

**“I’VE COME SO FAR IT’S HARD TO SAY IT ALL”:  
A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO CHANGES IN PERCEPTIONS OF  
STUDENT IDENTITY IN A STUDENT SUCCESS PROGRAM**

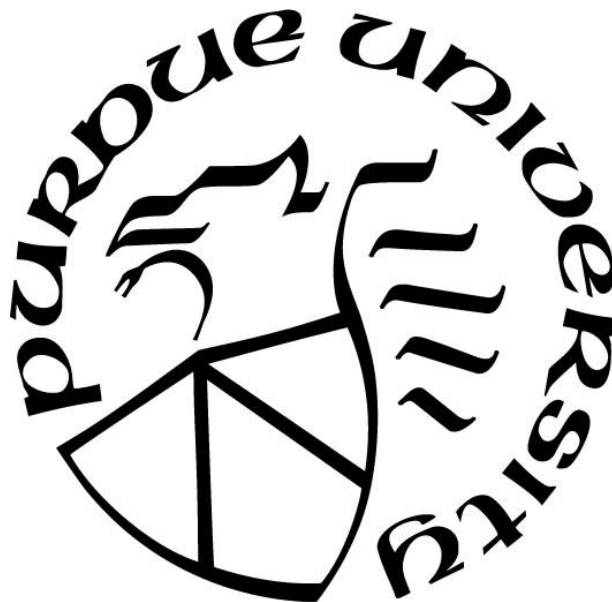
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*I dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful family.*

*To my husband, Tim, who has supported me throughout the rollercoaster journey that is grad school. There have been many sleepless nights, last minute changes of plan, and proofreads. Thank you for your steadfast love, encouragement, and ability to make me laugh even when I didn't think I could.*

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## ABSTRACT

This four-year study centers on identity research, exploring a two-year student success program in a midwestern school. The program follows a “school-within-a-school” model (Indiana Department of Education website, 2020) as it is housed on the same grounds as the main school but in a different building. The student-to-teacher ratio is lower than traditional schools and the English class covers less material, but in more depth, than parallel 9th and 10<sup>th</sup> grade classes. The study follows two students as they progress through the two-year program and integrate into the main student body for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, to understand how they narrate their journey through high school. The 9th and 10th grade teachers provide a sense of the impact of teacher identity on the student participants. A narrative approach (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) is used to examine individual’s perspectives- rooted in their experiences- to dig into my participants’ stories, framing them within an equity literacy context (Gorski, 2014). Using equity literacy allows for the exploration of biases and inequities that student participants may face in our education system. The findings of this dissertation study have three major implications: 1. Home identity has a significant effect on student identity. As such, an awareness of what high school students bring to the classroom and how this affects their thinking and motivation to participate in class is critical; 2. The importance of not only making lessons relevant to student lives, but also helpful. Both student participants appreciate being given space to write what they *want* to write, rather than being *told* what to write. As a result, writing becomes a means of processing events happening in their lives, and has a positive effect on self-efficacy; 3. Given the second implication, teacher educators need to provide space for preservice teachers to explore ways to make lessons helpful to their students by encouraging them to tell their own stories through discussions in a safe space, while modeling behaviors such as showing vulnerability in the classroom.

# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

## Background of the Study

This dissertation study was born from a conversation with a newly formed friend after a canceled group camping trip. This new friend was an English teacher in a local high school and taught within a student success program. We happened to sit together to eat the BBQ food that had been meant to be cooked over a fire, and was instead being eaten in a mutual friend's kitchen while a storm raged outside. Hearing about the two-year program and the fascinating stories of the many students she had taught; I knew I needed to find out more. I was especially interested in student identity and wondered how being in a program such as this one affected one's sense of identity within a school setting.

Throughout this dissertation I will refer to identity and student identity, and in Chapter 2 I will provide and explore different definitions of identity; however, here I will use numerous scholars' definitions to describe identity as *a process that is constantly in motion, shaping and reshaping an individual* (Erikson, 1968; Eyres, 2017; Rodgers and Scott, 2008; Gee, 1990; Danielewicz, 2001). Within this broader definition of identity sits student identity which I personally define as: *how someone perceives themselves as a student in a school setting in terms of how they behave, speak, and interact with peers and teachers.*

My Interest in student identity stems mainly from my own experiences throughout elementary school. From Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade I was with the same 30 students (it was a small school with a total student population of around 180), and while this allowed strong friendships to develop, it also caused some students to 'put up walls' concerning their home lives. My research interests stem from one friend in particular who, as an elementary school student, was intelligent, hard- working, and diligent. While at school he never spoke about his home life, nor did he ever invite any of his friends to his home. As he entered secondary school (6<sup>th</sup> grade), he became disengaged with schoolwork and his grades dropped significantly. At this time in the UK there were no intervention programs. His friend base changed, and he stopped attending certain classes. In 9<sup>th</sup> grade he moved to a neighboring school -which he claimed was "less strict" -and ultimately left education at 16 years old to enter the job market. At 17 he was sent to a young offenders' institution (juvenile prison). This was the first of multiple times he clashed with the law.

It was only as I got older that I learned his story. Since being a young child he had struggled with hunger, was exposed to drugs in the home, and suffered neglect. These things ultimately affected his life in school. While I do not believe that my friend's story is unique, I do wonder if interventions, such a student success program, had been available whether his story would have been different.

Many years later while pursuing a career in teaching - elementary and then community college - my interest in identity grew; however, it became focused on student identity specifically. My first teaching job was at a medium sized public elementary school in London which catered to predominantly low-income students. Seeing again the direct effects of hunger and poverty on young people and how it affected their lives in school in terms of ability to concentrate, study, and keep up with more affluent peers, sparked an interest in student identity. This interest peaked when I moved to the midwestern US and began teaching at a community college. Here my students would tell their stories of growing up with hardships and hunger, one recalls, "I was always hungry as a kid but I didn't want to complain cos [sic] I knew my mom couldn't do anything to change it." This is one example of many I heard during my time there.

Students' personal stories of hunger stayed with me, and as I started graduate school I knew I wanted to learn more about what was, or could be, done in schools to help students in these situations. Thus, my interest evolved from a personal interest to academic interest. While reading about the broad topic of identity I noticed that there were large gaps pertaining to student identity. As such, I wanted to fill some of those gaps with my own research, specifically looking at student identity within a student success program - a phenomenon that was new to me- having met a 10th grade teacher who taught within a student success program at a local high school, and learning about the program through her the previous summer.

I began by observing the 10th grade English class within the student success program; however, it quickly became clear that I was entering into the school lives of these students part way through their experience, and while I could see where they were at that moment, I could not get a good grasp of where they had come from. Thus, I decided to embark on a 3-year pilot study which followed two high school students as they first entered the student success program in 9th grade, and move with them through the program and their integration into the main school for 11th Grade. Their progress to the end of 12<sup>th</sup> grade would become my dissertation.

Specifically, I wished to look at how my two student participants narrated their student identity as a result of being placed in the program, being housed in a separate building for 9<sup>th</sup> grade - due to a lack of space in the main building- transitioning into the main school for 10<sup>th</sup> grade, before moving into the main student body for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. I was interested in students' identity development during the program and if/ how/ why it changed over the course of the entire four years.

### **The Student Success Program**

My study will concentrate on a student success program in a midwestern high school. The school is described as a “four-year comprehensive high school with an enrollment of 1,736 students [in the academic year 2016-2017 when my study began] in grades 9 through 12. There are 125 certified staff members of whom the majority have advanced degrees” (retrieved from school website). Student demographics are as follows:

- Male - 50.8%
- Female - 49.2%
- Native American/Alaskan - 0.3%
- Asian/Pacific islanders - 2.5%
- Black - 2.7%
- Hispanic - 8.7%
- White - 81.8%
- ESL – 6-10%
- 26.1% of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch.

As student success programs in Indiana are “designed to meet the needs of students who are not succeeding in a traditional school setting” (Indiana Department of Education website, 2020), school districts created alternative school settings to meet the needs of these students. The high school in this study has a student success program that follows a “school-within-a-school model,” where the program is housed on the same site as the traditional school but in a different building. My state describes the success program as being unique to each district, but sharing common goals such as:

- Teacher/student ratio of 1:15
- Must operate for a minimum of 3 hours per day
- Clearly stated mission and discipline code
- Caring faculty with continual staff development
- School staff having high expectations for student achievement
- Learning program specific to the student's expectations and learning style
- Total commitment to have each student be a success (Indiana Department of Education website, 2020)

The student success program at Lincoln High School (pseudonym) was created by a guidance counselor at the school who recognized the need for a new program as many students who should have been achieving Cs or Bs were receiving Ds or failing. When she examined these numbers and spoke to students, she discovered that the students were under achieving for a variety of reasons and the gap between their actual scores and their potential scores just keep widening as they progressed through the school. Together with a team of four teachers, she devised the program. Since then, each spring, the middle schools in the district are asked to identify students who were struggling and consistently had low grades. These middle school teachers, together with the 9th grade student success teachers, then consider the students identified based on 4 main criteria:

- ISTEP scores
- Grades – only students performing lower than their potential, as determined by the 8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, will be admitted
- Attendance – only students who attend school regularly will be admitted
- IQ of at least 90

If students meet these criteria they are nominated and invited to take part in the two-year student success program that runs throughout 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The invitation is sent to parents the summer before high school begins and they partake in a meeting where they can ask questions, meet the 9th grade student success teachers and former students who have been through the program. Not only does this meeting seek to inform parents and potential students about the program, but also alleviate any fears concerned with being in the program, the separation from the main school, and worry about not being able to partake in school sports/ clubs. Class sizes at

Lincoln High School are capped at 18 and those 18 students remain together with the same teacher throughout each grade in the program to encourage close bonds to form, and raise the level and quality of class discussions due to increased familiarity. Upon accepting a position in the program, students sign a behavioral and attendance contract stating that if either standard drops to below an acceptable level, students can be removed from the program. The program at Lincoln High School has its own guidance counselor who remains with the students throughout their time in the program, allowing strong relationships to develop based on mutual trust.

Success programs cover a variety of subjects. This particular student success program covers subjects including English, math, science and social studies. In English the pace of work is slower; for example, 9<sup>th</sup> grade students in the program read two books per semester instead of the four books students who not in the program read. While the student success program is housed on the same site as the main high school, it is in a separate building for 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The students within the program spend the majority of their day separated from the main school, only mixing for lunch and subjects such as PE and music that require space outside of the success center building.

The students in 9th grade attend a daily study hall which is an integral part of the program. It allows for their grades to be reviewed regularly, meaning that help can be provided when needed. During this time issues concerning any of the program's subjects can be discussed as well as the overall health and happiness of the student can be monitored. The advantage of this is that it permits a smoother transition from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade building to the main school building for sophomore year as any potential issues can be caught early and addressed.

Another unique aspect of this program is student led parent/teacher conferences. This permits the student to be present at conferences providing them with the opportunity to share their grades with their parents or caregivers. This is also an opportunity for students and parents to disclose their feelings about the program and discuss their own personal goals for success.

### **Freewrite Friday**

After learning about the program and meeting the 9th grade teacher, my professional interest was sparked by a class called Freewrite Friday. Freewriting is a term coined by Elbow (1989) and he defines it as "private nonstop writing" (Elbow, 1997, p.35). Elbow laid out four guidelines for freewriting:

- Not showing your words to anyone (unless you later change your mind)
- Not having to stay on one topic – that is, freely digressing
- Not thinking about spelling, grammar, and mechanics
- Not worrying about how good the writing is – even whether it makes sense or is understandable (even to oneself). (p. 35)

The freewriting class I observed followed the last three of these guidelines and left the first up to the student.

Freewrite Friday at Lincoln High School was a 50-minute class divided into two sections: a 15-minute freewriting section, followed by a 35-minute sharing section. The 15-minute writing section had very few guidelines, the students were able to write about any topic in any form they wish: prose, poetry, rap etc. Ms. Kean, the 9<sup>th</sup> grade teacher who designed Freewrite Friday, removed perceived barriers to writing such as: correct spelling, grammar, or structure. There was also no minimum word limit and no grade attached to the writing. This encouraged students who described themselves as “not a writer,” to just get their thoughts and ideas on paper. The main premise, as described by Ms. Kean, was to “get ideas down in any way: random thoughts, poems, bullets, whatever.”

At the start of the year students found it difficult to write three or four lines as they were unsure about what was appropriate, and often, how to start their freewrite. To combat this concern Ms. Kean wrote some topics on strips of paper along with “open ended first sentences” that were kept in an “idea basket”. Students could visit the basket and use these “idea starters” and open-ended sentences if they were having difficulty thinking of a topic for themselves. While students appreciated the idea basket, they relied on it less and less as the semester progressed. Additionally, Ms. Kean read excerpts from freewrites from previous years to not only lay the groundwork, but also show that students really can write about anything - a bad day, a bad week, a friendship issue. As the first semester wore on, students began to write more.

Alleviating the pressure of grades promoted more openness and willingness to write what students *wanted* to write about, and write *how* they wanted to write it. While the freewrites were written in a journal and Ms. Kean collected them at the end of the lesson and read them, she did not grade them or comment on them unless asked to. This reinforced the idea that students were writing for themselves, rather than for an audience or a grade.



After the freewrite students were invited to share if they wished. Many students were reluctant to share their writing at first, preferring instead to keep their freewrite private. However, after the first few weeks, trust began to grow and students began sharing. Ms. Kean explained that she had an “openness policy” where all students must have hands free of pens/ paper and face the speaker while listening. Over the course of the first semester, the sharing developed into the section that students seemed to look forward to most. When a freewrite was read aloud, others commented, commiserated, or shared how they handled a similar experience. This created a feeling of community and as this community grew in popularity, so did the freewrites. Students looked forward to Friday and began writing as soon as the bell sounded, or in some cases, began planning freewrites in their mind days in advance.

The foundation for the study - described in more detail in Chapter 3 - comes from this class. Ms. Kean established and designed the class in such a way that student identity was centered throughout the 50-minutes. Identities could be seen evolving both through the written section and the sharing/ discussion section. As such, Freewrite Friday laid the groundwork for this research as it provided avenues of study such as student engagement, home/ school links and the effect of teacher identity on student identity that I explore with my participants.

### **Research questions**

Given this background, my research aims to address the following questions:

1. How do students in a student success program in a high school English classroom narrate their student identities?
2. How has being in the student success program influenced students’ sense of identity?
3. In what ways has their perception of themselves as a student changed over the past 4 years?
4. What has contributed to/ influenced this change?

### **Purpose and Significance**

The purpose of this research is to study individuals’ perspectives, rooted in their experiences, both during a two- year student success program, and as they integrate back into the

main student body. I intend to use a narrative inquiry approach to understand how students narrate their own stories of their journey through high school. In particular, I am interested in the bearing that home and school identities have on student identity, the effect of teacher identity on student identity, and how student engagement in tasks and assignments is affected by student identity.

I hope the findings of this study will add to the current body of knowledge on student identity, and in particular the effects of student success programs within high schools on student identity. As some current 2-year student success programs within Indiana are considering eliminating the 2nd year of the program and reducing it to a 1-year program (the program in this study removed the 10<sup>th</sup> grade program the spring my participants ended 10<sup>th</sup> grade), my findings may hold significance for student success program coordinators and administrators on the advantages of student success programs, and the disadvantages of removing the 10<sup>th</sup> grade year. My study will also provide information to preservice and in-service teachers on the effects of student identity within schools.

### **Structure of this Dissertation**

My dissertation will consist of five chapters: Chapter 1, Introduction; Chapter 2, Literature Review; Chapter 3, Methods; Chapter 4, Findings and Chapter 5, Discussion and Implications. See table 1 for a comprehensive breakdown of chapter content.

Table 1. Dissertation Structure

Chapter 1	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Identity definition</li> <li>● My interest in identity research</li> <li>● The student success program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Freewrite Friday</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Research questions</li> <li>● Purpose and significance</li> <li>● Structure of the dissertation</li> </ul>
Chapter 2	Literature Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Theoretical framework <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Identity research</li> <li>○ Discourses and the dialogical self</li> <li>○ Narrative and discourse</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Equity literacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A resilient vs a deficient view</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Links between Equity Literacy and Identity Theories</li> <li>● Literature Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teacher Identity</li> <li>○ Student Identity</li> <li>○ Motivation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Chapter 3	Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Narrative inquiry</li> <li>● Methods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Context</li> <li>○ The pilot study</li> <li>○ Participants</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Data collection</li> <li>● Data analysis</li> <li>● Trustworthiness</li> </ul>

Table 1 continued

Chapter 4	Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The 9th grade class</li> <li>● Ms. Kean's story</li> <li>● Jon's story <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 9<sup>th</sup> grade</li> <li>○ 10<sup>th</sup> grade</li> <li>○ 11<sup>th</sup> grade</li> <li>○ 12<sup>th</sup> grade</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Fiona's story <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 9<sup>th</sup> grade</li> <li>○ 10<sup>th</sup> grade</li> <li>○ 11<sup>th</sup> grade</li> <li>○ 12<sup>th</sup> grade</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Chapter 5	Discussion and Implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Relationship between home and school identity</li> <li>● The effect of teacher identity on student identity</li> <li>● Student engagement</li> <li>● Implications for teacher educators and student identity research</li> <li>● Final thoughts</li> </ul>

## **CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Within this chapter I will provide an overview of identity theories from a variety of researchers. I will examine different concepts within identity research including Bakhtin's (1981) notion of multiple- I positions, Gee's (1990) ideas about discourses, and their interactions with Bakhtin's ideas about the dialogical self. After exploring Bandura's (1977) and Kegan's (1983) thoughts on self and identity, I will move on to Gorski's (2013) concept of Equity Literacy and its relevance to a high school setting in order to complete my theoretical framework. Finally, I will examine some of the existing literature on both teacher identity and student identity to provide a backdrop for my research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Identity Research**

Identity research is a large body of knowledge comprising many studies that provide varied insights into identity (Erikson, 1968; Bakhtin, 1981; Kegan, 1983; Gilligan, 1982; Alsup, 2006). Erikson (1968), a foundational figure in identity research, believed that identity is found both in the core of the individual and in the communal culture around them, and is in a constant state of development. He asserted that identity is a combination of social, cultural and environmental factors and a person passes through eight stages over the span of their life.

Further, Erikson examined how identity is formed within social contexts and the stages in which an individual progresses (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). He believes that identity is found both within the individual and the surrounding culture. His work reveals this link between the individual and the social:

Identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him. (Erikson, 1968, p.22)

Erikson (1968) believed that identity is a process in a constant state of development- a person passes through eight stages within their lifetime- and the process “becomes ever more inclusive as the individual grows aware of a widening circle of others significant to him” (p.23).

Similarly, Eyres (2017) views identity in terms of a process. He states that most people position themselves in various ways in relation to others during the course of a day and some of these positions may be conflicting. Thus, identity does not only change over long periods of time, it alters and oscillates within any 24-hour period. This means that identity is constantly ‘shifting’ and is therefore ‘unstable’ (Rodgers and Scott, 2008; Gee, 1990).

This sense of shifting can also be seen in Danielewicz’s (2001) work which found that people are always in the stages of trying to “become something or someone” (p.10). Danielewicz (2001) depicts identity as having two overarching themes which focus on the individual, and the other. For her, identity is a person’s idea of themselves and their idea of other people. She believes that identity works on two levels: how people are similar, and how they are different. Danielewicz (2001), like Erikson, finds “every person is composed of multiple, often conflicting, identities, which exist in volatile states of construction or reconstruction, reformation or erosion, addition, or expansion” (p.10).

While Danielewicz’s (2001) work concentrates on identity shifts that occur throughout a lifetime, Vygotsky’s (1981) work is concerned with identity development in children and young people. He states that development occurs on two different planes: the social and the psychological. Vygotsky’s (1981) concept of the zone of proximal development, where the “social and individual are brought together” (p. 7), focuses on elevating children’s learning through partaking in joint tasks. Moreover, for him, learning occurs in a social space where children learn from and with people who surround them (Vygotsky, 1978).

Likewise, Gilligan (1982) sees identity more as a coming together, or a fusing of the individual and the social. Gilligan describes identity as a dialogue between the self and others. Viewing identity as a dialogue is particularly useful when considering high schools, as life in the classroom is social and viewing student identity through a social lens helps focus attention on relationships and joint construction of knowledge.

Gee concurs with situating identity within the social sphere. In his (1990) monograph, he defines identity as “the ‘kind of person’ one is recognized as ‘being,’ at a given time and place,” and states that this person “can change from moment to moment in the interaction, can change

from context to context, and of course, can be ambiguous or unstable” (p. 99). Gee (1990) believes that people’s identities grow out of how they act in society.

For researchers such as: Erikson (1968), Gilligan (1982), Vygotsky (1978; 1981), and Gee (1990), identity is firmly situated within the social sphere. Erikson (1968) and Gee (1990) view identity as constantly shifting and being in continuous motion. Vygotsky (1978) and Gilligan (1982) on the other hand see identity more as a coming together, or a fusing of the individual and the social. Both ideas are useful when considering schools, as life in the classroom is social by nature. Within the confines of different classrooms students mold their identity depending on who they are with at any given time and the dynamics within the classroom. Thus, as students grapple with concepts of identity and who they are, viewing student identity through a social lens with help focus attention on the impact of relationships, the joint construction of knowledge, and the various discourses at play.

### ***Discourses and the Dialogical Self***

Discourses play an important role in identity theory as they are the means by which people identify with others and identify other members of a group. Discourses can situate people as insiders or outsiders (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011; Gee, 1990). Within different identity groups there can be one, or several, specific discourses used by that particular group which can act as identifying features. This section will explore the meaning of discourses as well as looking at Bakhtin’s (1981) ideas of the dialogical self and how the self is not a stable given, but a combination of individual, societal and historical constructs that are constantly changing and adapting.

### ***Discourses***

According to Gee (1990):

Discourses [with a capital D] are ways of being in the world...a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize (p. 142).

Gee likens Discourses to holding membership of a group. However, it is more than mere membership, it is an exclusive marker to indicate to others that you belong to something larger than yourself. This sits alongside Gee's (2010) concept of "social language" (p. 28), which describes how individuals use language to recognize one another in a variety of settings, and Wortham's (2004) concept of social identification. Social identification is the name given to easily identifiable groups of people who are categorized due to certain characteristics, for example, "the nerds" (p. 717) in a high school setting.

However, Discourses can also be exclusive in the negative form of the word. Groups and communities not only build language together that is particular to one specific group, they also use non-language cues (Gee, 2010). For example, Gee explains that individuals identify themselves to others, both inside and outside of their group, by wearing certain clothes, or speaking a certain way. Viewing discourses as exclusionary, creates the possibility of marginalizing people by valuing certain things over others (Gee, 1990).

As well as discourses being exclusionary, people can also face conflict when being part of multiple discourses. For example, in the context of school, one can be both a high school senior, and a member of the basketball team (Gergen, 1994; Gee, 2010). However, whenever a person partakes in multiple discourses there is always a risk that the different discourses conflict with each other. This sense of conflict can stem from a social encounter where two people expect two different identities from one person, or the conflict can come from within the self (Gee, 2010). Gergen (1994) suggests that when people are part of more than one discourse at the same time the self can become fragmented and de-centered. However, according to Akkerman and Meijer (2011) this stance is problematic in two ways:

1. If an individual's identity is continuously changing due to a multitude of situations being presented, then how can any sense of self be formed?
2. If one's identity changes as we interact with others then how can people be unique and have any sense of agency outside each context? (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011).

Gee (1990) addresses these concerns as he acknowledges that people have a central identity that remains fairly stable. Thus, the core self does not change while other aspects of identity adapt and change.



In sum, within identity research there are differing views on how discourses affect identity; whether there is a central, core identity, or whether identity is fluid and changes depend on social influences. Gee describes how inclusive discourses can serve to create communities while exclusionary discourses can divide and produce conflict. These dividing discourses can have negative effects in a high school setting as different discourses come together over the course of a day or a week.

### *Narrative and Discourse*

Storytelling is important within discourse discussions as stories are a component of our identity (McLeod, 2004); therefore, the use of narrative inquiry as my methodology is ideal. According to McLeod (2004), narrative is crucial in therapy as both therapists and clients construct stories together, revise them, and search for meaning and solutions within them. These “healing narratives” (McLeod, 2004, p. 4), help bring order to disordered lives and they take place: “in a complex social and cultural context, within a community of shared values and morality” (p. 4). Healing narratives in a high school context can take many forms, e.g. poetry, prose, freewrites; all are powerful in that they express the feelings of the writer in a non-restrictive way. That is, the writer has freedom to either write about any topic, or a certain topic in any way they choose.

According to McAdams (1988), people tell stories in order to understand who they are and how they fit into the world: “As the story evolves and our identity takes form, we come to live the story as we write it” (p. ix). Through narrative and reflection people are encouraged to connect with their inner selves and others. In this way people grow into their stories. Similarly, Connelly and Clandinin (1999), posit that people tell and retell stories in an attempt to arrive at a new way of knowing. Goodson (2012) believes that if life stories are found “within theories of context” (p. 5), they can be seen as social constructs situated within a historical and geographical space and time (Goodson, 2012). Understanding them in this way works to “personalize” (p. 6) them. Locke (2017) concurs, stating that people are created from historical and social events and they use and mold these stories to make sense of their lives and experiences. Thus, whether purposefully or not, people use stories to explain phenomenon they are grappling with, or attempting to comprehend.

Similarly, Bakhtin (1981) places emphasis “on the importance of narrative and dialogue in the construction of self” (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004, p.124). Thus, identity “is formed and reformed by the stories we tell and which we draw upon in our communications with others”

(Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004, p. 124). Bruner and Weisser (1991) view life as a text that can be written, revised and rewritten. Furthermore, each individual has multiple identities, and often identities conflict, yet they still sit alongside each other, being constructed and reconstructed (Burke & Stets, 2009; Locke, 2017; Danielewicz, 2001). Therefore, identity as a whole is constructed by a collection of different strands that can interact, merge or alter an individual's identity.

As shown here, identity emerges from the stories we tell and helps make sense of both a single moment, or a variety of experiences taken together. As identity is a social construct, it depends on historical factors happening at the time and the opinions of others.

### ***Dialogical Self Theory***

The term *dialogical self* was coined by Bakhtin (1981) and it weaves the self and dialogue in such a way as to bring new understanding to the link between self and society (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Within this theory, dialogical relationships happen not only *with* the self and others, but also *within* the self. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) believe that the self is not “pre-given...but rather as emerging from social, historical, and societal processes that transcend any individual-society dichotomy or separation” (p.1).

The dialogical self is a fusing of internal and external. It can alter depending on the situation and a person's reaction to that situation, as Akkerman and Meijer (2011) state, “[A] dialogical approach to identity perceives identity as a fluid or at least as a dynamic process” (p. 312). This process is not just linked to mood; identity changes depending on the situation. People evoke certain identities that they believe are relevant at the time.

Furthermore, within dialogical theory, Bakhtin (1981) describes multiple identities (I-positions), and state that they exist, not in opposition with each other, but alongside one another each being dominant at any given time (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). In this way it becomes a kind of turn taking. According to Hermans and Kempen (1993) these I-positions are created by not only the self but by the social environment surrounding them. Salgado and Hermans (2005) address this in their research; they claim that as people are different with different audiences, they have multiple selves.

Bruner (1987) also acknowledges the existence of multiple selves in his discussion of the "private self" and "public self" (p.61). He suggests an individual negotiates these two selves deciding which parts of their identity to make public and which parts should remain private. The 'private' consists of the "'untold' and the 'untellable' and our attitudes towards them" (p.68). The 'public' on the other hand, is what an individual shows to the world. In terms of keeping these parts separate Bruner (1987) and Hermnes and Kempen (1993) have opposing views. Bruner believes that the private and public are separate, despite the fact that many in academia wish to bring the personal in the public sphere. Hermnes and Kempen (1993) on the other hand, believe that the two selves serve as a single identity. Akkerman and Meijer (2011) too, see identity as a negotiation with people and community members. Our experience as a result is social as we live with and around others (Cresswell & Baerveldt, 2011) partaking in activities and communal experiences. Consequently, in his view, even one's inner thoughts are social.

Gee (2004) concurs as he describes "shape-shifting" (p. 105), as a means of altering or manipulating the self in order to become more appealing on the job market. He describes it in terms of building up a portfolio, stating that shapeshifters: "stand ready and able to rearrange [their] skills, experiences, and achievements, at any time" (p. 105). Gee (2004) argues that this shapeshifting allows for autonomy and control over the self as one responds to different situations and guidelines. However, shapeshifting puts low-income students at a disadvantage as they do not always have the 'tools' to switch skills at a moment's notice. Gee (2004) argues that children can only "begin to fill up their portfolios only if they can draw on family, community, or Internet resources, resources from various sorts of private sites and institutions" (p. 110).

### ***In summary***

According to Gee (1990) discourses are a way of being in the world. They place individuals into groups that are identifiable through language, clothing and/ or actions. They also help people "make sense" (Cremin & Locke, 2017, p. 134), of certain situations that can help to shape the self. Gergen (1994) states that people can be part of multiple discourse communities at the same time, which Akkerman and Meijer (2011) think can be problematic with regard to forming a cohesive identity. Storytelling is a large part of discourse as people tell and retell stories in the hopes of coming to a new understanding (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). McLeod (2004) builds on Connelly and Clandinin's (1999) idea in his research in the field of therapy. He states that patient and doctor

come to a common understanding as they construct stories together. McAdam's (1988) work differs as he describes participants attempting to understand identity as a means to see how they fit into the world.

The dialogical self, on the other hand, is a fusing of internal and external; it can alter depending on the situation. Within dialogical-self theory Bakhtin's (1981) multiple I-positions sit alongside one another with one taking precedence whenever the situation dictates, thus meaning there is no sense of fixed identity. Identity is a constantly shifting and molding experience dictated by who the person is with at various times and in various situations. In terms of high school this can be problematic as students move between subjects, between classmates, and between teachers, four or five times each day. The effects of this can be confusing as adolescents attempt to carve their identity during middle and high school.

### **Equity Literacy**

The above theories shed light on different aspects of high school identities that apply to participants in this study. However, in order to gain an even broader theoretical understanding of my participants, I will frame and view their experiences through an equity literacy lens. Equity literacy is a term first used by Gorski and Swalwell, in both joint and individual research. This section will define and explore the term, provide an example by Swalwell to show why equity literacy is crucial to today's world, and also explain why a resilient view is better than a deficient view in terms of how low-income students are perceived.

#### **Equity literacy: An exploration of the term**

Equity literacy is defined as: "[the] knowledge and skills that enable us to recognize, respond to, and redress conditions that deny some students access to educational and other opportunities enjoyed by their peers" (Gorski, 2014, p1). It was born from concerns about frameworks such as cultural competence that concentrate on culture instead of equity, and in doing so mask the inequities that appear in schools and other organizations (Gorski, 2014). Equity literacy is based on the fact that equitable educators must be adept, not merely with culture, but with exposing, explaining, and addressing inequities in schools (Gorski, 2014). Equity literacy,

“refus[es] to associate poverty with deficiency,” instead preferring to highlight “the strengths that allow poor communities to persevere through challenges related to poverty” (Gorski, 2013, p. 19).

In Gorski’s (2014) paper *Equity Literacy: An Introduction*, he provides a brief analysis of equity literacy and gives examples of the four equity literacy abilities:

1. Ability to recognize biases and inequities, including subtle biases and inequities
2. Ability to respond to biases and inequities in the immediate term
3. Ability to redress biases and inequities in the long term
4. Ability to create and sustain a bias-free and equitable learning environment.

Steps 1 and 2 - recognizing and responding to any biases or deficit views - calls for educators to be able to locate inequities and intervene when they appear within the classroom or curriculum. They are very much on-the-spot, immediate goals. Steps 3 and 4 – redressing biases, and creating and sustaining bias-free learning environments- call for longer term interventions that are sustainable.

Gorski and Swalwell (2015) describe a key feature of equity literacy as being an approach that places more importance on understanding the difference between equity and inequity, than on comprehending different cultures (Gorski, 2017). Thus, equity literacy puts equity at the center of the classroom and curriculum, rather than culture (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). As well as often going unaddressed, social justice issues are often deliberately ignored in the classroom due to teachers feeling that they do not belong (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). This then leads to many ethnically diverse and low-income students in the classrooms feeling marginalized. As Gorski and Swalwell (2015) state: “Teaching for equity literacy is a political act—but not more so than not teaching for equity literacy” (p. 5).

Hess and McAvoy (2014) reinforce Swalwell’s views on inequality; however, in their research it is in relation to voice. They posit that within some institutions some voices are heard and valued above others, and in relation to schools, this can have a damaging psychological effect on students. If at the highest level of government, large companies, corporations and educational institutions, students are not seeing themselves represented (Hess & McAvoy, 2014); how can we as educators convince these students that they should aim high and that their voices matter? In

response, Hess and McAvoy (2014) discuss how educators can make their classrooms and student interactions more equitable. They posit that this can be challenging if the majority of students are middle class and white, and these students tend to dominate discussions, excluding or silencing others. Hess and McAvoy urge teachers to be aware of who is, and is not, speaking within the classroom, who is, and is not comfortable sharing their ideas, and how teachers can attempt to redress the imbalance.

### **A resilient vs deficient view**

Educators who wish to be equitable should let go of their deficient view of low-income students in favor of adopting a resilient view (Gorski, 2013). Deficient views lead teachers to view their students as not being able to achieve at a high level in the classroom and having lower academic expectations (Gorski, 2013). Gorski (2013) claims that: “There is as much diversity *within* any identity group, whether “tall people” or “women” or “people with disabilities,” as there is *between* any two identity groups” (p. 53). This knowledge is something that he argues is missing within the deficient view of students.

Gorski (2013) argues that when teachers teach for equity literacy they do not need to do so at the expense of content, but rather use it to enhance content by viewing it through an equity lens. In Gutstein and Peterson’s (2013) *Rethinking Mathematics*, they design mathematics lessons that incorporate social issues and ask students to view these issues from a social justice perspective. For example, during a math lesson about money and wages, students can investigate issues surrounding poverty and living wages both historically and present day in their own city. Equity literacy is most effective when integrated into subjects such as math and science, as well as areas of literacy such as writing (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015).

Moreover, the deficient view of both families and low-income students leads people to believe that the issue of unequal educational outcomes can be addressed and solved by ‘fixing’ the low-income students and families rather than focusing on fixing the unfair and inequitable conditions (Gorski, 2012; 2019).

## **Concluding thoughts**

In summary, Gorski (2013) lays out goals in the hopes that educators will recognize, respond, and redress the aspects of school policy and day to day school life that are not equitable. Gorski (2012; 2013), Swalwell (2011), and Hess and McAvoy (2014) all home in on the inaccurate belief that aspects of inequity and racism are thought to be in the past and no longer relevant today. While Gorski (2012; 2013) and Swalwell (2011) describe inequities based on income and race, Hess and McAvoy (2014) concentrate on student voice and how, in some instances, certain voices are drowned by others.

## **Links Between Equity Literacy and Identity Theories**

Equity literacy complements identity theory as it provides a more focused lens with which to view participants. While identity theories provide the foundation for examining my participants' past and present situations and who they see themselves as being in both school and at home, equity literacy considers how these situations arise and what influences them. For example, my participants consider their past and present identities as being influenced by events outside school. Equity literacy will examine these events, looking specifically at any inequities that arise in the classroom as a result of what is happening outside the classroom.

Thus, Equity literacy works to narrow the focus to concentrate our gaze on specifics. It will allow me to look for inequities and injustices, and to frame them within a social justice lens. Therefore, while an identity lens looks at how students view themselves as students and what influences this perception such as grades or performance in the classroom, equity literacy examines the reasons behind the grades and and/ or attitudes toward school. It looks at situational and historical aspects of students' lives and how those aspects influence student attitudes and feelings of belonging.

## **Literature Review**

The above identity and equity literacy literature detail the theoretical framework from which I approach this research. In addition to this literature, I will also explore research on teacher identity and student identity as applied to a high school setting, and how my research extends or elucidates it.

## **Teacher Identity**

Teacher identity has been studied by numerous researchers (Alsup, 2006; Danielewicz, 2011; Lasky, 20005; Gompers, 2019; LaMay, 2016). Alsup (2018) tells us that identity is closely tied to a teacher's sense of "agency, authority, and vulnerability" (p. 14). This section will explore these ideas concentrating on literature that sits within three categories: showing vulnerability, building rapport and borderland discourses.

### ***Revealing vulnerability***

Being vulnerable as a teacher in the classroom is something that is not always considered appropriate (Kelchtermans, 1996), yet researchers have found that when teachers share their personal struggles with their students, and put themselves in the position of learners, the results can be transformative (Dale & Frye, 2009; Brown, 2012; LaMay, 2016). One of the multiple I-positions that Dale and Frye (2009) refer to in their research is the teacher seeing herself as a learner. Positioning herself as a learner (Dale & Frye, 2009), the teacher promotes vulnerability that students can sense; and by seeing how teachers then face difficult situations and make decisions about coping with them, students can use, and apply these modeled behaviors to their own lives. This face-to-face modeling can be powerful for all students; but even more so for students who are dealing with life issues both inside and out of school. For these students, teachers can promote caring by helping students work through situations, look at things from different perspectives, and "develop in students an intellectual and moral capacity" (p.129).

Brown's (2012) research on vulnerability encompasses feelings of belonging which she defines as: "the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us" (p.146). She confronts a number of vulnerability issues such as trusting another person enough to show vulnerability in front of them, trusting someone not to turn on them, and knowing who to trust. These situations can produce a chicken and egg situation; trust needs to present to be vulnerable, yet we need vulnerability before we can trust. I believe that for this cycle to be broken, one side must be willing to take the risk.

Showing emotions, and thus vulnerability with students, is a helpful aid to student writing (LaMay, 2016; Gompers, 2019). LaMay's research consists of a two-year study during which she journals alongside her students permitting them insight into her inner thoughts. This not only



shows that she too has struggles, but also how she deals with those struggles. After her journaling sessions LaMay shares her writing with her students as a study of writing, rewriting and why journaling matters. This openness ultimately strengthens the relationship between LaMay and her students. Thus, similar to Brown's research, LaMay puts herself on the line so to speak in order to start the cycle of trust. This too can also be seen in Lasky's (2005) research. She found that when teachers shared vulnerabilities with their students, the students appreciated and benefited from the experience. Additionally, Lasky also found that teachers believed that trust and good relationships were paramount in order for students to learn successfully. When Kelchtermans (1996) talked about the idea of vulnerability with teachers in her study, she reported that they thought those feelings did not belong in school. These deep-rooted feelings and fear of showing vulnerability originate from times when teachers were seen and encouraged to be in complete control at all times.

Kelchtermans research shows that many teachers shy away from appearing vulnerable in front of students preferring to remain in complete control. However, I would argue that with complete control comes a rigidity that is resistant to emotions, and as LaMay, Brown, and Dale and Frye have shown, letting emotions be visible in the classroom can increase student learning and a sense of community.

### ***Building Rapport***

Rapport between teacher and student in a classroom is essential for reaching students on a personal level (Lasky, 2005). One participant in Lasky's (2005) study felt that her students would like the lesson content if they liked her. This reveals that likeability was ranked highly in her approach to teaching. Throughout Lasky's (2005) research she places emphasis on the importance of caring in order to build relationships. She concludes that for one of her participants, building a good relationship with "non-academic students" is vital for "student buy-in for school. Increased student buy-in brings greater student participation in their learning" (p.908).

Two other researchers who study caring, Gilligan and Noddings, examine relationships and the treatment of one another. For Gilligan (1982), care is about relationships and responding to needs within those relationships. Care is inclusive and taking care of others in this way creates a "web of connection so that no one is left alone" (p. 62). In her 1988 work, Gilligan found that care was gendered, leaning more toward the female. When faced with a moral conflict, more

women responded with a care focus than men. Noddings (2013) also takes a gendered approach toward care. In her discussions about “ethics of care” (p. xii) – people who have close relationships and are deeply involved in those relationships - she believes that women’s experience plays a central role. Like Gilligan, Noddings (2014) believes that we should approach others with the view of starting and maintaining caring relationships, “as care must be ...a major purpose of schools” (Noddings, 1995, p. 687).

### ***Borderland Discourses***

The term borderland discourses was coined by Gee (Alsup, 2006) and consists of different identities coming together in an attempt to find common ground. Alsup explains that it is not one discourse submitting to another, but rather a creation of a new discourse stemming from the old and adding in the new. Also, borderland discourse is not something “that can be identified easily based on linguistic features,” as it is a “complex discourse reflecting metacognition or critical reflection” (p. 36).

Alsup’s (2006) research followed six student teachers who grappled with a variety of pedagogical beliefs that came from both home and school experiences. She noted how these beliefs affected their identity as teachers to such an extent that it caused some of them to leave teaching. One of the student teachers she followed, Carrie, struggled with multiple identities including teacher and lesbian identities. She wanted to bring conversations about different identities (specifically homosexuality) into the classroom through literature, but found she was restricted by school policies. Carrie’s difficulties meshing the two identities of home and school are viewed in the wider concept of borderland discourse within Alsup’s (2006) study. Thus, there is often a “push and pull between academic responsibilities and personal ones” (Alsup, 2019, p. 10).

Danielewicz (2001) found that one of her participants, Howard, had similar thoughts about differing school and personal beliefs: “I’m not sure if I’ll fit the mold that they seem to want to put us in” (Danielewicz, 2001, p.58). Both Carrie and Howard’s situations are significant as they reveal a mismatch between reality and expectation. In both examples the schools have set ideals that they expect teachers to adhere to. Thus, student teachers have to navigate these borderland discourses, or multiple I-positions (Bakhtin, 1981), in an attempt to appease both the school and their own sense of identity by contemplating “opposing identity strands” (Alsup, 2019, p. 10).

Everyday teachers and student teachers alike negotiate borderland discourses as they deal with different aspects of their identities, and grapple with restrictions that might be in place to suppress certain parts of themselves.

## **Student identity**

Student identity, like teacher identity, is influenced by various factors; however, two of the most prominent are family (Lareau, 2011) and school (Bandura, 1995, 1997; Dean & Jolly, 2012). This section will review the literature on engagement, the effects of what students bring to school from home, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

## ***Engagement***

How interested a student is in any given task often plays into their level of engagement. According to Dean and Jolly (2012), student engagement depends on many factors; however, a large part of engagement levels depends on family and self-attitudes toward tasks. These attitudes can have a negative effect if the family member does not rate academic success as a worthwhile goal. Consequently, they may promote negative behaviors such as claiming: “It’s not cool to speak up in class” (p. 292). Attitudes such as students who let their voices be heard in class are not as cool as those who remain silent, often go against the student’s beliefs (Dean & Jolly, 2012), and thus produce conflict. I posit that engagement and student identity are intricately linked as aspects of identity can be deliberately reined in by the student in order to conform, which may cause dissonance within the self. Moreover, Dean and Jolly (2012) suggest:

A student’s sense of identity ultimately is responsible for his or her willingness to engage with a given learning opportunity. Students enter the classroom with a current self, complete with values, goals, demands, and norms. (p. 234)

My identity research began with observing a class named Freewrite Friday. When I first started visiting the class the students were at various stages of both engagement and investment in freewriting. The first proponent of freewriting was Peter Elbow and in his 1989 work he explains why freewriting is not a tool for teachers to encourage students to write, it is, “something at the center of what I do as a writer and a teacher” (p. 43). Elbow explains that freewriting is not something done in isolation and then forgotten until next time, but should be part of a routine of

engaging in thoughts, exploring topics, and making sense of experiences. Elbow (1989) describes freewriting as “letting myself rave” (p. 44). He freewrites to make sense of experiences and wanted his students to do the same. Elbow also differentiates between “private and public freewriting” (p. 55); public meaning the freewrite is shared with others and private meaning it is not. With public freewriting there is a desire for the writing to mean something to the audience and as a result may appear contrived (Elbow, 1989).

Elbow (1998) describes freewriting as ““starting to write”” (p. 37, quotation in original). This means just getting thoughts down on paper in any way possible. Thoughts do not have to have a clear start or finish, and can start in the middle of a concept. This “raw material” (p. 37) is the start of idea formation and threads that can be elaborated on at a later date and turned into coherent writing. Elbow (1998) describes freewriting as often, “produc[ing] garbage, but that’s all right” (p.7). He also states that freewriting can be messy, bordering on but never descending into, incoherence. It is a string of thoughts that can meander into different topics often not having a main thread.

Diener and Dweck’s (1978) research is similar in that it deals with engagement; however, they discuss the phrase ‘learned helplessness.’ Learned helplessness is, “the perceived inability to surmount failure” (p.451). They discovered that when faced with a difficult task they believed they had ‘failed’ at, the participants found it hard to find solutions to the problem. The researchers discovered that the participants categorized as helpless dwelled “on the cause of failure” (p.451), rather than trying to seek remedies for improvement. With the focus on remedies also comes a certain sense of control and optimism that Diener and Dweck (1978) found the students they classed as helpless were often lacking.

Helplessness is also linked to feelings of self-efficacy; how students act, think, and are motivated depends on their sense of self-efficacy with any given task (Bandura, 1995). Confidence in one’s own ability has ramifications for student identity. Bandura states: “Successes build a robust belief in one’s personal efficacy. Failures undermine it, especially if failures occur before a sense of efficacy is firmly established” (p. 3). If a student does not think success is possible they may be reluctant to engage in a given task, and so avoid it and not engage in it at all. Vygotsky (1978) had similar results with his “choice reaction” (p.70) research. He found that when adults were faced with a fairly simple choice --using one’s left hand to press a button when the color red is shown, and the right hand to press a button when the color green is shown – they complete the

activity happily. However, when the number of stimuli increases and participants were faced with a larger number of responses, including being asked to not only use both hands but in some cases push with only a finger, they “often refused even to attempt to deal with the problem” (p. 70). Thus, if students believe they are going to fail, they may not even attempt a task. Bandura (1977) found similar outcomes with what he referred to as, “Aversive experiences.” Such experiences can “create expectations of injury that can activate both fear and defensive conduct” (p. 61), which in the context of student identity can have huge implications. If a student has had an uncomfortable learning or classroom experience in the past, they may be unwilling to try a similar task again for fear of reactivating those emotions.

It is clear from the research presented here that previous experiences have a bearing on future tasks if there is an underlying similarity between what the person is being asked to do and the previous experience. Learned helplessness stems from previous perceived failures and can have ramifications for high school students in terms of test taking, homework assignments, or even units of study that appear similar to units taken previously that the student may have found difficult.

### ***The effects of what students bring to school***

Circumstances at home play a large role in what students bring to school. Lareau (2011) carried out research looking at how the upbringing of children in different social classes affected their growth. Her results revealed the way parents approach their child’s learning is different. For example, middle-class families tended to favor a “concerted cultivation of children,” while working class parents favored a “natural growth” (p. 3), approach. A cultivation approach involves structured activities, while a natural approach involves extended, “leisure time, child-initiated play, clear boundaries between adults and children, and daily interactions with kin” (p.3). The experiences of the working-class children often lead to a more “childlike” (p. 3) upbringing.

Lareau (2011) also studied the shaping of identity in youth and found a distinct difference in the “cultivating” atmosphere of the middle class as opposed to the “natural” stance taken by low-income families. Lareau discovered that middle class children tend to have greater vocabulary ranges and “verbal agility” due to frequent and lengthy conversations with parents and other adults. Lareau’s findings are similar to Bowers (1973), who found that behavior is not produced from people or situations alone, but rather an interaction of the two. This can be seen in one of Rose’s

(1990) participants in his book *Lives on the Boundary*. Here his participants tell their stories of educational hardship:

Lilia is telling me about one of her fellow classmates who had also been designated a slow learner. “She said it was awful. She had no friends because everyone called her dumb, she started to believe she really was dumb. And with myself and my brother it was the same thing. When we were in those courses we thought very low of ourselves. We sort of created a little world of our own where only we existed. We became really shy.” (Rose, 1990, p. 241)

However, after moving to a new house to live her Aunt, Lilia states:

The schools were good, the teachers really liked me and I did really well...Between the eighth and ninth grades I came to UCLA for six weeks in the summer [...] It was like a dreamland for me. And I made it my goal to come here. (Rose, 1990, p. 239)

Thus, once Lilia had a glimpse of what the future could hold, she made it her goal to get accepted into UCLA.

The above quotes speak to the formation of failure attitudes toward education. Lilia, her brother, and her friend internalized the label ‘slow learner’ that had been imposed on them by others (in this case, the school), and it became part of their identity. The fact that they then began to feel ‘dumb’ as a result of being in those classes, shows that they started to believe those around them who told them they needed to be there, rather than believing in their own ability.

## **Motivation**

Within the field of motivation, Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) states there are two types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, or doing something for the joy of it without an external reward, and extrinsic motivation, doing something for an external reward (Lepper & Henderlong, 2000). Lepper and Henderlong (2000) posit that receiving an external reward may cause someone to expect a similar reward for the same action in the future. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), the reward could be tangible or merely the approval of a family member or teacher. They also describe a type of extrinsic motivation - introjected regulation – which involves the ego and causes people to carry out an act “in order to enhance or maintain self-esteem and the feeling of worth” (p. 62). Intrinsic motivation on the other hand “results in high-quality learning and creativity” (p. 55), in other words doing something solely for the pleasure it incites.

Interestingly, they claim that intrinsic motivation lessens with age. Additionally, Lepper & Henderlong (2000) claim there is a “Motivational value of a sense of control” (p. 259); therefore, in order to encourage writing, it is important to provide an environment where the students feel some kind of control, whether it be control over content or control over who has access to their work. In addition to feelings of control, material has to be relevant to students so they can see activities as holding personal interest (Bruner, 1966) as well as encouraging ‘ownership of ideas’ (Sharrock, 1974). If students can be encouraged to take control of concepts they can begin to own their work and consequently the motivation to write will increase.

In conclusion, levels of student engagement depend on both family and self-attitudes toward tasks. Learned helplessness is linked to self-efficacy as students who believe they have failed at a task previously may not attempt to look for solutions when faced with a similar task at a later date. Similarly, learned helplessness affects motivation as students may be discouraged during a task due to prior experiences.

## **CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY**

Chapter 3 explores narrative inquiry and the reasons behind using it as an approach for my dissertation; as well as examining the methods used to carry out the study including the initial pilot study, data collection and analysis techniques, and how I maintained trustworthiness.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

This qualitative study uses a narrative inquiry approach (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Bell, 2002; Kim, 2016; Locke, 2017; Wang & Geale, 2015) to explore the stories of two high school participants and their 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade teachers. Stories are a component of our identity (McLeod, 2004), and according to McAdams (1988) people tell stories in order to understand who they are, how they fit into the world, and how “to reach out to others” (Dyson, 2015, p. 202). Through narrative and reflection people are encouraged to connect with their inner selves and change as a result of their connection with others (McAdams, 1988). Similarly, Connelly and Clandinin (1999), posit that people tell and retell stories to arrive at a new way of knowing. As stories shift, they can “shape our thinking and living” (Hubber, Caine, Hubber, Steeves, 2013, p. 213). As Ross (2008) states: “storytelling is about survival” (p. 65). Life stories can be seen as social constructs situated within a historical and geographical space and time (Goodson, 2012; Locke, 2017). Understanding them in this way, “individualizes and personalizes” (Goodson, 2012, p. 6) these stories or discourses in order to make sense of experiences (Locke, 2017). Narrative inquiry thus allows for these stories to be explored and therefore become vehicles for expression, sense-making and comprehension.

Similarly, Bakhtin (1981) places emphasis on the connection between narrative and dialogue when considering the construction of the self (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). In this respect identity “is formed and reformed by the stories we tell and which we draw upon in our communications with others” (p.124). Furthermore, each individual has multiple identities, and often identities conflict, yet sit alongside each other, being constructed and reconstructed (Burke & Stets, 2009; Locke, 2017; Danielewicz, 2001). Therefore, identity as a whole is constructed by a collection of different strands that can interact, merge, or alter an individual’s identity.



Which strands are chosen to be part of a story is up to the narrator, and which parts are shared in research depends on a combination of the teller and the narrative inquirer. Therefore, as these stories are shaped by the person telling them- with certain parts told and certain parts withheld- the story may not adhere exactly to the reality of events (Knight 2009). Moreover, stories are often told with a specific audience in mind (Kohler Riessman, 2008; Joyce, 2015). Which sections narrators think are important is significant when considering the effect that a particular section has on identity, and the identity the participant wants to portray.

Teachers and students naturally tell stories, and within these stories they themselves are characters (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Bell, 2002). In adopting the persona of character, a narrator takes on a more significant and agentic role in narration, as the story inherently includes a narrator's reflection on a story (Conle, 1999; Knight, 2009). Thus, through the reflective process, the narrator has the opportunity and agency to shape the discourse in the retelling making it more significant to the listener. Bell (2002) states that these stories are often parts of larger stories that people are not always aware of, and if they are aware of them they often leave these sections out of storytelling as they may contradict part of the identities they have formed. Therefore, people use stories that support their idea of identity, rather than refute it (Bell, 2002). Interestingly, Bell (2002) claims that people do not necessarily have to believe their own stories because it is the underlying assumptions that help create and shape these stories that is important. Thus, narrative inquiry is also an important way of exploring identity as stories not only shape peoples' worlds (Smith & Sparkes, 2008; Polkinghorne, 1988), but actually help construct identity (Smith & Sparkes, 2008; Atkins, 2004; Singer, 2004). Rosenwald and Ochsberg (1992) claim: "Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are the means by which identities are fashioned" (p. 1). Atkins concurs as he believes that identity is constructed through narratives. As students construct their own narratives daily both at home and at school, they are creating their own student identity based on what is important to them at the time.

Singer (2004) goes one step further believing that identity formation and forming narrative experiences go hand in hand. He posits that stories are not only relevant to the self but go beyond the self to the "other and the world in general" (p. 438). Once the stories go beyond the self- narrative researchers listen, encourage, and retell the stories in order to reveal "deeply hidden assumptions" (Bell, 2002, p. 212). These assumptions are interpreted by the researcher and the audience reading the narrative.

### **Justification for using narrative inquiry**

I intend to use narrative inquiry as my research design as I believe the “living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories” (Connolly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4), will help bring the stories of my participants to life. During interviews with my participants they both mentioned that throughout middle school they did not feel empowered to speak up in class - to ask questions or clarify points- therefore, as Wang & Geale, (2015) state, narrative inquiry allows “voices that may have otherwise remained silent” (p. 195), to be heard. Narrative inquiry thus provides a window through which we can view people’s experiences (Bell, 2002; Bishop, 1990), concentrating on the events that they think are important (Kohler Riessman, 2008).

My participants also revealed sections of their lives in the classroom through journaling, discussion and writing activities. They journal, discuss, and complete other writing assignments that include viewing novels, poems and texts from a personal perspective. As they tell and interpret these stories they interact with their own texts and create meaning in the telling of their experiences (Joyce, 2015). During interviews my participants tell the stories of their writings, and together through collaboration, we retell aspects of their narrative. Furthermore, retelling stories allows isolated aspects of the narrative to come together and provide a context for understanding other parts of the narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995).

As narrative inquiry is a collaboration between participant and researcher that involves the process of storying and re-storying, both participant and researcher have a voice (Connolly & Clandinin, 1990). Consequently, as the researcher is cognizant of this fact, they must work to construct a relationship that accommodates both parties and promotes an atmosphere of questioning and seeking meaning (Connolly & Clandinin, 1990; Hendry, 2010; Bruner, 1996). Collaborative storytelling about the previous interview at the start of each new interview, allows me to conduct member checking while also providing a means of recapping and revisiting parts of my participants’ narratives.

For these reasons I believe narrative inquiry is ideal for my study.

## Methods

### Context

The majority of current identity research (Alsup, 2006; Danielewicz, 2001; Brown, 2002; Burke & Stets, 2009; Locke, 2017) addresses teacher identity and preservice teacher identity with a lack of research on student identity (especially within student success programs). This is a void I hope to address here. I obtained IRB approval at the start of the 2016 fall semester, prior to commencing my pilot study. As well as gaining parental consent and student assent, I also gained teacher consent from my participants' 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade ELA teachers. While this dissertation concentrates on student identity, I was also interested in whether teacher identity within the classroom informs student identity, so it too became a focus.

The student participants in this study, Jon and Fiona (pseudonyms), were part of a two-year student success program in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade during the 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 academic years. The program followed a school within a school model, where the program is housed on the same site as the main high school, but in a separate building for 9<sup>th</sup> grade. This study was born from a pilot study that followed Jon and Fiona throughout the two-year program and during 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

### *The Pilot Study*

In 2015 the opportunity arose to observe a 10<sup>th</sup> grade English class that was part of a student success program in a local school. As I was interested in student identity I jumped at the chance to visit the school and see how the class worked. After observing for six weeks I became curious about how the students came to be in the class, their background up until high school, and if their attitude toward school- as well as how they felt about themselves as students- had changed since the beginning of 9<sup>th</sup> grade. In other words, I wanted to discover if they thought the program had helped them as students.

After gaining IRB approval I began the study by visiting the 9<sup>th</sup> grade class each week to observe and take notes. I repeated my observations for 10<sup>th</sup> grade, again taking anecdotal notes each week. As Jon and Fiona were no longer part of the program in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, I did not carry out any observations. Instead, I interviewed them at the end of the fall and spring semesters.

This pilot study revealed many things about my participants including their motivation for completing in-class work and homework, how the attitude of family members affected their thoughts about school, and how the program had helped them become successful as they entered their final year of high school. The study provided background information for my dissertation, which is a more focused continuation of the pilot study. It includes following Jon and Fiona as they progress through 12th grade.

## **Participants**

As stated above my participants are two high school students and their 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade English teachers at Lincoln High School (pseudonym). All four participants are part of the student success program within the school. The student success program encompasses 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade. My student participants are in this study as a result of being in the program and being in the same 9<sup>th</sup> grade English class. As I wanted to explore the concept of identity I chose to carry out observations each Friday during a class the teacher named *Freewrite Friday* (Freewriting is to write quickly without stopping and not worrying about spelling or punctuation (Elbow, 1973)). I chose this particular 50-minute class as students spent 15 minutes freewriting about a topic of their choice, before 35 minutes of voluntarily sharing their freewrite and discussing it as a class.

During 10<sup>th</sup> grade my student participants were in the same class and I observed them during their English class each week where they read, analyzed, made personal connections, and ultimately wrote about novels. I chose this class to observe in order to remain with the discussion/ personal connection theme. Jon and Fiona were in different English classes during 11<sup>th</sup> grade and as they were no longer in the program I did not carry out regular weekly observations, choosing instead to observe them twice and rely mainly on data collected during interviews. As my participants entered 12<sup>th</sup> grade I continued to follow their progress to see how/ if personal connections helped to inform and shape their student identity. The data I collected during 9th, 10th, and 11th grade helped inform my dissertation.

There were three criteria used to select student participants for this study and Jon and Fiona met all three:

1. be in 9<sup>th</sup> grade during the 2016/17 academic year,
2. be enrolled in the student success program,
3. be in the same 9<sup>th</sup> grade English class.

I visited the class prior to starting the study and described my intent to conduct research on student identity to a group of 15 students. After introducing myself and describing my research, I distributed consent forms to students who were interested in participating. Eight students were interested. As the students were under 18 I also distributed parental consent forms.

From the eight students who took parental consent and student assent forms, two returned the forms. I enrolled them as participants and gave them pseudonyms. Of the two participants, one identifies as male, and the other identifies as female. My teacher participants were selected as they taught English within the program. Ms. Kean teaches 9<sup>th</sup> grade and helped develop the student success program, and Ms. Sotherland teaches 10<sup>th</sup> grade and has been part of the program from its inception. Both teachers agreed to be in this study, signed consent forms and were given pseudonyms. Both teachers identify as female. See Appendices 2-4 for approved consent and assent forms.

## **My Role**

As narrative inquiry dictates, the researcher has a prominent role in the telling of participants' stories (Connolly & Clandinin, 1990; Kim 2016). Kim (2016) reminds us that a narrative inquirer's voice is present in the "collaboration... [of] mutual story telling between the researcher and the participants" (p. 112). Having multiple I's places the researcher within the story; thus, as stories are co-constructed there must be a balance between the voice of the participant and the voice of the researcher. Both voices should be heard (Connolly & Clandinin, 1990). Further, Connolly and Clandinin (1990) liken narrative inquiry to writing a story: there should be plot, scene, and multiple 'I's'.

In relation to co-constructing stories another thing that should be considered is telling someone else's story with fidelity (Kim, 2016). Kim reminds us that the difference between telling a story truthfully and telling a story with fidelity, is that telling a story truthfully states exactly

what happened, while telling a story with fidelity pays attention to the way participants tell it. They concentrate on what they believe to be important.

During my thirteen years of teaching experience in the classroom, from Kindergarten through college in both the UK-where I'm originally from- and the US, I have heard many student stories pertaining to student identity. Many of my students faced barriers to their education outside of their control, usually originating from something happening at home or in the community. Most of my students who articulated their stories themselves were older, while the stories of younger students tended to be told by child welfare services or other adults. Therefore, while the stories were varied and told from different perspectives, I believe that issues relating to student identity and equity are relevant for all ages. Coming into this project, after hearing about it from a student success teacher, I wondered about the effect of placing students in a success program that was separated from the main school. I was also curious about the effect of being in a separate building for 9<sup>th</sup> grade. As I began my observations I was aware that my feelings and interpretations would, and should, color the narratives; therefore, as my participants and I co-constructed their narratives, member checking and authenticating their stories became vital to maintaining fidelity (Kim, 2016).

## **Data Collection**

The data I have collected from 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades was used to provide quotes and observational notes, as well as helping inform my 12<sup>th</sup> grade data collection. Further, the data from the pilot study helped shape interview questions and lines of inquiry during 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Methods for collecting data during 12<sup>th</sup> grade included anecdotal notes, observations, and interviews.

### ***Observations and anecdotal notes***

Anecdotal notes were taken during weekly observations in both fall and spring semesters of 9<sup>th</sup> grade and during the fall and spring semesters in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Anecdotal notes include information such as: student and teacher behaviors, student attitude towards assignments, attitudes toward the teacher, and attitudes toward school in general. They also comment on interactions: student to student, student to teacher, and student to assignments. I believe this information is important when attempting to form a detailed and holistic picture of my participants' identity within the classroom.

*Example of anecdotal notes*

Nov. 11<sup>th</sup>

A lot of the students seem restless today. There's lots of chatter and they take a while to settle down. The classroom is really hot and students remove sweaters. It seems like they are ready for Thanksgiving break. Fiona is one of the first to start writing, head bowed and concentrating hard. Jon does not seem too interested today. He looks around and when no one responds to his glances he pokes the student in front. She turns around and mouths "what?" in an annoyed whisper. Jon whispers something back I can't hear; she rolls her eyes at him smiling, and turns back around. He grins and looks toward Ms. Kean.

Jon stares around the room for a moment before looking at his laptop. He starts doing something – opening a document? Searching for something? I can't see the screen. Most students are writing by now. He begins typing. Looking around the room all students are now typing or writing. They all seem engaged and concentrating on their work.

While I took notes on my participants actions and discourse within the class I did not include any freewrites in my results (apart from the two Jon offered to share). This was an intentional omission. As Fiona is an exceptionally shy person and I did not want to request the freewrites and potentially put her in an awkward position. As I did not request any from Fiona, I also did not request any from Jon.

During observations I sat at the back of the class over to one side and away from the door. As well as being unobtrusive this was an excellent vantage point to see both students and teacher. During the class I did not speak to any of the students (expect to smile/ greet them if they greeted me). I compiled anecdotal notes concerning my two participants and the teacher.

Observations during 10<sup>th</sup> grade were conducted during a reading, discussion and writing class. This class was ideal as students were discussing characters and their actions within the text and exploring personal connections. In this class I again sat in the back corner and took anecdotal notes.

During 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade I continued to follow my participants conducting interviews at the end of the fall and spring semesters. The two weeks preceding the 12<sup>th</sup> grade interviews I carried out observations in both Jon and Fiona's ELA classrooms. Immediately after each

observation I wrote short memos noting students' moods, general classroom atmosphere and anything else noteworthy about the content of the lesson or students within the class. An example of a memo can be seen on page 57 and in Appendix 7.

### ***Interviews***

I conducted semi-structured interviews (see Appendices 5 and 6 for interview protocols) with both my participants and the grade level teacher at the start and end of each semester in both 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and my participants only at the end of each semester in 11<sup>th</sup> grade and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and transcribed immediately afterward. The interviews focused on groups of questions aimed at discovering specific information. For example, the questions for each student participant interview were divided into 3 sections:

1. Questions about how students feel the student success program has affected their sense of identity.
2. Questions about student identity and how the participants feel about being a student.
3. Perceived attitudes of friends and family toward the program and its effects.

These groups of questions originated from both my research questions and conversations I witnessed during observations, anecdotal notes I made during observations, and topics discussed in interviews (e.g. questions in spring were informed by answers/ discussions in fall of the same academic year). The interview questions for the teacher participants were similarly divided into sections. For example,

1. Questions concerning building rapport with students at the start of the year and retaining it throughout.
2. Questions concerning vulnerability and why they thought it was important.

### **Data Analysis**

As this is a continuation of a 3-year pilot study interim analysis is very important. Interim analysis, or the “cyclical ...process of collecting data, analyzing the data, collecting additional data, analyzing those data” (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p. 567), will allow for systematic analysis and a building of ideas. After each interview I analyzed the data to look for themes and these themes began the initial coding process (Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Saldaña, 2013). For example, family appeared multiple times during all three years of the pilot study; therefore, I reread



each transcript and highlighted all information pertaining to family. Here are some examples from the transcripts that I highlighted. They are taken from both participants and span multiple grades:

Fiona 9th grade: *I always feel like my family expects a lot from me because of my sister and my brother who were mostly in honors and AP classes.*

Fiona 10th grade: *My mom is more on board with the program [this year] and she thinks it's a good idea for me to be in it.*

Fiona 11th grade: *My mom helps with grammar as she's good at English*

Jon 9th grade: *There was a lot of stuff going on with my dad that was in my head, but I'm trying to put that behind me now.*

Jon 11th grade: *My granddad is pretty involved in my grades now. He checks them online regularly.*

All quotes concerning family were highlighted in yellow. I repeated this process looking for other similarities. These similarities were highlighted in different colors. Combing through the data in this way allowed a close inspection of what my participants were thinking and explaining over time. This was crucial as my study was longitudinal. Highlighting similar ideas in different colors worked to organize the data into themes; for example, information about the program was highlighted in blue, information about engagement was highlighted in green etc. I then created a large online spreadsheet with these themes. I will refer to this spreadsheet as my codebook. After each subsequent interview I again looked for themes and added them to the codebook along with salient quotes to provide evidence for the themes. In this initial codebook there were ten themes (see below for a list of themes).

### ***Themes in the initial codebook***

My initial codebook included 10 themes:

1. Background information
2. Thoughts about the program
3. Community influences
4. Concern about the program
5. Family influences

6. Behavior changes
7. Comments specifically about FWF
8. Changes in perspective
9. Motivation
10. Teacher identity

Figure 1 shows a screenshot of a section from my initial codebook.

The Program	Community	Worry	Family
<p>"I like the program. It helps and it's nice to have just small classes, more one on one time with your teacher. There's less students so you don't need to worry about a big crowd and the classes are smaller. So the teacher can know you better and know how you learn better and knows how to teach you better and you all get closer. Cos all the people out here, we're all out here for the same kind of reason. Cos we all have the potential to do so much better than we know we can. And I really think that people don't think of the program as a good thing. They think of it as 'you're out here cos you're stupid', but that's not true. You're out here cos you don't put in the work. And you really can, so I think it's a really good program."</p> <p>"It definitely has helped me a lot with like my homework skills and getting better at like actually doing things and like putting myself out there and like answering the questions and like showing my potential and like how smart I can actually be because last year I had really bad grades and I was one of those kids who never did their homework. And in my math class last year if you didn't do your homework you'd do it out in the hall while the rest of the class went over it and for the first semester, every day I was out in the hallway because I never did my homework and I had such low grades cos I'd never do my homework."</p>	<p>"I like it a lot because there's smaller classes and you get to know the people in those classes."</p> <p>"I like it [being with same people] because you can get to know people better and you can become friends with people that you never thought you'd be friends with"</p> <p>"We talk everyday now and we text all the time. I think it does help you academically because you feel more confident and you aren't as anxious or nervous of being in a class of people that you don't know"</p> <p>"I like it cos it's a small area and I can get to know people out here"</p>	<p>"I thought I would get bullied, get made fun of for being in the class. Just like people cos I was like scared. My family we joke around and make fun of other jokingly. My sisters and my dad call it the tard barn and I've actually heard someone say it to me, like, erm, someone I've known for a while but haven't see for a while. He said "How come I haven't seen you around?" So I said that I was out in the center and he said "oh what in the tard barn" and I said "hey" and then I laughed about it."</p> <p>"I'm still scared to tell people that I'm out here cos I'm scared I'll be made fun of for being out here"</p>	<p>"When I told my mom about it she was like w was like... because it was something I was sca and I just wanted a perspective outside of my what really happened"</p> <p>Brother in the quibowl team and very well k lived in my siblings' shadows. In middle school bothered me. But none of my siblings have b</p>

Figure 1. The Initial Codebook

Over time the quotes and ideas within the codebook grew and the themes began connecting and overlapping. These connections became my second round of coding, and were grouped together in a second, more focused, codebook. The above 10 themes were condensed into these three categories:

1. Relationship between home and school identities
2. The effect of teacher identity on student identity
3. The effect of student engagement on student identity

Category 1 emerged from crossover between Themes 1, 2, 3 and 5.

Category 2 emerged mainly from Theme 10 combined with quotes from Themes 2 and 7.

Category 3 emerged from Themes 4, 6, 8 and 9.

Table 2 shows how the themes were combined into categories in tabular form. Figure 3 shows a screenshot of a section from the second code book.

Table 2. Categories and Themes

<b>Category</b>	<b>Themes included in each category</b>
Relationship between home and school identities	Background information Thoughts about the program Community influences Family influences
The effect of teacher identity on student identity	Teacher identity Thoughts about the program Comments specifically about Freewrite Friday
The effect of student engagement on student identity	Concerns about the program Behavior changes Changes in perspective Motivation

	Home/ School	Student engagement on student identity	Teacher Identity/ Student Identity
	<p>Like my sister, her junior year, she went, she dropped out, like public school, where I did all my school, she dropped out and did an online school and her senior year got a whole new perspective – all those social hierarchies are so stupid. Popularity isn't really a thing, and it doesn't need to be a thing cos we're all people, we're all the same. We all have our problems and our high points and our low points. I don't know why we can't all be friends. It doesn't matter if you're more rich than another person, just like be friends with them. And it doesn't matter who you are or what you are, you can be friends and it doesn't matter. Cos in these movies it's like, this whole clique thing, and that's not really a thing cos I'm in like multiple cliques. Cos you have to be, like in the movies you have to be either this, or this. Like a Jock, or either someone who doesn't do anything. And I, I'm not really a jock but I do, I'm in cheerleading but I'm really book smart. And there are these stereotypes of cheerleaders who are like the stupid ones, and they're blonde and...I am blonde, yes, but I'm not stupid. I love musical theatre and I love acting and singing and people have this perception of it that those people are nerds and they don't do other sports. But that's not really true. Yes, I love music theatre, I love acting and singing but I also love cheerleading. And I feel like, because there's these stereotypes people try to fit in to one place. But just try to be yourself and don't be...you don't have to be in this clique, or that clique and that's the way it is. And you can have friends who do so much different things. I have friends who are in choir and they sing and other friends who are in sports and they don't really sing and there are people in choir who are – there's this girl who's in choir and she's on the football team and people will be like, oh she's on the football team she doesn't really have- she can't do anything else other than football but she's a really good singer so like that breaks the stereotype of the football player.</p>	<p>My mom always tells me try not to label yourself because if you label yourself that makes you think like I can't be friends with them because they are a different label and so I'm trying really hard not to label myself and be like, oh I'm this so I can't be friends with that person because they're that. So honestly high school, people think it's so hard but honestly just live your life, have fun. Cos after high school you have college and that's like the rest of your life. So have fun in high school but still do your work and try really hard to get good grades and in college, that's kind of your junior/ senior year of high school plan your life out. You don't have to plan your whole life out but think of what you want to do, think of what college you want to go to, and then in college do well, still have fun, but try to get good grades so you can graduate and get like a job. Try to get a job in what you like, work in an area that you enjoy not just for money or because there's less time you have to spend at your work. Try to have fun and even when you're an adult try to have fun because you have one life, live it to the fullest.</p> <p>I'm a diligent worker but sometimes I can procrastinate. Like, I get no work done. Nothing has really changed that much, like it's not easier, it's not harder, it's kind of like the same. It might get harder, cos I get English, it's one of my best classes. I understand it. And I feel like I'm good in that class. I have a low A cos like, because of something I turned in that I didn't finish. It was a time sensitive thing and so if I had finished that my grade would be higher. But I feel like English is just one of those classes that I understand. Like English has never been hard for me and I feel like it's not getting that hard.</p> <p>End of 10th. I still procrastinate. Like I, like I'm like I am different than last year but that's like outside stuff I needed a little bit last year, like grades grade wise, like my grades stayed pretty good throughout the year. You said that things have changed outside of school. Is that just for the better or you're just more aware of who you are as they're getting older? I've definitely like gotten more confident and decide for myself like I have like physically and mentally just changes completely because like, well eating, eating wise, like I have like a lot of like problems where I can't eat a lot of things.</p> <p>English is boring. Did you find it boring last year? Yeah, apart from FWF. That was good. English in general is boring. I mean half the words they teach you nowadays you don't even use. You just learn them this one time</p>	<p>In 9th grade I'd come in, I'd walk in and sit down, do my stuff, do what I'm supposed to do. Sit there and try to pay attention. But this year I go in, do I have to do, wait for further instructions. I don't understand some of the stuff she does, like... personally in my opinion I don't like the novel reading. We read Antigone, and that book's like – I don't understand any of it. Like there, thy, thee? you know? Stuff like that. I don't understand any of it. FWF - encouraged us to write by her doing it too.</p>
Fiona			

Figure 2. Screenshot of a Section from the Second Codebook

In addition to the initial codebook and second, more focused codebook, I also wrote reflections about the three categories (see Appendix 8 for an example), including what the category was, what was included in it, and why. Memos that I wrote during the initial coding about “emerging concepts, themes, and patterns found in the data” (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p. 568), also informed these longer reflections, which in turn revealed gaps that needed to be filled by my research. Below are two examples of memo I wrote during 9th grade that shows how teacher identity can influence students.

*Example of 9<sup>th</sup> grade memos*

Feb. 17th

Kate’s enthusiasm for writing really came today through as she encouraged [name of student] to share his freewrite with the class. Telling him it was his best freewrite so far really seemed to boost his confidence. He started off speaking quietly but his voice got stronger as he realized people were listening to him. While the class was listening for content, Kate seemed to be listening for something else. She smiled when he used a weekly vocab word -even though this wasn’t a stipulation - and nodded when he used a simile to describe his ex-girlfriend. At the end of the 2-minute read aloud several students clapped and one let out a low whistle: “that was *good*, man.” When the congratulations died down Kate jumped in with all of the things he had incorporated into his free-write: “you set the scene, you got the vocab, you nailed the telling.” He seemed to enjoy the praise.

Feb. 24th

This student produced another freewrite this week that was a continuation of his freewrite from last week. Interestingly, he told Kate that he had started writing bits of it during the week and kept adding to it every day up until Friday (something Kate told the class she used to do as a journalist). He seems very proud of his work and was first to raise his hand during the sharing section. The other students looked eager to hear him share again.

The memos I wrote were varied: some covered one lesson or one aspect of a lesson, while others (like the one above) were a combination of multiple weeks. As I am relying on stories my participants tell, and stories I tell about my participants, trustworthiness is crucial.

### **Trustworthiness**

Before starting this research, student participants in this study signed a student assent form, their parent/ guardian, and my teacher participants signed a consent form detailing procedures for anonymity and secure handling of data. All names and other identifiable features will be removed from my data. The participants will remain anonymous and any data collected from the interviews and in-class observations and used in any future publications will only be done with participants' consent.

Due to the nature of narrative inquiry being a “collaboration involving mutual storytelling between the researcher and the participants” (Kim, 2016), the researcher’s voice is inevitably present in narrative research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin & Connolly, 2000). As researcher voices shape the narrative, a bond of trust established through member checking is essential (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Member checking, or “The discussion of the researcher’s interpretations and conclusions with the study participants...for verification, insight, and deeper understanding” (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p. 299), ensures that my participants’ voices are being heard. I checked my understanding of each story and interview answer/ situation with the participants as the research progressed.

Using a variety of data collections methods (observations, anecdotal notes, and interviews) promotes trustworthiness. Multiple interviews with students and teachers each year will help gain different perspectives for data analysis.

## **CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS**

It was a swelteringly hot day without a cloud in the sky as I pulled into the parking lot of Lincoln High School (pseudonym). I drove through the parking lot searching for a spot and was fortunate to see a car backing out of a visitor parking space. I quickly snapped it up and made my way into the cool air-conditioning of the school foyer. Lincoln High School is located on the outskirts of a midwestern university town. The landscape is flat allowing a panoramic view of straight roads that stretch into the distance, little clusters of houses, and corn fields interspersed with pastures of grazing cows. With a student body of approximately 1800, Lincoln High School has a big school feel in a small town.

Within the school is the Student Success Program I was here to observe. I first heard about the program during the previous semester from a 10th grade teacher, Ms. Sotherland, whom I met at a social event. She described the program in detail and after discussing it with her for over an hour, the thing that I remember most from the conversation was the isolation of the 9th grade students. The 9th grade program is housed in a separate building just off the main high school, and while the buildings are only a short distance across the parking lot, they are very much separate. I began thinking about the effect this separation could have on students' sense of identity.

Later that evening I emailed my advisor asking what she thought about me going into the school to observe, and possibly conduct research, on the effects of the program on student identity. Happily, my advisor thought it was a great idea and I began preparations for observing the incoming 9th grade cohort. At the time I wanted to observe the class for a year; however, as the year wore on I realized I wanted to follow this class through 10th grade and possibly beyond. Thus, my 4-year longitudinal study began.

### **The 9th Grade Class**

After signing in at the main office I made my way back across the parking lot to the student success building. The one-story building was fairly small with the parking lot separating it from the main school on one side, and the sports fields on the other. I was curious to see how the students acted within the confines of the building as it was such a small space and the majority of the classes were held there. I happened to arrive as the students were transitioning between classes and there



was a lot of joking, laughter and chatter as they moved between rooms. The students all seemed to know one another and they smiled as they passed in the one long corridor that ran the full length of the building. My immediate feeling as I looked around, was one of community.

The 9th grade English class was located at the end of the building and a few students smiled at me as I entered. The 9th grade teacher, Ms. Kean, was standing by the door. She greeted me warmly and invited me to sit at a desk next to hers at the front. The desk was facing out into the classroom rather than toward the front of the room as the others were. This gave me a good view of the whole class. The room was full of desks that were laid out in rows with about four feet between them. They almost touched the one in front. As student success classes are capped at 15 students, I wondered why there are so many desks crammed into the room.

A few weeks prior I had met with Ms. Kean at a local coffee stop and she told me about the program and her 9th grade class. I was curious about the feelings of students toward the program and the 9th grade separation. She explained: “Some students are opposed to the program at first because it’s not in the main building. They are separated and don’t feel like they are really at [Lincoln High School].” She continued: “they also have to deal with the stigma of being in the ‘tard barn.’” The ‘tard barn’ was a name given to the building by some students in the main high school, as it used to house special education students. However, sitting and observing the students noisily enter the classroom I did not see any reservations.

Ms. Kean is a veteran teacher who has been teaching for 20 years and she has been with the Student Success Program since its creation. She has a bouncy and easy-going air about her as I watch her standing in the doorway and greeting her students. Some just walk past her with a nod while others stop for a longer chat about their day, an assignment, or a sporting event. Ms. Kean is quick to laugh at a joke or a student telling her in mock surprise, “What? That’s due today?” I realize she has a good relationship with these students and I wonder how she fostered it. As the bell rings the students begin to settle down and take out their laptops. They all look at the whiteboard to read The Quote of the Day, which today is: “Failure will never overtake me if my determination to succeed is enough.” The majority of the class read it, put their heads down and begin to type. I guess this is a daily routine as there are no instructions or explanations. After a few minutes, the tapping of the laptop keys begins to slow and students start to look up; a few raise their hands. A student sitting at the back of the room is asked to respond to the quote and explains how it is about overcoming the odds and how previously he didn’t care about his grades, but now

he does because he wants to do sports, but his grades are low. A discussion about grades then ensues and Jon explains, “I get 100% on my homework, but Fs on exams.” There are murmurs of agreement around the room and he continues quietly, “wow, we all suck.”

The feeling of happiness that I sensed at the start of the lesson is gone. As the weeks wear on I start to notice that this becomes a pattern: the class as a whole are fairly happy when they enter the room, but the happiness dissolves as soon as someone mentions grades.

### **Ms. Kean’s Story**

Prior to becoming a teacher Ms. Kean worked as a journalist for a newspaper in a large US city. She loves writing and it is a large part of her identity. As such she became frustrated that her students did not like writing as much as she did; she recalls, “they didn’t like writing at all!” Ms. Kean is a huge proponent of journaling and as a former journalist she believes that journaling helps people make meaning of experiences. She describes how the students within the Student Success Program “were there for a reason. It’s not that they’re not smart, they just aren’t getting the grades.” She explains, “it’s usually something going on at home. But whatever it is, it’s stopping them succeeding.” Rodger (2002) posits that Dewey would claim: “experience is what happens to you; what you do with what happens to you is directly dependent on the meaning that you make of it” (p. 848). Thus, while we may not be in control of the experiences themselves, we can control “the meaning that we make of them” (p. 849). Given the students’ backgrounds and what they were bringing to her class each day she described that she wanted, “to find a way to use journaling to get some of these feelings out. They need to talk to someone but often don’t know how.” Ms. Kean knew that in order to do this she had to first figure out why she “loved writing so much.”

This attempt to try and understand her own love of writing in order to convey it to her students made her realize that she loved writing because she could write about topics that she was passionate about. In other words: “I had choice.” During her years as a journalist she followed stories that she cared about in her local community; therefore, writing about them was not a chore. With this in mind she started exploring what her students cared about. She made an effort to talk with them in the hallway between classes or at the end of class, and she noticed that students wanted to discuss two things: sports and things happening in their own lives. Ms. Kean said that providing students with this opportunity to chat in the hallways, “told me that they all had stories

to tell and were willing to tell them if there was someone willing to listen. No strings attached. No grades attached.”

Keeping in mind that her students had things they needed, and liked, to talk about, Ms. Kean designed a class she called Freewrite Friday. Freewrite Friday - a 50 minute class each Friday – is based on the premise of writing about any topic the students cared about. Recalling the first year she implemented the class, Ms. Kean states: “the first year I tried this it didn’t go so well at first. The students struggled to write. They were reluctant and too hung up on the mechanics of writing.” However, observing the class 6 weeks into the fall semester, all writing with heads bowed, it is clear that choice works. Having told the students that “no topics are off the table,” including personal stories about life outside of school, meant her students quickly became comfortable with both the class, and her as a teacher. Ms. Kean states “it’s always hard at first as they try different topics out to see if they are okay [school appropriate] or not.” She continues:

as soon as they realize that yes it’s okay to write about an awful weekend they had, or something happening that they need to get off of their chest, they begin to relax some and next week write a little more. So each week their writing grows.

Ms. Kean structures Freewrite Friday in such a way that after the writing portion, students voluntarily share their narratives. She believes that this is an important process for students as they have often “buried [personal issues] deep inside of them and if they start to feel like they can actually put it down on paper, it starts to come out and oh man, then they share.” She explains that, “the sharing can get real emotional but it really helps. The stuff they write about, like, others in the class have often been there you know. Sometimes I feel like a therapist.”

By describing the sharing section as being “like therapy,” she identifies a need within her classroom for the students to write and discuss personal matters; the students “need to process and talk about this stuff”. When considering a particular student, she states:

I am really hoping that [Freewrite Friday] works well this week because I have a student who's coming back to school tomorrow and her mother was tragically murdered last week. I've never dealt with this before.

In situations like this Ms. Kean facilitates her students’ “opening up” by often writing alongside them. While I did not witness her share her freewrite word for word- though she explained during an interview that she often does read it aloud- she did provide the general gist

and explain *why* she felt the need to write about a particular topic on a certain day. For example, she shared her frustration about a problem she had with a family member that she was struggling to find a solution for. She felt that, “if [she] wrote about it a solution might come to her.” During the course of her writing Ms. Kean explained that she thinks the only viable solution is to speak directly to her family member in order to “get everything out in the open.” After sharing, Ms. Kean invited responses from her students. This example correlates with her students’ experiences as they often find themselves in “situations that are hard and don’t know what to do about them.”

As Ms. Kean told me about the program and her students, it became clear how much she cares about both. Being willing to devote a whole class period to students *getting things off their chest* was an interesting approach, and one I had never seen before. I was keen to see the effect on the students. With this background information on the program and Freewrite Friday, I am curious to see the class and meet Jon and Fiona.

### Jon’s story

**9th Grade: “this program helped me get better grades than I usually get. And I’ve never written as much as I do each Friday”**

Jon sits in the middle of the second row, he is short for his age and slightly overweight with a nonchalant attitude. There is a male student to his left that he frequently engages in conversation, and a female student in front of him, he often taps on the back to get her attention. Sometimes she turns around and talks to him; other times she ignores him. I quickly ascertain that he is one of the more vocal students; however, his contributions are often asides or comments about issues other students have raised. While discussing texts or novels, he tends to put his head on the desk and play with whatever is close to hand: a pen, an eraser etc. Despite his attitude he has a large presence in the class and when he speaks, others tend to listen.

During my first interview with Jon in 9th grade he explained, “I’ve never liked school. I want to join the army so I’m doing what I need to do to just get through school and join up.” He tells me that he does not like English and has not “read a book since *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* in elementary school.” When asked how he gets by with in-class quizzes on novels he states, “cliff notes, or friends. Mostly friends.” Jon explained that the class always got warning about quizzes beforehand so he could get together with friends to “talk about them.” I wondered how many other students also relied on these pre-quiz discussions.

Jon did not want to be in the program when he first heard he had been selected in 8th grade, explaining, “I didn’t want to be different, you know? I didn’t want to be stuck out in another building. High school is hard enough without that.” However, during my class observations I could sense that his attitude was beginning to change as the semester wore on. While he still did not engage in discussions about texts, he did begin to get involved in Friday’s Freewrite class.

Freewrite Friday quickly became a focus of my observations during the first semester and beyond as it was the class that got the majority of students interested in both participating in class and writing. Students who had not written more than 5 lines in a class period previously, were now writing multiple paragraphs without hesitation or complaint. I could see change happening both within the class as a whole and with Jon. When asked about it, Jon explains:

I used to be terrible at school. I used to get Fs and stuff, but this program helped me get better grades than I usually get. And I’ve never written as much as I do each Friday.

During Freewrite Friday Jon often responds positively to other students sharing their work, but rarely shares his own. He provides words of encouragement or affirmation when a student shares a story about violence in the home, “yeah, been *there* man.” Jon believes that being with the same students all year is an advantage of the Student Success Program: “It’s actually really nice cos [sic] I’m mainly with all my friends so I don’t get nervous and stuff talking in class. I’m much more confident.” He thinks that having close friends in class also helps him academically.

During my first interview with Jon I asked how he felt as a student in the Freewrite Friday class. He explained: “I’m not a writer, like, not at all...I don’t really get into that sharing stuff. It’s personal, you know?” However, by the spring semester Jon was a regular contributor to the sharing portion of Freewrite Friday:

I think the sharing section is kinda nice. Most people know what you’re talking about. They’ve either experienced it or they’ve dealt with a similar type of kind. I mean, I can kinda relate to my friends cos they’ve been there, done that. You know, like similar stuff that I’ve been through.

When asked about being in the program in general, he explains: “I get treated nice, I get treated with respect over here.” This is in sharp contrast to his previous experience,

I used to answer questions last year [in 8th grade] and people would laugh if I got them wrong. Or they'd stare at me like I was dumb. But here I've opened up more and I don't think people would laugh at the wrong answers. [Ms. Kean] taught us not to laugh at other people. She says there's no right or wrong answers. So, if you laughed you would be talked to. She set that up from the very beginning.

Nearing the end of our interview Jon reflects on his experience during Freewrite Friday:

When I came in here I was not writing, I wasn't comfortable sharing my thoughts, but I got to the end of the year, I heard other people share and they've inspired me to share and get deeper into my thoughts.

During my interview with Ms. Kean, she revealed that by the end of the year some students would start planning their freewrite earlier in the week: "they would show me what they had so far, or tell me about their idea." She explained that this kind of excitement about freewriting was common during the second semester. Jon describes how it is not just Freewrite Friday that has had an impact on him; the program has also "changed [him] a lot."

At the end of our interview Jon pulls out his notebook and asks if he can share two of his freewrites: one from October, and one from May. I tell him I would love to hear them.

Freewrite: October

My younger self back in middle school was so bad. I wish that I could go back and do better in lower school than I did, so hopefully I don't make the same mistakes and do better in my real world. Today I love that I can get some help and get those years back. I love [Lincoln High School] and I act a lot better but I need help cos I don't understand any of the things they've taught us.

Jon's final Freewrite: End of May

When your dad don't care, he looks at you and stares.  
Doesn't know who you are, God it's been 7 years so far.  
Still no call, not once at all.  
I love my real dad but I think he wishes I'm dead.  
People always say just be the bigger person,  
But what they don't know is he's been a bad person.  
I should not have tried to be the bigger guy.  
My dad will never come by.  
My door still has a crack,  
But my dad will never be back.  
He does not know what he did,  
He's slipping on a grid.

He has 2 little boys probably playing with lots of toys.  
“Hey little guy don’t be sad,  
I’m not that bad, aren’t you glad?”  
All those times you abused me,  
Messed up on Hennessey.  
You threw me in the snow,  
I guess that was a blow.  
You woke me up with shock collars,  
I don’t think you heard my hollers.  
I try not to think about you,  
But you’re all I ever think about.  
I thought I’d told you I loved you,  
But I guess I have to show it.  
Eating dog treats for a glass of water?  
I’m not that stupid,  
I didn’t even bother.  
You locked me outside whenever you had a date,  
I guess I’m worth one PB&J.  
You made me sleep outside one day at a time.  
I would always hide because I could hear the crying.  
It might as well be another time,  
Cos I have a better dad now, Holy cow!  
He don’t abuse me like you.  
He asks me how my day was,  
I say “Good, and you?”  
We have a good connection now,  
Not you real dad, my stepdad.  
He comes outside to throw a ball.  
You never came outside, nope, not once at all.  
My door is fully closed,  
Yep, I’ve been hosed.  
Goodbye real dad,  
I bet you’re glad.  
Never once have I been sad.  
Everything you do has been really bad,  
You threatened my mom.  
Yeah, you scared.  
Cos next visit it won’t be my mom,  
It’ll be my stepdad.  
Don’t try and be bigger,  
Don’t try and pull the trigger.  
My stepdad?  
Yep, he’s pretty mad.  
You hurt all my family,  
You need to be more manly.  
This is the end,

I've been through a lot.  
Look at this bend, it's curved all around you.  
I moved out on your will,  
You said I was too big of a bill.  
Yep, this [Jon] is now OUT.

### **10th Grade: "I'm just waiting for the bell to ring so I can get out of there"**

Walking into Lincoln High School in mid-August there is an air of anticipation. Students mill around the entrance in shorts and t-shirts; most holding water bottles. The sunlight streaks into the foyer and excited chatter fills the air. I find the English corridor and make my way to Ms. Sotherland's classroom. Ms. Sotherland is the 10th grade Student Success English teacher. She greets me warmly and we exchange summer stories. As it was Ms. Sotherland who first told me about the program two years prior, we chat about observing the program during 9th grade. Ms. Sotherland has a jolly personality with an air of fun about her. She is quick to laugh and chats easily with the students as they enter the room. I am excited to see her in action.

Ms. Sotherland's classroom is in the main building and looks similar to Ms. Kean's. Desks are crammed together in rows, touching the ones in front and behind. She points to a desk in the back corner and make my way over to it. From this position I can see the entire class as they enter. I unpack my laptop and look around. The students sit on desks chatting with friends, dumping backpacks on their chairs or on the floor. The second bell rings and the students lazily slide into their chairs. Jon notices me and nods in greeting. He then puts his head straight on the desk and looks sideways at the wall. Interesting start, I think to myself.

The students get out their books, *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, and turn to chapter 2. Ms. Sotherland begins to read aloud, stopping every now and again to ask questions. The same four students raise their hands to answer her each time while the rest of the class remain silent. I notice that at least two are asleep on their arms. Others stare at the wall, or the floor. This continues for 50 minutes and by the time the bell rings I wonder if Ms. Sotherland was aware that students were asleep, and of the ones who were aware, how many could successfully summarize the chapter.

I continue to observe this class weekly, and each week Ms. Sotherland reads another chapter for 50 minutes. During my fourth week, Ms. Sotherland stops 10 minutes before the end of the class and announces that there will be a quiz in three days based on chapters 1-5. She moves to the whiteboard and asks for students to call out names of the characters that appear in chapters



1-5. Again, the same four students start calling out names. After writing the character's names on the whiteboard she asks for character traits associated with each. Again the same four students answer. When Ms. Sotherland explains that the quiz will concentrate on character traits, students sit up and begin copying her notes on their laptops or onto paper.

Ms. Sotherland's teaching style intrigues me and as I sit down to interview her midway through the fall semester, I am looking forward to asking her about it. We meet at a local coffee shop straight after school and as we settle down in the comfy chairs with steaming mugs of coffee I ask a simple question: "How's it going?" Ms. Sotherland's reply is not as simple: "Rough. [She laughs] How long have you got?" Ms. Sotherland looks frustrated as she describes how the state is cutting student success programs and on top of that the administration within her school has changed. The new administration is not as "on-board" with the program as the previous one was. Brenda, the counsellor who started the Student Success Program, and three of the other original student success teachers left the school the previous summer. The new teachers who were placed in the program did not want to be there and Ms. Sotherland explains that this has had a detrimental effect on the students who can sense their discontent. As a result Ms. Sotherland describes how, "behavior has declined and engagement in general is very low." When asked about the class I observe Ms. Sotherland smiles sadly and states, "they don't like to read and I'm not even sure of their reading levels. They may not be able to follow along as I read aloud." She continues, "but they have to be familiar with the book for the test, so I have to read it aloud. I don't really have a choice."

A few days after this interview, I speak to Jon. I open the interview asking about 10th grade and the English class:

Well, it's a big jump going from having extra help to not. It would be nice to have it in English. If I could learn how to study better I'd pass more stuff cos right now I'm not studying.

Jon explains that he gets by on English quizzes and tests because Ms. Sotherland discusses which questions will be on the test and "goes over the answers beforehand." When asked about the novels class that I observe he states:

To be honest I really just want to get the class over with. I'm just waiting for the bell to ring so I can get out of there. I try to listen and pay attention and stuff, but sometimes it's hard, cos I'm just bored.

During the interview Jon compares English to math: “now in math, that’s different. It’s my favorite subject and I actually get it.” He explains that he prefers math because it’s “hands on.” Jon mentions multiple times that he is “good with his hands” and “learns best by doing stuff.” He tells me a story about plugging a tire at his weekend job: “I only need to be shown once and I’ve got it. Literally, no leaks, no nothing” He explains with a laugh: “if English was more hands on I’d be great at it!” Jon segues into a tale about an English lesson that happened last week:

we did a group activity - 4 groups of 7. I personally work better as a group than I would by myself. We were in competition for extra credit and we won! It was a quiz and we had to ask the other groups questions. I knocked them all dead with ‘*Who was the author?*’ No one knew! Ha! Can you believe that?

He states: “if all English lessons were fun like this, I’d be great at them.”

At the end of each interview I ask if there is anything else Jon would like to share. He sits and thinks for a moment before saying:

yeah, English would be better if we didn’t need to read books with old language in them, like *thy*, *thee*, you know? I don’t understand any of it. It’s just stupid. Half the words we learn I’m never going to use.

Sitting opposite him I could sense his frustration. He needed good grades to get into the army yet in his opinion he was being asked to do assignments and read books that “had nothing to do anything.”

I continue to observe each week, and each week Ms. Sotherland reads the next chapter. The lessons are interspersed with tests and quizzes. During the second semester I observe a change; students in the class raise their hands to read a page aloud. Interestingly, it is not the same few students who raise their hands, it is different people each time. When asked about this Ms. Sotherland explains:

I had a student teacher for a day and when she was reading aloud she said ‘*if you feel like reading the next page just silently raise your hand and I’ll point to you when it’s time*’. And they did. Just like that!

By the end of the semester Ms. Sotherland had seen a change in her students: “They participate more and have started interacting positively with each other.” I ask if she knows why this is and she shrugs, “I guess they feel more comfortable with each other now.”

During my end of year interview with Jon I asked if he felt like he has changed as a student during 10th grade. He replied, “Not really.” He continued, “during 9th grade I changed a lot. I went from here [he drew an imaginary dot in the air], to here,” he drew a line from his finger upwards at a 45-degree angle. He continued: “but now, I’m here.” He drew a line upwards at about a 20-degree angle and explained: “I don’t think I’ve grown that much in English.” However, despite this he thinks the program has changed him: “In middle school I was the kid who goofed around and didn’t care. But that’s different now. The program has taught me how to study.” As a result he believes that the “program would be good for anybody.” Jon sees the benefit of remaining in the program for two years, “I got so much more help than my friends did who weren’t in the program. I would say two years is much better than one.” Additionally, Jon explains that he used to “mean” to his classmates in middle school and “at the start of 9th grade too.” He continues,

the program really changed that though. I realized that I didn’t need to be mean. Like I didn’t have anything to prove, you know? I could just be me and do my work, and no one would laugh at me.

When asked what he liked most about the program he explained: “The help. The first year it was just given, but the second year I had to learn to ask for it.” He described how he could “see the difference” asking for help made. He also explained that he now understands why grades are important, “in elementary and middle school I didn’t care. It was a letter. But now I know that they actually mean something and can affect you in the future.”

Elaborating on this Jon describes how good grades equal a good job, and a good job equals security. He explains that even though he does not like English, he does care about his grade so he gets his work done (although he is still not reading!).

### **11th Grade: “Dream big and shoot high”**

I was excited to interview Jon in 11th grade to see if he retained any of the study habits he had learned during the previous two years. As he was no longer in the program I did not observe him in class. I met him during his study hall and was very surprised to see how much he had changed. He had grown a lot over the summer and was no longer short for his age. He had also joined a gym and the change in his physique was astounding.

Jon also gave off an air of confidence that I had never seen before. He smiled as we sat down in comfy chairs in the open space by the gym and I started my audio recorder. I opened, as I always did, with “how’s everything going?” This time was the first time he answered with a grin: “everything’s going great [he laughs], everything’s changed.” I ask him what he means by this and he leans back in his chair, spreads his arms and says: “school, home, everything.” During Freewrite Friday Jon had been very open about his family and his feelings toward his dad who left some years earlier. He talked a lot about how his dad had said and done hurtful things and how he wanted to move on but found it difficult. This interview was the first time Jon mentioned his stepdad. He explained that his mom and stepdad were more involved in his school life and his grandad helped him with schoolwork: “my grandad checks my homework almost every night. It’s a bit of a pain [laughs] but I know he does it cos he cares so I don’t complain too much.” He describes how his grandad checks his grades online regularly and, “if he sees something he doesn’t like [a low grade], he’s straight on me asking about it.” Jon likes the accountability and explains that it makes him work hard because he knows his grandad is “checking up” on him.

Jon is excited to tell me that his “grades are up,” and he is finding it “easier” to do English homework. Jon attributes this to his new English teacher who: “doesn’t just give you an assignment and wait until you do it. She makes you go over it and helps you; she doesn’t just sit there, she actually teaches the class.” Coupled with his grandad helping him, “He told me to not just write the words down, to look at them and make sure I understand them before I write them down,” Jon has seen a huge improvement in English classes. He tells me excitedly: “I’m getting all As and Bs now.” We chatted about the transition from the program to 11th grade and he described how the “program helped tons, even though I didn’t always see it at the time.” He reflects that it was a worthwhile experience and he wished he had taken advantage of the extra help more in 10th grade.

I ask Jon if he can pinpoint a specific time when he realized he needed to “buckle down”. He laughs, “Oh yeah. End of last semester. With the help of my grandad, I realized that I had an opportunity and if I didn’t take it, I might not graduate. And I had to graduate. No matter what.” Jon is very motivated and explains that looking back on his time in the program he can now see the opportunities he had: “I see my friends who weren’t in the program struggling with vocabulary or the right punctuation to use. I don’t have any of that.” Jon explains that previously he was living “day to day” and not thinking too much about next week or next month: “Now I plan things and I know what assignments are due when.” Jon does a lot of “planning ahead.” Thinking back to his

grandad he says, “I often hear him in my head [saying] *work smarter, not harder*.” Jon explains that this means using the correct tools for the job, or trying to find the easiest way to complete a task; e.g. when looking for character traits, “use the book, don’t just try to use your mind.” He smiles and tells me that his grandad also told him to, “dream big and shoot high.” This is a motto he repeats to himself “often” as it helps him, “remember what [his] goals are.”

### **12th Grade: “The light at the end of the tunnel”**

At the start of the next academic year, similar to 11th grade, I see another big change in Jon as he walks across the hallway to meet me. He has grown even taller and broader. He is very relaxed and wears a big smile as we walk down the hall toward the teacher breakroom. I have not seen him look so confident or self-assured. We settle ourselves in the small English office that is filled with extra desks and plastic chairs stacked in the corner, and old office chairs pushed together. It is a little cramped but we unstack two chairs to sit on and I turn on the voice recorder.

Similar to 11th grade, I’m excited to see how 12th grade is progressing so far, especially as Jon looks so happy. I open the interview asking him how everything is going; Jon leans back in his chair and reveals, “I’m doing pretty well in most things academically, so things are good.” Thinking about English class in particular he says, “I’m making it through, well barely, but I’m making it!” He explains that there is a lot of reading and that is not his “strong point.” Having previously told me that he does not read if he can help it, this seems like a change. When asked about it he tells me, “there’s kinda no way of getting round it. I have to read or I’ll fail the tests.” Jon explains that as things are getting serious this year he has to focus, “stay away from the drama and get [his] grades up.”

Jon has always tried to stay out of the “drama” of high school and with his new focus of graduating this seems to have intensified. He explains that some of the “bull crap” concerned with friendships has intensified this year and it has made him work harder to be able to graduate. With regard to the drama, his grandad encourages him to “keep his head down” and ignore “all that stuff.” Jon explains that his grandad is still a big influence, “he keeps me in line, makes sure I’m doing my homework and getting everything done.” Another big influence in Jon’s life is his girlfriend who is, “on me all the time about getting good grades.” Jon’s girlfriend is a fellow 12th grader who he explains works hard and wants him to do the same. Laughing he tells me, “she won’t let me come over [to her house] if I don’t have my homework done. She’s pretty tough on

that.” His girlfriend “got even tougher” as schools went online in March due to the pandemic, and he begins to see “the light at the end of the tunnel.” Jon explains that he likes having her “on his case” because, like his grandad, she does it because she cares. He explains that he “wouldn’t work as hard if she didn’t get on me all the time.”

Going online in March due to the global pandemic is a surprise for Jon yet he finds that he prefers it. Talking to me via Zoom in his front yard, he explains that he finds the assignments easier and having more time to complete them is helpful. He describes how most teachers post work on Monday mornings and give students a week to complete it. One teacher is more erratic about posting times which Jon states is, “frustrating, as it means I have to keep checking online to make sure I didn’t miss anything.” Jon also appreciates the freedom of working online as he can fit working on assignments around his job and is not limited to staying within a 7:30- 2:30 timeframe, and he had the ability to, “google answers to questions” if needed.

I wonder if moving to an online format helps Jon be more motivated in English. When asked about this, he is very honest and replies, “nothing about English excites me or motivates me.” Even though he describes the work as “easier” online, as his teacher only assigns one assignment per week, he describes it as “boring.” What does excite Jon however, is his new job: putting glass doors and windows together, “it’s basically a union paying job, so I’ve got money. And they started a pension for me too!” Money is a big motivator as Jon reveals his wish to move out of his house, “my goal is to get out of school and just get my own place.” He explains that this new job is exciting because he can see himself staying with this company long term as there are plenty of opportunities for advancement.

Despite his excitement about working, Jon still seems invested in schoolwork and as Jon’s life at high school was drawing to- an albeit abrupt- close and this was the last time I would interview him, I was interested in how he felt about his journey over the span of all four years. Trying to be as broad as possible I ask him, “tell me the story of your last four years.” He settles back on his front step, clasps his hands behind his head and looks up to the sky, thinking. I realize it was a hard -and huge -question, but I am interested in what he would say. He starts at the very beginning of 9th grade and tells me how his feelings about school have evolved over the years, he tells me about good teachers and not- so- good teachers. As his story wears on, he keeps circling back to 9th grade and Ms. Kean. When Jon has finished I ask which teacher had influenced him the most, and without hesitation he replies, “Ms. Kean.” He continues,

she always believed in me, and let me know it was okay that I had a D or whatever because there was always a next time. It was always ‘don’t worry about it, cos I know you can do better.’ And I guess I started to believe her. [He laughs] cos I did better!

Jon reminisces, “[Ms. Kean] also taught us all how to study and how to remember stuff with a memory hook [he laughs], I still do that today!” Thinking back to 9th grade, I ask Jon if he remembers anything from Freewrite Friday and he smiles, “oh yeah, definitely. That class taught me how to write. Like, not school writing, but just getting my thoughts down on paper and not having them all messed up in my head.”

I feel sad as the interview draws to a close as I realize this is the last time I will speak to Jon about his school life. After interviewing him for an hour as he sat in his front yard, I realize that he is ready to finish high school and move on. He is already working as many hours as his schoolwork will allow, and is hoping to increase that once school is over. Jon is not sad about leaving school, he is excited for the next phase of his life.

## **Fiona**

### **9th Grade: “We all have the potential to do better than we think we can.”**

The first time I meet Fiona is in Ms. Kean’s class in 9th grade. She is sitting alone at the front of the class. While the rest of the class are talking and unpacking their books at the start of the lesson, she doodles on her notebook. Fiona does not look around as noise levels rise and as people squeeze past her to get to their desks. As soon as the bell rings however, she looks up and begins to put her notebook away.

Fiona listens intently as Ms. Kean reads out the directions on the board. Glancing around the room, I notice that she is one of the only students listening. The rest of the class are slow to start work after Ms. Kean has finished describing the task for the day; Fiona however, is first to begin writing. As the weeks wore on I noticed that this is a pattern. Fiona is one of a small number of students who begins work quickly and remains engaged throughout.

During my first interview with Fiona I ask her what she thinks about the program: “I like it. It helps and it’s nice to have small classes, more one- on- one time with your teacher. There’s also less students so you don’t need to worry about a big crowd.” Fiona shares that she does not

have many friends in the program but, “it’s small so you learn better and the class is starting to get closer.” She describes a comradery; a feeling of all being in this together: “We’re all here for similar reasons and we all have the potential to do better than we think we can.” To Fiona, the Student Success Program is a good thing:

It definitely has helped me a lot with my homework skills and getting better at actually doing things and putting myself out there. I’m okay answering questions and like showing my potential and how smart I can actually be.

Fiona also explains that she thinks it is a “shame” that the principal and vice principal do not “come out here [to the Student Success Program building].” She describes how there are “so many good things going on and no one is evaluating or anything.”

Asking about how Fiona felt about the program when she first learned she had been selected she said, “I thought I would get bullied. People think you’re out here cos you’re stupid, but that’s not true. You’re out here cos you didn’t put in the work.” Two months into the program Fiona tells me: “I’m still scared to tell people that I’m out here cos I’m scared I’ll be made fun of.” She reveals that she was “bullied really badly” in middle school and being in a separate building from the bullies helps her concentrate. She tells me, “it still happens sometimes online, but I don’t have to see those people so it’s better.” Fiona explains that her family “joke around a lot” and made fun of her at first calling the Student Success Program building: “the ‘tard barn.” This bothered Fiona at first but now she “shrug[s] it off” as she can see the benefits. She states:

At first I was really upset and I wanted my parents to take me out of the program. But now, honestly, I’m glad that I’m in here because if I wasn’t I would have failed most of my classes.

Fiona talks about pressure she has felt to compete with her siblings: “I always feel like I’ve lived in my siblings’ shadows...my sister and brother were both in AP and honors classes.” She continues, “people would tell me how smart they were, and it really bothered me.” However, as neither of them were in the program she describes herself as being “free of all that.” She reveals that she is more “comfortable with [her]self” as a result.

Fiona describes herself as a “procrastinator” and appreciates the fact that the Student Success Program has “less work.” She describes the work as easy, and tells me that she has “tried harder this year” than during the “whole of middle school.” During our interview Fiona talks a lot



about changing her ‘mindset’, “it’s all about changing my attitude. I get good grades because I worked for them. I’m not smarter, I just worked harder.” Fiona describes how she changed her mindset during the second semester of 9th grade and went from a low grade to an A: “I changed because I didn’t want to fail.” She laughs and tells me that during middle school she was “*that kid*” who did not complete homework and never tried in class.

Two months into the program Fiona tells me: “I’m still scared to tell people that I’m out here cos I’m scared I’ll be made fun of.” However, despite this Fiona reveals: “I definitely feel more confident as a student because I know that I can do work and I have potential to go somewhere and to get somewhere high in life. The program’s changed my perspective on things.” She tells me a story about a girl who was surprised to find out that she was in the program, telling Fiona, “but you’re so smart.” Fiona recalls laughing and saying that she never did her work, “And that’s the same for a lot of people” in the program. She describes them as “smart,” but having things “going on so their heads aren’t in class.” Fiona shares that she now does her work and, “things have been going well and I’m in a much happier place.”

Fiona attributes better grades in part to Freewrite Friday: “I’ve always liked writing so Freewrite Friday is awesome. It’s a whole lesson, like, writing a diary.” Fiona describes how she used to keep a diary at home but it was really personal and she was worried that her family might read it. She describes that she writes “personal stuff” during Freewrite Friday but does not mind [Ms. Kean] reading it as, “she’s not my mom!” A lot of Fiona’s freewrites are concerned with a “bully.” One freewrite describes an interaction that seems to be a common occurrence,

She [the bully] is always on at me and being mean because I want to do well at [Lincoln High School]. Sometimes, I pretend that I don’t like school and don’t do my homework and stuff just because I know it’s what she wants to hear.

As a result of these personal entries Fiona rarely shares her work in class but if she does it is “just little bits” and she omits names. She tends to share sections she believes are well written, whereas the majority of students seem to share sections they want to discuss or invite others to comment on. For example, one student shared a story about his mom not being at home much because of work and this affecting his homework. He described how he tried to do it on his own but would receive low grades, so he stopped doing it altogether as he was failing anyway. This story received a lot of nods and started a productive conversation about how homework can be difficult and many students feel like they understand the work at school but cannot transfer this

knowledge to homework tasks. Ms. Kean lets her students lead the discussions only contributing when the conversation slows or she has something important to add. In this case she asks: “Okay, so what do you think you can do about this?” After another student-led discussion they decide that looking at homework the day it is set is a good idea because they then have time to ask questions before the due date.

Fiona also describes how Freewrite Friday has brought the class closer. She recalls: “sharing personal things that others have gone through means you have something in common. It’s nice to know that you’re not by yourself in some things.” This sense of community grows as the weeks progress: “you get to know people better and you become friends with people that you never thought you’d be friends with.” Fiona describes how this helps “academically because you feel more confident and you aren’t as anxious or nervous of being in a class of people that you don’t know.”

Familiarity has helped Fiona: “become a better student and feel more positive about school.” This has also contributed to her confidence, “I know that I can do the work and I feel like I can do more than I could last year.” However, she tells me that she still has “procrastination problems,” but her:

views about work and school itself have changed. Sometimes I didn’t want to even get out of bed in a morning. And sometimes I still feel like that but most of the time I’m like yeah I want to go to school. I want to have fun and I want to learn.

### **10th Grade: “Ms. Kean taught us to aim high. And Kelter University [pseudonym] is my high”**

I am excited to observe Fiona’s class in 10th grade as she had been so positive at the end of 9th grade. As I watched her take out her books and pens I noticed that while she did not talk to many other students, she did engage one in conversation. They laughed at something Fiona had in her hand and as the bell rang they exchanged last words before returning to their seats. As Ms. Sotherland began talking I watched most students switch off. As I mentioned in Jon’s story most students put their heads on their hands or doodled without looking at Ms. Sotherland. Fiona, however, was alert and seemed to be listening intently. I wondered if she noticed the attitudes of those around her. This was a recurring pattern that continued throughout 10th grade.

When I sat down with Fiona for her interview a few weeks later she seemed happy and full of energy: “10th grade is going well so far. Over the summer it just hit me. I need this program. I did really well in 9th grade and can do well in 10th grade.” Fiona described how this attitude has arisen from thinking about colleges: “college letters keep coming in the mail and it’s all starting to get a little surreal.” When talking about colleges Fiona stated that she “definitely” wants to go to Kelter University as that is her “dream college.” She told me excitedly that Kelter required a GPA of 3.5 and as she has met that requirement. Her goal for this year is to maintain it: “last year gave me a lot of confidence so I know I can do it. I just need to beat my procrastination.” Procrastination was a recurring theme for Fiona as she told me: “it’s something I’ve struggled with for years.” She reveals that she has, “a lot going on out of school that I have to deal with and sometimes I’m more focused on that than on school.” Previously Fiona had shared that: “bad stuff [bullying] happened in 8th grade and some of 9th grade that kind of tore away at my motivation for things.” Thinking about that as she was talking to me, I wondered if it was still on her mind as she seemed to have either compartmentalized it, or learned how to deal with it. I asked her how things were going in 10th grade and she replied: “all that stuff, the bad friend choices, they changed me, like, mentally. But I’m not letting it get me down anymore.”

During 9th grade Fiona relied heavily on Freewrite Friday as an outlet for her thoughts, so I was curious if the same sense of community had transferred into 10th grade; especially as the classes contained a few different students to the previous year. When asked about this she told me: “we all shared the same experience last year, and this year it’s just not as much of a comfortable place as it was in [Ms. Kean’s] class.” Fiona describes the program as “very different” because some of her teachers are part of the program while others are regular 10th grade teachers. This change means: “less help in some areas.”

Fiona described how students in 10th grade can drop some Student Success Program classes in favor of regular classes with permission from a parent. She excitedly revealed that she can now take Speech and other English classes: “My mom was helpful with that as she knows I love English, and writing.” When asked what she loved about English she replied with a smile: “I just get it, like I just naturally understand it.” When asked what she likes about writing Fiona explained, “I don’t write as much as I did last year but I still enjoy it.” She described how she used writing to “think things through. Sometimes I have a mental block and can’t finish. [She laughs] so I have a lot of half stories and half freewrites.”

Fiona explains that she also: “doesn’t need to write like [she] did last year” because “I now actually talk about my feelings with my family.” She also explains that there have not been any opportunities to write this year, “It’s all short answer stuff or multiple choice. Hmmm, kinda boring actually. I miss it. I don’t get into the assignments as much now.” Fiona shares that during 10th grade she has “turned a corner” in her thinking about friends. She explains that a large majority of high schoolers do not take school seriously and sometimes they, “drag other people into that way of thinking, but I’m staying out of that now.” She states proudly that she is focused “100 percent” on getting into Kelter University. She smiles and tells me that “Ms. Kean taught us to aim high and [Kelter University] is my high.”

Thinking about university I ask Fiona what she would like to study and she replies immediately: “music therapy in hospitals.” She tells me excitedly that she “loves music,” and is heavily involved with the show choir. Fiona talks a lot about Ms. Baker, the teacher who runs the show choir, “she’s great. She lets me work in an empty rehearsal room and we talk a lot, [laughs] I kinda offload. She’s a good listening and I like talking to her” When asked what kind of things they discuss, she laughs and replies, “everything. I can say anything cos she isn’t my mom [...] She really helps me. She adds another perspective and doesn’t judge me or comment too much on things that have happened.”

### **11th Grade: “If you don’t ask [questions] you’re not going to do well in class or with the homework.”**

When I met with Fiona in 11th grade she had changed. She seemed older and more confident than I had ever seen her. As she was no longer in the program I wondered how the transition into the main high school had gone and how she was feeling about school. Last year she revealed that she was extremely motivated to apply to Kelter to study something related to music therapy. During my interview with her I asked her about her future plans: “I want to go to [university 1] or [university 2] instead now as they have a forensics program.” She explains that she is, “really into biology.”

As English had always been a strength of Fiona’s I asked her if it was going as well in 11th grade as it did in 9th and 10th: “I love Speech class; that’s my favorite.” Fiona states that she likes Speech because it is “all about my opinion and I’m good at writing about that kind of stuff. It kinda

takes me back to 9th grade and Freewrite Friday.” I ask Fiona if there’s anything specifically that she still uses from Freewrite Friday and she answers:

not really. The thing I remember most about back then was how there was never a wrong answer, or wrong thing to write about. I knew every week that what I was doing was correct. I guess that gave me a confidence I still have now.

Fiona segues into a story about a teacher she has currently who “doesn’t really give us any direction, we have no idea what’s going on. I don’t think he cares about his subject much.” She continues: “if a teacher doesn’t care, then why should we, you know?”

Caring adult figures seemed to be on Fiona’s mind during the interview. She tells me about her mom becoming more involved in her English homework, “My mom is great at English; always has been. She loves it, so she helps me quite a bit.” I’m curious as to how she helps and why Fiona thinks her mom has just started helping. She explains,

English suddenly got harder, I still like it and all that, but the grammar stuff is hard. There’s a lot that I just don’t get but luckily my mom does. She’s pretty good at explaining it all.”

Thinking about why her mom is offering help she states, “I think she likes that she can help me now. It’s things that she knows about [laughs], and I definitely appreciate it!”

Thinking about the Student Success Program I ask Fiona if she agrees with the recent decision to cut the 10th grade program and limit the Student Success Program to the 9th grade year. She thinks for a while before answering,

I think 9th grade really helped me. It kinda got me back on track. It helped me study more and also know how to study, you know? I don’t think 10th grade really benefitted me at all in terms of studying, but I guess it did really help being a slower pace.

She explains that the program did help her overcome her fear of asking questions in class: “the teachers were always on at us to ask more questions to make sure we definitely understood something.” She elaborates, “if you don’t speak up and ask questions then you’re not going to do well in class or with the homework.”

As Fiona talks about the program she reveals a downside that she had not foreseen, “it has limited what classes I can take as a senior because I don’t have as much flexibility.” She explains that if biology had been available to students in the program during freshman year she would have taken it and then been able to do chemistry in 10th grade and physics in 11th grade. If she had

done that she, “would have that room to take an anatomy class or a forensics class during my senior year.” She explains that this is, “the only thing that’s super annoying about the program.”

### **12th Grade: “I’ve come so far it’s hard to say it all.”**

I had mixed feelings about interviewing Fiona during the fall semester of 12th Grade; while I was looking forward to hearing her ever-evolving story, I was sad that this was the last year of my study. Over the past three years of following and talking with Fiona, I had seen an increase in confidence and a change/strengthening in personality that allowed her to cut people out of her life who were not on “[her] side.” At the end of 11th grade I had also seen a determination to succeed in class and reach her goal of college. When I first met Fiona in 9th grade she was extremely thin and pale, but when she walked into the English office -where the interview was to take place- she had gained weight, had a fading summer tan and a broad smile. She looked very happy.

I commented on her smile as she sat down opposite me at the long table that was covered in books, old coffee cups and papers. She laughed and replied, “I’m really happy, everything is going really great and I have some good friends.” Fiona explains that she has a new friend group who are all “really close.” She also has reconnected with an old friend from elementary school and explains that this makes her happy as they have a lot of shared history. This friend is in one of her classes and they help each other with schoolwork and homework. Yet, Fiona’s smile is the widest when she tells me, “and I just started seeing someone.” I get the impression this is what makes her the happiest. She describes how, as a fellow 12th grader with a similar workload, they “try to keep each other on track.”

As procrastination has always been a problem for Fiona, I was curious if this new relationship had changed this. However, Fiona explains that this year is no different, “I still put work off” until the last minute. She laughs, “yeah, I’m not sure I’ll ever get over that!” Fiona explains that she sometimes watches YouTube or a show on Netflix in an attempt to delay starting homework, “It’s like I would rather be doing anything else.” She describes how she, “wants to study,” and just needs to actually sit down and “get on with it.” Additionally, it is show choir and musical season so auditions are looming. Fiona states that she is practicing hard and often feels like she does not have time for other things, “when really I do. It’s just homework kind of comes bottom of my priorities.” She laughs and explains,

I know it shouldn't come so low down on my list and I should prioritize it, but I just don't. I know it's important but I guess I put other things- more fun things that I'd rather be doing- first.

In 11th grade Fiona's mom had helped with her English classes and I was curious if she still helped during 12th grade. She described how her mom helped with grammar, something Fiona explained she herself is "not good at". Interestingly, having previously told me that English was easy for her she now states that, "writing is not one of my strengths." She tells me that her mom also helped write her college entrance essay, "which was great cos I got another perspective. She read it as someone from the college would" When asked about the change in attitude toward English as a subject she tells me, "I guess it just got harder this year." Fiona was also excited to reveal that she is taking an AP history class and as her dad majored in history, he "likes to help me." She smiles, "he's pretty good actually, I've learned a lot from him."

Family has always been important to Fiona, yet not consistently supportive. This has improved as Fiona got older and left the program. She told me that there were, "family issues that happened that I struggled with but I'm proud of myself for keeping up with my grades and stuff." Fiona described how it can be hard to concentrate when "something bad is happening" but she became adept at "shutting that off and saying, now I'm in school, I'm concentrating on school. When I'm at home I can deal with this stuff." She describes how "she pushes her emotions down" at school, and can then concentrate as a result. Smiling, she tells me, "I've also learned it's easier to push them down at home too."

During the second half of 12th grade schools closed as a result of COVID 19 and I was curious to hear how completing schoolwork at home had impacted Fiona. She described how she would rather be at school because, "it's hard to stay motivated and remember what is due when." Moreover, the process of asking questions has changed as "getting the answer you need in that moment isn't possible, so sometimes I just have to guess what the teacher means by something." She explains,

if I'm working at night and I email a teacher, I'm not going to get an answer until the next day. Waiting for it is hard because the next day I have to work on something else, or I've forgotten what I was going to say.

However, she reveals that in relation to English, having a little extra time to study is better and as a result she has "done really well on quizzes."

Thinking about English in particular, I ask if there have been any assignments that she has particularly enjoyed or found motivating. She tells me about an extended definition paper where she had to choose a word and research its definitions and origins. Fiona explains that she chose the word *cult* as she is, “really into learning about them.” She found this, “a really fun paper to write.” Fiona describes it as, “really interesting to learn more about cults and different types of people. It was also fun to write about something I’m curious about, you know, rather than just another regular assignment.”

Thinking about next year Fiona is excited to tell me that she has applied to four in-state colleges and been accepted to two - both an hour drive away- to do forensics, plus the local college to double major in chemistry and criminology. She tells me, “I would like to work for the police as a forensic scientist. It would be pretty cool to go to crime scenes, analyze them and figure stuff out.” Fiona explains that she really wants the local college so she can stay at home and save money, but the cost of tuition is an issue. She explains, “I don’t think I can do all four years at [Kelter University] as it costs too much, so I might do the first two years at [name of local community college] and then transfer.”

During this interview it was obvious that Fiona was looking forward to life after school; however, as with Jon, I was curious how Fiona would reflect on her four years of high school. When I asked the question, she laughed and exhaled, “wow, I’ve come so far it’s hard to say it all.” I was really happy that she could see her progress as much as I did. Fiona took her time to answer, “well, I guess, I’m a much better student than I used to be... I have goals now, a dream I guess.” Fiona’s dream is to go to college. She continues,

in 9th grade I was a mess. I wanted to study, but I didn’t. I think being in the program has really helped me focus. I definitely wouldn’t be where I am now if it weren’t for the program.

Fiona described how she was overwhelmed by middle school and found it hard to concentrate on homework. That changed in 9th grade with Ms. Kean, she reflects, “Ms. Kean helped so much. Got me back on my feet I guess. She taught me how to focus.” After pausing she adds, “she taught me to be a good student.” Interestingly, as she talked about the next 3 years of high school, she did not refer to another teacher.



Fiona acknowledged that she has “come so far,” in so many aspects of her student life, but none as much as with grades; she muses, “I really care now. I got a C in one class and it really bothered me, I was really upset.” She smiles as she tells me, “it’s not a C anymore though.” As Fiona reflects on the program specifically she reveals that she did not think she would be “in this position [applying for college] if it weren’t for the program.” She explains that during the program she learned to not fear asking questions in front of other students. Further, she had learned to ask again if she still did not understand or get a satisfactory answer.

Thinking back to the program and especially Freewrite Friday, I am curious as to whether Fiona still wrote in her journal. She explains,

occasionally...more so when I'm not in the best mind set, like when I'm angry or I'm sad. Um, I rarely ever write when I'm happy because like, for me, happy feelings are easier to show people than my sad feelings or my angry feelings.

As this was the final time I would talk to Fiona I wanted to ask why she volunteered to be in this study. She seemed surprised when I asked her and shrugged, saying,

well I guess I thought it would help me. As soon as you said it was a study about identity I knew I wanted to be a part of it. I was struggling with who I was at the time and, like, how I fit into school and how I fit into my family, I guess I just thought it might help me answer those questions.

I thought this would be my final question and would conclude the last four years of interviews nicely; however, after that answer, I just had more questions. I was curious whether she thought the study *had* helped, and if it had, *how* it had helped. Fiona explained that the interviews made her reflect on her life in a way that she would not have done otherwise,

I talked about a lot of stuff that was on my mind, and was like, bothering me. Talking about it out loud kind of helped me work through it, [she laughs]. It helped, and anyway, it’s better than talking to yourself.

As I sat opposite her I realized that the discussions we have had over the past four years during our interviews were a verbal version of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade freewrites. Each time she spoke to me she was mentally sorting through her thoughts and organizing her school life in her own mind in order to share it. While the idea of verbal freewrites was a strange thought, I felt flattered. As a private, introverted person, she had opened up during our interviews and shared her thoughts

willingly. So, while she did not share her written freewrites (and I did not want to share them out of respect to her privacy), she did share these verbal versions.

## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Chapter 5 will explore how the following three categories emerged from the data: 1. the relationship between home and school identity, 2. the effect of teacher identity on student identity, and 3. student engagement and its relationship to identity. I will examine how the data from my participants' stories led to these categories, and how the research questions relate to the categories (see Table 4), before considering how this study can further research on student identity and provide implications for teacher educators as well as preservice teachers.

Table 3. Relationship Between Research Questions and Categories

	Category 1: Relationship between home and school identity	Category 2: Effect of teacher identity on student identity	Category 3: Student engagement
RQ1: How do students in a student success program in a high school English classroom narrate their student identities?	X		X
RQ2: How has being in the student success program influenced students' sense of identity?		X	X
RQ3: In what ways has their perception of themselves as a student changed over the past 4 years?			X
RQ4: What has contributed to/influenced this change?	X	X	X

### Relationship Between Home Identity and School Identity

This research study examined how students in a high school student success program narrate their student identities and what contributed to and influenced their identity. My analysis showed that home identity - how a person views themselves while at home - influenced school identity - how a person views themselves while at school - for both Jon and Fiona. For Jon, the connection

was more noticeable and visible in the classroom, whereas for Fiona the connection was more subtle, only becoming obvious when she mentioned it during her interviews.

### **Narrating student identities through freewriting**

The relationship between home and school identities emerged as my participants narrated their student identities through Freewrite Friday. During this 50-minute class, they brought aspects of their home life into the classroom: Jon in a very visual way as he worked through his feelings and concerns by writing about them and sharing them openly with others; and Fiona in a more subtle way, preferring to write about them but not share with peers.

Jon found the discussions that ensued after reading his freewrite aloud brought healing for him (Elbow, 1989), and the feedback provided encouragement for his identity as a writer. After initial reluctance to participate in the sharing section of Freewrite Friday, preferring to keep his feelings to himself, he soon saw the benefit other students in the class were experiencing: practical advice and moral support for events happening outside of the classroom. Indeed, once Jon began sharing, he became extremely open about his home life; the support he received began a healing process that culminated in the final freewrite (shared in Chapter 4) that was a goodbye letter to his “real dad.” As Elbow (1989) reminds us, freewriting is not an isolated activity; engaging in thoughts and working through experiences should be part of a regular routine. Jon began 9th grade stating he was not a writer, but by the end of the year he presented a well written and well thought-out freewrite he had mentally planned and revised over the course of a week. Thus, for Jon, the ability to bring home life into the classroom regularly strengthened his sense of identity as a writer.

Family was such a motivating factor for Jon that, in the final years of high school, the support he received encouraged him to work harder. Jon wrote about his family frequently during Freewrite Friday and he often thought about them through a series of juxtapositions: his biological dad, who “has been a bad person” and “wishes [Jon is] dead,” and his stepdad who “asks [him] how [his] day was,” and with whom he has a “good connection.” A further juxtaposition is his grandad who “checks [his] homework almost every night [...] cos he cares,” and his mom who Jon describes as being “involved” without giving any specific examples. In the case of his dad/ stepdad, the comparison was often articulated during Freewrite Friday classes in 9th grade, culminating in the poem during the final freewrite class. The connection between his grandad and mom was more subtle. He did not refer to it during class or in front of others; it only came to the fore during the

11th grade interview sessions where he mentioned his mom had a greater involvement in his school life without specifying how. Jon did, however, make it very clear how involved his grandad was in helping with homework and checking his grades.

Interestingly, this behavior and accountability was welcomed by Jon as he recognized that his grandad was doing it out of concern: “I know he does it cos he cares.” While Jon claimed, “[it] was a bit of a pain,” it spurred his engagement and also boosted his confidence as he knew the underlying reason behind checking his grades was because he cared (Noddings, 2014). This caring attitude meant Jon tried harder in order to please him, and as a result of Jon’s grades going up, his confidence also rose. Jon further emphasized the importance of his grandad as a teacher as he shared his grandad’s two mottos: “Work smarter, not harder” and “Dream big and shoot high.” The influence of his grandad was evident as Jon repeats these mottos to himself “often.”

Jon’s grandad remained a steady influence on his school life throughout 12th grade, providing advice and support. As “drama” increased, his grandad reminded him to “keep his head down” and ignore “all that stuff.” The strong and trusting relationship between Jon and his grandad meant that Jon took that advice. An additional support in 12th grade was Jon’s girlfriend, who reminded him about the importance of grades, even setting boundaries: “she won’t let me come over if I don’t have my homework done.” As a result of this relationship, Jon felt he was a better student. He stated that he “wouldn’t work as hard if she didn’t get on me all the time.”

Fiona’s connection between home and school differed from Jon’s in that it was more internal, influencing the way she worked individually and thought about assignments. While she wrote about her feelings in Freewrite Friday, she preferred being private, choosing not to discuss her freewrites publicly; on the few occasions she did share, she was more concerned with the quality of her writing than with receiving feedback. For Fiona, therefore, home life was present in the classroom within her freewrites.

Fiona’s freewrites manifested in the form of a diary. Like Jon, Fiona’s entries were a way for her to work through her thoughts and feelings in an unstructured way. The non-stop writing of the freewrite produced unstructured text, yet allowed her to organize her thoughts mentally in her own mind. These organized thoughts remained unwritten unless she shared her freewrite. On these occasions, Fiona rewrote the section to be shared to make sure it was “good.” Fiona also used her freewrites to reflect on events that had happened at home -with her family or the “bullies” - or

worries she had. Ms. Kean did not comment on freewrites unless specifically asked, so Fiona's work – in her mind- remained private (Elbow, 1989).

Fiona mentioned her family throughout all four years of interviews with me, addressing how their thoughts, and even their presence, influenced her. She described how she felt being in her "siblings' shadows" was detrimental, as previous teachers and other students would mention how smart they were, both being "in AP and honors classes," thus highlighting she was not. Once Fiona had settled into the program, she started growing in confidence and became more "comfortable with [her]self." In terms of family relationships, a significant change happened in 10th grade as Fiona began to talk to her family about her "feelings" and matured enough to be able to "ignore" their teasing, as she could see how much the program helped her. As Fiona's writing skills flourished, her mom became a huge influence in her school life as they connected over their shared "love" of English. Jon's excitement about his girlfriend matches Fiona's happiness at finding friends in choir that "didn't want anything from [her]," and finding support from her mom. For both participants this was significant because it was new.

Relationships in and out of school were important to Jon's and Fiona's identity development and they influenced their motivation. Both Fiona and Jon lacked motivation at the start of the 9th grade due to the fear of stigmatization by being part of the Student Success Program, which is in a building separated from the main school building that used to house the special education program. Both Fiona and Jon had "things going on" outside of school that affected their schoolwork – one of the reasons they were selected for the program. According to Ms. Kean, neither participant was there because they "weren't smart;" they were there because of "something going on at home" that affected their motivation (Lepper & Henderlong, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan and Deci, 2000). By the end of 9th grade, both participants viewed being in a separate building as an advantage, an opportunity to be with people who were not only similar to them in terms of work ethic and home life, but who supported them emotionally. As Fiona and Jon became comfortable with their peers, their engagement and motivation increased and, with it, their sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995). Both participants alluded to higher levels of self-efficacy during the final 9<sup>th</sup> grade interview, explaining that Freewrite Friday encouraged them to write.

While Fiona's motivation remained relatively steady throughout 10th, 11th and 12th grades, Jon's did not. His oscillation depended, in large part, on a combination of which English teacher he had at the time and his family dynamics. While Fiona received an increasing level of support

from her family over the four years of high school, Jon's family support did not start until 11th grade. However, once the support for schoolwork and homework was there, Jon, like Fiona, flourished and "buckled down." The change in attitudes at home - from teasing to support in Fiona's case, from abuse to support in Jon's - had a positive effect on their sense of identity. They both became more confident and happier at school. While Jon did not have support from one specific teacher that spanned multiple years, he did have unwavering support from his grandad throughout the last two years of high school.

This connection between two very different discourses: home and school, meant borderland discourses (Alsup, 2006) are at play for both Fiona and Jon. As both participants bring home life into the classroom they tread a line between the two: for Fiona, this is wanting to study and "get good grades" while at the same time attempting to hide this desire from the "bullies" by appearing not to care about studying and completing homework. For Jon, this includes slowly bringing his home life into the classroom via Freewrite Friday, while also distancing home from school by describing his Freewrites as "not school writing... just getting my thoughts down on paper."

### **Changes in student identity**

Jon and Fiona described their student identity changing throughout the four years of high school, partly due to the influence of, and relationship between, home and school identities. In 9<sup>th</sup> grade, this connection emerged through storytelling during Freewrite Friday and was particularly helpful in guiding them toward a new understanding of their home identities (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). The collaboration in the new understanding that is seen in McLeod's (2004) work applies to Jon and Fiona as they construct their stories, and the stories of others, together during the freewrite. McLeod (2004) stated that within discourse discussions, storytelling is significant as a means of theory and co-constructing narratives in order to look for meaning. As Jon and Fiona created meaning during their interviews with me and through Freewrite Friday with their peers, their ideas evolved, as did their understanding. Jon gained advice about his home life and realized that his grandad was not interfering but was there to help him; Fiona realized that ignoring her siblings and other students' taunts was the best course of action as she became more confident.

As Jon considers plot, vocabulary and delivery (as a read aloud text), his freewrite moves from an expression of inner thoughts meant to heal (McLeod (2004) to a performance for others

to hear (Elbow, 1989). Jon wants his work to be discussed, questioned and analyzed. Fiona, on the other hand, wishes to keep her work private. She is also writing for healing, but for her, writing is personal and belongs in the private sphere (Elbow 1989). Due to Fiona's strong sense of privacy I did not share any of her freewrites here. While she spoke about freewriting a lot during our interviews and I used them as data, she did not offer to officially share any with me. Further, I did not ask her to share any as I felt this could potentially put her in an uncomfortable position.

Throughout Freewrite Friday, both participants navigate, and negotiate, the private and public sphere on a weekly basis (Bruner, 1987). Elbow differentiates between public freewriting and private freewriting in terms of the constraint of public freewriting. A writer- for example Jon- will make an effort to ensure their freewrite is coherent and may also write it specifically for an audience, whereas another writer – for example, Fiona – will write for herself and so is free from the constraints of writing for an audience. Therefore, while both Fiona and Jon brought home life and family into the classroom, Fiona's was a private healing as opposed to the public healing Jon and other peers enjoyed.

Fiona's family has always influenced her school life and her sense of student identity was affected by events at home. While she did not allow these events to overwhelm her, they were nevertheless present in the classroom through her freewrites. However, despite this negativity during 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades, Fiona's sense of student identity seemed to strengthen as she welcomed more parental support in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, friend support, and a partner in 12<sup>th</sup> grade who kept her "on track." In 9<sup>th</sup> grade, her family teased her about being in the program and the "tard barn," which lowered her confidence and motivation for school-work. However, as 9<sup>th</sup> grade continued, Fiona made the conscious decision to ignore the teasing once she could see the benefit of the program in terms of grades and support. In 11<sup>th</sup> grade, the teasing eased and Fiona's family became more supportive. Her mom helped with English in terms of "writing" and structure, and in 12<sup>th</sup> grade this help was directed toward college applications and "grammar." Fiona also appreciated the help her dad provided with history in 12<sup>th</sup> grade as he majored in history in college. However, Fiona's life outside of school also weighed on her mind during 12<sup>th</sup> grade as she mentioned- but did not elaborate on - something "bad" that happened at home. The fact that she is naturally a private person allowed her compartmentalize that part of her life by "shutting [it] off and saying, "Now I'm in school, I'm concentrating on school." Similar to the feelings concerning bullying in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, Fiona stated it was easier to "push [emotions] down" rather than face them.



### **The effect of teacher identity on student identity**

Teacher identity had a significant impact on student identity over the entire four years of this study; however, it had the most pronounced effect during the two-year student success program. While in the program, both Ms. Kean's and Ms. Sotherland's identity as teachers influenced Jon and Fiona: Ms. Kean understood the power of writing for healing through her background as a former journalist, and the importance of showing vulnerability as a teacher, while Ms. Sotherland preferred lecture style teaching that centered on teacher voice, as she was unsure of her students' reading levels and reluctant to put them on the spot. As such, this category encompassed the research questions 1: How has being in the student success program influenced students' sense of identity? and 4: What has contributed to/ influenced this change?

#### **Listening to student stories**

At the start of 9th grade, Ms. Kean referred to Diener and Dweck's (1978) phrase 'learned helplessness' to describe some of her students. She detailed how she worked to change their perceptions of themselves by teaching them to focus on success. Ms. Kean achieved this by showing vulnerability (Brown, 2012). With a more inclusive and welcoming classroom that fostered feelings of belonging, Ms. Kean worked to make an inclusive environment where everyone's voice was heard (Wang & Geale, 2015), including her own. Lasky's (2005) belief that vulnerability and trust are "virtually inseparable constructs" (p. 907) when constructing relationships was reflected in Ms. Kean's thoughts and actions. Dale and Frye (2009) claimed that students sensed this vulnerability and, in turn, saw how teachers faced difficult situations and made decisions about coping with them. In Ms. Kean's case, revealing vulnerability and, thus, building rapport became part of her teacher identity and helped to make connections with students (Gilligan, 1982; Lasky, 2005; LaMay, 2016).

Further, Ms. Kean's identity as a former journalist made her interested in her students' stories as well as understanding the need for her students to have a channel to tell those stories. This was accomplished through journaling; she modeled both writing and sharing behaviors by reading aloud sections of her own journal entries, such as why she was having a bad day or a conflict with a family member. While I did not witness Ms. Kean freewrite during my observations, her willingness to participate is reminiscent of LaMay's (2016) work which used teacher

vulnerability as a tool to model journal writing. Being a former journalist meant she understood both the *power* of writing and the *need* for writing. She explained that students “need to process and talk about [personal] stuff”. She described writing as therapy for them as they often needed “to get some of these feelings out. They need to talk to someone but often don’t know how.” As a result, Ms. Kean encouraged them to write about any topic. This willingness to give her students free reign over topics allowed them to write about true concerns rather than topics they would normally consider ‘school’ topics. Thus, by legitimizing this home/ school connection and blurring the lines between home life and school life by stating, “no topics are off the table,” Ms. Kean opens the door for students to write about topics they sincerely cared about, such as “an awful weekend.”

Ms. Kean designed Freewrite Friday as a vehicle to aid students in talking about things happening in their lives that they needed to “get off their chests.” By not restricting writing topics and allowing student choice, Ms. Kean weaved concepts of equity literacy (Gorski, 2013) throughout the lesson and, subsequently, saw her students’ writing improve. By employing a social justice- oriented curriculum that enhanced content (Gorski, 2013), she provided a more equitable classroom space (Gorski, 2013). It is significant to note that at the start of 9th grade Jon described himself as not being “a writer” and not taking part in Freewrite Friday; however, with Ms. Kean’s support, he began to participate. Ms. Kean’s willingness to ‘go there’ encouraged her students to write about things she believed they needed to “process,” such as domestic violence, abuse, or bullying, successfully passing on her understanding of writing as a means of processing events in their lives. Gilligan (1982) tells us that care is about relationships and responding to needs within those relationships; therefore, as Ms. Kean built caring relationships through Freewrite Friday, she used the power of that bond to respond to her students’ needs.

Another important part of Ms. Kean’s teacher identity was her ability to listen. She took a backseat during discussions, encouraging students to lead with the topics they wished to talk about. Jon notes that he was reluctant to answer questions in 8th grade as other students would laugh if the answer was incorrect; however, in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, he explains, Ms. Kean “taught us” to listen and “not to laugh at other people.” He states that this was something she did “from the very beginning” of 9th grade; thus, by setting a standard early and enforcing it repeatedly, she centers students in the classroom, setting up a safe space for discussions that promoted a sense of community. Here, Ms. Kean draws on Noddings’ (1995) idea that “care must be ...a major purpose of schools” (p. 687), and part of that care for these students was fostering a community of listeners centered on

promoting empathy. Both Fiona and Jon recognized that Freewrite Friday brought the class closer together. The experience of reading personal narratives aloud and having other students comment on them is helpful, as, in Fiona's words it is, "nice to know that you're not by yourself in some things."

As stated above, Freewrite Friday and Ms. Kean's identity as a writer made them aware that they were writers – although, interestingly, Jon differentiates between school writing and other writing: "[Freewrite Friday] taught me how to write, not school writing, but just getting my thoughts down on paper" - and how powerful their writing can be for both themselves, and in Jon's case, for others (Elbow, 1989). Jon's freewriting style was akin to Elbow's (1989) idea of "letting myself rave" (p. 44). Getting things "off their chests" in this way was greatly encouraged by Ms. Kean.

It was clear that Ms. Kean had an effect on both participants as they referred to her often throughout the four years of interviews with me. Fiona described her as the teacher who helped her most in English: "[Ms. Kean] got me back on my feet... [and]...helped so much," as well as teaching Fiona "how to focus." During our final interview, Jon kept circling back to Ms. Kean when he was thinking about high school generally. 9th grade was eye-opening for Jon in respect to the realization that he could write and complete assignments if he tried. Ms. Kean gave him space to grow and, more importantly, permission to make mistakes: she "always believed in me, and let me know it was okay that I had a D... because there was always a next time." This encouragement changed Jon as a student: "I guess I started to believe her. Cos I did better!" Ms. Kean's influence can be seen in 12th grade as Jon recalls being taught how to use a memory hook to remember new information: "I still use that [technique] today!" Therefore, for Fiona, Ms. Kean helped in English specifically, while Jon states she was the most influential teacher throughout his high school English experience.

Ms. Sotherland had a very different teaching style to Ms. Kean, and not being "sure of [her students] reading levels," was concerned that they were "low." As a result, she opted to read chapters aloud each week to ensure that students are getting the information they need "for the test." However, interestingly, when a student teacher taught for a day, Ms. Sotherland was surprised to hear her students voluntarily reading aloud. The worry about putting her students on the spot and pushing their comfort level meant she did explore her students' potential or provide space for them to challenge themselves. Ms. Sotherland's hesitation in exploring her students'

abilities meant missed opportunities for learning and student growth, as her students were often bored or disengaged. By taking a deficit view rather than a resilient view (Gorski, 2013), she missed the opportunity to discover students' reading levels and challenge them to improve. Ms. Sotherland's teaching style did not provide chances to draw on Brown's (2012) idea of teacher vulnerability. By distancing herself from her students and not revealing vulnerability, her teaching style was more akin to the teachers in Kelchtermans' (1996) study who believed that feelings of vulnerability did not belong in school, as teachers were not "pitiful victims, looking for compassion" (p. 307).

However, the one 10th grade lesson that stood out for Jon was when Ms. Sotherland introduced an interactive quiz. During this class she placed students in groups. As Jon excitedly told me, "It was a quiz and we had to ask the other groups questions...if all English lessons were fun like this, I'd be great at them." Jon's excitement about group work revealed that he prefers to work with peers.

Jon's 11th grade teacher, on the other hand, was similar to Ms. Kean in that she inspired him and went over assignments so thoroughly he found English classes easier: "She doesn't just give you an assignment and wait until you do it. She makes you go over it and helps you; she doesn't just sit there she actually teaches the class." Bakhtin's (1981) concept of the dialogical self and multiple I-positions are visible in Jon and Fiona as they navigate a multitude of subjects, group work and collaboration in math versus the isolation of working alone in Ms. Sotherland's class, and identities throughout the day that are often in conflict with each other. Similarly, Gee's (2004) discussion of a person's ability to shape-shift can be seen both within the Student Success Program and the English class as Jon and Fiona navigated different identities during discussions and written works.

### **The need for emotional support**

Throughout high school, Jon and Fiona's perception of themselves as students shifted as the amount of help they received during in-person schooling compared to online learning, changed. Perceptions also depended on the emotional support received from teachers when given the chance to tell their stories.

During her time at Lincoln High School, Fiona liked both the emotional support and the accountability of face-to-face classes; therefore, moving online did not help her remain engaged

with assignments. Without the structure of the school day, she found it difficult to stay on top of deadlines, “stay motivated,” and remember to complete assignments. Another downside to being online was the delay in teacher response - in other words, “getting the answer you need quickly.” Yet, Fiona preferred the extra time online instruction allowed for quizzes and consequently received better “grades” as a result. An obstacle to keeping on track was a teacher who did not follow the pattern set by his colleagues of posting work on Monday to be completed at any time during that week. This teacher did not have a set schedule for posting, which Jon described as “frustrating.” However, in response to the erratic schedule, Jon checked online every day “to make sure [he] didn’t miss anything.” This discipline and commitment to schoolwork was something not seen in 9th or 10th grade.

Interestingly, while both participants flourished when given the opportunity to tell their stories, Fiona prefers an authority figure while Jon prefers his peers. However, while Jon preferred telling his story to peers, both participants revealed the importance of a teacher they could rely on who helped them not only with schoolwork, but emotionally. For Fiona, this was her choir teacher, Ms. Baker, and for Jon, it was Ms. Kean. They could also see the antithesis of this: a teacher who does not outwardly seem to care. For Jon, this is Ms. Sotherland, and for Fiona, it is a teacher who gives very little direction and does not “care about his subject much.” As Fiona bluntly put it, if a teacher “doesn’t care, then why should we?”

### **Student engagement**

During middle school, Jon and Fiona lacked motivation to complete schoolwork and participate in classroom activities; however, during 9<sup>th</sup> grade, they both experienced a sharp increase in engagement. This increase remained steady for Fiona, while it oscillated for Jon depending on teachers and what was happening in his life outside of school. All four research questions fit into this category: How do students in a student success program in a high school English classroom narrate their student identities? How has being in the student success program influenced students’ sense of identity? In what ways has their perception of themselves as a student changed over the past 4 years? And what has contributed to/ influenced this change?

## **Changing levels of engagement**

Fiona and Jon both narrated their student identity through engagement and how they felt they were doing as “students.” This translated into success with assignments and grades. Fiona’s engagement increased throughout the two-year program; Jon’s increased during the first year and leveled off during the second. While they both still faced barriers - procrastination for Fiona and motivation for Jon - overall, their engagement increased once they realized that their grades were changing. Grades were a huge motivation for both students; as soon as they realized their grades had shifted from their usual Ds and Fs to As and Bs, they were encouraged to work harder. Both participants displayed extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985) as they worked to increase their grades and keep them high. Fiona’s goal was going to college and she strived to maintain her GPA in order to do so. Introjected regulation (Ryan and Deci, 2000) was relevant for Jon as he worked to maintain his self-esteem. Being the class clown, as well as enjoying the feelings produced by answering questions correctly and publicly sharing his work, were two aspects of his student identity that conflicted with each other at the start of 9th grade but complemented each other as time wore on. Fiona also displayed intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985) with her journaling as she wrote solely for herself and shied away from sharing with her peers, representative of both her introverted personality and quiet demeanor in the classroom.

Throughout both years of the student success program, the participants were eager to share their stories of how they felt as students, whether or not they believed themselves to have changed in terms of study habits, and how they thought about themselves. Coming into the program, both participants were doing just enough to get by; both were apprehensive about being in a separate building and worried about not feeling like they were at high school. However, early in the program, Fiona and Jon both came to the realization that they had been given a good opportunity by being placed in the program and saw the advantages of fewer assignments, more detailed teacher input, additional help both in-class and with completing homework, and being with people who were in a similar situation to them, either in terms of home life or previous attitude toward schoolwork. As a result of recognizing the program as an opportunity, both participants’ engagement and work ethic increased.

As well as increased engagement, being in the program was empowering for Jon and Fiona: Fiona thrived in the isolation of the separate building, which helped her focus on school work, and enjoyed the feeling of community; Jon felt supported emotionally by being with the same group

of people, allowing friendships and bonds to grow. They both benefitted from Freewrite Friday as they recognized the power of writing and their own identities as writers. This sense of shifting of identity is reminiscent of Danielewicz's (2001) work: "We are continually engaged in becoming something or someone" (p.10). This can be seen clearly as Jon shifts his identity from a non-writer to a writer in his desire to seek advice and approval from peers through sharing his work. In doing so he brings his writing from the private sphere into the public sphere (Bruner, 1987). Likewise, Fiona reshapes her student identity as she begins to put more effort into her schoolwork: "I'm not smarter, I just work harder." This increase in self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995) affects her identity as she now sees herself as a student who succeeds rather than a student who procrastinates believing she will fail.

### **The effects of the program on student identity and engagement**

The program effected both participants' student identity and levels of engagement. For Fiona, the separate building in 9<sup>th</sup> grade was empowering and consequently her level of engagement rose, while for Jon the slower pace of 9<sup>th</sup> grade and freedom of choice afforded by Freewrite Friday had a positive impact on engagement and his sense of student identity. Being in a separate building meant a safe space for Fiona where she was no longer a target of face-to-face bullying, even though it still occurred online, and where she was away from anyone who knew her siblings. This anonymity allowed her to try, make mistakes, and ultimately succeed, without the stigma of being their little sister. Moreover, the separate building and perceived exclusion from the main school, while a worry at first, soon became an advantage for both participants as this isolated microcosm allowed inclusive discourses (Gee, 1990) to form. The discourse created through Freewrite Friday promoted empathy through creating a shared understanding. The clash of school discourses and home discourses lessened throughout the two-year program as her grades increased and her siblings no longer teased her about being in the student success program. The identity conflict (Gee, 2010) between Fiona as a victim of bullying while also being a strong student who wanted to achieve in the classroom lessened over the course of the two years. Bakhtin's (1981) and Gilligan's (1982) notion of identity being a series of internal dialogues that either co-existed or were in conflict with each other was also at play here.

Fiona described how the isolation provided a place for students to foster strong relationships. She recognized the sense of community in the shared experiences. To Fiona, this

separation was empowering and “has helped me a lot with my homework skills and getting better at actually doing things and putting myself out there. I’m okay answering questions and like showing my potential and how smart I can actually be.” Fiona described how being in the program “helped her focus,” as well as changing her attitude about herself. During 9th grade, she came to the realization that she received good grades because she worked for them. She began taking responsibility for her learning as she wanted to maintain her GPA.

Like Fiona, Jon experienced a change in levels of engagement. At the start of high school, Jon revealed, “I wasn’t comfortable sharing my thoughts”; however, this changed as the year wore on. He became engaged in both verbal discussions - “I heard other people share and they’ve inspired me to share and get deeper into my thoughts” - and written work - “I’ve never written as much as I do each Friday.” For Jon, the program changed his outlook as he believed he is no longer “terrible” at school. At the start of high school, Jon viewed school as something you ‘do,’ where success is measured by grades. Freewrite Friday changed that, and subsequently his engagement, as Jon began seeing the value in the weekly lesson. By planning ahead and taking time to think about how the freewrite would sound to others, he showed an evolving consciousness of the power of his own writing. He also started taking pride in his writing and became excited about writing so much each week. The students in the class found a sense of shared understanding in each other’s stories and, for Jon, these other stories influenced his writing and how he came across through his freewrite during the sharing section.

Jon’s attitude and engagement changed significantly in 10th grade as he struggled to be motivated in English class. As mentioned earlier, the most enjoyable 10th grade English lesson was a quiz that was structured like a game show. This interactive review session is viewed by Jon as fun and consequently a helpful way to learn. However, this interactive class and opportunity for collaboration only occurred once, so his motivation and engagement in English class were not high. Despite his lack of engagement, he did see value in the 10th grade program as a whole, stating that “two years is much better than one.” Consequently, the end of 10th grade marked a turning point for Jon as he realized that he was at the end of the program and he needed to graduate from high school. With the study skills he had learned throughout the program and his determination to succeed, he decided to take the opportunities the program provided: “I see my friends who weren’t in the program struggling with vocabulary or the right punctuation to use. But because of the program, I don’t have any of that.”



As well as changing in an academic sense, Jon also changed with respect to how he treated others. He revealed that he used to be “mean” to the other students in middle school and at the start of 9th grade. Yet the shared understanding and shared experiences of students within the program changed him as both a student and a person, increasing his compassion and caring. Jon also commented that being with the same students all year was a strength of the program as it helped get rid of nerves and worry about talking in front of peers that might “stare at [him] like [he] was dumb.” Thus, as well as helping academically, it helped emotionally. Further, the sense of shared understanding strengthened the sense of community, as students collaboratively shaped a group identity as well as their individual identities within both the writing and sharing aspect of the class.

The idea that identity is a social construct (Erikson, 1968; Gee, 1990; Eyres, 2017) plays out during 9th grade as the students shared their freewrites and reshaped their thinking during the discussion section. Identity as constantly shifting and thus unstable (Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Gee, 1990) can also be seen as students’ identities evolved (Erikson, 1968; Eyres 2017) over the course of the two-year program. Similarly, the idea of social languages within a discourse (Gee, 2010) also applies as students within the 9th grade class used specific, shared words and phrases such as mindset, procrastination and learned helplessness (Diener & Dweck, 1978). The integration of individual identity and social identity, which came together in Vygotsky’s (1981) concept of the zone of proximal development, is relevant for the student success program as the joint task of social learning concentrated on elevating students’ learning through discussion and questioning, meaning the students “grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 88).

### **The effect of motivation and engagement**

Being in the student success program influenced both participants and affected their engagement and motivation levels. Fiona’s motivation came from obtaining better grades in 9th grade. Her change in attitude evolved from the realization that she could get A’s if she “put the work in.” Both participants measured their success as how they were doing as students by letter grades; as grades increased, so do their motivation. Extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000) is a factor for both participants as they strived to keep the high grades they earned, and intrinsic

motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000) is evident in Fiona's writing for herself during Freewrite Friday in 9th grade.

At the start of 9<sup>th</sup> grade both participants lacked motivation due to experiences at home and during middle school. Dean and Jolly (2012) and Bandura (1977) tell us that if people had prior "aversive experiences" (p. 61) with a situation, they would be unwilling to try it again due to fear of another bad experience. Thus, in the context of school (and this study), Jon and Fiona both had prior classroom experiences that could cause them to be unwilling to try, or even fear, a task: Fiona was bullied if she answered a question or spoke out in class, and Jon described peers looking at him, "as if [he] was dumb" if he tried to answer a question.

During the first interview in early fall of 9th grade, Jon revealed he had little motivation to complete schoolwork. He was focused on his end goal of joining the army and school was just one of several stepping-stones on a long checklist to reach that goal. His engagement increased as 9th grade progressed, yet during 10<sup>th</sup> grade his motivation in English decreased, only being interested in one class session that consisted of a group discussion and quiz. However, a change occurred in 11th grade with an increase in engagement and motivation. Jon grew from a short 9th grader to a tall 11th grader, began working out and physically looked stronger; he also began to take school seriously. With these physical changes came a change in confidence and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995) that altered his perception of himself as a student. For Jon, the program "changed [him] a lot" in terms of offering answers in class and having the courage to ask questions without fear of being laughed at. He also came to understand that grades were not just a letter but were instrumental in his future career: "good grades equal a good job, and a good job equals security." When I first met Jon, he just wanted to get through each week and was focused on his goal of joining the army; however, once his grades started to increase, he saw the value and importance of studying.

Fiona's perception of herself as a student changed in 9th grade and remained steady throughout the four years of high school. She gained confidence from the separation from "bullies" in 9th grade and flourished in the anonymity of the program. She also realized the benefits of the student success program and made the mental decision to work hard for her goal of going to college. Grades greatly affected Fiona and, once she had a good GPA, she became determined to maintain it. This determination remained throughout 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. As Fiona entered the final two years of high school, her family's attitudes changed; they became supportive with her mom

helping in English and her dad in history. This support changed Fiona's sense of self-efficacy. Bandura (1995) believes that self-efficacy affects how students act, think and are motivated for any given task, stating, "Successes build a robust belief in one's personal efficacy. Failures undermine it" (p. 3). Accordingly, both Fiona and Jon had low self-efficacy coming into the program and a gained confidence in their own abilities in 9<sup>th</sup> grade that continued throughout high school. In agreement with Vygotsky's (1978) research where participants were reluctant - or even refused - to engage in a task if they thought they had little chance of success, Fiona and Jon also felt this way prior to the Student Success Program.

### **The effect of self-efficacy on engagement**

12<sup>th</sup> grade saw a change in both Fiona and Jon, and many factors contributed to this change. Fiona's feelings of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995) seemed to decrease, as she claimed she was "not good" at English, a subject she previously found easy. Having stated in multiple interviews that she has "always liked writing" and is "good" at English, a subject she just "seemed to get," she now found it challenging. Despite the decreased sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995) in English, Fiona could see how far she had come in the last four years "I'm a much better student than I used to be." She measured her success by having good grades in English and a good overall GPA. She also linked her success to "hav[ing] goals, a dream, I guess." Her dream of going to college, which began in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, had motivated her ever since and was now being realized as she received acceptance letters from various colleges.

English had never been a favorite subject for Jon and he described it as not his "strong point." Throughout high school, he maintained an aversion to reading; however, this changed to a certain extent in 12<sup>th</sup> grade; as his teachers no longer went over answers to quizzes beforehand, if Jon did not read the material, he would not pass the test. He revealed, "There's kinda no way of getting round it. I have to read or I'll fail." Thus, Jon's decision to read and engage in materials was motivated by his desire to pass.

As well as increased engagement in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, Jon found the autonomy of going online due to COVID-19 in March of his final year liberating. He felt that "assignments [were] easier," coupled with "more time to complete them." Completing schoolwork at home also allowed Jon to devise his own schedule around his new job, which he happily did. While the new job had long-term prospects, he did not give up on schoolwork or become less engaged. This commitment to

finishing strong is partly due to the influence of his girlfriend, who “keeps him on track,” and his grandad who was a stabilizing figure in his life over the past two years. This continuing adherence to those around him reveals how much Jon relies on and values the opinions of those he is close to.

### **Implications for teacher educators and student identity research**

As this study had two student participants and two teacher participants, it cannot be generalized to a larger population. However, I do believe the findings of this study hold import for both preservice teachers and teacher educators. The findings emphasize the need to teach from an equity literacy perspective (Gorski, 2013; 2014). By refusing to associate deficiency with poverty (Gorski, 2014), preservice teachers can create a more equitable classroom environment for *all* of their students through open discussion and the removal of certain writing barriers, such as restrictive topics and ‘good’ vocabulary choices. In other words, just allowing students to *write*. Moreover, teaching from an equity literacy stance allows voices other than middle class white students who tend to dominate student discussions (Hess & McAvoy, 2014), be heard and valued within the classroom.

Throughout the four years of this study, my findings reveal that home identity had a significant effect on student identity (Dean & Jolly, 2012; Diener & Dweck, 1978). While this is not a new concept, it has implications for both preservice teachers and teacher educators. Awareness of what high school students bring to the classroom and how this affects their thinking and motivation to participate in class is essential (Bruner, 1966; Lepper & Henderlong, 2000; Rose, 1990). However, an awareness is not enough; this awareness must lead to understanding in order to increase student motivation. This implication speaks to the importance of getting to know students: their backgrounds, likes and dislikes, if they have former connections to one another that can be capitalized upon in the classroom. For example, in teacher education classes, teacher educators can address ways to motivate high school students by providing opportunities for preservice teachers to plan lessons based on individual interests, needs, and hobbies; discussion and writing topics can be co-planned between the preservice teacher and student, or left open for students to decide content. The latter, mimicking Ms. Kean, would open the door for students to write about what is truly important to them. This would facilitate more buy-in from students. Further, discussions can be student-led with preservice teachers being present as observers rather

than leaders. Facilitating student-led discussions will encourage ownership and promote participation. Moreover, in a student success classroom, where students are familiar with one another, it will help redress the balance emphasizing that discussions are all inclusive and all welcoming (Gorski, 2014). Taking this equity literacy approach (Gorski, 2013) will promote student voice within the classroom, increase engagement and ensure that *all* voices are heard (Wang & Geale, 2015).

The participants in this study revealed the importance of not only making lessons relevant to their lives, but also helpful. Jon and Fiona both appreciated being given space to write about what they *needed* to write about (Elbow, 1977; 1989; 1998), rather than being told what to write about. As a result, writing became a means to process events happening in their own lives; thus, writing became a kind of therapy (LaMay, 2016) that increased self-efficacy (Bruner, 1995). Many teachers currently work to make lessons relevant to their students' lives, but how many make it helpful in a practical sense. Teaching from an equity literacy stance facilitates rich discussion and removal of barriers that constrain writing, such as topic or adherence to specific writing mechanics. My participants had a clear idea of what constituted 'school writing,' and freewriting each Friday did not fall into this category. Thus, there is a need for teacher educators and preservice teachers to discuss what constitutes writing, and what is and is not acceptable within the classroom. This study questions the limits that current curricula place on both students and teachers in terms of writing. We should ask ourselves: What is writing in the English classroom? Why does it look the way it does, and how can we change it?

Given the second implication, teacher educators need to provide space for preservice teachers to explore ways to make lessons relevant and helpful to their students. Teacher educators can explain the importance of encouraging students to tell their own story, while starting discussions in a safe space. Furthermore, this study has shown the importance of teacher vulnerability (Brown, 2012; Gompers, 2019; Lasky, 2005). Teacher educators and preservice teachers must capitalize on this to foster a trust within the classroom that cultivates a community of listeners, centered on promoting empathy and understanding (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). Within the high school classroom, efforts can be made to blur the often perceived line between 'school writing' and 'home writing.' This will allow a more inclusive classroom, where writing is valued as writing, rather than a set of grammatical and spelling rules that produce a technically 'good' piece.

As this study has shown, providing space for students to write about what they *want* to write about, rather than what the school *thinks* they should write about (LaMay, 2016), is important. Freewriting (Elbow, 1977; 1989; 1998) emerged as an essential tool for both participants. Taking away the restrictions of grades and the need for correct spelling and grammar appealed to them and removed much of the stress of writing and the need to ‘get it right.’ Teaching from an equity literacy stance (Gorski, 2013; 2014; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015) emerged as a concept that must be integrated into every classroom.

### **Final thoughts**

Since starting my research, Lincoln High School has abolished the 10<sup>th</sup> grade year of the program. I, along with both Ms. Kean and Ms. Sutherland, feel the loss of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade program is detrimental to future students. While some students may rely solely on the 9<sup>th</sup> grade year to “get back on track,” there are others, such as Fiona, who benefitted from the continued help the second year of the program offered. Jon, too, liked the support of the second year, despite his experience within the English classroom and only came to see the full benefit once he was out of the program and in classrooms with peers who had not been in the program and struggled with learning concepts as a result. Thus, while Jon does not feel like the 10<sup>th</sup> grade year was as helpful as the 9<sup>th</sup> grade year, it did provide extra support with its slower pace and fewer assignments. It also worked to cement knowledge and provide an additional year of focused help. Therefore, looking back, they both felt a two-year program was better than one.

Jon and Fiona graciously shared their four-year high school experience with me and for that I am eternally grateful. Over the time we spent together, they provided an unfiltered glimpse into their lives. Their thoughts and ideas have revealed the impact of social interactions and family on student identity. I have learned that many things influence student identity- both implicit and explicit- and during this study I witnessed the true fluidity of identity. My initial concerns about the isolation of the program were alleviated after I heard Jon and Fiona’s stories. For them, the benefits of extra help, deepened friendships, and better grades far outweighed the limitations of being placed in a separate building from the rest of the school.

While this study began four years ago, the seeds were planted many years before with a friend in elementary school who I have long since lost touch with. During the writing of this dissertation, I endeavored to find out where he is now and what he is doing. With the help of

friends living in my hometown, and Facebook, I discovered he is doing well and has a family of his own. I wish him, and Jon and Fiona, well.

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## APPENDIX A: HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM



### HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARDS

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<b>To:</b>	JANET ALSUP BRNG
<b>From:</b>	JEANNIE DICLEMENTI, Chair Social Science IRB
<b>Date:</b>	10/15/2018
<b>Committee Action:</b>	<b>Expedited Approval for Renewal - Category(7)</b>
<b>IRB Approval Date</b>	10/15/2018
<b>IRB Protocol #</b>	1607017954
<b>Renewal Version</b>	Renewal-002: Renewal-002:
<b>Study Title</b>	Longitudinal Study of Changes in Perceptions of Student Identity in an Alternative School
<b>Expiration Date</b>	10/14/2021
<b>Subjects Approved:</b>	15

The above-referenced protocol has been approved by the Purdue IRB. This approval permits the recruitment of subjects up to the number indicated on the application and the conduct of the research as it is approved.

The IRB approved and dated consent, assent, and information form(s) for this protocol are in the Attachments section of this protocol in CoeusLite. Subjects who sign a consent form must be given a signed copy to take home with them. Information forms should not be signed.

**Record Keeping:** The PI is responsible for keeping all regulated documents, including IRB correspondence such as this letter, approved study documents, and signed consent forms for at least three (3) years following protocol closure for audit purposes. Documents regulated by HIPAA, such as Authorizations, must be maintained for six (6) years. If the PI leaves Purdue during this time, a copy of the regulatory file must be left with a designated records custodian, and the identity of this custodian must be communicated to the IRB.

**Change of Institutions:** If the PI leaves Purdue, the study must be closed or the PI must be replaced on the study through the Amendment process. If the PI wants to transfer the study to another institution, please contact the IRB to make arrangements for the transfer.

**Changes to the approved protocol:** A change to any aspect of this protocol must be approved by the IRB before it is implemented, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject. In such situations, the IRB should be notified immediately. To request a change, submit an Amendment to the IRB through CoeusLite.

**Continuing Review/Study Closure:** No human subject research may be conducted without IRB approval. IRB approval for this study expires on the expiration date set out above. The study must be close or re-reviewed (aka continuing review) and approved by the IRB before the expiration date passes. Both Continuing Review and Closure may be requested through CoeusLite.

**Unanticipated Problems/Adverse Events:** Unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others, serious adverse events, and serious noncompliance with the approved protocol must be reported to the IRB immediately through CoeusLite. All other adverse events and minor protocol deviations should be reported at the time of Continuing Review.

## APPENDIX B: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT STUDENT ASSENT FORM

Purdue IRB Protocol #: 1607017954 - Expires: 14-OCT-2021

### RESEARCH PARTICIPANT STUDENT ASSENT FORM

An Investigation into How Student Identity Changes as Relationships Evolve Within an  
Alternative School Setting  
Janet Alsup and Helen Bentley  
Curriculum and Instruction  
Purdue University

#### **Key Information**

Please take time to review this information carefully. This is a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary which means that you may choose not to participate at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may ask questions to the researchers about the study whenever you would like. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this form, be sure you understand what you will do and any possible risks or benefits.

This study is looking at how participants in a student success program view themselves as high school students, and whether this view changes as a result of being in the program. This study will continue for the next two years.

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

We are doing a research study. A research study is a special way to find out about something. We want to find out if your sense of identity changes because you are a part of the Raider Student Success Program

#### **What will I do if I choose to be in this study?**

You can be in this study if you want to. If you want to be in this study, you will be asked to complete a short questionnaire and 8 short (10 minute) interviews. 3 interviews will take place during the fall semester of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 3 during 10<sup>th</sup> grade (2 in the fall semester and 1 at the end of the year), 1 during 11<sup>th</sup> grade at the end of the fall semester and the final interview will be conducted at the end of 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Homework may be collected. Each interview will be voice recorded. and names will be changed to protect identity.

#### **How long will I be in the study?**

Your participation will be over the course of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 10<sup>th</sup> grade, 1 interview in 11<sup>th</sup> grade and 1 interview in 12<sup>th</sup> grade . Each interview will be approximately 10 minutes long.

#### **What are the possible risks or discomforts?**

There will be no risk to you as a result of being in this study. Breach of confidentiality is always a risk with data, but we will take precautions to minimize this risk as described in the confidentiality section.

#### **Are there any potential benefits?**

There are no potential benefits

**Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?**

The project's research records may be reviewed by departments at Purdue University responsible for regulatory and research oversight.

The primary investigator and co-investigator will have access to identifiable research records and any data collected. Data and records will be stored on an encrypted flashdrive in locked storage at Purdue University. All records and data will be transcribed and voice recordings will be destroyed at the end of the year. All data will be de-identified after 5 years.

**What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

You don't have to be in this study. You can say "no" and nothing bad will happen. If you say "yes" now, but you want to stop later, that's okay too. No one will hurt you, or punish you if you want to stop. All you have to do is tell us you want to stop.

**Who can I contact if I have questions about the study?**

If you have questions, comments or concerns about this research project, you can talk to one of the researchers. Please contact Helen Bentley (508) 887 5146.

To report anonymously via Purdue's Hotline see [www.purdue.edu/hotline](http://www.purdue.edu/hotline)

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in the study or have concerns about the treatment of research participants, please call the Human Research Protection Program at (765) 4945942, email ([irb@purdue.edu](mailto:irb@purdue.edu)) or write to:

Human Research Protection Program - Purdue University  
Ernest C. Young Hall, Room 1032  
155 S. Grant St.,  
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2114

**Documentation of Informed Consent**

I have had the opportunity to read this consent form and have the research study explained. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research study, and my questions have been answered. I am prepared to participate in the study described above. I will be offered a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



# APPENDIX C: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT PARENT CONSENT FORM

Purdue IRB Protocol #: 1607017954 - Expires: 14-OCT-2021

## RESEARCH PARTICIPANT PARENT CONSENT FORM

An Investigation into How Student Identity Changes as Relationships Evolve Within an Alternative School Setting  
Janet Alsup and Helen Bentley  
Curriculum and Instruction  
Purdue University

### Key Information

Please take time to review this information carefully. This is a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary which means that you may choose not to participate at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may ask questions to the researchers about the study whenever you would like. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this form, be sure you understand what you will do and any possible risks or benefits.

This study is looking at how participants in a student success program view themselves as high school students, and whether this view changes as a result of being in the program. This study will continue for the next two years.

### What is the purpose of this study?

This study will look at how participants view themselves as students and whether being part of the Raider Student Success program changes this view. Your child will be part of a group of 14 students selected from the Raider Student Success program to take part in this study.

### What will my child do I choose for them to be in this study?

If you chose for your child to be in this study your child will be asked to complete a questionnaire and take part in 3 short individual interviews throughout 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 3 short individual interviews throughout 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Your child will be asked to take part in a short individual interview in 11<sup>th</sup> grade and a short individual interview in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Homework may also be collected. All interviews will take place during study hall periods and will be voice recorded.

### How long will my child be in the study?

This study will take place over the course of 4 years. Each interview will approximately 10 minutes long and take place at the start, mid-point and end of each semester .

### What are the possible risks or discomforts?

Risks are no greater than the participant would encounter in daily life. Breach of confidentiality is always a risk with data, but we will take precautions to minimize this risk as described in the confidentiality section

### Are there any potential benefits?

There are no potential benefits.

### Will information about my child and my participation be kept confidential?

The project's research records may be reviewed by departments at Purdue University responsible for regulatory and research oversight.

The researchers will have access to identifiable research records and any data collected. Data and records will be stored on an encrypted flash drive in locked storage at the university. Records and

Purdue IRB Protocol #: 1607017954 - Expires: 14-OCT-2021

data will be transcribed and digital recordings destroyed at the end of each year. All records and data will be de-identified after 5 years. Information may be used for future research.

**What are my rights if my child takes part in this study?**

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose for your child not to participate or, if you agree for your child to participate, you can withdraw your child at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Who can I contact if I have questions about the study?**

If you have questions, comments or concerns about this research project, you can talk to one of the researchers. Please contact the researchers at [jalsup@purdue.edu](mailto:jalsup@purdue.edu).

To report anonymously via Purdue's Hotline see [www.purdue.edu/hotline](http://www.purdue.edu/hotline)

If you have questions about your child's rights while taking part in the study or have concerns about the treatment of research participants, please call the Human Research Protection Program at (765) 494-5942, email ([irb@purdue.edu](mailto:irb@purdue.edu)) or write to:

Human Research Protection Program - Purdue University  
Ernest C. Young Hall, Room 1032  
155 S. Grant St.,  
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2114

**Documentation of Informed Consent**

I have had the opportunity to read this consent form and have the research study explained. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research study, and my questions have been answered. I am prepared to allow my child to participate in the research in the study described above. I will be offered a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Purdue IRB Protocol #: 1607017954 - Expires: 14-OCT-2021

### RESEARCH PARTICIPANT TEACHER CONSENT FORM

An Investigation into How Student Identity Changes as Relationships Evolve Within an  
Alternative School Setting  
Janet Alsop  
Curriculum and Instruction  
Purdue University

#### **Key Information**

Please take time to review this information carefully. This is a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary which means that you may choose not to participate at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may ask questions to the researchers about the study whenever you would like. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this form, be sure you understand what you will do and any possible risks or benefits.

This study is looking at how participants in a student success program view themselves as high school students, and whether this view changes as a result of being in the program. This study will continue for the next two years.

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

This study will look at how participants view themselves as students and whether being part of the Raider Student Success program changes this view. You will be part of this study along with 14 students.

#### **What will I do if I choose to be in this study?**

If you chose to be in this study you will be asked to take part in 2 short individual interviews during 11<sup>th</sup> grade, 1 in December and 1 at the end of the summer semester. Interview questions will center on your perception of how student identity may have changed during the course of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> semester. All interviews will be voice recorded.

#### **How long will I be in the study?**

Your participation will be over the course of 11<sup>th</sup> grade (1 interview in December and 1 at the end of the year). Each interview will be approximately 10 minutes.

#### **What are the possible risks or discomforts?**

Risks are no greater than the participant would encounter in daily life. Breach of confidentiality is always a risk with data, but we will take precautions to minimize this risk as described in the confidentiality section

#### **Are there any potential benefits?**

There are no potential benefits

**Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?**

The project's research records may be reviewed by departments at Purdue University responsible for regulatory and research oversight.

The primary investigator and co-investigator will have access to identifiable research records and any data collected. Data and records will be stored on an encrypted flash drive in locked storage at Purdue University. All records and data will be transcribed and voice recordings will be destroyed at the end of the year. All data will be de-identified after 5 years.

**What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or, if you agree to participate, you can withdraw your participation at any time.

**Who can I contact if I have questions about the study?**

If you have questions, comments or concerns about this research project, you can talk to one of the researchers. Please contact Helen Bentley (508) 887 5146.

To report anonymously via Purdue's Hotline see [www.purdue.edu/hotline](http://www.purdue.edu/hotline)

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in the study or have concerns about the treatment of research participants, please call the Human Research Protection Program at (765) 494-5942, email ([hrb@purdue.edu](mailto:hrb@purdue.edu)) or write to:

Human Research Protection Program - Purdue University  
Ernest C. Young Hall, Room 1032  
155 S. Grant St.,  
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2114

**Documentation of Informed Consent**

I have had the opportunity to read this consent form and have the research study explained. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research study, and my questions have been answered. I am prepared to participate in the study described above. I will be offered a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **APPENDIX E: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT**

### **Sample of Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Student Participants**

1. Tell me about 9<sup>th</sup> grade so far.
2. Tell me about being in the program.
3. Tell me your thoughts on being in a separate building.
4. Tell me about your initial thoughts when you first heard about the program.
5. Tell what you like/ would change about the program.
6. Tell me about your English class.
7. Describe your thoughts on being with the same group of students in English for a
8. Do you think you have changed as a student in 9<sup>th</sup> grade? Why/ Why not?
9. Do you feel more/ less confident as a student compared to middle school?

## **APPENDIX F: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER**

### **Sample of Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Teacher Participants**

1. Tell me about the program
2. Tell me about the students who are eligible for the program
3. Describe students' initial reaction to being invited to the program
4. Describe a typical parent's reaction to their child being invited to the program
5. Tell me about student attitudes as they progress through the first year of the program
6. What do you think are the strengths of the program?
7. What do you think could be improved?
8. Describe how the lessons in the program differ to lessons in the main school
9. Tell me how you plan your lessons?
  - a. Any student input?
10. Tell me about Freewrite Friday

## APPENDIX G: EXAMPLE OF MEMO

### **Example of a memo: March of 9<sup>th</sup> grade during Freewrite Friday.**

Kate's enthusiasm for writing really came through today as she encouraged [name of student] to share his freewrite with the class. Telling him it was his best freewrite so far really seemed to boost his confidence. He started off speaking quietly but his voice got stronger as he realized people were actually listening to him. While the class was listening for content, Kate seemed to be listening for something else. She smiled when he used a weekly vocab word -even though this wasn't a stipulation - and nodded when he used a simile to describe his ex-girlfriend. At the end of the 2-minute read aloud several students clapped and one let out a low whistle: "that was *good*, man." When this congratulations died down, Kate jumped in with all of the things he had incorporated into his freewrite: "you set the scene, you got the vocab, you nailed the telling." [name of student] was very happy and stayed happy for the rest of the lesson.

## APPENDIX H: EXAMPLE OF A REFLECTION

### Example of a reflection

#### The influence of teacher identity on student identity

The last 3 weeks have seen an evolving change in the attitudes of the students during FWF: largely due to Ms. Kean. After [name of student] shared, there was silence and a few students looked around nervously as if checking other student's reactions to see if they should clap, or maybe say something. Ms. Kean clapped and others followed. The week after, a student clapped first and others followed. It had only taken one week to imitate Ms. Kean's reaction. How often do students need confirmation or approval of behavior? If this modeling hadn't occurred, would students just sit there in silence after a share? Yesterday, [name of student] was in tears after [name of student] shared. Ms. Kean told me that this reaction is normal and as time passes she predicts more and more students will feel "this kind of bond, usually because they've been in a similar situation." This mimicking of behavior- or need for some kind of affirmation before displaying certain behaviors- is interesting. Does this appear in other situations within English class? What is lost if these behaviors are not openly displayed? The difference between home life and school life is become clearer, yet in this particular class, the line is blurring: home is being willingly brought into the classroom. It's interesting to note that home is not just in the classroom, it's in the classroom *during* a lesson, as *part* of a lesson. How does this cross-over contribute to the sense of community and belonging within the class? This idea of blurring lines also speaks to the fact that the classroom is a safe space for students to off-load or receive student or teacher input.