Next, I want to ask you a few questions about tutoring writing and about your impressions on a piece of writing you recently work on with your tutee. Finally, I wanted to ask you a few questions about tutoring at Pathways (e.g., St. Basil’s).

I. Impressions of tutoring your student

1. How would you describe the writing tutorials with your student? Please give me some examples of what was successful/challenging.

II. Writing with Voice

2. In our first interview you defined or described voice in writing as

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

You also saw that the Ontario writing curriculum defined ‘voice’ for grades 9-12 as

"the style or character of a piece of writing conveyed through the author's use of vocabulary, sentence structure, imagery, rhythm, and other elements that contribute to the mood of the piece as a whole."

Here are two other definitions from writing teachers or scholars.

"Voice is what most people have in their speech but lack in their writing--namely, a sound or texture--the sound of “them”. We recognize most of our friends on the phone before they say who they are. A few people get their voice into their writing. When you read a letter or something else they’ve written, it has the sound of them. It feels as though writing with voice has life in
it. It's almost as though the breath makes the words themselves do some of the work of getting up off the page into our head as we read." (Elbow, 1981, p.288)

"Just as you dress differently on different occasions, as a writer you assume different voices in different situations. If you're writing an essay about a personal experience, you may work hard to create a strong personal voice in your essay...If you're writing a report or essay exam, you will adopt a more formal, public tone. Whatever the situation, the choices you make as you write and revise...will determine how readers interpret and respond to your presence in the text" (Ede, 1989, p. 158).

3. What do these various definitions mean to you?

4. Based on these different definitions of voice, if you were to explain voice to a student what would you say?

III. Tutoring Writing and Giving Feedback

5. What has been most important to you in tutoring writing with your student? (i.e., What are your overall goals with him/her?)

6. In our first interview, you said that your approach to feedback is to

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

Has your approach towards feedback changed since that first interview? If so, how? If not, why not?

In what ways do your comments on ___________ writing reflect your philosophy of what is good writing? (Please provide 2 or 3 examples.)
7. In what ways is it possible to teach voice to a student? Can you give me 2 or 3 examples of how you have helped your student learn to write with voice?

IV. Sample essay from tutoring

8. Please tell me how you helped your student work on this essay.

9. Where there particular success or challenges in working on this piece?

10. What were the ways in which you helped your student develop his/her voice this piece?

V. Tutoring at Pathways

11. Why did you decide to tutor at P2E and what has your experience been like?

12. What recommendations do you have for new tutors who are helping students with writing?

13. Recently, P2E education held a workshop on anti-racism and anti-oppression for P2E volunteers.

   Did you attend this workshop? If so, why? If not, why not?

14. P2E has tried to increase the diversity of tutors who
can tutor math, science, and French. They have also tried to increase the tutors coming from more diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

In what ways do you think having tutors from different ethnic, cultural or linguistic backgrounds can help students in the program become better writers? Why?

(Alternatively, to what extent do you think language, age, gender, cultural, religion, or ethnic background play in how a tutor gives feedback on writing? Why?)

In what ways do you think your own identity/background has influenced how you help students become better writers?

VI. Space/Place

15. What do church basements symbolize for you? (or what kind of connotations do church basements raise in you?) and Why?

16. What do you think church basements symbolize to the students from the community? Why?
Appendix M

Tutee Interview #3

Instructions [Robert]: Thank you for participating in this third and final interview. First, I am going to read a few definitions of a writer’s voice and ask you some questions about them. Next, I want to ask you a few questions about a piece of writing you recently composed and to share a piece of writing you brought with you today. Finally, I wanted to ask you a question about writing with tutors and writing at St. Basil’s.

I. Writing with Voice

1. In our first interview you defined or described voice in writing as

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

You also saw that the Ontario writing curriculum defined ‘voice’ for grades 9-12 as

"the style or character of a piece of writing conveyed through the author’s use of vocabulary, sentence structure, imagery, rhythm, and other elements that contribute to the mood of the piece as a whole."

Here are two other definitions from writing teachers or scholars.

“Voice is what most people have in their speech but lack in their writing—namely, a sound or texture—the sound of “them”. We recognize most of our friends on the phone before they say who they are. A few people get their voice into their writing. When you read a letter or something else they’ve written, it has the sound of them. It feels as though writing with voice has life in it. It’s almost as though the breath makes the words themselves do some of the work of getting up off the page into our head as we read.” (Elbow, 1981, p.288)

“Just as you dress differently on different occasions, as a writer you assume different voices in different situations. If you’re writing an essay about a personal experience, you may work hard to create a strong personal voice in your essay...If you’re writing a report or essay exam, you will adopt a more formal, public tone. Whatever the situation, the choices you make as you write and revise...will determine how readers interpret and respond to your presence in the text” (Ede, 1989, p. 158).

2. Based on these different definitions of voice, if you were to explain voice to a friend what would you say?
II. Sample essay from tutoring

3. Tell me how you composed this essay and how you integrated the feedback you got from your tutor(s) (e.g., point to specific examples).

4. List thee ways in which your tutor helped you to develop your voice this piece.

5. What advice would you give to new tutors to help students improve voice in writing?

III. Writing Sample

6. Tell me about the specific piece of writing you brought today:

   Where did you write this piece? When?

   Did you write on paper or on a computer? What tools did you use to help you write?

   Why did you write it?

   How did you feel about writing this assignment? Did you enjoy it or find it interesting?

   Where did you get your ideas from for writing this?

IV. Working with tutors at St. Basil’s or P2E office

P2E has tried to increase the diversity of tutors who can tutor math, science, and French. They are also interested in increasing the number of tutors from more diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
7. In what ways do you think have tutors from different ethnic, cultural or linguistic backgrounds can help students in the program become better writers? Why?

(Follow up: To what extent do you think language, age, gender, cultural, religion, or ethnic background play in how a tutor gives you feedback on your writing? Why?)

V. Space/Place

8. What do church basements symbolize for you? (what do you think of when you think of a church basement?) and Why?

9. What do you think church basements symbolize to the students from this community? Why?
Appendix N

Acknowledgement of Completion

I acknowledge that I have received a gift card of $25.00 redeemable at any Indigo Bookstore for my full participation in Robert’s project on adolescent writing practices. I also know that I am welcome to attend any writing-related workshops at Pathways to Education facilitated by Robert in the upcoming year.

Your name ______________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

Signature ___________________________ Today’s date __________________
Appendix O

### Transcription Conventions and Presentation Style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Convention</th>
<th>Meaning/Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[…]</td>
<td>Removed speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(--)</td>
<td>Unintelligible or approximate wording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--</td>
<td>Pauses or interruptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Italics</em></td>
<td>Stressed or emphasized words within a sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( )</td>
<td>Indicate non-verbal action (e.g., laughing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotes</td>
<td>Something read aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times New Roman</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courier</td>
<td>Line-by-line transcription dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helvetica</td>
<td>Computer screen excerpts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>, , ? !</td>
<td>Standard punctuation conventions used in writing were used to put speech into readable text</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgement of Member Check

I acknowledge that I have read a draft of the case study about my participation in Robert Kohls’ dissertation about adolescent writing entitled “Sacred Spaces and Socialization: Tutoring Writing and Appropriating Voice in an Inner City Church Basement.” To the best of my knowledge, I confirm that Robert has accurately represented my beliefs and my experiences during the time he interviewed me and observed me.

Your name _____________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Signature ___________________________________________________________________ Today’s date