WRITING EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS: PERSPECTIVES OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS AND COLLEGE INSTRUCTORS

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all those who have chosen education as their profession. May you know how special and appreciated you are. I also dedicate this to my husband and daughter because without their patience, flexibility, and support I could not have done it.

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of the study was to explore the writing expectations and requirements of educators, investigating the viewpoints of high school English teachers and college writing instructors on writing, expectations of students, classroom writing requirements, and methods and assessment strategies. A mixed-method approach was used. Surveys were distributed to educators within the sampling frame; focus group interviews were conducted with volunteer educators and chosen secondary and post-secondary students. Descriptive statistics were conducted and themes were identified among the interview data. Independent t-tests were conducted to determine if the difference in high school English teachers' and college educators' perceptions were significant. The study revealed that all participants believed editing and proofreading, avoiding plagiarism, maintaining focus, providing organization with logical grouping, and using discernable introductions and conclusions were important in writing. Differences included high school English teachers perceived employing a writing process, providing students with examples of effective writing, representing different points of view, and using appropriate vocabulary as essential writing requirements and expectations. College writing instructors' foci were on presenting a thesis and supporting these claims with multiple and appropriate sources of evidence while also evaluating these source materials critically, and providing written feedback to students.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

For numerous high school graduates, college is the next step in their path to career development. They put faith into the schooling system to prepare them for higher education, often interpreting assessments to signify their readiness. While many students do receive adequate preparation, others do not. This deficiency in the latter group is reflected by higher percentages of remediation. Various situations and experiences may explain academic deficiency. Luke-warm student motivation, apathy, and lack of ownership of their learning may be contributing factors. Likewise, if they are disinterested, do not put in sufficient effort, feel a sense of entitlement, or are not receptive to teacher instructional methods or styles, learning may be compromised. Unfortunately, identification of deficiencies at elementary and secondary levels is not always accurate; students can be passed onto the next grade level without meeting expectations. Further compounding the situation is the intervention which may be sporadic or ineffective. Yet another challenge is inconsistency in expectations and standards among educators even within the same school. Consequently, students may be confused about what they are expected to achieve.

Research conducted with secondary and post-secondary schools indicates that only 19 out of the 50 states have policies and procedures that align high school and college expectations in areas such as writing (Achieve, 2008). High school teachers often

value and teach different concepts from their college peers. In the National Curriculum Study (2009) conducted by American College Testing (ACT), a non-profit organization, whose mission is to help people achieve education and workplace success, data gathered indicated that high school teachers rate the need to teach more content and skills as important, yet they tend to focus on topics that college professors do not deem as critical. Key findings in research by the Achieve Inc. (2004) for the American Diploma Project indicate that academic standards in high school are not aligned with post-secondary entry requirements. This discrepancy in the importance of specific skills and topics, as well as inconsistent alignment between high school and college standards and requirements, impacts students.

According to the ACT National Curriculum Survey (2009)—a nationwide survey of educational practices and expectations conducted every three to five years—the majority of high school teachers believed state standards were preparing students for college-level academics. In contrast, nearly 60% of postsecondary instructors felt students were *not* prepared for this level of work. Greene and Winters (2005) reported that only about 34% of students graduate ready for college. Students, however, based on their high school graduation requirements and scores on college entrance exams, were under the assumption they *were* prepared for college level work. Franke (1986) declared, "Although the value of placement testing at the college level is generally accepted, there is no consensus about the best approach to such testing" (p. 31). Again, the ACT National Curriculum Survey (2009) presented findings indicating high school and college writing instructors emphasize different writing skills in the classroom, which may explain

high numbers in remedial writing courses among college freshmen. In a report conducted by the Alliance for Excellent Education, students in the United States today are not meeting even basic writing standards, and teachers are often not aware of how to help them (as cited in Graham & Perin, 2007, p. 11). Many students, misinformed about their real-world writing skills or lack thereof, struggle in college classes. The Center for Educational Policy Research has shown that these conflicting messages are detrimental to student self-concept and academic performance (Conley, 2007). Students believe their writing to be adequate, and in some cases even exceptional, while their writing composition performance indicates otherwise.

Nowadays students in secondary and postsecondary schools are the millennial generation, defined as those born in 1982-2002. Many in this demographic have an expectation of entitlement—an unrealistic understanding of academic achievement coupled with grade inflation and a belief that they are owed high marks. Additionally, a lack of drive, motivation, and accountability result in a different type of student. "The mindset of many millennials is that just showing up for all the classes merits a minimum grade of a B" (Alexander & Sysco, 2011, p. 1). Hershatter and Epstein (2010) stated millennials have an attitude that educators are there to entertain; further, they have a lack of concern for accuracy and validity of sources of information, a skewed perception of entitlement and privilege, and a distorted view of what is fair or unfair. According to Howe and Strauss (2000), millennials have always had things planned out for them and are not used to ambiguous situations. They have been continually told they are special and can achieve anything they dream. These generalized characteristics may be

contributing factors which distort expectations, skew students' sense of accountability, and explain struggles in college classes. Students may not be acquiring the skills from high school due to their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions. Such unrealistic views are a mismatch for the college classroom.

Writing is an essential form of communication in society and the professional world. "Writing transforms our cognitive abilities" (Menary, 2007, p. 621). It is also an area in which numerous high school students are lacking the skills to succeed in college-level writing courses. Results from reports by the Montana University System Writing Assessment show that every year writing scores increase among students who are entering the university system. However, over the past five years, from 2007-2012, enrollment into remedial courses still averages 12.2% with only minimal improvement in this rate over the last two years (Montana University System, n.d.) Nearly ten percent of students who scored a 23 or above on their ACT placement test received a C or lower in their freshmen level writing course (Montana University System, n.d.). A disconnect between secondary school preparation and university expectations is apparent (ACT Inc, 2009). Students who enter the college campus with anemic writing skills are disadvantaged. Unfortunately, there is no simple or quick fix to ameliorate the situation.

My varied experiences have led me to believe in the importance of writing as a form of communication, especially for teachers. I have observed how students' writing abilities can impact the opportunities for jobs and scholarships. I have experienced how writing serves as the first impression and can eliminate a person from job consideration immediately. Moreover, writing is vitally critical for those who enter the education field.

Writing takes on many different forms for varied audiences in the day-to-day setting of the classroom. Subsequently, practitioners must be comfortable with diverse writing tasks. Newsletters to parents, presentations to school board members, grant writing, and classroom website communication are only a few of the assorted writing responsibilities of the teacher. Writing is communication that informs, persuades, entertains, and describes. Each focus invokes a different style of writing, and the author must be aware of the purpose to communicate clearly – selecting words, mediating tone, and delivering accurate content. Writers, conscious of their audience, manipulate format, style, and language to connect with the identified reader.

My involvement with secondary and post-secondary students ignited her interest in writing, for I witnessed the lack of connection between high school and college writing requirements and expectations. Curiosity about what instructors at both levels felt the important elements of writing were, propelled me to ask questions. In my investigation, I found important differences in writing abilities among students.

I taught a Literacy and Assessment course, part of the teacher preparation program, at a land-grant university. A 400-level course, enrolled students had successfully passed through other teacher preparation courses, reporting A's and occasional B's. Many were expecting to student teach the subsequent semester. Specifically, in this course, I was shocked at the substandard quality of student writing. Fewer than 10% of the students had adequate writing skills needed for future educators; they did not demonstrate basic writing skills, composition, organization, or audience appropriateness. Chronic deficiencies raised alarm bells in me for these errors appeared

throughout the semester across assignments—completed both inside and outside of class. Writing incomplete sentences such as *"By showing your child the pictures"* which is only a prepositional phrase and *"The best of answers"* which does not contain a verb or a predicate. Both are examples of demonstrated inability of pre-service teachers to meet the writing expectations of the profession. Besides the use of incomplete sentences, subject-verb agreement was often missing; for example a student would write *"The child are drawing pictures"* or *"The child write a story."* Furthermore, run-on sentences were prevalent, as well as a lack of paragraphing. In fact, it was not uncommon for paragraphs to be a page or two in length. Additionally, pre-service students did not seem to understand how to structure their thoughts into paragraphs. Other rudimentary writing skills—organizing ideas, establishing a main topic, and adding supporting details—were not present. In fact, students' writing resembled an informal conversation with a person who was unable to organize similar ideas, one idea streaming to the next with no logical connection between them. Such weak performance, especially in a group of college students on the cusp of graduation from a teacher education program, served as a catalyst for this research project. I was highly motivated to uncover *why* the present state of writing inadequacies existed.

Compounding the lack of fundamental writing skills, students did not understand the importance of their role as future educators in communicating clearly. For example, they lacked specific know-how in explaining assessment scores, using data that had been collected, and in interpreting what the numbers meant. Many of the students, when presented with feedback, did not see the relevance of providing that level of detail to

parents. Rather, they seemed to just expect parents to "take their word for it." As an educator and parent, I found their unwillingness to learn about and practice educational professionalism and responsibility unsettling. After teaching this 400-level course for two semesters, it became apparent that not only did pre-service teachers lack writing skills, but the value of writing as a quintessential form of communication in education was also compromised.

This topic has been investigated by others. Many groups have been comparing writing requirements of high school and college writing instructors. The Conference on College Composition and Communication created a description of student writing in high school and college. Collaboration between the Council of Writing Program Administrators and National Survey of Student Engagement focused on what faculty are doing in their classrooms; as a result, a National Commission on Writing was created by the College Board to target writing improvement. Additionally, the importance of writing has been recognized by testing companies that have added a writing assessment component to their placement tests. Since 2005, both the SAT and ACT have included a writing assessment to their battery of tests. In 1999, prior to the introduction of these exams, the Montana University System Writing Assessment (MUSWA) was implemented to assess the writing of high school students.

Additionally, discrepancies between instructor and student perceptions exist. "For example, while 30% of high school faculty report "always" requiring multiple drafts, only 16% of high school students report "always" writing multiple drafts. And while 31% of high school faculty report "always" conferencing with students on papers

in progress, only 12% of high school students report “always” discussing their writing with their teacher” (Addison & McGee, 2010, p. 159). Multiple drafts are important and essential in grooming the writer, resulting in stronger pieces. The differing perceptions may be explained by “definitions.” Students may not consider that when they are asked to make changes to their writing, that they are indeed developing a new draft; to them, it may just be another assignment. Teachers may see conferencing as their feedback written on the student’s paper or as a conversation they have while walking around the classroom. Alternatively, students may only view conferencing as sitting down with the teacher one-on-one and having a focused dialogue. This difference in perceptions may explain the disconnect. Student perceptions are crucial to consider in writing if improvements are to be realized.

Close investigation of previous studies revealed that the one voice not considered in the research was that of the student. This study is important because it does not merely duplicate other studies on this topic; it embraces the voice of the student, a critical essential component. Furthermore, students are the ones who are engaged in and experiencing the lesson, having a crucial viewpoint that is reflected in this study. This inclusion marks its uniqueness and importance.

An understanding of what good writing is achieved through multiple lenses—personal perceptions, instructors, and placement testing. Inquiring into successful student writers’ perceptions may help educators understand the expectations and requirements they are communicating to students. Exploring the perceived expectations of students, high school English teachers, and college writing instructors may help identify

commonalities, discrepancies, and provide guidance for eventual success in writing instruction.

Statement of Purpose

The primary purpose of the study was to explore the writing expectations and requirements of educators and how these were perceived by students. I was interested in investigating the viewpoints of high school English teachers and college writing instructors on writing, expectations of students, classroom writing requirements, and methods and assessment strategies they felt were effective in teaching writing, and how they were interpreted by students.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What writing requirements and expectations do high school English teachers have for their students and what are student perceptions of those requirements?
2. What writing requirements and expectations do college writing instructors have for their students and what are student perceptions of those requirements?
3. What are the similarities and differences between writing requirements and expectations of high school English teachers and college writing instructors?

Research Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods approach to address the research questions. "The mixed approach helps improve the quality of research because the different research approaches have different strengths and different weaknesses" (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 51). To investigate writing expectations and requirements at the secondary and postsecondary levels, causal-comparative research was used. This type of quantitative research methodology was chosen because it allowed for group comparison with random sampling from each group. I used surveys to study the relationship between two categorical independent variables (high school English teachers and college writing instructors) and one quantitative dependent variable (writing expectations and requirements). The survey instrument was adapted from the English/writing ACT National Curriculum Survey.

Constructivism theory framed my understanding of what contributes to the success of college students. Humans generate knowledge and meaning from interactions, experiences, and the ideas generated from these experiences, which can highlight the unique aspects of the subjects and render their viewpoints as valid and respectable. Data was collected through focus group interviews with high school English teachers and college writing instructors. These interview questions were adapted from interviews conducted by The National Study of Writing Instruction (2011). Students, identified as proficient writers by their high school English teachers and college writing instructors were interviewed in focus groups. Interview questions for secondary and post-secondary students were adapted from the Nancie Atwell (1998) Writing Survey. The target sample

size was two focus group interviews per group; I conducted two focus group interviews for high school English teachers (N=2, N=3) and similarly, two focus group interviews of college writing instructors (N=2, N=2). However, only one focus group interview was conducted for secondary students (N=4) and post-secondary students (N=5). Through this mixed-method approach, I was able to collect both qualitative and quantitative data to address the study's research questions.

The Researcher

For over ten years, I have taught writing to junior high students. Further, I taught upper-level Department of Education courses at a land-grant institution in a rural state in the upper Rocky Mountains. Working in a school district that did not have a set elementary or secondary writing curriculum, I was in the position to determine what important skills students should acquire to be successful writers beyond the realities of high school. This was a difficult task, especially without the guidance of an established curriculum. I learned that students often entered the classroom with minimal experience and writing skills. I questioned if what I taught was preparing students for high school; I did not even consider the writing realities students might encounter beyond high school. Through these experiences, I began to ponder the veracity of writing expectations and the idea for this investigation took shape.

I reflected on my own experience. In high school, I was considered an above-average writer, having easy success with classroom assignments and essay competitions, only to be critiqued at the college level for several inadequacies. My written work did

not meet the expectations for college-level writing, despite her confidence and false sense of accomplishment. Specifically, the organizational structure, as well as my use of sentence transitions failed to match instructor requirements. I also struggled with appropriate use of word choice for various college level assignments. Previous secondary expectations required descriptive language and use of colorful adjectives. But writing in college focused on clear, concise, and simple language. Through these accumulated experiences, I have seen writing through multiple lenses. Assignments and teachers differed for high school and college. I wondered why this might be and began to consider possible mitigating factors. Could it be that writing curriculums were disparate? Were students not receiving adequate writing instruction? Could it be that students had not sufficiently mastered required skills so as to use them efficiently and effectively? Might it be possible that only simple writing how-to's were included in instruction?

As writing clearly and for different audiences is heralded as part of thinking and being a well-rounded student, educators understand its pivotal role as one of the three R's. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were released in June 2010 by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) after a year-long process. "It resulted in what the two organizations stated was the establishment of clear and consistent goals for learning that would prepare America's children for success in college and work" (Reese, 2011, p. 16). To be competitive in today's world, American students must have the knowledge and skills to succeed in an information-based economy and compete with students from the highest performing nations. The CCSS have established college and career ready, internationally

benchmarked standards in English Language Arts, literacy, and math. Importantly, the CCSS require students to think and write well.

For English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, standards were released with the mandated purpose: "to help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school" (Common Core Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, 2010, p. 3) and further defines this readiness as:

> "the ability to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas, to conduct original research in order to answer questions or solve problems, and to analyze and create a high volume and extensive range of print and non-print texts in media forms old and new," (Common Core Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, 2010, p. 4).

The Common Core charge adopted by most states focuses attention on the need for all educators to prepare themselves to guide elementary and secondary students to become informed readers and writers. Unlike previous standards, the CCSS specify writing types: arguments, informative/explanatory texts, and narratives. A strong emphasis is placed upon students' abilities to "write sound arguments on substantive topics and issues, as the ability is crucial to college and career readiness" (CCSS, 2012, p. 24). They focus on responding to authentic text, writing to sources, reporting on research, responding to text of certain complexity, drawing evidence from multiple texts, and synthesizing and evaluating information presented in diverse media. Computer skills, such as keyboarding, and conducting research are also included in the CCSS writing standards. However, the main focus of the English Language Arts standards is on

arguments and information/explanatory texts; students should be reading and writing about nonfiction texts in preparation for the material they will use in college and in careers. Emphasized throughout the standards is the ability to write logical arguments with sound reasoning and relevant evidence. Students should be able to create both short and focused, as well as in-depth research projects consisting of a written analysis and presentation of findings. An evaluation of the student samples in Appendix C of the CCSS points to prominently expository writing, with use of facts and details to support stated claims. Throughout all grade levels, the writing examples have moved from creative to concentrated arguments that inform and explain. Increased mastery of writing skills, text analysis and comparison are also evident across grade level samples. The level of writing required by the English Language Arts standard is at a higher level, involving critical thinking and centered on preparing students for the types of writing required in college and the workplace.

I hoped to understand the similarities and differences between perceptions of high school English teachers and college writing instructors. By identifying these, I yearned to gain insight into those essential writing skills needed for first-year students so they might experience success in postsecondary education. I wanted to also identify what might support writing improvement at every level, and, conversely what might inhibit performance. Finally, I hoped to use study findings to prepare students more effectively for written communication in today's world.

Conceptual Framework

Using the findings of other researchers and those from a previous pilot study, I anticipated the present study would help clarify the writing expectations and requirements of high school English teachers and college writing instructors. The concept map (Figure 1) provides a visual framework; the components are described and defined below.

Student Perception of Writing Expectations and Requirements

This term includes what students gathered from their high school English teachers and college writing instructors to be important writing expectations and requirements through teacher feedback, instructional strategies, and assessments used.

Teacher/Instructor Perception of Writing Expectations

This consists of what writing expectations and requirements high school English teachers and college writing instructors believed in and stressed. It also includes the impact of school curricula and writing standards, as well as how these are interpreted and used by the teacher and instructor. The final element of this component includes strategies, methods, techniques, and assessments teachers and instructors utilized in their writing classrooms.

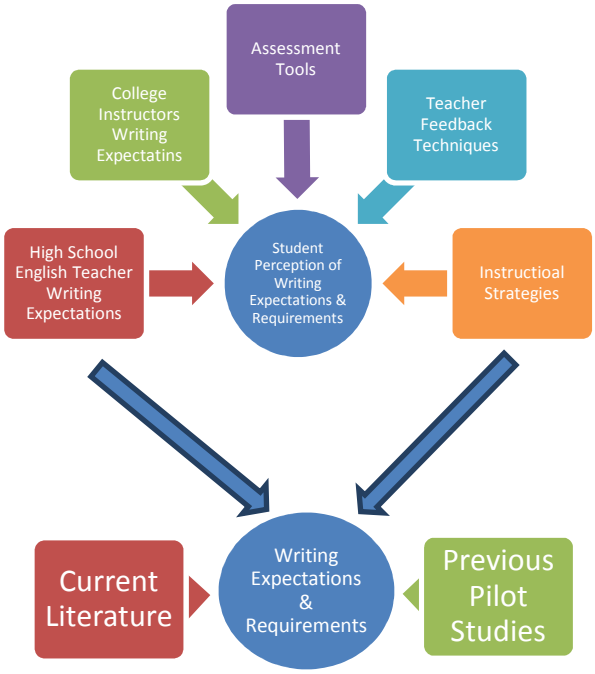

Figure 1. The Study Concept Map illustrates the concepts included in the framework of this study.

Significance of Study

Remedial placement for incoming freshmen to postsecondary education can postpone degree completion and delay positioning in career placement. Furthermore, remedial courses used as preparation for college-level classes often do not count toward graduation. Poor writers take longer to obtain a college degree because they, initially, must pass these remedial or introductory level courses before they are able to enroll in a credit-bearing course, thus delaying their college completion date. In order to decrease the ubiquity of remediation, high school and college educators may need to collaborate and develop common understandings of important writing skills necessary for incoming postsecondary education students. The Board of Regents in an upper Rocky Mountain northwestern state, where the study took place, is focusing on on-time completion of

graduation for their university system. The Board of Regents (2013) Strategic Plan stated their intent: to increase retention and graduation rates, and work collaboratively with K-12 schools to increase high school preparedness.

This study is also significant because it identified the commonalities and differences among writing expectations and requirements of high school English teachers and college writing instructors. With this information, educators may be equipped with a better understanding of what writing knowledge is required in college. Thus, instruction can be tailored to increase success for students in their postsecondary education, as well as decrease the number of students placed in remedial courses. Identifying the similarities and differences between writing expectations at the high school and the college level may illuminate factors that contribute to perennial problems for universities: over-subscription to remedial writing courses, lack of retention of first-year students, and delays in on-time graduation. Finally, this study may be used to guide further research about writing preparation, especially for students who plan on attending a post-secondary institution.

Definition of Terms

American College Testing (ACT): is a test that assesses high school students' general educational development and their ability to complete college-level work in four skill areas: English, mathematics, reading, science and an optional writing test (ACT Inc., 2006).

American Diploma Project: is a project funded by a $2.4 million dollar grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, which defined English and math benchmarks high school graduates must master to succeed in credit-bearing college courses. Their findings point to the reality that states' current high school exit expectations are not meeting these benchmarks (Achieve Inc., 2004).

Board of Regents: is a group of people appointed to supervise an educational institution who administer public institutions of higher education, which include both state universities and community colleges ("Board of Regents," 2014).

Common Core State Standards (CCSS): is a U.S. education initiative that seeks to bring diverse state curricula into alignment by following the principles of national standards-based education reform. The initiative is sponsored by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012).

College writing instructors: are considered in this study to be educators with Class 1 teaching licenses who teach primarily taught college level writing in a rural state in the upper Rocky Mountains.

English Language Arts (ELA): involves learning about reading, spelling, literature, composition, conventions, and grammar so as to develop the students' comprehension and capacity for use of written and oral language ("English Language Arts," 2013).

High school English teachers: are considered in this study to be educators with Class 1 teaching licenses who teach English composition in writing in communities with a population of 5,000 or smaller in a rural state in the upper Rocky Mountains.

The Montana Association of Teachers of English Language Arts (MATELA): promotes the teaching and learning of English and the language arts at all levels of education in Montana. It is a state affiliation of the National Council of Teachers of English (MATELA, 2004).

Montana University System Writing Assessment (MUSWA): is an assessment given to measure student proficiency in writing. Adopted by the Montana Board of Regents and used by Montana postsecondary institutions for placement in college English composition courses, it is a measure of written composition (Clinard, 2011).

Pre-service teachers: are students who have been accepted in a teaching education program but is not yet a qualified teacher. This student is in their last one or two semesters before they will be placed as a student teacher. They may also be referred to as teacher candidates.

Postsecondary: is the educational level that follows the completion of a school providing a secondary education, grades 9-12 (“Postsecondary,” 2013).

Remedial: is intended to correct or improve deficient skills in a specific subject area (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000).

SAT: formerly the Scholastic Aptitude Test and Scholastic Assessment Test, is a widely used standardized test for college admission covering the subject areas of critical

reading, mathematics, and writing. It is designed to measure critical thinking and problem solving skills needed for postsecondary education success (Grove, 2011).

Secondary: represents a high school or a school of corresponding grade ranking between eighth grade and a college or university.

Writing skills: are needed to compose meaningful text, and to communicate ideas and information that is understandable and targets a variety of audiences ("Writing Skills," 2012). In this study, writing skills are those that students need to have mastered in high school in order to be successful with college writing tasks.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study is limited to high school English teacher and college instructor participants who are currently faculty members in high schools, colleges, and universities in a state in the upper Rocky Mountains. Their participation is restricted by responses to survey questions with no additional personal conversation or interaction.

Additional limitations of this study include the backgrounds of the college and high school English educators participating in this study. The participants vary in many ways: years in the classroom, their teacher preparation experiences, understanding of personal skill level as writers, and participation in professional development--especially that which supports better writing instruction. Other limitations consist of expectations of college writing instructors and high school English teachers per institution, as well as requirements for their students in writing. Diversity among individual institutions may also limit this study. Additionally, the survey used may not have captured all the factors

classroom practitioners believe influence student writing preparation and experience. Finally, the study is also limited by my ability to evoke relevant, truthful, and reflective responses from participants as well as by the possibility all participants would feel comfortable to communicate answers in written form, with candid and full disclosure. There is no way for me to guarantee participant's full participation or control their responses; thus, this is an additional limitation.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Fundamental writing skills are integral to student success in higher education because writing reflects knowledge and thinking. In 2003, the National Writing Project issued a report entitled "The Neglected R" making the case that, of "Three R" triad—reading, writing, and arithmetic— "writing is clearly the most neglected" (National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, 2003). With only one quarter of graduating high school seniors considered to be writing at a level of proficiency as established by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, 2003), the potential impact of this declaration on success in post-secondary education is alarming. According to the National Curriculum Study (2009), nearly one-third of high school graduates in the United States are not ready for college-level English courses. College instructors view the situation in more dire terms, for they estimate that 50% of graduates are not prepared for college level writing (Achieve, Inc., 2004). Students also feel under-prepared for writing beyond the high school context. "Thirty-five percent of high school graduates in college and 39% of graduates in the workforce feel their writing does not meet expectations for quality" (Achieve, Inc., 2004, p. 6). Notwithstanding national writing standards that have been established to assist educators in preparing students for college level and workforce level writing, the problem remains. Individual schools and teachers

interpret state standards differently, and resulting in various ways what knowledge might be transmitted (as cited in Sullivan and Nielsen, 2009, p. 11). This may result in inconsistency in writing expectations and varying perceptions of what qualifies as essential writing skills.

Abrahamson's (1993) research found that middle school students are asked to express their feelings and tell stories in writing. As a result of these experiences—which are but only one type of written discourse—many enter high school feeling like competent and effective writers, for they are familiar with one genre. Students are then confronted with an abrupt realization that narrative writing, in which they are confident, is devalued. "But all are soon disabused of the notion that they are writers and either accept the C's or discard the self in writing to get A's and B's" (Abrahamson, 1993, p. 15). In turn, high school teachers express frustration because students have not been exposed to the type of writing they require. They resent having to re-teach writing to students "who should know how to do it." They observe students' incompetency in writing for different purposes and audiences, which is now something they must address. Many simply move on despite student inadequacies. Curriculum demands and lack of instructional time result in an assign-and-assess cycle that fails to provide intervention.

College instructors face a similar situation; they are frustrated when students enter their classrooms and do not possess the skills they deem as important. At the college level, faculty want students to understand and apply correctly the conventions of written English and academic discourse as well as demonstrate, through writing, that they can

generalize, infer, and synthesize; students should have the ability to step outside their own vision, developing clear positions and arguments based on evidence.

Interestingly, just what constitutes college-level writing skills has been debated among university experts (John Pekins in Sullivan & Tinberg, 2006). Correctness and conventions have rivalled with originality and depth of analysis. As a result, the variety of issues, have created ambiguous, vague performance standards related to university-quality writing—a confusion plaguing those seeking either to attain or to uphold college-level standards of written communication (Sullivan & Tinberg, 2006, p. xv; Green, 2000, p. 9).

Additionally, Sullivan (Sullivan & Tinberg, 2006) urged that post-secondary student success, at least partially, is vitally dependent upon a consensus by experts as to a clear understanding of the differences between pre-college and university-level writing. Besides advocating for a basic level of standardization in order to better support under-prepared writers entering colleges and universities, Sullivan also acknowledged that what defines college-level writing might vary across departments (2006, p. 2), thereby opening the possibility of differing standards for varying courses of study. Specifically, Sullivan and Tinberg (2006) emphasized that what defines university-quality writing may have critical implications for those at all levels of education—elementary, secondary, and post-secondary (p. xiv).

Berlin (1982) stated that, "teaching writing is tacitly teaching a version of reality and the student's place and mode of operation in it" (p. 766). Recognizing the history of writing, writing placement strategies, and empirical research on methods and assessments

may shed light upon the disconnect between high school and college writing expectations.

History of Writing

Prior to the 1970s, the teaching of writing was dominated by classical rhetoric, a form to supposedly capture what was already neatly organized in a writer's mind (Hairston, 1982). Composition textbooks during this time accentuated correctness and structure, such as the five-paragraph essay. Thanks to the work of Janet Emig in the early 1970's, writing shifted from product to process. Process research was converted into classroom implementation approaches. Such approaches were received favorably in education, but were constrained by the everyday realities of schools—diverse populations, time schedules, and increased numbers of students and classes. According to Sperling and Freedman (2001), "The difficulty in implementing writing process research seemed related to the realities of teachers' and students' lives inside schools, which forced compromises that re-searchers had not anticipated" (p. 373). Furthermore, time spent on writing often included inadequate intervention and negligible feedback (Applebee, 1993). Mistaken perceptions caused the conceptualization of process as isolated strategies for certain genres. According to Hillocks (1986) the emphasis shifted to process decisions directed by the purpose, task, and kind of writing being produced.

The 1990s expanded the boundaries of process approaches by including influences on writing such as multidisciplinary, social, and cultural factors (Flower, 1994). Schools were dealing with changing demographics and the need to accommodate

learners from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. "The sociopolitical context was again shaping what it meant to be literate and what constituted appropriate literacy acts" (Street, 1993, p. 25). The negative effect was that writing instruction became measured solely by performance on standardized testing. Ketter and Pool (2001) stated that by 1999, 38 states measured students' writing skills with a direct assessment. The process approaches that had previously guided writing instruction were being set aside for test-driven writing. Instruction was limited to specific instruction in the five-paragraph essay, and thus this standard emerged for learning to write. Although teachers might encounter textbooks with terms such as prewriting, revising, and editing, in actual practice, many used prescriptive rules and formulaic writing, separated from the purposes writing was supposed to serve (Mabry, 1999).

Similar to the 1990s, the 21st century has been marked by governmental reform: specifically "No Child Left Behind (NCLB)" (2001) and The New Common Core Standards (2010). Under "No Child Left Behind," the government re-introduced the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, with intent of ensuring equal access to education for all students, while simultaneously strengthening school accountability including delineating national standards for highly qualified teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). However, as Darling-Hammond (2007) identified, NCLB's reliance on standardized testing has been regarded by many to compromise precision and accuracy, critical thinking, and problem solving skills (p. 3). This, according to Darling-Hammond (2007), has marred America's academic comparisons with other nations in several areas including the ability of students to "defend" their ideas orally and in

writing" (p. 3). Because test scores were perceived as foremost, classroom practitioners seemed unable to implement research-based practices related to writing, focusing on the grammatical aspects of writing. Often in de-contextualized learning settings, the study of subject-verb agreement, of choosing the prepositional phrase from a sentence, and of correcting conventions were typical lessons. Less time was given for students to actually compose anything longer than a few sentences. In response to these and other concerns, the new Common Core Standards (CCSS) were developed, and writing instruction continued to change. With the CCSS focus on preparing students for college and the workplace, writing standards are now more robust and include writing for various audiences, composing within different genres, and writing for a variety of purposes. Furthermore, they are integrated into all content areas, reflecting that writing is not just taught by the English Language Art's teacher. Additional implications for teachers include a change in methodology in the CCSS. No "scripted curriculum" supports those who teach under the new standards and students are to learn while avoiding any prescription for how these goals need to be taught (Porter, McMaken, Huang, & Yang, 2011). Predictably, writing in schools will be transformed yet again.

Writing Placement Testing

Prior to 1959, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) was the only nationally standardized college entrance exam. As student interest in higher education and the desire of universities to increase enrollment, the need for an additional standardized college entrance exam arose. The American College Testing Program (ACT) was

established in 1959. Interestingly, neither college entrance exam included a writing component until 2005; this change resulted in response to complaints from college faculty about the lack of consistency in students' writing abilities.

Nowadays, the most commonly accepted writing placement tests for colleges and universities are the SAT and ACT. The required SAT writing section includes multiple-choice questions and a brief essay; multiple choice items contribute 70% toward the total writing score and the essay supplies the balance (College Board, 2000). The multiple-choice questions test knowledge of grammar, word errors, and understanding of logical organization of ideas. The essay, administered first, takes 25 minutes and requires responses to broad philosophical prompts "designed to be accessible to students regardless of their educational and social backgrounds" (College Board, 2000, para. 4).

The essays are scored by two trained readers, who spend approximately three minutes per essay. Each scores the essay on a scale of 1-6 and the two numbers are summed for a final score. Research conducted after the addition of a writing section to the SAT in 2005 suggested that, while SAT scores can be predictors of college success, they are aggregated with other correlative data, and likewise, need to be interpreted cautiously. One preliminary study found a moderate correlation (r = .46) between a prototype of the new writing section and first-year college GPA (Norris, Oppler, Kuang, Day, & Adams, 2006). A second validity study analyzing the predictive power of this revised SAT was undertaken in 2007 and included a sample of 151,316 students from a variety of post-secondary institutions across the U.S. When compared with first-year college GPA scores, "across all institutions, the recently added writing

section…[was]…the most highly predictive of the three individual SAT sections" (Kobrin, Patterson, Shaw, Mattern, & Barbuti, 2008, p. 1). This validity study concluded that the ability to write well may be someway associated with overall success at the post-secondary level.

In comparison, the optional writing section of the ACT, given at the end of the test, takes about 30 minutes and presents a prompt that relates to social issues applicable to high school students (ACT, 2006). Responses are read by two trained readers who then each assign a score 1-6. As with the SAT, the scores are summed to produce a final score. The writing is scored holistically, based on the overall impression of several elements: the writer's skill in taking a position, maintaining focus throughout the essay, using logical reasoning and support, organizing ideas, and using language appropriately according to standard English conventions (ACT, 2013). The ACT writing test is meant to complement the English portion of the test. Students' understanding of standard written English conventions and ability to produce a direct sample of writing is assessed. However, the writing test is optional because postsecondary institutions make their own decisions about whether to require the ACT writing results for admission or for college course placement purposes. Similarly to validity studies conducted for the SAT, studies of first-year college GPA (ACT, 1998; Allen, Robbins, Casillas, & Oh, 2007) suggest that ACT scores and high school grades should carry approximately the same weight if an institution wants its admission criteria to reflect expected level of first-year academic performance in writing. The combination of ACT scores and high school GPA provides

greater accuracy and validity of the predictability of student success than test scores alone.

In addition to national standardized testing, the Montana University System Writing Assessment (MUSWA) was implemented in 1999 to assess the writing of high school juniors as they prepare for postsecondary education. Over 140 schools have participated. The MUSWA tests skills in composing a persuasive essay and requires students to answer one of two prompts in 40 minutes, which is modeled from the ACT writing section (Montana University System, n.d.). This assessment was implemented as Montana's response to a need for consistency with evaluating student writing in preparation for appropriate course placement in postsecondary education. These scores, along with the ACT and SAT, have been accepted by colleges as metrics of student readiness for college composition.

With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in June 2010, national tests replace state-based assessments. The Office of Public Instruction received a multi-million dollar grant to establish the ACT Plus Writing, which is aligned to the CCSS and is a requirement for all juniors. It takes the place of the existing MUSWA. In a study conducted by the Indiana Department of Education (2012), both the ACT and SAT, had high degrees of alignment with the CCSS.

College placement tests were designed to channel students into courses that would best prepare them for academic writing throughout their educational career. "The Writing Skills Placement Test helps institutions determine whether students are ready for entry-level college writing courses or other courses with significant writing loads, or

whether students require developmental writing instruction prior to entry into those courses" (ACT Inc., 2009, para. 1).

However, controversy accompanies writing placement exams. According to Sullivan and Nielsen (2009), practices for placement are complicated by many variables such as student dispositional, demographic, and situational characteristics. The assumption that there is only once correct score or placement for each student and that this can be determined from one assessment is also problematic. Nevertheless, despite the limitations, Matzen and Hoyt (2004) concluded that a timed essay exam *is* valuable for placement purposes.

The Focus in Teaching Writing

Investigating what skills and knowledge currently being taught which are considered important for college readiness was a charge for the ACT National Curriculum Survey group. First conducted in 2002-2003, this nationwide survey of instructional practices is administered every three to five years with thousands of middle school/junior high school, secondary, and postsecondary teachers participating. One tested area is writing. Evidence from the past three surveys—2005-2006, 2009, and 2012—reveals a large gap between how high school teachers and postsecondary instructors perceive the readiness of high school graduates entering their first semester of college. Survey findings also indicate a difference in perception of important writing skills and what the classroom focus is.

In the ACT National Curriculum Survey Report (2009), high school English teachers place greater importance on content issues such as topic and idea development, along with organization, unity, and coherence while postsecondary English instructors felt correctness, such as sentence structure and formation and conventions of writing, were of most importance. Similarly, both groups of participants felt frustrated with having students enter their classes not being able to write complete sentences and not understanding discussion of basic writing elements. They both felt their job was to teach students how to weigh and develop arguments, not to dwell on grade-school types of tasks. High school English teachers valued collaboration with peers in review of drafts and developing one's own voice more than postsecondary English instructors did. Interestingly, remedial writing instructors at the postsecondary level shared common perceptions and viewpoints with high school English teachers.

The survey results in 2009 proved to be similar to the previous findings. High school English teachers again placed greater importance on content, while postsecondary English instructors on correctness. Some differences included skills such as sentence fluency or altering straightforward subject-verb agreement. The latter was ranked as sixth highest in importance with postsecondary English instructors, but 46th with high school teachers (ACT, Inc., 2009). Instructional time spent on writing to analyze literature ranked highest (18th) among high school English teachers whereas very low (87th) among postsecondary instructors (ACT, Inc., 2009). High school instructors did not report teaching usage and punctuation as part of their standard course content, yet postsecondary instructors reported this skill a three on a scale of 0-4 as important for

success at the postsecondary level. Notwithstanding these distinctions, remedial postsecondary writing instructors aligned with postsecondary English instructors in perceptions of important writing skills. According to the ACT National Curriculum Survey (2012) the difference in perceptions is "due at least in part to a lack of alignment between K-12 and postsecondary curricula that may be hampering the efforts of K-12 to prepare students for life after high school" (p. 12).

Strategies and Method Research

Schunk (2008) observed that less research has been conducted in *teaching* writing, in part because historically it was believed that good writers were born. The notion that words should flow with little effort contributed to the pervasive belief that some are just naturally talented. Graham and Mason (2006) stated contemporary research has discredited that belief; furthermore, they note that effective instruction in writing is essential for all students. They must be taught and provided the opportunity to become more knowledgeable of the four types of knowledge used in writing: topical, audience, genre, and language. Flower and Hayes (1980) formulated a model that conceptualizes writing as a set of thinking processes, classifying various activities that occur during writing and their relationships to the task environment and to the internal knowledge state of the writer. The task environment is established by a rhetorical problem, which should be defined by the teacher. A teacher must keep in mind that writers interpret problems in their own ways, so it is important to define the problem as clearly as possible. Because writers should be involved in goal setting, teachers ought to

facilitate this process by helping them determine what effects they want to achieve so they can modify their generating and organizing activities to achieve set goals. The teacher guides writers in transforming the writing assignment and long-term memory into a conceptual plan, and then translates the plan into text expressing the planned content. Teachers also direct students in reviewing, revising, and monitoring metacognitive process that link planning, translating, and reviewing together.

Writing processes begin with planning which "involves forming an internal representation of knowledge to be used in composing" (Schunk, 2008, p. 426). Teachers need to help students generate ideas by retrieving or acquiring relevant information. The next step, organization, is where teachers provide strategies and skills for students to use to group ideas and decide on the flow of the text. "Organization is conveyed through cohesion among sentence parts and coherence across sentences. This is achieved by instruction from teachers on grammar and composition. Translation is the next process, putting ideas into print and addressing writer's block. The final process is reviewing which consists of evaluating and revising. Teachers show students how to edit and revise, providing feedback to students over multiple drafts. During this process, students should focus on evaluating and modifying plans to alter subsequent writing. "This Flower and Hayes model has proven to be remarkably durable and has served as the conceptual framework for much research" (Schunk, 2008, p. 428).

A common element found in research on effective strategies and methods is development of rhetorical knowledge. According to the National Council of Teachers of English (2011), rhetorical knowledge is the basis of good writing and allows writers to

adapt to different purposes, audiences, contexts, and types of writing. Writers learn to compose a variety of texts to match different disciplines and purposes. Teachers can help writers develop this knowledge by practicing key rhetorical concepts through writing and analysis of writing with a variety of texts; writing for different audiences, purposes, and context; and contributing through writing opinions, arguments, and decisions.

Developing a knowledge of conventions is also critical. According to Acker and Halasek (2008), teachers can help writers develop a knowledge of conventions by investigating the logic and implications of different conventions. They can assist with practicing various conventions for punctuation and grammar, editing and proofreading writing, and exploring the implications of editing choices. Additionally, teachers can help students use resources to edit drafts and examine the underlying logic in commonly used citation systems. Because correct use of conventions aids in communicating clearly to the reader, attending to the presentation of ideas does matter.

Since there is "no single best approach to the teaching of writing under all circumstances and with all students" (White, 1989, p. 54), teachers need to design the appropriate mix of tasks for students in any given term. And just as "university proficiency is not a static or universal concept" (White, 1985, p. 57), readiness for college does not mean the same thing for all college-preparatory students.

Confidence and Motivation in Writing

Student confidence plays a significant part in how successful they will be as writers. Confidence levels are determined by instructional and assessment, and

consequently, how motivated students feel about writing. While educators use a variety of techniques in their classrooms, the answer is still unclear to what truly motivates students to have confidence in themselves as writers. A study conducted by Schunk and Swartz (1993) investigated how goal setting and progress feedback affected self-efficacy and writing achievement. The findings confirmed that "providing students with writing strategy instruction and a goal of learning the strategy enhances self-efficacy and achievement more than strategy instruction alone" (Schunk & Swartz, 1993, p. 10). Progress feedback was effective in increasing achievement and self-efficacy. "Combining process goals with progress feedback enhanced transfer of writing strategy use, skill, and self-efficacy" (Schunk & Swartz, 1993, p. 10). Subsequently, students need to set goals and receive feedback to enhance self-efficacy and motivation.

Another significant study (Deci & Reeve, 1996) investigated elements of competitive situations' effects on intrinsic motivation. Results revealed that competitive outcome and interpersonal context, affected intrinsic motivation. The competitive situation of winning positively impacted intrinsic motivation, but only in the non-pressured context. "Perceived competence and perceived self-determination are the processes through which elements of the competitive situation affect intrinsic motivation" (Deci & Reeve, 1996, p. 32). Consequently, intrinsic motivation was diminished in the competitive situation where participants felt pressured to win.

In another study, Smith, Rook, and Smith (2007) examined the use of cognitive, affective, and metacognitive questioning strategies in structured journal entries to determine if questioning strategies would lead to higher grades and increased student

motivation to succeed. The study found that journal writing with metacognitive and affective questions had a positive effect on student grades; such questions supported content learning to a much greater degree than the use of simple cognitive and text-related questions. Using metacognitive and affective questioning promoted learning and allowed for students to personally connect to the content, evident by more engaged journal entries and entries in which students exhibited a personal relationship with the content. Thus, metacognitive and affective questioning appeared to support learning.

Practices of Effective Teaching

Effective teaching practices are essential for student learning. Chickering and Gamson (1991) identified seven principles of good practices. "These seven principles are not Ten Commandments shrunk to a 20th century attention span. Rather they are intended as guidelines for faculty members, students, and administrators—with support from state agencies and trustees—to improve teaching and learning. These principles seem like common sense. Many teachers and students have endorsed them and research supports their use. They rest on 50 years of research based on the way teachers teach and students learn, how students work and play with one another, and how students and faculty talk to each other" (Chickering & Gamson, 1991, p. 1). The seven principles are as follows:

1. Encourage student-faculty contact: Contact between faculty and students in and out of class increases student motivation and involvement because they feel valued as individuals.

2. Encourage cooperation among students: Learning is enhanced when it is collaborative and social. Working with others improves thinking and deepens understanding.
3. Encourage active learning: Active learning includes talking about it, writing about it, relating it to past experiences, and applying it to daily lives.
4. Give prompt feedback: Students need frequent opportunities to perform, receive suggestions for improvement, and a chance to make improvements. They also need time to reflect on what they have learned and still need to know, as well as how to assess themselves.
5. Encourage time on task: Teachers need to assist students using time productively by teaching them effective time management skills based on all individual factors influencing their use of time.
6. Communicate high expectations: If you ask, you will receive. Teachers must set high expectations in order for students to strive to achieve them. High expectations are perceived by students as a sign that a teacher has confidence they can achieve.
7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning: There are many distinct styles to acquire skills. Students should be given an opportunity to show their talents and use their stronger skills. They also need to identify weak areas and be given opportunities to work on them. Teachers must acknowledge methods, and strategies used must be varied as well.

Conclusion

"Writing today is not a frill for the few, but an essential skill for the many" (College Board, 2000, para. 2). It is a necessary ability for succeeding in college and in the workplace. Writing well matters. It is the responsibility of educators at all levels to give students the best possible instruction, establish high expectations, and encourage multiple drafts which improve the final product. Writing is also the result of hard work, not luck. When educators at all levels work in concert to deliver this message, students may come to realize their part in working toward the goal of writing competency.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe writing expectations and requirements of high school English teachers who taught secondary English courses and college writing instructors whose primary teaching responsibility English composition or writing to freshmen or sophomore secondary students. I focused on gathering data from the participants via a survey instrument; I then incorporated focus group interviews from voluntary participants within the sample population. Based on a previous pilot study and the literature review, a conceptual framework was developed to initially identify topics for categorizing participant data. General topics for high school English teacher and college instructor data were as follow: (1) important qualities in student writing, (2) the educator's role in writing, and (3) teaching and assessment techniques. This organizational strategy was beneficial during the coding of interviews and for the initial analysis of survey data to help determine prevalent patterns and themes.

Additionally, I also performed focus group interviews of secondary and post-secondary students designated by their teachers as strong writers. The data obtained were utilized, offering details about writing requirements and expectations of high school English teachers and college writing instructors, as well as further defining them.

In this study I acknowledged her positionality on the importance of writing; as well, I acknowledged my experiences as a student and teacher may have differed from

those of the study participants. When conducting this study, I was mindful of possibilities and conclusions that did not match my previous experiences. Furthermore, I was cognizant of my assumptions and biases, and worked to eliminate these from this study.

Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods approach. I used the quantitative research method of causal-comparative research. "In causal-comparative research, the researcher attempts to determine the cause, or reason, for existing differences" and "established groups are already different on some variable, and the researcher attempts to identify the major factor that has led to this difference" (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 218). A cross-sectional survey design was utilized as well. The survey was administered to high school English teachers and college writing instructors once to "provide a snapshot of the behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs in a population" (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 176). This survey design was chosen because it provided data fairly quickly so analysis could be conducted in the designated time frame. Additionally, it allowed participants to provide data once, possibly increasing participation and sample size.

The qualitative method employed was constructivism. According to Patton's (2002) theoretical perspective of constructivism, humans gain knowledge and meaning from interactions between their experiences and the ideas generated from these experiences. "Constructivism taken in this sense points out the unique experience of each of us" (Patton, 2002, p. 97). I identified the unique experiences of the participants

through data collected in focus group interviews. I accomplished this by "rooting categories in the data being analyzed, seeking the underlying logic of apparently disparate events, recognizing causal inferences at work through categorization, and checking, revising, and amplifying techniques to evaluate evidence and explore connections between categories" (Dey, 2007, p. 188). Likewise, this method provided the foundation for data analysis.

Context of the Study

Educators enter the teaching profession from various backgrounds, with different training, degrees, past teaching experience, and home lives. They also teach a diverse assembly of students whose backgrounds, ethnicities, and home situations differ. Understanding these factors, I selected 150 college writing instructor participants from a rural state in the upper Rocky Mountains who teach at the post-secondary level, primarily first year college writing or English composition. Purposeful random sampling was used. From this convenience sampling, I gathered experiences and perceptions. Data collected varied, but those who participated allowed for consistency in geographical and demographic components. The chosen state for this study has a university system governing board which focuses on consistency in expectations through college readiness, common standards, and K-20 collaboration. The university system also educates approximately 47,000 post-secondary students per semester, with 17% minority students.

First, accessibility mattered. Second, this state is currently undergoing a transition to the Common Core State Standards in which writing is a strong component.

It also ranked above the national average in SAT writing scores (College Board, 2012). Finally, because I have taught in this state for nine years in three separate school districts, I was committed to writing improvement.

Participants

Educator participants were selected based on their teaching assignments. Chosen high school English teachers had the primary teaching responsibility of secondary English composition and writing in communities with populations of less than 5,000 in a rural state in the upper Rocky Mountains. College writing instructors taught first year writing or English composition to freshmen or sophomore postsecondary students. Both high school English teacher and college writing instructor participants hold a Class 1 teaching license were randomly selected from inside this sampling frame and asked to voluntarily participate by completing a survey (Appendix A). I used a statewide association of English teachers and faculty directories for electronic distribution of the survey to possible participants. Four hundred surveys were distributed.

A total of 40 high school English teachers participated in the survey; they included 9 males and 31 females. Further, they represented the following school sizes: 9 participants taught in a school with approximate enrollment of 81-120 students; 15 participants had school enrollments of 120-300; 10 participants with approximately 301-500 students enrolled; 4 participants with approximately 501-1,000 students enrolled; and 2 participants with approximately 1,001-5000 students enrolled. The majority of high school English teacher participants had been teaching for either 10-15 years (N=10) or

over 20 years (N=12). Another group was teachers who had one to three years of experience (N=8).

Forty-one college writing instructors submitted completed surveys. Males represented roughly 29% of respondents, with females at 71%. Only three participants taught in a post-secondary education system with enrollments of 501-1000 students; the remaining were at institutions with school enrollments of 10,001-15,000. Similarly, as with high school English teachers, the majority of college respondents were experienced. Fifteen teachers had been teaching for over 10 years and fourteen for 15-20 years.

Based on my intention to triangulate data, I conducted focus group interviews with the following: high school English teachers, college writing instructors, secondary students, and post-secondary students. High school English teachers and college writing instructors within the sampling frame were invited to participate (N=30), and nine accepted the invitation. These interview participants were asked to provide one or two names of students who they felt were adept writers. I chose this method of selecting students to interview because the intent was to gather information regarding students' experiences with writing expectations and requirements. I determined that students designated as high achievers in writing would be familiar with the subject area terminology and better equipped to answer the survey questions. They would be able to reflect and articulate why they are good writers, as well as be savvy and have the vocabulary to accurately explain and have their voices heard. Students were then contacted by email with a follow-up telephone call (N=18) and asked to participate in a focus group interview. Each focus group interview participant was provided with an

informed consent letter and signed this document. During each forty-minute audio recorded session, I took notes. Educator focus groups were guided by adapted interview questions from the National Study of Writing Instruction (Appendix B) whereas the student interviews were steered by an adapted version of Nancie Atwell's writing survey (Appendix C).

Participant profiles can be summarized as follows. There were five high school English teachers—all female and experienced teachers, having taught for 12 or more years, with the exception of one. Additionally, a total of four freshmen-level college writing instructors participated in the focus group interviews, two females and two males. Most were in their early years of teaching (1-5 years), apart from one male who had been teaching for 15 years.

Collectively, seven students participated. Post-secondary students included (N=3): one female sophomore student majoring in Accounting, another female freshmen student who was undecided about her major, and one male sophomore student studying Engineering. A total of four secondary students participated: a female senior interested in studying nursing, another female senior thinking about law, a female junior, and a male senior wanting to pursue Ag Business.

Data Collection Procedure

Using a valid and reliable survey instrument is essential in obtaining valid and reliable results. "If researchers' interpretations of data are to be valuable, the measuring instrument used to collect those data must be both valid and reliable" (Gay, Mills, &

Airasian, 2009, p. 155). I adapted the English/writing ACT National Curriculum Survey (Appendix A) which asks participants to rate the importance of content knowledge and skills in relation to English and writing success of students, utilizing a Likert-type scale. The validity and reliability of this survey is confirmed by the ACT organization due to its production of stable and consistent results. It has been distributed and used to gather data since 2002, connected to national academic and curricular standards, and produced an established correlation between survey results (ACT, Inc., 2009).

High school English teacher and college instructor participants received a letter introducing the study, informed consent letter, the survey instrument, and the deadline for information collection via email. The Montana Association of Teachers of English Language Arts (MATELA) was also used to locate participants for the survey. The invitation was sent out in their newsletter and those educators who chose to participate could go on-line and fill out the survey. I distributed the initial surveys to 400 possible participants on October 17, 2013, and had a response rate of only 16%. Subsequently, I sent out follow-up surveys on November 15, 2013, which resulted in an additional return of 4%. A target sample size of 100 total participants was set; however, the actual sample size was 81. This discrepancy can be explained: (1) The survey was sent out to the state-wide association of English teachers via electronic newsletter; as a result, this method may have excluded participants who do not view or read the electronic newsletter; (2) Surveys were sent via email to 100 randomly selected high school English teachers and college educators and it is possible that the message might have been disregarded as spam or delivered to incorrect email addresses; and (3) Educators were in the middle of their

respective school terms, and time constraints may have resulted in a non-response. Furthermore, participants were given the option of filling out the survey in Microsoft Word and returning it via email, or filling out the survey on-line via a Google shared drive. Consequently, 25% responded via the Google share drive (N=20), while the remaining utilized Microsoft Word and submitted it via email. The MATELA newsletter method resulted in 40 respondents, all of whom used the on-line survey to reply. Survey data was collected and entered into Microsoft Excel for statistical analysis.

For the qualitative aspect of the study, voluntary focus group interviews were conducted. The interview questions I used for high school English teachers and college writing instructors were adapted from the interview guide developed by the National Study of Writing Instruction (Appendix B). The National Study of Writing Instruction (NSWI) is a collaboration between the Center on English Learning & Achievement at the University at Albany and the National Writing Project at the University of California—Berkeley, with additional support from the College Board and the Spencer Foundation. Questions included in the survey and questionnaires administered to teachers, students, and school administrators by NSWI were "developed from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) cross-sectional and longitudinal assessments in reading and writing were inventoried for items related to the teaching of writing in particular and literacy in general, at Grade 8/ age 13 and Grade 12/ age 17" (Applebee & Langer, 2011). The survey instrument used for secondary and post-secondary students was adapted from the Nancie Atwell's writing survey (Appendix C). This survey tool was designed by a highly regarded educator in the United States and has been used for over forty years

(Atwell, 1987). In order to ensure the questions were adapted to accurately fit the study's needs, I piloted them with six colleagues and made minor revisions based on their suggestions. The target sample size for the focus group interviews was one to two per category with four participants in each group interview. The actual sample sizes were as follows: high school English teachers – 2 focus interview groups (2 participants, 3 participants); college writing instructors – 2 focus groups (2 participants in each interview); secondary students—one focus group (4 participants); and post-secondary students—one focus group (3 participants). The lower-than-anticipated-sample size of focus group interview participants was due to scheduling conflicts, previous commitments, and lack of interest in participating.

All interviews were held in a neutral location chosen and agreed upon by the participants, with the intention of eliminating the likelihood of nervousness or discomfort. Throughout the interviews, I employed common procedure. I asked one question at a time, remained neutral and refrained from offering personal commentary, encouraged responses while allowing the interview participants to speak openly and expand on their answers at will, and kept control of the interview. The average duration of the focus group interviews was 40 minutes. The participants were asked to sign the informed consent letter and were provided a copy if they desired, although, no one wanted one. Participants who were minors were asked to bring a signed informed consent letter.

The interviews were recorded and later transcribed by me; I also took notes during the focus interviews. The beginning of the interview was informal; I made

introductions, stated the purpose of the interview, and thanked the participants for their willingness to participate. The participants were informed of the opportunity to stop at any time and their option to not respond to items. This possibility was given to ensure a comfortable, safe atmosphere, and to help establish trust and openness. In addition, during the interview, I abstained from adding comments, providing advice, or offering viewpoints. At the end I thanked the participants for their cooperation. Immediately following the interview, the audio file was saved to my laptop for security.

Within a week of each focus group session, all interviews were transcribed verbatim, not summarized or abbreviated. As well, to check for accuracy, the transcript was compared to the notes I took during the interviews. All transcription was completed by me; the data was then coded and entered into Microsoft Excel for analysis.

Data Storage

Throughout the study, I made back-up copies of all electronic files and created files for printed documents, categorizing them by participant categories. I developed a master list of information which was updated throughout the project. I kept track of interviews conducted, transcribed, coded, and analyzed the data. Additionally, I inventoried the surveys sent, received, and entered these data into a spreadsheet. I stored all files, both printed and electronic, in a secure location.

Data Analysis

Using the processing framework presented in *The Survey Research Handbook* (Alreck & Settle, 2004), the data was prepared for analysis. The receipt date of each survey was recorded at the end of the completed survey, and each survey was labeled (c – college instructor, hs – high school English teacher) with a unique, consecutive identification number. Post-coding was conducted on the demographic information gathered in the survey.

Table 1. Demographic information and corresponding coding for study survey information.

Demographic Information	Category Coding
Gender	1=Female 2=Male
Years of Teaching Experience	1=1-3 years 2=4-6 years 3=7-9 years 4=10-15 years 5=16-20 years 6=over 20 years
Grades Primarily Taught	1=9th 2=10th 3=11th 4=12th 5=post-secondary 6=9th & 10th 7=11th & 12th 8=other
Approximate School Enrollment	1=under 50 2=50-80 3=81-120 4=121-300 5=301-500 6=501-1000 7=1001-5000 8=5001-10,000 9=10,001-15,000 0=over 15,000

The structure of the survey itself contributed in coding efficiency, for it asked the respondent to score each question 0-4, zero indicated no importance and 4 specified essential importance. Additionally, the survey presented overlying topics: (1) Composition Process and Purpose, (2) Topic & Idea Development, (3) Organization, Unity, & Coherence, (4) Word Choice in Terms of Style, Tone, Clarity, and Economy, and (5) Assessment and Instruction, which were pre-coded respectively.

I entered the survey data into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Columns across the top were labeled, as well as a definition of code translations. Labels were as follows: the first number corresponded with the topic (i.e. 1 for Composition Process and Purpose, 2 for Topic & Idea Development, etc…) and the second number corresponded with the location of the question under the topic i.e. 1.1, 1.2, etc… Data from the surveys was added to the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet by me and furthermore verified by a third party to ensure accuracy.

Basic descriptive statistics were used to analyze the survey data. The response means and standard deviations of each question and for each topic were calculated, and then analyzed to determine frequency. Subsequently, this provided me with a basis of comparison of writing expectations and requirements. Thereafter, an independent t-test was conducted to compare the means of high school English teachers and college writing instructors which provided further data for analysis.

Investigating the qualitative data collected through focus group interviews was initiated by transcription, with Patton's (2002) questions analytical framework approach used to group responses by interview questions. This type of structure worked because a

standardized interview format was utilized. After responses had been grouped by question, thematic coding was used to code the data. According to Gibbs (2007), thematic coding is a form of qualitative analysis which involves recording or identifying passages of text or images that are linked by a common theme or idea allowing I to index the data into categories and consequently establish a framework of ideas. After I completed the initial coding, the data was entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet where the coded responses were grouped together in similar categories using a data matrix. "Classifying and coding qualitative data produced a framework for organizing and describing what has been collected during fieldwork" (Patton, 2002, p. 465). Patterns and themes, as well as similarities and discrepancies in each category and across the categories were identified. To determine their significance, I conducted further analysis using the following guiding questions:

1. To what extent and in what ways do these findings increase or deepen understanding of writing expectations and requirements?
2. To what extent are the findings useful for the intended purpose of supporting the data provided through the survey?

Finally, all the data—both qualitative and quantitative—were then organized under the study's three research questions, thus allowing me to draw conclusions and formulate answers. As a result, I was then able to make recommendations in regard to writing expectations and requirements.

Conclusion

This study explored the writing requirements and expectations of high school English teachers and college writing instructors. The participants in this study were educators and students located in a rural state in the upper Rocky Mountains. Data was gathered through a mixed-method research methodology using triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data. "The main advantage of this method is that the strengths of the qualitative data offset the weaknesses of the quantitative data and vice versa" (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 463). I used established survey and interview instruments to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the question. Prior to administering any of the instruments, I asked peers to use them. Through this process, I discovered minor changes that needed to be made in order to ready them for use with a wider audience.

Students need to be able to write clearly and concisely. This truism launched the present study. To be successful beyond high school, students ought to possess the skills needed to meet this demand. This study sought to uncover the writing requirements and expectations of high school English teachers and college writing instructors, as well as identify commonalities and difference among them.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

Data analysis was conducted to help detect patterns and mine the data with the goal of discovering useful information, suggesting conclusions, and supporting future decision making. I designed three research questions. These questions included identifying the writing requirements and writing expectations of high school English teachers and college writing instructors; furthermore, I compared responses to recognize similarities and differences.

Analysis of Participants

Two groups of study participants were analyzed by the researcher: survey participants and interview participants. This examination provided further definition of the study population.

Survey Participants

Statistical analysis was performed on the demographic data provided by the survey participants: gender, grades primarily taught, approximate school enrollment, and years of teaching experience. Furthermore, analysis was conducted for two groups of participants: high school English teachers and college writing instructors. Demographic details are presented in Table 2. A total of 40 high school English teachers participated.

Their teaching experience ranged from 7-15 years (m= 3.95, sd= 1.87) while the grades primarily taught were 9th and10th grade (m= 6.18, sd= 2.49). Student enrollment in their high schools ranged between 121 and 500 (m= 4.43, sd= 1.08). Forty-one college writing instructors responded to the survey. Years of teaching experiences for these participants spanned from 7-15 years (m= 3.90, sd= 1.47). They all taught at the post-secondary level (m= 5.00, sd= 0.00), and school enrollment from their respective institutions ranged from 5,001-15,000 (m= 8.78, sd= 0.79).

Table 2. Statistical calculations of the demographic information of the survey participants.

		HS English Teachers (N=40)		College writing instructors (N=41)	
Item	Range/Coding	m	sd	m	sd
Gender	1=Female 2=Male	77% 23%		71% 29%	
Grades Primarily Taught	1=9th 2=10th 3=11th 4=12th 5=post-secondary 6=9th & 10th 7=11th & 12th 8=Other	6.18	2.49	5.00	0.00
Approximate School Enrollment	1=under 50 2=50-80 3=81-120 4=121-300 5=301-500 6=501-1000 7=1001-5000 8=5001-10,000 9=10,001-15,000	4.43	1.08	8.78	0.79
Years of Teaching Experience	1=1-3 years 2=4-6 years 3=7-9 years 4=10-15 years 5=16-20 years 6=over 20 years	3.95	1.87	3.90	1.47

Interview Participants

Fifteen interviews were conducted in a focus group format. This approach allowed me to perform one interview with multiple individuals. Participants included five high school English teachers, four college writing instructors, four high school students, and three college students. Each focus group was composed only of common participants: two focus groups of high school English teachers, two of college writing instructors, high school students made up one group, and one group of college students. A short description of each participant follows along with each one's brief response to the question *What qualities does a good writer possess?* Moreover, Table 3 provides an overview of participant profile, category (high school English teacher, college instructor, high school student, or college student), and gender.

Participant Descriptions

- *Participant 1* was a sophomore college student attending a four-year college and studying Engineering. He believed, "qualities of good writing include structure, a well thought out process behind it, how the writing flows."
- *Participant 2* was a female sophomore enrolled in a four-year college who was studying Accounting. She stated that good writers "must have good content, mechanics, organization, word choice, and they must be able to communicate and speak to the reader."
- *Participant 3* was a freshman college student attending a local university, but had not determined a major yet. She considered good writing to be indicative of "an organized piece of writing that has strong fluency and voice."

- *Participant 4* was a male professor at a four-year college who taught Writing, Literature, and Philosophy. He had been teaching at the post-secondary level for fifteen years and believed students who are good writers "organize their thoughts clearly; their flow of writing easy to follow; their argument is clear; they have laid out their ideas logically; it makes sense; uses appropriate evidence; the level of the language is really competent; and there is no poor word choice."
- *Participant 5* had been teaching for five years in post-secondary education at a four-year college, primarily freshmen English classes. She stated, "The flow of writing is strong; their paper makes sense. It also has the appearance of confidence and understanding of the topic. Writing for this type of student is easy and fun."
- *Participant 6* was a male adjunct professor in his first year teaching in a university system. He taught freshmen-level seminar courses and considered strong writers to be "students who know what they want to say usually have the easiest time saying it, and those who begin writing even before they know what they are saying."
- *Participant 7* was a female professor in a university system with five years of teaching experience at the post-secondary level. Freshmen-level seminar courses were her focus. She believed good student writing has flow. "I have noticed that freshmen level writing is so choppy. When it takes me so long to grade a paper, it is because there is no flow. I think that is one of the most important characteristics. Good transitions, makes sense, and it is clear."

- *Participant 8* was a high school senior interested in studying nursing at the post-secondary level. She deemed good writing as "fitting to the audience; it should be intriguing and organized."
- *Participant 9* was a female student, currently in her senior year. She was interested in pursuing a law degree. She stated, "Good writing to me is it must hook you right away. Appropriateness, I don't want someone talking down to me. If I am a 17-year-old person, then it should not be dumbed down or over my head because you don't get anything from it either way. You are bored or confused."
- *Participant 10* was a high school female junior, who had not decided fully on endeavors after high school; she expressed an interest in the teaching field. She felt that "qualities of good writing would be like different sentence structures. Like not all like simple sentences, but like complex sentences where you get all funky with your writing."
- *Participant 11* was a male high school student currently in his senior year. Upon graduation, he wanted to study Ag Business at a local university. He thought good writing was represented by "organization and flow. Writers have to be able to write so others can read it easily."
- *Participant 12* was a female high school teacher who had been teaching for twelve years, all 9^{th}-12^{th} grade English classes. She believed, "You can tell as a teacher; it sounds natural and those papers are easy to read because they sentence fluency is there. Their paper just flows and it has their voice; it sounds like them and it flows through."

- *Participant 13* was a secondary educator who has taught seniors advanced English, as well as Art classes for 23 years. "I would say they have very good mechanics and good spelling. That all comes naturally. And their voice really comes through. They have creative ideas and creative ways to put their thoughts down on paper. And someone who enjoys it, can't wait to get started."
- *Participant 14* was a second year high school teacher in 10^{th}-12^{th} grade English and Advanced English. She stated, "A student with high quality writing skills shows critical thought, maintains focus, has fluent and clear writing, and is willing to seek help and listen to feedback."
- *Participant 15* was a veteran teacher, having taught English for 33 years. Her responsibilities were 9-11^{th} grade English classes. She believed "a student with good skills would approach writing with a plan. He would organize and support his statements and carefully proofread."
- *Participant 16* was a female high school teacher, who taught ninth- and tenth-grade remedial English for 18 years. She considered a student who exhibited strong writing skills to "write so that he/she can be clearly understood and can write appropriately for each audience and purpose."

Table 3. Interview participant profiles are presented in this table.

Participant #	Participant ID	Category	Grade Level	Gender
1	CS1	College Student	Sophomore	Male
2	CS2	College Student	Sophomore	Female
3	CS3	College Student	Freshmen	Female
4	CI1	College Instructor	NA	Male
5	CI2	College Instructor	NA	Female
6	CI3	College Instructor	NA	Male
7	CI4	College Instructor	NA	Female
8	HS1	High School Student	Senior	Female
9	HS2	High School Student	Senior	Female
10	HS3	High School Student	Junior	Female
11	HS4	High School Student	Senior	Male
12	HT1	High School Teacher	NA	Female
13	HT2	High School Teacher	NA	Female
14	HT3	High School Teacher	NA	Female
15	HT4	High School Teacher	NA	Female
16	HT5	High School Teacher	NA	Female

Survey Results

Survey responses were calculated for descriptive statistics: mean (m), standard deviation (sd), and median (P). Tables 4-8 below display the statistical analysis per category.

Table 4. Statistical analysis (mean, standard deviation, and median) for survey questions under Composition Process and Purpose.

	HS English Teachers (N=40)			College Writing Instructors (N=41)		
Item	m	sd	P_{40}	m	sd	P_{41}
1.1 Determine purpose and audience	3.55	0.60	4.00	2.95	0.84	3.00
1.2 Students employ a writing process to develop their writing	3.60	0.58	4.00	2.79	1.05	4.00
1.3 Use prewriting, brainstorming, or other techniques of invention	3.30	0.65	3.00	2.68	1.15	3.00
1.4 Use mapping, clustering, outlining, or other organizational tools	3.00	0.85	3.00	2.54	0.97	3.00
1.5 Gather and synthesize resources	3.33	0.57	3.00	3.02	0.94	3.00
1.6 Evaluate source materials critically	3.15	0.70	3.00	3.39	0.67	3.00
1.7 Edit and proofread for usage and mechanics	3.80	0.46	4.00	3.46	0.67	4.00
1.8 Cite sources accurately	3.43	0.59	3.00	3.37	0.66	3.00
1.9 Avoid plagiarism	3.70	0.56	4.00	3.70	0.46	4.00
1.10 Develop one's own voice as a writer	3.35	0.74	3.50	3.15	0.79	3.00
1.11 Write to explore ideas	3.00	0.61	3.00	3.29	0.78	3.00
1.12 Write to express one's feelings	3.18	0.50	3.00	2.13	0.94	2.00
1.13 Write to tell a story through fiction or nonfictions	3.05	0.64	3.00	2.34	0.99	2.00
1.14 Write to analyze literature	3.28	0.55	3.00	2.56	0.90	2.00
1.15 Write to convey information	3.55	0.50	4.00	3.22	0.65	3.00
1.16 Write to argue or persuade readers	3.35	0.58	3.00	3.24	0.70	3.00
1.17 Write to describe a process or how to do something	3.05	0.71	3.00	2.24	0.86	2.00
1.18 Write to present research	3.28	0.55	3.00	2.76	0.80	3.00
Total	3.33	0.24	3.32	2.94	0.45	2.99

Note: The initial coding for the data is 0-4; 0 indicating of no importance to 4 indicating essential importance.

Table 4 presented a summary of the topics under Composition Process and Procedure. High school English teachers reported editing and proofreading for usage and mechanics (m= 3.80) to be of most importance, while college writing instructors believed avoiding plagiarism (m= 3.70) was a top priority in this category. Moreover, using mapping, clustering, outlining, or other organizational tools (m= 3.00), along with writing to explore ideas (m= 3.00) were ranked the lowest by high school English teachers. According to college writing instructors, writing to express one's feelings was only of general importance in writing requirements and expectations of students.

Table 5. Statistical analysis (mean, standard deviation and median) for survey questions under Topic and Idea Development.

	HS English Teachers (N=40)			College Writing Instructors (N=41)		
Item	m	sd	P_{40}	m	sd	P_{41}
2.1 Present a thesis that establishes focus on the topic	3.38	0.84	4.00	3.56	0.67	4.00
2.2 Maintain a focus on the general topic throughout a piece of writing	3.70	0.56	4.00	3.63	0.58	4.00
2.3 Narrow the focus to a specific issue within the general topic	3.33	0.62	3.00	3.02	0.61	3.00
2.4 Provide appropriate context or background information for readers	3.50	0.75	4.00	3.15	0.82	3.00
2.5 Develop ideas by using some specific reasons, details, and examples	3.68	0.47	4.00	3.39	0.59	3.00
2.6 Take and maintain a position on an issue	3.44	0.68	4.00	3.32	0.91	4.00
2.7 Support claims with multiple and appropriate sources of evidence	3.53	0.78	4.00	3.76	0.54	4.00
2.8 Differentiate between assertions and evidence	3.43	0.68	4.00	3.34	0.76	4.00
2.9 Fairly and accurately represent different points of view on an issue	3.58	0.59	4.00	3.24	0.80	3.00
2.10 Anticipate and respond to counterarguments to a position taken on an issue	3.33	0.66	3.00	3.02	0.79	3.00

Table 5 Continued

2.11 Determine the appropriateness of wording for audience and purpose	3.55	0.50	4.00	3.00	0.59	3.00
2.12 Determine whether a piece of writing has accomplished its intended purpose	3.30	0.65	3.00	2.80	0.90	3.00
Total	3.48	0.13	3.47	3.27	0.28	3.28

Note: The initial coding for the data is 0-4; 0 indicating of no importance to 4 indicating essential
importance.

In summary of writing requirements and expectations under Topic and Idea Development, high school English teachers perceived maintaining a focus on the general topic throughout a piece of writing (m= 3.70) to be most important, whereas supporting claims with multiple and appropriate sources of evidence (m= 3.76) was identified by college instructor to have the highest value. However, both groups agreed that determining whether a piece of writing has accomplished its intended purpose rated lowest amongst the topics presented in this category.

Table 6. Statistical analysis (mean, standard deviation and median) for survey questions under Organization, Unity, and Coherence.

	HS English Teachers (n =40)			College Writing Instructors (n =41)		
Item	m	sd	P_{40}	m	sd	P_{41}
3.1 Provide an adequate organization with a logical grouping of ideas	3.55	0.50	4.00	3.34	0.66	3.00

Table 6 Continued

3.2 Use discernible introductions and conclusions	3.58	0.50	4.00	3.32	0.73	3.00
3.3 Use appropriate transition words and phrases	3.43	0.64	3.50	2.95	0.77	300
3.3 Use appropriate transition words and phrases	3.43	0.64	3.50	2.95	0.77	300

Table 6 Continued

3.4 Use effective transition sentences to connect paragraphs	3.30	0.72	3.00	2.73	0.81	3.00
3.5 Use conjunctive adverbs to show time relationships (e.g. then, this time)	3.25	0.63	3.00	2.31	0.91	2.00
Total	3.42	0.15	3.43	2.93	0.43	2.95

Note: The initial coding for the data is 0-4; 0 indicating of no importance to 4 indicating essential
importance.

In regard to Organization, Unity, and Coherence, presented in Table 6, high school English teachers and college writing instructors differed in perceptions. High school English teachers placed using discernible introductions and conclusions (m= 3.58) as the top priority and using effective transition sentences to connect paragraphs (m= 3.30) as the lowest among these items. College writing instructors diverged, ranking providing an adequate organization with a logical grouping of ideas (m= 3.34) as the most important writing requirement and expectation with using conjunctive adverbs to show time relationships (m= 2.31) less important.

Table 7. Statistical analysis (mean, standard deviation and median) for survey questions under Word Choice in Terms of Style, Tone, Clarity, and Economy.

	HS English Teachers (n =40)			College Writing Instructors (n =41)		
Item	m	sd	P_{41}	m	sd	P_{41}
4.1 Maintain consistency of tone	3.00	0.68	3.00	2.77	0.54	3.00
4.2 Choose words and images that are specific, precise, and clear in terms of their context	3.30	0.65	3.00	3.29	0.68	3.00
4.3 Use appropriate vocabulary	3.53	0.68	4.00	3.05	1.12	3.00
4.4 Delete obviously synonymous and wordy materials in a sentence	2.98	0.70	3.00	2.80	0.75	3.00
4.5 Use varied word and images	3.13	0.80	3.00	2.83	0.77	3.00

Table 7 Continued

4.6 Avoid vague pronouns (i.e., pronouns without a clear antecedent)	3.10	0.78	3.00	3.00	0.81	3.00
4.7 Determine the clearest and most logical conjunction to link clauses	3.13	0.85	3.00	2.54	0.84	2.00
Total	3.17	0.19	3.13	2.90	0.24	2.83

Note: The initial coding for the data is 0-4; 0 indicating of no importance to 4 indicating essential
importance.

Table 7 displayed a summation of the results under the topic Word Choice in terms of Style, Tone, Clarity, and Economy. The writing requirement and expectation, using appropriate vocabulary (m= 3.53), was considered to be most important to high school English teachers. In contrast choosing words and images that are specific, precise, and clear in terms of their context (m= 3.2) was selected by college writing instructors. Likewise, results indicated deleting obviously synonymous and wordy materials in a sentence (m= 2.98) and determining the clearest and most logical conjunction to link clauses (m= 2.54) were rated least important respectively.

Table 8. Statistical analysis (mean, standard deviation, and median) for survey questions under Assessment and Instruction.

	HS English Teachers (n =40)			College Writing Instructors (n =41)		
Item	m	sd	P_{41}	m	sd	P_{41}
5.1 Use rubrics for assessment	3.20	0.72	3.00	2.79	0.86	3.00
5.2 Provide verbal feedback to students	3.23	0.70	3.00	3.00	0.81	3.00
5.3 Provide written feedback to students	3.43	0.68	4.00	3.51	0.51	4.00
5.4 Talk with students about the importance of receiving and considering feedback	3.00	0.72	3.00	2.95	1.00	3.00

Table 8 Continued

5.5 Have students compose multiple drafts and revisions	3.28	0.64	3.00	3.20	0.68	3.00
5.6 Use peer editing	2.83	0.96	3.00	2.73	0.71	3.00
5.7 Conduct one-on-one conferences with students	2.90	0.63	3.00	2.93	1.10	3.00
5.8 Demonstrate to students how to revise writing	3.45	0.60	3.50	3.02	0.88	3.00
5.9 Provide students with examples of effective writing	3.58	0.50	4.00	3.07	0.79	3.00
5.10 Students reflect on writing as part of the writing process	3.10	0.55	3.00	2.54	0.95	3.00

Table 8 Continued

5.11 Teach specific strategies for how to revise drafts into more polished final versions	3.50	0.68	4.00	2.93	0.82	3.00
5.12 Model the writing process for students	3.28	0.60	3.00	2.68	0.65	3.00
5.13 Model the revision process for students	3.48	0.51	3.00	2.93	0.75	3.00
5.14 Model how to receive and reflect on feedback	3.33	0.57	3.00	2.78	0.82	3.00
Total	3.26	0.23	3.28	2.93	0.24	2.93

Note: The initial coding for the data is 0-4; 0 indicating of no importance to 4 indicating essential
importance.

Results in the table above indicated differing perspectives among high school English teachers and college writing instructors in Assessment and Instruction. High school English teachers designated providing students with examples of effective writing (m= 3.58) as most valuable while using peer editing (m= 2.83) scored the lowest Moreover, college writing instructors believed providing written feedback to students (m= 3.51) was most notable whereas the lowest was reflecting on writing as part of the writing process (m= 2.54).

Interview Findings

Four common themes emerged from the interviews: Writing as a Priority, Roles in Writing, Evaluation of Writing, Writing Requirements and Expectations, and Teaching and Learning Methods.

Writing as a Priority

This theme emerged from responses about how important writing was to them and how essential is it for students to possess strong writing qualities.

Roles in Writing

This theme identified what roles students and teachers play or should play in the writing process.

Evaluation of Writing

This theme focused on processes used for evaluating and grading writing.

Writing Requirements and Expectations

This theme dealt with what participants perceived as the writing requirements and expectations deemed important to them or to those who evaluated their writing.

Teaching and Learning Methods

Participants shared what teaching and learning methods they felt were most beneficial and helpful to students with writing.

The data matrix presented in Table 10 below shows responses per participant on each of the identified themes.

Table 9. Data matrix of interview responses categorized by themes and participant ID's.

Participant ID	Writing as a Priority	Roles in Writing	Evaluation of Writing	Writing Requirements/ Expectations	Teaching/ Learning Methods
CS1	Writing is the basis of communication such as in today's world of emails, texts, and things like that. In today's business world you need it to be able to communicate well because communication today is not face to face much.	Conceptual framework and composition. Also using creativity, seeing things different that you normally would.	I think most go off of a standard similar to a rubric. Both the way the teacher describes the paper helps with what to write and how it should be written as well as feedback from other papers	I think qualities of good writing include structure, a well thought out process behind it, how the writing flows	Both written and verbal feedback because written you can keep and look at for reference for years to come. But like verbal provides help when you need it right away
CS2	Writing is a key component to communication and to being scholarly	Simply practice makes perfect	The ones that are fully developed, speak to them, and catch their attention Reading and re-reading and re-reading again	They must have good content, mechanics, organization, word choice, and they must be able to communicate and speak to the reader.	I love getting feedback
CS3	Writing is the key to communication	Reading makes you a good writer	Strong in the qualities teachers feel are important multiple drafts and revisions	An organized piece of writing that has strong fluency and voice.	I like getting feedback from my teachers. They give me good suggestions; I try to keep

Table 9 Continued

					all of those in mind each time I write a new paper.
CI1	I think writing is really important, argumentative writing.	The most important thing a teacher should do is model the argument. It is important to show what it means to make a good argument and then provide them feedback on their attempts.	For me it changes all the time. I used to think grammar was critical, but then I realized grammar is just an outward expression of the argument itself. If a student cannot frame an argument, it doesn't matter how good their grammar is. To me I majorly look at the argument and how it is framed.	How well they can frame an argument and logically argue The level of vocabulary is important; education consists of no more than mastering the vocabulary. Master grammar so you can talk about how to improve your writing. The punctuation is all editing, the very last thing that you can go back and do those cosmetics later	Well I cannot answer that. What helped me the most as a student were teachers that were no nonsense about it
			I open their document and use the comment bar and highlight changes. There is a difference between feedback and criticism… feedback is neutral…		
CI2	I think writing is really important. I try	Model, provide examples of	I use a rubric that covers mostly ideas,	I place emphasis on all of these, but	Students engaged and motivated

Table 9 Continued

	to put a lot of emphasis on it by communicating its importance to their professional lives and	good writing, and provide feedback so students can improve.	content, organization, evidence, and mechanics. I do not look for grammar or mechanics specifically.	not individually. I lump it into conventions. I think students learn through reading. Reading exposes them to	about writing, teacher is actively engaging students, modeling the writing process,
	careers		Students should, at this level, know those things. comments on their rubrics relating to their papers on their final drafts	correct mechanics and to the vocabulary.	allowing for discussion and providing feedback
CI3	The curriculum is set and we get a course packet and that it set. I do not get much liberty to decide, but I do get to decide what our short writes are	I don't know. I am still trying to figure that out honestly	A rubric that we use for my classes I teach. It really lays it out, and shows what is important. provide written comments and a semester meeting	Element of critical thinking. I want them thinking deeper than just surface level, more than just what the text was, or how they are reflecting on it and that they are connecting it to other texts or to what they know. I don't think that grammar the most important part and they need to learn it, but should already have by now	Your writing will improve when you read more. Read a variety of types and then it becomes part of your vocabulary and part of your thinking process
CI4	For one of my classes it is pre-	I also try to let them know I	I use a rubric. I	Things like their critical	Writing is the best

Table 9 Continued

	determined the number of papers. For another class I taught, and just recently put together, approximately 50% of their grade is determined by their writing as assignments. Half discussion and half writing.	am available to like talk with about their writing. If they want to come to me, I won't do it the day before or the day of, but if they want to come talk to me and say hey what do you think of this idea, but no one ever takes me up on it.	don't know how effective that is. Written comments principally and their grades	thinking ability, the ability to form an argument by taking a text and assess it somehow, provide evidence, and present an argument Not very much focus on grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure	thing. Once you get them comfortable with just writing. Putting their thoughts into written form. I also think getting them excited about the writing process.
HS1	It is important in like all jobs you may have. It is important for college. Everything relates to writing.	Practicing makes perfect	I don't know I like both verbal and written feedback. It is all helpful I think.	Fitting to the audience, it should be intriguing and organized.	A critical viewpoint because they get right to the point
HS2	I think writing make you more well-spoken	By reading and having someone critique you. And ya writing at home	It is different for each teacher. Some teachers really do grade on their own opinion. And some teachers grade on creativity or some are really grammar focused Along that line I like it when someone writes it	Um, I like appropriate to audience	So before I have a peer, not just any peer, but one I feel to be at my level. I want someone who actually picks out things that don't make sense and grammar stuff. I like someone who counters my flaws.

Table 9 Continued

			write right on my paper, like circle it in red or write this doesn't make sense		
HS3	I think it is important to write well because it can definitely get you ahead in life	Understanding of how things need to flow and you need to have strong vocabulary	Uses rubrics which is really fair because they state what needs to be done Probably the teacher little notes on my paper, what I did good, what I can improve on. It's not like all completely red, just short little clips.	Like different sentence structures	Like written feedback. Little teeny notes all over my paper. When I get my paper back I don't look at my grade; the first thing I do is read all of the comments.
HS4	Everything is about writing	You also need to have strong mechanics like grammar and things	My teacher uses rubrics to and I think it is a fair way to do it looking at the rubrics from my other papers and trying to make the things that were not so good on those better	Organization and flow	Sit down and talk about it
HT1			I almost always use the 6 traits rubric		
	day, but we do writing every	pop the projector up	conferences throughout	conventions is worth the least	about word choice one

Table 9 Continued

	day	and show the students how	and I will write in the margins and then put an arrow in that section	amount of points. I make it so it is still important like as a senior you can only have 2 errors in your paper and if more then I will start marking you down.	day and look at their essay in regard to that one trait and break it down that way. We just go step by step and we talk about the stages of the process
HT2	We are working on some aspect of writing the entire time	I think teachers need to be excited about writing	Give them the rubric so they know what things I will be looking for. The writing conference. but put comments on the rubric	They need to organize it in a way that is clear and concise. I put a lot of importance on it. I mean a big portion of my English class is grammar	Our textbook has lots of examples and we look at those examples, Again our textbooks do a great job of breaking it down
HT3	They wrote every single day	Three roles: models, instruct along the way, and assess effectively.	A rubric that highlights a handful of specific writing skills feedback is written	Effective and thoughtful change from rough draft to final I put quite a bit of emphasis on those skills, but more emphasis on student thought, focus, and ideas.	Combination of brief instruction of the skill, then targeting it with formative writing assessments for individual practice sitting down and having students hash out what their writing process looks like and how it could possibly be improved

Table 9 Continued

HT4	It is a high priority. All grammar, literature, and speech lessons were linked to writing.	Introduce, explain, model, and evaluate all aspects of the writing process	Individual comments on student writing. I also used rubrics. I write individual comments and that provides feedback for me. Also using the rubrics provides feedback as well	Clear communication with supporting evidence Considerable on emphasis on teaching appropriate vocabulary, grammar	Practice, practice, practice examples of effective writing
HT5	Much more emphasis on it now	Provide opportunities for free writing to develop a student's willingness to write	Well I do use a rubric, General positive verbal feedback for classes as a group. I also provide written feedback.	Getting them to actually start writing, Have to place a lot of emphasis on these things because my students struggle with all of these things.	Provide clear instructions start out with creative writing so students aren't afraid to try writing

Comparing Perceptions

Data gathered from the focus group interviews was analyzed for similarities and differences among perceptions of high school English teachers and college writing instructors. I looked at comments from the interviewees and distinguished areas in which interview comments and survey results differed, interview comments from students were different from educator interviewee comments, and also where survey item scores varied between high school English teacher and college writing instructor participants. In this process, I identified five themes to utilize as a basis for comparison: feedback, grammar

and mechanics, purpose of writing, teacher modeling, and assessment techniques. Moreover, six items from the survey were selected and independent t-test results were analyzed to determine significant differences in the writing requirements and expectations of high school English teachers and college writing instructors.

Table 10. Survey items that are significantly different between the two groups (high school English teachers and college writing instructors).

Item	Result of t-test	HS English Teacher (m)	College Writing Instructor (m)
1.7 Edit and proofread for usage and mechanics	$t_{(79)} = -2.61$, $p < 0.01$	3.80	3.46
1.13 Write to tell a story through fiction or nonfiction	$t_{(79)} = -3.81$, $p < 0.00$	3.05	2.34
1.18 Write to present research	$t_{(79)} = -3.38$, $p < 0.00$	3.28	2.76
5.1 Use rubrics for assessment	$t_{(79)} = -2.26$, $p < 0.03$	3.20	2.79
5.3 Provide written feedback for students	$t_{(79)} = 0.66$, $p <$	3.43	3.51
5.13 Model the revision process for students	$t_{(79)} = -3.83$, $p < 0.00$	3.48	2.93

Note: The initial coding for the data is 0-4; 0 indicating of no importance to 4 indicating essential importance.

Results of the independent t-tests are presented above in Table 10. Five of the six survey items were determined to be significantly different between high school English teachers and college writing instructors. The one item, considered not significantly different was providing written feedback for students.

Research Question One

What are writing requirements and expectations of high school English teachers and what are student perceptions of those requirements?

Survey results revealed that overall high school English teachers perceived that writing requirements and expectations that fell under the category of Topic and Idea Development were the most essential (m= 3.48, sd= 0.13). Though not in this category, high school English teachers believed editing and proofreading for usage and mechanics was the most critical writing requirement/expectation students needed to meet. Other areas these participants felt were important writing skills students must possess included the following: avoid plagiarism, maintain a focus on the general topic throughout a piece of writing, develop ideas by using specific reasons, details, or examples, employ a writing process, and provide students with examples of effective writing

Through the interview process, editing and proofreading was reinforced as the most important writing requirement and expectation. Three of the five high school English teacher interviewees stressed the importance they put on grammar in the classroom. One stated, "I put a lot of importance on it. I mean a big portion of my English class is grammar" (*HT2*). Similarly, another commented, "Considerable emphasis is placed on teaching appropriate vocabulary and grammar" (*HT3*). This finding differs significantly from the 2009 ACT National Curriculum Survey in which high school teachers surveyed stated they do not teach usage and punctuation as part of a standard course.

Furthermore, the survey results disclosed that providing students with examples of effective writing was an instructional approach used by high school English teachers.

Interviewees corroborated this. Three of the five stated a role of the teacher was to model effective writing. "They need to be the leader and instruct, but at times pop the projector up and show the students how," shared one participant (*HT1*). Another commented that a teacher had three roles: "model, instruct along the way, and assess effectively" (*HT3*). Finally an interviewee said it is the role of the teacher to "introduce, explain, model, and evaluate all aspects of the writing process" (*HT4*).

The voice of secondary students was clear on many aspects of writing requirements and expectations. All of these interview participants stated organization was essential in quality writing, which aligned with the viewpoints of high school English teachers in the survey. One high school student commented, "It should be intriguing and organized" *(HS1)*, while another student stated he felt "organization and flow" were essential *(HS4)*. Differing perceptions between high school English teacher survey and secondary student interview participants were found in areas such as the purpose of writing and assessment techniques. Students shared how they felt audience appropriate was important, while this component was not expressed by the teachers. All students perceived the use of rubrics to be beneficial. One high school student said that teachers should use rubrics, "which is really fair because they state what needs to be done" *(HS3)*. Likewise, another student shared, "My teacher uses a rubric and I think it is a fair way to do it. Looking at the rubrics from my other papers and trying to make the things that was not so good on those better" *(HS4)*.

Interestingly, a teacher providing written feedback to students was not considered one of the top important elements of writing in this survey. Nevertheless, this was

communicated by high school student interviewees to be a preferred form of teacher response. One high school student said, they "like written feedback, little teeny notes all over my paper. When I get my paper back I don't look at my grade; the first thing I do is read all of the comments" (*HS3*). Likewise another student commented, "Along that line I like it when someone writes it right on my paper, like circle it in red or write this doesn't make sense" (*HS2*). This seemed to be equally important to high school English teacher interviewees: "I will write in the margins and then put an arrow in that section" (*HT1*), and "I put individual comments on student writing. I write individual comments and that provides feedback for them" (*HT4*). The importance of feedback aligns with the literature. Schunk & Swartz (1993) emphasized the significance of progressive feedback, while Chickering & Gamson (1991) suggested giving student prompt feedback is essential in teaching writing.

According to the ACT National Curriculum Survey (2009), upon which this study's survey is based off of, high school English teachers place more emphasis on content, organization, unity, and coherence. They believed collaboration with peers in the review of drafts and developing one's own voice were essential writing requirements and expectations. The participants in this study did not share this perception. Multiple literature resources mentioned the importance of multiple drafts, the opportunity to receive feedback, and make adjustments to the piece of writing (Acker & Halasek, 2008; Chickering & Gamson, 1991; Schunk, 2008). This topic was not considered a top writing requirement or expectation of the high school English teachers who participated.

Research Question Two

What are writing requirements and expectations of college writing instructors and what are student perceptions of those requirements?

The survey results exhibited the most important writing requirements and expectations for college writing instructors were under the category Topic and Idea Development. The following survey items were perceived to be important in writing: support claims with multiple and appropriate sources of evidence, avoid plagiarism, maintain a focus on the general topic throughout a piece of writing, present a thesis that establishes focus on the topic, and edit and proofread.

Two of the four college instructor interview participants noted the importance to support claims with multiple and appropriate source of evidence, which fell under Topic and Idea Development. Correlating comments from these participants included they looked for "how well they can frame an argument and logically argue" (*CI1*), and "their ability to form an argument by taking a text and assess it somehow, provide evidence, and present an argument" (*CI4*). This viewpoint is supported by Schunk (2008) who stated teachers need to show students how to generate ideas by retrieving or acquiring relevant information, and present this information in a logical manner.

Postsecondary students who participated in the interview process spoke of process, flow, and communication as essential elements in writing. One postsecondary student commented, "Good writing includes structure, a well thought-out process behind it, and how the writing flows" *(CS1)*. Similarly, another stated that college writing instructors look for "an organized piece of writing that has strong fluency" *(CS2)*. "They

must have good content, mechanics, organization, word choice, and they must be able to communicate and speak to the reader" shared another postsecondary student *(CS3).* These students also perceived writing multiple drafts was a focus area of college writing instructors. Likewise one student shared she felt her instructors believed strongly in multiple drafts and revisions. Another stated, "Reading and re-reading, and re-reading again" allows the author to make revisions that will better the piece of writing *(CS2).*

Providing written feedback to students, based on survey results, was considered to have high importance among college writing instructors. Once more, this perception was verified by interview responses of both instructors and students. Students commented on what feedback they liked to receive. One student said she liked, "both written and verbal feedback because written you can keep and look at for reference for years to come" (*CS1*), and another remarked, "I like getting any feedback from my teachers. They give me good suggestions and I try to keep all of those in mind each time I write a new paper" (*CS3*). Moreover, college instructor remarks mentioned common terminology in regard to feedback. One noted they liked to "provide written comments" (*CI3*), and another said they use "written comments principally" (*CI4*). Yet another instructor pointed out for feedback they use "written comments relating to their papers" (*CI4*). The belief presented by both post-secondary students and instructors supported the literature gathered by the researcher. For students to acquire the writing skills needed to be an effective writer, they need to receive prompt feedback; furthermore, teachers need to provide feedback to students over multiple drafts (Schunk, 2008). The post-secondary survey participants agreed with the value this strategy had on student writing.

Based on survey results, editing and proofreading for mechanics was considered a priority for college writing instructors. In contrast, interviewees did not indicate this to be important for them. In fact, many stated that mechanics did not consume much emphasis of their instruction time in the classroom or of their grading criteria. One said, "I used to think grammar was critical, but then I realized grammar is just an outward expression of the argument itself. It doesn't matter how good their grammar is if they cannot frame an argument" (*CI1*). Likewise, another respondent mentioned, "I do not look for grammar or mechanics specifically. Students should, at this level, know" (*CI2*). Similarly, another noted, "I don't think grammar is the most important" (*CI3*), as well as another commented their focus was "not very much on grammar, vocabulary, or sentence structure" (*CI4*).

As reported by the ACT National Curriculum Survey (2009), post-secondary instructors believed that sentence structure, formation/correctness, and conventions in writing were essential requirements; additionally, sentence fluency, subject-verb agreement, usage, and punctuation were considered top priorities. This was similar to the results I found with the survey results, but was different from the perceptions shared by the focus group participants.

Research Question Three

What are the similarities and differences among writing requirements and expectations of high school English teachers and college writing instructors?

Results indicated that high school English teachers and college writing instructors differed significantly on the following survey items: editing and proofreading for usage and mechanics, writing to tell a story through fiction or nonfiction, writing to present research, using rubrics for assessment, and modeling the revision process for students. Likewise, they did not differ significantly on providing written feedback to students.

According to Urdan (2000), if a probability of 0.00 is obtained, I can conclude that the difference between the two sample means probably represents a genuine difference between the larger populations the samples represent, indicating the result is reliable and the researcher can be sure a difference exists. When the independent t-test looked at the average score of high school English teachers and the average score of college writing instructors per item, it was able to determine the probability of each item being different. The following survey items received a probability of 0.00, and thus indicate an authentic difference between how important high school English teachers and college writing instructors felt these writing requirements and expectations were: writing to tell a story through fiction or nonfiction, writing to present research, and modeling the revision process. The above items signify where the greatest differences in perceptions of high school English teacher and college writing instructors exist. Educators who participated in this survey holding differing opinions what type of writing style students should proficient at composing, as well as the role of the teacher in the writing process.

I also determined that high school English teachers felt writing requirements and expectations on the survey were important 100% of the time, whereas responses from college instructor believed the topics on the survey to be less important. This was evident

in the ratings given on survey items, 0-4 with four indicating essential importance. The average rating of high school English teachers on each survey item was higher than the average rating given by college writing instructors.

The ACT National Curriculum Survey (2009) indicated high school English teachers and college writing instructors differed on editing and proofreading which aligns with my results. However, differences in the role of the teacher were apparent between my survey results and that of the ACT National Curriculum Survey (2009). Those participating in that survey agreed it was most important to teach students how to weigh and develop arguments; in my study findings represent a discrepancy in the purpose of writing between high school English teachers and college writing instructors, evident in the significant difference between writing fiction, nonfiction, and presenting research.

Conclusion

Through a mixed-method approach that employed quantitative and qualitative analysis, I determined that the writing requirements and expectations of high school English teachers and college writing instructors have similarities and differences. Both groups of educators believed editing and proofreading, avoiding plagiarism, maintaining focus, providing organization with logical grouping, and using discernable introductions and conclusions were important in writing. Yet, high school English teachers were different from their counterparts in that they perceived employing a writing process, providing students with examples of effective writing, representing different points of view, and using appropriate vocabulary as essential writing requirements and

expectations. Conversely, college writing instructors' foci were on presenting a thesis and supporting these claims with multiple and appropriate sources of evidence while also evaluating these source materials critically, and providing written feedback to students.

Study findings both corroborated with and differed from research presented in Chapter 2. The importance placed on providing feedback by college writing instructors aligned with Schunk (2008) who stated students need timely feedback to be effective writers. Another similarity existed between the ACT National Curriculum Survey (2009) and the emphasis college writing instructors in this study placed on editing and proofreading; consequently, this perception differed between the national survey and the current study's high school teacher participants. Teachers in this study believed editing and proofreading to be highly valued, whereas those who submitted survey to the national survey indicated collaboration with peers in review of drafts and developing one's own voice as most important. In summary, findings presented both similar and diverse viewpoints when compared to the literature gathered on writing requirements and expectations.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Introduction

Because of my experiences and genuine interest in and passion for writing, I designed a study to examine writing from the perspective of students, high school English teachers, and college writing instructors, the study's significance. The delimitations and limitations were presented in Chapter 1. Discussed were the factors that may contribute to student writing abilities—attitude, alignment of secondary and postsecondary requirements, generational characteristics. Chapter 2 reviewed literature defining the current dilemma in student writing, including studies related to the writing perceptions of educators. The history of writing and writing placement tests were examined, as well as the strategies, methods, confidence, and motivation in teaching writing. The research methodology was outlined in Chapter 3; a mixed-method approach was utilized by me within a defined context with the range of participants described. Moreover, this chapter included how the data was collected, stored, and analyzed. Chapter 4 discussed the findings; qualitative and quantitative data was presented and the study's three research questions were answered. In this final chapter, I will provide a brief overview of the study, evaluation of methods used, interpretations of findings, how findings can be used, limitations, and directions for future research.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the writing expectations and requirements of high school and college educators. Through surveys and interviews, I gathered data from secondary English teachers, college writing instructors, secondary students, and post-secondary students. Of interest were their viewpoints about expectations, classroom writing requirements, and methods and assessment strategies perceived to be effective in teaching and learning writing. The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. What writing requirements and expectations do high school English teachers have for their students and what are student perceptions of those requirements?
2. What writing requirements and expectations do college writing instructors have for their students and what are student perceptions of those requirements?
3. What are the similarities and differences between writing requirements and expectations of high school English teachers and college writing instructors?

After data collection, statistical and qualitative analyses were conducted. The study's research questions were addressed based on participants' responses to survey and interview items.

Evaluation of Methods Used to Collect and Analyze Data

The quality of data collection instruments and the process of analyses determine validity and reliability of the study. Accordingly, it is important for me to reflect upon these elements and consider further studies on writing expectations and requirements that might be a natural outgrowth from the present study.

Data Collection Instruments

To gather survey information, the tool (Appendix A) utilized was adapted from the English/writing ACT National Curriculum Survey. Covered in the survey were essential components of writing: composition, idea development, organization, word choice, teaching methods, and assessment. I believed this survey instrument collected the intended information; furthermore, it provided a strong basis for comparison among the two samples in the study. Additionally, it was user-friendly; participants could easily follow directions without guidance to complete. In future studies, I recommend this tool for assembling data in regard to writing expectations and requirements. For example, this survey could be used with a broader state-wide audience. This might result in a larger sample size, thus increasing the validity and reliability of the results.

The survey was distributed to possible participants via individual email and membership newsletters. This method was useful and resulted in an adequate number of surveys returned; however, I concluded that to gain additional participation I would suggest attending conferences where access to a large number of educators is more likely.

Likewise, collecting data over a larger period of time may also increase the number of surveys returned and included in the study.

Focus group interviews were guided by pre-defined questions. For educators, the interview content (Appendix B) was adapted from the National Study of Writing Instruction interview guide. It encompassed a variety of questions in which I gained perspective and insight on writing expectations and requirements of the interviewees. They were open-ended and allowed for details and expansion. I felt the educator interview questions used in this study were relevant and would endorse them for further study. Secondary and post-secondary students who participated in the focus group interviews were asked questions (Appendix C) based on Nancie Atwell's writing survey. Similarly, they were predetermined prior to the interviews and asked of each participant. After applying the content to the study, I concluded that the questions may need to be re-evaluated to align more accurately with the educator survey and interview questions. This would allow for stronger comparisons; correspondingly, the data gathered would provide stronger validity and reliability in the study.

Conducting focus group interviews on a volunteer basis was a sufficient method of collecting qualitative data. It allowed me to interview multiple participants in the same session. This process presented a conversational atmosphere; those involved built upon and expanded on responses. I felt the educator participants were easier to obtain than were students. Again extending the timeframe of the study may have increased the interview sample and allowed time to resolve conflicting schedules and availability.

Furthermore, tapping into connections and relationships of colleagues and professional resources may also have strengthened the focus interview sample.

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data, collected through the study's survey instrument, was analyzed using statistical analysis—the calculation of the mean, standard deviation, and probability. These descriptive statistics provided me with a basic means of identification and classification. This method created a holistic framework of writing expectations and requirements for each sample, and allowed for an apples-to-apples comparison, eliminating subjective interpretation. I perceived this analysis strategy to be efficient and effective. Correspondingly, the ability for examination and revaluation of the data was successful.

Responses to interview questions were investigated, patterns and themes recognized, and a matrix composed. I coded the interview text manually; this technique may have been better conducted via software intended for this purpose to reduce the time it took for the coding to be completed. The matrix served its planned function. In addition its organizational formation lent itself to comparison of participant comments per outlined theme. Upon reflection, I perceived the use of a data matrix to be advantageous.

Conceptual Framework

This concept map represents the factors I associated with writing expectations and requirements at the onset of this study, as well as the influence the results I found may

have on them. This map (Figure 2) provides a visual framework; the components are described and defined below.

Student Perception of Writing Expectations and Requirements

Limited amount of research has been conducted on student perceptions. Literature in this area is sparse; likewise, this element adding uniqueness and originality to the study. What I found was both secondary and postsecondary students valued feedback. They expressed feedback as essential in the improvement process as a writer. Chickering and Gamson (1991) shared giving prompt feedback as one of the seven principles of good practice. Postsecondary students perceived multiple drafts to be important; whereas, high school students did not share that awareness. According to Addison and McGee (2010), only 16% of high school students report "always" writing multiple drafts.

Teacher/Instructor Perception of Writing Expectations

Previous studies about high school English teachers' perceptions of writing expectations indicated they place more emphasis on content, organization, unity, and coherence. They believed essential components to include collaboration with peers in the review of drafts and developing one's own voice. Many literature resources mentioned the importance of multiple drafts, the opportunity to receive feedback, and make adjustments to the piece of writing (Acker & Halasek, 2008; Chickering & Gamson, 1991; Schunk, 2008). I did not find any of the above documented perceptions to be

consistent with the findings of high school English teacher perceptions in this study. The ACT National Curriculum Survey (2009) reported post-secondary instructors believed that sentence structure, formation/correctness, and conventions in writing were essential requirements. Likewise, the research supports the results I found with the survey results.

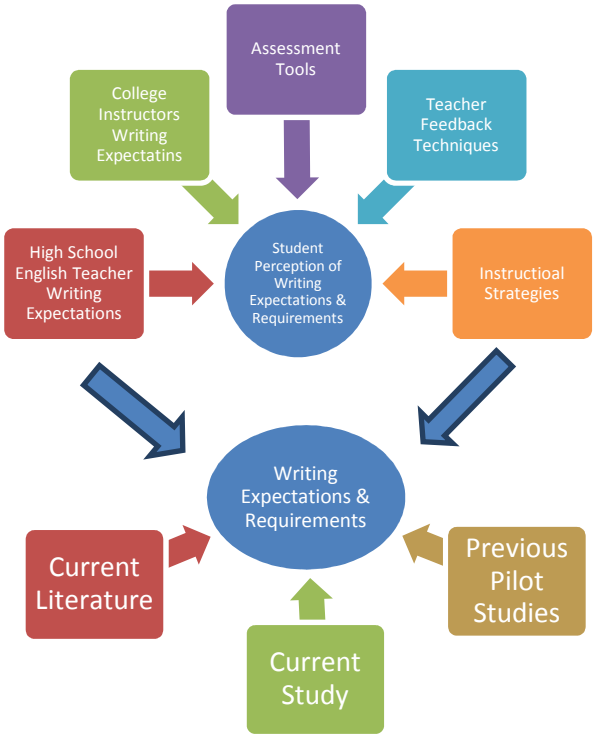

Figure 2. The Study Concept Map illustrates the concepts included in the framework of this study.

Interpretation of Findings

The survey revealed that high school English teachers perceived the following writing expectations and requirements to be of higher value: editing and proofreading for usage and mechanics, using one's own ideas and avoiding plagiarism, maintaining a general topic throughout a piece of writing while developing ideas using specifics, and

employing a writing process to develop writing. High school English teachers tended to focus a bit more on mechanics and grammar, while still encouraging students to produce a well-rounded piece of writing. The rationale behind the emphasis placed on conventions is these skills are part of the curriculum, and national assessments test students on them. Teaching realities felt by educators that may have influenced survey responses is the need to prepare students for these exams, in essence "teach to the test." Secondary educators may feel pressure to center their writing requirements and expectations on this which eliminates any time for other writing skills. Time constraints in class schedules may also discourage them from encompassing a variety of writing experiences in the classroom. Furthermore, they must teach reading comprehension through literature. Consequently, other elements of writing, and at times writing itself, may receive less instructional focus.

Secondary educators and students expressed high importance and value of providing feedback in the focus group interviews conducted, although they stated the majority of the time feedback is provided only after the writing assignment is graded. Many factors may contribute to the lack of feedback offered through the complete writing process: time constraints on teachers prohibit them from editing multiple drafts, a deficiency in communication of their availability to perform this activity for students exist, or students do not take advantage of the offering from teachers. Whatever the reasoning, the findings indicate contradiction on the topic. As a result, this topic is worthy of a follow-up study so as to explore the discrepancy presented in this research.

Survey findings indicated that among college writing instructors, essential writing requirements and expectations revolved around developing a thesis and supporting claims with multiple and appropriate sources cited accordingly. This focus can be attributed to the type of writing required at the post-secondary level. As expressed in the interviews by both students and instructors, writers must have the ability to develop arguments and provide evidence to support them. Therefore, the qualities writers are expected to possess at this level are advanced; conventions, the writing process, and basic writing skills are expected to be mastered by the time a student enters post-secondary education. This thought process and reasoning is reflective in what students and teachers deem as pertinent writing requirements and expectations. Moreover, many college courses are specifically focused on writing and do not contain other elements that may be required of a common secondary English class; hence, more time can be spent focusing on writing.

In addition, college writing instructors perceive providing written feedback to be important. Most likely due to typical post-secondary class size, individual interaction and communication between instructor and student is limited; thus, written feedback provides an avenue to aid student development with written expression. The use of technology allows for providing feedback to be somewhat instantaneous. A student can submit a writing assignment, and the instructor can record comments directly on the paper via review tools such as track changes or adding comments. Furthermore, the feedback can be received by the student almost immediately, thus eliminating the need to wait for the next scheduled class. While technology as a means to offer feedback was not directly explored in this study, investigation into this topic would be of merit.

How Findings Can Be Used

The findings from this study can be used as a basis for further research. They present a snapshot. However, this study does establish a foundation for comparing and contrasting educator perspectives on writing requirements and expectations. This study could be a starting point. Subsequent research can expand its structure to a larger sample group. Additionally, this study may present data useful for conversations around standards, curriculum, and skills needed for preparing students for college and the workplace. Finally, the findings may provide insight for those educators who experience the disconnect or the problem of unprepared students. A dialogue may begin to explore the ways students under prepared for college-level writing may be assisted or counseled to other career options.

Even though the study was able to compare the responses of high school English teachers and college writing instructors to determine if their perceptions of writing requirements and expectations were similar or different, the findings were limited in scope and cannot be generalized because of the following: the study's small sample population is not representative of the educator population as a whole; the findings did not provide the knowledge or the ability to determine if the shared perceptions of participants were equivalent to their classroom practice; and the data on student perception was narrow and not gathered quantitatively for comparison.

Limitations of the Study

The results of this study showed there are similarities and differences in perceptions of writing requirements and expectations of high school English teachers and college writing instructors. It also disclosed a voice not heard of in past research on this topic, that of students who are instructed by these educators. While the study did reveal these findings, due to the small return of surveys, 400 possible participants with an initial return rate of 16% and follow up of 4%, the findings are limited. Again the findings exposed the perceptions of both secondary and postsecondary students on writing requirements and expectation, but the number of participants in this sample was limited as well. Furthermore, this study was conducted in a rural area of the upper Rocky Mountains. While this allowed for uniqueness, it also limited the variety of participants. Results determined in this study were interesting and informational, but have the ability to expand with future research.

Directions for Future Research

In addition to research that has already been conducted around this topic, a need for future research is still very much needed. Based on the scaffolding presented in this study, an expansion including a combination of the survey aspect, classroom observation, more in-depth interviews, and further inclusion of students is a possible direction for research. Enlarging the sample, in addition to the growth of the data components, would increase the applicability to a larger population. Other possibilities include collecting data in relation to writing standards. Exploring the connection between classroom

lessons and the standards to which they are aligned may provide insight into effective classroom practice. An additional area of data collection in regard to writing expectations and requirements is actual writing samples of students throughout high school, looking at maturity of the writer and comparing skills necessary for college-level writing. This may provide a unique spin on evaluating the preparedness of students for post-secondary education. Furthermore, investigating teacher education programs to see what instruction future teachers are receiving on teaching writing may be beneficial: what they are taught to focus on, instructional strategies and methods they are provided with, and discussions they participate in considering the connection between high school and college-level writing expectations. With the increased focus in writing with the Common Core State Standards, writing instruction and student performance can be scrutinized. As students will be writing in all subject areas—not just in English classes—the opportunity for continued dialogue among teachers is available. The neglected "R" will be examined more critically as state standards aim for competency with written composition across genres and for different purposes. This direction may deliver insight into the implementation of writing intensive standards and their association with the quality of writing.

Conclusion

This study provided insight into the writing expectations and requirements of educators at the secondary and post-secondary levels. The results demonstrated what these educators perceived to be the most important elements of writing, as well as those

that are deemed non-essential in the development of student writing skills. Furthermore, commonalities and differences among them helped explain the possible conundrum me experienced teaching at the post-secondary level. Outcomes of this study offered explanations as why the post-secondary students taught by me had such dismal and unacceptable writing skills. Because of the inconsistences in writing requirements and expectations communicated to students by educators, they do not have adequate writing skills to be successful in post-secondary education, a complex enigma.

This study was important because it shed light upon the underlying problem; high school and college educators need to communicate more effectively. It is essential to understand that aligning expectations and requirements matters. This situation will only continue if educators do not dialogue and realize how student voices are important as they are part of the solution. Writing is going to become more significant with state standards, as evident in the Common Core State Standards where classroom practitioners are aware of what has been accomplished and what is left to do. The focus on narrative writing only sets students up for an unrealistic view of real world writing tasks that await them. The sense of "I'm a good writer" is not accurate if the individual cannot perform basic writing skills such as controlling language use and conventions or writing across disciplines for varied purposes and different audiences. "American education will never realize its potential as an engine of opportunity and economic growth until a writing revolution puts language and communication in their proper place in the classroom" (National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, 2003, p. 4). Writing is an integral part of education, careers, and life. For students, having the writing

skills needed to be successful is imperative; it is the responsibility of educators to help them reach this goal.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

EDUCATOR SURVEY

My name is Mandy Keaster a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction conducting my dissertation research. I am studying writing expectation among educators at the secondary and post-secondary levels. You are invited to participate because of your experience in writing education. This survey will be asking you questions about your writing expectations and requirements. Your participation is voluntary. You can choose to not answer questions, and you can stop anytime.
Please email completed survey to mandyflo@hotmail.com.

Gender: Choose an item.

Years of Teaching Experience: Choose an item.

Grades You Primarily Teach: Choose an item.

Approximate School Enrollment: Choose an item.

Please choose the appropriate rating per writing skills from the drop down list to the left of each statement based on how important you view this skill to be for exiting high school seniors/incoming postsecondary students. 0= of no importance, 1= of little importance, 2= of general importance, 3= of high importance, 4= of essential importance.

Composition Process and Purpose

Determine purpose and audience	Choose an item.
Students employ a writing process to develop their writing.	Choose an item.
Use prewriting, brainstorming, or other techniques of invention	Choose an item.
Use mapping, clustering, outlining, or other organizational tools	Choose an item.
Gather and synthesize resources	Choose an item.
Evaluate source materials critically	Choose an item.
Edit and proofread for usage and mechanics	Choose an item.
Cite sources accurately	Choose an item.
Avoid plagiarism	Choose an item.
Develop one's own voice as a writer	Choose an item.
Write to explore ideas	Choose an item.
Write to express one's feelings	Choose an item.
Write to tell a story through fiction or nonfictions	Choose an item.
Write to analyze literature	Choose an item.
Write to convey information	Choose an item.
Write to argue or persuade readers	Choose an item.
Write to describe a process or how to do something	Choose an item.
Write to present research	Choose an item.

Topic and Idea Development

Present a thesis that establishes focus on the topic	Choose an item.

Maintain a focus on the general topic throughout a piece of writing	Choose an item.
Narrow the focus to a specific issue within the general topic	Choose an item.
Provide appropriate context or background information for readers	Choose an item.
Develop ideas by using some specific reasons, details, and examples	Choose an item.
Take and maintain a position on an issue	Choose an item.
Support claims with multiple and appropriate sources of evidence	Choose an item.
Differentiate between assertions and evidence	Choose an item.
Fairly and accurately represent different points of view on an issue	Choose an item.
Anticipate and respond to counterarguments to a position taken on an issue	Choose an item.
Determine the appropriateness of wording for audience and purpose	Choose an item.
Determine whether a piece of writing has accomplished its intended purpose	Choose an item.

Organization, Unity, and Coherence

Provide an adequate organization with a logical grouping of ideas	Choose an item.
Use discernible introductions and conclusions	Choose an item.
Use appropriate transition words and phrases	Choose an item.
Use effective transition sentences to connect paragraphs	Choose an item.
Use conjunctive adverbs to show time relationships (e.g., then, this time)	Choose an item.

Word Choice in Terms of Style, Tone, Clarity, and Economy

Maintain consistency of tone	Choose an item.
Choose words and images that are specific, precise, and clear in terms of their context	Choose an item.
Use appropriate vocabulary	Choose an item.
Delete obviously synonymous and wordy material in a sentence	Choose an item.
Use varied words and images	Choose an item.
Avoid vague pronouns (i.e., pronouns without a clear antecedent)	Choose an item.
Determine the clearest and most logical conjunction to link clauses	Choose an item.

Assessment and Instruction

Use rubrics for assessment	Choose an item.
Provide verbal feedback to students	Choose an item.
Provide written feedback to students	Choose an item.
Talk with students about the importance of receiving and considering feedback	Choose an item.
Have students compose multiple drafts and revisions	Choose an item.
Use peer editing	Choose an item.
Conduct one-on-one conferences with students	Choose an item.
Demonstrate to students how to revise writing	Choose an item.
Provide students with examples of effective writing	Choose an item.

Students reflect on writing as part of the writing process	Choose an item.
Teach specific strategies for how to revise drafts into more polished final versions.	Choose an item.
Model the writing process for students	Choose an item.
Model the revision process for student	Choose an item.
Model how to receive and reflect on feedback	Choose an item.

APPENDIX B

EDUCATOR INTERVIEW

My name is Mandy Keaster a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction conducting my dissertation research. I am studying writing expectation among educators at the secondary and post-secondary levels. You are invited to participate because of your experience in writing education. This survey will be asking you questions about your writing expectations and requirements. Your participation is voluntary. You can choose to not answer questions, and you can stop anytime.

1. What do you see as the most important aspects of student writing?
2. How much emphasis do you personally put on student writing in the classroom?
3. How do you show that emphasis?
4. How would you describe the teacher's role in student writing?
5. How do students learn the underlying skills and strategies of effective writing?
6. How do you focus on the writing process in your instruction?
7. How do you evaluate student writing?
8. How do you provide feedback to students concerning their writing?
9. How and to what extent are students' writing products collected, displayed, or published in your classroom?
10. What do you see as the greatest challenge in developing students' abilities in writing?
11. What do you think are the best ways to teach and encourage writing?
12. How much emphasis do you place on teaching appropriate vocabulary, grammar usage, sentence structure?
13. How would you describe high quality writing instruction?
14. How would you describe a student who has high quality writing skills?

APPENDIX C

STUDENT INTERVIEW

My name is Mandy Keaster a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction conducting my dissertation research. I am studying writing expectation among educators at the secondary and post-secondary levels. You are invited to participate because of your experience in writing education. This survey will be asking you questions about your writing expectations and requirements. Your participation is voluntary. You can choose to not answer questions, and you can stop anytime.

1. How do people learn to write?
2. How did you learn to write?
3. What does one have to do in order to be a good writer?
4. What is the easiest part of writing for you? What do you do well?
5. What is the hardest part of writing for you? What do you need to work on?
6. What are the qualities of good writing?
7. How do your teachers decide which pieces of writing are the good ones?
8. What is the best piece of writing you've ever done? What makes it so good?
9. What helps you the most to make your writing better?
10. What kind of response helps you the most as a writer? Who gives you that response?
11. Why is it important to be able to write well?
12. What do you like about writing?
13. What do you think the connections are between reading and writing?