

AP English Language and Composition Teachers' Perceptions and Beliefs  
Concerning Preparation for Teaching Rhetoric and Composition

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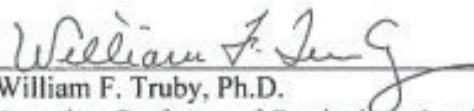
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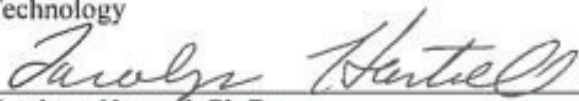
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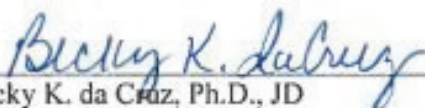
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the strategies and practices used by veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in South Georgia Title I high schools in rural communities with an AP open enrollment policy. The participants for this study were volunteer AP English Language and Composition teachers from qualifying school districts. Data were collected through personal data forms, interviews, non-participatory observations, and document analyses. The inductive analysis model was used to analyze data collected from the interviews, observations, and documents. The key findings of this study were that participants have been influenced by a variety of sources from professional and personal experiences and that they practice strategies based on a variety of composition theories. Participants agreed students' lack of knowledge hinders their ability to help students successfully prepare for the rigors of the AP English Language and Composition exam. They also agreed time and school constraints can limit the effectiveness of their courses.

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **An Overview of the History of Composition-Rhetoric**

In ancient Greece, writing instruction became more than teaching students how to construct letters and arrange them into words. The ancient Greeks, specifically Aristotle, helped writing don a more rhetorical function, and, as a result, writing instruction underwent a radical transformation from a craft skill to what has today become more of an art or a *techné* (technique) to gain—or maintain— social power and status (Enos, 2012). Though writing instruction has maintained a presence in education for several centuries, pedagogical requirements and directives for writing instructors have been personal and social ideological battles since Aristotle and Plato argued over the value of the written word.

Centuries later and worlds away from ancient Greece, Applebee, Auten, and Lehr (1981) published a report detailing the writing instruction practices of teachers in ninth and eleventh grade classrooms in America. In response to this National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) publication, Hillocks Jr. (1986) researched the best pedagogical composition methods and reported that when instructors prompted students with problems mirroring the skills they wanted students to learn, students performed better than when instructors delivered information through lectures. Soon afterward, the social construct of language and the role of the self within this ideology became a focus of the composition classroom (Berlin, 1988). More recently, self-assessment has played

a larger role in writing instruction to encourage students' meta-cognition (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009; Campillo, 2006; Graham, Harris, & Hebert, 2011; Nielson, 2014) and to help beginning writers improve their own work (Bloom, 1997; Graziano-King, 2007; Nicol & Mcfarlane-Dick, 2006; Nielson, 2014). This debate concerning the roles of the instructor and the writer has persisted in writing instruction for many years with moments of crisis resulting in several teacher initiatives, a turn to literacy, culture wars, feminist approaches, cultural awareness, and technology initiatives (Gold, Hobbs, & Berlin, 2012).

Regardless of pedagogical approach, composition standards and high-stakes tests require students to complete a difficult and sometimes arduous task. Composing, especially composing well, requires the writer to recall a vast amount of information and gather it all together in a creative production (Miller, 1976). Sometimes students have the additional burden of completing these tasks under pressure of a timed assessment. Those tasks are difficult ones for young students learning their way around the written word.

Initially, composing was not viewed as an intellectual pursuit or as a source of social power but as a functional skill to help individuals navigate and facilitate the oral tradition of language so valued by Plato (Enos, 2012). As technologies slowly improved and the world became a more global society through exploration, writing became a source of social power and influence, taking its current place in politics, the university, and public education. The American educational system saw a similar transformation from orality to literacy between 1870 and 1900, as written exams quickly (within a generation) replaced oral exams (Brereton, 1995). In fact, the development of the

Department of Education in 1867 was, in part, an attempt to help implement a national, standardized exam; however, vehement adherence to states' rights (and a desire to preserve the nation) halted the exam's creation (Addison & McGee, 2015).

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, pedagogical material had slowly moved away from classical texts, which focused on grammatical patterns and rhetorical effects, to more vernacular literature and forms of analysis focusing on textual aesthetics (Ferreira-Buckley, 2012). Rhetoric, nonetheless, would quickly return: the sheer difficulty of the task of writing and the increase in enrollment at universities and colleges at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century eventually prompted the creation of writing admissions requirements for colleges, generating a resurgence of interest in rhetoric (Gold et al., 2012). In the 1870s, Harvard began educational reform on its own with a new writing-based entrance exam requiring demonstration of students' writing abilities combined with a broad understanding of canonical literary texts (Jamison, 2015). Because Harvard changed the texts and written requirements each year, high school teachers' main concern was the adequate preparation of students for these difficult entrance exams (Jamison, 2015). As a result of universities' increased writing rigor, English departments at the university level began offering composition as students' first English courses (Coxwell-Teague & Lunsford, 2014; Gold et al., 2012).

Because the declining state of literacy in American high school and college students has long been on the forefront of political and educational concerns, periodic empirical studies (both large- and small-scale) have examined the state of literacy instruction in the United States (Addison & McGee, 2010). Addison and McGee (2010) listed the stakeholders interested in America's literacy as the U. S. Department of

Education (National Assessment of Education Progress [NAEP], also known as the Nation's Report Card), testing and assessment organizations (e.g., College Board), nonprofit educational organizations (e.g., National Survey of Student Engagement), professional organizations (e.g., Writing Program Administrators and Conference on College Composition and Communication [CCCC]), and individual institutions (e.g., Harvard University, Stanford University). This collective illustrates an increased commitment to writing instruction as well as an increased interest in vigorous literacy research in general; however, research has also pointed to a persistent shift away from writing instruction toward the reading process as the focus of literacy instruction (Addison & McGee, 2010; Pytash, 2012). The emphasis placed on writing in both First Year Composition—and, eventually, the College Board's intended high school equivalent, Advanced Placement (AP) English Language and Composition—has made composition instruction a crucial element for both courses.

### **An Overview of the Advanced Placement Program**

When composition became the university freshman's first exposure to post-secondary-level English coursework, universities began to recognize the need for more cooperation with secondary schools. As a result, there was rapid initial development and expansion of educational testing and measurement as universities attempted to influence secondary curriculum to ensure students were better prepared for university-level written assignments (Addison & McGee, 2015). In 1900, the College Entrance Examination Board, later the College Board, was founded to adopt and publish a set of skills and content secondary schools should cover to better prepare students for university work (Addison & McGee, 2015; Bowman, 1911).

In the early 1950s, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Swarthmore, Oberlin, Wesleyan, Andover, Exeter, Lawrenceville, and other institutions advised colleges and secondary schools to work together to better prepare society's youth (College Board, 2003). They formulated a plan to develop rigorous, college-level courses secondary schools could offer to provide students the opportunity to earn college credit—thus the creation of the AP program (College Board, 2003). By May of 1954, the first AP examinations were administered (Addison & McGee, 2015; College Board, 2003; Jamison, 2015).

When the Soviet Union successfully launched Sputnik just a few years later in 1957, many in American society saw it as a sign of declining educational standards – mostly in math and science. The resulting resurgence of interest in educational standards allowed for the argument that education itself was a matter of national defense meriting federal intervention (Addison & McGee, 2015). On the heels of Sputnik, standardized testing became a national concern, and the Educational Testing Service (ETS), founded in 1947, was contracted to conduct exams in some experimental schools (Jamison, 2015).

AP English Language and Composition—a challenging course focusing on nonfiction texts; rhetorical situations, strategies, and analysis; and argument, analysis, and synthesis essays—was taught, and the exam was first administered, in 1980. Initially designed as a junior year high school English course, the AP English Language and Composition class began as a study of canonical texts and basic writing instruction (Puhr, 2010). Harvard's continued need for improved articulation from high school to college, combined with society's desire for an improved education system, significantly influenced the inclusion of rhetoric and composition in the academy (Skinnell, 2014). In 2002, the AP English Test Development Committee met with several colleges' writing

program administrators to discuss what college composition classes taught and, therefore, what the AP English Language and Composition course should teach as well. As a result of that conference, the AP English Language and Composition class transformed to focus on the study of nonfiction texts, with an emphasis on analysis, synthesis, and argument (Dennis, 2014; Puhr, 2010).

### **AP English Language and Composition in Education Today**

In all 50 states, there has been a large and expanding movement (from 300,000 students in 1995 to over one million in 2015) to teach college-level courses in high schools (Balonon-Rosen, 2018). The AP program is one of the options available in many schools for students to earn this credit. Of the 38 AP courses currently offered, AP English Language and Composition is the largest (Total Registration, 2018). In the 2017-2018 school year, 22,612 high schools offered at least one AP course with 2,808,990 students taking 5,090,324 AP exams (College Board, 2018a). With 580,043 students enrolled in AP English Language and Composition in 2018, more students took this course than any other AP offering (College Board, 2018a).

The AP Program does, however, offer two courses in English, both of which were designed to engage students in typical introductory college English coursework. The AP English Language and Composition course specifically focuses on rhetorical analysis of nonfiction texts as well as “the development and revision of evidence-based analytic and argumentative writing” (College Board, 2019b, p. 7). According to the College Board (2019b), the intent of the course is to encourage students to become more flexible writers who can respond to a wide variety of writing situations; as such, students should learn

how to plan, organize, and construct compositions based on the rhetorical variables of audience, purpose, and situation. The College Board continues:

The reading and writing students do in the course should deepen and expand their understanding of how written language functions rhetorically: to communicate writers' intentions and elicit readers' responses in particular situations. (p. 11)

Secondary teachers responsible for teaching this rigorous course often attend AP Summer Institutes or workshops to prepare content and curriculum. While the College Board (College Board, 2017e) strongly urges administrators to send prospective AP instructors to this professional development, it is not a requirement for teachers who teach AP courses (except for the new AP Seminar and AP Research courses). Yet, according to the most recently published data, in any given year many teachers attend College Board workshops and institutes through scholarships or school funding (Milewski & Gillie, 2002).

### **The Need for Writing and Writing Instruction**

The importance of writing as a skill cannot be hyperbolized, and universities have not been the only institutions taking notice of the lack of writing skills in graduating high school seniors. In 2004, the National Commission on Writing sent a survey to the human resource directors of 120 American corporations of the Business Roundtable; combined, these companies employed almost 15 million people and generated more than six trillion dollars in annual revenue (Business Roundtable, 2017b). The survey results disclosed that two-thirds of employees in these companies had some writing responsibility, inadequate writing skills often inhibited promotion opportunities, a writing component was the norm in most positions, and three billion dollars was spent each year in writing

instruction (National Commission on Writing, 2004). There was, of course, a growing concern within the education, business, and political communities that the level of writing skill was not where it should have been and continued research into the problems associated with the lack was needed (National Commission on Writing, 2003).

Businesses' concerns with the writing skills of their employees continued: the Business Roundtable's (2017a) Education and Workforce Survey reported that 83% of businesses indicated research and writing skills were "very [or] somewhat relevant" for current job openings, and 42% of employers indicated finding applicants with qualifying research and writing skills was "somewhat [or] very problematic" (p. 6). Similarly, 100% of businesses indicated communication skills' relevance as "very [or] somewhat important" while 71% of businesses noted finding applicants with these skills was "very [or] somewhat problematic" (p. 6). To counteract their employees' shortages, businesses planned to spend an average of \$1,645 per employee each year on learning programs; most also planned to increase this amount in the following two years (Business Roundtable, 2017a).

Writing, however, is an extremely nuanced, organic, and complex activity that evolves based on societal norms, cultural mores, and technological advancements. It has, however, been extraordinarily difficult to measure student achievement in any valid way over any period of time (Addison & McGee, 2015). Meanwhile, the expectations of employers and universities continue to require teachers to consider their writing instruction practices and philosophies to become more effective writing instructors. Troia, Shankland, and Heintz (2010) summarized the importance of committing to improving students' writing skills:

Literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires facility with written expression for varied audiences and purposes in and out of educational and employment contexts; thus, the consequences of inadequate writing proficiency for personal and professional growth are dire. Professional development also is at the forefront of stakeholders' agendas because many of today's educators are unprepared to teach writing effectively. (p. 1)

### **The Need for Writing Research and Current Deficiencies**

Although reading and writing are fundamental and analogous processes relying on common knowledge and cognitive processes (Graham & Hebert, 2010), years of research has examined, by a large margin, mostly reading pedagogy, processes, and difficulties. In fact, writing research has indicated persistent concerns about and a shift from writing in the classroom (Addison & McGee, 2010; Carnegie Mellon University, 2015; Maguire, 2016; Sanoff, 2006). Similarly, college students have reported limited exposure to essay writing practices in high school (Mathews, 2010; Sanoff, 2006). Yet, much of the instruction required in the AP English Language and Composition course centers on writing with a focus on rhetoric (College Board, 2003; College Board, 2019b). While many AP English Language and Composition teachers have attended the College Board's Summer Institutes to improve their practices and learn course expectations, attendance is not required to teach the course (Byrd, Ellington, Gross, Jago, & Stern, 2007). And for those who have attended the training, an understanding and adoption of rhetoric may not have been the end result.

Research in K-12 composition is important because writing at any level generally begins in these schools (Russell, 2006). Certainly, elementary and secondary

composition research is completed, in part, as a way to better understand the origins of pedagogical practices in colleges (Russell, 2006). Juzwik (2010) promoted composition research as a means of providing readings in professional journals for teachers and professionals interested in improving their own practices.

For writing researchers, part of the difficulty of studying writing lies in the recursive nature of the writing process, where the automatic and intuitive aspects of the act result in its inherent complexity. There have been many limits to what researchers can draw from writers whether the researcher videos, interviews, or observes participants (Haswell, 2012). Although there are many research studies on reading in elementary and secondary schools (and few on reading in colleges and universities), they tended to treat composition parenthetically (Pytash, 2012; Russell, 2006), and few studies examined the preparation of students for high stakes writing assessments (Olinghouse, Zheng, & Reed, 2010).

Considering the contextual situation of today's teachers formed by accountability and argumentation requirements, more research is needed to better understand and to shape writing instruction in secondary schools (Newell, VanDerHeide, & Olsen, 2014). A scarcity of research on the secondary level remains and even less has been completed on argumentative writing instruction (Juzwik et al., 2006). Studying composition pedagogy from anthologies and journals has been problematic as well. Listings of pedagogies have limited benefits because an explanation or reflection on pedagogies that existed at a specific moment is the best any bibliography or anthology is able to provide (Taggart, Hessler, & Schick, 2014), so this type of research always looks backward.

Additionally, more research is necessary to examine the connection between pedagogy and assessment (Taggart et al., 2014).

Besides the great lapses in secondary composition research, there are other challenges: the tendency of researchers to focus on what other researchers miss and their disregard for others' methodologies (Juzwik, 2010). The result of these difficulties is composition's neglect. The National Commission on Writing (2003) noted that even though writing is crucial for academic and career success, it has consistently been the most overlooked academic subject.

### **Problem Statement**

AP English courses are based on foundational epistemologies and ideologies: AP Literature and Composition on literary analysis (College Board, 2019c) and AP English Language and Composition on rhetoric and composition (College Board, 2019b). Based on research, the ideologies and epistemologies of those who teach these classes should align with the teachers' respective courses (Addison & McGee, 2010; Elbow, 1983; Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006; Fulkerson, 1979; Hillocks & Shulman, 1999; Juzwik & Cushman, 2014; Newell et al., 2014). AP English Summer Institutes (APSEs) and workshops focus on core reading and writing skills such as close reading and analytical writing, but the College Board has posited there is no need for a course core curriculum (Greenblatt, 2007). Although there is no common curriculum, the AP English Language and Composition course culminates in a common College Board AP exam each spring (College Board, 2019b). For participating colleges and universities, this exam has helped determine how much, if any, English course credits students will receive.

Studies have shown that high-stakes, standardized tests such as the AP English Language and Composition exam can exert a strong influence on what teachers practice in their classrooms (assigned writing tasks; choice of genre; and decisions regarding curriculum, pedagogy, time strategies, writing theories, and rhetorical stances), which may nullify teacher ideologies and epistemologies resulting in a disconnect between instruction and pedagogy and in limited student performance (Hillocks, 2002; Loofbourrow, 1994; Samuelson, 2009; Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt, & Ferman, 1996). The College Board (2019b) is explicit in the instructors' and students' need for an understanding of rhetoric:

The AP English Language and Composition course focuses on . . . the rhetorical analysis of nonfiction texts and the decisions writers make as they compose and revise. . . . They read and analyze rhetorical elements and their effects in nonfiction texts—including images as forms of text—from a range of disciplines and historical periods. (p. 11) . . . [Moreover,] students must comprehend the major claims in the texts they consult, understand how these claims are substantiated, and identify how they might appeal to intended or unintended audiences. Students then need to know how to develop their own original arguments by acknowledging and responding to the claims they've encountered in their sources. (p. 90)

These requirements are complex and varied, necessitating an epistemological and ideological understanding of rhetoric that will impact pedagogical practices (Berlin, 1988; College Board, 2014c).

According to the College Board’s annual comments on AP English Language and Composition student exams since the year 2000 (College Board, 2017c), student essays have displayed a lack of understanding of rhetoric, the College Board’s declared theoretical and practical basis for AP English Language and Composition. Likewise, Georgia students’ 2018 average score of 2.87 out of five (College Board, 2018c) demonstrated a discrepancy between class instruction and course descriptors and goals provided by the College Board. Additional commentary by the College Board asserted that student essays demonstrated a course focus on literature and textual aesthetics instead of the course required rhetoric and composition (College Board, 2017c). More specifically, students are not demonstrating success in a rhetoric and composition based course (College Board, 2014b, 2017a, 2017c), the foundation of AP English Language and Composition and First Year Composition (College Board, 2019b; Gold et al., 2012).

### **College Board Requirements**

Although the College Board does not have a prescribed curriculum for AP English Language and Composition, it does provide a set of descriptors, goals, and expectations to help instructors meet the goals of the course and better prepare students for successful course completion and for the annual exam in May. The AP Development Committee is responsible for creating clear connections between the class and the exam, and they emphasize the importance of focusing on the rhetorical analysis of nonfiction texts and the construction of “evidence-based analytic and argumentative writing” (College Board, 2019b, p. 11). Ultimately, reading and writing in the course should “deepen and expand [students’] understanding of how written language functions

rhetorically” (College Board, 2019b, p. 11) as evidenced by the course descriptors included in Table 1.

Table 1

*AP English Language and Composition Course Descriptors*

<u>Text Requirements</u>	<u>Learning Objectives</u>	
	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Composition</u>
Represent a clear rhetorical situation	Analyze and interpret samples of purposeful writing, identifying and explaining an author’s use of rhetorical strategies	Use effective rhetorical strategies and techniques for a variety of purposes
Speak to one another in a variety of genres	Analyze images and other multimodal texts for rhetorical features	Respond to unique rhetorical/composition demands and translate into a writing plan
Could be read in an introductory college course	Focus on reading as comprehension and interpretation	Create and sustain arguments based on synthesized information
Rate upper-high school on a Lexile chart	Recognize the social interaction of text	Demonstrate understanding of citation conventions
Need teacher guidance to discern meaning		Control various reading and writing processes
Require rereading as an interpretive strategy		Converse/write about personal writing processes
Should be nonfiction texts instead of imaginative literature		Understand/control Standard English as well as stylistic maturity in writing
Should include pre-20 <sup>th</sup> century, 20 <sup>th</sup> century, and modern pieces		Revise for a variety of audiences

*Note.* Course descriptors taken from “English Language and Composition: Course Description,” 2014.

## **The Role of Theory and Epistemology in Practice**

For an AP English Language and Composition course to be effective for students, the AP teacher should adopt a rhetorical theory as a foundation for his or her epistemology, ideology, and pedagogy to match the requirements of the College Board. In composition, epistemology refers to a person's beliefs concerning "the roles that language, writing, and pedagogy play in constructing and communicating knowledge" (Ervin, 1996). Empirical studies in elementary through high school have demonstrated that teachers' beliefs about writing and their perceptions about themselves as writers affected their writing instruction and their students' development as writers (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; Englert et al., 2006; Hillocks, 1986). More importantly, epistemologies created conditions in the classroom that inhibited or enhanced interactions among individuals and texts, and, of course, more dynamic interactions produced more refined and practiced forms of discourse (Ervin, 1996; Rose, 1985).

Juzwik and Cushman (2014) argued teacher epistemology involved more than a theory of knowledge and an understanding of how writing worked but also theories of knowledge and the "*teaching of writing*" (p. 89). The underlying beliefs teachers held about language and writing influenced their own learning and teaching practices in ways that affected what instructional practices they chose—and chose not—to adopt in their classrooms (Newell et al., 2014). Research suggested teachers with different epistemologies interacted differently with different students, organized instruction differently, and made differing assumptions about how students learned and developed over time (Freedman, Delp, & Crawford, 2005; Hillocks & Shulman, 1999; Langer & Applebee, 1987; Newell et al., 2014). These findings suggest epistemologies may have

been an important factor in considering teachers' comfort and adoption of AP English Language and Composition practices.

Kennedy (1998) found that the source of teachers' beliefs may have likely been from their own experiences in classrooms and from the activities and theories practiced in other composition teachers' classrooms, usually in elementary through high school. Heilker (2002) noted fortunate students had instructors who embodied composition theory and taught students how to connect composition theory and practice as both writers and teachers, but many lacked those instructors. As a result, writing teachers relied on their own experiences, which may or may not have correlated with the goals of the writing programs they represented. The parts of teaching repeated from generation to generation tended to be teacher-centered, focused on writing forms, and persistent—problems that arose largely from teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning (Cuban, 1984). Another problem with composition theory in the classroom was that teachers claimed to hold one set of beliefs yet practiced another, interpreting situations based on their former teachers' beliefs and practices regardless of their own proclaimed values (Kennedy, 1998). Figure 1 represents how all of these factors—teacher beliefs, composition theories, and pedagogies—lead to classroom procedures (Fulkerson, 1979). The problems associated with composition at any level have derived from the epistemological warfare that has occurred since the 1940s over “progressive theoretical and empirical research struggling with entrenched traditional pedagogy” (Connors, 1997, p. 102).



Figure 1: Composition and Classroom Procedures Development

Ideology, “choices of value in the economic, political, and cultural,” is also vital in writing teachers’ practices as they are based on “interpretations, not mere transcriptions, of some external, verifiable certainty” (Berlin, 1988, p. 478).

Composition’s (and rhetoric’s) role, according to Berlin, has been to address the competing claims of value in the social, political, and cultural realms. Other rhetoricians have disagreed on the roles of composition and ideology, but few disregard the existence of a relationship. Regardless of a teacher’s viewpoint, he or she must have a defined opinion toward ideology and writing because ideology has been the guiding principle behind all of rhetoric and composition (McComiskey, 2002).

AP English Language and Composition asks much of its instructors partly because students who have learned higher-order thinking skills have teachers who possess higher-order thinking skills and deep content knowledge (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). Additionally, if First Year Composition courses are grounded in contemporary rhetorical theory (Hansen, 2010), AP English Language and Composition courses should be taught with the intention of asking students to assume a more inquiry-based stance of critical thinking as well (College Board, 2014c). Pedagogy derived from an absence of rhetorical philosophies and theories looks and sounds different from pedagogy that asks students to produce rhetorically appropriate texts (Lindemann, 2002). For students and sometimes their instructors, learning new

theories and ways of understanding text can, and should, interrupt and disrupt learned structures and internalized composition rules (College Board, 2014b).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to determine the strategies and practices used by veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an AP open enrollment policy. Lynch (2013) stated, “Teaching begins neither in practice nor in theory, but in experience” (p. xvii). As such, analysis of those experiences forms the hallmark of educational growth, especially in organic fields—like composition—based on *techné* rather than science. While the ability to speak, and therefore communicate, may be considered innate, practitioners can only realize the rhetorical and ideological context of language in a social context (Berthoff, 1981).

AP English Language and Composition students and instructors operate daily in a social context that forms and has been formed by experiences and interactions, all of which lead to growth for the individuals involved. Additionally, professional development and trainings intend to assist teachers in navigating the waters of social interaction, ideology, epistemology, and practice. Despite these varied experiences, composition instructors fulfill their responsibilities as teachers when they recognize ideological questions associated with composition and analyze their own roles in developing students’ composition practices (Berlin, 1988).

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the lived and career experiences of veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an AP open enrollment policy?

2. What are veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers' beliefs, epistemologies, and ideologies about composition instruction in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an AP open enrollment policy?
3. What changes or strategies for instruction have been implemented by veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an AP open enrollment policy following professional development for the AP English Language and Composition course?
4. What classroom practices are used by veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an AP open enrollment policy?

### **Significance**

The growing concern in the business, education, and policy-making communities that writing skills are not at a satisfactory level has encouraged educational policy makers and researchers to identify problems and search for solutions to the nation's writing difficulties (Addison & McGee, 2010; National Commission on Writing, 2005). Composition instruction itself is a difficult process to analyze, as it requires teachers to consider every pedagogical option available while simultaneously ensuring they eliminate all but the best; these are often contradictory skills with the tendency to interfere with one another (Elbow, 1983). AP English Language and Composition instructors face the additional difficulty of reconciling their own beliefs about writing and their instructional processes with the College Board's charge to "[focus] on the development and revision of evidence-based analytic and argumentative writing, the rhetorical analysis of nonfiction texts, and the decisions writers make as they compose

and revise” (College Board, 2019b, p. 7). As with much writing instruction, many of the problems associated with AP English Language and Composition hinge on a disconnect among teachers’ ideologies, epistemologies, and pedagogy, along with continued instruction in literary analysis instead of rhetorical analysis (Addison & McGee, 2010; College Board, 2014c; Johnson, 2008; Juzwik & Cushman, 2014).

According to previous research, teachers’ underlying belief systems and past experiences have created a set of difficult to alter assumptions about composition requiring intentional efforts to change (Berlin, 1988; Newell et al., 2014; Skorczewski, 2005). Not only does this study add to the existing educational literature on AP and the role of professional development and trainings in teachers’ instructional practices, but it also provides valuable insight concerning AP English Language and Composition teachers’ perceptions of their own preparation for teaching the course.

A focus on teachers’ epistemologies, professional development, and teaching practices has become especially important in a time when their knowledge, theories, and practices are “hyperscrutinized, undervalued, and grossly misunderstood, if taken into account at all” (Juzwik & Cushman, 2014, p. 89). Studies such as this one benefit not only teachers in classrooms but also the community of composition instructors at the high school and college levels because research questions can professionalize composition instructors as academics distinct from those who study literature (Johnson, 2008).

The information resulting from this study also provides information to develop implementation guidelines for a better evaluative instrument for current AP English Language and Composition teachers’ professional development experiences such as College Board Summer Institutes and workshops. Furthermore, the study offers

suggestions to improve professional development for AP English Language and Composition teachers. On a grander scale, the study prompts research beyond AP English Language and Composition. As teachers progress in their own courses and writing instruction methods, studying past experiences and personal beliefs could become a part of all writing teachers' professional development.

Public schools' ratings in national reports such as those published by *Newsweek* and *US News & World Report* are based, in part, on AP participation, resulting in an increased national interest in AP access and success (Jamison, 2015). Additionally, the state of Georgia emphasizes student access to and success on AP exams by including the number of students enrolled in AP courses and the percentage of students scoring a three or higher on AP exams in accountability measures for schools' College and Career Readiness indices (Georgia Department of Education, 2015). This study provides guidance for high school principals and other administrators as they consider options for the training and professional development needs of their AP teachers. Further, as local and state administrative decisions are made concerning resource allocation, this study provides specific information to educational leaders at the local, district, and state levels who need to deal politically with stakeholders who seek research-based data and processes that produce positive results.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The AP English Language and Composition course is intended to mirror the rigor and pace of a college-introductory English course, usually First Year Composition. As such, the AP English Language and Composition course requires more of its teachers in terms of knowledge and preparation than other high school courses (Oberjuege, 1999;

Page, 2015). Moreover, the course has the dual requirements of teaching an engaging college freshman English course and preparing high school juniors for the rigors of a three-hour standardized exam (Borenzweig, 2009). Successful rhetoric and composition instruction such as what is required in First Year Composition and AP English Language and Composition does not occur in a vacuum or overnight, though.

As depicted in Figure 2, successful teachers of such courses have had years of preparation developing background, philosophies, and practices that lead to classroom procedures, which, for AP English Language and Composition teachers, is hopefully a direct path to College Board suggested practices. The framework is comprised of several layers. The outer square depicts the elements of teachers' experiences forming classroom practices. These elements include not only the basic tenets of classroom procedures such as philosophies, theories, and pedagogical goals, but also factors that influence these basic components such as teacher experiences and trainings. The interplay among these elements forms the foundation of a teacher's writing practices in the classroom. The experiences and trainings of a teacher can directly influence these basic components, which may or may not affect the development of suggested College Board practices for AP English Language and Composition.

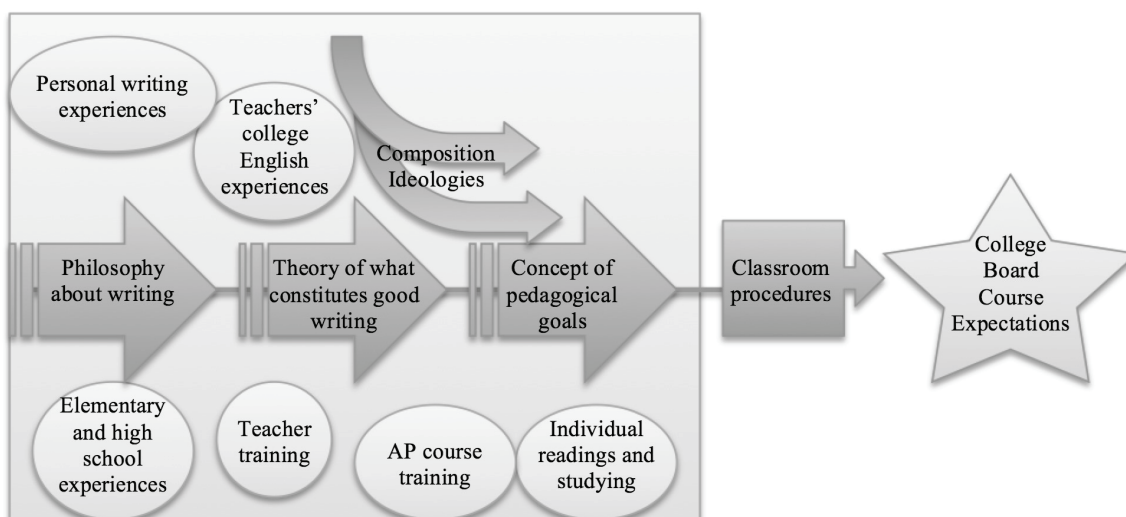


Figure 2: A Conceptual Framework of Composition Development for Teachers

### Summary of Methodology

Creswell (2014) argued the intent of qualitative research is “to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world” (p. 8). This approach allowed for an examination of participants and data in the natural setting of the teachers’ classrooms, and it encouraged the qualitative element of using inductive reasoning to establish patterns and themes related to AP English Language and Composition training and professional development based on multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2014). This qualitative approach matched the nature of the research problem. More specifically, this study utilized the empirical inquiry model of the case study. Stake (1995) defined the case study as a “bounded” and “integrated system” with “working parts” (p. 2). Teachers who had participated in College Board trainings and were actively teaching the course provided the information and perceptions to examine these “working parts” (Stake, 1995, p. 2). As Stake (1995) suggested, the research began with an issue—AP English Language and Composition teachers’ training—followed by a flexible approach to research with focused questions, data collection, and data analysis.

The research for this study was conducted in the natural setting of rural South Georgia Title I high schools. Once completed, the multiple viewpoints presented by teachers were studied for emerging patterns. A constructivist worldview informed this study as the intent of the research was to interpret how others make meaning of their world by inductively developing a theory and finding patterns that inform meaning (Creswell, 2014). The aim of this study was to study the relationship between the phenomenon and the contexts in which it arose; form conclusions based on observations of AP English Language and Composition teachers, interviews with teachers, and analysis of provided documents; interpret findings based on subject interactions; and reflect the perceptions and experiences of South Georgia AP English Language and Composition teachers. This case study addressed the role of professional development in teachers' decision-making processes by interviewing and observing six AP English Language and Composition teachers.

To gain a detailed understanding of AP English Language and Composition teachers' perceptions and perspectives, participants of this study were selected through purposeful sampling from all rural South Georgia Title I high schools. Additionally, since the College Board currently requires AP Readers to have at least two years of experience teaching their respective AP course (College Board, 2017d), this study required the same amount of experience. Likewise, only teachers who worked at schools with open-enrollment policies were selected.

This type of qualitative study allowed for the analysis of unexpected results and unforeseen issues. The primary sources of data consisted of interviews, observations, and data sources (both published information in the public-domain such as AP data and

unpublished personal materials of teachers such as planning documents, assignments, and lesson plans). Information obtained from interviews provided historical information, teacher perceptions and observations provided contextual information and observable behaviors, and document analysis provided a glimpse of the participants' perceptions in their own language (Creswell, 2014). This information, in the form of a narrative, helped present a clear picture of the information shared.

Initially, I gained permission to conduct research on human subjects from an Institutional Review Board (IRB), and obtained permission from district superintendents to interact with school employees. Details of the study were explained to school principals, when necessary, and data were collected. The collection and analysis of data from participants in the study began with an observational protocol of separate descriptive (setting, demographics, activities, etc.) and reflective notes (Creswell, 2014). Open-ended, in-depth interviews provided data about AP English Language and Composition teachers' perceptions and perspectives about their professional development and college experiences related to rhetoric and composition. The interview protocol involved a prepared guide for questioning, audio recording of interviews, transcriptions of audio recordings, and handwritten notes. Documents such as lesson plans and classroom assignments were analyzed for composition pedagogy and ideology while notes were kept for compilation and analysis.

Data analysis occurred concurrently with data gathering: as interviews and transcriptions were completed, document analysis and observation analysis commenced. As data were read and analyzed, information not relevant to the research questions were eliminated and pertinent data were coded and organized into themes or categories

(Creswell, 2014). After coding, themes or patterns were disaggregated and organized to demonstrate the multiple perspectives discovered in the study. A narrative passage represented the findings of the study, and, finally, the research findings were interpreted based on the results of the study and the theories represented in relevant literature.

### **Limitations**

There were several possible limitations to this study. First, my role as an AP English Language and Composition instructor in the South Georgia area resulted in the possibility of human bias. Maintaining neutrality and impartiality, implementing triangulation techniques, emphasizing procedures, and focusing on the research questions helped eliminate or mitigate researcher bias (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002).

Another limitation was that interviewing could introduce inaccuracies. Interviewees could filter and limit information, and some interviewees may not have articulated their perceptions as well as others (Creswell, 2014). Using different data sources such as document analyses and observations helped curb the limitations of interviews, but interview limitations were not limited to articulation and point of view. Data limitations from interviews also included “possibly distorted responses due to bias, anger, anxiety, politics[;] . . . simple lack of awareness[;] . . . recall error[;] reactivity of the interviewee to the interviewer[;] and self-serving purposes” (Patton, 2002, p. 306). Additionally, document analysis could have introduced access restrictions, inaccuracies, and quality variations (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002). Using a variety of sources and resources combined with careful data collection, transcribing, and analysis minimized any weaknesses inherent in a single data collection method.

## Definitions of Terms

For the purposes of this study, terms are defined as below:

*Advanced Placement courses.* These classes are college-level courses taught in the high school setting using standardized course syllabi requirements aligned with the AP examination (College Board, 2008).

*Advanced Placement exam.* The College Board administers the Advanced Placement exam once a year, usually in May. An exam is given for each of the courses offered in the AP program for a fee—some schools pay the fee while others require students to pay their own fees. Students receiving a passing score on the exam may be eligible for college credit in the subject of the exam (College Board, 2007b).

*AP workshops.* AP workshops are offered throughout the year to AP teachers (new and experienced), interested teachers, administrators, and AP coordinators. These are one- or two-day workshops offered in a variety of settings and usually taught by AP teachers (College Board, 2017a).

*College Board.* The College Board is a non-profit organization that has continually developed and maintained the AP program; supported high schools, colleges and universities; and coordinated the administration of annual AP examinations since 1954 (College Board, 2008).

*College and Career Readiness Index (CCRPI).* The Georgia CCRPI is defined as a platform that promotes school accountability, comprehensive school improvement, and improved communication for all Georgia education stakeholders. Its purpose is to promote college and career readiness for Georgia public school students. The index is a rating each school receives to help stakeholders determine how well schools have been

preparing students for work or further education. Factors informing the index are based on four main components: achievement, progress, achievement gap, and challenge points (Georgia Department of Education, 2015).

*Composition-rhetoric.* Composition-rhetoric refers to the theory and practice of teaching writing, emphasizing the “function of rhetoric (with its 2,500-year tradition) as an underlying theory of composition” (Nordquist, 2016, par. 2).

*Discourse.* Discourse is any form of communication, verbal or written, that has the capacity to be analyzed (Fairclough, 1993).

*Epistemology.* Crowley (1990) referred to epistemology as a “worldview”: “some currently accepted theory of knowledge” (p. 2, 4). More specifically, it refers to the “roles that [individuals believe] language, writing, and pedagogy play in constructing knowledge” (Ervin, 1996).

*Ideology.* Ideology is a teachers’ beliefs concerning the way composition addresses “competing discursive claims of value in the social, political, and cultural” (Berlin, 1988, p. 477).

*Passing score.* An AP English Language and Composition passing score, for the purposes of this study, is a 3, 4, or 5 on a 5-point scale. The College Board (2019b) considers a score of 3 to mean a student is *qualified* for entry-level college work, a score of 4 means the student is *well-qualified*, and a score of 5 means the student is *extremely well-qualified* for entry-level college work.

*Pedagogy.* Elbow (1998) referred to pedagogy as the craft, mechanics, processes, rituals, and logistics of writing instruction. Briggs (1995) expanded Elbow’s definition

by stating that composition pedagogy is “the effective and meaningful application of technique” (p. 83).

*Rhetoric.* For the purposes of the AP English Language and Composition course and this study, rhetoric involves the ability to recognize the language choices a writer makes, analyze how those choices affect the intended audience, and use similar techniques to effectively communicate ideas to audiences (Roskelly, 2008).

*Rhetorical analysis.* In rhetorical analysis, students are expected to “attend to the pragmatic and stylistic choices writers make to achieve their purposes with particular audiences, or the effects these choices might have on multiple, even unintended audiences” (College Board, 2014b, pp. 18-19).

*Rural school districts.* The United States Census Bureau defines rural as a residual category of places “outside urbanized areas in open country, or in communities with less than 2,500 inhabitants,” or where the population density is “less than 1,000 inhabitants per square mile” (NCES, 1997, p. 3).

*Summer Institute (APSI).* The College Board offers three-day or week-long professional development opportunities to beginning and experienced AP teachers called AP Summer Institutes. Universities, colleges, and high schools sign quality and consistency agreements with the College Board before receiving approval to offer the courses. The courses are taught by College Board-endorsed instructors who provide College Board materials to each participant (College Board, 2017a).

*Teacher professional development.* Professional development is attendance at a College Board sponsored training.

*Title I.* Title I school districts are those with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families. These districts and schools receive financial assistance from the U. S. Department of Education to ensure that all students can meet state academic standards (U. S. Department of Education, 2015).

*Veteran teacher.* The College Board requires a teacher to have at least two years of experience teaching an AP course before he or she can apply to be a reader (College Board, 2017d). For the purposes of this study, veteran teachers are those who have at least two years of experience as well.

### **Summary**

The inclusion of rhetoric in the AP English Language and Composition course has seen a rapid evolution in the relatively recent past. Teachers' inclinations and tendencies to adopt literary analysis practices in their classrooms was not an unforeseen problem; however, understanding the role of AP English Language and Composition professional development in altering underlying ideologies and epistemologies has been largely unexamined in educational literature. This study attempted to address issues that present themselves in an analysis of AP English Language and Composition teachers' perceptions of their own professional development and college trainings and experiences.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. This chapter provided an introduction, a purpose statement, research questions, significance, a conceptual framework, a summary of methodology, a discussion of limitations, and a list of definitions of terms for the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of available and relevant literature. Chapter 3 contains information about the study itself including the population sample, instruments used, and data analysis techniques, and Chapter 4 presents study

findings. Finally, Chapter 5 includes a summary of findings and a discussion of the implications of those findings.

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Atwan (2015), editor of *The Best American Essays* series, argued that solidly defining the essay and listing its essential features is an impossible task. Despite the difficulty of the task, guest editors of the series—all of them essayists themselves—have attempted to define or describe this most inexact of genres: Wallace (2007) simply said we know one when we see one; Hitchens (2010) noted “an ‘essay’ is really a try, an attempt, even an adventure” (p. xvi); Levy (2015) argued “whatever its narrative shape, an essay must have an idea as its beating heart” (p. xv); Franzen (2016) contended the democratic and subjective nature of the essay combines with the prevalence of today’s instant communication to create an “essayistic golden age” (p. xv); and the most recent guest editor, Als (2018), maintained the essay is “indefinable, but you know an essay when you see it, and you know a great one when you feel it, because it is concentrated life” (pp. xxiv). This nebulous form of composition is the focus of writing instruction for high school, First Year Composition, and AP English students. It is the form high-stakes tests often use to assess a student’s writing ability, and it is the form that determines a student’s ability to communicate effectively in society.

Gold et al. (2012) stated that over the past century, the role of writing instruction in schools and colleges has been an ideological and pedagogical struggle largely because educators and policy makers have long known the integral role language and literature play in shaping meaning and experience. In fact, contests over the educational

endorsement of economic, political, and social formations often determine the role and practice of education in a democratic society (Gold et al., 2012). Yet, if literacy, as it has in the past, constitutes nothing more than learning how to read and write, writing instruction would be simply memorizing a recording technique to help individuals recite oral text (Enos, 2012). Writing and writing instruction is much more nuanced and multi-faceted than memorization—it is a skill, an art (Enos, 2012; Miller, 1976). More than any other subject, decisions made about writing pedagogy reflect a teacher’s, school’s, and society’s beliefs about the purpose of not only written communication but also education in general (Gold et al., 2012).

Miller (1976) argued composition is the only art high schools demand “students attempt to master at a fairly high level of proficiency as a prerequisite for graduation” (p. 61). While the state of Georgia no longer requires a separate writing assessment or graduation test, writing plays a role in students’ End-of-Course assessments, AP exams, and common department assessments (College Board, 2018d; Georgia Department of Education, 2018). The pervasiveness of writing demonstrates there is a continued need for students to write and write in “a fairly specialized and demanding genre . . . [requiring students] to call up a large fund of information . . . [and] bring all that to bear in a creative effort” (Miller, 1976, pp. 61-62).

While good writing involves the disparate skills of thinking of many possibilities and criticizing and rejecting all but the best, good writing instruction requires these skills along with mentalities that contradict and interfere with one another (Elbow, 1983). The sheer number of variables involved in writing instruction results in practices that change over time and from teacher to teacher. Writing instruction has drastically changed in the

last century with the average freshman writing assignment jumping from 162 words in 1917 to 1,038 in 2006 and with the value of writing and writing instruction being more routinely recognized (Gold et al., 2012). Current Scholastic Aptitude Tests, ACTs, and AP exams emphasize the value of writing instruction in high schools, yet most college freshman writing courses have been taught by instructors with the least experience and the largest class loads (Gold et al., 2012). These trends also appear in the high school classroom where standardized tests such as the AP English Language and Composition exam can influence teachers' classroom practices without altering their underlying ideologies about writing, resulting in a disconnect between instruction and pedagogy (Hillocks, 2002; Loofbourrow, 1994; Samuelson, 2009; Shohamy et al., 1996).

Six areas are theoretically and practically related to the present study: (a) composition-rhetoric and AP English Language and Composition history; (b) composition-rhetoric theories and pedagogies; (c) composition-rhetoric research; (d) the AP English Language and Composition course; (e) teacher training; and (f) current issues related to composition-rhetoric and AP English Language and Composition. This literature review synthesizes the theory and research relevant to the parameters of this study.

### **Composition-Rhetoric and AP English Language and Composition: A History**

A brief yet comprehensive explanation of composition-rhetoric helps clarify the roles theory, pedagogy, and ideology play in developing both teachers and writers. Rhetoric's twenty-five-hundred-year history includes prolonged periods in which its study was the fundamental aspect of curricula. Because of the importance of and preference for skills in both the spoken and written word in the courts, government, and

the church, rhetoric flourished in several periods of history (Corbett & Connors, 1999). Corbett and Connors (1999) noted that periods of social and political upheaval often instigated a resurgence of rhetoric as a discipline. They continued, “Let it be said, first of all, that rhetoric is an inescapable activity in our lives. Every day, we either use rhetoric or are exposed to it” (p. 24).

For most of the history of rhetoric, students were expected to write and speak on any subject they were given; consequently, rhetoric historically had no particular field of its own (Connors, 1997). Through the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, classical rhetoric was the prominent, if not dominant, discipline in schools (Corbett & Connors, 1999). Since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, rhetoric and composition have existed concurrently as theorists and practitioners found the two fields historically and practically identical and inseparable (Russell, 2006; Villanueva, Swearingen, & McDowall, 2006; Yancey, 2016). Those in the field of composition-rhetoric have acknowledged a “self-evident claim” about the discipline: “It has at its center the practice of writing and its teaching” (Yancey, 2016, p. xvii).

The art or science of any field of study is almost always inductively framed from the history of that discipline, particularly for the fields of verbal arts (Corbett & Connors, 1999); therefore, a study of the history of composition-rhetoric is appropriate for the purposes of this study. Additionally, AP English arose from the competitive social environment of 1950s America, and identifying the contexts spurring its development provides a more thorough understanding of why AP English has the value it does (Jones, 2010). A historical sketch of First Year Composition—AP English Language and Composition’s intended equivalent—and standardized testing in America explains how

all three have become pillars of the American educational system (Addison & McGee, 2015) and how research concerns for this study include all three.

### **The Origins of Rhetoric**

Arts are often practiced long before they are classified and codified. The art of rhetoric is no exception as historians believe it has been practiced since the ancient Mesopotamians and their neighbors—long before its codification (Hallo, 2004). There came a time in the 5th century when people felt the drive to create a set of laws or rules to accompany this art. At this time, the formation of democracy (Jebb, 2017) resulted in a vacuum of power and rampant looting and theft (Leith, 2012). In an effort to help citizens advocate for themselves in court, Corax of Syracuse formulated the art of rhetoric (Corbett & Connors, 1999). From Corax's time through the Middle Ages, rhetoric was mostly associated with oratory and persuasive discourse with the end goal of changing an audience's way of thinking or acting. As time progressed, rhetoric began to be applied to more informative and expository modes, but in the beginning, rhetoric was intended as a means for examining questions all citizens (even children) could argue based on their knowledge of history, myths, and current events (Connors, 1997).

To better understand the theoretical and pedagogical role of rhetoric in today's classrooms, it is necessary to study rhetoric's origins in ancient Greece. These beginnings form the basic structure of what and how teachers instruct their writing students today, especially in courses built around a rhetorical infrastructure such as AP English Language and Composition.

**Ancient rhetoric: An oral tradition.** The ancient Greeks valued political discourse and those who participated in it, so rhetoric became a necessary skill for

successful citizenship. The Sophists, a group of intellectuals and teachers who taught what they called *aretē* (virtue) to students in Greece for a fee, believed a successful citizen could speak eloquently on any subject (Duke, n.d.). They focused on the power of language and argued they could help their students become better (or achieve *aretē*) through study and practice. Further, they believed all arguments had a counterargument, and an audience's acceptance of an argument's possibility largely determined their acceptance of an orator's claims. Rhetoric thrived during this period because courts required litigants to argue their own cases, and the wealthy would pay generously for a professionally prepared speech (Leith, 2012).

The Sophists' history of rhetoric began with Gorgias—a supposed student of Corax (Leith, 2012)—notable for igniting Athenian interest in the value of oratory with his own impressive speaking skills (Corbett & Connors, 1999). Gorgias doubted the connection between language and truth and felt language was its own entity capable of changing a person's spirit, making them aware of a new view, and changing emotions (Crowley & Hawhee, 2009). These characteristics are at the heart of persuasion, even in today's academic studies. Isocrates, though, was perhaps the most influential Sophist, partly due to his longevity (he died at age 98) and partly due to the number of influential speakers coming from his schools (Corbett & Connors, 1999). Isocrates valued imitation as a method of instruction and believed study and practice were superior to talent (Crowley & Hawhee, 2009)—a belief still strongly held in the American educational system (Berquist, Coleman, Sproule, & Golden, 2010).

Plato's contributions to rhetoric were two-fold. He was a vocal critic of the Sophists and of rhetoric—and a skeptic of democracy (Leith, 2012)—calling rhetoric a

form of flattery in *Gorgias* but becoming one of its finest practitioners by defining what he called true rhetoric in *Dialogues* (Villanueva et al., 2006). After seeing how easily the populace could be swayed—he was deeply affected by the quick condemnation and execution of Socrates (Leith, 2012)—Plato claimed rhetoric was no better than cosmetics as rhetoricians were more interested in appearance and lies than in “transcendental truth” (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 492). While he was one of rhetoric’s most vehement critics, it is worth noting that in *Gorgias*, Plato is the first to use the term *rhetoric*: *rhetorika* (Leith, 2012). Current rhetoric’s focus on audience and emphasis on the social interaction of discourse began with Plato.

A student of Plato, Aristotle is perhaps the most prominent and well-known rhetorician of ancient Greece. It is his definition of rhetoric—“the power of finding the available arguments suited to a given situation” (Crowley & Hawhee, 2009, p. 1)—that provides a basic understanding of rhetoric in both the past and present. He defined the three branches of oratory and the three persuasive appeals—*ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* (Leith, 2012). While Plato’s work highlighted what he saw as the difference between artificial and real rhetoric, Aristotle was more concerned with the pragmatics of codifying and teaching the subject (Foss, 2009) and in proving rhetoric was a “teachable and systematic discipline that could guide men in adapting a means to an end” (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 493)—a *technè*. His interest was in developing or inventing arguments, which helped counter the adverse opinion many ancients held of rhetoric.

Aristotle’s *Art of Rhetoric*, which is actually a collection of his students’ lecture notes, was the first comprehensive treatise on rhetoric. In this piece, Aristotle (trans. 2009) stated rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic (logical argumentation, or persuasion)

because they function together in discourse production. Therefore, he argued, individuals needed dialectical techniques to discover truth, but more practical matters—such as determining guilt and innocence or making governmental decisions—required rhetoric. The Greek word for *persuasion* has an etymological root in the verb “to believe” (Persuade, 2005), and this knowledge helps individuals understand Aristotle saw rhetoric as effective in both argument and traditional expository discourse modes. This implied flexibility was a revolution demonstrating writing instruction could assist students with all complex thoughts and expressions. Instructors began to see writing as a process that would require practitioners to slow their thinking much more than in speech; additionally, once complete, writing was accessible for further and future thought and reflection, thus encouraging creativity and abstract thought (Young & Sullivan, 1984).

Leith (2012) explained Aristotle sought to analyze why rhetoric worked; he did not see it as a simple set of tools to use. Leith (2012) continued: “If other rhetoric teachers were driving instructors, Aristotle was a mechanic: he didn’t just want to know where the accelerator was—he worked to understand what went on under the hood” (p. 31). Many of the College Board’s suggested professional development and course preparation materials (College Board, 2007a, 2014b, 2019b; Hudley, 2018; Roskelly, 2008) retained Aristotle’s ideas and theories behind rhetoric’s purpose, the three rhetorical appeals, and the logical organization of the syllogism and enthymeme.

By the time Quintilian was born in 35 AD, rhetoric had become the most important part of Greek and Roman education, though the trend was to focus on ornate embellishments instead of traditional techniques (DeCaro, 2011). Quintilian advocated a return to simpler language, and though he believed the widely educated man was the best

student for a rhetoric course (Corbett & Connors, 1999), he did not go as far as requiring a good rhetor to know everything. He did, however, recommend rhetors have a thorough knowledge of literature and philosophy before learning rhetoric (Connors, 1997).

Quintilian's division of the practice of argument into five canons (*inventio*, or the discovery of arguments; *dispositio*, or the arrangement of arguments; *elocutio*, or style; *memoria*, or memorization; and *actio*, or delivery) is still used in composition-rhetoric as a guiding system to craft effective speeches and texts and as a template to analyze arguments (McKay & McKay, 2011).

**Along came the written word.** Initially writing was seen as a functional skill that facilitated the ancient tradition of an oral education (Enos, 2012). Philosophers were first fascinated with the ambiguity of language, but they later worried the ambiguity inherent in figures and tropes could be dangerous if used to serve nefarious purposes or the interests of those in power (Leith, 2012). In fact, some ancient rhetors feared the written word would give speakers license to claim knowledge they did not personally possess. The intimate knowledge required to speak on a topic without written notes is much more involved and personal, and these rhetors saw writing as an invention that would steal that ownership from speakers.

Ancient Greeks then realized limiting writing to serving as an aid to memory hindered its function as a heuristic and could be dangerous for the citizenry (Enos, 2012). They transformed writing into a public activity centered on creating orators and statesmen, endowing writing with the ability to give educated men power and status and wrest it away from the elite. This evolution is one of the most important developments of writing instruction. Enos (2012) observed that when writing became a part of Greece's

*paideia*, or the education of the Greek citizenry, it gained pedagogical value in addition to the craft value it already possessed. He stated Greece's *paideia* also referred to the virtue of intellectual evidence and was based on the standards of Homeric literature. Over time, this Homeric heritage would be challenged and writing soon became the central issue in the concept of *paideia*.

### **The Middle Ages**

The Dark Ages was a time when rhetoric and Sophistic thought were mostly ignored. The Islamic world, thankfully, preserved many classical Greek and Latin texts in Arabic translation (Leith, 2012). Early-medieval Renaissance scholars translated them back, and Plato, Aristotle, Quintilian, and others returned to Western thought in medieval universities in the forms of letter writing (Corbett & Connors, 1999) and sermons (McKay & McKay, 2011). The goal of rhetoricians during this time was to astonish the audience instead of sway them, so they encouraged the use of stylistic tricks.

Rhetoric split into two schools: the Sophistic school, which promoted rhetoric as an art, and the political school, which relished the more practical and political side (Corbett & Connors, 1999). Because of the popularity of the Sophistic school and its focus on ostentatious displays of language, the practicality of rhetoric lost some of its force. At this point in history, Longinus penned *On the Sublime*, a work written by a rhetorician about literary criticism with equal implications for rhetoric. Longinus's goal was to indicate what details a noble and impressive writing style, but his belief in the death of free speech left style and emotional appeals as the only remaining elements of oratory (Grube, 1957).

Although not best known as a rhetorician, St. Augustine was schooled in rhetoric and used these learned skills to spread Christianity. Before St. Augustine, the church condemned rhetoric as pagan, and many believed the ancient Greek and Roman art should not be studied because faith alone should bring with it the ability to communicate that belief (DeCaro, 2011). After his conversion to Christianity, St. Augustine explored the use of rhetoric in religion in his *De Doctrina Christiana*, laying the foundation for homiletics, or rhetoric of the sermon (McKay & McKay, 2010). By returning to a more practical use of rhetoric, he started to extend the capacity of rhetoric again (Corbett & Connors, 1999). One of the divisions of St. Augustine's book deals with the sign, or that which is used to signify something else, and, according to St. Augustine, is necessary to understand the world and God (DeCaro, 2011). He argued that every Christian needed to understand signs to understand the Bible, and they needed to understand rhetoric to explain and teach their message. Thus, rhetoric was an obligation of every Christian (DeCaro, 2011). The practices associated with Christian rhetoric were dominant into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with teachers relying on grammar, logic, and rhetoric to teach communication skills (Ferreira-Buckley, 2012). By the beginning of the Renaissance, rhetoric had burrowed such deep trenches into the culture and mind of the West "that it shaped the way all knowledge was approached" (Leith, 2012, p. 33).

### **The Renaissance Through the 18<sup>th</sup> Century**

The death of the Middle Ages resulted from the birth of the Renaissance, which began as a revolt in favor of a freer approach to intellectual discovery and a classical revival resulting in thinkers and creators such as Petrarch, Shakespeare, Galileo, Newton, and da Vinci (DeCaro, 2011). Rhetoric constituted a third of these great thinkers'

grammar school educations—better known then as the trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric (Leith, 2012). Joseph (2002), an American nun who originally studied journalism, categorized these three areas thusly: logic concerns known things; grammar, symbolized things; and rhetoric, communicated things. Renaissance humanists believed rhetoric was an important discipline because they believed language gave humans access to the world (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991). A more influential trend in rhetoric during this time period, however, was rationalism. Rationalists valued scientific truths and sought objective facts that would exist for all time (DeCaro, 2011). They did not value rhetoric and believed, while aesthetically pleasing, rhetoric had no connection to science and truth (Foss et al., 1991).

One influential scholar in the rebirth of classical rhetoric, however, was Erasmus, whose work, *Copia: Foundations of the Abundant Style*, became one of the basic school texts on rhetoric and composition. As indicated by the title, Erasmus’s text emphasized the importance of variety in discourse (Erasmus, trans. 1978). In one section of the text, Erasmus provided two hundred variations of the sentence “*Semper, dum vivam, tui meminero*” or “I shall remember you for the rest of my life” as a demonstration of the importance of acquiring elegance and variety of expression (Corbett & Connors, 1999). Erasmus spent only five years in England, but his influence shaped the grammar-school curriculum for rhetorical training by noting the importance not only of the drilling of rules but also of discriminating reading and practice (Mere Rhetoric, 2015).

The Renaissance saw other changes reflected in current curricula as well. Letter writing, a popular activity during the Middle Ages, and Ramus, a French scholar, subordinated rhetoric by placing invention and organization under the aegis of logic and

relegating rhetoric to only style and delivery (DeCaro, 2011). His ridicule of rhetoric lasted for centuries. Language quickly became a method of simply communicating truths once discovered and not an influential method of associating with the world (Foss et al., 1991). Ramus's ideas quickly gained traction in the curriculum of schools organized by Protestant, and especially Puritan, groups (Ong, 2004) whose writings centered on sermons, manuals, and informational writings.

Eventually, the Renaissance saw the line between rhetoric and writing blur as the two became inseparable, dominating both culture and education (Abbott, 2012). In the more vernacular texts appearing in the Renaissance, narratives became increasingly concerned with the stories of realistic individuals: "Beowulf gave way to the Wife of Bath; Everyman gave way to Shylock. By 1700, all the literary groundwork had been laid for the rise of . . . the forms of literary discourse that burgeoned in the 18<sup>th</sup> century" (Connors, 1997, p. 301). These new narratives served as a reflection of the rise of the middle classes and the threat they imposed on the traditional powers of the church and royalty. Renaissance teachers began to see grammar as a means to an end instead of as a necessity (Abbott, 2012). Yet, the 17<sup>th</sup> century also evinced a preoccupation with the rules of language and a concern for a clean, functional style (Corbett & Connors, 1999). The concerns and daily life of the common man may have appeared in writings, but his language did not.

As a reaction to the growing popularity of vernacular language, the Royal Society, founded in 1660, named a committee to improve the English language, and the activities of this committee spurred the development of restrained prose (Stark, 2015). The invention of the printing press and the sudden increase in texts using vernacular language

(Abbott, 2012) caused certain members of society to fear what they foresaw as the degradation of the English language. Those named to this committee included Dryden, Evelyn, Sprat, and Waller; they hoped that the authority of the Royal Society would “refine, augment, and fix” (Abbott, 2012, p. 509) the English language. They planned to create a series of symbols with each symbol having one universal and constant meaning; thus, literary symbols would be as precise and stable as mathematic symbols. Even though the project never advanced beyond the planning stage, the proposal of a scientific prose was given encouragement by the proposal alone. Corbett and Connors (1999) extended the idea of this period’s restrained prose by discussing the late 17<sup>th</sup> century development of the Senecan style, characterized by brevity of sentences, loose structure, concise and terse phrases, and jerky rhythms (Nordquist, 2018). This interest in a plainer style caused a decline in the use of schemes, tropes, and other aesthetic elements of literature.

As the 18<sup>th</sup> century began, delivery—the concern with *how* something is stated—began to receive some attention (Corbett & Connors, 1999). Compositionists paid homage to classical precepts but urged students to discover a style unique to themselves. Ferreira-Buckley (2012) noted that as the century progressed, adults in England needed to deliver speeches less and less while written communication was becoming more of a necessity, indicating an increased demand for writing instruction. Considered essential to writing instruction at the time, grammar was stressed to all students at all levels as a way to rid them of their rustic words and phrases and train them in the way of a standard system (Ferreira-Buckley, 2012). Instructors believed the first stage in learning to write was learning grammar; students then proceeded to themes and lengthier compositions.

## **Changes Were Coming . . .**

Leith (2012) summarized Western education between 1400 and 1700 as a proliferation of repetitive and boring memorization. The 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, marked a change in educational emphasis from notations to delivery, and British society's belief in the connection between elocution and class helped propel rhetoric to a staple of British and Western education. As a result of these influences and in opposition to them, teachers began to see rhetoric as a practical art, much as Aristotle had, and a new, modern English style was born with the assistance of rhetoricians and writers such as Hobbes, Dryden, and Sprat (Swedenberg, 1966).

Ramus remained highly influential in New England and at Harvard College, but several writers were beginning to influence the course of rhetoric (Miller, 1983). Although not a rhetorician, Bacon contributed to the field through his many writings that shed light on his own writing practices as well as the direction rhetoric was soon to take (Corbett & Connors, 1999). Bacon confronted one of the growing issues of the time: finding a suitable style for the discussion of scientific matters and a clear explanation of facts rather than more ornate styles (Miller, 1983). While he criticized those who were preoccupied with style over matter, he suggested style conform to the subject matter and audience while writers use simple words whenever possible (DeCaro, 2011; Jardine, 2009). These emphases on audience and application of reason and imagination to excite an audience's will spawned three trends of modern rhetorical theory: epistemological, belletristic, and elocutionist (DeCaro, 2011).

Epistemologists tried to understand rhetoric in terms of its psychological process and its relation to human nature. Bacon and Campbell posited that rhetoric could not

only persuade but also “enlighten the understanding, please the imagination, move the passions, and influence the will” (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 516). The *belles lettres* movement, best represented by Blair, focused on the aesthetics of writing rather than the information it provided and included all of the fine arts (poetry, music, drama, architecture, oral discourse, writing, and criticism) (DeCaro, 2011). His emphasis was on “individual genius and the cultivation of taste . . . and the written over the spoken word” (Leith, 2012, p. 40). Blair’s lectures on rhetoric were so popular that he was encouraged to compile them, and he later published them as *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres*. While it did not present any new theories of rhetoric, the text is what Blair referred to as a compilation of his understanding of theories of classical and modern rhetoric and is one of the first works to focus on written, as opposed to oral, discourse (Berquist et al., 2010). His belief that upward mobility could be influenced by eloquence along with his belief in the power of logic and language persisted until almost the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Berquist et al., 2010; Corbett & Connors, 1999). Finally, the elocution movement focused primarily on delivery and rhetoric’s connections to psychology and science; however, their focus on the theatrics of delivery led to a view of rhetoric as empty and insincere, leading to their eventual demise (DeCaro, 2011).

### **America and the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

It was in America, however, that the most important rhetorical ideas of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were formed. The American and French Revolutions saw the overthrow of tyrants in favor of more representative governments and broadened the use of rhetorical theory to a rhetoric of writing (Corbett & Connors, 1999). The field of composition-rhetoric grew from the much older oral traditions of rhetoric (Clark, 2012) and slowly

became interchangeably known as “composition” or “composition-rhetoric,” either with an implied or explicitly noted connection to those ancient rhetorical practices and teachings. This transition began during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Schools and instructors continued the oral tradition as a primary method of instruction; however, most advances in rhetorical theory were made in composition. Early American writing instruction departed from the aesthetic, belletristic approach and headed toward a more scientific method using definitions and rules (Schultz, 1999).

In America in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, writing—when taught—used practices and assignments that were abstract and socially and culturally constructed. The language students were suggested to use changed from the high style of classic oration to a more common language (Bordelon, Wright, & Halloran, 2012). Connors (1997) concluded that personal feelings, thoughts, and perceptions acquired power in composition education in a way that would have astounded composition instructors of only 50 years earlier. With this more autonomous, more democratic idea of composition gaining ground, the bedrock for America’s Romantic writers was being set. This independent form of composition persists today in the AP English Language and Composition charge for students “to communicate writer’s intentions and elicit readers’ responses in particular situations” (College Board, 2019b, p. 11).

Meanwhile, rapid advancements were made in the American education system to help society become more literate. The rise of interest in literature as a fine art and in the American democratic culture helped build an educational system that increased access to both reading and writing (Corbett & Connors, 1999). This democratic ideal was the foundation of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century common schools where teachers could cultivate young

citizens of the new republic (Hansen, 2010). Inevitably, America's democratic culture encouraged the rapid development of colleges: from seven colleges in 1776, the nation had over 400 by 1850 (Corbett & Connors, 1999). The idea of social efficiency progressed into the 20<sup>th</sup> century when comprehensive high schools were established with vocational training, student tracking, and ability testing with the goal of preparing youth for work (Hansen, 2010).

**Composition and an American identity.** After 1800, populist ideas prevailed across the country, and both Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democracy encouraged an egalitarian ethic that encompassed all areas of American life including education and language (Connors, 1997; Russell, 2006). Additionally, writing's emphasis began to shift from eloquence to the new idea of taste (Bordelon et al., 2012). This "Great Awakening" in American education—along with a secular approach to religion in public life—was a movement toward universal primary education (Russell, 2006). Schools were suddenly available to a wider population of students, including those from classes previously unable or not allowed to attend. There was a new romantic view of the child as a "developing and active learner rather than a container for content or miniature and defective adult" (Russell, 2006, p. 246). These changing attitudes toward education along with changing literature drastically altered composition instruction.

During the first 50 years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the United States had settled into its new independence and was searching for a national identity separate from England. Part of this identity necessitated a national literature distinct in its portrayal of American culture. While British literature showcased writers of elite status and wealth, America needed to find voices that represented America's belief in the power of the common man

and the wildness of its frontiers. The dichotomy between American and British composition is personified by poet Whitman who broke form into free verse; used the beautiful and sometimes crude language of the everyday man (including erotic, homoerotic, military, and working man language); directly addressed all manner of Americans (including presidents, prostitutes, and slaves); and freely discussed formerly taboo issues such as sexuality, work, death, patriotism, and individuality. Although derided, condemned, and chastised for his vernacular (sometimes referred to as vulgar) language, Whitman—and others like him—ushered in a new American literature and method of composition. These writers offered America her first national literature, one written in the vernacular of the everyday American man. Whitman (1855/2015) best described this new American identity and America’s literature as “the greatest poem [where] the most stirring appear tame [and where] genius [lies] . . . most in the common people [and] . . . the fluency of their speech” (par. 2-3). Whitman’s ideas concerning the role of language in America reflected the country’s values of independence, freedom, and equality and emphasized the importance of these being reflected in writing.

Because of the increasing number of students from farming and working families in American schools (Bordelon et al., 2012), teachers could no longer assume students had read texts in the classical literary canon, so pedagogical trends had to shift (Connors, 1997). Classroom material started to be drawn increasingly from vernacular literature and less from Latin and Greek pieces to clarify the grammatical patterns and rhetorical effects of contemporary text (Ferreira-Buckley, 2012; Russell, 2006). Additionally, discourse was quickly shifting from a largely oral one to a written one (Brereton, 1995; Russell, 2006), and students in these vernacular schools relied largely on readers and

grammars for literacy instruction (Connors, 1997). With an emphasis on *belles lettres* (poetry, fiction, drama, essays, and so on), the composition culture based on oratory was evolving to a hybrid of oratory, composition, and critical analysis (Bordelon et al., 2012).

**Composition-rhetoric in early American classrooms.** It was also during this time that English composition as a subject first appeared in American colleges. Around 1810, the first English composition course was offered, and a composition pedagogy had to quickly follow suit (Connors, 1997). Almost immediately, the writing of formal English became a central concern for American schools (Bordelon et al., 2012). While classroom assignments could have included writing, review, and discussion, teachers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century would have seen this approach as shockingly incomplete. Connors (1997) indicated teachers knew pedagogy had to be informed by theory and practice. Rhetoric provided teachers with the theory they wanted, and no teacher wanted to bypass the theory provided by the classic Greek and Latin texts nor would a practice pedagogy have been practicable in the large lecture halls of the 19<sup>th</sup> century writing class. To alleviate the burden of overwhelming class loads on teachers, Lancastrian teaching—originating from the ideas of Lancaster—took the responsibility for classroom activities off the teacher and placed them on classroom monitors who drilled students on grammar and style lessons (Connors, 1997). During the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, English and many other disciplines relied heavily on similar question-answer methods.

Russell (2006) noted writing was limited to copying or imitation of adult texts in earlier centuries; however, in the 1830s reformers such as Alcott—influenced by European education reformers Fröbel, Herbart, and Pestalozzi—began to introduce teachers and students to composition methods that included writing about their own

environment and experiences. Thus, writing transformed from a study of handwriting and basic grammar into one of composition. Quickly exposition and argument worked themselves to the forefront of the composition modes as can be seen in many rhetoric and composition texts of the time as these modes consumed much more space than narration or description (Connors, 1997). These modal categories were formalized in 1866 by Bain and slowly but drastically changed writing topics in America. In the 1890s, the two personal modes—narration and description—became the first modes taught in most classes (Connors, 1997).

Writing instructors allowed grammar to retain its importance because the central myth of its power to discipline the mind, preserve the culture, and assimilate children into American society persisted (Woods, 1985). Reformers, however, were beginning to argue against starting writing instruction with rules in favor of learning to write by writing and by using models in complex activities (Russell, 2006). Students wrote in journals to discover their own topics, and textbooks started providing examples of concrete, practical writing instead of memorization and dictation exercises (Russell, 2006).

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, scholars in all fields expected careful study to reveal the rules and principles underlying all observable phenomena (Corbett & Connors, 1999). As this theory of cognition spread, composition theorists like Blair, Campbell, Homes, and Kames broadened the range of texts utilized in composition courses to include literary appreciation (Ferreira-Buckley, 2012). The belief that studying works of literature could help students become better writers has been a prevalent notion ever since; the College Board (2019b), however, expects students in AP English Language and

Composition to read more nonfiction texts to help them better understand how language works.

**Classism and composition-rhetoric.** The egalitarian push of the early part of the century began to fade from 1830 to 1870 as a class system began to appear and Americans became aware of and concerned about their discourse habits (Bordelon et al., 2012). The concern of class renewed cultural and pedagogical interest in the role of grammar in pedagogy. This era in history was America's Renaissance, a time that saw the rise of the literary intellectual and created "writers and poets who could stand with the best of the old—and who wished to stand separate from the old" (Connors, 1997, p. 114). As an extension of this new approach to writing, grammar found itself in a new situation: formal grammar was criticized for its sterility—the teaching of composition became more concerned with the written product along with its accuracy and eloquence—and American culture was more aware of standard English as an indicator of status and wealth. Connors (1997) noted that after the Civil War, teachers began to revolt against the idea of classroom instruction and activities focused on abstract subjects. Additionally, social stratification was more distinct, and proper language usage became a valuable part of writing instruction along with the modes of discourse—narration, description, exposition, and argument. Grammar instruction became writing instruction.

**Politics and education.** Political events played a demanding role in changes in composition instruction as well. In 1862—after more than five years of effort—Vermont congressman Morrill had Congress pass, and President Lincoln sign, the Land-Grant Colleges Act (usually known as the Morrill Federal Land Grant Act), which provided grants of federal land (mostly in the West) to each state which could then sell the land

and use the money to establish agricultural and mechanical colleges in that state (Peshek, 2018). The large increase in the number of colleges drastically increased the number of post-high school students with diverse backgrounds, furthering the need for instructors and creating large class sizes.

Addison and McGee (2015) explained that this influx of students caused drastic changes in American universities, which began to organize around defined academic disciplines. The emerging professorate slowly began to resemble today's college faculty. It was also at this time that Congress established the Department of Education to have a federal agency presiding over the educational system. After the creation of this department, people began to champion the implementation of a national standardized exam. However, a desire to support states' rights (and a fruitless attempt to preserve the Union) combined with logistical barriers to keep the creation of such an exam at bay (Addison & McGee, 2015).

During this time the number of children in government-funded schools also increased, and these public schools began following examples set by universities in terms of measuring student achievement (Addison & McGee, 2010). The world of teaching was expanding rapidly as more people entered the classroom. Students arrived with only the "broad, unspecialized education of the common schools and frontier academies" (Connors, 1997, p. 308). Instructors were no longer receiving classically trained students of the earlier, elitist order: "They did not have their Caesar, their Livy, their Aristotle, their Demosthenes—not even their Ramus. They had a little readin', a little writin', and a little 'rithmetic, and they needed a different sort of training" (Connors, 1997, p. 308). It was at this point that teachers began to reject the abstract, non-personal assignments of an

earlier age. The conflict between what colleges needed and what high schools could provide resulted in a rift between the two levels of education. Post-secondary schools demanded public schools produce college-ready students, and with the introduction of scaled writing achievement tests and the creation of local Boards of Education, the argument for standardized testing began to find more solid ground toward the end of the 1860s (Addison & McGee, 2010). And, despite a number of available approaches, Harvard emerged as the model for and arbiter of the American university system (Stewart, 1992).

**Changes in composition-rhetoric.** After the Civil War, there was a thorough examination and contraction of rhetorical theories to assume those that worked on a more practical level for writers. Corbett and Connors (1999) noted that rhetoric at this time was largely in the hands of non-PhD instructors (journalists, grammarians, textbook authors, ministers, eccentrics, geniuses, and performers—few were trained scholars) who widened the understanding of what rhetoric could be. The texts of the time focused on practice materials and deduction lessons rather than the grammatical and mechanical considerations of earlier texts. The authors of the top four rhetoric texts—Bain, Hill, Genung, and Wendell—were crucial to the development of early American composition-rhetoric not only because their books were extremely popular but also because they promoted the idea that conscious application of learned abstract principles could result in effective writing (Connors, 1986). Their ideas would shape rhetorical theory and writing instruction well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

During the 1870s colleges reflected changing cultural attitudes as universities were spreading west and developing in the northeast (Thelin, 2014), women were

attending colleges (Newcomer, 1959), Agricultural and Mechanical schools were opening (Berman, 1972; Mayberry, 1991), and the prevalence of colleges focused on classical study and mental discipline was waning in favor of science and engineering, forging America's technology-based economy (Ferleger & Lazonick, 1994). Students seeking vocational specialties and training in social acceptability broadened the purposes for college enrollment. No longer was college only for aspiring lawyers, ministers, and gentlemen; post-Civil War colleges clambered to implement radical changes and give students what they wanted. There was no way for composition-rhetoric courses to be impervious to these changes: the focus of writing underwent a profound change. Connors (1997) argued, "Rhetorical instruction was forced to move away from the abstract educational field of 'mental discipline' and toward more immediate instructional goals" (p. 124). Teachers' goals during this era focused on mechanical correctness instead of effective communication.

**America's first literacy crisis.** Throughout the 1870s, a crisis had been reached. Student writing was under new scrutiny (and was being declared unreadable), and teachers were tired of the older methods of instruction (Connors, 1997). Textbook writers, however, still relied heavily on abstract subjects, though they tried to include more personal subjects over the older topics-based activities. Connors (1997) asserted teachers knew something must change for students to excel and saw personal experience topics as the answer. During the 1870s, invention methods shifted from recall and synthesis of sources to observation, choice, and analysis of personal knowledge. The romanticism at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century began to reappear in composition courses, and the idea of writing as a social responsibility gained prestige as students were encouraged

to be original and record from observation (Berlin, 1984). This transitional process resulted in depth replacing breadth and lasted through the 1880s; by the 1890s, the old ways were openly rejected (Brown, 1995).

This change began, in part, in 1872 when Harvard's president Eliot created a composition course as part of an elective, specialized curricula (Russell, 2006). The elective status of this composition course was soon to end, however. In 1874, Harvard introduced an entrance examination featuring a writing requirement (Connors, 1997; Corbett & Connors, 1999; Jamison, 2015). This entrance exam resulted from growing class distinctions in America, poor writing by Harvard students, Harvard's desire to prove its preeminent position in American education, an affirmation of the importance of writing instruction, and even a challenge to secondary schools (Connors, 1997). After the first administration of the entrance exam, parents, professors, and the intellectual culture as a whole were shocked and horrified that 157 of the 316 students tested failed it: it was America's first literacy crisis as readers found the compositions riddled with bad spelling; poor punctuation; ambiguous, vague, awkward diction; and grievous grammar errors (Corbett & Connors, 1999).

Large-scale educational reformations began immediately. There was rapid expansion in the development of educational testing and measurement in America—mostly from universities' efforts to guarantee better prepared students (Addison & McGee, 2015). At Harvard and other colleges, students were soon required to demonstrate their writing ability and knowledge of literary classics (Jamison, 2015). Brereton (1995) noted that Harvard soon began to “prod its preparatory schools about improving their writing instruction, beginning a 20-year-long acrimonious debate over

composition in the schools,” a debate complicated and enhanced by Harvard’s publication of “lengthy official reports pinpointing the problem and laying the blame on the preparatory schools” (p. 27). High school teachers continued to worry that they were inadequately preparing their students because Harvard’s reading list changed annually, complicating secondary teachers’ attempts to choose relevant texts (Jamison, 2015).

**The birth of First Year Composition and its immediate effects.** First Year Composition grew out of Harvard’s attempts to control secondary school curricula (Russell, 2006). To address the large number of students failing their entrance exams, in 1885 Harvard moved Eliot’s composition course to freshman year, simplified it, and made it mandatory (Connors, 1997; Jones, 2010). Harvard never intended the required composition course to be permanent; it was intended as a temporary solution until high schools could improve (Jones, 2010). Other universities quickly followed Harvard’s example, however, and First Year Composition was established as the norm (Connors, 1997). Both of these factors—secondary schools’ struggles to solidify curricula and the lack of a model for high schools—made Harvard’s decision to implement an entrance exam decisive in shaping high school English courses (Gold et al., 2012).

Schools received some helpful funding when the Morrill Federal Land Grant Act was renewed in 1890. The government provided additional resources to build new technical schools and colleges, which were allowing minority races and women into their classes (Jamison, 2015). As these changes were absorbed into the high school level, increased rigor and a better method of assessment were needed. Jamison (2015) observed that rising college expectations and the nation’s need for a literate working class spurred teachers and professors to advocate for an organized and consistently structured public

school system. Professor J. H. Canfield from the University of Kansas exposed the rudimentary and simple nature of secondary education across the country in his 1890 “Report on Secondary Education,” delivered for the *National Council of Education* (Jamison, 2015). Most of the drawbacks to the public school system occurred because elementary and secondary schools were only accountable to local school boards that chose their own standards, curricula, and rules (Eliot, 1890). Jamison (2015) argued most of these school systems never communicated their curricula to other school systems or to universities. Teachers could not know how their curricula or their school compared with other schools or how effective they were in preparing students for college. Education and academic scholars wanted to develop common standards to guide teachers and students in the secondary and university levels, and they hoped that a more rigorous curriculum would help narrow the widening gap between secondary and post-secondary schools. To help restructure schools across America and create a sense of cohesion (Jamison, 2015), the National Education Association created the Committee of Ten—a group of scholars headed by Harvard’s president Eliot (Murphy, 2001).

Another major development during this era was the development of the College Entrance and Examination Board (CEEB) in 1900 (Addison & McGee, 2015). A group of private high schools and elite colleges created this board to standardize the college admissions process and inspire a more uniform curriculum at the private New England high schools from which the elite colleges acquired most of their students (Addison & McGee, 2015). The CEEB was later renamed the College Board.

## The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Through Present-Day

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the middle class was growing in size and its value of hard, honest work discouraged youth from leaving family businesses to pursue higher education in classes of literature and Latin, which were often seen as frivolous (Jamison, 2015). Educators would spend the next several decades trying to abolish this negative perception and emphasize the importance of a high school and college education. For America to become a more competitive and progressive world power, an educated citizenry was necessary. Because of educators' efforts, high school enrollment rose from 202,963 to 1,000,000 in the years between 1890 and 1912 (Murphy, 2001). Along with this growth in clientele, educators felt growing pressure to create competitive curricula, and writing assessment methods changed accordingly. The “movement to prepare students for economic and social life [created] English courses that ignored literature altogether, offering instruction in current traditional rhetoric . . . including units on salesmanship, advertising, and printing” (Murphy, 2001, p. 257).

Richards (1965), a noted contemporary rhetorician, stated in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric* that the time period was “the dreariest and least profitable part of the waste that the unfortunate travel through in freshman English” (p. 3). Kuypers and King (2001) argued that the time period was a struggle to refocus rhetoric on civic engagement instead of elocution. Yet, Connors (1997) added that the changing atmosphere of America helped develop the teaching of rhetoric as written composition that exists today. The shift away from what Wright and Halloran (2001) called “scripted orality to silent prose” (p. 222) was seen as a consequence of social changes from print-technology to American individualism, from sharp social stratification to the rise of a middle class, and from

professionalism (Graff, 1987) to innovations in logic, philosophy and psychology (Crowley, 1990; Rorty, 1967; Russell, 2006). This focus on writing eventually led to an emphasis on literature, a trend that resulted in the dominance of literary criticism over rhetorical education, the eventual separation of reading and writing, and the professionalization of composition (Horner, 1993; Miller, 1997; Russell, 2006).

Personal writing assignments remained popular, though, and almost every writing course used personal writing to some degree (Connors, 1997). The modes of discourse did, however, prevent personal writing from overtaking the composition classroom. By 1930, simplified rhetoric textbooks, rhetoric handbooks, and drill books were controlling the writing of American classrooms and directing the type of writing students were completing (Gold et al., 2012).

**The professionalization of composition-rhetoric.** Most textbook and journal article authors continued to assume that the linguistic approach, with its emphasis on grammatical correctness, would somehow improve students' writing skills (Tate, 1976). Slowly, however, changes in the structure of composition took place and affected the writing textbooks that often directed instruction. Fortunately, the professionalization of composition hindered the overarching power of textbooks. Connors (1997) summarized this process: The NCTE, founded in 1911, remained a small group of Midwestern writing instructors until the 1930s when the *English Journal* expanded into a high school and college version. More university teachers and Dewey's social-educational theories led to an increased membership in the Dewey-supported NCTE. By 1938, so many college instructors were members of NCTE that the *English Journal* could generate a separate journal, *College English*, specifically for college instructors. The Conference on College

Composition and Communication was formed in 1949, and these members founded the journal *College Composition and Communication*. Within 20 years, there was a literature base for the problems associated with composition instruction, a source for a growing body of knowledge. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, writing teachers had another, more reliable source for timely information about their field of work (Gold et al., 2012).

**Helping gifted students.** After World War II, enrollment in America's colleges increased considerably and would continue to grow for decades: "college enrollment (including community colleges) increased from 2.6 million students in 1949-1950 to 3.2 million in 1959-1960" (Valentine, 1987, p. 67). Still, halfway through the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a growing concern that despite improvements in education, the top students were not getting the education they needed (Jamison, 2015; Jones, 2010). The concern over the education of gifted and talented students reached a critical moment in the 1950s; many feared gifted students were not being challenged or accelerated as expeditiously as they should be and that American society would suffer (Jones, 2010).

In 1951, educational initiatives for gifted and talented students gained a push from the Ford Foundation's Fund for the Advancement of Education, a \$70 million fund set to expire in 16 years (Jones, 2010). Its historian Woodring (1970) stated that the fund's mandate was to improve and expand education in North America. He noted, "[It] was in operation during a time of national affluence, population expansion, international tension, growing social unrest, educational turmoil, rapid social change, and the adventure into space" (p. 3). There was also growing concern—since the Korean War followed World War II so quickly—that the draft would keep gifted and talented men from entering the

labor force, so stakeholders were exploring ways to have these students take college-level courses before joining the military (Jones, 2010).

Another concern was that gifted students were languishing in high school and freshman courses they did not need (Hansen, 2010; Jones, 2010). The headmaster of Andover, Kemper, oversaw a study of students from Andover, Exeter, and Lawrenceville (considered the best preparatory schools) who subsequently attended Harvard, Princeton, and Yale and reported that these students found freshman courses repetitive (General Education, 1952; Jones, 2010). His findings were an important part of the final report presented to initiate the development of the AP program (General Education, 1952).

Administrators and professors from Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Exeter, Andover, and Lawrenceville soon met to plan for student achievement during high school (Casement, 2003; Jamison, 2015; Jones, 2010; Rothschild, 1999). This group of individuals would be known as the General Education Committee. They recommended that students who qualified be able to enter college as sophomores and that achievement tests were needed to determine the students who deserved “advanced placement” (Jamison, 2015, pp. 48-49). This committee made clear, however, this program was not intended for all students. Their final report was titled, *General Education in School and College: A Committee Report by Members of the Faculties of Andover, Exeter, Lawrenceville, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale* (1952).

Appended to the committee’s report was a second report titled “A Proposal for an Experiment in Advanced Placement,” which proposed the College Board guide the following experiment (General Education, 1952):

- To see whether it is possible to get sufficient agreement on the content and objectives of certain college freshman courses to make feasible the construction of valid tests for advanced placement[;]
- To see whether such tests could be produced, administered, and scored at reasonable cost[;]
- To see whether there would be enough able and willing students to make an advanced placement program worthwhile on an extended basis[; and]
- To see whether college teachers would accept good performance on an advanced placement test as equivalent to passing college courses. (p. 129)

The committee also suggested a process for selecting students for these new courses that included SAT scores, school recommendations, and performance on CEEB tests (now SAT II exams)—all much more stringent than most contemporary schools required (Jones, 2010). The irony is that as the program has “become more widespread and egalitarian, there has arisen an implicit mistrust of this program that began as a sort of gentlemen’s agreement between elite secondary and postsecondary schools” (Jones, 2010, p. 62).

The Advanced Placement program, developed from this meeting, solved many of the concerns about the disenfranchisement of the gifted and talented including the problem of languishing students in redundant courses (Hansen, 2010; Jones, 2010) and functioned as a way to respond to the criticism of progressive education (Applebee, 1974). The General Education Committee hoped the College Board would develop the exams for their proposed advanced placement program (Jones, 2010). Concurrently with the committee’s meeting, Chambers, who was president of Kenyon College, developed a

list of courses college faculty would accept if taught in high school (Jamison, 2015; Rothschild, 1999). Fairly quickly, ten high schools agreed to offer these courses, and “Advanced Placement was born” (Jamison, 2015, p. 96).

**Details are finalized.** The committee also decided on a test format—a three-hour exam, the content and structure of which would be decided for each subject by a Committee of Examiners (Jamison, 2015). In English, this first approved course was AP English Literature and Composition. By May of 1954, the first AP exams were administered (Rothschild, 1999), including 500 handpicked students who took the first English exam, and the College Board—though reluctant, for the program seemed to have little growth potential (Jones, 2010)—was handling the administration of the program (Addison & McGee, 2015).

The General Education committee made a clear distinction between English language courses—meaning composition, grammar, and speech (or rhetoric)—and their preferred literature courses (Jones, 2010). Jones (2010) argued there is an explicit and implicit reason for the division. The explicit reason could be found in the committee’s charge that “training in language is the teacher’s first task because verbal skills are central to the curriculum as a whole” (General Education, 1952, p. 47). The implicit reason can be inferred from the mid-century’s privileging of literature over composition (Jones, 2010). The committee’s report reflected this bias (General Education, 1952) in its statement that primary and secondary schools should be responsible for composition because higher education was incapable of succeeding in more refined studies until secondary schools could help students become more competent writers. The committee also made a clear recommendation for formal grammar training, typical of the period and

still forming attitudes and guiding instruction in many contemporary AP English classrooms (Jones, 2010).

**“A greater defeat for our country than Pearl Harbor” (Edward Teller).** The concern—and fear—of weakening educational standards was heightened again with the launch of Sputnik in 1957 (Addison & McGee, 2015; Jamison, 2015; Jones, 2010). Suddenly, education was a matter of national defense requiring federal intervention (Addison & McGee, 2015), and AP courses garnered more societal support. Yet, Jones (2010) argued Sputnik was only a symbol to mark public schools’ final shift in emphasis from progressive education to a more traditional academic standard. In fact, Applebee (1974) observed that the “reemphasis of academic achievement was already well underway” (pp. 189-190) before 1957. The outcry, however, revived interest in special programs for gifted and talented students and subject-specific coursework (Jones, 2010).

The nation’s experiences in the Cold War eliminated the desire to experiment and try new techniques in English courses as composition-rhetoric reverted to more traditional methods, conforming to the Eisenhower era’s focus on unity and patriotism (Connors, 1997). As a “return to normalcy” (Connors, 1997, p. 104), this period did not last long because the societal turmoil of the 1960s brought new changes to the field of composition-rhetoric. Great numbers of Baby Boomers started enrolling in colleges in 1963, and students were getting better test scores. Simultaneously, a new generation of rhetorically trained college composition teachers was facing teaching methods that had remained largely the same for six decades. Textbooks had to change to meet the needs of these instructors and students. Many textbooks altered material as the popular text

*Writing with a Purpose* (published from 1950 through its most current edition in 2005) did by adding new, more updated material.

**Moving to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.** The idea that writing should be taught as a recursive process, an idea that directs most writing instruction today, gained popularity in the 1960s (Heilker, 1996; Johnson, 2008). The pedagogic approach it replaced—a product centered technique involving mirroring models—had been in the forefront of composition for centuries (Johnson, 2008). Rohman (1965) claimed, “writing is usefully described as a process, something which shows continuous change in time like growth in organic nature” (p. 106). This long-lasting view of writing as an organic and fluid process has been used as a foundation for many composition theorists like Berthoff (1981) who argued that the composing process helps students make meaning through abstractions, imagination, and insight.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the nation was once again interested in education for democracy and equality as the Civil Rights Movement made education available for people of all races, classes, genders, and abilities (Hansen, 2010). This democratic ideal, combined with the idea of education for social mobility, was the strongest element leading the expansion of the nation’s educational system (Hansen, 2010). Addison and McGee (2015) noted it was during this period that America became a nation of standardized testing. In fact, the NAEP was first administered in 1969. The popularity of standardized testing only helped the progress of the AP program. Conversely, the 1970s and 1980s presented a number of journal articles decrying the evils of the time and imploring teachers to return to the ancient ways (Russell, 2006).

After the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983—and from the events leading to its publication—America’s educational system was forced to face a rebirth (George, 2014). George (2014) explained the report as depicting a crisis that “crippled America’s ability to compete in the global economy” (p. 79). The 1980s was a turning point in public education as conservative educators strove to reform and redefine schools as “company stores” where “good citizenship is equated with economic productivity” (Giroux, 1988, p. 18). At this critical juncture, the College Board had just implemented its new AP English course, AP English Language and Composition (Puhr, 2010).

The College Board created the AP English Language and Composition course because of the changes occurring in First Year Composition courses: namely the tendency to move away from writing about literature (Puhr, 2010). It was not, however, originally intended to be a junior year AP English course, which it has become. It was supposed to be an alternate (and equivalent) course to the already offered AP English Literature and Composition course (Puhr, 2010). However, the birth of the information age in the 1990s changed the American (and global) culture with new technologies that created opportunities for writing, expanded existing writings, and changed what counts as composition (Reid, 2011). The omnipresence of writing, Reid (2011) stated, lessened the role of teachers and educators to reveal “what people’s writing looks like, for better or worse, when it hasn’t been conformed to a narrow academic standard” (p. 696).

The pervasiveness of writing began to require a fluency with language in education, work, and society; meanwhile, the inability to express oneself in writing began to have grievous consequences (Troia et al., 2010). To aid students with this more autonomous approach to composition, researchers (Falchikov & Boud, 1989; Nielson,

2014) found that student self-assessment had garnered attention in courses relying on teaching and evaluating composition. In fact, more recent publications have demonstrated that instructors found self-assessment helped students' metacognition skills (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009; Campillo, 2006; Graham et al., 2011), and that writers who struggled in reviewing their own work showed improvement in writing (Bloom, 1997; Graziano-King, 2007; Nicol & McFarlane-Dick, 2006). Recent curricular changes have emphasized argumentative writing strategies in an effort to encourage students to improve cognition and mimic the controversies and discussions they see daily in popular culture, on social media, at work, and in school (Andrews, 2010; Graff, 2003; Street, 2004).

AP English Language and Composition played an important role in many of the educational and writing movements developed over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, over the past decade or so, several research studies have suggested students can earn many benefits beyond future success in college from more rigorous courses in high school (Wyatt, Patterson, & DiGiacomo, 2015). Research has positively correlated a rigorous course load with standardized test scores (Attewell & Domina, 2008; Milewski & Sawtell, 2006), college enrollment rates (Attewell & Domina, 2008; Long, Conger, & Iatarola, 2012), institutional choices (Horn & Kojaku, 2001), lower requirements for remediation (Adelman, Daniel, & Berkowitz, 2003), and higher college graduation rates (Adelman, 1999, 2006). There continued to be, however, a growing concern with students' writing abilities, especially in education, business, and policy-making communities (Addison & McGee, 2010). Thus, in 2002, the College Board created the National Commission on Writing to offer a writing assessment as part of the SAT but

also to help improve the quality of writing so students would have a greater chance of succeeding in college (National Commission on Writing, 2005). The writing sample required on the SAT follows more traditional rhetorical concepts, and many charter and home schools are currently teaching traditional essay and genre forms (Villanueva et al., 2006). AP English courses, especially AP English Language and Composition, have been offered as a way to help students improve their writing skills and abilities using rhetorical models as a course foundation. Though society may not teach, study, or use rhetoric as the ancient Greeks, many people depend and rely on it more than any of our ancestors (Leith, 2012).

### **Contemporary Literacy and Composition-Rhetoric Defined**

Educators, and society in general, have heard of the decline in literacy skills of high school and college students for some time (Addison & McGee, 2010). As connected practices, reading and composition employ similar knowledge and cognitive processes (Graham & Hebert, 2010). Unlike reading, composition exists in a constantly evolving system of cultural norms, technological advancements, and societal change (Addison & McGee, 2015). It has been noted, however, that composing is a difficult task requiring the composer to recall skills and information from a vast storehouse of knowledge and generate a creative text using audience-appropriate language and data (Elbow, 1983; Gallagher, 2016; Lindenman, Camper, Jacoby, & Enoch, 2018; Miller, 1976; NCTE, 2016). Researchers have found several benefits to practicing this difficult art, especially for students (Handwerk, 2007): improved academic performance, particularly in reading scores (Bottoms & Bearman, 2000; Langer, 2001); enhanced communication and higher

order thinking skills (Angelo, 1995; Bottoms & Bearman, 2000; Marzano, 1993); and greater cognitive functions such as analysis and synthesis (Emig, 1977).

Composition scholars such as Heilker (1996) have long noted that the etymology of “composition” is “placing with” (p. 40). In its most basic sense, “composing” means putting words together; by extension, it also means finding and creating relationships among parts to produce a whole (Heilker, 1996). What is today called “composition” began in elementary and middle schools and is, more definitively, “the conscious and explicit development of students’ writing in formal education, from preschool through higher education” (Russell, 2006, p. 243).

The commonality among all composing activities is the writer’s systematic and purposeful decision-making processes concerning language (Larson, 1976). It is not, however, beneficial to discuss the composing process unless the distinction it holds is understood. Berthoff’s (1981) “analogy for writing . . . based on culinary experience would . . . include ways of calculating the guests’ preferences, as well as ways of determining what’s on the shelf—the cook’s and the grocer’s—and what’s in the purse” (p. 293). It is the difficulty of this process that makes defining, explaining, and teaching it a most contradictory and difficult task.

In 1983, Gardner published *Frames of Mind* and introduced the world to his theory of multiple intelligences. While not a composition theorist himself, Gardner (2011) argued for the arts to play a greater role in all of education. His ideas influenced composition theorists who widened the definition of “composition”—especially modern composition—to other literacy tools (Smagorinsky, 2006). When the field of semiotics was incorporated into composition studies in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, scholarly

ideas about what it means to write began to include any process that produces signs and can be read such as musical scores, drawings, performances, artwork, and so on (George, Lockridge, & Trimbur, 2014; Smagorinsky, 2006). Additionally, the flexibility implied by Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences was particularly important for the field of composition studies because the goal of studying contemporary writing practices is both variable and dynamic (Haas, Takayoshi, & Carr, 2012). It requires a distinct set of knowledge-making skills, techniques that Dewey (1938), one of America's most well-known composition theorists from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, called "competent inquiries," which theorists today understand to mean inquiries that are "systematic, self-conscious, clearly articulated, and warranted" (Haas et al., 2012).

### **Prevalent Composition-Rhetoric Theories and Pedagogies**

Some composition theorists have defined writing in three ways: form, process, and ideas and content, all contextualized by society and culture (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011; Newell et al., 2014; Nystrand, Greene, & Wiemelt, 1993). Writing is never a single one of these definitions, but it does tend to privilege either grammar, mechanics, and drilled skills; ideas (form) and content such as application of skills to situations and innovative or aesthetic material; or the contextual setting in which writing occurs (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011; Newell et al., 2014). Many theorists have divided composition into several camps beyond these three: (a) current-traditional rhetoric, used during the first two-thirds of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and popularized by Young and Fogarty; (b) expressionism/expressivism, popular in the 1960s and 1970s and associated with Elbow and Kinneavy; (c) cognitivism, mostly appearing in the 1970s and 1980s and promoted by Berlin and Flower; (d) social constructionism, evolving in the 1980s by Porter and

Bartholomae; (e) critical pedagogy, developed in the 1980s and 1990s mainly by Freire and Shor; and (f) post-structuralism, beginning around the turn of the century and led by Crowley and Vitanza. This list, while not exhaustive, demonstrates the wide variety of theories available for teachers to learn and adopt through practice and instruction.

### **The Connection Between Theory and Pedagogy**

In their introduction to the 2014 edition of *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, Taggart, Hessler, & Schick discussed at length the development of teachers' composition pedagogies. They argued writing instructors learn the meaning of composition pedagogy inductively from remembering their own effective teachers, and they use those memories to form and apply theories and methods. Typically, pedagogy ties learning theory and rhetorical theory together to affect classroom practices. Unfortunately, the formation of a personal composition pedagogy takes considerable time, they stated, and new teachers can often become frustrated. Although the distinction between theory and pedagogy may seem to be simply one of concept versus practice, theory is more a matter of "text production, circulation, and reception" (Taggart et al., 2014, p. 4) while pedagogy is the process of instruction and learning.

Teachers develop composition pedagogies from the knowledge they have learned through experiences, theories, and research on teaching, literacy, writing, rhetoric, and the practices that accompany these activities. The close relationship between theory and experience produces pedagogies that ebb and flow according to theoretical variations and trends (Taggart et al., 2014). Furthermore, the vast numbers of theories now available means teachers often experience many of them in the course of their own educations, and finding a way to reconcile theory, pedagogy, and goals is often difficult. Given the close

relationship between theory and practice, it is imperative to examine the composition-rhetoric theories that form the foundation of many teachers' pedagogical practices.

### **Current-Traditional and Genre-Based Rhetoric**

As people in the early modern period grew suspicious of rhetoric and the appeals and stylistic maneuvers associated with it, they became convinced that seeking certainty and truth would be more fruitful (Fleming, 2014). Current-traditional rhetoric's epistemological base is from this 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century search for rationality and scientific progress and the desire to offer writing as an extension of the scientific process (Berlin, 1987; Gold et al., 2012). Early current-traditionalists believed the basis of reality is gathered from sense impressions and should be relayed as transparently as possible to let reality be the received content (Bilsky, Hazlett, Streeter, & Weaver, 1999; Gold et al., 2012).

Though Newman was the first theorist to closely examine the internal structures of rhetoric and propose ways to subdivide text (Corbett & Connors, 1999), the idea was furthered by Day (1853) who said invention is far superior to style, and his love for rules and laws fostered his belief that rhetoric should be relieved from the role of inducing belief and instead reproduce reality. Thus, accompanying current-traditional pedagogies assume students will be able to write more appropriately if they know what sample texts look like (Fulkerson, 2005; Hyland, 2003). Teachers explain the features of each mode as well as any accompanying constraints, and students examine several example texts and their own rhetorical contexts before beginning their compositions (Devitt, 2014; Fulkerson, 2005) or analyzing the works of others (Devitt, 2014).

Current-traditional rhetoric was descended from British rhetoricians such as Bain whose most lasting contribution to rhetoric formed the backbone of current-tradition theory—rhetoric in its codification is essentially a multimodal discipline, resulting in the modes of discourse (Corbett & Connors, 1999). Discussions on modals formed a large part of his discussions on rhetoric, and his belief in the role modes can play as both a classification system and conceptualizing strategy for composition instruction is evident.

**Pedagogical implications.** The theory became a largely textbook-based form of writing instruction and persists in many rhetorical readers' and composition textbooks' organization methods—among them, *Patterns for College Writing* published by Bedford/St. Martin's, most recently updated in 2017 (13<sup>th</sup> edition); *The Norton Sampler* published by W. W. Norton and Company, most recently updated in 2017 (9<sup>th</sup> edition); *The Longman Reader* published by Pearson, most recently updated in 2015 (11<sup>th</sup> edition); and *Frames of Mind* published by Wadsworth Publishing, updated in 2009 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). The major contemporary modes of discourse included in classroom discussions and textbooks include narration, description, exemplification, classification and division, process analysis, comparison and contrast, definition, cause and effect, and argument. Typical textbook chapters begin with discussions of the features of the mode, the situation in which the genre is likely to arise, invention prompts and guidelines, revision and editing suggestions, and professional and student examples (Fulkerson, 2005). As reflected in these textbooks, current-traditional rhetoric emphasizes writing in modes along with the inherent focus on forms that accompany such writing: division of text into its constituent parts, words, sentences, and paragraphs; mechanical and grammatical correctness; and reading professional models (Russell, 2006). What it does not

emphasize is communication, invention, or the writing process. The pedagogy that adopts the current-traditional theory essentially follows Isocrates's *progymnasmata* technique of imitation (Fulkerson, 2005).

The problems associated with current-traditional theory arose from the 18<sup>th</sup> century assumption that there were general rules and guidelines all people could feel and follow that allowed writers to easily transform memory to text regardless of audience (Russell, 2006). This thought leads to writers who ignore the role of audience—one of the foundational aspects of classical rhetoric—and the differences between writers and audiences that create communication in the first place (Crowley, 1990). It also creates instruction centered on textual forms; a focus on content over meaning; teaching by prescription; a loss of *ethos* and *pathos*; creating the “banal five-paragraph theme” (Russell, 2006, p. 254); and prose that “establishes no voice, selects no audience, takes no stand, makes no commitment” (Crowley, 1990, p. 149). As a result, rhetoric began to be seen as a dangerous practice focusing on form over content. Current-traditional is a now pejorative term used to describe a form of composition instruction and thought popular throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Courses based on the current-traditional theory see writing pieces as textual conventions while the more contemporary adaptations can focus on the rhetorical acts inherent in each mode (Devitt, 2014). At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, genre theory appeared as a reincarnation of what Fulkerson (2005) says was a properly disparaged “‘modes of discourse’ approach” (p. 674). Miller (1984) differentiated these new genres and modes by paying homage to a contextual or situational definition instead of a form or formula. The consensus in current rhetorical studies is that a genre exists when a

common subject and a common *exigence* creates a common form that appears in a variety of discourses (Fulkerson, 2005; Miller, 1984). Coe (2002) stated that writing (and teaching) genres involves a process of selectivity—the writer must make decisions about what is relevant and irrelevant—which necessitates a sense of purpose as differing purposes will generate different texts. The key difference between current-traditional rhetoric and a genre-based rhetoric is that scholars have found some genres’ distinctions valuable enough to teach their distinct features and social contexts (Fulkerson, 2005; Hyland, 2003). As Hyland stated, “from a genre perspective . . . people don’t just write, they write to accomplish different purposes in different contexts, and this involves variation in the ways they use language” (p. 21).

In simpler terms, genre-based rhetoric relies on the idea that texts become what they are because writers often face similar tasks and make similar rhetorical choices; in turn, readers approach similar texts with rhetorical expectations and recognize similar rhetorical situations (Devitt, 2014). If rhetoricians and writers understand genre as an action and as conveying a rhetorical meaning instead of just a form, they can use genres to understand and create or change situations. The goal of genre-based rhetoric is not to provide writers with a template but to “serve other ends” such as “increasing rhetorical flexibility, writing more effectively within unfamiliar writing situations or within new technologies, or developing critical thinking and effecting change” (Devitt, 2014, p. 157). Genre-based rhetoric was promoted as an approach to help writers “act rhetorically and consciously” (p. 147) throughout their lives by giving them a sense of genre control, helping them learn unfamiliar genres, and providing insight into cultural and ideological bases for any genre. Regardless of the derogatory comments made about current-

traditionalists, it was the heart of rhetorical theory for over half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Corbett & Connors, 1999) and continues to influence today's genre-based rhetoricians and many foundational composition textbooks, thus impacting classrooms across the country.

### **Composition-Rhetoric: Changes Were Occurring . . .**

Corbett (1965), author of *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, helped revive rhetoric and separate it from its disparaging current-traditional past as well as from modern literary criticism and educational research by creating a more historically legitimate connection for compositionists using rhetoric's Greek and Latin roots (Fleming, 2014; Russell, 2006). Crowley's *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* soon followed, and many theorists and researchers were highlighting similarities among rhetoric from the ancients, Middle Ages, Renaissance, 18<sup>th</sup> century, and more current periods (Villanueva et al., 2006).

As composition became more professionalized in the 1960s, a "vigorous revival of interest in rhetoric . . . [began] in English departments" (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 541). Current-traditional rhetoric was seen as too formalist—focused on form, prefabrication, outlines, and product (Villanueva et al., 2006). Soon theorists and practitioners began to rediscover elements of classical rhetoric that returned composition to a writing process relying on audience and context (Russell, 2006). Of course, there were social factors affecting the turn from current-traditional as well: the rise of industrialization and a middle class (Fleming, 2014). Thus, a genesis of "new rhetorics" (Fleming, 2014, p. 255) started occurring in United States English Departments.

Rhetoricians have tried to categorize the rhetorical theories that have emerged from this rebirth with each classification representing an axiology held by groups of rhetoricians. Berlin (1988) classified three practices—cognitive psychology, expressionism, and social-epistemic; Bartholomae (1985) defined two categories—the “inner-directed theorists” (p. 13), or cognitive theorists, and the “outer-directed theorists” (p. 14), or social theorists; and Fulkerson (2005) listed three types—“social” or “social-construction” (p. 655), expressive, and rhetorical. Regardless of the number of theoretical classifications, it is evident that the professionalization of composition greatly affected the number of rhetorical theories available to direct both composition and composition instruction. The 1970s and 1980s drastically increased the study of rhetoric as both rhetorical history and theory were integrated into burgeoning rhetoric and composition graduate programs (Villanueva et al., 2006), including material on pedagogical practices from different periods instead of as foundations for rhetoric textbooks (Bizzell, 1994; Lindemann & Tate, 1991; Tate, Rupiper, & Schick, 2001; Villanueva, 2003; Villanueva et al., 2006). This addition of history and theory also appeared as an academic discipline supported by research and founded on sociolinguistic studies, language histories, ethnographies, and literary studies (Bawarshi, 2003; Berthoff, 1991; Horner, 1983; Odell, 2003; Schilb, 1996; Villanueva et al., 2006).

Since the 1960s, composition-rhetoric has become “less unified and more contentious” (Fulkerson, 2005, p. 654). The increasing diversity of rhetoric’s theories and practices are reflected in an examination of composition-rhetoric’s pedagogical texts (Fulkerson, 2005). From the eight “approaches” of Donovan and McClelland (1980) to Tate, Rupiper, and Schick’s (2001) twelve pedagogies and Tate, Taggart, Schick, and

Hessler's (2014) seventeen pedagogies, it is evident that rhetorical theories and practices have evolved and expanded. Each of these guidebooks was designed to help novice freshman English instructors (Fulkerson, 2005). The gaps of 21 and 13 years between publications with accompanying increases in pedagogies from eight to 12 to 17 demonstrated the diversity and growth of the field. Table 2 provides a chapter outline for each of the three texts along with authors for each. Choosing a theory and pedagogy for instruction is becoming even more of a challenge as the field advances and becomes more factious.

Table 2

*A Map to Composition-Rhetoric: 1980-2014*

<i>Eight Approaches to Reading Composition</i> (Donovan & McClelland, 1980)	<i>A Guide to Pedagogy</i> (Tate, Rupiper, & Schick, 2001)	<i>A Guide to Pedagogy</i> (Tate, Taggart, Schick, & Hessler, 2014)
1. Writing as process by D. M. Murray	1. Process pedagogy by L. Tobin	1. Basic writing by D. Mutnick & S. Lamos
2. The prose models approach by P. A. Eschholz	2. Expressive pedagogy by C. Burnham	2. Collaborative writing by K. Kennedy & R. M. Howard
3. The experiential approach by S. Judy	3. Rhetorical pedagogy by W. Covino	3. Community-engaged by L. Julier, K. Livingston, & E. Goldblatt
4. The rhetorical approach by J. M. Lauer	4. Collaborative pedagogy by R. M. Howard	4. Critical by A. George
5. The epistemic approach by K. Dowst	5. Cultural studies and composition by D. George & J. Trimbur	5. Cultural studies by D. George, T. Lockridge, & J. Trimbur
6. Basic writing by H. S. Wiener	6. Critical pedagogy by A. George	6. Expressive by C. Burnham & R. Powell
7. The writing conference by T. A. Carnicelli	7. Feminist pedagogy by S. Jarratt	7. Feminist by L. Micciche
8. Writing in the total curriculum by R. H. Weiss	8. Community-service pedagogy by L. Julier	8. Genre by A. J. Devitt
	9. The pedagogy of writing across the curriculum by S. McLeod	9. Literature and composition by C. Farris
	10. Writing center pedagogy by E. Hobson	10. New media by C. G. Brooke
	11. Basic writing pedagogy by D. Mutnick	11. Online and hybrid by B. L. Hewett
	12. Technology and the teaching of writing by C. Moran	12. Process by C. M. Anson
		13. Researched writing by R. M. Howard & S. Jamieson
		14. Rhetoric and argumentation by D. Fleming
		15. Second language writing by P. K. Matsuda & M. J. Hammill
		16. Writing in the disciplines and across the curriculum by C. Thaiss & S. McLeod
		17. Writing center by N. Lerner

The paradigm shift to a process theory of writing was evident in Donovan and McClelland's (1980) text as the selections (especially two to five) were proponents of process theories and approaches to writing. The more noticeable difference occurred in sections five through eight, ten, and twelve of the first edition of *A Guide to Pedagogy* (2001). These eight chapters demonstrated 21<sup>st</sup> century interests such as a burgeoning technology theory and an introduction to cultural theories. The 2014 edition continued to add more cultural diversity and technology interests. Additionally, the techniques of the contributors changed, illustrating the growing professionalization of the field of composition-rhetoric, as chapters began to be co-authored (0% co-authored in 1980, 8% in 2001, and 47% in 2014), and the content changed from personal experiences with students to heavily cited and researched surveys (Fulkerson, 2005). The number of interactions among theories and pedagogies is vast and often confusing, which may result in misapplied classroom practices (Fulkerson, 1979; 2005). Below, is a discussion of a few popular theories followed in classrooms today.

### **Expressionism**

The social and intellectual context of the 1970s and 1980s began to reject the text production methods of classical argumentation on both historical and social grounds (Villanueva et al., 2006). Practitioners and rhetoricians began to see classical rhetoric as another form of current-traditional rhetoric because of its focus on product over process; the finished essay over the creative, cognitive, and critical activities it involves; and its lack of emphasis on the depth of thinking involved in composition (Crowley, 1990; Flower & Hayes, 1981). Although expressivist thought began in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was prevalent after World War I, it became a driving force of

composition in America from immediately before the Vietnam War through the Reagan administration (Berlin, 1988; Fulkerson, 1979). The advent of expressivist rhetoric “democratized” (Berlin, 1988, p. 484) writing, making it a form of art of which everyone is capable.

Expressionism removes the force of the form and places the writer at the center of composition. This theory places highest value on the composer; develops its pedagogy by valuing the writer’s imagination and psychological, spiritual, and social development above all other matters; and examines how a writer’s development influences individual and social behavior (Burnham, 2001; Burnham & Powell, 2014). For expressivists, writing should have a “credible, honest, and personal voice” (Fulkerson, 1979, p. 345), hence the title of Stewart’s well-known expressivist text, *The Authentic Voice*. The names most commonly associated with this movement are Dixon, Macrorie, Moffett, and Kelly (Fulkerson, 1979).

The epistemological foundations for expressionism lie in the role of power in writing and of the writer. This theory has roots in the psychological argument that all people are inherently good but are altered by interactions with society and institutions. From the perspective of the expressivist, societal power always lies within the individual, and the composition instructor’s role is to give students control of language so they will become less helpless (Berlin, 1988; Elbow, 1981). This interplay of the individual and the world produces power when one realizes his or her voice (Elbow, 1981; Murray, 1969). The underlying belief of expressionism is that if writers can avoid the “effects of a repressive social order, their privately determined truths will correspond to the privately determined truths of all others” (Berlin, 1988, p. 486). The force it opposes—

capitalism—often uses expressivist thought. The ideology of expressivists can, in fact, reinforce capitalist values including individualism, the value of risk-taking, personal initiative, and the right to disagree with authority (Berlin, 1988).

**Pedagogical implications.** As with any theory, there is no one way to ground teaching practices in expressive theory. Fulkerson (2005) noted that some expressive teachers strive to help students become more self-aware, mature, and reflective while others use writing as therapy or as an outlet for self-expression. Writing topics appear in these classrooms as student- or teacher-chosen topics or as the personal essay. Fulkerson also noted expressive teachers range from those who are entirely non-directive and feel that no writing should be evaluated to those who are more directive, designing curriculum that supports self-discovery.

Since expressivists value personal writing, journaling is usually an essential part of the class (Fulkerson, 1979), but teachers also rely on free-writing, reflective compositions, and collaborative efforts (Burnham & Powell, 2014) to “foster a writer’s aesthetic, cognitive, and moral development. Expressivist pedagogy encourages, even insists upon, a sense of writer presence even in research-based writing” (Burnham, 2001, p. 19). More modern expressivists see their writing instruction as a chance to raise the writerly conscious (Fulkerson, 2005). In these courses, features of argumentation such as a clear thesis and support are often shelved.

The expressivist focus on the writer’s psyche produces a completely different set of evaluative processes than other theories that may, for example, focus on the writer’s ability to change an audience’s opinion (Fulkerson, 1979). A writerly focus necessitates an emphasis on voice or *ethos*, and this element should be the focus of evaluation

(Burnham, 2001). The goal of expressivist writing, instruction, and evaluation is always on the aesthetic, cognitive, and moral development of the writer, not to have a successful text, not to improve communication skills, and not to develop critical thinking skills (Burnham, 2001; Burnham & Powell, 2014; Fulkerson, 2005).

### **Cognitivism and Process Writing**

Johnson (2008) noted that the idea of composition as a process did not become common until the 1970s, transforming classrooms and teaching communities because the process allowed for endless research questions, professionalizing writing teachers as academics separate from those who focused on literature. Moreover, the view of writing as a non-linear, continuous, and recursive process added to and complicated the idea of composition since the process allowed a writer's meanings to change and grow (Foster, 1989). It also led to a questioning of composition's theoretical underpinnings (Faigley, 1986) and its role in classrooms.

Many changes happened in the time period surrounding the Vietnam War. However, "no development [was] more influential than the emphasis on writing as a process" (Faigley, 1986, p. 527), and the cognitive theory of writing is the strongest proponent of that view (Berlin, 1988). Most process teaching used in classrooms today originated with the cognitive research of Flower and Hayes; the foundational work of Emig, Sommers, and Perl; and the "rhetorical revival" led by Corbett (Fulkerson, 2005). Additionally, Young and Hairston's work in demonstrating the paradigm shift of cognitive theory and its associated view of writing as a process improved composition's professional and disciplinary status (Faigley, 1986).

While other theories also refer to writing as a process, they propose different processes and support different outcomes. For cognitive rhetoric, the purpose of writing is to create a new object that belongs to the writer but has exchange value (Berlin, 1988)—a theory that corresponds well with capitalist societies. Berlin (1988) described cognitive rhetorical theory as one where the “real is rational” (p. 123) and where important features of writing can be “analyzed in discreet units and expressed in linear [and] hierarchical terms” (p. 123) though those terms may be both recursive and seemingly capricious. For cognitivists, the mind is rational and adapts to achieve goals. As such, cognitive theory ignores ideology and centers itself on a more scientific examination of the act of composing. Berlin (1988) argued the ideology behind cognitivism is reflected in this theory’s promotion of writing as a commodity and teachers’ preparation of students for corporate capitalism. Other theorists also began to examine the inherent politics in writing instruction as rhetorical theory and process pedagogy filled the universities (Durst, 2006).

**Pedagogical implications.** Cognitivists view writing as a recursive, problem-solving process and as a corresponding set of discrete, stratified thinking processes (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Heilker, 1996). Irmischer’s (1979) description of cognitive theory as an acceptance of writing as an “investigation[,]” . . . “a way of learning about anything and everything[,]” . . . “a process of growing and maturing[,]” . . . “[and] a way of promoting the higher intellectual development of the individual” (pp. 241-242) clarified how the theory appears in pedagogy. Writing classrooms are centered on investigation and in following a cognitive search for an effective composing process. There is no universal view of how process writing should look in a classroom— teachers

may use a portfolio approach; they may respond to multiple drafts, require students to share drafts with peers, and encourage revision; or they may divide time among the processes differently, spending more time with research, for example (Fulkerson, 2005).

Based on some early work of Graves and Murray, the writing workshop was developed as part of the cognitive approach to writing. Popularized by Calkins (1983, 1986), the writing workshop is based on sets of materials she created following cognitive rhetorical theory's idea of writing aiding in and representing cognitive growth. She based her program on a two-year case study of one writer's development across time, utilizing observations, field notes, interview transcriptions (student and student's teachers), student drafts, and videotapes of the student writing and conferencing (Calkins, 1983, 1986). Pritchard and Honeycutt (2006) mentioned, "Considering how limited Calkin's research was—just one child's processes—it has had enormous impact on how the writing process is implemented in the elementary grades" (p. 281). Yet, the writing workshop model is now often viewed as a pillar of writing instruction across all grade levels (Juzwik, 2010).

Rhetoricians have since defined different forms of process writing instruction. One type of instruction—the one Calkins used to form her writing workshop—is based on what is called the "natural process" (Juzwik, 2010, p. 263). It was found to be not as effective as the "environmental mode," which relies more on "structured, carefully scaffolded instruction and on student-to-student collaborative problem solving and exploration of writing topics, skills, and genres" (Juzwik, 2010, p. 263). Kent (1999) resolved the disparities by stating process implies a set of procedures writers should follow that are both regular and follow a sequence, but, he continued, since writing is "hermeneutic guesswork" (p. 3), the process and theory are often mistaken.

Fulkerson (2005) noted that process in classrooms and textbooks did and still does reduce to formulaic responses and sequences. Thus, composing can be seen as similar to math in its process and, even worse, as an “automatic, mindless, and biomechanical process” (Heilker, 1996, p. 41). To counter these disparaging descriptors, later cognitivists emphasized writing as a social process (Heilker, 1996). These instructors used writing as an activity to help students engage with and find themselves in a socially constructed system of interactions, purposes, ideas, cultural norms, and text forms (Cooper, 1986).

### **Social-Epistemic and Social Constructivism**

Many rhetoricians began to see the expressivist view of the writer as an isolated individual struggling with personal meaning as a bit too romantic and rejected the more expressivist processes of writing (Fulkerson, 2005). They also realized that to ask about literacy at all is to ask rhetorical questions as well as sociolinguistic and historical ones (Villanueva et al., 2006). Social-epistemic rhetoric sees the writer as the creation of historical and contextual moments; therefore, the self (writer) and reality (truth) exist in a relationship resulting from interactions among the self, the society in which the writer finds himself, and the conditions of his existence (Berlin, 1988). This theory views knowledge and the communication of knowledge as areas of ideological conflict: since there is no greater, transcendent truth, all arguments arise from ideology (Berlin, 1988).

While language had been seen in its social context since Saussure’s work in structuralism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, rhetoricians began to value the social aspects of composition-rhetoric as well (Berthoff, 1991). A brief explanation of Saussure’s theories helps clarify social-epistemic theory.

Saussure (2007) is considered by many to be one of the founders of 20<sup>th</sup> century linguistics (Chapman & Routledge, 2005; Thomas, 2011; Wintle, 2002; Wood & Lodge, 2008) and was one of the two founders of semiotics (Nöth, 1990). His linguistic work had a profound effect on composition-rhetoric beginning with his discussion of the nature of the linguistic sign. His central notion was that language should be analyzed as a formal system comprised of differing elements—his proposal of the linguistic sign and signifier. Saussure (2007) stated, “Every means of expression used in society is based, in principle, on collective behavior or—what amounts to the same thing—on convention” (p. 843). For example, a tree is not a *tree* because it has the essence of anything tree-like; it is a tree because a specific society agreed to call it such. By extension, the meaning that comes with any sentence, paragraph, or full text does not form from the words alone but also from the social contexts in which the language is used (Dryer, 2016). For example, not only do the four words in the statement “We need to huddle” work together to create meaning, but social context can make the statement mean one thing outside in the winter and another on the football field. Not only does Saussure’s work convey that the meaning of words relies on their relation to other words but also that meaning is determined by social context (Dryer, 2016), which is at the heart of the social-epistemic theory of composition-rhetoric.

For social rhetoric theorists, writing is never anything but a social interaction among people (regardless of time or space) to respond to the needs of an audience (Roozer, 2016). More importantly, because they view the writer, the discourse, and the community as verbal constructs, this theory is founded on language (Berlin, 1988). Since the social aspect of writing entails a counterpart to the writer, the audience plays an

integral role in social theories of rhetoric, and the key to successful discourse changes from persuasion—with its stress on form and design—to identification, with a focus on audience (Burke, 1969). The idea of affecting an audience is implicit in many definitions of rhetoric (Corbett & Connors, 1999) such as Nichols's (1963) "a means of so ordering discourse as to produce an effect on the listener or reader" (p. 7-8); Burke's (1969) "the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (p. 43); Bryant's (1953) "adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas" (p. 413); and Richards's (1965) "the study of verbal understanding and misunderstanding" (p. 3). Currently, the College Board (2019b) echoes this emphasis on audience and the social aspect of composition with its explanation for the role of texts in the AP English Language and Composition classroom: "Texts [should] represent a clear rhetorical situation . . . [and] speak to one another through a variety of genres" (p. 85).

**Pedagogical implications.** This social turn in theory and ideology prompted an acknowledgement of the social, political, and economic forces that shape writers (Berlin, 1988; Corbett & Connors, 1999). Berlin (1988) emphasized this theory produces classroom practices that address ideological subjects such as race, class, and civil rights. He believed the classroom is a place to address the ideological battles present in society and that instruction and activities should critique economic, political, and social structures. The goal of writing, then, becomes an effort to move an audience, not simply to affect belief (Fleming, 2014). Since moving an audience inherently involves emotions, *pathos* becomes an important element of discourse with this theory. Similarly, structure of any kind becomes a means of achieving identification with an audience because the way writers structure and adjust discourse is seen as a way to fit text to the needs of an

audience (Corbett & Connors, 1999). Writing prompts suddenly become audience- and context-specific. Bryant (1953) asserted that the goal of writing should be publication and that this goal should be reflected in the writing classroom through “the publicizing, the humanizing, the animating of [ideas and information] for a realized and usually specific audience” (p. 19).

Compositionists and composition instructors using these social theories are acutely aware that knowledge is a socially constructed, linguistic product, and the linking of these two entities produces instruction that uses language to mediate reproduction and disruption of dominant ideologies (Berlin, 1988; George, 2014). Classrooms become sources of interaction among the individual, the social, and the material, questioning and challenging ideology to reveal the economic, political, and social consequences for individuals (Berlin, 1988). Because of the extensive number of arguments available for students, composition instruction becomes, in part, a “matter of developing an understanding of what is appropriate, why, when, and to and for whom, to make a contribution to those arguments in effective and compelling ways” (Newell et al., 2011, p. 298).

In essence, if composition instructors can help students realize their audience(s) and purpose(s), students will be more likely to understand what makes a text effective and what makes it ineffective (Roozer, 2016). Overall, this social turn in theory and pedagogy led to awareness of the political, social, and cultural forces not only in writing but also in the classroom and the ways ideology affects students and their writing.

## Critical Theory and Cultural Studies

The differences reflected in rhetorical theory and pedagogy near the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have no parallel in earlier scholarship and are generally classified under the headings of critical or cultural studies, reflecting the effects of postmodernism, feminism, and other cultural studies (Fulkerson, 2005). George (2014) described critical theory and pedagogy as “analyses of the unequal power relations that produce and are produced by cultural practices and institutions. . . . [They aim] to help students develop the tools that will enable them to challenge this inequality” (p. 73). While George acknowledged that the goal of instruction is to help students become better writers, there is also an underlying belief that writers and readers should examine authority and authorship and how individuals can effectively silence, interrupt, and create voices of power. Those who adhere to the core beliefs of critical and cultural theories anticipate societies devoted to and participating in freedom and social justice.

Many critical and cultural rhetoricians look to Dewey’s (2018) *Democracy and Education* (originally published in 1916) as the start of this student-centered learning theory (George, 2014). Frequently dismissed as too progressive and liberal, critical teachers such as Ronald and Roskelly implemented his theories as critical pedagogy. The best known critical and cultural theorists, however, are Freire and the American translator of Freirian pedagogy, Shor. These men helped teachers who had adopted the critical and cultural theory transform their beliefs to pedagogy (George, 2014).

A Brazilian educator, Freire worked among the illiterate poor and developed an educational philosophy that would usher in not only voting rights for those who could not pass Brazil’s literacy test but also the liberation theology movement of the 1970s

(Bethell, 2000; Martínez-Fritscher, Musacchio, & Viarengo, 2010). Freire's (2018) text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (originally published in 1970) presented his criticism of the "banking" model of education, which sees students as "receptacles" awaiting knowledge from the teacher who holds the official information so education becomes more "an act of depositing" (p. 58). He was a proponent of the idea that writing should help the oppressed gain a sense of humanity. To do so, he stated, the student and teacher must realize their own roles in the political vortex. In his text, Freire introduced several terms and ideas that form the foundation of today's critical and cultural theories and pedagogies (George, 2014).

Judging from the scholarship published in the last 20 years, critical and cultural studies have been at the forefront of changes in composition studies. The number of bibliographic entries related to these theories in the Tate, Taggart, Schick, and Hessler (2014) text are voluminous. Trimbur and George (2001) alone cited 111 sources, saying, "Cultural studies has insinuated itself into the mainstream of composition" (p. 71). These approaches to composition concentrate on cultural, political, and societal injustices inflicted on subordinate societal groups and on the power composition wields if writers read, resist, and compose the subordination (Fulkerson, 2005). Dominant theorists include Berlin, Shor, and Giroux.

**Pedagogical implications.** Whereas critical pedagogy is crucial and influential, it is difficult to implement in the classroom (Taggart et al., 2014). The course aim is not to improve writing, but to liberate students from dominant discourse (Fulkerson, 2005). Students and teachers have to be hyper-aware of the biases and politics they bring into the classroom and the role they play in the oppressor-oppressed model (Freire, 2018;

Kincheloe, 2008). Still, certain textual forms play a vital part in the classroom. If teachers ask students for an argument, those texts should include claims about oppression, race, gender, the American Dream, and so on, but the arguments should be supported by a variety of texts that also deal with social and cultural factors (Fulkerson, 2005). Classroom dialogues should be drawn from students' experiences and often revolve around themes such as marriage, immigration, oppression, and work (George, 2014).

Freire (2018) visualized this classroom as one that supports an approach based on problem-solving and dialogue to develop students' conscious ability to recognize, analyze, and disturb the cultural, political, and economic forces that affect them on a daily basis. Shor (2016a) implemented this approach in his classroom by eliminating textbooks and using materials from the students' everyday lives. He felt it was valuable to learn his students' culture, know their language, and view the world as they did. The material he found was what he used for his syllabi.

Shor (2016b) began the process of composition by posing a relevant problem—based on the language, culture, and interests of his students—instead of delivering a lecture. As students progressed in the dialogue, he entered and posed questions to keep the conversation in motion and provide background. For example, Shor began bringing in newspapers that his students read (and some they did not); he asked them if they had noticed that every newspaper had a business section but not a labor section. The project that evolved from this discussion required students to design and write a labor news section that did not yet exist.

The next step was to pose two problems: one inside and one outside the students' experiences. The first problem to address was what happens to young people who graduate from college and try to convert their achievement into economic goals. In the process, students learned to read charts, tables, and other visual sources; interpret and analyze data; and discover the sometimes hidden narratives in visual and written texts. Students created written pieces demonstrating their interpretations, collaborated with their peers, and discussed their findings. Finally, Shor (2016b) posed a problem by giving students sources outside their experiences like an essay by Warren Buffett who announced that class warfare was occurring and his class was winning. Students evaluated Buffett's argument, Shor provided them with other sources, and finally expanded the discussion to the idea of gentrification as class warfare.

The prevalence of cultural and critical studies in the classroom is unknown. The number of texts in composition journals has suggested that it is widespread; however, a definitive answer would require survey data that does not yet exist (Fulkerson, 2005). Ultimately, the theory and pedagogy adopted by an instructor often depends on his or her experiences as a writer, and what 21<sup>st</sup> century students need may not be what their standardized assessments require. Regardless, these are the foundational theories that form every composition teacher's pedagogical practices.

### **Current Trends**

Corbett and Connors published *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* in 1965, 1971, 1990, and 1999 as guides for both instructors and students. In their most recent edition, they claimed that many modern students (and instructors) have heard of the term *rhetoric* yet may not clearly understand its meaning because it has acquired so

many definitions. Nonetheless, they argued there is evidence the principles and practices of classical rhetoric operate in a 21<sup>st</sup> century society even though the style of writing most appreciated has changed. No longer is the ornate prose of the Renaissance or the Ciceronian prose of the 19<sup>th</sup> century most valued, rather it is the plain yet elegant prose that appears in *The New Yorker* or *Harper's Magazine* or the simple yet stylish prose of writers such as Thurber, Didion, Orwell, and Atwood that prevails today.

Twenty-first century rhetoricians have defined rhetoric with a focus on the role language plays in moving audiences, constructing reality, and effecting social change. Their definitions, however, express a variety of roles rhetoric plays in society. Today's rhetoricians focus on the power of rhetoric to form reality (Petraglia, 2000; Rickert, 2013), to act as a force in communication (Bazerman, 2013; Hauser, 2002; Kuypers, 2014; Leith, 2012; Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012), to affect an audience (Hauser, 2002; Kuypers, 2014), and to exist in a social and cultural context (Bazerman, 2013; Rickert, 2013). Series editor for the annual *The Best American Essays*, Atwan (2016), who has a unique perspective on rhetoric today, argued that rhetoric should be concerned with the "struggle with language going on 'inside' the essay" or the audience will miss the "literary and intellectual exhilaration" (p. xi) of the text. Atwan's discussion implied a "passion for free and open discussion" (p. xii) and an open acceptance of self-opposition, which allows for a degree of tolerance and respect difficult to achieve in climates of political and cultural discord.

Rhetoric has become an amalgamation of the definitions, roles, and nuances of rhetoric through the centuries. Though these variations in rhetoric can open the door to a wide world of possibility, they also create a vast amount of information and introduce

variations and gradations that can be confusing to both instructors and students. The increase in rhetorical definitions reflects not only an increase in rhetoricians but also an increase in the number of composition and rhetoric programs across the country. With more than 70 graduate programs in rhetoric and composition in the United States (Rhetoric Society of America, 2018), it is increasingly likely that writing program administrators will be either a graduate of a rhetoric and composition program or at least familiar with the scholarship available, which means there is an increasing chance that First Year Composition will be grounded in the theories that influence pedagogy (Hansen, 2010).

### **Fundamental Concepts**

Ultimately, the goal of rhetoric remains persuasion, or moving others' will and inciting them to act, and argumentation is its preferred tool. Arguments help writers persuade audiences by connecting the unknown to something audiences know well; it helps an audience rationalize and identify the unknown (Bilsky et al., 1999). While rhetoric emphasizes the rationality of humans, it also sees individuals as situated and assimilated in a context (Fleming, 2014). Writers have to bridge the gap created by context between the known and the unknown. Though it cannot give advice to writers, rhetoric can provide guidelines and tools to help writers adapt texts strategically for different situations (Corbett & Connors, 1999).

Although Fleming (2014) argued that the political and cultural events since 9/11 have limited the influence of rhetoric, Fulkerson (2005) indicated that the number of argument-based textbooks has demonstrated the growth of argument as an instructional method. In fact, Fleming (2014) admitted his instructional focus changed from canonical

writers to “ordinary writers” (p. 248) as he began to focus on strategies for text production instead of analysis, and his classroom shifted from creative writing to argument. Corbett and Connors (1999) argued that *strategies*, with its root in the Greek word *army* (Strategy, 2016), is a good word to use when discussing rhetoric because it implies the choices writers have available to effect a desired end. As a general adopts the resources and tactics available to him to defeat his enemy, writers should also search for the best available argument, structure, and style to influence an audience. There are, though, no scientific, mathematical, or magic formulas for success in the field of composition-rhetoric. Instead, writers have to find and weigh the value of disparate elements and create an original text with a singular purpose and intended effect (Kuypers, 2014).

Composition instructors are urged to focus on successful writing as an art that ensures readers understand the writer’s intent (College Board, 2019b; Larson, 1976). This focus on the interplay between writer and audience replaced instruction that concentrated on grammar and discourse methods and has persisted into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Corbett & Connors, 1999; Fulkerson, 2005). Foundational concepts such as proofs, claims, evidence or warrants, accurate assumptions, and explicitly defended premises are still at the heart of effective argument and are necessary for academic success (Newell et al., 2011). The nuances that divide current rhetorical theories do not separate the importance of social context from rhetoric.

### **Postprocess**

The past few years have introduced a new outlook on composition-rhetoric often referred to as post-process. Post-process theorists such as Kent (1999) and Lynch (2013)

asserted that there is no codifiable process for writing, and good writing cannot be captured in a generalizable theory. These theorists believe that writing is public, interpretive, and situated (Kent, 1999). In short, no process can encapsulate what writers do in the changing cultural and social moments in which they write (Lynch, 2013). For these rhetoricians, “there is no capital K knowledge or capital T theory that can be perceived, described, and repeated regardless of circumstance” (Lynch, 2013, p. 33). Ultimately, writing is a communicative act occurring between individuals at specific, quickly changing times and places in history, so no single process can encapsulate what writers do during these moments (Kent, 1999).

Inherent with a lack of a generalized process, writers have to make compositional and rhetorical decisions on an individualized, situational basis (Lynch, 2013). Dobrin (2005) described post-process as a destruction of the pedagogy of composition; however, Corbett and Connors (1999) argued that some form of rhetoric will always exist in the classroom. All of these rhetorical theories and composition discussions demonstrate the field’s move from a “cognitive examination of a process to a more social, ethnographic, and political examination of context” (Durst, 2006).

### **Composition-Rhetoric Research**

Writing research has had a long history in America and across the globe as ideas about what constitutes quality writing accompanied the history of rhetoric, even if writing research in secondary schools has seldom been the focus (Hillocks, 2006; Newell et al., 2014; Olinghouse et al., 2010; Russell, 2006). Research for secondary writing instruction is vital for many stakeholders as is understanding the identity work inherent in the process of writing instruction (Roozer, 2016). Yet, the significance and benefits of

argumentative reading and writing in schools has traditionally been an unexamined assumption of literacy instruction (Newell et al., 2011). Some may question whether the delivery of writing instruction matters.

Establishing composition as a recognized field within the academy has involved, among other debates, a furious defense of teachers as legitimate practitioners as opposed to scholarly researchers or those whose interest and days involve theoretical or philosophical concerns (Jarrett, 1991). The difficulty of composition research lies in its organic nature: it is a “situated, systematic, and reflective investigation of literate activity with the goal of deepening our understanding of why, how, when, where, and what writers write” (Sheridan & Nickoson, 2012, p. 1). The number of elements involved in the contextual situation of writing combined with the vast number of goals and writing’s recursive nature make writing research a difficult task.

Writing research can focus on the reception, publication, and circulation of texts (without examining the production of writing), but these research studies generally fall under the category of literacy and reading—by far the dominant form of research on writing (Russell, 2006). Earlier writing research attempted to implement quantitative methods, and though these have not disappeared altogether, most current writing research consists of qualitative methodologies that provide more specific details for practitioners (Hillocks, 2006). The importance of case studies, ethnographies, and other interpretive approaches in composition-rhetoric exemplifies the methodological gap between the discipline and other educational fields such as educational psychology, which often value more experimental studies (Juzwik, 2010). Most writing researchers are not solely academics but are teachers themselves, who approach learning as a situated,

contextualized, and individualized molding of behavior and self (Fishman, 2012). Yet the differences between the scholars—writing researchers and theorists—and the teachers of composition create multiple layers of research and conflicts that inhibit any progress toward solving the common problem of student writing difficulties (Juzwik, 2010).

### **Progress**

With the professionalization of composition in the 1960s and 1970s came new research endeavors. During these decades, composition was having difficulty establishing itself as a credible source of study in the academy (Smagorinsky, 2006). In the beginning of composition studies—between 1963 and 1983—most research concentrated on syntax, the changes in students’ writing across time, student writing in relation to quality writing, and the effects of instructional practices such as imitation activities on students’ syntax (Hillocks, 2006). Additionally, the 1980s demonstrated increasing attention to college writing while 1990s research expanded to include a diversity of writers (Fishman, 2012).

In the early days of writing research, Graves (1979) noted teachers were ignoring published research largely because they found it tedious and tiresome. He supported this statement by arguing that experimental research was difficult to read and included few descriptions to help teachers see their classrooms and students in the data. Smagorinsky (2006) stated useful writing research included studies that were becoming more accessible in the form of case studies, providing teachers with more engaging material and broadening the meaning of valuable writing research. Near the end of the 1970s, a few researchers were looking at other disciplines for different theories and methods for writing research. Emig’s (1971) *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*

introduced writing instructors and researchers to the potential of case studies as a way to understand the writing process. Additionally, Atwell's (1986) *In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents* demonstrated that a reflection on one's own experiences could be beneficial to instructors, improve teachers' pedagogies, and be a bestseller (Smagorinsky, 2006). However, a strong bias toward quantitative methods persisted until the early 1990s.

The acceptance and expansion of qualitative methods in writing research accompanied researchers' perceptions of writing as a socially situated act (Hillocks, 2006). Unfortunately, Hillocks (2006) noted, the quantity of research in writing seemed to reach a peak in the early 1980s. He judged this zenith in research based on the number of writing studies published in *Research in the Teaching of English*. In 1984, 81% of the articles published in this journal concerned writing; in 1999, 15% of them did. Nevertheless, research into writing continued. Atwell's book did, fortunately, become a foundational text for teachers practicing the writing workshop (Juzwik, 2010), ushering in a greater acceptance of qualitative methods. Her text's claims about what works in a writing classroom were based on research conducted in her classroom with her rural middle school students, and she reported her findings in interesting narratives (Atwell, 1986). Her results were neither replicable nor data-driven, yet teachers bought her book, read it, and implemented many of her practices (Haswell, 2005).

Today many forms of qualitative research help teachers understand the practices that are most effective in their classrooms. Ethnographic research is seen as a cultural artifact that provides proof about the nature of writing at a particular moment so earns credibility as a viable research methodology (Fulkerson, 2005). Cohort studies, case

studies and various posts (poststructuralism, postmodernism, postprocess, feminism, queer theory, multiculturalism, and so on) have also moved to the forefront of research (Fishman, 2012). As cultural studies gained popularity in rhetorical theory, issues of equity, culture, gender, and power along with the social nature of text surfaced as focal points for writing research (Smagorinsky, 2006). Modern research, as Fishman (2012) indicated, tends to reflect researchers' beliefs in writing as "not only product and process but also performance or activity mediated by a complex of interrelated material and rhetorical circumstance" (p. 175).

Twenty-first century writing changes as quickly as technology, and much of the recent research becomes outdated quickly (Fishman, 2012). The tendency for writing research to appear anachronistic highlights the need for writing instructors to longitudinally study research for a better historical orientation. Fishman (2012) explained that the methodical documentation of research can create records of the past (both immediate and distant), and although practitioners' concerns are with the present and future, the interpretation of the past constructs histories to situate the discipline in context. These tendencies to rely on longitudinal and qualitative studies have led to a rejection of quantitative methodologies, especially those attempting to reach a scientific truth about writing instruction (Fulkerson, 2005). For writing instructors, truth is always rhetorical, constructed from language, contextual, and ever-changing. *Research in the Teaching of English*—historically a largely quantitative journal—now publishes chiefly ethnographic studies. Research interests have shifted as well. Studies of syntactic features of student writing are a thing of the past as are quasi-experimental studies and studies of cognition (Hillocks, 2006). In their place, studies now examine "response to

student writing, teacher-student writing conferences, peer group conferences, the idea of class discussion, how teachers acquire knowledge of writing, the education of writing teachers, [and] the concept of composing across disciplines” (Hillocks, 2006, p. 48).

### **AP English Language and Composition**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century brought a vast population increase with industry, technology, and employment escalation, so the need for a more literate citizenry grew as well (Jamison, 2015). In the last 30 years, American education stakeholders have recognized the need for improving student writing achievement, which had remained relatively static (Troia et al., 2010), despite the increased need for writing in a global economy and culture. The desire for students to be college-ready—meaning a student “can enroll and succeed in a credit-bearing course at a post-secondary institution without remediation or remedial support” (Chambers & McSwain, 2013, p.2)—has rapidly increased as well. The AP program has quickly and exponentially spread throughout America to meet the desires of education stakeholders and has quickly become the principal and most widely recognized college-level program in America’s high schools (Casement, 2003; Hansen et al., 2006).

#### **Course Overview**

The AP Program currently offers two courses in English. Both of these courses are designed to give students the opportunity to participate in typical college freshman English coursework (College Board, 2019b). The AP English Literature and Composition course focuses on analysis of imaginative literature and how writers use the tools of writing to create meaning and pleasure for readers (College Board, 2019c) while the AP English Language and Composition course centers on rhetorical analysis of nonfiction texts and the development of cohesive, well-reasoned, and logical analytic and

argumentative writing (College Board, 2019b). The two AP English courses currently offered were similar when the AP English Language and Composition course appeared in 1980. Since 2002, however, they have been quite different (Dennis, 2014; Hansen, 2010; Puhr, 2010).

In 2002, representatives from the AP English Test Development Committee and experienced AP English teachers met with writing program administrators at the WPA Conference to discuss what happens in college composition classes (Dennis, 2014; Puhr, 2010). They found that the description of the AP English Literature and Composition course more closely matched First Year Composition as it was taught in the 1950s when AP began (Hansen, 2010) than contemporary college composition classes. Significant changes were made to the AP English Language and Composition exam, and therefore to the course that prepares students for it, after this meeting. The changes helped make AP English Language and Composition primarily a rhetoric course focused on nonfiction texts and composition (Dennis, 2014; Puhr, 2010). They also created the “holy trinity” (Puhr, 2010, p. 74) for AP English Language and Composition teachers: argument, analysis, and synthesis. Unfortunately, Hansen (2010) noted, “[AP English Literature and Composition] is still thought by many—including students, parents, and high school and college administrators—to be similar to First Year Composition, despite the divergence of its aim and content” (p. 20). Again, the two courses are vastly different; in fact, two different committees have developed the exams since 2005 (Hansen, 2010).

**Curriculum.** Though the AP English Language and Composition curriculum has never been standardized (Hansen, 2010), the College Board does offer online materials, Summer Institutes, suggested skills, and shorter workshops during the school year to help

teachers plan their curriculum. It began auditing the curricula of all AP courses in 2007 by requiring schools offering AP courses (or any course the school referred to as “Advanced Placement”) to submit a syllabus for vetting and determination of its similarity to equivalent college courses (Hansen, 2010).

**Enrollment.** As far as student enrollment is concerned, the College Board (2002) does not have a requirement beyond their Equity Policy Statement:

All students who are willing to accept the challenge of a rigorous academic curriculum should be considered for admission to AP courses. . . . Schools should make every effort to ensure that their AP classes reflect the diversity of their student population. (p. 2)

Each high school currently determines its own enrollment policies with many schools screening students before allowing them to enter the course (Jones, 2010). Current requirements of various schools include teacher or committee recommendations, strong student transcripts or standardized test scores, an admissions test, or early placement on an AP track (Jones, 2010). Many schools also rely on parental requests.

Faculty and experienced AP teachers design AP course descriptions and exams to better reflect and assess the college-level material and requirements for the courses’ respective subjects (College Board, 2014b). This group is referred to as the AP Development Committee, and they “define the scope and expectations of the course, articulating what students should know and be able to do upon completion of the AP course” (College Board, 2014b, p. 6). This committee also ensures that the exams and courses have clear connections to one another.

## Course Description

The College Board supports the idea of schools implementing programs that will help students develop the skills and gain the knowledge outlined in course descriptions (College Board, 2019b, 2019c). The two AP English courses, of course, have different content and goals: The AP English Literature and Composition course focuses on “reading, analyzing, and writing about imaginative literature (fiction, poetry, drama) from various periods” (College Board, 2019c, p. 7) with the goal of encouraging students to “read, write, and discuss works critically and with energy and imagination” (Greenblatt, 2007). Conversely, the AP English Language and Composition course focuses on an examination of formal and informal non-fiction texts such as memos, letters, advertisements, political satires, scientific arguments, personal narratives, speeches, critiques, research reports, and so on (College Board, 2019b) with the general goal of creating writers who can compose mature arguments and analyses using appropriate diction and sentence variety (Greenblatt, 2007). The College Board (2014b, 2019b) designates more specific skills including:

- an awareness of the relationship and interactions among a writer’s purposes, readers’ expectations, and an author’s content as well as genre and language resources that contribute to meaning;
- a growing awareness of and ability in critical literacy;
- a facilitation of informed citizenship; and
- a deepened understanding of how language functions rhetorically to communicate a writer’s intentions and provoke reader responses.

In support of these goals—and because the course focuses on teaching students how writers structure argumentative texts and how students can enter the conversations among these texts—the AP English Language and Composition course should function much like a rhetoric and composition course emphasizing the reading and writing of argumentative and analytic texts instead of those representing more literary traditions (College Board, 2019b).

**Reading in AP English Language and Composition.** Selecting texts for the course can be a challenging task. The final goal for students in an AP English Language and Composition class is that they “develop the skills of rhetorical analysis and composition as they repeatedly practice analyzing others’ arguments” (College Board, 2019b, p. 11). Reading rigorous texts helps students develop critical reading and writing skills, encouraging them to move beyond simply summarizing a text and into analyzing how and why a text affects a reader. Though the College Board (2014b, 2019b) does not suggest specific texts, it does recommend texts have a clear rhetorical situation, represent a variety of genres, are appropriate for college courses, necessitate teacher guidance, and have at least a high school Lexile score.

The College Board does not provide teachers with a definitive amount of reading students should complete either. It does, however, provide a guiding set of questions to help teachers determine an appropriate amount of assigned reading. When choosing texts to use in classrooms, teachers should remember that good nonfiction helps students examine the complexities inherent in society; study the past to find meaning for themselves; access the lives of others; explore new frontiers; discover social and political problems; generate ideas about art, philosophy, religion, science, and history; and

experience vicarious journeys and adventures (Wrye, 2016). Additionally, the College Board (2019b) mentions several times that lengthy fiction texts are not the intention of the AP English Language and Composition course, though they can be used “if they were composed to accomplish a rhetorical purpose . . . or are excerpts that enact particular rhetorical functions within literary texts (p. 87).

**Curricular requirements.** The College Board (2019b) Course Description advises teachers who are designing their own curriculum. The College Board states that teachers will benefit if they think of and state the course outcomes in terms of activities and skills students will develop over time instead of as discrete types of knowledge. Additionally, teachers should think of and teach reading and writing as complex, social, contextually-based activities requiring students to disrupt learned templates, rules, and structures such as the five-paragraph essay because they restrict and limit writers. The College Board (2019b) recently updated the AP English Language and Composition objective statement to read:

An AP English Language and Composition course cultivates the reading and writing skills that students need for college success and for intellectually responsible civic engagement. The course guides students in becoming curious, critical, and responsive readers of diverse texts and becoming flexible, reflective writers of texts addressed to diverse audiences for diverse purposes. The reading and writing students do in the course should deepen and expand their understanding of how written language functions rhetorically: to communicate writers’ intentions and elicit readers’ responses in particular situations. (p. 11)

To help teachers accomplish these goals, they also added a set of skills divided into four categories: claims and evidence, rhetorical situation, style, and reasoning and organization. The skill list, however, is not a curriculum design, as the course description explicitly states, “This publication is not a curriculum. Teachers create their own curricula by selecting and sequencing the texts and tasks that will enable students to develop the knowledge and skills outlined in this document” (p. 11).

In an effort to ensure that AP English Language and Composition courses meet the expectations of the College Board, each teacher must submit a course syllabus to the College Board for audit by two college professors who verify the course is similar to First Year Composition (Puhr, 2007). Currently, the two AP English courses are audited using different criteria. For AP English Language and Composition, the syllabus should require students to draft and revise several pieces of their own writing; revise writings for different audiences and purposes; learn and utilize research skills, especially citation processes; and consider organization, tone, and voice in their own writing and that of others. The syllabus must also specifically and intentionally address three types of writing: analysis, synthesis, and argument.

As Puhr (2007) continued:

Mere approval of the syllabus does not guarantee that the course will actually deliver what the syllabus promises . . . but it does show that the teacher whose syllabus has been approved has at least become familiar with the criteria that constitutes a college-equivalent course. (p. 83)

If a syllabus does not meet the requirements of the College Board, it cannot be labeled “Advanced Placement,” but students can still take the exam and receive scores that could qualify them for exemption of college coursework (Boyd, 2010).

### **Connections Between First Year Composition and AP English Language and Composition**

An intrinsic component of AP English Language and Composition is that the curricular requirements and guidelines are the same as First Year Composition (Byrd et al., 2007; College Board, 2014b; Holifield-Scott, 2011). Holifield-Scott (2011) argued the only way to legitimize AP credit is to meet the standards of the college course, and the realization of this premise is contingent on both college instructors and high school teachers implementing appropriate curricula.

While First Year Composition courses vary, they do have commonalities that place them in the same genre (Hansen, 2010). When the Committee of Ten met in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, they outlined two primary objectives for teaching English: to help students understand the written thoughts of others while helping them express their own and to develop a taste for reading, giving students knowledge of good literature (National Education Association of the United States, 1894). There have been few studies to “gather systematic data that would allow statistically accurate generalizations about the nature of this brand” (Hansen, 2010, p. 9). Like any communications course, however, First Year Composition must rely on rhetoric (Coe, 2002).

In fact, each of the 11 reading skills the College Board (2019b) has designated for AP English Language and Composition has a writing skill counterpart. Additionally, AP English Language and Composition encourages teachers to help students construct

arguments by presenting counterarguments and refutations; outlining common goals to reach agreement; and relying on grounds, claim, and warrant as rhetorical methods—efforts aligning with First Year Composition (Puhr, 2010). To further represent a college composition course, AP English Language and Composition courses generally include efforts to consider the context from which texts emerge as well as the mediums used as delivery methods (Puhr, 2010).

In the generic sense, First Year Composition’s main objective is to have students write often, create justifiable positions, address specific audiences intentionally, use audience-appropriate evidence, organize writing effectively, incorporate and cite evidence, and follow conventions of style and grammar. In 2000, the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) approved a statement titled “WPA Outcomes Statement for First Year Composition” (most recently updated in 2014) that included a list of minimal standards for First Year Composition. This document—approved by the people who direct writing programs—does not promote a particular composition theory (Fulkerson, 2005), but does designate four areas in which students should have specific competencies by the end of First Year Composition (Hansen, 2010). These areas include: “rhetorical knowledge[;] . . . critical thinking, reading, and writing[;] . . . processes[;] . . . and knowledge of conventions” (Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2014). Underneath these four headings is a list of several outcomes for First Year Composition, which emphasize writing for a variety of audiences, presenting writing as a process, and controlling features of writing (Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2014)—all features of AP English Language and Composition. The outcomes for AP English Language and Composition closely align with these WPA outcomes. Finally, it is

important to note that First Year Composition continues to evolve according to administrative and “faculty desires, curricular pressures, new technologies, staffing changes, and ongoing research and discussion in the field of rhetoric and composition” (Hansen, 2010, p. 12). Additionally, some schools have risen above these generic requirements and have created unique offerings. Schools claiming their writing courses are particularly valuable are Harvard, Duke, Rutgers, the University of Denver, Washington State, and George Mason University (Hansen, 2010).

### **The Exam**

The College Board, headquartered in New York, is the entity in charge of developing AP exams (Jamison, 2015). The exam does have an associated fee of \$94 paid to the College Board for each AP exam a student takes (College Board, 2018f). Exams administered outside of the United States, its territories, or Canada can assume an additional cost as can approved, alternate testing dates. Additionally, the College Board offers a fee reduction of \$32 if students can demonstrate financial need (College Board, 2018f). Some states or schools choose to pay the cost of the AP exam from public or school funds as they look for ways to improve school ratings, encourage students to take more rigorous coursework, and move students through college (Hansen, 2010).

The process of developing each exam consumes several years as all AP exams “undergo extensive review, revision, piloting, and analysis to ensure that the questions are fair, of high quality, and reflect an appropriate range of difficulty” (College Board, 2019b, p. 2). Until recently, the AP English Test Development Committee—the committee responsible for constructing the exam—created both English exams, influencing high school curricula notably (Puhr, 2010). The AP English Literature and

Composition exam has from its genesis emphasized poetry and fiction and, being the older course, had somewhat eclipsed AP English Language and Composition, “rendering its identity somewhat uncertain” (Puhr, 2010, p. 70). In more recent years, the number of students taking AP English Language and Composition has far surpassed the number of AP English Literature and Composition students (Total Registration, 2018).

For about 20 years, the AP English Language and Composition exam included texts from belletristic writers (Puhr, 2010). Even when the exam did include nonfiction excerpts, students were directed to provide what was essentially a literary analysis on elements such as diction, figurative language, and tone, so an exam supposedly about rhetoric bypassed the five canons of rhetoric (Puhr, 2010). Originally, poetry was the only literary element not included on the AP English Language and Composition exam. Puhr (2010) explained that in 2002, the then outgoing AP English Language and Composition chief reader, Jolliffe from the University of Arkansas; the then incoming chief reader, Hatch from Brigham Young University; and members of the AP English Test Development Committee (including Puhr) met to discuss changing the types of questions on the exam. From the conversation, three skills emerged: analysis, synthesis, and argument. “They have become the new holy trinity for AP Language teachers and students because they are fundamental to reading and writing in any discipline and are the focus of most college first year writing courses” (Puhr, 2010, p. 74).

**The argument essay.** The exam has, however, always included an essential element of rhetoric—the argument prompt—so even from its inception, the course indicated its tendency toward rhetoric and composition and away from the aesthetic and thematic concerns of AP English Literature and Composition (Puhr, 2010). The

argument essay requires students to express clear claims, provide sufficient and appropriate evidence, and present convincing justification to convince a reader to agree with the claim or to pursue a course of action (College Board, 2019b). Students may receive any number of types of arguments to compose (Bilsky et al., 1999). The College Board (2014b) Course Description suggests teachers spend a considerable amount of class time teaching argumentation in order to help students read and analyze different types of arguments, examine structures, analyze rhetorical features in social contexts, examine different kinds of evidence, assess the audience, synthesize information, and think of argument as a way to converse with a question or with other individuals or groups.

**The analysis essay.** The other two writing exercises currently tested on the AP English Language and Composition exam—analysis and synthesis—were added or revised more recently. Puhr (2010) stated that the analysis was modified to focus more on the broader rhetorical situation of a text instead of simple stylistics. This type of essay assesses a student’s ability to analyze a given passage and create an essay that provides an effective thesis and evidence to demonstrate knowledge of the writer’s rhetorical situation, argument development, and rhetorical choices (College Board, 2019b). The value of analysis lies in its requirement of students to criticize and analyze a writer’s discourse. The current AP English Language and Composition exam and course encourage students to complete a full rhetorical analysis of several types of rhetoric in texts from a variety of disciplines and genres, considering meaning, purpose, context, and effect on audience.

**The synthesis essay.** Since 2007, the exam has also included a synthesis prompt. The synthesis essay represents an essential skill in First Year Composition. It is also vital in today's world with "information overload, multimedia input, and clashing moral and ethical systems" (Puhr, 2010, p. 74). This essay begins with a prompt that requires students to develop a claim about a topic and compose an argument using at least three of six or seven provided sources, at least one of which is a visual such as a chart, graph, map, schedule, photograph, painting, cartoon, advertisement, or artwork (George et al, 2014; Hogan, 2014; Smagorinsky, 2006). Students have 15 minutes at the beginning of the exam writing time to read and annotate the sources.

The College Board (2014b, 2019b) noted that students who can read texts rhetorically will recognize the conversations writers are having and be able to insert themselves into that conversation. To successfully complete the prompt, students must understand the major claims each source is proposing as well as how they are supported and how they affect different audiences. Their compositions must acknowledge and respond to the provided sources without summarizing, misattributing claims, or oversimplifying an argument (College Board, 2019b).

**Multiple-choice.** Before 2020, this section of the exam contained four nonfiction excerpts from a variety of genres and time periods with 54 to 55 analysis questions. Beginning with the spring exam in 2020, the multiple-choice section of the exam will consist of five short nonfiction excerpts or passages about different topics and from a variety of disciplines, cultures, and time periods (College Board, 2019b). Three passages will accompany 20 to 22 questions about writing, and two passages will have 23 to 25 questions about reading. As of 2005, when the AP English Language Test Development

Committee separated from the AP English Literature Test Development Committee, the multiple-choice section of the AP English Language and Composition exam has also included at least one passage containing footnotes and endnotes with questions about the citations themselves in addition to the usual questions concerning rhetorical features in the text (Puhr, 2010). There are 45 questions on this portion of the exam. Multiple-choice questions have always had five distractors on the AP English Language and Composition exam.

Since good rhetorical criticism examines the speaker, text, audience, situation, and their interrelationships (Medhurst, 2014), the questions on this portion of the exam tend to mainly address these aspects of rhetoric. More specifically, the questions gauge students' literal comprehension of the excerpt; ability to infer; skill and facility with vocabulary, syntax, organization, grammar, and mechanics; and ability to use academic terminology to discuss features of written text. They also help introduce students to the idea that rhetorical criticism is engaging in a conversation, which helps students recognize the unity in the field of composition-rhetoric (McGeough, 2014). This part of the exam helps students prove they understand one of the most important concepts AP English Language and Composition teachers can convey: the study of language is largely about the creation and use of symbols in a society at a given point in time (Medhurst, 2014). Recently added writing questions present students with an essay excerpt and ask editing and stylistic questions related to their facility with rhetorical syntax, arrangement, invention, style, and tone (College Board, 2019b). Points are awarded for correct answers but are not deducted for incorrect answers or omitted questions (College Board, 2014b).

The AP English Language and Composition exam itself consumes a total of three hours and 15 minutes. The free-response section, consisting of the three essays, takes two hours and 15 minutes.

**Scoring and scores.** The AP exam is scored on an amalgamation of students' performance on a 45-question, five passage multiple-choice section along with three essays. The essays count as 55% of students' scores while the multiple-choice section counts as 45%. The process for setting the score each year is precise and complex, "involving numerous psychometric analyses of the results of a specific AP exam in a specific year and of the particular group of students who took that exam" (College Board, 2014b, p. 7). Additionally, as part of the score setting process, the performance of AP students is compared to college freshmen enrolled in comparable classes in colleges across America. The College Board (2019b) stated the composite score is set so the lowest raw score needed on an AP exam to earn a score of five is equivalent to the average score of students who receive an A in the equivalent college course in that year. By extension, "AP exam scores of four are equivalent to college grades of A-, B+, and B. AP exam scores of 3 are equivalent to college grades of B-, C+, and C" (College Board, 2019b, p. 2).

AP English Language and Composition is often combined with high schools' offerings of the required American Literature course (usually offered to high school juniors); however, these two courses do not have to be taken concurrently. In its most recent Report to the Nation, the College Board (2014a) reported that 86.9% of students taking the AP English Language and Composition exam in 2013 were juniors, 1.9% were sophomores, and 11.2% were seniors.

The essays students compose are read and scored by college composition professors and experienced AP English Language and Composition teachers from around the world using standardized procedures. Beginning with the 2020 exam, scorers will be guided by six-point, analytic rubrics tailored to the demands of individual questions. As of September 2019, these rubrics were still being edited by the College Board (2019e). Before the 2020 exam, essays were scored using nine-point holistic rubrics. The AP Reading occurs every summer (currently in Tampa, Florida) and ensures that a “consistent, fair standard is applied to students’ work” (College Board, 2014a, p.19). Originally, essay responses were to be forwarded to the colleges in which students enrolled so faculty could examine incoming students’ writing skills (Keller, 1980). Colleges still can request students’ test booklets as can high schools, but few schools do (Jones, 2010).

**Possible college credit.** The familiar one-to-five score ranking used on the AP exam was developed with the notion that a score of three or higher would be the recommended range for college course credit (Jones, 2010). Originally, it was thought that selective colleges would require a score of four or five, but the dean of Harvard and manager of the Ford Foundation Grant, McGeorge Bundy, stated that Harvard would consider a score of three (Cornog, 1980). When Harvard changed its AP requirement to a score of five, the change was so startling that the news was published in the *New York Times* (Lewin, 2002). Currently, Harvard College (2018) does not award credit based on any AP English Language and Composition score: “Harvard does not offer college-level credit for AP and IB scores on a one-for-one basis. Instead, students who acquire the equivalent of eight half-courses (that is, eight semester-long courses) of AP or IB-level

credit are eligible for the Advanced Standing Program” (par. 3). Many other schools require a score of four (Casement, 2003).

The College Board (2014b) claimed that most four-year colleges and universities in America and in over 60 other countries recognize AP and grant students “credit, placement, or both on the basis of successful AP scores” (p. 5). Georgia’s colleges and universities largely follow this pattern. As evidenced in Table 3, not all Georgia colleges and universities follow these guidelines, though. Of the 56 Georgia-based colleges and universities researched (excluding technical colleges and online schools), 36 schools give students at least three hours English course credit for an AP English Language and Composition exam score of three or higher, 15 require students to score at least a four, one requires a five, and four require a review of students’ transcripts and test results before awarding credit (College Board, 2017b). All of these schools except one give students freshman English credit; Oglethorpe University credits students with an English elective for a score of four or five (Oglethorpe University, 2017). Other universities students from South Georgia often attend—Florida State University (2017) and Auburn University (2017)—require scores of three and four, respectively, for English composition course credit.

Table 3

*Georgia College and University AP English Language and Composition Score Requirements*

College or University	Score Required	Credit Earned (unless otherwise noted, credit earned is academic credit)
Abraham Baldwin Ag. College (n.d.)	3 or 4	3 hours English credit
Augusta State University (2018)	5	6 hours English credit
Bainbridge State College (2017)		
Columbus State University (2018)		
Dalton State College (2018)		
East Georgia College (n.d.)		
Georgia College and State Univ. (2017)		

Georgia Gwinnett College (2015)  
 Georgia Highlands College (2016)  
 Georgia Southern University (2018)  
 Georgia State University (2018)  
 Gordon College (2017)  
 Kennesaw State University (2018)  
 Shorter University (2016)  
 University of Georgia (2012)  
 University of West Georgia (2017)  
 Valdosta State University (2018)

Agnes Scott College (Office of Academic Advising, 2017) 4 or 5 4 hours English credit  
 Georgia Institute of Technology (2018)

Albany State University (2018) 3, 4, or 5 3 hours English credit  
 Atlanta Metropolitan State College (2010)  
 Clayton State University (n.d.)  
 College of Coastal Georgia (2017)  
 Georgia Military College (n.d.)  
 Georgia Southwestern State Univ. (n.d.)  
 Middle Georgia State University (2016)  
 Paine College (n.d.)  
 Piedmont College (n.d.)  
 Point University (2014)  
 Reinhardt University (2017)  
 South Georgia State College (2018)  
 Thomas University (2017)  
 University of North Georgia (2018)

Table 3 (continued)

Berry College (2015) 4 or 5 3 hours English credit  
 Covenant College (2013)  
 Emmanuel College (2015)  
 Emory University (2013)  
 LaGrange College (2011)  
 Mercer University (2016)  
 Morehouse College (2011)  
 Spelman College (2010)  
 Wesleyan College (2016)  
 Young Harris College (2017)

Brenau University (n.d.) 4 3 hours English credit  
 5 6 hours English credit  
 4 on both Lit and Lang 6 hours English credit

Brewton Parker College (n.d.) 3 3 hours English credit  
 Fort Valley State University (2012) 4 or 5 6 hours English credit

Beulah Heights University (2011) Carver College (2013) Georgia Christian University (2016) Truett-McConnell University (2016)	Credit awarded upon review	Determined after review
Clark Atlanta University (n.d.)	5	3 hours English credit
Gupton-Jones College of Funeral Service (2017)	3, 4, or 5	5 hours English credit
Savannah College of Art and Design (2018)	4 5	3 hours English credit 6 hours English credit
Life University (2017)	3, 4, or 5	6 hours English credit
Oglethorpe University (2017)	4 or 5	3 hours elective English credit
South University (2016)	3 4 or 5	4 hours English credit 8 hours English credit

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While most schools encourage students enrolled in the course to take the AP English Language and Composition exam in May, the exam is optional (Puhr, 2010). In fact, it must be noted that students are more than welcome to take an AP exam without taking the corresponding course, or they may take the course without taking the exam (Hansen, 2010). And, as noted in Table 3, not all schools use the exam as an equivalency exam. An increasing number of selective colleges have demonstrated an inclination toward preferring applicants who have taken AP courses, but they are increasingly unlikely to exempt students from first-year English courses (Jones, 2010).

### **Students by Number**

The number of students taking AP exams has increased dramatically, and the AP English Language and Composition exam is no exception. In the past ten years, the number of students taking the AP English Language and Composition exam has increased from 282,230 to 579,426, a 105.3% increase (College Board, 2018e). The

national mean score, however, has fluctuated only slightly. In this same time period, the nation's lowest mean (2.75 in 2016) and highest mean (2.88 in 2009) differed by only 0.13 of a point, or 0.01% (College Board, 2018e). Georgia's mean AP English Language and Composition exam score has demonstrated a similar trajectory with its lowest (2.78 in 2017) and highest (2.86 in 2010 and 2011) differing by 0.08 of a point (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019).

Examining the percentage of students who score a three or higher, however, provides a more accurate depiction of the number of students who the College Board (and many schools) deem capable of college level English work. As shown in Table 4, Georgia's overall performance has rivaled the national percentage of students scoring three or higher on the exam with slightly more students scoring a three or higher some years (2011, 2015, 2016, and 2018) and slightly lower other years (2012, 2013, 2014, and 2017). The 30 school districts in South Georgia offering AP English Language and Composition have demonstrated vast differences in the percentage of students scoring three or higher even though these scores are calculated in Georgia's overall percentages as well. Other than the years 2011 and 2018, South Georgia's students demonstrated a greater decrease in the percentage of students scoring a three or higher than the state did as a whole. From 2011 through 2016, South Georgia had an average of 9.73% fewer students score three or higher on the AP English Language and Composition exam than the nation and an average of 10.5% fewer scored three or higher than the state (College Board, 2018e; Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019). On the 2017 exam, 43.6% of South Georgia's students scored a three or higher; conversely, 55.8% of students in the state's remaining districts scored a three or higher (Governor's Office of

Student Achievement, 2019). If 55.8% of South Georgia’s students had scored at least a three, 167.0 more students would have earned potential college credit. While the number of districts in South Georgia offering AP English Language and Composition has risen from 21 in 2013 to 30 in 2019, the region does not demonstrate the same upward trend as the state: passing rates fluctuate from year to year. Considering there are 71 school districts in South Georgia, fewer than half even offer AP English Language and Composition. Keeping in mind that the state average includes South Georgia students, there is a marked discrepancy in AP exam participation and performance between the two halves of the state.

Table 4

*AP English Language and Composition Score Analysis*

Year of Exam	National Percentage Scoring Three or Higher	Percentage of Students in Georgia Scoring Three or Higher	Percentage of Students in South Georgia Scoring Three or Higher
2011	51.2	60.2	58.3
2012	60.2	58.2	48.3
2013	55.0	53.1	46.5
2014	55.8	54.4	47.9
2015	55.5	56.4	32.6
2016	55.4	55.6	41.1
2017	55.0	55.8	43.6
2018	57.2	59.1	43.9

*Note.* National and state statistics retrieved from College Board’s (2018e) archived data. South Georgia statistics retrieved from the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (2019).

The AP English Language and Composition exam is a difficult exam on which to score a three. Of the 47 AP exams administered in 2018, AP English Language and Composition was ranked 39 with a “passing” rate of 57.2% (College Board, 2019d) with only nine areas having lower passing rates—one was English Literature and Composition

(47.3% “passing”). Interestingly, in 2018 one out of nearly 600,000 students scored a perfect score of 150 out of 150 points possible on the AP English Language and Composition exam (Total Registration, 2018).

### **Teacher Training, Experiences, and Pedagogy**

Borenzweig (2009) argued AP English Language and Composition teachers often find themselves caught in the tension between teaching an engaging college-level English course to high school students and preparing those students to earn a four or five on an extended standardized exam. The goal is not so much a point in time or knowledge but a developmental stage in students’ lives. Borenzweig (2009) noted, “We as AP teachers take high school [students] to a place in their study of literature and composition that is supposed to be more college than high school, though we never leave the public school setting” (p. 10). AP courses, taught at an accelerated pace and intended to mimic college-level courses, generally ask more of teachers in terms of content knowledge and course preparation (Oberjuege, 1999). Chambers and McSwain (2013) found effective AP teachers were those who were internally driven to see results, goal-oriented, innovative, able to effectively balance standards and autonomy, committed to growth, and versed with the use of data to improve instruction.

### **AP Teacher Characteristics**

In 2015, there were 132,500 teachers involved in AP courses around the world (Page, 2015). Additionally, in 2002 when the most recent data was reported, as many as 60,000 teachers attended AP workshops and Summer Institutes (Milewski & Gillie, 2002). Although not all students do, high school students enrolled in AP English Language and Composition can experience a level of rigor and instruction similar to that

offered in freshman college courses, especially if they are taught by experienced, well-trained teachers and if the course is taught as a true rhetoric course instead of a literature class (Puhr, 2010). Since teachers are able to organize their own courses, there are a wide variety of approaches to implementing an AP English Language and Composition course (Hansen et al., 2006). Utilizing many of the exam-oriented strategies allows AP teachers to give their students the best preparation for the summer exams (Foster, 1989). Regardless of their teaching approach, however, AP teachers often have difficulty navigating the path between teaching a small community of learners and sending them to the anonymous world of a national, corporate, standardized exam (Borenzweig, 2009).

Byrd et al. (2007) found that three characteristics normally associated with student success in an AP course actually had no bearing on student success: the teacher taught AP the previous year, the course relied on a textbook, and students practiced the AP exam. They also found that AP English (and AP United States History) instructors tended to assign group projects outside of class more than other courses and that three out of five AP English instructors held a Master's degree. Byrd et al. (2007) added the finding that AP English teachers also spent more time on practice exams than other AP teachers. There were, however, a wide variety of approaches used in AP English programs; the one thing these courses had in common was the instructors' desire to prepare students for the common AP exam (Hansen et al., 2006). Unsurprisingly, many teachers spent quite a bit of class time preparing students for the exam (Holladay, 1989; Iorio, 1989; Vopat, 1989). The intense requirement of students to produce three essays in approximately 40 minutes each made practice critical (Hansen et al., 2006).

## **Writing in the Classroom**

The humanities function differently from other disciplines; their goal is not content delivery—studying language or history does not provide individuals with directly useful information (Coe, 2002). Nonetheless, students receive skills that help them better “comprehend, order, evaluate, and control their experience” (Coe, 2002, p. 23).

Composition-rhetoric falls into this difficult to define category, and teachers often struggle with delivery of writing skills to students who have varying degrees of language and writing facility. Often delivery of composition is based on the requirements of the institution, which determines needs based on perceived student inadequacies. And, perhaps more than with any other subject, the resulting diversity of delivery methods is defined as a function of the knowledge and preparation of the teacher(s), the kind of course (workshop, lecture, and so on) and its definition of composition, and the type of site sponsoring the course (Yancey, 2006). Yet, teachers’ experiences and beliefs directly influence their classroom practices, so an examination of general writing instruction guidelines is helpful.

**Writing instruction complications.** For much of history, composition was relegated to elementary education, so composition-rhetoric’s history is one of transition from primary skill instruction to today’s rhetorical instruction (Connors, 1997). In 1892, the NEA’s Committee of Ten established two primary objectives for English instructors: to help students understand the discourse of others and express their own thoughts as well as to encourage a fondness for reading, acquaint them with good literature, and provide tools for continued reading and writing (Gold et al., 2012). The first goal is most important for composition-rhetoric.

Teacher training has been found often to consist mainly of child development theories and information on feedback or expectations, and future teachers have gotten little instruction in teaching to accomplish the objectives required by the NEA, standardized tests, or institutions (Leslie, 2015). Another difficulty with writing instruction, according to Gold et al. (2012), is that “perhaps more than with any other subject, decisions about writing pedagogy put into material practice our beliefs about the purpose education should serve in society” (p. 233). Furthermore, the way a teacher thinks of composition-rhetoric will affect the way he or she practices composition-rhetoric (Medhurst, 2014). These are heady complications to address for any teacher, especially for those beginning the profession. All of these difficulties highlight the importance of learning both content and teaching techniques as writing well requires many skills from students including the ability to recall a great deal of information—social conventions, lexicography, rhetorical conventions, rhetorical flourish, grammar, spelling, and logic—and then use all of those skills to assemble a creative and effective product (Miller, 1976). Leslie (2015) made an appropriate analogy between teaching and coaching: Coaches know that even though something may look effortless, it is actually the result of countless hours of both practice and evaluation.

**“What teachers do, know, and care about.”** In the 1950s, the error-free final essay dominated (Connors, 1997); it was quickly followed by an expressive essay approach and, finally, a process-focused pedagogy. The strong prescriptive focus of the 1950s has continued to be a mainstay of modern composition—with continued emphasis on grammar, memorizing, and modeling—for a variety of reasons as has the personal, expressive writing assignment (Connors, 1997; Ferreira-Buckley, 2012). The Common

Core standards were meant to end the favoring of prescriptive and expressive writing in favor of instruction that teaches clear communication skills (Tyre, 2012). Coleman (2011), one of Common Core’s creators, told a group of educators in New York that the most popular form of writing in schools—personal writing—had to leave the classroom because, he stated, “As you grow up in this world, you realize people really don’t give a shit about what you feel or what you think” (p. 11). His hope was that the Common Core standards would deliver a shock to American writing instructors and to the public.

As for AP English, Greenblatt (2007) suggested teachers provide students with more “‘thought pieces’ or short reflections” (p. 12) to encourage development of students’ writing skills. Otherwise, Butts (2017) explained, teachers settle with teaching students writing processes that consume too much class time and may or may not work with various writing situations. These instructional practices rely on one assignment to teach a number of skills, and students write less, prompting fewer occasions to develop their writing abilities. Hattie (2003) completed an assessment of 800 empirical studies on student achievement. His conclusions ultimately summarized what matters most (other than students’ prior cognitive skill) for effective classroom instruction: “What teachers know, do, and care about” (p. 2). How teachers’ knowledge, actions, and core beliefs affect their writing instruction is integral to this study.

### **Formation of Teachers’ Composition Practices**

Learning to teach students how to write well is a lengthy, organic, and multifaceted process with a recursive nature often buried beneath a façade of quick competence (Estrem & Reid, 2015). The detailed process involved in teaching students is termed *pedagogy*, which literally means the art of teaching (Myers, 2002). The

purpose of pedagogy is to meet the needs of students; drive, generate, and refine classroom practices; guarantee that classroom activities are not arbitrary; and encourage new theories and practices (Taggart et al., 2014). One of the persistent questions plaguing composition pedagogy has been “What are students of discourse supposed to know, to be able to speak, and write about?” (Connors, 1997, p. 205).

It is the obligation of the composition instructor to teach students how to effectively compose by sharing their knowledge and assessing the progress of their students; however, instructors must first acquire foundational knowledge about English composition-rhetoric (Christian, 2007). Writing pedagogy has long existed in a state of contestation, and teachers cannot survive without examining writing’s historical context (Gold et al., 2012) and current political and social concerns (Durst, 2006). When First Year Composition courses developed and spread across the country in the 1960s, universities began to be more concerned about and attempted to understand the connection between secondary and university teachers. Tremmel (2001) explained that writing teacher education for secondary teachers began when they started to rebel against the College Entrance Examination Board’s and universities’ attempts to dictate how writing was taught in high schools.

Writing instructors have many sources for their pedagogical practices: college coursework (Samuelson, 2009; Smagorinsky, 2010; Tremmel, 2001); past experiences with writing (Barnes & Smagorinsky, 2016; Estrem & Reid, 2015; Skorczewski, 2005; Stygall, 2002); personal ideologies, theories, and epistemologies (Fulkerson, 1979, 2005; Johnson, 2008; Juzwik & Cushman, 2014; Newell et al., 2014); professional experiences (Estrem & Reid, 2015; Reid, 2011); professional development (Darling-Hammond et al.,

2009; Puhr, 2010; Troia et al., 2010); social and cultural situations (Berlin, 1988; Shor, 2016a); and institutional requirements (Puhr, 2010; Samuelson, 2009). In Estrem and Reid's (2015) study of 29 teaching assistants at George Mason University over a three-year time frame and 12 at Boise State University over a two-year period, teaching assistants listed four main sources for their understanding of writing pedagogy: (a) formal studies, including college coursework and composition scholarship; (b) personal characteristics such as beliefs, values, and intuition; (c) teaching and tutoring experiences; and (d) professional colleagues.

Newell et al. (2014) believed that how and why teachers adopt certain practices and do not others is much more nuanced than simply learning a new theory, strategy, or device. Part of the difficulty with writing pedagogy, according to Kennedy (1998), is that the field (and future composition teachers) belongs to several academic disciplines: English (or sometimes communications, philosophy, and so on), composition-rhetoric, and education. Additionally, formal and professional conversations resulting in “collaborative organizational actions regarding writing teacher preparation” and affecting composition pedagogies are relatively limited (Reid, 2011, p. 687). The radical changes in what society considers writing, including what people are writing, how they are writing it, and why they are writing, prompts a need to adapt writing research to fit societal needs (Sheridan & Nickoson, 2012). Another difficulty with writing pedagogy studies is the concept that writing is a subject capable of study and a distinct activity because those ideas counter the popular notion of writing as a skill with a foundation in ideology (Wardle & Adler-Kassner, 2016). When teachers recognize the need for study in writing practices, they can “approach, learn, and teach writing differently and . . .

[change] their practices around writing that extends from [changed] conceptions” (Wardle & Adler-Kassner, 2016, p. 16).

As educated adults and excellent communicators, writing teachers rely on their skills of finding patterns and drawing on experiences to form instructional patterns, but they also need theories, methods, and tools to improve their instructional flexibility (Taggart et al., 2014). The result of the amalgamation of these elements is a vast number of pedagogies and practices that are born from but also drive practice. However, there are three general directions for composition-rhetoric pedagogy. One idea is that writing is mainly a process of learning and following a set of prescriptions—grammatical, mechanical, structural—while the teacher’s job is to introduce, teach, and assess these prescriptions (Kennedy, 1998). Conversely, Kennedy (1998) explained, those who view writing as strategic and purposeful see the teacher’s role as that of designer of “authentic, meaningful writing projects . . . [to help students] discover the forms and conventions that best suit their purposes” (p. 10). She defined a third view as conceptually based. These teachers see writing as the acquisition of certain concepts—genre, dialogue, metaphor, and so on—and the teacher’s role as deciding which concept will help students improve their compositions. It is this movement that returned literature to the composition classroom (Connors, 1997).

Composition instructors face all of these dueling facets of composition and pedagogy when designing the curriculum for their courses. Composition instructors are bombarded by many (sometimes overwhelming) factors that influence their instructional decisions (Barnes & Smagorinsky, 2016). Taggart et al. (2014) suggested that instructional goals, set by programs, departments, student populations, and institutions,

determine general requirements and learning outcomes to guide pedagogical decisions. Yet, they contended, teachers usually have more flexibility in interpreting those goals and engaging their experiences and philosophies to implement activities and practices. Thus, pedagogies rarely look the same, even though recognizable patterns exist.

Composition studies has always had roots (though sometimes shallow) in pedagogy (Harris, 1996), and understanding how and why teachers adopt the pedagogies and practices they use in their classrooms is integral to this study. The following provides a survey of many prominent sources of pedagogical practices for composition teachers, particularly those in the secondary schools who teach AP English Language and Composition.

**College and university experiences.** Research in composition tends to center on teaching while simultaneously paying less attention to learning *about* teaching (Estrem & Reid, 2015). The idea of composition pedagogy as a discipline worthy of study is a recent development itself. The relative youth of the study of composition pedagogy results in several problems with universities' programs to instruct future composition teachers.

Many secondary teachers find themselves in the composition classroom after earning their certification through a university's education program and after learning how to teach writing through the school's English education program (Smagorinsky, 2010). At the middle and secondary levels, composition teachers are more likely to have considerable content knowledge in literacy and earn the equivalent of a B.A. in English or B.S. in English education; yet, English department coursework tends to focus more on reading and literature than writing and informational or nonfiction texts (Juzwik, 2010;

Smagorinsky, 2010). Despite the degree(s) earned, observations completed, certificates received, or education workshops attended, college writing pedagogy instructors are not likely to have completed much coursework or research to prepare them to teach future (or current) teachers (Juzwik, 2010; Reid, 2011). The result is that secondary writing teachers often have even less preparation for developing a composition pedagogy than university instructors.

Faust, Cockrill, Hancock, and Isserstadt (2005) found that English departments and their faculty were generally unconcerned with student growth, democratic views of language, attention to the ways students process information, the situated meanings of texts, and other elements that direct pedagogical decisions. English professors tend to be concerned with literary criticism—the focus of their own research—not with composition and writing pedagogy (Smagorinsky, 2010). These situations have left the budding composition instructor finding his or her way into composition instruction based on the instructional methods they experienced in college themselves. However, Vavra and Spencer (2007) asserted that learning how to write papers to please a college professor “does not necessarily translate into a robust ability to write effectively for a range of audiences and purposes. Nor does it equip one to teach others to do so” (p. 5). By the time they graduate, writing teachers have a few composition techniques but no overall concept of writing instruction (Smagorinsky, 2010). Even for First Year Composition, instructor preparation has been a problem (Juzwik, 2010).

As a result, researchers have found that, generally, English educator programs affected composition teachers’ instructional practices much less than anyone may have hoped (Grossman, Valencia, & Hamel, 1997; Smagorinsky, 2010; Wideen, Mayor-Smith,

& Moon, 1998). There are several reasons to believe these university programs would not have influenced teachers beyond cursory adjustments: students already had established ideas concerning what they would do as teachers, the programs were relatively short, and few programs presented coherent views of pedagogy as professors often functioned autonomously (Kennedy, 1998). The reasons English field experiences have also been rather ambivalent about writing teacher preparation include a lack of composition and rhetorical theory in universities and the wide variety of writing instruction in schools (Smagorinsky, 2010). Unfortunately, Smagorinsky (2010) noted, “there are still teachers out there who are teaching the five-paragraph essay, the research paper, handing out worksheets, and not doing too much else with writing” (p. 280). As a result, he continued, teachers, especially beginning teachers, can go through an entire education program including field experiences without being involved in the process of writing or thinking of English teachers as writing instructors.

Although most education programs pay little attention to writing reform, concentrating instead on classroom organization, rules, lesson delivery, and classroom management (Kennedy, 1998), a number of English and writing education programs either have developed or are developing courses that offer writing instructors direct, specific instruction in rhetorical theory, history, linguistics, and composition-specific teaching practices (Tremmel, 2001; Villanueva et al., 2006). Samuelson (2009) suggested teacher training include techniques to raise teachers’ language awareness, and a stronger concentration in rhetoric instead of literature would help teachers develop a more effective composition pedagogy (Juzwik, 2010).

**Personal experiences.** Often beginning composition-rhetoric teachers have difficulty reconciling their own successful writing experiences with the more progressive pedagogies they encountered in the university and in their schools (Smagorinsky, 2010). Still, many researchers have acknowledged the majority of writing instructors' primary knowledge of how to teach composition arises from their individual experiences as secondary students since they tend to teach the way they were taught (Barnes & Smagorinsky, 2016; Borenzweig, 2009; Estrem & Reid, 2015; Smagorinsky, 2010). These instructors take ideas from their experiences as secondary students to find value in various types of teaching practices, learn how to react to different classroom situations, and develop assumptions about the role of writing and school (Kennedy, 1998). For example, if an earlier writing teacher presented writing as a prescriptive set of grammar and spelling rules, they are more likely to do the same.

Often the influences of prior writing experiences override the effects of university education courses (Barnes & Smagorinsky, 2016; Boyd, Gorham, Justice, & Anderson, 2013). As a result, teachers are constantly in an internal conversation with former teachers, social conventions, family, and peers (Skorczewski, 2005). Many have to rely solely on these past experiences because they received no direct writing instruction—even in literary criticism—in their majors (Stygall, 2002).

Other researchers argued teachers never adopt university teachings because their past experiences are too ingrained—they truly believe in the value of the traditional prescriptive teaching practices that originally attracted them to the teaching profession (Smagorinsky, 2010). The tendency to rely on past experiences often results in a pedagogical cycle that repeats prescriptive and formalist practices. Even those who use

the correct terminology and espouse current theories use less specific language when discussing their own students, causing researchers to question if teachers are relying too heavily on past experiences (Estrem & Reid, 2015). Perhaps this problem is the biggest one facing education and writing courses: convincing teachers they cannot rely on their own experiences when making pedagogical decisions (Stygall, 2002).

**Ideology, values, and epistemology.** Personal, internal qualities of the teacher often play a vital role in determining pedagogy, but several factors complicate the integration of individualized traits into writing pedagogy. For example, traditional conservative assumptions about the established and fixed nature of language, knowledge, and social expectation direct the assessment of student writing and institutional requirements and goals, especially in high stakes testing situations (Smagorinsky, 2010). Additionally, many instructors believe in the binary nature of theory and practice—that theory is too nebulous to survive in practice and pedagogy will muddy the waters of theory (Lynch, 2013). Nevertheless, teacher epistemologies, ideologies, and values survive to direct teachers’ classroom decisions.

Newell et al. (2014) advised teachers (and school leaders) to understand their own experience, knowledge, epistemologies, ideologies, and values well enough to maintain informed conversations about how these elements are separate and interrelated parts of their individual writing pedagogies. The knowledge teachers have about writing or about educational terminology and practices may not alter their almost innate beliefs, but these beliefs can influence their classroom practices (Kennedy, 1998).

An ideology is a set of worldviews formed and maintained by religion, economics, culture, myths, language, law, and schools (Scott, 2016). They shape how a

teacher addresses claims of value in society and function as the “central guiding concept behind all of rhetoric and composition” (McComiskey, 2002, p. 168). Writing and the teaching of it are never innocent of ideology because discourse and language cannot exist separately from culture and society (Scott, 2016). Berlin (1988) is well-known for his position that every pedagogy exists within an ideological base, a set of “tacit assumptions about what is real, what is good, what is possible, and how power ought to be distributed” (p. 135). Writing is deeply rooted in power struggles, identity formation, and belief system negotiation (Scott, 2016); therefore, it (and its practitioners and instructors) cannot ignore ideology. If teachers attempt to avoid addressing their own ideologies, they fail as teachers (Berlin, 1988).

The idea that writing is ideological and social complicates writing instruction for both teachers and the institutions housing them (Scott, 2016). First teachers must articulate, at least to themselves, the role they feel language plays in claims of value in society. For example, Berlin (1988) believed composition-rhetoric’s role is to address competing claims of value in the social, political, and cultural realms. Conversely, Sanchez (2002) contended composition’s role is to produce discourse that develops, negotiates, perpetuates, and contests claims of value. These differing ideologies would reflect different practices in the classroom. However, McComiskey (2002) suggested a better method is to consider different ideologies when developing instruction. The danger of adopting a single ideology is that it would limit students’ abilities to enact change—classroom activities would be singular and ineffective. The benefit of considering multiple ideologies such as Berlin’s and Sanchez’s seemingly contradictory views is that such an examination would first require an investigation into the teacher’s

own ideologies. Such an activity, McComiskey continued, could then progress into analysis of others' positions and, ultimately, toward an ability to represent multiple perspectives to students.

For many years, writing was seen as a universal skill all individuals could master if they put forth the effort and if they were taught well. Scott (2016) stated writing, under such a view, is ideologically neutral as a set of acquirable prescriptive conventions; it operates outside the social setting of a learning environment. He continued, there is a research-based drive to an ideological view of writing instruction, but attempting to incorporate ideological perspectives in the classroom often conflicts with the practices and goals prevailing in many institutions. Finally, Scott commended recent efforts to accept responsibility for the consequences of ideological assumptions on pedagogy.

Writing instructors who are conscientious and critical will challenge the view that schools are decontextualized from societal tensions and will use the political and cultural when analyzing language (Giroux, 1988). It is the function of the instructor and of rhetoric to produce ideological discourse and create identities through writing (Sanchez, 2002). Effective writing instructors have defined opinions toward the role of ideology in writing because ideology is the guiding principle behind all composition-rhetoric (McComiskey, 2002).

As writing instructors, teachers make daily choices shaped by their personal writing philosophies, values, and theories (Fulkerson, 1979, 2005; Johnson, 2008; Sim, 2004). Swanson-Owens (1986) found teachers' underlying beliefs influenced what writing practices teachers chose—and chose not—to adopt. In light of the uncertainties associated with writing instruction, teachers' beliefs—largely derived from childhood and

adolescent classroom experiences—played a vital role in helping them interpret classroom situations and make instructional decisions (Kennedy, 1998). Sadly, Troia and Maddox (2004) found many middle school teachers believed students would have little use for writing outside of standardized testing, so they focused specifically on passing these tests, making grammar and workbooks pedagogical choices in teaching students a difficult and demanding skill.

In composition-rhetoric, epistemology refers “to the roles that language, writing, and pedagogy play in constructing and communicating knowledge” (Ervin, 1996, p. 76). Certainly, composition cannot escape the “scramble for the power and prestige that go with being able to say what constitutes knowledge” (North, 1987, p. 3). Writing instruction researchers have found that while teachers can incorporate new activities into their classrooms, it is often much more problematic to change the epistemologies that form their teaching and learning (Hillocks, 1999; Langer & Applebee, 1987; Newell et al., 2014).

One reason describing a teacher’s epistemological foundation is so fleeting is because epistemologies often change through history while they can also coexist (Ervin, 1996). Since about 1985, writing researchers have condemned the idea of the “one, true [writing instruction] system” (Berlin, 1987, p. 3) and championed “competing epistemologies” (Hobson, 1992, p. 65), “clashing epistemologies” (Bridwell-Bowles, 1991, p. 109), or the less pugnacious “several epistemological systems” (Crowley, 1990, p. 173). Still, researchers generally find some epistemologies better than others (Ervin, 1996). Another reason it is difficult to define a personal epistemology is there are so many kinds. Crowley (1990) identified several including “modern epistemology[, which]

is permeated with patriarchal assumptions about the way the world works” (p. 174); “classical epistemology,” in which “knowledge [is] contained in the collected wisdom of the community” (p. 2); “empirical epistemology[, which emphasizes] powers of perception . . . [to learn] as much as possible about the world” (p. 78); and “current-traditional epistemology,” which implies reality is objective and that language can clearly represent it. Newell et al. (2014) named three epistemologies specific to argument: “structural”—concerning rules and centered on the five-paragraph essay (Johnson, Smargorinsky, Thompson, & Fry, 2003), “ideational”—seeing argument as a foundation for inquiry and idea generation (Hillocks, 2011), and “social”—contextualized, audience-driven argumentation tracing back to Aristotle. Ervin (1996) advocated what he called an “epistemological megalomania” in which teachers and writers try out several epistemologies in an effort to help students metacognitively figure out how they are “figuring out” (p. 296).

The implication in writing instruction is that teachers who adopt different epistemologies will prepare and organize instruction differently, communicate with different students differently, have different expectations for student learning and development, approach research differently, and have different expectations for what qualifies as support and proof in student writing (Freedman et al., 2005; Fulkerson, 2005; Hillocks, 1999; Langer & Applebee, 1987). Since these epistemologies can dramatically affect so many aspects of instruction, research has suggested a change in epistemology may be the most effective way to change teacher practices (Newell et al., 2014). Teaching writing is an act that argues for a certain way of knowing and communicating knowledge, whether teachers are aware of this aspect of their profession or not (Berlin,

1988). Epistemologies can enrich or inhibit classroom interactions, and, as always, more active and dynamic teacher-student and student-student interactions produce much more sophisticated discourse (Ervin, 1996).

**Contextual factors.** Bakhtin and Vygotsky’s research on language acquisition explained how language—with its accompanying social aspects—helps mold how people think, identify, and act (Scott, 2016). Teachers and students exist in social contexts that shape how they interpret and internalize language. Part of writing instructors’ practices are formed by the social interactions they have experienced and the social construct of their own classrooms. Gee (2008), a well-known linguist, noted that writing (and reading) teachers and curriculum designers need to ask a single question before making even one curricular decision: “What sort of social group do I intend to apprentice the learner into?” (p. 48). This question may seem simple, but it implies that teachers must assist students into the negotiation of language in specific social situations. Depending on institutional requirements and the social composition of the classroom, teachers’ own ideas about appropriate social situations for writing infiltrate their writing pedagogies.

Freire (2018) and Shor (2016a, 2016b) are perhaps the most well-known advocates for weighing social aspects of language heavily when designing writing instruction. Shor (2016b) explained teachers must first understand the social situation they are entering in their classroom. He argued that the instructor’s role is to situate himself or herself in the classroom and discover the social context in which his or her students live. However, in an interview on the podcast *This Rhetorical Life*, Shor (2016b) discussed how teachers must also take note of the social context of the time period as he did when recognizing the socially and politically restrictive environment in

which he worked. This recognition was important because “pedagogy can only accomplish what the situation allows” (p. 3), and he had to adjust his pedagogy appropriately.

Classroom interactions occur instantaneously, and teachers must make choices based on those group interactions. These decisions are subjective, quick, and socially oriented (Skorczewski, 2005). Current trends in writing instruction have noted the importance of focusing on the social relationship in writing, and these relationships should direct instruction. For example, writers should use standard spelling because it meets the audience’s expectations and makes their job easier not because it is more virtuous to do so (Coe, 2002). Additionally, as it does in writing, ignoring social context within the classroom by failing to adjust to students makes any attempts at instruction fruitless and boring (Shor, 2016b).

**Teaching experiences.** Lynch (2013) stated simply, “Teaching begins neither in practice nor in theory, but in experience” (p. xvii). In fact, Estrem and Reid’s (2015) study found First Year Composition teachers’ own experiences influenced their pedagogy more heavily than any university coursework. Teachers tended to borrow (or steal) each other’s work and “weave them into [their] own nests like pedagogical magpies” rather than appropriating a greater vision of pedagogy (Reid, 2011, p. 692). Adopting and adapting the practices of others influences teacher pedagogy, usually without the foundational theory and research to explain or support the new pedagogy. Part of the reason for this piecemeal effort to establish pedagogy is that writing teacher preparation is often segregated from (or even in opposition to) explanations of pedagogical excellence (Reid, 2011).

Although it would seem that teacher preparation programs would influence practices more than any other element, some researchers (Borko & Eisenhart, 1992; Ritchie & Wilson, 1993; Smagorinsky, 2010) discussed the disparity between the theories and practices promoted in universities and the social context and “assessment driven climate” (Smagorinsky, 2010, p. 280) of modern high schools. High stakes testing requirements promote content coverage—often by way of pacing guides—instead of the student-centered methods learned in university courses. Puhr (2010) made a more specific statement about AP teachers’ experiences: the best AP teachers are those who have taught for several years. When teachers with less experience are asked to teach the AP English Language and Composition course, their inexperience often leads to weak pedagogy and ineffective instruction. Traditionally, AP teachers not only have more experience but also higher graduate degrees than other teachers (Page, 2015; Milewski & Gillie, 2002).

**Institutional requirements.** Grossman, Smagorinsky, and Valencia (1999) found, even when they disagreed with their educational backgrounds, teachers conformed to the requirements and goals of the institutions for which they were employed. And, of course, studies have shown that high stakes tests have great effect on teacher pedagogy, especially on curriculum, time management, text choice, and activities (Loofbourrow, 1994; Samuelson, 2009; Shohamy et al., 1996). Although dated, Cuban (1984) found a persistent problem with the teacher-centered approach to pedagogy. In his study, he documented classrooms that exhibited pedagogical change with the many that did not and discovered that teacher pedagogy did not fail to progress because of teacher preparation programs but because of teachers’ traditional beliefs about writing and institutional

constraints placed on instruction. This generational problem has persisted for centuries. Institutional guidelines can limit the implementation of classroom social needs such as Shor advocated above. Shor (2016b), however, suggested teachers covertly meet the social needs of their students by metaphorically “bring[ing] the documents in under [their] coat,” (p. 9) as many effective instructors do. He said teachers may have to host forums outside class or use the hallways as a type of art gallery; regardless, meeting the social needs of the students is paramount.

**Professional development.** Schools and other entities often offer professional development opportunities for teachers. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2009), most teachers have participated in some form of professional development even though most of those experiences have failed to go into much depth, they have been poorly funded, and applicability to curriculum has varied. Because many of today’s English teachers are not prepared to teach writing, professional development for these teachers is important to stakeholders (Troia et al., 2010). With the addition of English language learners, inclusion classrooms, socio-economically disadvantaged students, and students who do not value writing, many teachers need professional development to polish their classroom practices.

Troia et al. (2010) added that desire to increase student achievement in rigorous courses such as AP English Language and Composition has encouraged many stakeholders to demand more effective professional development opportunities for these teachers. Improved writing ability is reliant upon teachers’ ability to improve their practices. Unfortunately, Troia et al. (2010) countered, policy makers commonly

announce expectations and demand tools for improvement without offering suggestions or opportunity for implementation.

Puhr (2010) suggested AP English Language and Composition teachers attend workshops and institutes to realign their curriculum to closely match the College Board's requirements. These professional development opportunities are not mandatory, but they do give willing instructors the opportunity to alter their pedagogy to effectively assist students (Puhr, 2010). The College Board workshops are one- or two-day sessions in both fall and spring in various locations around the country (College Board, 2017a). These workshops are led by trained AP consultants who encourage AP teachers to share ideas, content, and materials. Consultants also introduce or reacquaint teachers with the online materials offered by the College Board. Teachers in rural areas like those in the six South Georgia RESA districts often do not have the chance to attend a workshop or institute—mainly offered in the Atlanta area (College Board, 2017a)—or their school systems may not be able to fund their participation though research suggests schools need to send teachers to trainings to improve test scores (Education Commission of the States, 2017). The College Board does offer Summer Institute scholarships, online discussion groups, and online live discussions and presentations, obviously finding professional development a valuable aspect of effective instruction in the AP English Language and Composition course.

### **Final Commentary on the Development of Teacher Pedagogy**

It is a difficult task to design a pedagogy on which teachers can build an entire course. Fulkerson (2005) has posited four questions to guide teachers in the process:

- The axiological question: in general, what makes writing “good”?

- The process question: in general, how do written texts come into existence?
- The pedagogical question: in general, how does one teach . . . students effectively? . . .
- The epistemological question: “How do you know that?” (pp. 657-658)

Generally, writing teachers have been immersed in conservative schools (K-12 and university); experienced traditional, prescriptive writing instruction; have been presented with few direct alternatives to such writing instruction; and have been encouraged to promote literature (Smagorinsky, 2010). The formalist approaches they return to in the classroom are not surprising. Fulkerson’s four questions provide a starting point in breaking the cycle and understanding teacher values, epistemologies, and ideologies and then using these elements to create practices for the classroom.

Until recently, teachers had little scholarship and research to help develop their writing pedagogies. There is still no national conference or journal based on the field of writing pedagogy as there is for other (sometimes even more specific) disciplines like computers and writing (*Computers and Composition*), feminist rhetoricians (*Peitho*), or composition theory (*JAC*). Writing journals such as *College Composition and Communication* contain articles that mention pedagogy and call for better teacher preparation, but other topics usually shove pedagogy out of its covers. While this phenomenon does help professionalize the field of composition, it also creates a lack where a field is needed (Reid, 2011). Reid (2011) explained the source of this dearth of scholarship lies in the difficult task of quantifying writing teacher quality as it is complicated to measure any composition learning that could lead to a description of

teacher quality, and it is complicated to identify the pedagogical elements that could have led to any improvement.

Fulkerson's (2005) four questions may help a teacher develop a pedagogy, but the components he mentioned are not independent or mutually determined. Fulkerson (2005) continued, "it's easy to create a course that is self-contradictory and thus baffling to students. We may teach one thing, assign another, and actually expect yet a third" (pp. 679-680). Ultimately, when teacher preparation programs cannot provide the coherence teachers need, English courses focus on literature more than writing, field experiences reinforce prescriptive teaching, content is valued above education practices, and secondary schools support formalist writing for high stakes testing, teachers are not likely to understand or practice non-traditional writing instruction, relying instead on staid practices and models such as the five-paragraph essay (Smagorinsky, 2010).

The multi-faceted pedagogy teachers form needs to develop from a slower, more recursive process with extended learning opportunities in universities, with colleagues, or in professional development opportunities (Estrem & Reid, 2015). Kennedy (1998) provided several suggestions to improve writing teacher practices including expanding what teachers need to learn—not just content, but also technique and new concepts about the nature of school, the student, and teaching; defining learning as adapting and altering ideas instead of acquiring knowledge; re-evaluating the study of teaching; and encouraging teachers to continue studying learning.

### **Issues Related to Composition-Rhetoric and Classroom Instruction**

Since people learn to speak and write before they learn the writing process and definitely long before they learn to teach it to others, pedagogical problems are

understandable (Bartholomae, 1985). Though writing instruction has always been entrusted to English departments, histories of and research in composition have not treated composition as the mainstay it is (Gold et al., 2012). These problems inhibit teachers' abilities to develop solid and effective theories and practices in their English classrooms.

One of the most recognized problems with writing instruction in both K-12 and university classrooms has been the tendency to teach using traditional, formalistic methods. Perrin recognized this issue even in 1939, and he became a staunch critic of the reduction of writing to formal correctness (Corbett & Connors, 1999). Perrin (1942) stated:

We need a practical, realistic knowledge of the possibilities of English usage, of what successful speakers and writers do with words. . . . We can gain such habits of expression not by memorizing rules and trying to apply them but by reading and listening to good writers and speakers and occasionally pausing to examine how they gain their effects. (p. 2)

Decades later, most everyone agrees that the current-traditional method of writing instruction is not effective and process writing is (Faigley, 1986). Nevertheless, this formalistic approach to writing instruction persists in America's writing classrooms. In fact, almost all education panels and commissions have denounced American school writing curricula for its emphatic concentration on memorization and drill instead of analysis and problem-solving (Kennedy, 1998). They have argued that students need more rigorous content and intellectually challenging assignments: students should learn in collaborative groups, learn to be flexible, and work to solve problems. Traditional

writing practices isolate students, encourage competition, teach individual facts instead of problem-solving skills, and avoid new and experimental tasks.

There have been serious problems in American writing education, but these problems stem from teacher and program mindlessness, not maliciousness (Fulkerson, 1979, 2005; Silberman, 1970). Fulkerson (1979, 2005) argued that the problem with writing instruction begins with teachers' failure either to develop viable composition theories, ideologies, and epistemologies or their inability to allow those factors to shape their pedagogy. For example, he stated, having an expressive writing philosophy is acceptable; having a classroom methodology which simultaneously implies something different is not.

### **Society's Perception of Student Writing**

When Harvard introduced its writing entrance examination in 1874, they had just recognized the inadequacies of student writing (Connors, 1997). Their analysis of student writing revealed students from even the best secondary schools in the nation were composing texts full of grammatical and mechanical errors. Over a century later, Carroll (2002) observed students still struggled in different ways with different writing assignments as they rode what she called the "roller coaster" of writing (p. 49).

Researchers and stakeholders continued to find that students' lack of skills made them not even adequate writers: Khadaroo (2009) found that 30 million people—14% of the American population above the age of 15—lacked basic writing skills; Hillocks (2006) argued that writing assessments from the NAEP to state writing assessments have shown students are not writing as they should; and the NAEP (2011) reported on the Nation's Report Card that only 3% of the nation's twelfth graders could write a sophisticated and

well-organized essay. Generally, elementary, middle, and secondary students across America have shown a low level of writing achievement with few signs of any improvement over the past years (Olinghouse et al., 2010; Persky, Daane, & Jin, 2003; Salah-Din, Persky, & Miller, 2008).

Despite improvements in writing theory and composition research and the resulting improvement in available process pedagogies (Hillocks, 2006; Smagorinsky, 2010), high schools continued to graduate students “whose writing skills better [equipped] them to work on farms or in factories than in offices” (Tyre, 2012, par. 8). Decades of research have demonstrated steady, but low, achievement rates in writing. The College Board has attempted to alleviate some of the shortcomings in student writing achievement. In September 2002, it created the National Commission on Writing to help create a writing revolution (Hansen et al., 2006). The newly formed National Commission on Writing (2003) declared it intended to help by assessing writing on the SAT, but, of course, its ultimate motive was much greater: it was troubled by the “growing concern within the education, business, and policy-making communities that the level of writing in the United States is not what it should be” (p. 1).

### **Issues Within the University**

Until the late 1800s, English departments focused on literature and failed to have any planned instruction in rhetoric and composition (Eliot, 1890). With the addition of composition to the university curriculum and its recognition as an area worthy of research, questions concerning its theoretical foundations flourished (Faigley, 1986). Yet, another problem confronting early American universities was that universities had difficulty finding trained professionals to teach courses like composition, which rely on

tutorial instruction methods requiring more knowledge and flexibility in instruction (Connors, 1997).

As a result of this shortage, colleges (especially newer ones) were forced to hire younger, less trained instructors. These teachers immediately turned to the recitation and drill techniques they had used in secondary school (Connors, 1997). With little rhetorical training and no pedagogical training, these inexperienced instructors turned to ineffectual textbooks, handbooks, and workbooks, and the instruction in such classes was almost entirely based on rules, grammar, and mechanics. Additionally, improved grammar was thought to improve writing—thus was the genesis of the trust in correctness that persists in many classrooms today. The irony of the universities’ situation lies in the notion that, in rhetorical tradition, rules and grammar belonged to a separate tradition; “grammatical instruction was as unthinkable [to ancient rhetoric instructors] as teaching gymnastics [and] tumbling” (Connors, 1997, p. 126). Yet, this emphasis on formalistic measures in early American colleges and universities has existed through modern times.

Scott was one of the earliest proponents of a rhetoric and composition that consisted of more than error-hunting (Gaillet, 1993). He, however, recognized that the impetus behind this focus on mechanics and grammar was the overwork of composition teachers. With exceptional class loads, early composition instructors taught between 140 and 200 students (Connors, 1997) and were grossly overworked and under-supported. Yet, Scott still advocated for a less artificial means of writing instruction. He was one of the founders of NCTE (Gaillet, 1993), which became known partly for its attacks on “college tests, correctness-only standards, grammatical purism, and prescriptivism”

(Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 534). By the 1930s, the split between scholars and teachers occurred, creating the rift that afflicts composition instruction today.

Increasingly, composition instruction has been seen as a less-than course, subordinate to literary studies. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the turn of this century, unprepared and inexperienced assistant professors were pulled away from “the comfort of their academic studies in literature and were forced to serve several years’ duty in composition until they were able to escape its rigors and assume a position in literature” (Tremmel, 2001, p. 8). And English courses, no longer charged with teaching students skills for public rhetoric, soon replaced classical texts with imaginative literature and the charge to encourage appreciation of such (Farris, 2014). English departments grew larger because of several literacy crises, but literature specialists strove to distance themselves from what they saw as the more pedestrian composition courses. This separation of literature and writing (Connors, 1997) created an implied yet easily understood hierarchy in departments, resulting in some professors questioning the goal of writing instruction if English and writing instructors could not communicate with one another.

Having composition instructors who are biding time until they can focus on the literary interests they really want to pursue results in the inept use of literature in composition courses (Connors, 1997). As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, however, instructors and researchers began to question the use of literature in composition courses. Despite the research that suggests otherwise, literary works dominated freshman courses as did personal writing assignments (Connors 1997) and traditional assignments emphasizing grammar, mechanics, and correctness (Hansen, 2010).

The goal of helping students become conversant in the discourse of the academy is a difficult task to accomplish in one semester with classes full of students representing any number of academic fields. Even if teachers focused on the writings required in core courses, these disciplines are so varied that the success of such a writing course would be doubtful (Tate, 2002). Nevertheless, researchers and practitioners have offered several suggestions to improve college composition and rhetoric pedagogy. Hansen (2010) discussed Downs and Wardle's claim that First Year Composition should move away from the goal of preparing students to enter academic discourses and become an "introduction to writing studies, a course in which first year students would be exposed to the scholarly theoretical discourse about rhetoric, language, and literacy in order to understand the field as a genuine discipline like any other" (p. 12).

### **Issues with Secondary Teachers**

Writing teachers' jobs today are certainly different from the tasks of the ancient Greeks. Lecturing on oratory and critiquing the oral compositions of 200 students is very different from reading essays for 200 students (Tremmel, 2001) with a total of as many as 3,000 essays annually (Connors, 1991) consuming as much as 31 hours a week just for reading and assessing (Berlin, 1987). An additional problem concerns the emphasis of largely formalist reading and writing pedagogies (Newell et al., 2011). These approaches to writing instruction often entail reading to ensure comprehension, make inferences, and write the formalized five-paragraph essay in preparation for high-stakes tests (Hillocks, 2002). The contrasts between historical precedent, research, and institutional requirements make implementing effective writing instruction difficult for instructors. Research on the teaching of writing in high school English classes (VanDerHeide &

Newell, 2013) and freshman college classes (Lunsford, 2002) demonstrated both teachers and students struggled with the intricacies of argumentation, especially with the concerns of form, content, and context (Newell et al., 2014).

The history of writing instruction is an exploration of the disparity between the literature teachers are reading (and sometimes producing) about writing and the literature that scholars are reading and producing (Juzwik, 2010). English instructors receive little, if any, writing instruction in their preparation courses because reading and teaching reading are emphasized much more than writing. This trend has carried over into the classroom (Fulkerson, 2005; Juzwik, 2010). In addition, the question of what constitutes good writing is rarely addressed in secondary schools or in their English departments. Broad (2004) suggested every English department map the textual features it values and then share these characteristics and goals with students. These discussions could also lead to professional learning opportunities for some teachers.

Both process writing instruction and proper instruction in rhetoric and composition has been scarce in secondary schools (Addison & McGee, 2010; Applebee & Langer, 2009). In Addison and McGee's (2010) study, they were astounded by teachers' lack of instruction in audience and purpose, especially considering some courses' emphasis of rhetoric and composition. They explained this result as teachers' ignorance of the "role that audience and purpose play in helping a writer make sound rhetorical choices" (p. 166). Many teachers, however, were aware of the value of process writing, highly ranked it on the ACT writing survey, and claimed to incorporate it into their writing instruction (Addison & McGee, 2010). In Applebee and Langer's (2009) analysis of NAEP results, they noted: "what teachers mean by this [process-oriented

writing instruction] and how it is implemented in their classrooms remain unclear. The consistent emphasis that emerges in teachers' reports may mask considerable variation in patterns of instruction" (p. 26).

**AP English Language and Composition teachers.** The AP English Language and Composition course requires students to gain higher order thinking and analysis skills and sophisticated writing skills to help them succeed in the academy. If the teachers of this course want their students to acquire these skills, the teachers themselves must have higher-order teaching skills and profound content knowledge (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Fleming 2014; Newell et al., 2011). Researchers (Gebhardt, 1981; Tremmel, 2001; Villanueva et al., 2006) identified some areas of knowledge important for writing teachers of all levels of student writers: (a) teachers need an understanding of the history and structure of the English language; (b) a solid grasp of rhetoric; (c) mastery of a theoretical foundation to wade through the ideas, methodologies, and texts associated with writing; and (d) a thorough awareness of available and reliable writing methodologies. These needs are especially important for AP English teachers, and College Board Summer Institutes attempt to provide teachers with at least a cursory understanding of each of these elements. The most recent available data (Milewski & Gillie, 2002) calculated that only 52.2% of AP teachers attended these institutes before they began teaching the course while only 44.9% of teachers who taught their respective AP course for at least five years had attended an APSI within those five years. Additionally, only 32.4% had taken a university course in their discipline, and 12.1% had participated in an AP reading. This data implied that many AP English instructors may not have the knowledge they need to adequately prepare students for the exam in May or

to teach a course equivalent to First Year Composition. Puhr (2010) stated, “It’s sad that some students weren’t better instructed, sadder still that some AP English Language teachers weren’t better informed” (p. 80).

Berlin (1982) said it well:

Everyone teaches the process of writing, but everyone does not teach the *same* process. The test of one’s competence as a composition instructor . . . resides in being able to recognize and justify the version of the process being taught. (p. 777)

Research plays an important role in the recognition and justification process, requiring both cognitive and social perspectives of learning and writing (Newell et al., 2011).

Research in reading and writing has continuously shown that teachers were frequently unfamiliar with the fundamental concepts associated with writing (Applebee, 1991; Hillocks, 1999, 2007, 2010; Langer, 1992; Langer & Applebee, 1987; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008)—causality, warrants for claims, explicitly defended premises—and cannot give students the support they need to learn these difficult yet foundational concepts (Newell et al., 2011).

Another adverse impulse writing teachers have is to be protective of their subject and become defensive toward students and colleagues who react negatively (or fail to react at all) to the “gift” they feel they are providing with their writing instruction (Elbow, 1983, p. 331). Reactions such as this one can result in ineffectual, condescending, or dictatorial instruction (Elbow, 1983). Avoiding this negative reception requires more “intensive and effective professional learning than has traditionally been available” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 2). However, professional learning is often

inadequate and ineffective largely because teachers do not have the time to work collaboratively, visit one another's classrooms, and learn from experienced colleagues: the professional learning they do receive is often shortsighted and trivial (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Additionally, Elbow (1983) suggested teachers must be willing to admit their doubts and biases, what they are still learning, and when they are stuck.

AP English Language and Composition's emphasis on rhetoric is often a new focus for course instructors. Admitting one's lack of knowledge in this area is vital for teachers to improve their practices. However, teaching teachers about rhetoric and changing their courses from literature-based to rhetoric-based take time (Puhr, 2010). Ironically, many English majors test out of the introductory English classes that provide more intensive writing instruction. Many others may even graduate having earned an English degree and never taken a writing class (Puhr, 2010). The College Board (Puhr, 2010) suggested AP English Language and Composition teachers take a graduate-level rhetoric course or at least read a book about rhetorical theory. While these courses and similar research may emphasize argumentative structures (Kuhn, 2005; Retznitskaya & Anderson, 2002), they do not concern themselves with instructional methods that will help students develop as argumentative writers (Newell et al., 2011).

**Teachers' beliefs about writing.** Empirical studies in K-12 schools showed teachers' beliefs about writing and about themselves as writers had profound effects on their writing instruction and on students' development as writers (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; Englert et al., 2006; Hillocks, 1986). Still, teachers' procedures should harmonize with the values and foundations that form their writing selves. Fulkerson (1979, 2005) and Kennedy (1998) warned of the problems that may occur when a teacher espouses one set

of beliefs and practices another. Fulkerson referred to this practice as modal confusion and added that it is difficult to pinpoint since it can only be observed from within the classroom. For example, if a prompt asks for students' opinions, teachers must not judge students' opinions or grammar or any other factor of writing not related to an expressive philosophy. If a teacher discusses the idea of persona and assesses writing on style or voice, the teacher has failed to provide an explanation of his or her appreciation of expressive writing (Fulkerson, 1979).

### **Grammar and Textbooks**

Despite the pejorative opinion many researchers and theorists have toward grammar instruction, grammar remains present in many composition classrooms. Much of this attention to grammar and forms lies in the prevalence of textbooks in composition classrooms. Below is a discussion of the seeming ubiquitous nature of grammar and the role textbooks play in composition instruction.

#### **Grammar's Reign**

When Harvard instituted freshman English to rescue America from its writing problem, universities strove to blame students' poor writing skills on secondary schools, but they also found they had to deal with the students they accepted into their programs (Connors, 1997). Not dealing with the problem would have resulted in an even greater national scandal. With overwhelming workloads, though, teachers gave up rhetoric and focused on grammar and mechanics as elements that seemed like a quicker and easier fix to student writing problems. However, this type of formal instruction is deceptive: it is so time consuming "it crowds out the ability to process and learn language in more natural ways" (Myers, 2003, p. 620).

To better understand the lasting influence of grammar in writing instruction, it helps to follow its progression through history. For the ancients, grammar was not in any way creative; it was intended as a mental training for the mind and was part of elementary education where students learned to speak correctly (Connors, 1997). This division between disciplines remained until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Connors (1997) summarized grammar's popularity through history by defining its pedagogy before 1850 as mostly rote memorization, analyses of syntax, and proofing sentences. Grammar was seen as so integral to elementary education that those schools became known as grammar schools around 1850 when grammar reached its peak as the center of students' early schooling. What was taught, enforced, and assessed was correctness.

Eventually, some instructors realized studying grammar had few positive effects on student writing (Connors, 1997), but by this time, the methods and beliefs associated with such instruction were thoroughly ingrained in American culture. Kennedy (1998) noted that composition reformers urged instructors to pay more attention to strategy and purpose. She contended that writing is different from other disciplines because it is “an inherently purposeful and inherently social activity and . . . excessive attention to prescriptions not only ignores purpose and content . . . but may even inhibit students from wanting to write” (p. 9). Even some process approaches can fall into more formalistic pedagogical schemes. Smagorinsky (2010) explained these approaches tend to rely on often abbreviated forms of instruction—the teacher presents a model, explains the features of the essay, and gives students an imitation assignment, leading to omission of instruction in content generation, purpose, and audience consideration. Connors (1997) described this pedagogy as a process of providing students with structures and expecting

them to memorize and replicate them. He asserted this pedagogy was based on an “absorption-regurgitation epistemology” (p. 72) teachers found difficult to relinquish.

**The business of textbooks.** Textbook makers soon figured out teachers wanted compositions ruled by correctness, so they designed textbooks to accommodate those desires (Connors, 1997). In composition instruction, especially in secondary schools, traditional teaching methods rely heavily on textbooks, workbooks, and their associated prescribed writing activities (Isaacs, 2009). Textbooks, though, change slowly and tend to represent older (sometimes outdated) practices while scholarship advances through journal articles (Connors, 1997). The difference is that composition—and especially composition pedagogy—had, essentially, no scholarly professional journals until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, the influence of textbooks was ubiquitous. What was printed in early composition journals such as *English Journal* was read by very few while textbooks were in every teacher’s and almost every student’s hands. Connors (1997) stated teachers received their textbooks upon entering the classroom and assumed its contents were accurate and appropriate. Composition, Connors summarized, was the only course taught by individuals whose only training came from the textbooks they used in their courses.

The widespread acceptance of the power of prescriptions in composition instruction complicated students’ learning in three ways: teachers’ understanding of the prescriptions they taught seemed insufficient, teachers often seemed uninterested in the rules they taught, and most teachers felt they should understand the prescriptions better than they did and were embarrassed by their own deficiencies (Kennedy, 1998). Faced with overloaded classes, overwork, and pressure to teach basic skills, teachers found a

way to protect themselves and continue working: they eliminated abstract concepts and substituted simpler assignments easily scored for mistakes, becoming formal error correctors instead of writing instructors (Connors, 1997). Fortunately, Applebee and Langer (2009) found that since 1995 or so, teachers reported focusing on the writing process, but these reports have not been confirmed with observations. They concluded that there was likely variation in what teachers actually implemented and did in their classrooms. Rhetoric is, as it has in the past, been called upon to “rescue composition from its seemingly anti-intellectual baggage of word-, sentence-, and paragraph-level pedantry” (Jolliffe & Covino, 1996, p. 213).

Current standardized tests in the state of Georgia as well as the AP English Language and Composition exam emphasize the importance of argumentative writing. Textbooks, however, often favor expository and narrative writing, limiting a student’s access to argumentative instruction for both writing and analysis (Calfee & Chambliss, 1987; Newell et al., 2011). Secondary school writing instruction has received little attention by historians (Russell, 2006), but it is well-documented that classroom teachers began deviating from pedagogical research and relying on their own experiences (Barnes & Smagorinsky, 2016; Borenzweig, 2009; Estrem & Reid, 2015; Smagorinsky, 2010) and textbooks (Calfee & Chambliss, 1987; Connors, 1997; Isaacs, 2009). Even though the 1930s demonstrated vast changes in writing research including work in error analysis and a reassessment of the value of correctness, textbooks showed few changes—a trend that has continued (Connors, 1997). Formal correctness was still viewed by many as the essential problem with student writing (and teachers’ class sizes were not getting any

smaller), so the emphasis in grammar and mechanics in writing instruction continued. In some classrooms today, textbooks' grip on pedagogy persists.

### **Preponderance of Literature**

Disputes between literature and composition have existed since the Greeks divided composition studies into the trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric (Farris, 2014). The resulting tension between knowledge and skills has persisted through the rise of English literature and English composition as disciplines. Despite Georgia's secondary English standards emphasizing the equal distribution of literary and informational texts, many secondary classrooms are largely literature based. Fulkerson (2005) described these courses as those in which students read texts the teachers or textbooks deem valuable, write about them, and are evaluated on how well they interpret the texts. Feedback in a writing-centered classroom should be about the writing instead of about how the text was read, but the distinction is often unclear. Yet, teaching composition with a literary focus proved popular since that part of English study is what teachers knew best, and this approach has remained popular (Connors, 1997). Generally, writing classes that have any literary component devote the course to reading literature instead of using literature to help teach students to write (Tate, 2002).

Fulkerson (2005) provided two reasons a literature-based writing course is inappropriate: reading, analyzing, and discussing works of literature will leave little time for writing instruction, resulting in a writing course where writing is performed and evaluated but not taught, and reading teacher-chosen literature can lead to indoctrination, denying students the ability to develop and explore their own views. Lindemann (2002) further explained that literary-based writing assignments require students to abandon their

own voices and adopt the “disembodied voice” (p. 143) of the academy. The ideal writing course, Lindemann argued, does not argue or have a significant place for literature. She offered reasons literature is inappropriate for use in writing instruction:

First, literature-based courses, even more essay-based courses, focus on consuming texts, not producing them. The teacher talks 75 to 80% of the time. Students do very little writing, and what they write has little relation to the intellectual demands of assignments in a political science or chemistry class. A pedagogy derived from teaching literature looks and sounds different from one that encourages students to produce texts. [Literature teachers] also report clear preferences for teaching by lecture and discussion. (p. 142)

A better way to teach writing, she stated, is to ask students to examine texts they encounter in school and in society, texts that provide wider rhetorical variety and choices than literature tends to demonstrate. Then students must make those rhetorical choices in their own writing.

Tate (2002) disagreed with Lindemann but admits literature was often “badly misused by teachers desperate to teach literature, teachers who really should not be blamed for trying to teach the one subject they know” (p. 146). He also recognized a teaching approach will not leave classrooms simply because it is misused or damaging. However, Tate argued literary works do have a place in the composition classroom. While he did not advocate a writing class structured solely on literature, he felt students should not be denied any text that could help them be better writers.

Similarly, Farris (2014) argued literary texts make arguments students can use in learning to write. Schilb and Clifford (2012) provided their students with questions and

strategies originating with literary works, and Halpern (2007) felt she taught argument when she encouraged students to make a claim for one interpretation over another instead of discussing close readings. Farris (2014) expanded on the integration of literature in composition classrooms by noting literary scholars often defend the use of literature in composition courses. Nonetheless, Taggart et al. (2014) stated a writing pedagogy emphasizes text production while literature pedagogies emphasize text reception. In most cases, English studies students, who form the majority of composition instructors in secondary schools, have little to no interest in writing and have had little university-level coursework in the matter; many actually view writing as “a tedious adjunct to the study of literature . . . [and] can be similarly indifferent to the idea that students need to be taught to write” (Stygall, 2002).

Composition scholars have found that literature in the writing classroom often points to interpretation at the expense of student writing. Yet, despite NCTE and the Common Core’s requirement for more argument in the secondary classroom (Fleming, 2014) and NCTE’s imperative that writing should begin with ideas and processes instead of modes or prescriptions, English classes have remained largely literary (Smagorinsky, 2010). Even when composition publications try to keep writing instructors current on composition theory and pedagogy, schools tend to hire those who conform to the formalist traditions promoted by their institutions (Smagorinsky, 2010). What instructors should remember is that writing program directors and coordinators explained that the majority of freshmen students are rarely expected to write about literature in their other courses (Stygall, 2002).

In Hansen et al.'s (2006) study, students reported English teachers taught elements of writing less than once or twice a week, opting instead for studies of literature. They also found that the most assigned essays were five-paragraph essays, comparison and contrast essays, book reports, and test preparation questions, and 87.3% of the assignments required three or fewer pages of writing. They also analyzed AP classrooms and found little deviation from the pattern.

Students seemed to be concerned more with the prescriptions of writing and paid more attention to their spelling and grammar errors largely because their teachers emphasized these elements when assessing their writing (Kennedy, 1998). Despite the intentions of various composition programs, this tendency is widespread and pervasive. Langer (2001) found that more successful and higher performing students appeared in schools where teachers used standardized tests as a reference point to design curriculum and to guarantee students understood fundamental language concepts and skills. Students in more successful AP English Language and Composition courses have almost exclusively used nonfiction texts, using only literary works with a clear rhetorical purpose (Puhr, 2010).

### **Philosophical Confusion**

As mentioned earlier, teachers' philosophies about writing and writing instruction influence the texts they choose, the activities they implement, and the way they assess writing. Fulkerson's (1979, 2005) composition research focus was on the resulting confusion from philosophy and practice incongruity. He asserted that a teacher's writing philosophy (including ideology and epistemology) about writing leads to a theory of what comprises good writing, which leads to pedagogical goals, which leads to classroom

procedures. The number of philosophies along with the multiple influences that constitute teacher practices results in a wide variation in teacher practices and assessment procedures along with a baffling variety in writing instruction courses (Fulkerson, 1979, 2005; Kitzhaber, 1963). Fulkerson (2005) further explained that the complexity in goals and procedures resulted in teacher mindlessness because those associated with one value cannot be used to reach the end of another.

### **Issues with Research Implementation**

In the 1960s and 1970s, emphases on personal growth and cognitive development resulted in the process movement in writing instruction and teachers' reliance on literary texts as models (Farris, 2014). Led by grammar and modal rules, writing pedagogy focused on these elements in current-traditional composition for over half a century (Farris, 2014). To break out of the cyclical nature of writing instruction, Gebhardt (1981) and Tremmel (2001) suggested that writing teachers understand the foundational theories of composition and writing instruction and test them out in their classrooms. Shaughnessy (1976) added teachers should be willing to discover accurate data by applying pedagogical and composition research.

Learning to question is an important element for teachers according to composition researchers like Shaughnessey, Fulkerson, Gebhardt, and Farris. Freire (2018) even said he would rather train the illiterate and uneducated to teach writing than university-trained professionals because those from the university are filled with knowledge from the academy and with the idea that good teachers deliver knowledge comprehensively, an idea that strengthens the tendency and desire to lecture. As instructors, Shor (Shor, 2016b) and Freire (2018) had difficulty encouraging students to

overcome the pull of lecturing to create writing instructors who could pose problems, listen to students, and work with students at their developing writing stages. Shor sees this difficulty as one of the greatest problems of writing instruction.

Another problem with writing research is that there is no unified theory to guide writing instruction (Lindemann, 2002). When such an absence exists, teachers embrace the practices that make them comfortable: literature, not writing. Heilker (2002) acknowledged the importance of mentors who make theory present in their practices as they are walking examples of how to “connect theory and practice as writers and teachers” (p. 260). Writing courses should have a connection to real-world application and develop skills for the schools and professions students may enter, raising questions of purpose and form that rhetorical theory and training has always addressed (Lindemann, 2002). These courses, Lindemann continued, require rigorous reading and writing and are difficult to teach. They are more like writing workshops than literature courses where students are always working on a writing project and teachers are experienced writers, not lecturers.

Even if teachers can agree on the goal (to help students improve their writing) and a definition of good writing (“writing that was rhetorically effective for audience and situation” [p. 655]) as Fulkerson (2005) stated, they often disagree on which pedagogical approach is best to reach that goal. Research has noted, however, that contemporary composition’s rhetorical focus is on the idea that writing and thinking skills are connected and that pedagogy for the two should be taught simultaneously (Corcelles & Castelló, 2017; Taghinezhad, Riasati, & Behjat, 2019).

## Specific Issues with Secondary School Systems

State-specific and exam-specific standards will inevitably play a large role in instructional goals and activities. While such testing broadened stakeholders' interest in writing instruction, it invariably narrowed instruction (Reid, 2011). Yet, teachers have a responsibility to help their students navigate the standards without losing their originality and voice—both qualities advocated by writing instructors and readers (Beck, 2006). Additionally, Common Core Standards changed elementary writing from its traditional focus on personal narratives and memoirs to one of informative and persuasive essays. By high school, students are expected to write mature and thoughtful essays across subject areas. These standards may be creating a dearth of lengthy writing assignments before students graduate (Applebee & Langer, 2009).

Some schools and districts attempt to overcome their faculty's lack of writing instruction skills by implementing professional development opportunities for teachers. Juzwik (2010) discussed the role of professional development on writing instruction: The lack of communication between practice and research can limit the effectiveness of any professional development, and the importance placed on teachers teaching teachers can cause professional development creators to ignore the benefits of connecting research and practice. Two particularly inhibitive issues with writing instruction professional development include the disconnect between practice and research and between the different research disciplines (i.e. composition-rhetoric and educational research).

Tremmel (2001) discovered from a thorough study of composition history a need for reconfiguration of the discipline and a sharing of information and practices to solidify the common ground on which composition research and practice stand. Yet he noticed

English teachers often fail to commit themselves as writing teaching professionals. One reason he found was that writing teacher programs were often inadequate in their overrepresentation of practice and underrepresentation of theory. Many writing instruction students were so nervous about instruction that they demanded information in practice, and many resisted theory because they failed to see a need for it. Additionally, field experiences disregarded writing instruction entirely or almost completely. Tremmel (2001) noted:

Bluntly put, there are still teachers out there who are teaching the five-paragraph essay, the research paper, handing out worksheets, and not doing too much else with writing. As a result, it is not uncommon for prospective and beginning teachers . . . to go through an entire field experience sequence without ever becoming fully involved in the teaching of writing and without ever thinking of themselves as writing teachers. (p. 17)

Researchers also noticed that teachers' personal experiences with the five-paragraph essay and formal grammar helped shape their identities as writing instructors (Johnson et al., 2003).

### **Issues with the AP English Language and Composition Course**

Research has shown many benefits for students who are willing to take the rigorous courses associated with AP (College Board, 2014a; Dougherty, Mellor, & Jian, 2006; Mattern, Shaw, & Ewing, 2011; Morgan & Klaric, 2007; Murphy & Dodd, 2009). The growth of charter schools and standards-based instruction have encouraged competition for high school students resulting in more rigorous curricula “chock-full of

AP options” (Judson & Hobson, 2015). Yet some stakeholders are concerned America is getting ahead of itself (Koebler, 2012).

AP teachers face the daunting task of teaching a college-level introductory course to high school students who must take a high-stakes three-hour or longer standardized exam which will reflect on both students and the teacher (Borenzweig, 2009). Because of the freedom AP English Language and Composition teachers are granted in designing their curriculum (Greenblatt, 2007), there are many approaches to developing an AP English Language and Composition program. The activity that most have in common is intense preparation for the AP exam (Foster, 1989; Hansen et al., 2006). In fact, anecdotal and published reports (Hansen et al., 2006; Holladay, 1989; Iorio, 1989; Vopat, 1989) have shown that many classes spend a large portion of their class time on test preparation, and the requirement to compose three essays in two hours makes practice a necessity (Hansen et al., 2006). The complexities inherent in the interplay among students, teachers, and flexibility of course design inevitably produce some issues that inhibit student success in the class and on the exam.

Puhr (2010) noticed the uneven development of the course as an issue with AP English Language and Composition. Though all of the AP English Language courses should be somewhat equal, the truth is “some are more equal than others—in other words, not all the courses produce the outcomes that they should” (p. 79). She found three issues that have caused the discrepancy in course effectiveness: the joining of AP Language with American Literature, ill-prepared students enrolling in the course, and under-qualified instructors teaching the course. In addition, the College Board introduces

its own issues into the success of the course. The following sections will discuss each of these sources of trouble in more detail.

**The College Board and the AP English Language and Composition exam.**

Again, the curriculum of AP courses is not and has never been standardized.

While the IB program requires a two-year implementation process entailing site visits to guarantee appropriate preparation, the AP program has no such process (Hansen, 2010).

There are provided online sources, a suggested progression of skills, and summer workshops, but there is no requirement teachers attend these opportunities. The College

Board did begin a process to help ensure a rigorous curriculum. In 2007, they

implemented a course audit requiring all schools to submit AP course syllabi for vetting

by college instructors (Hansen, 2010). Boyd (2010) noted that the audit process is

identical across AP subjects, but AP English Language and Composition raised “unique

challenges” (p. 16) for the program. First Year Composition courses, which the AP

English Language and Composition course is intended to replace, vary from school to

school and even from class to class within the same school (Boyd, 2010). Since colleges

and universities approach First Year Composition in so many different ways, it is difficult

to design an exam that will reflect the goals of these courses.

Boyd (2010) continued explaining the concerns associated with AP English

Language and Composition as being sourced from the course descriptors being simply

recommendations. The list of course goals, expected outcomes, the audit system, and

online and summer workshops help align course activities and goals, but the heady

influence of the exam at the end of the course is often minimized. Boyd added that the

goals presented in the AP English Language and Composition course description are often at odds with multiple-choice and timed essay assessment formats.

Another problem initiated by the College Board is the inclusion of many students in AP English courses who are woefully unprepared for the rigors of the course (Jamison, 2015; Puhr, 2010). The College Board's Equity and Access Initiative was implemented to encourage diversity in and equal access to AP courses; however, in some cases, it has resulted in the inclusion of lower-ability students (Jamison, 2015). Combined with the increased scrutiny placed on schools by *Newsweek* and *US News & World Report's* school ratings—which consider AP participation—the Equity and Access policy has encouraged inclusion of students in AP classes for purely financial or social reasons.

Writing assessment forms the backbone of many AP English Language and Composition courses. Scott and Inoue (2016) argued that writing assessment is never neutral as it is shaped by factors such as stated goals, philosophies of writing, politics, cultural assumptions, and institutional or individual factors. Assessments apply values, encouraging writers to adopt the same values. In essence, “whatever is emphasized in an assessment produces what is defined as ‘good writing’ in a class, a program, or a curriculum” (Scott & Inoue, 2016, p. 30). AP teachers must carefully examine provided rubrics to determine what they should include in their writing instruction. Likewise, they should learn what is less important. Further, writing assessments and rubrics such as AP rubrics can create boundaries for learning and inform a student's sense of agency as a writer and his or her chances of future success (Scott & Inoue, 2016). Questions concerning the legitimacy of the essays' rubrics and the scoring processes for AP English courses have raised questions about the validity of the AP program.

Complicating the issues associated with the College Board is the knowledge that most of the information, statistical data, and studies regarding AP English have been conducted and published by the College Board (Vopat, 1989). Yet, Byrd et al. (2007) have found some common characteristics that consistently characterize high performing AP courses: a higher than average number of meetings with feeder schools, a lack of gaps in student coursework prior to AP, a high number of qualified students in classes, a positive attitude from site principals, relaxed pressure to achieve high scores, teachers with more experience teaching the course, and teachers who possess a doctorate.

**Scoring and scores.** Studies have demonstrated that students who take AP English Language and Composition and score a three or higher are more likely to complete college than those who take dual enrollment courses affiliated with either two- or four-year colleges and universities (Wyatt et al., 2015). Additionally, Hansen et al. (2006) found that students who took both AP English Language and Composition and First Year Composition proved to be better writers than students who completed one or the other partly because they were willing to accept more opportunities to learn about writing. This information suggests more writing instruction equates with better writing ability.

Until 2014, the College Board published a print version of its AP Report to the Nation (College Board, 2014a) to provide every state with information to help celebrate its successes and improve its performance. Since then, it provides most comparable data through its online Report to the Nation (College Board, 2018e) site, and Georgia reports its counties' scores on its Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2019) site. Although Georgia's scores demonstrated an upward trajectory comparable to (and usually

better than) national passing rates, South Georgia students have demonstrated a lower passing rate. For example, on the most recently reported AP English Language and Composition Exam, 59.1% of Georgia's students scored a three or higher on the exam, but only 43.9% of South Georgia students scored such. The discrepancy in Georgia's scores is reflected in different College Board AP honors as well. The Eighth Annual AP District Honor Roll (College Board, 2018b) recognized districts for their commitment to increasing access for underrepresented students while maintaining or increasing passing rates on the exam. Of the four Georgia school districts receiving this honor in 2017 (Forsyth County, Gainesville City, Greene County, and Jasper County), none were from South Georgia. All of this data signaled a need for improvement in South Georgia AP English Language and Composition courses.

**Essay commentary.** By the 1980s, composition instructors had access to both classical rhetoric and modern rhetoric through new workbooks and textbooks; however, class time available for writing instruction was shrinking (Fleming, 2014). Many institutions began to initiate literacy initiatives, which tended to emphasize reading over writing, but argumentative writing was slowly becoming more prominent than personal writing—in the available scholarship if not in the classroom (Fleming, 2014). In 1996, four books on argument were published, *Perspectives on Written Argument* by Merrill, *The Rhetoric of Reason: Writing and the Attractions of Argument* by Crosswhite, *Argument Revisited; Argument Redefined: Negotiating Meaning in the Composition Classroom* by Emmel, Resch, and Tenney, and *Teaching the Argument in Writing* by Fulkerson. Despite the revelations occurring in theory and scholarship, students and teachers still struggled with argumentative writing.

Newell et al. (2011) attempted to explain these difficulties as partly due to the complexity and demand inherent in writing. Unlike reading and other styles of writing, they stated, argument requires more sophisticated skills and a wider range of genres (letters, essays, speeches, essays, sermons, reviews, testimonials, and so on). The idea that argument can contain several genres itself contradicts the formalist notion that argument is a genre of its own (Freedman, 1996) and complicates teachers' content and procedural knowledge for teaching argument (Hillocks, 2010). Another difficulty with argumentative writing instruction arises because teachers often try to maintain a peaceful classroom, and disagreements and conflict can often occur when teaching argument (Newell et al., 2011; Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985).

Each year, AP readers provide commentary for the essay portion of the AP English Language and Composition exam to help teachers improve their instruction for the following year. Essay commentary on AP English Language and Composition exams from the past ten years has demonstrated a continuing need for a refocus of the class to rhetoric (College Board, 2018c). Readers have continually noticed a need for student access to more nonfiction texts, seemingly absent from AP English Language and Composition courses, partly because of its conjoining with American Literature. Additionally, commentary has emphasized the need for teachers to help students explain how a writer constructs an argument over what the argument says; focus on how rhetorical devices help construct an argument, create or support purpose, and appeal to an intended audience; construct texts conceptually instead of formulaically; and read and write rhetorically (College Board, 2018c). These comments highlight the lack of rhetoric occurring in AP English Language and Composition classrooms.

## **Opposition to AP and Some Alternatives**

There are many who oppose AP English Language and Composition, many other AP courses, and the College Board for several reasons. Some college instructors worry that sharing what they do in First Year Composition is less than useful when high school English remains largely literary in nature (Severino, 2012). Also, many complained that the AP English Language and Composition exam assesses little of what is actually taught in First Year Composition. Jones (2010), however, noted that those complaints mistake curriculum with assessment. The AP English Language and Composition exam gauges whether students have facility with language and can prove so on a timed assessment. Only those students who are comfortable and able enough with language to earn credit by testing will “pass”; all others will continue through First Year Composition. Jones continued describing AP English classes replete with multiple-choice and timed essay practice, but it would be ill-advised to assume this approach is normal because most AP English teachers strive to develop thoughtful, challenging courses for their students.

These worries, however, centered around the idea that students are skipping First Year Composition before they step onto a college campus and that the College Board program is too commercial (Severino, 2012). Many more selective colleges now demonstrate a preference for students who have taken an AP English course, but they are becoming less and less likely to exempt students from their English courses (Jones, 2010). Jolliffe (2010), a former chief reader for AP English Language and Composition, stated that his support for AP English Language and Composition derived from his belief the AP course is better and more rigorous than any other English course in high school (Jolliffe & Phelan, 2006), and Puhr (2010) argued AP courses are more than capable of

fulfilling the functions of First Year Composition. To alleviate the concern many have about students exempting First Year Composition, Jolliffe (2010) suggested colleges and universities admit students who score well on the AP English Language and Composition exam into an advanced course or require them to take an intensive writing workshop to help them learn about the culture of writing in their college or university.

### **Summary**

Helping students navigate the rigorous and demanding waters of the AP English Language and Composition course lies largely in the hands of teachers. Successful completion of this course depends on students developing composition-rhetoric skills and teachers managing composition-rhetoric instruction while reconciling their own composition epistemologies, ideologies, and theories with the College Board's course expectations. Studying teachers' perceptions of their preparation for this rhetoric-laden course and the strategies and practices they implement in their classrooms may help students, teachers, and stakeholders in their respective roles in this course.

The initial section of this literature review focused on the history of AP English Language and Composition and First Year Composition. Additional literature concerning composition theories and composition-rhetoric research delineated the different belief systems and corresponding practices to which teachers adhere. The AP English Language and Composition course was examined to better understand the goals, skills, recommendations, and examination requirements for the course. Experiences that form teachers' composition beliefs and practices were researched to explain the elements that create pedagogical decisions. Finally, issues associated with both AP English

Language and Composition and First Year Composition provided research-based concerns about the two courses.

While this chapter discussed the review of literature that formed the conceptual framework and guiding principles of this study, Chapter 3 discusses the methodology that framed the processes I followed in researching AP English Language and Composition teachers' perceptions of their preparation for teaching composition-rhetoric and the strategies they use in their classrooms.

## Chapter III

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methods of research used in this study. In order to research the strategies and practices used by veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools, this qualitative study explored teachers' perceptions of the quantity and quality of professional development, training, and preparation for AP English Language and Composition instruction. The study also explored the strategies and practices these instructors used. I performed a case study analysis of teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and classroom practices in relation to professional development for this rigorous high school course. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine AP English Language and Composition instructors' perceptions of AP professional development and how they incorporated learned practices that could lead to successful classroom instruction.

#### **Research Questions**

The general problem of this study was that students in rural South Georgia Title I high schools had not demonstrated success in the composition-rhetoric based AP English Language and Composition course (College Board, 2014b, 2017a, 2017c). According to the College Board's annual comments on AP English Language and Composition student exams (College Board, 2017c), student essays have consistently displayed a lack of understanding of rhetoric, the College Board's stated theoretical and practical basis for

AP English Language and Composition. Comments also noted courses seemed to focus on literature instead of nonfiction texts. Likewise, Georgia students' 2018 average score of 2.87 out of five (College Board, 2018c) demonstrated a discrepancy between class instruction and course goals provided by the College Board (College Board, 2014b, 2019b). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine and analyze the composition practices, theories, and pedagogies of teachers in light of their training to teach AP English Language and Composition.

To aid in accomplishing the above purpose, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the lived and career experiences of veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an AP open enrollment policy?
2. What are veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers' beliefs, epistemologies, or ideologies about composition instruction in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an AP open enrollment policy?
3. What changes or strategies for instruction have been implemented by veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an AP open enrollment policy following professional development for the AP English Language and Composition course?
4. What classroom practices are used by veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an AP open enrollment policy?

## Research Design

This investigation used a qualitative methodology, which, according to Creswell (2014), is used to “make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world” (p. 8). Qualitative research, by extension, is an approach to research centered on the gathering of information and descriptions to facilitate discovery or the understanding of meaning (Merriam, 2009). Much research on reading and writing in general has focused, by a large margin, on reading pedagogy, processes, and difficulties. Research has indicated a shift away from writing in the classroom (Addison & McGee, 2010; Carnegie Mellon University, 2015; Maguire, 2016; Sanoff, 2006). Yet much of the instruction in the AP English Language and Composition course centers on writing instruction with a rhetorical focus (College Board, 2014b, 2019b).

The problem this study addressed was that student essays from the AP English Language and Composition exam have consistently demonstrated a lack of understanding of rhetoric, implying a course focus on literature and textual aesthetics instead of rhetorical analysis (College Board, 2014b, 2016, 2017c, 2019b). Although people have conveyed differing experiences and perceptions (Patton, 2002), I have attempted to interpret the perceptions and experiences of AP English Language and Composition instructors and develop a pattern of meaning (Creswell, 2014). The central problem was that scores in AP English Language and Composition have been low in South Georgia—with an average score of 2.87 out of five on the 2018 exam, for example (College Board, 2018c). These low scores have indicated that the professional development and trainings of instructors, or lack thereof, may have hindered student achievement. Thus, this study explored teachers’ experiences in developing the rhetorical background necessary for

teaching the rhetoric-laden AP English Language and Composition course. As such, the voices and opinions of AP English Language and Composition instructors should be heard. Quantitative studies could not effectively capture the multi-layered and thematic data that can result from qualitative techniques such as interviews and observations.

### **Case Study**

Specifically, a case study approach was used for this study. Case studies examine a phenomenon in context with working parts (Stake, 1995) within delineated boundaries (Creswell, 2014); Merriam (2009) argued that the latter characteristic was the defining characteristic of the case study. Given these attributes, Stake (1995) noted that the case study is best for studying people and programs instead of events and processes. The situation under study was the training, epistemology, ideology, and pedagogy of South Georgia AP English Language and Composition instructors. The study was bounded by including only veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers as defined by the College Board's requirement for AP readers to have at least two years of experience to apply for summer reading positions (College Board, 2017d). Veteran teachers have experienced the stresses of a first year AP English Language and Composition course and have seen multiple score reports for their students. Therefore, they better understand the roles reading, composition, and rhetoric play in their courses and can better correlate their training experiences to the needs of the course. Additionally, the study was limited to teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with open enrollment policies. Using teachers from similar schools meeting these specific requirements produced schools with similar demographics, districts with similar funding, and teachers with similar opportunities, students, and school systems. Limiting the variables in the study also

improved validity and reliability as these factors were not as likely to alter teachers' perceptions or experiences. Through the use of a variety of sources of evidence including interviews, document analysis, and observations, I triangulated data to improve validity and reliability as well.

### **Population**

Every school in the six South Georgia RESA districts located in a rural district as defined by the United States Census Bureau was used as the population pool for this study. These rural schools were "outside urbanized areas in open country, or in communities with less than 2,500 inhabitants" or where the population density was "less than 1,000 inhabitants per square mile" (NCES, 1997, p. 3). Qualifying schools were designated as Title I high schools (at least grades 11 and 12) with high numbers or percentages of students from low-income families (U. S. Department of Education, 2015). Finally, schools selected also followed the College Board's (2002) open enrollment policy for AP students as set forth in their Equity Policy Statement:

All students who are willing to accept the challenge of a rigorous academic curriculum should be considered for admission to AP courses. . . . Schools should make every effort to ensure that their AP classes reflect the diversity of their student population. (p. 2)

Qualifying school districts for this study included those from Chattahoochee-Flint, Heart of Georgia, Southwest Georgia, Coastal Plains, First District, and Okefenokee RESAs.

The participants for this study were volunteer AP English Language and Composition teachers from qualifying school districts, according to the parameters above. A further requirement was that teachers were veteran teachers as defined by the College

Board's requirements to become an AP Reader (College Board, 2017d). Potential teachers' names were gathered from school personnel lists, curriculum directors, and AP seminar and workshop directors.

### **Sampling**

Data analysis for a qualitative study is often detailed and time consuming because of the abundance and depth of data. Therefore, when more individuals are involved in the study, more time is required for data collection and analysis. Stake (2005) posited that the ideal sample size for a study such as this one should be four to ten participants. He argued too few participants would not provide enough information to draw conclusions while including too many may introduce so many unique interactions that meanings would be difficult to infer. Understanding the situation in this study required careful consideration of available participants (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 1990; Stake, 2005; Vaughan, 1992), and participation was solicited from qualifying school districts and qualifying teachers. I purposefully chose participants based on the above criteria to reveal the lived experiences of AP English Language and Composition teachers. The descriptions and explanations given by the selected participants allowed me to unveil, analyze, and further understand rhetorical knowledge and skill for students and teachers (Nelson, 1989; Wolff, 2002).

The number of participants needed for this study was flexible, depending on how many AP English Language and Composition teachers volunteered for the study. I strove to have five to seven participants to achieve the detailed and comprehensive coverage needed. The seven participants who volunteered represented five of the RESA districts in South Georgia, so they offered a thorough cross-section of South Georgia's AP English

Language and Composition teachers. They also allowed an in-depth study of the narratives, experiences, and themes of AP English Language and Composition instruction. The use of purposeful sampling involving geographic location and the above-mentioned specific criteria to eliminate and choose participants promoted a focused, bound, and profound understanding of the emerging data.

### **Sampling Procedure**

Participants were selected from a pool of South Georgia AP English Language and Composition teachers from school districts meeting the above-mentioned qualifications. Final selection of possible participants was further determined from teacher qualifications listed below and upon verifying continuous offering of the course by the participants' schools and by the participants.

Before contacting possible participants, I obtained IRB approval (see Appendix A) for the study. I also contacted superintendents of districts meeting the criteria for this study for permission to conduct research in their respective districts (see Appendix B). Letters of invitation were emailed to potential participants meeting the criteria for the study following formal approval by the IRB. Seven qualifying respondents agreed to participate in the study. One participant was chosen for the study's pilot, and the six remaining participants formed the main study. The remaining six volunteers represented five of the six RESA districts, providing appropriate variety of representation. Follow-up emails and telephone calls were made to schedule interviews and observations. Dates for subsequent interviews and observations were also planned. Participants in the study were all volunteers and advised that they would receive no direct benefit from their

participation. Observations and document analysis ensured validity and reliability via triangulation of the data (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005).

An in-person meeting was scheduled with each volunteer who expressed interest in participating after receiving the invitation letter. I explained the purpose of the study in detail and informed each potential participant that he or she could withdraw from the study at any time regardless of the reason and without penalty. Invitees were also informed that their participation was anonymous; additionally, they were notified that names of participants' schools would not to be published. Each potential participant had the opportunity to review the invitation letter, which detailed the purposes and processes of the study. If the participants were interested in continuing, each was asked to verbally acknowledge informed consent at the beginning of their individual interviews.

Confidentiality was established in the study, as individual names were not used nor were individual school or district names. I assigned each teacher participant a unique pseudonym to use throughout the study. Each participant was asked to provide contact information for notification of times, dates, and places for interviews. Contact information was also used to notify participants of the availability of the study for review or comment before submission.

To further ensure confidentiality, participants were specifically informed that pseudonyms were to be used in place of participant and school names. Participants were also informed that confidentiality would be further maintained in interviews, in observations, and on any documents. Personal identifying information and specific school names were coded or omitted to ensure compliance with and respect for individual and group confidentiality. Every effort was made to guard against specific identifiers in

field notes, notes taken during the data collection process, and document replication. Audio recordings will be destroyed upon completion of data analysis, approval of the dissertation, and the lapse of a required minimum time span of three years.

### **Data Collection**

Before data collection, a comprehensive review of relevant literature was conducted to better understand the problem. The appropriate methodology arose from the literature review, and the research questions became a way to formulate meaning from teacher experiences. The literature review was used to frame the problem for the study (Creswell, 2014) not as part of the data. Instead, data was collected through personal data forms, interviews, observations, and document analysis. Varied resources such as these were used as well as a variety of data collection methods to improve triangulation (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was completed as a miniature version of the study to guide the development of the research plan and develop interview processes most appropriate for the study (Prescott & Soeken, 1989). The pilot study also improved the likelihood the methods and processes worked on a larger scale (Lancaster, Dodd, & Williamson, 2004). One benefit of utilizing a pilot study was to enhance the study's credibility (Padgett, 2008), but the main benefit of this pilot study was to make adjustments before launching the main study.

The pilot study began with an interview of one qualifying teacher to find patterns, develop a more precise interview format, and develop a direction for the interview process. One individual was chosen from the qualifying respondents. This person was

purposefully selected according to the parameters of the study and from the number of commonalities shared with the main study participants but was not a part of the main study. I chose not to use this participant in the main study because he and I had been colleagues earlier in our careers. The pilot study helped determine the accuracy and suitability of the interview questions (Turner, 2010).

The pilot study interview session was scheduled during a phone call but took place at the interviewee's convenience on a weekday afternoon in a school office; consisted of open-ended, semi-structured questions; and lasted approximately 30 minutes. The individual participating in the pilot study was required to verbally consent to participation at the beginning of the recorded interview, confirming that the pilot study maintained the same level of respect afforded to the main research study participants. The pilot participant received the same information as the main study participants, which included an explanation for the process of withdrawing from the pilot study without penalty at any point. All information was identified, given a code, and secured, along with all recording materials.

An analysis of the pilot study determined the adjustments subsequently made to the interview questions, observation instrument, and document analysis instrument. After the pilot study, I edited some interview questions to encourage participants to provide more detailed information about their composition instruction and rearranged the questions' order to provide a more coherent interview. The observation and document instruments received levels in some fields to signify the degree to which those characteristics were observed and to aid in quick notations.

The primary study's individual interviews began after analysis of the pilot study responses. The primary research study included all questions edited, approved, and validated by the pilot. Turner (2010) suggested that a pilot study of interview questions may detect weaknesses, flaws, and limitations. Additionally, triangulation can assist with completely understanding the phenomena under investigation (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2012). This pilot helped refine interview questions and edit observation instruments to more appropriately address the study's purpose and research questions.

### **Personal Data**

Merriam (2009) stated there are six types of questions to encourage open dialogue between an interviewer and interviewee; one of these types involves questions concerning demographic and background information. This type of information can be gathered efficiently using personal data forms, which also facilitate efforts to arrange provided information into a demographic table. Therefore, prior to interviewing, each participant was asked to complete a personal data form requesting information concerning years of experience teaching AP English Language and Composition, number of College Board APSIs attended, number of College Board workshops attended, types of college courses taken, type(s) of degree(s) earned, number of years teaching English courses, number of students enrolled in AP English Language and Composition, and other relevant background information (see Appendix C). The information gathered from this form was used to provide descriptive statistics, verify information, and form part of relevant data for collection.

## **Interviews**

Each participant was scheduled for one one-hour interview and notified subsequent interviews may be required. Limiting the interviews to one-hour sessions helped lessen any interference to the participants' plans. Additionally, planning for subsequent interviews allowed time for further questioning to clarify participant commentary or to gather any extra commentary from the participants. To minimize interruptions to the teachers' schedules and to facilitate participation, the interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience either during the school day, after school, or on school breaks. Participants were offered to participate in the interviews via phone or through a Voice over Internet Protocol program such as Skype or Face Time, but all participants preferred in-person interviews. Before the interview, participants were asked to complete a personal data form available on Google Forms (see Appendix C) and sent a link via email. Then in-person interviews using pre-written, guiding questions took place (see Appendix D). The guiding questions provided structure for the interview but did not dictate the direction of the interview.

**Interview protocol.** I asked each participant for consent to be interviewed. Voluntary participation in this study required participants who were willing to answer questions and provide commentary about their educational background, professional development experiences, beliefs about composition, and teaching methods. No data was collected and viewed until consent was provided. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and participants were informed they could be asked to participate in several interviews if additional information was needed. At the beginning of each interview

session, I asked each teacher for consent to participate in the study and audio record each interview.

Each interview was recorded with an audio recording device, as each participant granted permission to be recorded. These recordings provided a more exact record of the conversation and permitted me to create an accurate transcription. Additionally, I recorded any thoughts, questions, or reactions in my notes. After each interview, I transcribed the interview to analyze emerging themes. The transcription was typed into a Microsoft Word document and saved on a password-protected device. Once transcriptions were complete, coding began.

For the purposes of this study, the interview process was identical with each participant. Introductory remarks, the introductory questions, order of questions, use of audio equipment, time allotted, and transcription process remained the same. Uniformity of the interview process allowed for systematic and accurate coding of individual responses.

To help create “controlled” rapport (Seidman, 2006, p. 97) with the participants, the interview began with questions such as where participants went to college, early experiences in education, and personal interests. Participants were also asked questions about major area(s) of interest, inside and outside of the classroom, and when they became interested in or were asked to start teaching AP English Language and Composition. Other questions referenced their experiences in the classroom and with professional development, specifics of their credentialing, and other pertinent information regarding their experiences, particularly as AP English Language and Composition instructors (Hayes, 2010).

The protocol had 16 open-ended questions designed to evoke voluntary and open responses in the participants' own words on the influence of professional development and training in their teaching, their perceived facility with rhetoric, and their current pedagogical practices. Open-ended questions included questions related to teacher experiences (personal and professional), class goals, beliefs about composition and rhetoric, College Board experiences, and instruction strategies (see Appendix D). Questions one and two addressed research question one, questions five through six addressed research question two, questions three and four addressed research question three, and questions eight through 16 addressed research question four. Subsequent interviews focused on any unanswered questions, material that needed clarification, and further commentary from the participant.

The open-ended questions were designed to examine the participants' perceptions of the AP English Language and Composition curriculum and the accompanying training, content, and theories that formed the foundation of their practices. I designed the questions based on experience and knowledge gained from several rhetorical theory courses, composition courses, available literature, and AP English Language and Composition experience, trainings, and readings. The questions elicited information from participants to directly address research questions one and four, which asked participants about lived experiences and classroom practices. Participants' lack of experience with rhetorical theory and composition instruction, however, made explicit questions for research questions two and three impractical. The interview questions for those required information and commentary that demonstrated characteristics of rhetorical theories and changed practices, as found in the literature. Additionally, the

questions explored the participants' beliefs, teaching practices, attitudes, and behaviors in relation to the College Board's proclaimed basis for the AP English Language and Composition course. Participants were also asked to comment on their own experiences as students and as writers.

### **Observations**

Observations function in a qualitative study as a "firsthand encounter" with the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). For this study, my role was that of a non-participatory observer in the AP English Language and Composition classroom. As seen in Appendix E, I followed the observation protocol of recording descriptive notes such as descriptions of the participants, dialogue, physical setting, and events as well as personal thoughts, feelings, questions, and impressions (Creswell, 2014). I designed the observation checklist from AP English Language and Composition course goals as described in the Course Description (College Board, 2014b). The classroom atmosphere was also recorded, including posters, decorations, reminders, technology, and so on. The notes aided in the accurate recording of data from the observations. Visual demographic data was also recorded. The goal of the note-taking session was "thick, deep, and rich description" (Patton, 2002, p. 331) of the practices of teacher participants. Quotations were used as often as possible, and description, reflection, and interpretation remained separate in field notes (Patton, 2002). The teachers were observed once for at least 50 minutes during a scheduled AP English Language and Composition class at the convenience of the participant. I observed three teachers before their interviews, and interviewed three participants before observing them.

## **Documents**

The document analysis portion of this study centered on any lesson plan material, teacher assignments, texts, and notes gathered from participants; additional data was collected from my notes as well as from electronic sources of information such as the College Board and relevant school district sites. These data sources helped me contextualize and understand teachers' perspectives. Additionally, teacher lesson plans assisted in determining the classroom practices teachers used on a regular basis.

Document analysis occurred concurrently and after individual interviews. The protocol used to analyze documents (see Appendix F) followed similar guidelines as the observation protocol. Both the document and observation checklists followed course goals and descriptions from the College Board AP English Language and Composition Course Description (College Board, 2014b); however, the document checklist provided space for the examination of up to three documents for those qualities. The qualitative data from the document analysis helped analyze teachers' classroom content and pedagogy in an effort to draw connections between interview data and practice by correlating teachers' stated practices and the materials that represented their actual practices. These documents helped address research questions three and four concerning teachers' practices and implemented strategies.

## **Data Analysis**

Creswell (2014) argued that the purpose of data analysis is to "make sense out of text" (p. 195) through a process that takes apart the data and puts it back together. The majority of data for this study were gathered from responses to semi-structured initial and follow-up interviews. Additional data were comprised of observation and document

analyses. Other data for the study were retrieved from course description documents available online. The analysis of data began upon completion of the first interview and continued through subsequent interviews and data collection. I used inductive analysis to analyze the data collected, moving from specific information to more general ideas and themes.

### **Interview Analysis**

After the interviews, I transcribed each one using the application Transcribe+. The transcriptions of each interview were written verbatim to permit the most complete data set and provide a tangible set of data for analysis. Listening to the interviews and typing and reading the transcripts gave me intimate knowledge of the respondents' answers and made initial coding more accurate. After transcription, I shared the transcripts with participants for corrections and additions. After the initial reading of the completed transcript, I read the transcripts two more times to familiarize myself as much as possible with the data before coding. Following Saldaña's (2013) coding protocol in *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, I also made a note of any first impressions. In this first cycle coding (Saldaña, 2013), I used descriptive, process, and values coding methods. Descriptive coding grounded the coding as it helped me discover topics of discussion across the participants' experiences. However, process coding allowed me to categorize the participants' conceptual processes as well as the actions their stated and observable strategies and practices represented. Finally, values coding allowed me to note the participants' values concerning AP English Language and Composition and composition-rhetoric.

During this first cycle of coding, I wrote phrases or words next to every line in each participant's transcript. These were followed with the more focused descriptive, values, and process codes. I found codes relevant if they were repeated, if the participant emphasized their importance, if I found them surprising, or if their comments connected with theories or other research. First cycle coding initially resulted in 16 codes and 46 subcodes, which were subsequently narrowed to 11 codes and seven subcodes (see Appendix G). After completing first cycle coding, I divided transcripts into their respective codes using color coding to separate participants' individual contributions. Then I re-analyzed them using pattern coding as a way to identify the emergent themes (Saldaña, 2013). Color-coding the participants' relevant commentary for each code provided a more complete sense of the entirety of the data. An example of this stage in the coding is in Appendix H.

Once all data were organized and coded, I analyzed them further to determine themes. A theme is an "extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 175). The purpose of a theme is to attach meaning to data and provide purpose and significance to the experiences and perceptions of participants (Saldaña, 2013). I identified themes several ways: by looking for repeated ideas, for similarities and differences of participant experiences, for theoretical issues suggested by the data, and for missing information from the data (Saldaña, 2013).

First, I used an online word-cloud generator to complete a word-count analysis on the interviews by copying and pasting all interview transcripts into the program. The program, Wordart.com, produced a visual representation of participants' most often repeated words and a list with how many times each word was repeated. An analysis of

this data provided me with repeated ideas, which, when partnered with another reading of the transcripts to provide context, produced three themes. The two most often repeated topics were “writing,” “knowledge,” and “time,” with words participants most often associated with writing, such as *write*, *know*, *argument*, *essay*, and *analysis* appearing 500 times. Words participants associated with time such as *time*, *year*, *week*, and *semester* appeared a total of 345 times. Finally, words related to knowledge such as *know*, *think*, *learn*, and *understand* appeared 332 times.

I discovered additional themes when I considered the study’s goals, research questions, conceptual framework, and literature review (Saldaña, 2013). I created a three-column layout on paper and included the transcripts arranged by codes in the middle column, working space in the left column, and thematic connections in the right column. Saldaña’s (2013) process description, topic description, and interpretation of statements served as the basis for thematic connections. This process resulted in five themes, but only three of them remained after further analysis.

I chose two of the discovered themes and reread all of the collected data. This process improved the likelihood that the data supported the themes I uncovered (Hatch, 2002). When I found evidence of a theme, I noted it in the data and copied and pasted it into a separate document underneath its appropriate theme. After completing this process with the two initial themes, I repeated the process with the remaining themes. Completing these steps allowed me to examine the data again with thematic concerns in mind and gave me a thorough understanding of the themes. After completing the theming process, I read all of the data again to verify themes and ensure all were based on repeating ideas, ideas participants found important, and surprising finds. I also looked for

any evidence to contradict the themes. To determine which themes were pertinent to the study, I checked them against the study's research questions (Hatch, 2002). Those which were relevant to the research questions remained in the study and those which were similar to one another were combined. Overall, six themes emerged from the collected data. Each theme was assigned a Roman numeral, and transcript excerpts were copied and pasted into their respective themes.

As I continued analyzing the data, I looked within and across themes in an effort to discover any new relationships (Hatch, 2002). This process produced several subthemes, which deepened my understanding of the data and of the meanings of the study as a whole. To complete the inductive process, I worked from the individualized, specific data gathered from each participant to form a holistic understanding of the information gathered in the study.

After collecting data on six separate Word documents, one for each theme, I examined the data again to determine representative and exceptional excerpts to use in the findings to support the results of my analysis. This step helped me prepare to write my findings and served as a check that there was enough data to support each theme and the findings.

### **Document Analysis**

Once obtained from participants with informed consent, documents such as student assignments, textbooks, and lesson plans were organized and evaluated using the document analysis protocol as represented on the Document Checklist and Notes sheet in Appendix F. From these documents, I developed codes similar to those developed from the participants' interviews. Document analysis served several purposes in this

qualitative study. The documents used provided the context in which the participants operated, gave supplementary data, and verified findings (Bowen, 2009). The process of document analysis helped refine and augment data gathered from the interview because as documents were gathered and analyzed, the data became more detailed and nuanced to capture the subtle variations in participants' intentions and practices.

The protocol used in the document analysis process ensured that important information related to teachers' actual practices was recorded and topics and codes were identified and verified. After receiving the documents, I engaged with them, reading and rereading documents and recording initial impressions through notes in the margins and in appropriate spaces on the Document Checklist and Notes sheet. These "reflections, tentative themes, hunches, ideas, and things to pursue" (Merriam, 2009, p. 170) were summarized in my memos and used to triangulate data from the interviews and observations. Using a research journal, I recorded my notes on emerging patterns and themes and tracked similarities and differences across data sources. I compared and contrasted emerging patterns and themes from collected documents against interview transcripts and observation notes and checklists. Coding led to the discovery of more patterns and themes and created connections among data sources.

Saldaña (2013) defined a qualitative research code as "a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum" (p. 4). The coding process was continuous, as I coded and recoded with the goal of extracting themes and patterns from the collected data (Saldaña, 2013). During the initial stage of coding, I coded words and phrases by penciling repetitive categories in the margins, generally based on predetermined codes from interview coding (Bowen, 2009).

Initial categories used during analysis included codes such as use of rhetoric, fiction or nonfiction, test preparation, and vocabulary and terminology. These initial codes were tested against the data, and more nuanced and specific codes emerged, leading to the development of themes. Documents from this study were not used verbatim in the findings of this study as they may not have been “necessarily precise, accurate, or complete” (Bowen, 2009, p. 33). Instead, they were used as a whole according to the meaning they established and their contribution to the issues of the study.

### **Observation Analysis**

I observed one of each participant’s AP English Language and Composition classes as a nonparticipant observer for an entire class period. Five of the six classes lasted 90 minutes, and one class lasted 50 minutes. I documented teachers’ interactions with students, classroom environment, evidence of texts, evidence of course objectives, composition instruction strategies, assessments, and classroom demographics. I later compared these observations to the participants’ statements regarding composition instruction strategies and composition instruction beliefs. Data from the classroom observation were collected following the observation guideline (see Appendix E).

Analysis of the observation notes helped determine teacher beliefs about composition, some of their strategies, and the language used in conversations with students. Observation data also assisted with triangulating data by comparing the results with those of the document and interview analyses. All three data sources were compared and contrasted to verify findings. Observation analysis included three phases: (a) descriptive coding, in which a word or phrase delineated the topic of the data; (b) process coding, in which phrases connoted conceptual actions; and (c) values coding, in

which words or phrases described a participant's expression of their values about composition or AP English Language and Composition (Saldaña, 2013).

I compared and contrasted emerging patterns and themes from collected observation notes against interview transcripts and document analysis notes and checklists. The data were organized and classified using predetermined coding categories from the interview data. The coding process resulted in categories that provided meaningful patterns and data for this study (Creswell, 2014). Then the data were analyzed for thematic connections. The goal of the theming phase was to explore the relationships among categories and triangulate data with the other data sources. Differences and similarities were identified at each level and among each source.

From the data collected and themes created, findings were determined. The coding and theming of all data helped create a meaningful narrative for AP English Language and Compositions experiences, perceptions, and beliefs.

### **Validity**

Validation of findings occurred throughout the collection and analysis of data. Creswell (2014) noted that explicitly stated steps to check for accuracy and credibility are vital to research. Triangulation involves the use of a variety of data sources, and accurate themes are the result of the convergence of several sources (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). This case study relied on school documents, teacher interviews, and classroom observations. The methods by which data were collected varied as well including document analysis, field notes, and interviews. I hoped not only to gain insight into the context of teachers' instruction but also to corroborate data from a wide variety of sources and methods to strengthen the study's findings (Merriam, 2009). Similarly,

repetition among the participants' experiences provided validity. Additionally, triangulation provided a means to clarify meaning and test the replicability of the study's findings (Stake, 2005).

Researcher objectivity and bias are also issues related to validity and reliability in educational research. Using open-ended questions maximized participants' descriptive responses and minimized the effect of the interviewer and the inclusion of researcher bias (Seidman, 2006). Recognizing the inherent interaction and addition of the interviewer in the interviewing process (as well as the analysis of documents and observations) also minimized the distortion the interviewer could cause (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2006).

The entire data collection process required a reflective stance toward the collected data, examining and considering the data and subsequent analysis continually. Memo writing documented this important aspect of the study, allowing the recording of and reflection upon emerging codes, modifying codes as new data was collected or discovered, clarifying relationships among codes, and providing a starting point for detailed reflections in regard to the participants under study. Memo writing improved the reliability of codes and validated the analysis by ensuring the collection of all details and providing detailed data for analysis. Memos included handwritten as well as computer-generated notes organized by date, participant, and location. The memos were coded separately but used the same themes that emerged from the data.

Member checking, or sharing emerging findings with research participants (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009), also helped ensure internal validity. Therefore, interview transcripts and document analyses were shared with participants for verification of accuracy. I emailed each participant a copy of individual interview transcripts and

document analyses to verify for accuracy as well as to allow participants to add or delete content. Each participant was provided with a deadline, and confirmation was assumed if edits were not received by stated deadline.

Peer-debriefing, interacting with other professionals to assess the integrity of insights throughout the process (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009), also helped with the study's validity. As such, I asked a colleague in my school district who was also a colleague in Valdosta State University's doctoral program, to function as the peer who debriefed with me throughout the study. He assisted by reading coded data and verifying findings were not influenced by bias. He also read the review of literature to corroborate findings and provide an opinion on conclusions and implications.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 provided an overview of qualitative research as a means for exploring the meaning individuals attach to the role of composition ideology, epistemology, and pedagogy in teaching AP English Language and Composition (Creswell, 2014). It also detailed how this qualitative research study was designed to examine the beliefs, theories, and practices that formed the foundation of veteran AP English Language and Composition instructors in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with open enrollment policies. The study also examined the role of professional development and educational experiences in developing these foundational elements.

The research design detailed my study plan guided by the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 1 and founded by prior research discussed in Chapter 2. More specifically, participants, data collection, and data analysis were presented in this chapter. The purpose of this study was to determine the strategies and practices used by veteran

AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an AP open enrollment policy and to explore the connection between composition beliefs and College Board course guidelines. The results of this study are discussed in Chapter 4.

## Chapter IV

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to observe the strategies and practices used by veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in South Georgia high schools in an effort to understand teachers' perceptions and beliefs toward the trainings they had received from the College Board and elsewhere and to understand the strategies and procedures used in their classrooms. This study was built upon an understanding of composition theory and pedagogy along with a study of the College Board's expectations for the AP English Language and Composition course. The study arose from an observation of the College Board's annual comments on AP English Language and Composition exams, which invariably noted student essays demonstrated a lack of rhetorical knowledge and a course focus on the aesthetics of literature instead of the rhetorical analysis of nonfiction texts (College Board, 2017a). Specifically, students were not demonstrating success in a rhetoric and composition laden course (College Board, 2017a, 2017c), the foundation of AP English Language and Composition and First Year Composition (College Board, 2014b, 2019b; Gold et al., 2012).

A goal of this study was to improve professional development for teachers, to promote a more effective training evaluation process, and effect a composition pedagogy aligned with College Board expectations. The achievement of these goals could result in more effective classroom instruction and higher pass rates for South Georgia students. The results reported in this chapter will explain South Georgia AP English Language and

Composition teachers' composition pedagogies and classroom practices and their correlation with the goals and skills both outlined by the College Board and tested on the exam in May. This chapter explores the findings collected from interviews, observations, and document analyses and analyzes them according to the research questions.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the lived and career experiences of veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an AP open enrollment policy?
2. What are veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers' beliefs, epistemologies, or ideologies about composition instruction in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an AP open enrollment policy?
3. What changes or strategies for instruction have been implemented by veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an AP open enrollment policy following professional development for the AP English Language and Composition course?
4. What classroom practices are used by veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an AP open enrollment policy?

### **Description of Sample**

This study focuses on AP English Language and Composition instructors in the six South Georgia RESA districts: Chattahoochee-Flint, Heart of Georgia, First, Southwest Georgia, Coastal Plains, and Okefenokee. Using the Governor's Office of Student Achievement's (2019) Data Dashboard, I narrowed the number of South Georgia

school districts to those offering AP English Language and Composition. I then gathered each school's Title I status (Georgia Department of Education, 2016), and population density information (United States Census Bureau, 2016). This information helped determine two of the qualifications for inclusion in this study: schools had to be Title I schools in a rural school district. Of the 72 school districts in South Georgia, 29 qualified for this study. After procuring permission from district superintendents and local AP English Language and Composition instructors, I found seven teachers who had two or more years of experience teaching AP English Language and Composition, worked in a qualifying district, and agreed to participate in the study.

All of the participants taught AP English Language and Composition during the study, had at least one degree, had taught AP English Language and Composition at least two years, had attended at least one College Board sponsored training, and were employed by a school in one of the six RESA districts in South Georgia. The participants in this study represented five of these six RESA districts.

### **Description of Participants**

The following section provides a detailed description of the participants in the study including their teaching pedagogies, beliefs, and history; their personal qualities; their classrooms; and their students. Table 5 is an overview of all participants (as provided by the participants) listed by their pseudonyms with their ages, number of years teaching AP English Language and Composition, their degree(s), how many APSI and College Board workshops they had attended, and how many years they had served as AP English Language and Composition Readers.

Table 5

*Overview of Participants*

Pseudonym	Age Range	Experience Teaching AP (in years)	Degree(s)	APSI(s)	Workshop(s)	Years as AP Reader
Hester	44-54	5	BS Secondary Education; MS English Education; EdD Instructional Leadership	3	0	0
Johnny	44-54	29	BS Secondary English Education; MEd English Education	4	40	20
Tabitha	44-54	9	AS Teacher Studies; BS Secondary English Education; MEd	1	5	0
Dan	33-43	10	BA English	1	8	0
Lydia	33-43	7	BA English; BA German; MEd Secondary Education	0	1	0
Harriet	44-54	2	BS Print Journalism; MEd Secondary Education	0	1	0

Each of the six participants is presented below in a narrative that first describes his or her school demographics and classroom environment. Individual information such as the participants' educational background, teaching experience, and reason for teaching

is also included. Finally, each participant's unique characteristics, valued practices, singular experiences, and various beliefs about composition and AP English Language and Composition are described.

### **Hester**

Hester's classroom was located near the office, so upon my arrival, she saw and immediately greeted me with a cup of coffee in her hand. Unfortunately, on the day of the interview, she had a case of laryngitis but was more than willing to continue with the interview and observation. Her determination and enthusiasm became even more apparent as I interviewed her and watched her in her class. Hester taught in a small rural school of 751 students, grades six through 12 (Georgia Department of Education, 2019b). She taught one AP English Language and Composition course with 23 students—eighteen female, five male; seven Black, one Hispanic, fourteen White, and one Multi-Racial student. Hester had taught English for 15 years. At the time of the interview and observation, her community had recently experienced a devastating natural disaster. They returned to school one week before I came to observe them after a three-week disaster release from school. She noted most of her students were either living with someone outside of their home or had someone living with them. Hester herself lost a member of her family because of the disaster. Nevertheless, the school was repaired, and she and her students continued with the process of learning.

Hester studied literature in college and had no idea she would eventually teach a composition-rhetoric course nor had she ever taken one. As an English Education major, her courses consisted of literature surveys, novels, poetry, and literary analysis. Even her graduate English courses were literary in nature, and she explained it was only at the end

of her graduate work that she began to develop an appreciation for writing. Before then, she saw writing as an assignment and nothing else. Yet, she lamented, it is the fiction which draws most English teachers to the profession, and it is the fiction to which most of them gravitate.

**Becoming an AP English Language and Composition instructor.** Hester started teaching AP English Language and Composition when her administrators chose her to facilitate an online version of the course in her district. She then attended a regional workshop for AP English Language and Composition but had not attended any other workshops. At the time of the interview, she had attended two APSIs for AP English Literature and Composition and one for AP English Language and Composition. According to Hester, the APSIs offered precisely what she needed at the time, and she found them all beneficial to her teaching. Yet, the training that changed her approach to composition more than any other was a school-sponsored professional development workshop on the now-defunct Georgia High School Writing Test. This training, she said, introduced her to composition's use of anecdotes, analogies, credibility, and calls to action. While she admitted a fundamental love for the aesthetics of literary text, her experiences at APSIs, at College Board workshops, and in the classroom taught her to "prefer [nonfiction] to other literature" and helped her develop an appreciation for the complexity of the act of writing. She also stated teaching the course proved to her she may never completely understand the art of composing.

Besides AP English Language and Composition, Hester taught a variety of courses and played many roles in her school, largely because of its small size. She was the English department head, graduation coordinator, junior class sponsor, AP

coordinator, AP Literature and Composition teacher, and inclusion American Literature teacher. She taught three classes a day on a block schedule and was the only AP English Language and Composition teacher in her district.

Hester's classroom was relatively square with a gray carpeted floor and white cinder block walls. She had a ceiling-mounted data projector which displayed on a whiteboard, and she had a cart containing 28 Chromebooks. Her classroom was arranged with two teacher desks forming the shape of an L at the front of the room near the door with five rows of five desks taking up the remainder of the room except for a couple of bookshelves. There was an aisle between the second and third rows of desks. Hester spent most of her time behind her desk, teaching from PowerPoints displayed on her board via the data projector and using a wireless microphone because of her laryngitis. Her walls were adorned with posters of American poets, American writers, British writers, writing genres (expository, personal, persuasive, and narrative), and citation methods. While she had no class sets of books, she did have a few dictionaries; nine copies of *Advanced Language and Literature: For Honors and Pre-AP English Courses* edited by Shea, Golden, and Balla; and copies of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden* by Steinbeck.

**Grammar and novels.** Her experience with students taught Hester to appreciate her own analysis of student needs and their comments on what was most helpful. As a result of and despite the fact that Hester noticed the seemingly excessive amount of time it took to review multiple-choice practice questions, she continued to do so because students told her the reviews helped them on exam day. One field she expressed strong feelings about teaching was grammar. She commented that the state's standards harmed

Georgia's students by eliminating direct grammar instruction, so she continued to make room for it in her instruction. She admitted this grammar instruction infringed on composition instruction but continued to believe the grammar instruction she provided for her students helped their writing on many levels. The day of the observation, Hester completed a grammar activity and told students to prepare for a one-hour final grammar exam consisting of 452 questions. She also completed a vocabulary lesson comprised of words such as *conflagration*, *deluge*, *conventional*, *trite*, *enterprising*, *standard*, *pollinate*, *popularize*, and *generalize*.

To maintain student interest during these grammar lessons and during vocabulary activities, Hester used many anecdotes and personal experiences. She felt taking what she referred to as “commercial breaks” with humorous stories and personal anecdotes enlivened the room and maintained students' attention. Hester stated she tried to rely on nonfiction selections from the class text *The Language of Composition* by Shea, Scanlon, and Aufses, but she also required students to read fictional works to maintain their interest in the class: *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Lee, *The Stranger* by Camus, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Twain, and *Animal Farm* and *1984* by Orwell. She also mentioned using some of Dickinson's poetry in class, but she said she approached all of these texts using a rhetorical lens.

**Teaching knowledge, teaching writing.** Using code landscaping and the Internet program WordArt Version 4.5.4, I analyzed the word count frequencies in Hester's interview (see Figure 3) to determine her values and concerns based on the number of times she repeated related words. The content of her interview and her use of the words *write*, *teach*, and *know* demonstrated a belief in the value of teaching students



## **Johnny**

Johnny, the most experienced teacher in this study, taught in a school district adjacent to a more urban district. His school, grades nine through 12, had 1,839 students (Georgia Department of Education, 2019b). He taught two AP English Language and Composition classes with a total of 46 students. The class I observed had seventeen students present: six male, eleven female; one Hispanic, eleven White, three Black, and two Asian students. I met Johnny as he was leaving the theater at his school, and he walked me to a workroom for his interview. With a forthright yet friendly attitude, Johnny answered my questions, then led me to his classroom. The business-like nature with which he conducted class reflected in his students who followed classroom procedures and maintained that candid and sincere atmosphere throughout the class. On the day of the observation, his students took a vocabulary test, worked on a group novel assignment, and previewed their most current copies of *The Week* and *Upfront* magazines.

Johnny's classroom was the largest of the classrooms I observed, and he had his students arranged in groups of five or six around six large tables. His large bulletin board was covered with 42 pictures of and quotes from famous writers from all time periods and from around the world. His walls had two *Don Quixote* posters; a poster of Socrates with the quote, "I am not an Athenian or a Greek, but a citizen of the world;" and three maps (the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the world) along with a sign stating, "The World Is Our Textbook." The floor in his classroom was carpeted, and the walls, mostly covered with the aforementioned bulletin boards and posters, were white. When entering the room, students placed their phones into a pocket classroom organizer, above which

was a sign stating, “No phones allowed.” Though there were no classroom sets of books, Johnny had several anthology collections located around the room.

Although he had a strong background in literature “because that’s what everybody wants to teach,” Johnny had some personal experiences in college and through professional development that instilled in him an obvious passion for teaching composition-rhetoric. His first experiences with composition were with his college advisor, who he said was a leading composition instructor at the time. Johnny felt “very lucky” to study under her tutelage as an undergraduate. Some of his earliest experiences with composition instruction were when he worked in the writing lab at the state university he was attending in a neighboring state. He commented that his experiences helping struggling writers in the lab were extremely important in developing his career goals and aspirations, and his double major in English and history led to a growing interest in composition-rhetoric. As a graduate student, Johnny completed ten hours with the National Writing Project, which he noted, was an incredible experience. Working with kindergarten through twelfth grade teachers on nothing but composition instruction gave him insight into and an interest in composition instruction he felt few people had.

**Professional development and AP experiences.** Besides teaching AP English Language and Composition, Johnny also served as his English department chair, worked with the school’s theater program, served on his district’s committee to align writing curriculum across all grades, and participated in the National Math and Science Initiative. Of his 31 years of teaching, he taught AP English Language and Composition for 29 of those years.

Johnny stated he attended four APSIs and 40 College Board workshops in his career. A little sadly, he stated his school used to be more willing to send him anywhere he wanted to attend a training, so he intentionally traveled to other parts of the country for exposure to a variety of trainings. He said he had been to trainings all over the country and noted the APSIs affected everything he does. His vast experience included AP trainings at pivotal moments in the program, including when AP English Language and Composition was changing from stylistic to rhetorical analysis. However, he explained the best professional development for an AP English teacher is participating in the annual AP Reading. At the time of the interview, Johnny had worked as a Reader for 20 consecutive years. Those experiences, he revealed, were the best professional development experiences he had ever had. He claimed seeing the minute evolutions in scoring from year-to-year and being present for the major changes in philosophy (like in 2007 when the synthesis prompt was added) made all the difference in his instruction.

Like Hester, Johnny was also the only AP English Language and Composition instructor in his district. He planned on relocating soon to another school system but had enjoyed his many years in this district. Students obviously found value in Johnny's instruction: he had six Teacher of the Year trophies displayed on a bookshelf in the back of his room.

**Reading and writing as kindred spirits.** The word-count analysis for Johnny (see Figure 4) demonstrated his focus on the relationship between reading and writing. He used the words *read* and *write* and words related to them 147 times during his interview. Ten years ago, he decided to make reading the focus of his AP English Language and Composition class. He decided helping students become better readers



expose students to a variety of texts, he said he relies heavily on nonfiction but stated he does want them to have some experience with fiction. The four novels they read during the year were written during various American literary periods, and the class approached them rhetorically—studying purpose, structure, and argument. The group activity in class the day of the observation asked students to consider the arguments various novels make through different lenses. For example, students who read *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Twain were asked to make an assertion, find supporting evidence, justify the assertion, and explain the benefits of the assertion to the audience through each of the following lenses: a bildungsroman, a drama of moral conflict, a slice-of-life realism, a statement of naturalism, a rebellion against Romanticism, a cultural satire, and an anthem to democracy.

**Johnny and composition instruction.** Discussing composition with Johnny revealed his penchant for following the current-traditional (genre-based) theory and the practices typically accompanying it. Much of his discussion of his classroom practices centered on creating frameworks and encouraging students to follow them. He used Aristotle’s classic argument structure as well as examples of different modes of writing to provide students with models to direct their own compositions. Weaknesses in writing occur, he claimed, when students do not know what structure to follow, so he provides them with frameworks to successfully compose in different modes. He stated he also drills arrangement through repetition of “formula, evidence, assertion, and commentary.” He advocated for a core focus of reading as a writer to analyze a text for invention, arrangement, and style. This focus, he said, will lead directly to a successful paper.

**Johnny's goals and administration's goals.** Johnny stated he spends time every year examining the score reports he receives from the College Board not only to gauge his students' successes but also to make changes to his instruction. He noted many administrators, including his own, examined the score reports and focused solely on the percentage of students who scored a three or higher. He argued the passing rate is not the point of any AP course; the point is improvement. Johnny said he studies those score reports annually to plan his upcoming year, but he also measures his success by how much students improved. If students moved from a one on his diagnostic to a two on the exam, he said he feels he has successfully taught, and students have successfully completed, AP English Language and Composition. One of his greatest frustrations was parents', administrators', and other stakeholders' emphasis on scores.

Instead, Johnny commented that he compares his students to state and national averages. He would like for his students to come close to those numbers but said he is perfectly happy as long as each one improves. He also claimed he wants his students to develop an appreciation if not a love for language, so he attempts to emphasize the difference between AP English Language and Composition and other disciplines' AP courses. The "wonderful thing" about AP Language, he told them, is that it is a skill-based course instead of an information-based one. While he cannot give them a pack of cards with terms to learn, he can provide them with a transferable skill that will help them in every course they take in college.

### **Tabitha**

Tabitha, an energetic and happy woman, had been a teacher for 13 years at the time of this study. Her school consisted of grades nine through 12 and housed 1,523

students (Georgia Department of Education, 2019b). She taught on a block schedule, and her classes included AP English Language and Composition, AP English Literature and Composition, and AP Seminar. She was the only AP English teacher in her district. Though most AP teachers at her school qualified for students to receive dual enrollment credit as well as AP credit, Tabitha decided to forego those qualifications. She did not have a planning period during the day and taught two AP English Language and Composition classes with a total of 53 students. The class I observed had 24 students present: seventeen female, seven male; eighteen White, three Black, and two Asian students. Tabitha stated she preferred the aesthetic study AP English Literature and Composition provides but found AP English Language and Composition was more practical for most of her students.

Tabitha's unconventional classroom had two sofas (one yellow, one red), two recliners (each covered with a chair cover), one jumbo round chair (also red), and three tables with six chairs each for student seats. Lighting consisted of several floor lamps and strands of stringed lights hanging from the ceiling in various places, with an especially large collection of white stringed lights twisted amongst dried vines in the center of the room. Tabitha had also placed a few decorative lights around the room. Much of her walls were covered in whiteboards, but the one exposed wall was covered with a hand-painted mural of a map and characters from the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Various student projects were also suspended from the ceiling and posted on the walls. Tabitha's technology access consisted of a ceiling-mounted data projector and a shared set of Chromebooks.

**College and College Board experiences.** Tabitha’s college experiences were limited to literary studies including literature surveys and novel courses. As far as composition, she took one creative writing course in college, but it focused solely on narrative writing—not beneficial for either AP English Literature and Composition or AP English Language and Composition. Tabitha even skipped the introductory composition course, English 1101, because she had scored a qualifying score on the AP English Literature and Composition exam in high school. In short, Tabitha’s experiences in college prepared her more for teaching the AP English Literature and Composition course than any other course.

Since being asked to teach AP English Language and Composition, Tabitha had attended one APSI (in 2010) and five regional workshops. She stated the APSI and workshops helped her understand why the exam is structured the way it is and why the course requirements are as they are, and she had included much more composition instruction in her course since attending it. However, she still struggled with implementing the suggested practices from the College Board. She stated most of the activities from the AP consultants either did not work with her time schedule or her students did not like them. During the class observation, her students were watching a film version of *The Great Gatsby* as a final activity for the novel.

**Writing and time management.** Time management and writing instruction were Tabitha’s main concerns as the word analysis of her interview (see Figure 5) depicted. Though the largest word in the cloud is *time*, managing time was second to writing. Tabitha used words related to writing such as *analysis*, *essay*, *argument*, and *write* a total of 128 times during her interview while the concept of time appeared 36 times.



and Composition classroom. Furthermore, Tabitha asserted written expression's difficulty lies in its precision with limited space and time, forcing students to be both quick and more critical. The timed aspect of the exam, she claimed, makes the writing portion even more difficult for students.

Tabitha admitted time management was also an area of concern for her. Many of the activities she would like her students to complete such as debates and full-length practice exams consumed what she felt would be too much class time. In addition, several of the techniques she learned from College Board consultants at APSIs and workshops exhausted large amounts of class time she was not willing to surrender. One of the most effective methods of composition instruction for Tabitha was the individual conference, but that, too, expended quite some time in her classroom. She regretted having to forego those writing conferences. To compensate for the lost conferences, she no longer times student writing, especially in the first semester.

**Tabitha's course.** Tabitha's stated goal for her AP English Language and Composition course was for students to better articulate their thoughts upon completion of the class. To help students accomplish this goal, she felt isolated vocabulary and rhetorical terminology instruction were necessary. She taught these two throughout the year with an emphasis on rhetorical terminology earlier in the process. Her students seemed to struggle with her AP English classes more than other AP courses, but she felt their difficulties arose because AP English courses are skill-based, and memorization cannot help students as much as it does in other courses.

Though Tabitha's goal was for students to write an essay each week, her biggest struggle was grading and providing feedback. She attempted various methods of scoring

and feedback, but she found herself losing the battle with her instinct to mark and comment on every part of a student's essay. Therefore, she abandoned holistic grading in favor of an assessment strategy that incorporated her desire to grade each aspect of their compositions. The texts she used in class included shorter nonfiction pieces along with novels and film adaptations such as *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald and *The Kite Runner* by Hosseini.

### **Dan**

Immediately upon meeting Dan, I saw his upbeat and modest personality. When he saw me approach, he walked toward me—hand outstretched for a warm handshake—and welcomed me to his school. Expressing his excitement for having me there for an AP English Language and Composition study also conveyed his passion for the course itself. Dan taught in a school of 1,201 students (Georgia Department of Education, 2019b), grades nine through 12. His school ran on a block schedule, but he taught his AP English Language and Composition students both semesters. He had a total of 25 AP students—all in one class. Those students included six male, nineteen female; two Black, eighteen White, and five Hispanic students. Dan also served as the school's English department chair and served on the district's gifted committee. He was the only AP English Language and Composition instructor in his district, though the AP English Literature and Composition instructor was across the hall. He had been loyal to his school, having always taught there despite a lengthy three-hour, roundtrip commute. His largest concern for his school was the high turnover rate it had experienced. He stated he was the only teacher remaining in his department who was there when he started, which,

he laughingly said, made him feel very old. He did, however, note an upswing in both the talent and enthusiasm of recently hired teachers.

Dan did not originally see himself as a teacher; he majored in speech communications and envisioned himself working as a speech writer for the president. He attended college on a policy debate scholarship and took some composition courses. However, life happened—marriage and children—and he turned down a scholarship for graduate study at a state university. Fortunately, he remembered he had always enjoyed helping others learn and started substitute teaching. Though the degree he earned was a Bachelor of Arts in English, a school took a chance on him because of their experience with him as a substitute, and he found he loved his new career. He “fell” into teaching for what he hoped was “the right reason.” He had been teaching for 15 years at the time of this study, including 10 years as an AP English Language and Composition instructor. Though he had taught summer school every year, he was considering applying to be an AP Reader because he felt it would make him a better writing instructor.

Dan’s classroom atmosphere reflected his positive energy. Though it had gray walls, dark gray carpeted floors, and red desks, the overhead lights and windows covering an entire wall made for a cheery room. His desk, a ceiling-mounted data projector, and the whiteboard were located in the front of the room, which was one of the smaller sides of the rectangular room. The student desks were arranged in four rows of seven and one row of two. His walls had several posters: a list of figurative language terms, a list of phrases to use in an argument, pictures and lists of elements of literature, and answers to the question, “Why read literature?” The textbooks on his shelves were all literature

anthologies along with a few dictionaries. On the whiteboard, he had hand-written the Georgia Performance Standard and learning target for the day.

**Dan's AP experiences.** Ten years ago, Dan started teaching AP English Language and Composition. The first APSI he attended was the summer of 2007, the year the College Board added the synthesis prompt to the exam. He remembered College Board consultants flying to his training to bring sample essays from what is known as “the advertising prompt,” the first synthesis prompt given on the exam. Though the experience was extraordinary, Dan said the information presented was overwhelming, and he did not know what he was doing the first two years he taught the course. At some point in his third year of AP English Language and Composition, Dan realized his experiences in policy debate prepared him for teaching the course better than any training he had experienced or classes he had taken. He said those earlier experiences in debate laid a foundation in rhetoric, though he was not aware that was what he was learning at the time. He stated he felt he has since gotten a “pretty good grasp on everything” he noted during that first APSI. In his humble statements, Dan noted he believed the AP consultants always know more than he does, and he felt he always learns something useful at the trainings.

**Dan on composition and time management.** Word frequency analysis from Dan's interview (see Figure 6) demonstrated his concerns for writing and knowledge. Dan repeated the words *write* and *think* along with words associated with them such as *writer* and *know* a total of 170 times in the course of the interview. Composition, Dan posited, is a means to effect change in the world, and making students more capable of doing so was his stated goal. He stated he believes making students better thinkers will



Managing time with his family and grading became difficult for him, and he commented he was always behind with composition feedback. On the other hand, Dan felt exam preparation for the multiple-choice section consumed more class time than he should reasonably allow. However, he noted the necessity of providing students with this practice because of issues arising from the College Board's open-enrollment policy. Because his school had no qualifying requirements for AP courses, students and parents decided placement. Dan stated he had students with Lexile scores of 700 and ESOL students in his AP English Language and Composition course along with those whose Lexiles were 1700+—readers with a possible stretch of third grade to postgraduate reading abilities. He described how he dealt with this phenomenon by “teach[ing] to the middle,” by grading on improvement, and by using class time for exam preparation. (Dan has also been known to buy practice books for students and take practice tests with students.)

**Dan's course.** Dan affirmed that nonfiction plays a central role in what we do as a society and that he believes most adults read more nonfiction than fiction. Some of the specific nonfiction texts he and his students have read include Plato's “Allegory of the Cave,” Orwell's “Politics and the English Language,” and other texts from his class reader, *The Language of Composition* edited by Shea, Scanlon, and Aufses. However, they also read several works of fiction including Poe's “The Raven,” Arthur Miller's “The Crucible,” Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, several Romantic-era short stories, and several Poe short stories.

The relationship Dan developed with his students was palpable in his room and evident in his statements about them. He remarked that he tries on a daily basis to make each one of them smile, and he attempts to accommodate not only for their ability but also for their social and family lives. As far as the course was concerned, Dan tried to create foundations for his students with discussions because he felt everyone can express themselves in a discussion, and his ultimate goal was to help students become “good, productive contributors to society” regardless of their writing and reading abilities. He expressed great confidence in his students, stating 80% of them are on task daily even though many were misplaced, and he refused to give them homework on holidays so they can rest.

One of his greatest frustrations was when parents, administrators, and others rated the success of the course on the exam’s pass rate. He argued the success of his course lies in the ability of a student to think more deeply in May than he or she did in August. However, he added, he does feel it is his fault when some groups of students fail the exam. On a lighter note, one of his proudest moments was when a group of students used the skills he had taught them to propose a change to the principal’s plans for graduation practice. They succeeded in persuading the principal to make that change and successfully saw the real-world effect of rhetoric and composition.

### **Lydia**

Lydia worked in a large school district in a school of 2,451 students, grades nine through 12 (Georgia Department of Education, 2019b). After navigating through several halls between classes, I found Lydia and her room amidst a few other English classes. She quietly welcomed me to her class and asked me to sit at her desk for the observation.

Lydia's classroom was relatively square with whiteboards covering two walls. Her desk was located in the opposite corner from the door, and students sat at eight tables with four chairs at each table. The classroom's walls contained several motivational posters and signs with Lydia's monogram. Stuffed animals were intentionally placed around the room, and a diffuser emitted a soft citrus smell in thirty-second intervals. Lydia's students—and the students throughout the school—were extremely quiet and well-behaved. Signs throughout the school noted a strict no cell-phone policy, and I did not see a single phone that day. Lydia's calm, soft voice, combined with the atmosphere she had created in her room, produced a relaxed, serene learning environment for her students.

Her school was on a block schedule, and she had her students for one semester. Upon completion of Lydia's course, students received dual enrollment credit if they passed the course and AP credit for scoring appropriately on the AP exam. There were 180 AP English Language and Composition students in Lydia's school; she taught 90 of them while a new colleague taught the other half. She was the only teacher in the study who had access to another AP English Language and Composition instructor in her district. Lydia also had access to a veteran AP English Language and Composition teacher in her department who no longer taught the course. In fact, Lydia, a trained AP English Literature and Composition instructor with a stated preference for literary studies, began teaching AP English Language and Composition because she had the credit hours allowing her students to also receive dual enrollment credit. Lydia's class I observed had 20 students present: thirteen female, seven male; sixteen White, and four Black.

**AP experiences.** Lydia’s two Bachelor of Arts degrees were earned in English and German. She took a rhetoric course in her college studies along with a history of the English language class, but Lydia started her AP experiences teaching AP English Literature and Composition 12 years ago in another southern state. She attended an APSI for AP English Literature and Composition before teaching that course but had not participated in an AP English Language and Composition APSI at the time of her interview. She had, however, attended several College Board sponsored regional workshops for AP English Language and Composition. Though somewhat guarded about her past, Lydia expressed her love of fiction and literature several times. She still felt wary about teaching AP English Language and Composition but admitted she found it a much more practical course for most students than AP English Literature and Composition, which, she said, made students into “little literary critics” instead of more well-rounded writers.

Lydia moved into the AP English Language and Composition course eight years prior to the interview because her school started offering AP students dual enrollment credit for successfully completing AP courses. Though her school had a different, experienced AP English Language and Composition teacher, Lydia was moved into the AP English Language and Composition course because she had the graduate English credit hours necessary to teach dual enrollment courses. She remarked that though the other teacher was a better AP English Language and Composition instructor, she felt her administration was more interested in dual enrollment and moved her into the course for that reason. For her training, Lydia noted she learned most of what she knows about AP English Language and Composition from the veteran teacher in her school. However,



Part of this active learning involved students becoming better readers. Lydia's concerns can best be summarized as students' inclination to read and write superficially. She claimed students cannot begin to gain knowledge when they are ignorant of their lack of knowledge. She insisted active reading with guided questioning improves students' reading skills but will also develop their writing ability by providing them with the knowledge to use in their own texts and to pursue further information. These skills, she said, are applicable to every discipline.

**Composition: Lydia's lens.** Lydia's comments and responses in the interview demonstrated her tendency to some social-epistemic theoretical practices, but she mostly adhered to pedagogy based on the current-traditional (genre-based) theory. Lydia stated the most important factor in writing is students accomplishing what they desire to accomplish. In other words, a successful text has an intended effect on a reader. This interplay between a writer and audience are foundational to the social-epistemic compositionist. Furthermore, Lydia's grammar instruction centered on grammar as rhetoric, or considering grammar's effect on audience. She stated her grammar lessons are actually instruction in effective use of style, focusing of syntactic elements as audience influencers.

However, Lydia's commentary placed her largely in the realm of current-traditionalists. She explained her instruction practices rely on models to help students understand how structure can help promote an argument. The multiple-choice practice exams she used in class even helped her teach students the effects of structural (or modal) choices on their compositions. Because she did not fully understand Toulmin's argument model, she relied on Aristotle's classic structure to help students assemble their

compositions much like a puzzle. Using models of the modes helped students, Lydia stated, understand paragraph form and essay form.

**Lydia's course.** The interview revealed many concerns Lydia had for the authenticity of her AP English Language and Composition course. Many of those concerns were founded in factors beyond her control such as the dual enrollment/AP combination her school offered. Because of this dual offer, she had to teach the AP English Language and Composition course in one semester. She noted time constraints in a one-semester AP course resulted in a poorly taught course because she could not manage all of the assignments and activities needed to help students be successful. For example, she stopped teaching current events, she dropped the full-length practice exam from the class, and she limited the amount of writing students complete in class because she simply could not provide helpful feedback to 90 students frequently enough. She said she prefers to write letter-length feedback to her students, and, she argued, her age and declining vision limit the amount of time she can spend reading student essays.

Additionally, the new nature of the course, as offered at her school, made the AP exam optional, so many students choose not to take it. The students in her classes do not have to take the American Literature End-of-Course (EOC) test, either. Every other district in the study required AP English Language and Composition students to take the American Literature EOC as well as the AP exam. Lydia said she provides many activities in and out of class to help her students. She reported that she offers a voluntary full-length exam once a semester on a Saturday and administers a one-passage multiple-choice practice each week. Despite the time it consumes, the class discusses these practices each week as well.

Admittedly, Lydia had a difficult time teaching her course without including fiction. She organized her units around themes, which allowed her to include fiction, poetry, and nonfiction in each unit. Specific texts she mentioned using include “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Gilman, *The Scarlet Letter* by Hawthorne, *Of Mice and Men* by Steinbeck, *A Raisin in the Sun* by Hansberry, *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald, and *The Kite Runner* by Hosseini. She also noted they read works by writers such as Henry, King, Du Bois, and Douglass. Ultimately, Lydia hoped she helped students become better readers and thinkers by helping them forego their “superficial knowledge and superficial communication of it.”

### **Harriet**

Harriet taught in a high school including grades nine through 12 with 1,149 students (Georgia Department of Education, 2019b). Her school was on a block schedule, but she kept her 15 students all year. The class was composed of eleven female, four male; ten White, four Black, and one Asian student. Harriet was the newest teacher of AP English Language and Composition among this study’s participants with two years of experience. Although concerned about her students’ progress in her class, her 14 years of teaching experience helped alleviate some of her worries. One of her biggest concerns for her students was lack of access to materials other students may have. Harriet’s school was one of two high schools in her district, and she was under the distinct impression the other high school received more funding. Beyond AP English Language and Composition, Harriet also taught American and World Literatures.

Harriet felt her Bachelor of Science degree in print journalism made her a better AP English Language and Composition instructor because it encouraged her to see

written and visual text through a more analytical lens than her literature courses did.

Harriet had not, however, taken any rhetoric and composition courses in college. After beginning her career as an educator, Harriet earned her certificate and later completed a Master's in Secondary Education. To her dismay, her school had not provided funding for her to attend an APSI nor had she applied for an APSI scholarship for rural schools, but she had attended a College Board sponsored regional workshop. She stated that the information she received at the workshop did not prepare her for the intensity of the course and the amount of rhetoric involved. She gathered most of her materials and activities for the course from the school's previous AP English Language and Composition teacher. She seemed thirsty to learn more about the course and become a better instructor. The smaller size of her school and the fact that she taught most of her students their tenth-grade year as well gave her confidence in improving their ability to analyze and compose. When the school year was new, she already knew her students' personalities, strengths, and weaknesses.

Harriet's classroom was a carpeted square room with lightly colored block walls. The room was relatively large with enough room for a small stage, three cushioned benches in a "U" shape in the center of the room, two teacher desks, three bookshelves, and 26 student desks. Harriet also had access to a set of Chromebooks in a cart and a panel. She created a calm atmosphere in the classroom with a peppermint diffuser and soft instrumental music. The walls were covered in several different items including motivational posters, student projects (the hero's journey as applied to movies), class rules, American and World Literature standards, and an "Art of Blabblative and Scribble" poster with composition-specific terminology. A classroom set of literature



audience's reactions to their compositions. Similarly, Harriet taught structure as a means to aid an audience's comprehension of the students' claims and evidence. In her class, style was not subjected to rules; instead, it was a means to an end. She encouraged students to be creative and play with style in an effort to have a more forceful effect on an audience. Finally, Harriet's feedback was a list more akin to suggestions on how to reach the intended audience than a set of corrections. These techniques were intended to closely match her stated goal of helping students become writers who effectively communicate to specific and varied audiences.

In addition to writing, time management was a concern for Harriet. She said she still finds herself changing curriculum based on classroom experiences and struggles with her school's block schedule, especially when Milestone testing shortens (or eliminates) her class. An added impediment was her school's requirement for AP English Language and Composition to include the American Literature component. She did not have to follow her school's American Literature curriculum, but she felt the need to include some aspects of it in her course. In an attempt to prepare students for both exams, Harriet used USATestprep's database of passages and questions for multiple-choice practice. She admitted USATestprep's questions do not align with those of the College Board, but she believed they give students beneficial test preparation practice regardless.

**Harriet's Texts.** Harriet understood AP English Language and Composition's rhetorical focus and attempted to rely on nonfiction in her course. However, the first essay students wrote was a narrative creation myth composed after reading several creation myths in class. Her students also read some "American classics" such as works by Poe, Whitman, Dickinson (a British writer), and Twain. Her course text *Mirrors and*

*Windows: Connecting with Literature, American Tradition* edited by Owens contains fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Harriet stated, however, that she completed much research on her own in an attempt to find essays and speeches on topics of interest to her students. They used school subscriptions to the *New Yorker* and *The Atlantic* as well as texts Harriet located in her research.

### **Data Collection**

I used a case study design to study the strategies and practices used by veteran AP English Language and Composition instructors in rural South Georgia schools and to understand their perceptions of the training they received to teach this course. The case study design was vital in helping develop an understanding of participants' personal and individual experiences (Stake, 1995). The topics guiding this study were teachers' perceptions of their development as AP English Language and Composition teachers and their implementation of College Board theories and pedagogies. Participants in the study completed online forms, agreed to at least one interview, offered documents for analysis, and allowed me to observe their class instruction. Data were gathered through three methods in this study: interview, observation, and document analyses. The interview questions were connected to the research questions and were adapted from the pilot to best fit the population involved in this study while observation and document analysis forms were designed to reflect the College Board's course descriptions for AP English Language and Composition (see Appendices D, E, and F).

The majority of data for this study were gathered from responses to semi-structured interviews. Additional data were comprised of observation and document analyses. Other data for the study were retrieved from course description documents

available online. I used an inductive interview analysis strategy to analyze the interview data before determining if any follow-up interviews were necessary (Seidman, 2006).

### **Three Phase Process**

Data collection was completed in three phases. First, I conducted either an observation or interview, depending on the convenience and request of the participant. Half of participants preferred having the interview first, and half preferred the observation. Second, I used the information gathered during the previous data gathering stages to analyze provided course documents or materials located online. Finally, I conducted any needed follow-up interviews with participants.

**Interviews.** Interviews were planned according to participants' schedules and occurred in participants' home schools during their scheduled planning period(s) or after school. Interview questions (see Appendix D) were created in advance and edited after the pilot study. Questions related to participants' background in rhetoric and AP English Language and Composition training; teaching practices before and after training(s); held composition theories, epistemologies and ideologies; and instruction practices were asked. All interviews followed the same procedures. I first introduced myself and recited this study's Research Statement of Consent. Then I asked participants questions from the prepared question list. The interviews were recorded using the voice memo application on my phone. During the interview, I listened to the participants' responses, probed for further explanation, and used their responses to guide the interview as much as possible. Each interview lasted between 60 and 75 minutes depending on the participant.

After the interviews, I transcribed each one using the application Transcribe+. Listening to the interviews and typing and reading the transcripts gave me intimate

knowledge of the respondents' answers and made initial coding more accurate. After transcription, I shared the transcripts with participants for corrections and additions.

**Observations.** Observations were completed on the same day as the interview and at the convenience of the participant. Three of the observations occurred before the interview while the remaining three occurred afterward. During the observation, I played the role of a non-participatory observer, simply watching and taking notes on the physical classroom, observable characteristics of the students, student behavior, teacher behavior, instruction methods, materials used, conversations between teacher and students, and other incidental occurrences. Observations lasted from 60 to 90 minutes, depending upon the participants' scheduled class. Upon completion of the interview, notes were transferred to the observation checklist (see Appendix E).

**Documents.** Documents obtained during the interview or observation were analyzed using a prepared analysis checklist (see Appendix F). Documents received included individual texts, textbooks, assignments, and rubrics. Upon completion of the interview and observation, these documents were analyzed and examined separately. Additional documents obtained from the Internet such as test scores, district demographics, and school information were included as needed in the analysis process.

### **Data Analysis**

I used inductive analysis to analyze the data collected, moving from specific information to more general ideas and themes. Below, I present the patterns and themes found after explaining the coding and analysis process I followed.

The interviews were transcribed and read several times before coding began. Interviews were analyzed individually to hand-code for categories, then themes.

Observations and documents were subsequently analyzed as well to improve the study's validity and reliability. Initial coding was followed by two more rounds of coding to reach themes. The coding process—manual coding and reviewing for themes—was completed in batches of two participants to help embed analysis throughout the study.

### **Coding**

The transcripts, observation notes, and documents were each coded separately and then together to allow for multiple perspectives on the participants' data. Using what Saldaña (2013) referred to as first cycle coding, I reviewed each transcript three times to complete this first cycle. In this process, I used three of his coding methods: descriptive, process, and values coding. Descriptive coding served as a foundational element for the coding as it helped me discover topics of discussion across the participants' experiences. I also used some process coding to categorize the conceptual processes participants mentioned, the actions they stated they followed in their classrooms, and the strategies I observed them practicing. Finally, values coding allowed me to note the participants' "values, attitudes, and beliefs" (Saldaña, 2013, p.110) as they related to composition, AP English Language and Composition, their training, and the College Board.

When completing first cycle coding, I penciled short phrases or words next to every line or sentence in each participant's transcript. These were followed with the more focused descriptive, values, and process codes. First cycle coding initially resulted in 16 codes and 46 subcodes, which were subsequently narrowed to 11 codes and seven subcodes (see Appendix G). Upon completion of first cycle coding, I disaggregated transcripts into their codes—using color coding to separate participants' individual



Additional themes emerged after taking into consideration the study's goals, research questions, conceptual framework, and literature review (Saldaña, 2013). Using a three-column approach, I included the transcripts arranged by codes in the middle column, working space in the left column, and thematic connections in the right column. Then I grouped these thematic connections and labeled them with either a process description, topic description, or interpretation of statements (Saldaña, 2013). After completing the coding processes, I read all of the data again and developed themes based on these repeating ideas and thematic connections and finally associated them with their corresponding codes (see Table 6). Overall, six codes emerged from the collected data. Because of the organic rather than linear nature of composition, many of the themes addressed more than one research question, and some data appeared in more than one theme. Table 6 also disaggregates research questions into their corresponding themes.

Table 6

*Overview of Research Questions, Codes, and Themes*

Theme Number and Developed Theme	Corresponding Research Question(s)	Codes
Theme 1—Composition Theories and Pedagogies	2, 4	Composition theories in the classroom Invention and arrangement Writing frequency Modeling and scaffolding
Theme 2—Time and School Constraints	1	Managing time School-based issues
Theme 3—Factors Influencing Instruction	1, 2	Education Teaching philosophy Composition epistemologies
Theme 4—Changed Perceptions	1, 3	Collegiate and professional experience Professional development
Theme 5—Students' and Teachers' Knowledge	1, 3, 4	Student preparation Improving student knowledge Teachers' pursuit of knowledge
Theme 6—Planning and Organization	1, 4	Planning and organizing Grading and Feedback
Additional Findings	3, 4	Comparing self to others Multiple-choice exam preparation Reading and composition strategies

Each theme is presented below in the order presented in Table 6. The theme is first listed in sentence format to identify the meaning of participants' experiences (Saldaña, 2013). The themes are presented with their corresponding subthemes, which were excerpted and edited from coding categories. The themes are presented in the following order: composition factors, constraints on instruction, factors influencing

teachers, experiences that change teachers' perceptions, teacher and student knowledge, planning and organization, and additional findings.

### **Theme 1: Composition Theories and Pedagogies**

The first theme that emerged from the data was AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools adhered to a variety of theories and pedagogies, individually and as a group. This theme encompassed the findings related to participants' composition theories, epistemologies, ideologies, and pedagogies as evidenced by interviews, observations, and document analyses. The teachers largely followed the practices associated with the current-traditional (genre-based) theory but were implementing practices associated with the social-epistemic theory. Teachers also demonstrated elements of expressionism and cognitivism. Additional findings related to participants' writing frequency and their perceptions of invention and arrangement.

Since AP English Language and Composition is largely based on the rhetoric and composition courses of First Year Composition, I expected composition instruction to be a major topic for the participants. Of course, participants centered most of their discussions on how they teach composition, what they expect of student compositions, how they struggle with composition instruction, and what they believe the College Board expects of them and of students. As such, composition's concerns and practices were foremost in the discussions and comments of participants. Using participant comments and information from the study's literature review, I first correlated teachers' beliefs and practices with specific composition theories and pedagogies. Most teachers predominantly adhered to two theories, and most followed the current-traditional

theorists. Teachers tended to enjoy discussing their practices associated with composition, and their responses showed a marked concern with invention and providing students with effective, timely feedback.

Each participant's theoretical foundation directly informed his or her practices in the classroom. The literature on composition and rhetorical theory helped define correlations between teacher practices and the underlying beliefs of instructors. The participants in this study were largely current-traditional (genre-based) with elements of the older theoretical practices of current-traditionalists and the newer theoretical purposes and practices of genre-based theory. As the literature suggested, however, participants integrated elements of other theories into their classrooms in a more multi-faceted theoretical base. Teachers' perceptions of the frequency of writing and the invention and arrangement processes were also relevant as they demonstrated most readily these theoretical foundations. These subthemes are presented below.

**Current-traditional (genre-based).** Though teachers tended to have beliefs about composition and used practices aligned with at least two composition theories, five of the six teachers aligned most heavily with the current-traditional (genre-based) theory and its emphasis on content, modes, and forms. Four of the participants began teaching writing using the modes of composition as guides for their students to imitate. Harriet felt the modes helped students organize their writing while Johnny stated students who understood the modes they were using were more likely to present an effective argument for their reader. Those who used the modes of discourse as guidelines taught their students that structure depended on the argument they were attempting to form. This focus on form appeared in teachers' comments on compositions as well.

Several teachers also mentioned they used templates or frameworks to help students progress through the early stages of writing. These teachers, however, used six different frameworks or templates including the five-paragraph formula, the rhetorical précis, and four templates structured as lists: (a) claim, reasons, evidence, counterclaim; (b) assertion, evidence, commentary; (c) common ground, credibility, call to action; and (d) say it, quote it, explain it. Dan and Lydia adopted Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz's (2019) titled position that "everything's an argument;" therefore, they relied almost completely on the argument mode in their classrooms. Lydia qualified her statement, however, stating she showed her students a variety of modes to "point out the differences, and ask [students] what [those differences] are." Tabitha was the only teacher who knew the exact source of her template: it originated in a prescriptive composition program purchased by her school.

Half of the teachers in this study commented on the importance of introductions in compositions. This part of the composition, they attested, is the most important section of the form and can ultimately prove the success or failure of a text. Two teachers, Dan and Tabitha, said they explicitly teach the introduction through scaffolding, modeling, and practice before they continue with the remainder of the essay. One teacher emphasized the use of rhetorical devices in her classes as an important element of form while others encouraged the development of evidence through the body of the essay. Of the three rhetorical models presented by the College Board, two teachers adhered to the classic Aristotelian model. These same teachers noted they had heard of Toulmin's Argument Model but did not understand it, and no teacher mentioned the Rogerian Argument Model.

Regardless of whether teachers used the modes of discourse, argument models, none of these structures, or a combination of them, many paid special attention to form in sentence structure and essay organization when scoring student essays. Some teachers adhered to the stricter form guidelines of the current-traditional theory with their grammar instruction while others adopted a social-epistemic theory. Hester was the only teacher who discussed teaching isolated grammar lessons. Her frustration was evident in her remarks:

I blame Georgia's standards for [students' poor grammar]: we don't teach usage, punctuation, and grammar after eighth grade. . . . I knew for three years that I needed to go back to teaching grammar. . . . So I did that this year.

But Hester was not the only teacher focused on sentence form. Hester, Tabitha, and Dan discussed the difficulty of providing holistic scores on students' essays. They all explained their inability to avoid marking and commenting on students' grammar and usage mistakes. Johnny, Lydia, and Harriet approached grammar as more of a stylistic analysis of language's effect on the reader; thus, their adherence to the social-epistemic theory.

**Social-epistemic.** The social-epistemic theory suggests writing is always a social interaction between writer and audience with the goal to move that audience. Most of this study's teachers addressed an element of audience in their interview; Harriet and Tabitha even included audience in their stated goals for the course. Both set a goal of improving students' abilities to effectively communicate and affect an audience. Hester and Dan expressed their belief that everything ultimately has the intent to persuade someone, and Hester emphasized the importance of students' ability to build common

ground, establish their credibility, and create a call to action to effect change in the reader. Johnny, however, summarized most of the teachers' explanations, saying if students can read as a writer, they will be able to write to affect a reader.

All of these teachers discussed the idea of an intended, real-world audience for students. Teaching various methods to reach that audience became part of teachers' practices and expectations for their students. Harriet began with the rhetorical appeals of *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* because, she said, students usually come to her with a rudimentary understanding of these appeals. She noted these appeals are "half the battle" in composition because mastery of them allows a writer to reach an audience through logical arrangement, emotional appeals, and authorial credibility.

Similarly, Lydia praised the AP English Language and Composition course's practicality because it teaches students how to approach an audience and accomplish a goal with that audience. She encouraged students to play with language to help achieve their intended effect on an audience and used passages with unique syntactical structures to demonstrate the effect of playing with language. For example, when her students read Henry's (1776/2019) "Common Sense," she paid special attention to the functional fragment in the lines, "And what have we to oppose to them? Shall we try argument? Sir, we have been trying that for the last ten years. Have we anything new to offer on the subject? Nothing" (par. 5). She said she and her students discussed the effect Henry was trying to achieve in his audience, the effect of the inherent pause at the end of "nothing." This kind of thought about authorial choices, she argued, are new to sixteen-year-old students, and discussions helped them understand intent before they included such strategies in their own writing. Johnny echoed some of Lydia's focus on the effects of

stylistic choices: “I have never, never been a person who teaches [stylistic] terminology [though] invariably they learn some.” Johnny repeatedly stated how much he values the study of style, but he did not drill students on grammar and usage. Instead he encouraged students to experiment with language to determine the effect different structures have on different audiences. In fact, Johnny mentioned his use of sentence combining exercises, his love of syntax, and his instruction in different syntactical choices. He argued students cannot earn an eight or nine on an essay without mastering the stylistic effects of subordinate clauses.

Dan’s proudest moment for his course dealt with the social-epistemic approach to composition. When his principal decided to permanently change graduation to an indoor facility with limited seats for graduates’ families, his junior students were upset with the decision. They approached Dan for help in drafting a proposal, composing an argument, and presenting it to the principal. Students met after school and eventually persuaded the principal to change his mind about graduation’s location. He said the students were pleased with their ability to enact change, and he was ecstatic they saw “real-world benefits . . . to the kinds of things we were . . . thinking about and discussing in class.”

**Expressionism.** Four teachers also discussed practices which tended toward a more expressionistic theory of composition. These practices either dealt with students’ writing processes or with grading. Hester, Tabitha, and Lydia discussed several processes they used to teach students composition skills, including concept maps, brainstorming, outlining, and so on. However, each encouraged students to follow the process that allowed them to express their thoughts most effectively and completely. As Tabitha stated, they gave students options and “turn[ed] them loose to do what work[ed]

for them.” Lydia stated she tried to encourage this exploratory process in her students by giving them the freedom to make choices because students needed to recognize all composition is writers making decisions. Dan, on the other hand, demonstrated a penchant for expressionism in his philosophy on style and in his grading policies. He explained a “no writing rules” policy to encourage students to take chances in the expression of their thoughts. Additionally, Dan believed in grading his students individually on improvement. He said, “My memory is such that I forget what I had for dinner last night, and I can forget birthdays. But I remember very well the last essay every one of my students wrote.” He posited it is of vital importance to him that his students’ essays were scored on personal growth.

**Cognitivism.** Finally, three teachers’ composition epistemologies aligned with the theory of cognitivism and its focus on investigation and problem-solving. Hester claimed the goal of composition in her classroom was to teach students how to think critically and analytically. Dan, however, stated he encourages students to use unique evidence and believes writing about a topic well indicates knowledge about that topic has truly become ingrained knowledge. Harriet preferred to give her students time to develop a topic through research so students could examine a problem and develop a defensible position.

**Invention and arrangement.** Invention—sometimes described as the core of rhetoric—is the process of finding something to say. It is an area of concern for most composition instructors, including the ones in this study. As Lydia argued, invention is often considered the most difficult component of composition for students because they usually have limited experience, have read little, expose themselves to few current

events, and know little about history. Lydia explained further: Not only is invention difficult but it is also the composition piece students are least likely to adjust in editing. Therefore, one of her classroom goals was to teach students to avoid superficial knowledge and the expression of it.

Several teachers offered activities they used to help students with the invention process. Hester repeated the word *why* to her students to encourage complex and effective idea development while Harriet relied on graphic organizers and encouraged the use of personal experience. Tabitha voiced her intention to expand her students' skills in the invention phase of composing by using dialectical journals to encourage analytical thinking, modeling invention for the class, and requiring students to qualify some of the arguments.

Invention and arrangement have equal importance in the AP English Language and Composition course. Johnny explained that the Chief Reader at the AP English Language and Composition Reading told him an essay's "focus needs to be on invention and arrangement." In other words, have students organized their essays effectively? Have they made use of an appropriate mode of discourse? Are they explaining a process or comparing and contrasting two ideas? Lydia and Johnny relied on the Aristotelian Argument to teach structure while Harriet taught the five-paragraph essay, used concept graphic organizers to chunk information into units, and mapped student essays to focus students' organization. Regardless of their approach, all participants adopted some method to help students with invention and arrangement.

**Frequency of writing.** Five teachers discussed the amount their students write and how often they do so. They found this aspect of composition an important element to

discuss because practice can lead to improvement in many cases. Tabitha's data indicated she required more writing than the other participants with the goal of writing and scoring one essay every week. Lydia, ever the pragmatist (and the teacher with the highest number of AP English Language and Composition students) claimed her students averaged about one essay every two weeks while Hester said her students wrote six essays (two of each genre) every nine weeks. Harriet, who had been teaching AP English Language and Composition for two years, was still struggling with the amount of writing she and her students could manage. She stated that her first year they wrote one essay a month; her second, one essay every three weeks. She was hoping she could have students write once every two weeks her third year; yet, 15 days into the block-scheduled semester, they had not written one.

**Modeling and scaffolding.** Scaffolding or modeling was mentioned by five of the study's participants. Each of them stated these techniques helped their students progress from novice AP writers to more skilled ones. Hester relied on sharing personal experiences, analogies, and anecdotes when introducing a new topic, such as when she shared her first experiences analyzing a text or when she taught students to associate rhetorical devices with analogous sounds or words. She also modeled analyzing writing prompts with her students and shared student samples with the class. Dan also discussed his use of samples—both College Board samples and student samples from his class—as a strategy both to provide models for students and to give him the opportunity to model editing strategies. He also began the year writing introductions for his students as a way to model effective introduction strategies. However, he only modeled the first essay of each genre they will write.

Tabitha discussed scaffolding several times during her interview. She noted students often enter the course with little knowledge of the expectations and even less knowledge of writing. She relied on breaking the composition process into smaller pieces to help students process through the difficult task of composing an AP-level essay. Tabitha “[did] a lot of things in terms of scaffolding,” such as beginning with the EOC seven-point rubric and two-document synthesis. She then progressed to sample AP synthesis prompts but only gave students access to two sources. Eventually, students wrote a synthesis essay with all six to eight sources.

## **Theme 2: Time and School Constraints**

The second theme to emerge was time and school constraints can hinder instruction for rural South Georgia Title I AP English Language and Composition teachers. At some point in each participant’s interview, he or she mentioned constraints that hindered instruction: problems with time and issues related to school policies. Though not asked directly about such topics, participants conveyed perceived problems that fell into the two categories mentioned above. The concerns the participants divulged clearly demonstrated a concern for the best learning and teaching environment for their students and themselves. The codes discussed below demonstrate this theme.

**Time management issues.** AP English Language and Composition requires much from both the students and teachers. According to the participants, the effects of the rigor and intensity of the course reflect in time constraints and management problems with which they struggle from year to year. Dan’s comments encapsulated all participants’ perceptions best: “I have to balance time. . . . [Otherwise,] you just can’t do it and have a kid and a family at home and things like that.” Many of the participants

mentioned their struggles with time, and most commented on the continuous battle they fight with the clock.

Five teachers discussed strategies they had learned or had found useful in the past but have abandoned to save time. For example, Tabitha mentioned her APSI consultant suggested having students create their own synthesis prompts to develop students' abilities to evaluate the quality and appropriateness of texts, become more familiar with the synthesis prompt, and eventually give them practice writing a synthesis essay. Tabitha tried it one year but found it "a little more time consuming than any benefit" she felt it gave her students. She also enjoyed student debates in the past and saw the rhetorical benefits in such activities. She felt she needed to abandon these as well.

Harriet tried a year-long project in which students studied a topic of their choosing in depth through research, analyzed texts they found, created a variety of texts of their own, and compiled all into a literary magazine. She said she had to begin the project much earlier than she did the first year "in order to get everything done that needs to be done." Lydia faced a similar situation with an ongoing current-events assignment she had used in the past. She felt the assignment helped equip students with much needed knowledge to use as evidence in their argument and synthesis essays, but she said she "just doesn't have the time to fit that in." Finally, Hester, who championed grammar instruction, had to surrender composition instruction to include grammar in her plans.

Participants connected time management problems largely to necessary composition and exam preparation time. Dan, Lydia, Johnny, and Hester noted multiple-choice practice and review consumed an inordinate amount of class time. However, participants had differing opinions on the value of multiple choice. While Johnny and

Hester found these practices beneficial to students in both their writing and reading, Tabitha and Lydia preferred to offer multiple-choice practice on a voluntary basis only. Yet, all but one participant agreed they simply have not had time for students to compose as often as they would like. Dan discussed, at length, the frustration of making a minor mistake in the fall that escalated into a major problem in spring. He explained he failed to begin timed writing in fall, “and by AP time, I still had way too many [who] could not write [with] the time tower on them.” All participants regretted not having time to have students write as often as needed. In fact, every participant except Johnny had a target of writing one essay every two weeks.

According to the participants, the problem with time originated in the attempt to provide effective, useful, and timely feedback to student writing. All but one participant mentioned a marked preference for individual conferences, but only one had found the time to continue this practice. Lydia referred to grading essays as a “battle;” Dan called it his “kryptonite.” These combative verbs associated with grading student essays exposed the intensity of teachers’ feelings about the process. Five participants mentioned always feeling behind. The practice of scoring and providing students with feedback resulted in students composing fewer essays because teachers did not want to assign another essay when students had yet to see commentary on the ones they had already written. Johnny mentioned his solution to the problem—he did not write on their essays. Instead, he scored them and used representative samples to discuss as a class. Meanwhile, Lydia’s solution was to schedule time for each essay, turn off her lights, and hide in a corner until she completed them.

**School-based issues.** Several teachers mentioned school policies they felt hindered their success in AP English Language and Composition. Some of the most frequently addressed issues dealt with scheduling. Five of the participants' schools followed a full block schedule, and two of these teachers had students in their classrooms for only one semester. Both teachers who followed a one-semester, block schedule commented that the schedule did not provide enough time for success on the AP exam.

Lydia stated:

I still feel like this class cannot be taught and done justice in one semester.

There's a lot of growth that occurs in the year-long model between August and May . . . because they were able to reflect and really think about the things I've told them and the feedback I've given.

Johnny's school followed a modified block schedule where students followed a traditional seven-period schedule three days a week and a block schedule two days a week. His only complaints were that he had difficulty remembering the daily schedule and that a traditional 45- or 55-minute class could not provide adequate time for test preparation.

Teachers had a variety of other school policies they felt interfered with their instruction and success in the classroom. Lydia's school offered AP English Language and Composition in conjunction with dual enrollment, so students had the chance to earn credit both as a dual enrollment student and through successful completion of the AP exam. She believed the school's focus was on dual enrollment as evidenced by the replacement of who she saw as a more qualified AP English Language and Composition teacher by herself. Additionally, she stated, the administration "is more interested in

[students] taking dual enrollment than taking and passing the AP exam,” so her school experienced a substantial decline in the number of students who took the AP English Language and Composition exam. Yet students, she said, now prefer AP English Language and Composition because they do not have to take the American Literature EOC. It has resulted in a mindset that is “all about the numbers.”

Correspondingly, Harriet’s school required teachers to use USATestprep in EOC courses. Since her students did take the EOC, she had to use the program for test preparation even though the passages and questions on it are unlike those on the AP exam. Dan said he found several students in AP English Language and Composition who were misplaced, those with extremely low Lexile scores and those who were new to country. Finally, Johnny criticized schools for focusing on weaker students while ignoring the more gifted students, but the bigger offense, he argued, was the poor state of professional development. He said professional development was relatively “nonexistent” and “what we do is incestuous.” Johnny’s district tended to send one person to professional development, and that person was responsible for sharing his or her knowledge with colleagues. However, many times the professional development did not spread beyond the person who attended the training.

### **Theme 3: Factors Influencing Instruction**

The third theme to emerge was that a variety of factors influenced rural South Georgia Title I high school AP English Language and Composition instructors’ writing instruction. Although participants had a wide variety of possible influences to their composition instruction, including collegiate experiences, personal experiences, contextual factors, teaching experiences, ideologies, epistemologies, institutional

requirements, and professional development, they tended to mention only a few consistently. Their educational experiences became frequent topics of discussion; however, participants also implied qualities of their teaching philosophies and composition epistemologies that would have a lasting influence on the strategies they used in their classrooms. Many of these characteristics were formed before participants started teaching or early in their careers. The discussion below presents participants' perceptions of what factors influenced their composition instruction.

**Participants' education.** All of the participants in the study had an English or education degree, and five of them had at least one graduate degree. Of the six participants, only one participant took a rhetoric course in college, and she took just one class. One participant also took some composition classes, though they were not rhetoric classes, and another took a narrative composition course. Despite the rhetorical foundation of AP English Language and Composition, all of this study's participants had a combined total of one college course in rhetoric. Several, however, felt some of their educational experiences helped prepare them for AP English Language and Composition. Dan believed his experiences in debate in high school and as an undergraduate founded his knowledge of rhetoric and gave him "critical thinking skills" he would have otherwise missed. Johnny's experiences as an undergraduate in his university's writing lab and as a graduate student with the National Writing Project gave him experiences to form a composition instruction base. Hester realized when she started teaching AP English Language and Composition that she had no foundation for the course and still wishes she had taken some rhetoric courses. Yet, while almost all participants noted their

exclusively literature-based college experiences, only Lydia commented on the personal study she did, and said she continues to do, to strengthen her knowledge of rhetoric.

**Teaching philosophies.** Every participant in the study praised the AP English Language and Composition course for either its practicality, applicability, or rigor. Johnny also summarized many of the participants' observations that AP English Language and Composition is a vital course for students because it is a skill-based course requiring students to conceive, design, and create a product instead of learn content. Much of this praise originated with these teachers' teaching philosophies and each one's goal to improve students' abilities in a way that will make them better citizens. Four of the participants discussed how they believed they taught writing to help students become more effective when attempting to communicate their thoughts and ideas, and four participants explained how they wanted their students to leave their classes with the ability to be "good, productive contributors to society." To do so, the participants practiced analysis, reading, creating, and evaluation on a daily basis.

Beyond learning and skill goals, however, the participants discussed their philosophies about classroom practices and environments. Dan, Tabitha, and Hester lauded the effects of class discussions, saying group discussions helped students more than individual work, especially in the early stages of learning a skill. Dan preferred to lay foundational composition practices, composition skills, and reading processes by modeling. He argued that modeling helped him not only lay a necessary foundation but also developed vital relationships with his students. Other participants mentioned techniques they used to help develop relationships as well: humor, personal stories, analogies, and student choice on class elements ranging from texts to grading policies.

**Composition beliefs.** All of the participants stressed the importance of composition for all students but especially for AP students who will, presumably, advance to college after graduation. They also all commented on their belief that composition's purpose is to help students become better thinkers and on the difficulty of the task. Dan's summary of composition captured the spirit of all participants' views of composition: "I think there's no other way to prove that you truly know and have integrated [an idea] into your being . . . without being able to write about it."

#### **Theme 4: Changed Perceptions**

The fourth theme to emerge was that personal and professional experiences changed rural South Georgia Title I high school AP English Language and Composition teachers' perceptions of composition instruction. Since most participants had no educational experiences in rhetoric and composition and the ones who had sought more information about it had done so on their own, it follows that their perceptions of composition instruction would be varied. For AP English Language and Composition instructors who have not had the exposure to rhetoric and composition on the collegiate level, their past experiences and professional development experiences formed their classroom practices, and many mentioned having experienced something, whether it was an APSI or simple teaching experience, that changed their perception about writing. Although not directly asked about changed perceptions, interview questions inquired about collegiate, personal, and professional composition experiences. Participants sometimes expanded on these questions by relating them to their perceptions of composition, or they made statements that implied certain experiences had changed their

perceptions. These experiences fell into three categories—collegiate experiences, professional experiences, and professional development—as discussed below.

**Collegiate and professional experiences.** For the purposes of this study, teachers' professional experiences included any activities they completed because of their profession, or it referred to teacher experience as an agent to change perception. Collegiate experiences were any courses or projects they completed as part of a degree or certification program. Four of the six participants had five or more years of experience teaching AP English Language and Composition, and all of them had taught for at least a few years before they started teaching AP English Language and Composition. This time exposed teachers to many elements that affected their perceptions about teaching, composition, language, and so on. It also allowed for time to pursue knowledge through personal research and reading. However, those with less experience also mentioned changed perceptions from their short time teaching AP English Language and Composition. One of the benefits of interviewing those with fewer than five years of experience was that the reason for their change was more immediate in their memory; therefore, they discussed what happened to cause the change and why it changed their impressions of composition.

Research (Juzwik, 2010; Reid, 2011; Smagorinsky, 2010; Vavra & Spencer, 2007) has shown high school teachers' collegiate experiences failed to prepare them for composition instruction because most of them received no composition instruction themselves. The participants in this study are further examples of this phenomenon with only one teacher mentioning that any collegiate experiences had changed her perception of composition. Hester mentioned she had always viewed writing as something people

did because it was required for an assignment or because writing was someone's profession. Although she did not take any composition courses in her Master's program, she stated it was during this time in her collegiate career that she realized composition is a craft. She also mentioned her regret at having missed the opportunity to take a rhetoric and composition course. Yet, she believed she did not have the maturity at those times in her life to have appreciated rhetoric and composition for the art and skill it requires. Johnny also mentioned his collegiate experiences with composition, but he did not indicate they changed any of his perceptions.

Perhaps more immediate for the participants, professional experience was mentioned as having a more profound effect on their perceptions of composition instruction. Johnny mentioned his time spent as a tutor in a writing lab and his part on the National Writing Project as experiences that changed not just his idea of what composition was but his concept of what teaching someone to compose should entail. There he discovered the differentiation required and the nuances involved in teaching someone such a complicated art. Both Lydia and Harriet mentioned relying on previous AP English Language and Composition teachers from their districts in helping design their curricula and in helping shape their impressions and understandings of composition. Hester, Dan, and Harriet discussed the effects of classroom experience on their perceptions of composition. Hester claimed teaching the course made her aware of her own ignorance about composition, but it also encouraged a desire in her to write herself. Harriet mentioned how trying different strategies in the classroom influenced her ideas about composition. When an activity she was sure would work did not, she found herself changing not only the strategy but also her ideas about why certain strategies worked and

others did not. Dan, who admitted he did not understand what he was teaching during his first two years of AP English Language and Composition, found that experience helped “the light bulbs go off” until his ideas about composition settled into what they are now. Though not all participants mentioned experience changing their perceptions, Lydia discussed that the growing maturity and the marked amount of trial and error that accompanies experience would change every teacher’s perceptions of composition.

High stakes testing also played a part in changing the participants’ perceptions of composition. Tests, especially those such as the American Literature EOC and AP English Language and Composition Exam, usually affect a teachers’ instruction because high-stakes tests can determine employment, school policies, teacher expectations, and administrative requirements (Loofbourrow, 1994; Samuelson, 2009; Shohamy et al., 1996). Understanding what the College Board expects from students on the spring exam can determine how teachers approach composition and what they read, how they practice for the exams, how often they write, what strategies they choose to use, and so on. For the participants in this study, however, the American Lit EOC provoked a more drastic change in their perceptions of composition. None of the teachers mentioned the role of the exam in their understanding of composition, yet two of them explained how the EOC both introduced them to analytic and argumentative writing and changed their beliefs about writing. Hester and Harriet discussed how the EOC provided a useful format for composition with its analytic and more forgiving rubric. They implied the EOC introduced them to the idea that composition could be taught.

**Professional development.** Professional development was yet another factor teachers mentioned when discussing how their perceptions of composition had changed.

While the College Board created APSIs to help teachers develop their respective AP courses, none of the participants in this study claimed the APSIs or workshops they attended effected any change in their perceptions or strategies. Though all of the teachers said or implied the College Board trainings and workshops they attended were beneficial, the only professional development opportunities participants claimed changed their perception of composition were trainings offered by their schools. Hester praised the effects of training she received several years ago for the Georgia High School Writing Test, and Harriet lauded a training session she attended at her school about the writing portion of the American Literature EOC. Both of these participants appreciated the simplified rubrics and more relaxed requirements of the EOC, especially when beginning AP English Language and Composition.

Hester claimed the APSI she attended was the “most advantageous training” she had experienced, but she had earlier commented that the Georgia High School Writing Test training in which she participated was the training that helped her most with composition instruction. Johnny provided the highest praise for the College Board’s AP English Language and Composition APSIs: “It’s the best professional development. . . . It has an effect on everything you do.” Of course, Johnny had attended more APSIs than any other participant, and his school had paid for him to travel around the country to do so. Dan commented that the APSI consultants have been more successful in their classes and seemed to know more than he did, so he tried to implement the strategies they offered. However, he said he found he had to let time pass before he could fully understand what he learned at the APSIs. Tabitha, Hester, and Harriet picked a few strategies from their APSI trainings to use in their classes, but all three admitted they

chose not to use the practices they learned while at these trainings. Ultimately, the participants found the professional development that most changed their perceptions of composition in different places, but they seemed to find those influences somewhere other than the College Board's APSIs.

### **Theme 5: Students' and Teachers' Knowledge**

The fifth theme to emerge from the data was students' and teachers' knowledge were important factors in rural South Georgia Title I high school AP English Language and Composition teachers' courses. A word-count analysis on all interview transcripts demonstrated a marked interest in knowledge. Upon further analysis of the transcripts, I found participants' concerns for students' preparation and their awareness of their own preparation for the course were generally considered problems. Most participants worried about the preparation students received before entering their classrooms. When teachers and students are evaluated by the rigorous exam at the end of the year, a certain level of preparation before the course was seen as not only beneficial but also as a necessity for success on the exam. Stakeholders who pored over teachers' passing rates did not often consider how prepared students were when they entered the classroom in August. Of course, teachers were aware of the limitations some of their students faced, and they were vocal about this problem.

Additionally, participants addressed how they faced the problem of ill-prepared students by attempting to differentiate their instruction while providing students with the skills they need. The format of the AP English Language and Composition Exam requires students to have a foundational knowledge of a variety of disciplines from science to history, current events, and pop culture. The participants in this study

addressed the various methods they used to instill this knowledge in their students while simultaneously developing their analytic and composition skills. Finally, while not directly asked if participants felt well-prepared to teach AP English Language and Composition, several of them provided details about their own pursuits of knowledge. This theme—discussed below—conveys the participants’ perception of knowledge as it appears (or, in some cases, does not) in the AP English Language and Composition course.

**Student preparation.** Most of the participants stated at least some students were not prepared for the rigors of AP English Language and Composition, and though some may have risen to the occasion, many were not capable of reaching the bar the College Board sets. This bar is by necessity a high one. Yet the College Board requires schools to follow an open enrollment policy. How schools implement this policy, however, is largely an administrative decision, and most schools equate “open enrollment” with allowing any student to register for AP courses. Dan acknowledged open enrollment resulted in the placement of students with extremely low Lexile scores and limited English proficiencies in his AP course. He stated, “I have kids who have a lot going against them. They’ve got too many deficiencies to overcome in one year to be ready in May to make a three, four, or five.” Although his goal for students was to be a better reader and writer when they left his class than when they entered it, he worried the College Board goal was just too high, and he knew he had students who would never be able to reach it.

Like a couple of other participants, Lydia blamed the misplacement of these students on a lack of awareness of the rigor and requirements of AP English Language and Composition. She echoed other participants' thoughts:

We do kids a disservice [during registration] because there are only four people in this entire school who understand what my course is about. They don't understand what AP Language is. There are other English teachers who haven't a clue as to what I do. And even if they did, I don't know that they would change because it would require them to think differently about their course. It's aggravating when we do registration in advisory and you have, for example, a CTAE teacher registering a kid. He's trying to advise the student on AP Language, and he looks at the previous scores and says, "Well, you had an 80 in regular English. You should try AP Language." . . . I try to help [the students] understand what it's all about, but they're shocked. A lot of times they don't even know what they don't know.

This misplacement of students often resulted in the main concern for the participants: a lack of student knowledge. This lack of knowledge manifested as weaknesses in thinking, writing, and reading. Harriet noticed a lack of rhetorical knowledge, though most had heard of the basic terminology associated with it; Dan commented on his students' inability to write anything other than simple, and the occasional complex, sentence; Lydia considered students' lack of vocabulary and lack of knowledge about writing argument, analysis, and synthesis essays; and Hester speculated their lack of knowledge resulted in students just completing assignments instead of completing them with purpose. Dan provided an example of students writing an

argument about dress codes in schools. He said most students attempted to argue against dress codes because, being adolescents, they despised anything as authoritarian as dress codes. However, “when you ask them to think about it from the other point of view and really try to discover quality evidence, they really have a hard time.” Dan noted they tended to be incapable of anything beyond “because I don’t like it—the equivalent of their parents’ ‘because I said so,’ which they also despise.”

Lydia, Hester, and Johnny believed the reason students have such a difficult time with the foundational knowledge they need for AP English Language and Composition was their lack of exposure to rhetoric and nonfiction in earlier grades. Most English teachers became such because they have a passion for fiction and (admittedly, sometimes or) poetry. The intricacies and complexity involved in examining nonfiction texts with a rhetorical eye are both new and rarely practiced skills for even seasoned English teachers. Most English education high school students receive—until they enter the AP English Language and Composition classroom—is literary in nature, or, as Lydia characterized it, “training for little literary critics.” Johnny explained this lack of exposure to rhetorical analysis and nonfiction texts was the greatest challenge for AP English Language and Composition teachers:

[Georgia’s] changes to curriculum and standards should be taking care of that [lack of exposure]. But it isn’t taking care of that. By and large, these kids are pretty much taking literature courses, not reading [instruction] necessarily, but literature courses and literary analysis, perhaps, and, even worse, some narratives. . . . Well, anyway, that doesn’t help them. That doesn’t set them up for us.

The variety of student ability in the AP English Language and Composition course resulted in the need for differentiation in a course designed for the most advanced students. For the participants, the lack of foundational knowledge was the biggest detriment students faced. It required teachers to provide them with a variety of content while teaching analysis and composition. Dan seemed to have considered for some time how to approach an AP class with a disparity in knowledge and ability. He stated he has to consciously decide to which level he needs to direct his instruction on a daily basis. He explained the guilt he felt at teaching “up here and leaving too many behind” and teaching “down here and leaving [some students] so bored they can’t see straight.” The solutions he found involved remediation, accommodation, acceleration, and grading on improvement instead of accomplishment. Those were the solutions he said allowed him to sleep at night.

Although many students were ill-prepared for the course, many others had the knowledge they needed to excel in the course. Dan and Lydia discussed individual students and groups of students who were well-prepared, knowledgeable, civic-minded, and academically strong. These students were more likely to have the foundational knowledge to focus on analysis, logic, and the finer skills of composition. When they concentrated on refining skills instead of acquiring foundational historical, scientific, cultural, political, and societal knowledge, they were more likely to excel in the course.

**Providing students with knowledge.** The rigors of AP English Language and Composition require teachers and students to begin on a higher level of Bloom’s Taxonomy than other courses. The class requirements begin with analysis, evaluation, and creation. Johnny stated his goal more succinctly: “AP Language is about teaching

students to *do* something.” When students needed assistance with the more foundational levels of knowledge—remembering, understanding, and applying—the AP teachers in this study utilized a variety of tools they had at their disposal. Lydia’s stated goal for knowledge acquisition was to give students the ability to think more abstractly and analytically so they avoid relying on and using “superficial knowledge.” For Dan, laying that foundation of knowledge began with class discussions. It was only after those discussions that Dan felt true teaching and learning took place.

Because AP teachers cannot allow knowledge acquisition instead of skill practice to consume class time, the participants found ways to encourage or require students to pursue knowledge on their own. Harriet stated much of the material students read in her class was a result of her own and student research. She required students to find evidence to support their arguments and allowed them to spend time researching to find it. Once they found information, she taught them how to organize their thoughts and their evidence into a coherent argument. Lydia said in the past she required students to keep abreast of current events and quizzed them on their awareness of societal and cultural affairs. Parent complaints and the school’s decision to offer AP English Language and Composition in one semester ended the current events element of her course. Hester found herself constantly asking students to explain their thoughts and writing choices and made them write an essay for both sides of an argument as well as a qualification argument. Finally, Tabitha, Hester, Harriet, and Johnny used vocabulary activities, quizzes, and tests in class.

Essentially, these activities reflected a philosophy about knowledge acquisition for these teachers. All of the participants wanted their students to enjoy seeking new

knowledge, not only because the course was not designed to allow time to give it to them but also because the desire to learn helps ensure students success in the course and in life. Lydia specifically stated she wanted her students to make active choices, understand and apply information, think critically, and create sound arguments. She admonished her students when they relied on what she called “fake reading,” when students decoded words instead of absorbing the text. She encouraged them to use everything they read to “build their knowledge banks.” The connotation of “bank” is not lost on Lydia—she wanted them to connect learning to wealth. Certainly, Dan’s attempts to make real-world connections for his students helped them notice the value in learning, and maybe they, too, saw the importance of building that bank.

**Teachers’ pursuits of knowledge.** Although teachers’ experiences in APSIs, college, and other professional development opportunities was noted above in Theme 4, it bears repeating in this theme. Only one teacher said she had taken a rhetoric course while in college, and no teacher commented that the College Board’s APSIs had changed their perceptions about composition. Even though most participants said they found their APSI beneficial, none mentioned using any strategies or gaining any theoretical or pedagogical knowledge from the trainings. In fact, Hester maintained, “I wish I had taken some rhetoric courses.” Yet every teacher noted students’ lack of preparation for the rigors of the course. It makes sense that an interest in their own pursuit of knowledge was important to this study.

Lydia, Dan, and Johnny mentioned a couple of classes, extra-curricular activities, or work study programs that helped them gain a foundational knowledge for the course. The other three participants did not mention any coursework that could have prepared

them to teach rhetoric and composition, and only Lydia has ever taken a rhetoric and composition course. Harriet and Lydia relied largely on the knowledge and materials of veteran or retiring teachers, and both Johnny and Lydia admitted they did not understand one of the foundational argument models. However, no participant mentioned any plans to take a class, watch a Webinar, or do anything to help them prepare for the course. Some of the participants said they have pursued knowledge and skills on their own as an individual pursuit of knowledge. Dan created his own prompts and bought practice books to complete on his own (and with this students). Lydia said she still reads quite a bit about rhetoric and composition and strives to learn all she can on her own. Johnny, however, actively pursues AP English Language and Composition knowledge. He has attended as many APSIs as his school will allow, gone to as many regional workshops as he could, and worked as an AP Reader in the summer for the past 20 years.

### **Theme 6: Planning and Organization**

The sixth theme to emerge was planning and organizing the course is an important and time-consuming part of the rural South Georgia Title I high school AP English Language and Composition teacher's instruction. Although planning and organizing the course were not topics of consideration in the interviews, all of the participants addressed their planning and organization methods at some point during their interviews. Since the College Board does not provide a course outline or curriculum, planning the course is a task each teacher had to complete, usually on his or her own. The multiple and rigorous skills students must master through the course of the year means teachers juggle course goals, student needs, and available materials in combination with many teachers' requirements to fulfill Georgia's American Literature standards as

well. In addition, the individualized nature of writing and analysis requires constant adjustment—and sometimes completely rewriting—of yearly, unit, weekly, or daily plans. The College Board does not have any stated requirements for grading, scoring, or providing feedback, either. While the flexibility allowed by the College Board encourages teachers to approach the course in ways that best meet their students' needs, it also creates uncertainty for the teachers, especially those who are working as the only AP English Language and Composition teacher in their districts. Naturally, planning the course is on the forefront of most AP English Language and Composition teachers' minds and arose in these interviews. This theme was approached by the participants from the angles of planning and grading, as depicted below.

**Planning and organizing the course.** One of the biggest factors determining the direction of the course and the year-long planning of it is deciding what order to teach the three essays. Every participant addressed the order in which he or she teaches essays, and some explained why they chose such an order (see Table 7). The order in which teachers presented the different essays often determined other factors of the course. For example, teaching synthesis first required instruction in reading sources and entering academic discourse; on the other hand, teaching analysis first necessitated instruction in argument structure and reading claims, evidence, tone, and rhetorical situation. An argument-first approach involved instruction in evidence discovery, appropriate evidence, argument structure, and academic language. Regardless of the direction teachers chose, most had a rationale for choosing their route, and these choices were usually determined by student need.

Table 7

*Participants' Course Design—Composition Order*

Participant	Essay Order	Reason
Hester	Synthesis, analysis, argument	She follows the format of the exam
Johnny	Argument, synthesis, analysis	Began with argument because his score report showed a weakness in argument
Tabitha	Argument, synthesis, analysis	No reason provided
Dan	Argument, analysis, synthesis	Began with argument to provide structure for analysis
Lydia	Analysis, synthesis, argument	Saves argument for last to give students time to develop knowledge and content to use in their arguments
Harriet	Analysis, argument, synthesis	No reason provided

Beyond planning the sequence of composition instruction, teachers must also determine their course focus and the order they present skills. The participants discussed several ways they attempted to ease students into the rigor of the course by intentionally pacing material for a slower beginning, an intensely packed majority of course, and a quick review at the end. Harriet arranged composition requirements by having students only plan essays for the first nine weeks of the course, plan and write within a three-night time frame the second nine weeks, plan and write within a one-night time frame the third nine weeks, and compose in a 40-minute timed situation the last nine weeks. She felt this process eased them into the pressure of a timed assessment while giving them time to

improve foundational skills for most of the year. Tabitha and Harriet decided to delay introducing composition and began the year with vocabulary and rhetorical terminology. Although Johnny did include composition instruction throughout the year, he decided to focus his course on reading instruction instead.

Sources for AP English Language and Composition are ubiquitous, but the quality of those sources is not consistent nor is the material likely to be current. Where teachers found their material is worth mentioning in this theme because the source of instruction often determines the direction of the course. None of the participants mentioned using material from their APSIs and workshops as sources to guide the direction of their courses. The ones who did discuss their materials mentioned a variety of sources, however. Hester said she relies on material she found on the AP Teachers Community site, Teachers Pay Teachers, and other online sources. Lydia and Harriet mentioned using syllabi, strategies, and materials from teachers who had previously taught AP English Language and Composition in their districts. Johnny, who changes direction and units every year, relies on the College Board's annual score report to guide his instruction. The score report provides teachers information such as mean scores on each type of essay and on each type of passage in the multiple-choice section along with district, state, and global means. If Johnny's report signified a discrepancy among any set, he tried to focus on the lower scores the next year.

Most schools in the state of Georgia require AP English Language and Composition students to take the American Literature EOC in the spring with all other juniors. As such, some schools require AP English Language and Composition instructors to adhere to the American Literature requirements, and sometimes pacing

guides, of other American Literature courses. While five of the six participants did have students who would take the American Literature EOC at the end of the year, they had varying levels of school requirements concerning American Literature instruction in their courses. Hester and Harriet acknowledged their requirement to include American Literature in their courses, and they used iconic American novels, short stories, and poetry to teach American Literature. However, they structured their AP courses by strategies instead of the themes they used in American Literature. Johnny taught American Literature in combination with his AP course, even helping write a curriculum for his district called Advanced Placement English Language and Composition with American Literature.

Lydia provided the most detailed explanation of her unit planning. She seemed to integrate American Literature into her AP English Language and Composition course though her students did not have to take the American Literature EOC. Her love of literature made thematic units more sensible to her, but she was wary of using too much fiction in her class. She explained her integration of American Literature and use of thematic units:

I usually start with a TED Talk on the first couple of days, and it's called "The Danger of a Single Story." I try to get them thinking about how there's more than one way of looking at things. And then I have them do "The Yellow Wallpaper" and *Of Mice and Men* together. The reason I put those together is that for so long we just get the story as told from a white male perspective, and I want them to understand that what's not being said is as important as what is being said. What

is unsaid is often just as powerful and needs to be said, too. Then we add Patrick Henry and Hester Prynne.

Lydia's explanation of her first unit exemplified her approach to thematic units, but it was also fiction-heavy with only two—Adichie's TED Talk and Henry's "Common Sense"—pieces of nonfiction.

**Grading.** Grading for AP English Language and Composition presented its own set of unique challenges. On one hand, teachers wanted to score students similar to the way they will be scored on the exam in the spring. Conversely, providing students with a numeric score that corresponded to exam expectations seemed unfair in fall semester. Teachers did not expect students to perform in October the way they expected them to perform in May, so scoring them the same way throughout the year seemed counterintuitive. Several participants discussed how they tried to circumvent the problem of scoring student work with creative grading systems. As mentioned earlier, Dan graded based on individual student improvement. Harriet admitted her grading system was "convoluted" but relied on a system of bonus points to counter some of the lower scores students received on multiple-choice exams and essays. Lydia allowed students to make corrections on essays before she scored them and graded on a curve. Tabitha used a sliding scale to help student grades correlate to where she believed they should be at various points throughout the year. All of these methods attempted to help students maintain confidence in their abilities throughout the year while adequately reflecting their skills and improvement.

## **Additional Findings**

Because of the flexible and exploratory nature of qualitative research, the interviews in this study conveyed findings that were important to rural South Georgia Title I high school AP English Language and Composition teachers and relevant to the study but did not correspond with designated themes. These findings relayed information about teachers' perceptions of themselves and other AP English Language and Composition teachers as well as revealed information about their daily practices that reflected on their teaching styles and philosophies. An extension—and important element—of this study was the teachers' approaches to exam preparation. Despite what many teachers may wish, much of the success of students, teachers, and programs is determined by students' scores on this high-stakes exam in May. How teachers addressed the reading and multiple-choice passages in test preparation efforts was a vital part of their instruction. These additional findings are presented below.

**Comparing self to others.** Because of the high-stakes AP English Language and Composition Exam in May, teachers of the course often felt compelled to compare their students' results with those of other teachers. National, state, and local pass rates became sources of concern to most South Georgia AP English Language and Composition teachers because their pass rates tended to be lower than those in the state and nation. Participants in this study generally followed this penchant to compare themselves to others. Harriet expressly stated, "I'm concerned about my pass rate," and Dan commented on the role pass rate has had in class enrollment. He said, "If you have a 70% pass rate, kids are flocking to your class. If your pass rate is below the national average, they choose dual enrollment." The difficulties these teachers faced in dealing

with passing rates added to the stress of misplaced and under-prepared students complicating their instruction further.

Participants also compared their abilities to effectively teach concepts to other teachers. Some participants first commented on their similarity to other teachers: “I do probably the same thing everybody else does;” “I’m sure it’s the same with your students;” “We go through the standard stuff like every language teacher.” However, they also contrasted their feelings of failure with their presumption of others’ success. Some participants stated if something did not work in class, it was their fault. Harriet mentioned she hoped all teachers were behind in grading because otherwise she must be a “horrible teacher.” Similarly, Lydia expressed her distress when her attempts at teaching the modes of discourse were not a success in her class: “I didn’t find [the modes of discourse] useful, but that’s probably just me. I probably didn’t teach it right.” Likewise, Dan and Harriet assumed AP English Language and Composition consultants were much more successful and had much higher pass rates than they did. Dan even commented, “When certain groups fail, I feel like it is my fault.”

**Multiple-choice exam preparation.** Since analyzing passages and answering multiple-choice questions determine 45% of students’ exam scores, test preparation became an important consideration for rural South Georgia Title I high school AP English Language and Composition teachers. From Harriet who hated test preparation and the multiple-choice section of the exam to Johnny who used the multiple-choice section as a staple and guiding principle for his course, this study’s teachers had extreme feelings about this portion of the exam. All of the participants, however, noted the necessity of providing students with some test preparation through multiple-choice

practice passages and full-length exams. Tabitha and Lydia gave their students the option of coming to school on a Saturday to take a full-length mock exam, but Lydia also provided students with one-passage exam practices and reviews once a week. Tabitha stated the amount of shorter passages she and her students practiced depended on the group, but usually they completed one practice passage every two-to-three weeks. She encouraged her students to teach each other in a review session. Hester assigned her students two full-length multiple-choice exams for every nine-week grading period and spent an extended amount of class time reviewing each passage, question, and answer. Finally, Johnny used his block-scheduled days to complete full-length practice exams and reviews in class.

To make these practice exams more productive and helpful, teachers have found and discussed several strategies they used in class. Harriet used USATestprep to practice for the American Literature EOC and AP English Language and Composition exam simultaneously. Although the AP exam's questions are not formatted the same as those on the American Literature EOC, Harriet felt the practice helped prepare students for the AP exam regardless. Tabitha assigned various rhetorical terms to help her students prepare because she felt they helped even though terminology no longer appears on the exam. Johnny said he always encourages his students to engage with the test, so he teaches them how to read the passage, the questions, and the distractors. Dan's method of preparation was the most complicated. In fall semester, he began by turning the multiple-choice questions into short answer questions and allowing students to work in groups of four to answer them. Then they had to individually answer the questions with the five distractors. In the first few weeks of fall semester, they chose two answers and

received full credit if either answer was correct. Next, students chose two answers, but they starred one of them. They received bonus points if they starred the correct answer. In the final stage, students received full credit if they starred the correct answer and half if they did not. In spring semester, students received a never-seen passage and chose one answer without the assistance of a group. He believed this scaffolded process helped prepare students for the intensity of the exam.

**Reading and composition strategies.** The participants in this study were vocal about the strategies they enjoyed using in their classes and those they did not. It is worth noting the wide variety of techniques these teachers used to teach students the same skills and prepare them for the same exam (see Table 8). Even more interesting were the contradictory strategies some of them used. For example, Johnny and Lydia taught grammar as rhetoric; thus, their lessons revolved around style and purpose while Hester used isolated grammar lessons in her classroom. Similarly, Tabitha, Lydia, and Hester taught terminology, especially rhetorical terms, and Johnny expressly stated he does not teach terminology. Additionally, four participants mentioned using literary novels as a source to teach reading analysis in a course designed for nonfiction.

Table 8

*Reading and Composition Strategies*

Participant	Course Focus	Primary Strategies	Texts	Course Goals
Hester	Novel analysis Annotating Grammar Vocabulary Terminology	Peer review Prompt analysis Skimming/scanning	Fiction—6 Nonfiction—2 Poetry—1	“To teach students how to think”
Johnny	Reading as writing Vocabulary Frameworks Syntax	Modes of discourse Aristotelian model Sentence imitating Student responses as models	Fiction—4 Nonfiction—0 Poetry—0	“Learning to read as a writer and write as a reader”
Tabitha	Dialectical journals Vocabulary Guided questions	Prompt analysis Rhetorical précis Scaffolding Practice Peer review EOC rubric and prompts	Fiction—2 Nonfiction—0 Poetry—0	“The ability to take thoughts . . . and put them into words”
Dan	Discussions Tangents for teachable moments	Prompt analysis Peer review Modeling Student choice	Fiction—7 Nonfiction—2 Poetry—0	“To improve critical thinking abilities and to succinctly articulate ideas”
Lydia	Novels Vocabulary/ terminology	Modeling Grammar as rhetoric	Fiction—3 Nonfiction—6 Poetry—0	“Polish. Creating a sound argument”
Harriet	Aristotelian model Research Current speeches	Chunking Outlining Five-paragraph essay Modeling Conferences	Fiction—0 Nonfiction—0 Poetry—0	“To create writers who can effectively communicate”

Though many of the participants focused on reading, their text choices and the purpose for the reading varied widely. Johnny and Hester used reading as a method to improve writing while Tabitha and Lydia used reading to improve students' knowledge, and Harriet encouraged her students to read through research. The number of texts listed in Table 8 refers to the texts participants directly mentioned by title or author or texts listed on an assignment provided by the participant. Participants demonstrated a marked preference for fiction and poetry with a total of 23 instances of these genres and a total of ten nonfiction mentions. When specifically asked about their use of nonfiction texts in the classroom, four of the participants said they relied heavily on nonfiction, but they could name only ten specific texts they have used in class. In fact, Lydia, who discussed her use of fiction most, mentioned more specific nonfiction texts than any other participant.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to determine the strategies and practices used by veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an open enrollment policy. The social aspect of the classroom, the rigor required by the College Board, and the instructor freedom allowed in designing this skills-based course created varied experiences for instructors and students. To accomplish this purpose, I set out to answer the following research questions: What are the lived and career experiences of veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an AP open enrollment policy? What are veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers' beliefs, epistemologies, or ideologies about composition instruction in rural South Georgia Title I

high schools with an AP open enrollment policy? What changes or strategies for instruction have been implemented by veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an AP open enrollment policy following professional development for the AP English Language and Composition course? What classroom practices are used by veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools with an AP open enrollment policy?

After reviewing all of the data, the findings of the study were multi-faceted. As a current AP English Language and Composition teacher, I commiserated with some of the participants' responses, yet I was also surprised by some of the findings and the variety of strategies teachers practiced. The number of teachers adhering to the current tradition (genre-based) composition theory demonstrated the uniformity of these teachers' beliefs and resulting practices. However, their emerging beliefs in the value of audience showed an increasing awareness, if not adoption, of the social-epistemic theory implied by the College Board's AP English Language and Composition Course and Exam Description. Additionally, the amount of fictional texts used in the course and the number of teachers' frustrations with student placement and school policies were both expected because of the review of literature and surprising because of their prevalence and intensity.

This study is a qualitative research study using six volunteer AP English Language and Composition teachers from the six South Georgia RESA districts, where I also work as an AP English Language and Composition instructor. The interviews were completed in-person at each participant's school as were the observations. I extracted six themes from the gathered data and organized, coded, and analyzed all of it concurrently.

All teachers participated anonymously and were current AP English Language and Composition teachers. Chapter 5 will present my conclusions, which stem from the literature review and the collected data as presented in Chapter 4. Future recommendations will be included in the next chapter as well.

## Chapter V

### DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and practices of experienced AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools. I used a qualitative approach relying on composition theory, College Board requirements, and composition research to concentrate on the perceptions and experiences of teachers and how these two factors shaped their composition instruction practices. I first selected qualifying school districts and procured permission from superintendents to contact prospective participants. Data was collected from interviews of a purposeful sampling of six teachers from five Georgia RESA districts. I have included explanations of teachers' practices and their perceptions of AP English Language and Composition and College Board training. I have also addressed teachers' composition pedagogies, composition theories, changed perceptions about composition, and teaching concerns. By evaluating documents and data from observations, I triangulated my analysis of the initial interviews and observations.

The findings of the study have inspired me to consider ways to help AP English Language and Composition teachers provide students with a curriculum more aligned with the College Board's expectations. These teachers' stories reminded me of my own struggles and the struggles of many other AP English Language and Composition teachers I have met in my own district and at the annual AP English Language and Composition Readings. Reconciling College Board expectations, personal composition

philosophies, and student needs is difficult, and becoming aware of the complex factors involved in composition instruction is part of the process.

Navigating the rough waters of high passing rate expectations and teaching such a rigorous course to high school juniors are challenging tasks. Adding the complications of coordinating the many theoretical and strategic factors involved in successful alignment to a third entity's (the College Board's) high-stakes exam creates a complicated course teachers are designing much on their own. Many of the teachers of AP English Language and Composition hold degrees in English or English Education and are more versed in the aesthetic study of fictional works. They are often unaware of the complexities inherent in composition instruction and of the importance of reconciling the intricacies of this discipline to the course's requirements. These teachers' perceptions, practices, and experiences are possibly common amongst the wider community of AP English Language and Composition instructors.

In this last chapter, I provide a summary of the major findings of the study. I then present conclusions from the existing literature on composition theory, the AP English Language and Composition program, rhetoric, and teachers' training, experiences, and pedagogies. I then apply those conclusions to this study's findings. I also explain the various implications this study has on College Board training and the practices of AP English Language and Composition teachers. Finally, I suggest recommendations for educators and those who prepare and implement professional development and for future research based on the conclusions.

## **Summary of Findings**

The findings of this study revealed that rural South Georgia Title I high school AP English Language and Composition teachers perceived writing instruction as a vital part of their course design and relied on the College Board as a general guideline for both assignments and rubrics. They also perceived the AP English Language and Composition course as a valuable experience for students because it teaches a skill rather than content. Another finding was that teachers' composition epistemologies and practices were influenced by a number of factors related to their past educational experiences, professional trainings, and professional experiences in the classroom. Additionally, this study confirmed that teachers' perceptions about composition were vital in directing the curriculum and instruction in their courses. Six main findings arose from this study.

## **Discussion of Findings**

This study found many factors influenced the practices and beliefs of AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools. The variety of experiences they had in classrooms directly affected their composition epistemologies and pedagogies. Additional findings concerned the instruction choices teachers made such as textual selections, composition instruction practices, and their concerns and frustrations. These findings are discussed in more detail below.

### **A Focus on Literary Works**

The first finding of the study was that AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools relied heavily on fictional works such as *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald and *The Scarlet Letter* by Hawthorne in their courses.

The findings in this study mirrored those of many other researchers (Connors, 1997; Tate, 2002) and the College Board (2014c) who discovered an inordinate focus on literature in the AP English Language and Composition classroom. Though AP English Literature and Composition and AP English Language and Composition have divergent goals (Hansen, 2010), exams developed by separate committees, and separate genre requirements for texts used in class, AP English Language and Composition instructors consistently relied on fictional works to heavily supplement (or guide) their instruction.

The six participants in this study mentioned using a combined total of 19 different, specific fictional texts (two short stories and 17 novels) and only ten specific pieces of nonfiction. Hester and Lydia mentioned trying to use more nonfiction pieces in their classes, though. Four of the participants discussed their use of nonfiction, but only Hester, Dan, and Lydia named any specific texts or authors even when I directly asked all of them about their use of nonfiction. In fact, four of the six participants were completing assignments based on fictional texts the days of my observations. Lydia's students discussed *The Scarlet Letter*, Johnny's students worked on a group assignment about various American literature novels, Harriet's students were working in groups on various short stories, and Tabitha's students watched a film version of *The Great Gatsby*. Although the observations represented a small snapshot of these teachers' practices, their specificity in discussing fiction and their ambiguity when discussing nonfiction signaled a preference for and use of fiction in their AP English Language and Composition classes. Hester, Johnny, Lydia, and Tabitha even mentioned their preference for fiction during their interviews.

**English degrees and a preference for literature.** There are several reasons secondary writing teachers tend to rely on fiction to teach composition. One of them is that many composition instructors have degrees in English, which generally focus on literature and poetry (Byrd et al., 2007; Juzwik, 2010; Smagorinsky, 2010). Secondary teachers who have progressed through English departments have done so because of their love for fiction and poetry, not necessarily because they love writing (Faust et al., 2005; Stygall, 2002). Five of the participants in this study graduated with degrees in either English or English education and had little need to take composition or rhetoric courses while in college.

Universities' more recent inclusion of rhetoric and composition departments has increased the number of graduates interested in writing, but many of them do not pursue a career in secondary education. It is more likely, however, that writing program administrators and college composition instructors will hold such a degree or at least be familiar with the scholarship of a rhetoric and composition program. If AP English Language and Composition is an equivalent course to First Year Composition, it makes sense that those teachers should also be familiar with rhetoric and composition (Christian, 2007; Puhr, 2010). Many secondary English teachers, however, find the process of writing instruction tedious and boring (Stygall, 2002). Research has shown that the way a writing instructor thinks of composition-rhetoric will have a direct influence on the way he or she teaches composition-rhetoric (Medhurst, 2014). Without what usually has to be self-selected or elective studies in composition-rhetoric, secondary teachers would have little to no experience in this discipline, which would affect the way they think, how they feel, and how they teach composition-rhetoric.

Four of the six participants in this study specifically mentioned they originally did not want to teach AP English Language and Composition because of their strong preference for literature. They were asked to do so by their administrators because of their experience teaching English or because of their credit-hours in English, even though those hours and that experience were in literature courses. With a preference for literature and a lack of understanding of (or direct distaste for) composition instruction because of their unfamiliarity with its instruction, many AP English Language and Composition teachers, including those in this study, have used several pieces of fiction in their courses. The findings of this study and previous research suggested AP English Language and Composition instructors' reliance on literature may be adversely affecting their composition instruction.

**A lack of training.** Another factor increasing the tendency to focus on literature in the AP English Language and Composition classroom is a lack of knowledge of and little training in rhetoric and composition. None of the participants in this study had a rhetoric and composition degree, and only Lydia had taken a single rhetoric and composition course in college. Lydia took this rhetoric course as an elective during her undergraduate coursework. Milewski and Gillie (2002) published data that showed only 32.4% of AP instructors had taken a university course in their discipline. I presume the percentage depicted in this study would remain steady across the South Georgia districts. Much research, as this study, has shown composition teachers were often unfamiliar with the foundational theories and concepts associated with composition instruction (Applebee, 1991; Hillocks, 1999, 2007, 2010; Langer, 1992; Langer & Applebee, 1987; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008) and found it difficult to help students with the basic

underpinnings of composition. As a result, they depended on the familiarity of literary texts.

Based on such research, the lack of collegiate experience in rhetoric and composition led this study's participants to use more short stories and novels in their courses. Their experiences with, knowledge of, comfort with, and preference for fiction understandably led to this inclusion of literature in their composition courses. The requirement of five of the participating schools to include American Literature standards in AP English Language and Composition increased the likelihood that fiction would either directly or largely affect instruction as well. Tate (2002) found that writing classes including any fictional component tended to devote the course to reading literature instead of using literature to help teach students to write.

AP courses are generally taught at an accelerated pace and are intended to be the equivalent of a college-level course; therefore, the course and its requirements ask instructors to have both deeper content knowledge and more thorough course preparation (Oberjuege, 1999). For AP English Language and Composition, teachers should first acquire foundational theoretical and pedagogical knowledge about composition-rhetoric (Christian, 2007). The College Board provides APSIs and workshops to help accomplish this goal, but the quality of training varies widely, and participation in either training is not required. The most recent published data revealed that only 52.2% of AP teachers attended an APSI before they began teaching their AP course, and only 44.9% of teachers who taught their respective AP courses for at least five years had attended an APSI within those five years (Milewski & Gillie, 2002). Four of this study's six participants had attended at least one APSI in AP English Language and Composition. Those who

had attended an APSI commented on the benefits of the trainings, yet none discussed how the APSIs had changed their beliefs about composition or the practices they used to teach foundational principles in class. As Harriet stated, other teachers' and administrators' ignorance about AP English Language and Composition can leave new teachers struggling to effectively teach their course. When those districts do not encourage teachers to attend an APSI, they may be unaware of course expectations or not understand them as presented in the course description.

**Uses of literature.** The College Board is explicit in its directive to use fiction only in cases presenting a clear rhetorical situation and to discuss fiction only in reference to the writer's rhetorical choices (College Board, 2019b). These texts are pieces with the intent to change some aspect of society such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Stowe (to end slavery) or *1984* by Orwell (to eliminate the effects of a caustic government). The College Board (2019b) suggests teachers not use fictional works with any other purpose—to entertain, for example. Novels such as *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald and *The Kite Runner* by Hosseini fail to have the persuasive purposes required by the College Board and would be inappropriate for a rhetorical analysis.

The activities I observed, documents I analyzed, and activities participants in this study discussed with their fictional texts included reading checks, film-to-book comparisons, dialectical journals, and projects based on genre-specific arguments and thematic connections. Some of these activities focused on the rhetorical arguments of writers, but maintaining an emphasis on authorial choices was difficult when teaching a lengthy text. The intensity of rhetorical analysis is best completed on shorter texts, and full-length novel assignments seldom maintain necessary rhetorical analysis qualities.

Many of the activities listed and used by participants were reading strategies that helped students comprehend text but were not related to writing strategies.

When Georgia changed from the content-based standards of the Quality Core Curriculum to the subsequent skill-based standards, all English courses were required to use an equal balance of fiction and nonfiction texts in their classes. I have seen the difficulty teachers have of balancing these texts. Being on my school's English textbook adoption committee, I saw that readers and textbooks tend to weigh one genre over the other. Readers have more nonfiction passages without supporting material on theme, figurative language, rhetorical appeals, and so on. Textbooks have the supporting material, but they have a preponderance of fiction and poetry passages. With cash-strapped school systems, most cannot afford to update their textbooks at all and those who can purchase books, cannot afford to purchase two to provide the needed balance. In my school, teachers preferred the textbook and were left finding their own nonfiction texts. The twenty other English teachers in my department are not well-read in nonfiction (only five have a degree in English or English Education and none other than myself have taken a composition-rhetoric course). They have difficulty finding nonfiction texts that are appropriate in content, skill, and reading level for their students. According to research (Juzwik, 2010; Reid, 2011; Smagorinsky, 2010), many secondary English departments faced these same issues, and with AP English Language and Composition functioning as part of schools' English departments, those teachers faced similar problems.

Smagorinsky (2010) summarized the difficulty secondary teachers faced in effectively teaching composition as a combination of teaching in conservative schools,

experiencing traditional writing instruction themselves, having few alternatives to more progressive writing instruction, and being encouraged to promote literature. The participants in this study experienced a variety of these difficulties.

### **College Board Training Beneficial, Not Influential**

Another finding of this study was that although participants found College Board trainings helpful, AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools did not fundamentally alter their conception of composition or their composition instruction. Newell et al. (2014) noted that how and why teachers adopt some proffered practices and not others is more nuanced than learning a new strategy, theory, or activity. Every teacher in this study attended at least one College Board sponsored training with four of the six attending at least one APSI, and one attending the summer AP Readings for 20 consecutive years. All of the study's participants commented on the benefits of their College Board trainings, referring to them as wonderful experiences, trainings that "affect[ed] everything," and "the best professional development." Similarly, Harriet and Tabitha mentioned specific strategies they had learned at their trainings and had incorporated into their classrooms. However, Harriet, Tabitha, Hester, and Lydia discussed activities and strategies they learned at their trainings that they felt were inappropriate, ineffective, or too time consuming to incorporate into their classes. Only Hester noted that the College Board trainings had changed her teaching or personal philosophy by providing her with an increased appreciation for nonfiction, though she did not state her beliefs of composition or composition instruction were altered. Tabitha was the only person who mentioned

College Board trainings had affected her composition instruction by increasing the amount of writing she required from her students.

**Variations in trainings.** Composition courses rely on a different type of teaching from other disciplines, requiring a tutorial method of instruction as well as instructors with more knowledge and flexibility in instruction (Connors, 1997). As such, the College Board trainings should attempt to change teachers' perceptions of composition to equate with the College Board's theoretical foundation and assessed composition principles for AP English Language and Composition. This study's participants experienced trainings that offered strategies and activities and introduced assessment standards but did little to change the theories and pedagogies that grounded teachers' methods and beliefs.

Participants described their experiences as beneficial introductions to strategies and exam preparation with little to no influence on their foundational knowledge, theories, or preferences. Those who had attended the week-long APSIs explained several distinct activities College Board consultants had given them at their trainings. For example, Dan learned to have his students write synthesis prompts, Lydia was told how to use paint strips to teach tone, and Hester found a useful graphic organizer for analysis essays. Estrem and Reid (2015) found four main sources influential in understanding writing pedagogy: formal studies, personal characteristics of the instructor, teaching and tutoring experience, and professional colleagues. The College Board's limited exposure to teachers through very little formal study naturally resulted in little that affected the writing pedagogies of the secondary teachers in this study.

Another factor influencing teachers' experiences with College Board training is the disparity in the quality of training. All College Board sanctioned training is taught by

College Board trained consultants. However, the participants in this study reported differences in not only what was taught but also in the quality of materials and information provided. Johnny, who traveled around the country for trainings, found the best trainings in Florida. He added that he intentionally traveled to gain a variety of experiences. If Johnny's travels succeeded in providing him with multiple perspectives, College Board trainings, by extension, had differing content and quality based on location. Consultants tend to travel to trainings close to their homes, and he stated Florida's consultants provided him with his most beneficial training with more writing instruction help and rationales for specific strategies and requirements.

The other participants attended trainings in Georgia and found their quality ranging from "frustrating" to "extremely beneficial." The majority of trainings consisted of the consultant acquainting participants with the parameters of the exam and sharing his or her own practices and strategies. The effectiveness of these trainings subsequently ranged from those that changed participants' perceptions to those that did little more than provide participants with a few more sample essays. I have attended three APSIs in the past seven years and have found their effectiveness ranging from the first one that completely changed my approach to writing instruction to the most recent APSI, which was little more than a frustrating review of the AP English Language and Composition Course and Exam Description binder. For training that costs school systems, scholarship providers, or participants between \$500 and \$800 (plus travel and lodging expenses) depending on the location (College Board, n.d.), participants expected more consistency and course direction.

**The College Board's goal for APSIs.** The College Board does not claim APSIs will offer any foundational resources to match teachers' theories and pedagogies to those implied by the AP English Language Composition Course Description and exam. The goal of the APSIs according to the College Board is to explore the course design, the exam, and AP classroom resources like the online teacher community (College Board, 2019a). While the intent is to alter teachers' classroom practices to better prepare students for the exam in the spring, it has no stated goal to change teachers' perceptions, theoretical underpinnings, or foundational practices in their classrooms.

### **Current-Traditional (Genre-Based) and Social-Epistemic Theoretical Bases**

A third finding from this study was that the predominant theoretical bases forming the composition instruction of AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools were the current-traditional theory (or the more contemporary version, genre-based theory) and social-epistemic theory. Though writing researchers have often condemned the idea that teachers adhere to a single theory or epistemology (Berlin, 1987) in favor of following several epistemologies or theories (Bridwell-Bowles, 1991; Crowley, 1990; Hobson, 1992), researchers have also found teachers tend to follow one more closely. Additionally, researchers generally find some better than others (Ervin, 1996).

**Current-traditional (genre-based) theory.** The current-tradition theory values invention over style (Day, 1853; Fulkerson, 2005) and assumes students will write better if they follow the structure and format of sample texts (Fulkerson, 2005; Hyland, 2003). Though the term *current-traditional theory* is used pejoratively now in composition-rhetoric scholarship, the practices associated with it are still prevalent in composition

classrooms. Several of this study's participants relied on models, samples, templates, and frameworks to teach composition. They argued these sample texts and prescribed forms helped students through the difficult task of composition and gave them an understanding of the structures of texts. Like other current-traditionalists, many of this study's participants emphasized a variety of forms that break composition into its constituent parts. From Tabitha's use of the *précis* to Dan's and Harriet's use of the five-paragraph essay, these forms signified an adherence to the older current-traditional theory of composition. Similarly, Hester's focus on mechanical and grammatical correctness and all participants' uses of professional models indicated a current-traditional theoretical leaning. Though research has since proven many of these strategies ineffective, especially isolated grammar instruction (Cleary, 2014; Jaeger, 2011; Lynn, 2010), many teachers believe in their use and continue to implement their associated activities in their classrooms.

Researchers noted several problems arise from this approach to composition. These issues include: (a) it does not emphasize communication, invention, or the writing process; (b) it creates instruction centered on textual forms; (c) it focuses on content over meaning; (d) it teaches by prescription; (e) *ethos* and *pathos* are minimized; (f) it results in the five-paragraph theme (Russell, 2006); and (g) it results in prose that "establishes no voice, selects no audience, takes no stand, makes no commitment" (Crowley, 1990, p. 149). I do not suggest that the participants in this study adhered to this theory so tightly to have any of the results listed above, but those results were possible.

Most of the participants in this study have progressed to an adoption of a more contemporary version of current-traditionalists—genre-based theory. Genre-based theory

recently eclipsed the now-ridiculed current-traditional theory with a similar approach to modes and samples but with more emphasis on rhetoric (Devitt, 2014) and context over form (Miller, 1984). This study's participants have attempted to adopt this more purpose-based approach to the modes of discourse. Lydia tried to help her students understand "the way they structure an essay might depend on the point they want to make," and Dan emphasized the role of the audience in student compositions to add a purposeful element to student compositions.

**Social-epistemic theory.** The College Board and most contemporary composition theorists promote the social-epistemic theory with its focus on audience and intent. However, many secondary composition instructors experienced instruction following the current-traditional theory's focus on forms, so they, too, emphasized form over meaning. The prescriptive form of writing so prominent in the 1950s continues to be a mainstay of composition with continued emphasis on grammar, memorizing, and modeling (Connors, 1997; Ferreira-Buckley, 2012). This phenomenon is evident in South Georgia's AP English Language and Composition teachers' classrooms with Hester's inclusion of isolated grammar instruction and Johnny's use of imitation exercises. Harriet, Dan, and Tabitha also emphasized the role models played in their instruction by using College Board, professional, and student models in an effort to help students craft their essays. Yet a burgeoning social-epistemic theory was taking shape in the participants' practices.

The College Board's insistence on the value of audience implies a course base of the social-epistemic theory, and participants have readily adopted this aspect of the theory. All three required compositions and reading analysis questions on the AP English

Language and Composition exam rely on the social interaction between a reader and his or her audience. Readers take into consideration students' consideration of audience in argument and synthesis essays, readers score them on their analysis of another writer's audience consideration on analysis essays, and students must answer various multiple-choice questions about a writer's audience in the reading portion of the exam. In order to meet the College Board's expectations, participants taught students a variety of techniques to help them consider audience when writing and analyzing text. Tabitha emphasized the importance of audience considerations when writing; Harriet taught *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* as methods to affect an audience; and both Lydia and Johnny used audience considerations as guiding principles in their grammar instruction.

**Adopting multiple theories.** The College Board focuses on the interplay between writer and audience in AP English Language and Composition instead of the older composition formula of grammar and discourse methods. This emphasis on audience and purpose connects more readily to a social-epistemic theory of composition, which this study's participants were also beginning to adopt. The diversity of theories presented in the study's participants mirrored the suggestions of Berlin (1987), Hobson, (1992), Bridwell-Bowles (1991), and Crowley (1990) to practice a combination of composition theories and epistemologies. The theory participants followed most closely after the current-traditional (genre-based) theory was the social-epistemic theory. Dan's and Johnny's stated adoption of Lunsford and Ruskiewicz's (2019) "everything's an argument" philosophy signified a strong adherence to the social-epistemic theory as did Dan's and Lydia's appreciation of composition's real-world applications.

Dan stated his proudest moment as a teacher was when his students used the skills they had learned in his AP English Language and Composition class to persuade the school's principal to make changes to their graduation ceremony. Though Lydia appreciated and enjoyed AP English Literature and Composition more, she admitted the writing and skills offered by AP English Language and Composition are more practical for students in their future endeavors. Similarly, the rhetorical approach Lydia and Johnny used when teaching style and grammar largely aligned with the social-epistemic theory as promoted by the College Board. Tabitha, Dan, Lydia, and Harriet stated or implied that their goal for the course was for students to become better writers who could effectively communicate with an audience, demonstrating the social-epistemic idea that writing is never an isolated act but a social interaction between or among people (Roozer, 2016).

### **Invention and Arrangement: The Most Important and Difficult Aspects of Composition**

A fourth finding from this study was that AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools perceived invention and arrangement as both the most difficult to teach and the weakest areas for students. Invention, or the process of finding something to say, and arrangement, or the organization of the writer's thoughts, are concerns of most composition instructors including the ones in this study. The participants demonstrated a marked interest in invention as can be seen in the word cloud generated from the study's transcripts showing a definite concern about student knowledge. Hester's and Dan's concerns to teach students how to think critically showed an interest in invention, and every participants' comments on students' inability to

provide effective, academic evidence in their essays indicated teachers perceived invention to be an area of concern for student composition.

**Invention.** Invention is divided into five separate categories. These areas include (a) reading as a writer (a practice Johnny advocated), (b) generating ideas (a skill five participants mentioned as difficult for their students), (c) organizing ideas (a skill Tabitha and Harriet said they intentionally teach), (d) contextualizing ideas (a difficulty because of high school juniors' limited experiences), and (e) writing a working thesis (a focal point for three of this study's participants). The importance of knowledge in this step of composition has been noted since the time of Plato and Cicero (Nordquist, 2019).

It is difficult for students to write anything when they know very little about history, science, current events, literature, culture, and so on. As adolescents, students have very little experience to have gathered knowledge, but the participants in this study noted students seem to have less than they should. Teachers noticed several reasons for students' lack of knowledge: (a) they were ignorant of current world or national events, (b) they did not read seminal texts, (c) they remained unaware of the role historical events played in establishing current and future events, and (d) they had limited personal experience. Lydia summarized her concerns: "I think the invention part is the hardest because they have nothing. They have to draw from something, and they have nothing." This concern about invention has been on the minds of composition instructors, and instructors of other art forms, for some time. Reynolds (1840), an English artist, also noted students' lack of knowledge two centuries ago, "Invention, strictly speaking, is little more than a new combination of those images which have been previously gathered and deposited in the memory; nothing can come of nothing" (p. 7).

The participants in this study struggled to help (or force) students to gain the knowledge they needed to adequately compose the required essays. From my experience teaching AP English Language and Composition and the participants' comments, the complexity of the composing and analysis processes requires teacher assistance; thus, associated activities consume the majority of time students spend in the classroom. Providing students with the background information and knowledge (including current events, vocabulary, history, science, and so on) they need to be successful on the argument and synthesis essays is difficult. When students have not developed the intrinsic desire to gain essential knowledge for the invention process, teachers can resort to forcing students to complete assignments that many will not even attempt.

**Arrangement.** Participants perceived arrangement, or the structure of a text, as an issue in student compositions as well. Modern rhetoric views arrangement as less a prescribed, formulaic technique and more an attempt to convey the reality the writer wants (Lynn, 2010). Despite this modern understanding of rhetoric, prescriptive arrangement is still prevalent in today's composition classrooms. This study's participants attempted various strategies to overcome their students' deficits including the use of templates, models, outlines, and graphic organizers. Lydia and Johnny mentioned relying on the Aristotelian argument structure to help students through the arrangement phase of composition while other participants relied more heavily on templates, frameworks, or trial-and-error. Tabitha mentioned using the *précis* as a method of analysis and as a template for analysis essay introductions, Hester discussed various lists including "say it, quote it, explain it," Dan said he teaches his students a formula essay in the fall, and Harriet talked about the importance of the five-paragraph essay.

Although these formulas and templates are frowned upon by composition and rhetorical theorists, participants found them necessary to help high school students begin the composition process when they do not know how to start. The composition-rhetoric courses I have taken, the AP English Language and Composition classes I have taught, and the Readings I have attended have taught me that formula essays inhibit student writing more than they help students invent and arrange their thoughts. Students approach the formula (normally a five-paragraph) essay as a template instead of as an authentic (or even imagined) rhetorical situation. Additional problems arise with formula essays because they tend to result in essays lacking coherence, consisting of three body paragraphs with three separate defenses for the writer's thesis. Formulas may help students arrange an essay, but the authenticity of the rhetorical situation is lost as is the effectiveness of the argument.

### **Curriculum Varies Widely**

A fourth finding of this study was that AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools had widely varying curricula. The College Board intentionally does not have a prescribed curriculum for AP English Language and Composition, nor does it provide a reading list for either AP English course. Because teachers design their own curriculum based on a set of goals and skills, there is a wide variety of approaches to implementation of material, not only in South Georgia but also globally (Hansen et al., 2006). An examination of participants' general approaches to the course revealed a diversity in course focus, primary activities, texts, and goals. Such diversity created very different courses with different processes,

activities, goals, and outcomes. Naturally, these teachers followed a wide variety of pedagogies to accomplish their varying goals.

**Course goals.** All of the participants' courses focused on elements of reading, but the goal of the reading, how that reading was used, and the texts chosen varied from class to class. The heavy use of fiction (with 22 specific authors or pieces mentioned during the interviews) implied the study's participants relied on literature in their courses even though the College Board expressly states AP English Language and Composition should utilize nonfiction texts. They note fiction should be used only in cases that present a clear and specific rhetorical situation such as *1984* by Orwell or *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair. The use of lengthy fictional works will more than likely lead to an examination of what a text says instead of how it says it.

The goal for South Georgia AP English Language and Composition teachers was to help students become more effective writers. However, the stated goals of each participant varied slightly, and the activities teachers used in their classrooms reflected this variation, even when the activities did not correlate with their stated goals. Hester and Dan stated they wanted their students to become better thinkers, and they relied on the disparate activities of grammar and discussion to accomplish that goal. Johnny summarized his course goal as wanting students to be able to write as a reader; therefore, he centered his course on reading instruction. Harriet, Dan, and Tabitha wanted their composition instruction to help students become better communicators, relying on discussions, templates, modeling, and vocabulary to accomplish this goal. Finally, Lydia wanted her students to have polished compositions and stated she attempted to teach this skill using novels and vocabulary.

**The sources of course variations.** Researchers (Grossman et al., 1997; Juzwik, 2010; Reid, 2011; Smagorinsky, 2010; Vavra & Spencer, 2007; Wideen et al., 1998) noted secondary teachers have little preparation for developing a writing pedagogy, so the variations in designing a curriculum with little guidance was inevitable. Smagorinsky (2010) blamed this lack of coherence and the tendency of secondary composition teachers to rely on traditional practices and models such as the five-paragraph essay on teacher preparation programs for their lack of coherence and their focus on literature, field experiences for their reinforcement of prescriptive practices, and secondary schools for their support of formulaic writing and a literary focus. Much like the participants in this study, teachers are apt to adopt the practices of their colleagues more than they are of any professional development experience. As Lydia and Tabitha explained, their practices, activities, and assignments were mostly copies or remakes of material they received from outgoing AP English Language and Composition teachers in their districts.

Other participants similarly gathered activities from various trainings, colleagues, and online forums or websites. After a few years of teaching AP English Language and Composition, Dan said he understood the tools he was given at his first APSI and had implemented some of those borrowed practices. Hester, on the other hand, stated she found much of her material in online forums and from online teaching sources such as Teachers Pay Teachers. The problem that can occur with adopting pedagogical practices in such a piecemeal fashion is that teachers will fail to adopt the foundational theory and research to explain or support their new pedagogies (Reid, 2011).

## **Frustrations with Time, Schools, and Student Preparation**

A final finding from this study was that AP English Language and Composition teachers in rural South Georgia Title I high schools were frustrated with time management, school-based requirements, and student preparation for the course. All of these issues were interrelated because time management became an issue when students were not prepared for the course, and students tended to enter the course without proper preparation because of school-based AP entry requirements or lack thereof. Puhr (2010) found three issues that hindered the effectiveness of an AP English Language and Composition course: (a) the joining of AP English Language and Composition with American Literature, (b) ill-prepared students, and (c) under-qualified instructors. All three of these factors could result in the added pressure of constricted class time.

**Student preparation.** All six participants in this study mentioned issues they experienced related to student preparation for AP English Language and Composition. Dan explained his struggles with students who have 700 Lexile scores (third grade reading levels) and with English Language Learners, Harriet mentioned her students' lack of experience with rhetoric, and Lydia commented on her students' lack of knowledge for argument essays. Similarly, Hester stated her concern for her students' lack of grammar and mechanical skill and Tabitha noted her students' inability to form an opinion. Johnny summarized his frustrations with other English courses' insistence on teaching literature and narratives while ignoring Georgia's standards, which require teachers to use an equal amount of informational and aesthetic literatures in their courses. Those informational readings and writings are what help prepare students for the rigor of AP English Language and Composition.

The College Board's Equity Policy has inadvertently resulted in the inclusion of academically unprepared students in the course (Jamison, 2015). While schools could implement their own guidelines for inclusion in AP courses, all of the schools in this study had no guidelines for admission, meaning any student, teacher, or student's parent could place them in any AP course. This struggle with ill-prepared students forced teachers to spend valuable class time providing direct reading instruction and giving students content to use in their compositions. The time devoted to these skills took away from time AP English Language and Composition teachers needed to develop students' analytic and composition skills.

**School-based issues.** Additional issues related to time constraints arose because of school-based initiatives and policies. Every participant discussed his or her frustrations with providing students adequate and effective composition feedback. This problem persists throughout instruction because AP English Language and Composition teachers teach more courses than their AP course—five of the participants in this study did. However, five participants were also the only AP English Language and Composition teacher in their school district, meaning these instructors were responsible for teaching, assessing, and providing feedback to all AP English Language and Composition students on their own without the benefit of norming sessions or collaboration. Summer AP Readings could provide beneficial and accurate norming sessions, but Johnny was the only teacher in this study who participated in the summer readings. Being responsible for providing effective feedback to so many students (some of whom are under-prepared and need more feedback and assistance) in a timely manner can be overwhelming at best.

Many school policies were frustrating for the AP English Language and Composition teachers as well. From the difficulties of teaching AP English Language and Composition in one semester to parents', other teachers', and counselors' misplacement of students in the course, teachers in this study found themselves facing issues not discussed in College Board course guidelines, APSIs, or workshops. These practical problems concern a small percentage of a school's students, so AP teachers have little recourse in addressing these issues.

A more recent problem associated with AP courses and schools also mentioned by the teachers in this study is the battle between AP and dual enrollment. Lydia, Dan, Tabitha, Harriet, and Hester all mentioned the problems that accompany a school's blatant or implied promotion of dual enrollment. Students (and parents) often stated they preferred the "guaranteed credit" of dual enrollment (Gawra, 2017, par. 7; Mathews, 2019, par. 7), and participants noted the eagerness of guidance departments and administrators to move students into those courses. Dual enrollment participation in my school this year is 20 times greater than it was four years ago, and administration and guidance offices are encouraging students to continue enrolling in dual enrollment courses. The "guaranteed credit" of dual enrollment offered by guidance departments often surpasses the more rigorous requirements of AP. Some schools have found a compromise by awarding students dual enrollment credit for completion of their schools' AP courses. Sometimes teaching an AP course is reliant on a teachers' qualifications to teach dual enrollment. Lydia's school required her to teach AP English Language and Composition so students could receive both AP and dual enrollment credit even though her training and preference was for AP English Literature and Composition.

Both block and traditional schedules offered their own sets of difficulties. Block scheduling created problems for participants who have to teach the entire AP English Language and Composition course in one semester, and traditional scheduling limited teachers' chances to offer students adequate test practice sessions. Johnny had the best schedule because it consisted of traditionally scheduled days and block days. He stated his school's schedule gave him the time he needed throughout the year to help students mature and the time needed on a weekly basis to compose and complete practice exams in one sitting.

Finally, the limited funding of many South Georgia school districts resulted in what Johnny referred to as "incestuous" professional development. Many schools send one or two teachers to professional trainings and expect those teachers to redeliver to the rest of the faculty. For those courses with only one teacher, schools often found the cost-to-benefit ratio prohibitive. In my own school, teachers can attend professional development for AP courses when it is either free or when the cost is mostly covered by a scholarship. Juzwik (2010) argued the importance placed on teachers teaching teachers can cause professional development creators to ignore the benefits of connecting research and practice and result in teaching participants activities and lessons instead.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

While this research study is not generalizable because of its limited scope, there are potential opportunities to inform trainings and practices as they relate to AP English Language and Composition instructors, trainers, and stakeholders. This study can also be used as a springboard for further research. The findings of this study have the potential to generate conversations about AP training, writing instruction training, school policies

regarding writing instruction, and teachers' development of their own pedagogies and practices. The importance of this research lies in its recognition of the role theory, epistemology, training, and experience play in developing writing instructors' practices and how these practices translate to composition instruction. Additionally, this study notes the role AP training could play in developing or constructing the connection between teachers' beliefs about composition and course requirements.

### **Composition Training**

When grounded in current and effective theoretical practices, writing instruction should help students become better communicators and more effective analyzers of text—their own and of others. For AP students to gain these higher-order thinking and analysis skills, AP teachers themselves must have higher-order thinking skills and profound, extensive content knowledge (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Fleming, 2014; Newell et al., 2011). The goal of composition training is to ensure teachers have the tools to help students meet the expectations of the course not only to excel on the course exam but also to be successful in college, a career, and society at-large. However, the College Board's goal for APSIs is to present a list of course goals, describe the exam, explain the audit system, and introduce online resources. The varied experiences of myself and participants makes the likelihood of developing tools and content knowledge to help students be successful on the AP exam is not likely.

Since the implementation of the AP English Language and Composition course in 1980, there has been an ever-evolving effort to align course expectations and goals with First Year Composition. The College Board has made changes to the AP English Language and Composition exam in 2007 and 2019 to provide a closer alignment with

First Year Composition courses. However, with loose guidelines and course goals, teachers have designed and will continue to design their own course curricula. The addition of course skills in 2019 helped guide instructors, but the design of the course still remains in teachers' hands (College Board, 2019b). The new guidelines provide a detailed set of skills, but the rationale for these skills is missing. Conversely, the older course description (College Board, 2014b) contains more theoretical details to guide curriculum development but no explicitly stated skills. This qualitative study, by examining the perceptions of six South Georgia rural Title I high school teachers, discovered some of the challenges teachers faced with the creation of their curriculum and with the alignment of their composition beliefs and theoretical underpinnings to that of the College Board.

One of the largest gaps in the implementation of effective writing instruction in AP English Language and Composition courses seems to be in aligning teacher pedagogy with that of the course. According to research, teacher-held epistemologies and theories can dramatically affect many aspects of composition instruction (Freedman et al., 2005; Fulkerson, 2005; Hillocks, 1999; Langer & Applebee, 1987). As a result, many researchers suggested a change in teachers' theories and epistemologies may be the most effective way to change teacher practices (Newell et al., 2014). Because teachers' beliefs concerning writing are formed in their earlier years, APSIs should attempt to make these changes for teachers to adequately teach AP students.

Introducing several strategies to teachers and norming essays are beneficial for teachers, but AP consultants should ground these strategies with theoretical and research-based explanations. None of the participants mentioned any discussions of composition

theory they had in their College Board trainings, nor have I had any of those discussions in the three APSIs and five workshops I have attended. Without such training in theory, the College Board and school leaders are continually choosing and creating AP English Language and Composition teachers who are unfamiliar with the theory, pedagogy, and practices necessary to help students be successful on the AP exam, yet stake holders continue to expect high passing rates. AP teachers should also be aware of and responsible for efforts to alter their underlying epistemologies and beliefs so instruction, pedagogy, and assessment align with the goals of the AP English Language and Composition course (Hillocks, 2002; Loofbourrow, 1994; Samuelson, 2009; Shohamy et al., 1996).

Both Lydia and Harriet acknowledged they never attended an APSI (but had attended workshops), and Hester and Tabitha admitted they had not implemented the strategies they learned at the APSIs they attended. Without the research and theory founding the strategies they learned at their APSIs and workshops—which they did not use—they could not apply such concepts to the strategies they did use in class. Furthermore, none of the participants discussed any epistemological or theoretical shifts that occurred because of any training they experienced, and most saw the time constraints of the course a barrier to successful implementation of many APSI practices.

The variety of approaches to composition instruction and inclusion of literary texts demonstrated the disconnect between teachers' practices and the College Board's course expectations. Moreover, annual commentary on students' exam essays indicated a clear need for teachers to refocus their literature-based courses to rhetoric-based ones. AP Readers noticed a need for student access to more nonfiction texts, and commentary

has emphasized the urgent need for teachers to help students explain how a writer constructs an argument, how students can construct their own texts conceptually instead of formulaically, and how they should read and write rhetorically (College Board, 2017c). During my three years of participation in the AP English Language and Composition Reading, I noticed many students resort to discussions of literary texts in their arguments and synthesis essays. Although literature can be used in an argument essay, students learning the aesthetics of imaginative literature fail to discuss them rhetorically. They do not relate these texts to their provided prompt or they cannot explain how the literature functions as a representation of society. Hillocks (2002) contended writing teachers are often unaware of successful writing theories and pedagogies because English teacher programs fail to convey these to students. Additionally, many English teachers, including those teaching AP English Language and Composition, majored in English with a literary focus, and many may have never had a composition course themselves.

**Suggested requirements.** These findings and arguments support the need for composition methods courses in teacher preparation programs and the need for AP English Language and Composition teachers to take a collegiate rhetoric and composition course. Without the basic understanding of composition theories and pedagogies these courses offer, AP English Language and Composition teachers will have little foundational elements on which to base their curriculum. As a secondary teacher, my interest in composition-rhetoric was sparked in graduate school in an elective course in rhetoric. I continued to take composition-rhetoric courses throughout this study to validate my literature review and findings. I have taken over 20 elective graduate hours

in rhetoric or composition-rhetoric courses. Without these classes, I would not have the knowledge to give me the cognitive awareness of my pedagogical and curricular decisions. Though most schools do not fund college coursework for teachers, AP English Language and Composition instructors should be made aware of the importance of such knowledge. As an additional option, the College Board's APSIs could add an element of composition and rhetorical theory to their courses to provide teachers with the fundamental knowledge to better form an effective curriculum that aligns with the AP exam and with First Year Composition.

Despite increasing demands for writing expertise in all English teachers, but especially AP English teachers, writing instruction methods are usually embedded in reading instruction courses (Morgan, 2010), and Georgia does not require a separate course for certification or for teaching either AP English course. Unfortunately, not all English teachers are proficient writers themselves (Southern Regional Education Board, 2013). Perhaps requirements for English teachers should change, especially for teachers who are responsible for a course with an attached high-stakes assessment such as Ninth Grade Literature and Composition, American Literature and Composition, AP English Language and Composition, and AP English Literature and Composition. English is the only secondary discipline in the state of Georgia with writing standards; however, The National Writing Project (National Writing Project, 2019), the Southern Regional Education Board (Southern Regional Education Board, 2013), and NCTE (NCTE, 2019) strongly suggest that the goal of all educators should be to improve the teaching of writing in schools.

My recommendation is that the College Board and local boards of education enact policies to ensure AP English teachers receive appropriate instruction in writing, including training in rhetoric and composition, to better equip them to effectively teach composition. Requiring these teachers to pursue writing instruction training could encourage them to seek professional development and college courses that may help with writing instruction as prescribed by the College Board for AP English courses. Though funding can be an issue for rural school districts such as those in this study, often these schools and teachers can receive scholarships and grants to fund additional trainings, college courses, or reading material. Encouraging teachers to further their education and providing in-house trainings are also cost-effective methods of improving teachers' knowledge and skills.

### **Knowledge of Composition Instruction**

As AP instructors, AP English Language and Composition teachers are responsible for acquiring the appropriate theories and skills to help students achieve success in a demanding and rigorous course, followed by a similarly demanding and rigorous exam. Gebhardt (1981), Tremmel (2001), and Villanueva et al. (2006) identified areas of knowledge important for all writing teachers: teachers need an understanding of the history and structure of the English language; a solid understanding of rhetoric, including its history and theoretical basis; mastery of a theoretical foundation to understand the ideas, methodologies, and texts associated with writing; and an awareness of available and current writing methodologies. Because teacher knowledge and practices are the greatest indicators of AP English Language and Composition success (Byrd et al., 2007; Gebhardt, 1981; Hattie, 2003; Tremmel, 2001; Villanueva et al.,

2006), it is imperative that AP English teachers experience these elements of composition instruction. If they have not had the experience in their own university courses, schools and the College Board should provide them with the opportunity to experience them through effective professional development opportunities or require extended college coursework.

**Professional development.** Professional development, unfortunately, can be ineffective because teachers receive little time to work collaboratively and learn from one another (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Reid, 2011). Time should be a consideration for all teachers, but South Georgia school districts have the added problem of small AP numbers, requiring only one AP English Language and Composition teacher in most districts. In fact, only one AP English Language and Composition teacher in this study has access to a colleague for collaboration. AP English Language and Composition teachers should be encouraged to work collaboratively with their school's AP English Literature and Composition teacher, for writing instruction expectations in the courses are similar.

Though I am the only AP English Language and Composition teacher in my district, one of the more beneficial aspects of my school district is that the AP English Literature and Composition teacher and I are located next door to one another. Our understanding of one another's course is not complete, but we do collaborate when planning, acting as sounding boards for one another. Another teacher trained and experienced in AP English Language and Composition works at my local board of education, so he occasionally collaborates with me as well. These instances of collaboration help me plan my curriculum, and these colleagues assist with scoring

questionable essays, aligning grading with the curriculum and school requirements, and talking through strategies and activities. The benefits of working with an AP English Literature and Composition teacher are that he or she also understands the rigors and many of the frustrations of the course.

Administrators should also encourage and give their AP teachers time to collaborate with other AP teachers in their discipline in neighboring school districts. My district attempted to provide AP teachers common planning time, but planning with AP teachers of other disciplines proved fruitless. Coordinating meeting times with AP teachers from other districts would promote collaboration with peers in the same discipline, discourage competition, and encourage essay norming sessions, common curriculum design, and problem solving discussions. Administrators and professional development leaders should also encourage teachers to admit their doubts and biases and when they are confused (Elbow, 1983) to help them continue to learn, especially when collaborating or attending professional development.

**Personal study.** Puhr (2010) suggested AP English Language and Composition teachers take a graduate-level rhetoric course or at least read a book about rhetorical theory before they begin teaching the course and as they teach it. Only one of the participants in this study completed a rhetoric and composition course, though it was not a graduate-level course. Requiring teachers to attend a college course is not always feasible on today's school budgets, but requiring AP English Language and Composition teachers to read a rhetoric and composition text is not. Having a basic understanding of rhetoric and composition should direct teachers' practices toward the AP English Language and Composition course goals. Additionally, reading more about rhetoric and

composition tends to alter teachers' perceptions of writing and promotes a more social-epistemic approach to writing instruction.

Lydia said she reads often about composition-rhetoric in an attempt to be a more effective teacher for her students. I, too, have read many composition-rhetoric books on theory, strategies, history, and so on. These readings have provided me with valuable insight into my practices as an AP English Language and Composition teacher much as Lydia's self-study has provided her. Additionally, I along with four participants in this study read much nonfiction on our own time to provide students with well-written, interesting, and complex material for analysis.

**Classroom strategies.** Many participants were discouraged by the time constraints they felt as a result of an overwhelming amount of essay scoring and the desire to score every element of each essay. Teachers often try several methods to limit the amount of time they spend on student essays from focusing on single aspects of a text to having students write smaller pieces. Johnny stated he only writes a score on student essays, using representative samples in class to discuss composition errors, upcoming focal points, and strategies students can use. Limiting the amount of feedback as Johnny does is another strategy to help teachers manage the amount of time spent on grading.

Teachers can also teach students the College Board rubrics and provide them with a variety of peer review processes. Research confirmed that when high school students use a task-specific rubric, they were capable of giving student essays a more valid score than an untrained scorer and just as valid a score as a trained AP scorer (Schunn, Godley, & DeMartino, 2016). The peer review process alleviates some of the feedback teachers provide by requiring students to provide feedback for one another. Students also reap the

benefit of analyzing another person's composition and providing them with suggestions to improve their compositions.

### **Getting Involved**

There are currently no state-level policies regarding AP courses. The Georgia Department of Education expects AP coordinators and teachers to follow the recommendations and requirements of the College Board (Georgia Department of Education, 2019a), but the College Board does not currently have any certification requirements for instructors to teach AP courses. The College Board recommends AP teachers have at least three years of experience, hold a degree in the discipline he or she teaches, and have an advanced degree (Zeiger, 2019). It also suggests AP teachers be people who seek out professional development, stay abreast of current trends in their discipline, and analyze their own practices (Zeiger, 2019). These recommendations are just recommendations and are not always heeded.

**The College Board's involvement.** The College Board is rather guarded about the certification and educational experiences of its consultants. However, the three APSIs and four workshops I have attended have been taught by experienced AP English Language and Composition teachers, but none of them had any composition-rhetoric collegiate experience. If this pattern holds true to other consultants, the implication is that the College Board values practices over foundational theories and epistemologies. The College Board should hire instructors who are well-versed in composition-rhetoric and First Year Composition or AP English Language and Composition to help new and experienced teachers make the valuable connection between theory and pedagogy. Without that connection, research has shown the implementation of any practices will be

piecemeal and fruitless (Hillocks, 2002; Loofbourrow, 1994; Samuelson, 2009; Shohamy et al., 1996).

The participants in this study never altered their underlying epistemologies about composition after attending an APSI, and several mentioned they never implemented the strategies they learned at these trainings either. Training evaluation instruments designed to gauge whether participants have adopted the theories, ideologies, and epistemologies promoted by the College Board, AP English Language and Composition, and the accompanying exam could help guide the College Board in determining better training practices. Ultimately, employing consultants with knowledge of these foundational ideas could help better prepare AP English Language and Composition teachers.

**State involvement.** For any AP course other than AP Seminar and AP Research, the College Board does not require teachers to attend any APSI or workshop (College Board, 2017a). Some states do require certification for AP teachers, but Georgia does not (Education Commission of the States, 2019). Perhaps a state-level requirement should be put in place in Georgia as well. To help AP teachers, Georgia provides funding for localized, free workshops hosted by fellow, volunteer AP teachers. AP English Language and Composition teachers should attend these free workshops to have a voice in any policies or discussions occurring locally.

**Talking about it.** Conversations with local AP and ELA coordinators are also vital to improving the AP English Language and Composition course. The participants in this study found many people such as students, parents, counselors, teachers, and administrators failed to understand the underlying principles of AP English Language and Composition. Helping coordinators understand the differences between AP English

Language and Composition and other ELA courses can encourage them to assist teachers in locating grants, scholarships, and other funding to attend courses and trainings that will help teachers gain the knowledge and skills of effective composition instruction. The coordinators could also help find schools (possibly schools in North Georgia) with better exam scores and plan coordinated visits to examine the district's vertical alignment. They could also arrange teacher observations and meetings with the other schools' AP English Language and Composition teachers.

Teachers should also participate as AP Readers each summer to voice concerns or offer suggestions on a national level. The AP English Language and Composition Reading is located each summer in Tampa, Florida, with English professors and AP English Language and Composition teachers from around the world attending for seven, eight-hour days of essay scoring. The norming sessions for essay scoring provide valuable insight into both the expectations of the College Board and their theoretical underpinnings for composition. Teachers attending the Reading become more accurate scorers, but they also gain a theoretical base for those expectations.

My experiences over three years of participation in the AP Reading has helped me become a more accurate scorer and has given me firsthand knowledge of the exam's expectations and requirements. After the intense norming sessions at each Reading and after scoring 1200 to 2000 essays during the week-long session, becoming a more accurate scorer and a better composition instructor is almost inevitable. Likewise, being in the vicinity of 1600 English professors, AP English Language and Composition teachers, and AP English Language and Composition committee members creates a professional development opportunity unlike any other.

Additionally, each AP Reading has a Meet the Committee night which allows teachers to ask questions, give suggestions, and hear about any issues or topics the Development Committee finds important. For example, the AP English Language and Composition Development Committee opened the floor to questions the summer of 2019, weeks before the revised Course and Exam Description was released. Likewise, the networking opportunities available during this week are much more expansive than any other training. I have discussed theory and practices with a linguistics professor from Amsterdam, an American Literature professor from North Carolina, a composition-rhetoric professor from Texas, and a freshman composition professor from Michigan. I have also shared pedagogy and practices with AP English Language and Composition teachers from around the globe. Some school districts require qualifying teachers to attend their discipline's AP Reading in order to teach their courses. If South Georgia districts could reasonably make that requirement, considering staff availability, it would benefit both teachers and students without costing the district anything. In fact, teachers are paid \$1600 for the Reading, and their travel and hotel expenses are covered by the College Board.

Without proactive steps such as these, AP English Language and Composition teachers in South Georgia's rural Title I schools will continue to struggle with effectively incorporating strategies and practices that correlate with the College Board's expectations. South Georgia students who dedicate themselves to taking such a rigorous and demanding course should have the experiences the College Board expects and teachers as dedicated as they are. With the disconnect between the requirements of the exam and the epistemologies, practices, and strategies of teachers, the College Board,

state, and local boards of education should coordinate efforts to improve instruction in this course.

### **Future Research**

The participants in this study worked in districts of varying sizes and demographics with different resources available for students, teachers, and administrators to support effective training for AP English Language and Composition instruction. Therefore, it may be important for future research to examine schools with comparable resources to advance the conversation about effective AP English Language and Composition training. The College Board offers scholarships to teachers who teach in rural or poverty-stricken school systems. Future research may need to examine the role the College Board should take in ensuring these teachers have adequate and effective professional training that will help them connect theory to practice and practice to student learning. Examining the role of the College Board would also offer an opportunity to study the effectiveness of training offered and the consistency of the training.

With consistently fewer students in South Georgia scoring three or higher on the AP English Language and Composition exam than the nation and fewer scoring three or higher than the state (College Board, 2018e; Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019), it is vital to examine the students' and teachers' understanding of College Board requirements, rhetoric and composition, and analysis. Additional information about students' prior knowledge and reading abilities compared to those of North Georgia's students may also uncover information that would help alleviate some problems plaguing South Georgia's AP English Language and Composition students. A comparative study of the practices of North Georgia AP English Language and Composition teachers and

South Georgia's AP English Language and Composition teachers may also reveal beliefs, pedagogies, and strategies that could benefit South Georgia's teachers. Concerns about block scheduling, especially for schools offering AP English and Composition for only semester, necessitate future research into the effects of scheduling on student achievement in the course.

Finally, because this study was limited geographically and by the fact that several schools did not participate, future opportunities to sample more teachers and districts may allow researchers to control for specific parameters such as teacher experience, class size, and class enrollment requirements and may provide a more thorough and detailed analysis of teacher perceptions.

### **Summary**

Many modern students and instructors have heard of the term *rhetoric* yet may not understand its meaning. In fact, many see it only with the pejorative connotation associated with its use in politics and the media. The number of definitions the term has acquired over the centuries only complicates students' and teachers' understanding of the concept of the art of rhetoric (Corbett & Connors, 1997). Though the College Board places emphasis on rhetoric and composition in the AP English Language and Composition course, the adoption of its associated theories and pedagogies is muddied by teachers' inexperience and lack of exposure. The College Board provides a specific set of goals for the course but often fails to provide teachers with a way to adopt a composition theory that will enable effective implementation of appropriately associated practices. The attempts of the College Board to train teachers through optional APSIs and workshops failed to meet participants' expectations, and teachers rarely, if ever,

changed their composition epistemologies or pedagogies to match those of the AP English Language and Composition course and exam. Instead, teachers relied on the pedagogies they learned inductively from their own teachers (Taggart et al., 2014). Since many AP English Language and Composition teachers are experienced teachers, the early teachers who taught them worked in the 1970s to 1990s and probably relied on the prescriptive practices popularized throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The findings from this study supported the idea that teachers' perceptions about composition affect their composition practices, and though research has shown teachers should think of reading and writing as ways to disrupt students' learned rules, templates, and structures, many do not (Berlin, 1988; College Board, 2014b; George, 2014).

Teachers' writing experiences are generally from English courses focusing on literary texts instead of rhetorical ones (Juzwik, 2010; Smagorinsky, 2010), and the art of composition requires a much more substantial theoretical and pedagogical base than past experience to be successful (Hillocks, 2002; Loofbourrow, 1994; Samuelson, 2009; Shohamy et al., 1996). Several factors influenced teachers' perceptions of composition training and instruction in their AP English Language and Composition courses including their perceived need for the training, their experiences in trainings, their perception of their students' needs, and their personal comfort with composition. These teachers' perceptions do, however, affect the theoretical and pedagogical foundations their students learn. Support for teachers to adopt theories and pedagogies that correspond to AP English Language and Composition course goals is imperative.

This study sought to understand the perceptions of AP English Language and Composition instructors about training and composition instruction and to understand the

practices and strategies of veteran teachers in their efforts to help students succeed on the complex and rigorous AP English Language and Composition exam. The success of each teacher is often determined by the success of his or her students on this exam, so understanding their perception of the training that prepares them to teach it and the strategies they use in the process of instruction became the major goals of the study. This study determined the types of strategies teachers used and found that their methods of composition instruction were not only a result of teachers' perceptions but also a by-product of many experiences and trainings. These included their experiences as students in elementary school, in secondary classrooms, and in college; professional development experiences; their personal beliefs about writing; and school and institutional requirements (including high-stakes assessments). Teachers most frequently used their knowledge to provide instruction they thought was best for the needs of their students whether that instruction aligned with College Board requirements or not.

This study emphasized the need to provide AP English teachers with foundational theoretical and epistemological knowledge to better equip their students for the associated exam in May. Additionally, matching theories and epistemologies with College Board expectations will give students a closer approximation to First Year Composition, which is the ultimate goal of AP English Language and Composition. Local boards of education, schools, and the College Board should work together to encourage teachers to pursue further education in composition-rhetoric and enable teachers to do so. Teachers' perceptions are essential to student success and in meeting the guidelines and goals of AP English Language and Composition. It is important for teachers to understand the expectations of the course as they pertain to writing instruction

because students' ability to write well is crucial not only to their success on the AP exam but also to their success after graduation.

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Appendix A:  
IRB Approval



**Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
For the Protection of Human Research Participants  
PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT**

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**PROTOCOL NUMBER:** 03628-2018                      **INVESTIGATOR:** Ms. Jennifer Ballard  
**SUPERVISING FACULTY:** Dr. Dianne Dees  
**PROJECT TITLE:** *AP English Language and Composition Teachers' Perceptions and Beliefs Concerning Preparation for Teaching Rhetoric and Composition.*

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**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:**

This research protocol is **Exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under Exemption **Category 2**. Your research study may begin effective **09.18.2018**. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator ([irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu)) before continuing your research.

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**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:**

- *Upon completion of your research study all compiled data must be securely maintained (locked file cabinet, password protected computer, etc.) and accessible only by the researcher for a minimum of 3 years.*
- *The Research Statement of Consent must be read aloud to each participant at the start of the interview. The researchers voice (your voice) must be recorded reading the statement and confirming participant's willingness to participate. Audio recordings must be deleted immediately upon creation of the transcript.*
- *Your research study has been approved to be conducted at the school districts listed: [REDACTED]*

*If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu) to ensure an updated record of your exemption.*

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*Elizabeth Ann Olphie*                      *09.18.2018*  
Elizabeth Ann Olphie, IRB Administrator

*Thank you for submitting an IRB application.  
Please direct questions to [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu) or 229-253-2947.*

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Revised: 06.02.16

Appendix B:  
Letter to Superintendents

Date: August 15, 2018

Dr. XXX  
XXX Board of Education  
XXXX  
XXX, GA XXX

Dear XXX:

I am currently a doctoral candidate at Valdosta State University in the department of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology, working under the supervision of Dr. Dianne Dees. Your school district qualifies for participation in my research study titled AP English Language and Composition Teachers' Perceptions and Beliefs Concerning Preparation for Teaching Rhetoric and Composition. The purpose of this research is to determine the strategies and practices used by veteran AP English Language and Composition teachers in South Georgia high schools in an effort to understand the perceptions and beliefs of teachers toward the trainings they have received from the College Board and elsewhere and how they implement these practices in their classrooms.

I am requesting approval from you to interact with and interview members your faculty. My research will involve a demographic survey, at least one interview with your AP English Language and Composition instructor(s), and one class observation at the convenience of your district, school, and/or faculty. Participation in the study will be voluntary, and instructors may end their participation at any time. All information obtained from the study will be anonymous, including any identifying information garnered from surveys, interviews, and observations. No names will be correlated with data, and only group and thematic findings will be reported.

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study; however, the study itself strives for a greater awareness of professional practices. More specifically, the study could offer suggestions to improve professional development for AP English teachers and encourage teachers to examine their own beliefs and practices as part of their development as instructors. If desired, participants will receive a free summary of research findings.

Again, I am requesting your consent for access to the AP English Language and Composition instructor(s) in your school district. If you choose to grant permission, you may complete the second page of this letter and return in the enclosed postage paid

envelope or email permission directly to me (jrballard@valdosta.edu). If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me via email. Additionally, if you would like access to any surveys or questionnaires that will be used in this study, I will provide you with those materials.

Thank you for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Ballard

I grant permission for Jennifer Ballard to access XXX's AP English Language and Composition instructor(s) for the study AP English Language and Composition Teachers' Perceptions and Beliefs Concerning Teacher Preparation for Teaching Rhetoric and Composition. Individual teacher participation is voluntary, and all identifying information obtained from the research will be confidential and anonymous.

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(Signature)

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(Date)

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(Printed Name)

I do NOT grant permission for Jennifer Ballard to access XXX's AP English Language and Composition instructor(s) for the study AP English Language and Composition Teachers' Perceptions and Beliefs Concerning Teacher Preparation for Teaching Rhetoric and Composition. Individual teacher participation is voluntary, and all identifying information obtained from the research will be confidential and anonymous.

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(Signature)

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(Date)

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(Printed Name)

Appendix C:  
Demographic Form

## Demographic Data Form

Please provide the following demographic information by completing each question. Remember that all information is strictly anonymous.

\* Required

1. Email address \*

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2. Age \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- 22 - 32 years  
 33 - 43 years  
 44 - 54 years  
 55 - 65 years  
 66 years plus

3. I have been teaching for \_\_\_ years. \*

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4. I have been teaching AP Language and Composition for \_\_\_ years. \*

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5. Degree(s) Earned (Please list all including type of degree and field.) \*

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6. How many AP Language Summer Institutes have you attended? \*

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7. Approximately how many AP Language workshops have you attended? \*

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8. How many times, if any, have you been an AP Reader? \*

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9. How many rhetoric and composition classes have you taken at a college and/or university? \*

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10. How many AP Language students do you currently have in your class(es)? \*

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11. Please provide a time span that would be best for your interview. Specific days or a date range will be great. \*

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12. Provide a few dates and that would be convenient for a class observation. (Please include class times.) \*

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13. Which of the following methods would you prefer for your interview? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- In-person
- By phone
- Skype
- No preference

Appendix D:  
Interview Questions

1. What are your experiences in college that relate to or help your instruction for AP English Language and Composition?
2. What are your professional development or personal experiences, such as personal study and readings, that aid you in instruction of your AP English Language and Composition classes?
3. How did you teach composition before attending AP Summer Institutes? Provide an example.
4. How did you teach composition before attending AP workshops? Provide an example.
5. Describe the goal of composition instruction for your class.
6. Describe what you believe is the most important element of composition instruction.
7. Define the role that rhetoric should play in your AP English Language and Composition course.

Questions about instruction methods:

8. What strategies do you use to teach rhetorical analysis to your students?
9. What strategies do you teach students to organize their essays?
10. How do you practice for the writing portion of the AP English Language and Composition exam?
11. How often do you write?
12. How often do you complete practice multiple choice exams?
13. What strategies do you use to teach your students style?

14. What strategies do you use to provide feedback to your students?

- How much feedback do you provide?
- How do you provide feedback?
- How quickly is your turn-around?

15. What strategies do you use to encourage students to find their own processes for writing?

16. How do your strategies for teaching each of the three essays differ?

Appendix E:  
Observation Checklist and Notes\*

		In classroom	Mentioned by teacher			Mentioned by students	
<b>Evidence of Texts (Reading Level and Type)</b>							
Texts that represent a clear rhetorical situation							
Texts that require teacher direction for students to discern meaning							
Students employ rereading as an interpretive strategy							
Students write on a regular basis about what others have written							
Almost exclusive use of nonfiction texts							
Readings include	Trade books	Extended Texts	Speeches	Essays	Popular Culture Texts	Imaginative Literature	
<b>Evidence of Course Objectives</b>							
Students identify and explain an author's use of rhetorical strategies	Level 1						
	Level 2						
	Level 3						
Analysis of visual texts for rhetorical features	Level 1						
	Level 2						
	Level 3						

Use of effective rhetorical strategies when composing	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
Responses to different writing tasks based on unique rhetorical and compositional demands	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
Creation of original arguments based on synthesized information	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
Use of citation methods	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
<b>Evidence of Elements of Composition</b>			
Use of formulaic writing	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
The writing process as a personal endeavor	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
Examination of different argument structures	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
Analysis of the rhetorical features of argument	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		

Analysis of the role of audience	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
Thinking of argument as a conversation	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
Synthesis of a variety of sources on one topic	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		

<b>Assessments</b>				
Skill-driven assessments				
Designed to improve writing skills				
Feedback promotes rhetorical understanding of text and writing				
<b>Classroom Demographic Information (Visual Assessment Only)</b>				
Gender	Male		Female	
Racial Makeup	Black	White	Hispanic	Other

\*All elements of this observation checklist are originally from the AP English Language and Composition Course Description (2014).

Appendix F:  
Document Checklist and Notes\*

		Document A:	Document B:	Document C:		
<b>Evidence of Texts (Reading Level and Type)</b>						
Texts that represent a clear rhetorical situation						
Texts that require teacher direction for students to discern meaning						
Students employ rereading as an interpretive strategy						
Students write on a regular basis about what others have written						
Almost exclusive use of nonfiction texts						
Readings include	Trade books	Extended Texts	Speeches	Essays	Popular Culture Texts	Imaginative Literature
<b>Evidence of Course Objectives</b>						
Students identify and explain an author's use of rhetorical strategies		Level 1				
		Level 2				
		Level 3				
Analysis of visual texts for rhetorical features		Level 1				
		Level 2				
		Level 3				
Use of effective rhetorical strategies when composing		Level 1				
		Level 2				

	Level 3		
Responses to different writing tasks based on unique rhetorical and compositional demands	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
Creation of original arguments based on synthesized information	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
Use of citation methods	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
<b>Evidence of Elements of Composition</b>			
Use of formulaic writing	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
The writing process as a personal endeavor	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
Examination of different argument structures	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
Analysis of the rhetorical features of argument	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
Analysis of the role	Level 1		

of audience			
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
Thinking of argument as a conversation	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
Synthesis of a variety of sources on one topic	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		

<b>Assessments</b>			
Skill-driven assessments	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
Designed to improve writing skills	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		
Feedback promotes rhetorical understanding of text and writing	Level 1		
	Level 2		
	Level 3		

\*All elements of this observation checklist are originally from the AP English Language and Composition Course Description (2014).

Appendix G:

First Cycle Coding Categories and Subcategories

Initial coding categories and subcategories with number of participants (out of six) who addressed each category or subcategory.

#### Education

- Exposure to Literature (4)
- Exposure to Language and Composition (6)
- Personal Research/Writing (4)

#### College Board Training

- Experiences in (6)
- Opinions of (4)
- Application of (4)
- Changes in Values (1)

#### Other Professional Development

- Experiences in (4)
- Application of (2)

#### Collaboration (3)

#### Experience (5)

#### Reason to Teach AP Lang (2)

#### Texts

- Value of Fiction (3)
- Value of Nonfiction (3)
- Nonfiction in Class (5)
- Fiction in Class (3)
- Novels in Class (4)
- Textbook in Class (4)

#### Rhetoric in the Classroom

- Teaching of (5)
- Value of (6)

#### Comparing Self to Others (3)

#### Planning/Organizing Course (5)

#### Course Specifics

- Goal of Course (4)
- Dealing with Uncontrollables (4)

#### Subsequent coding categories and subcategories

- Frustrations (5)
- Time Issues (6)
- Pass Rate Concerns (3)

#### Analysis

- Reading (3)
- Reading Strategies (5)
- M/C Test Prep (6)
- Grading (4)

#### Reading & Writing Connection (2)

#### Composition

- Goal of Composition (3)
- Purpose/Goal of Instruction (5)
- Main Method of Instruction (5)
- Writing Strategies (6)
- Amount of Writing (6)
- Rubrics and Grading (6)
- Feedback (6)
- Timed/Not Timed (2)
- Online/In-Class (3)
- Writing Process (5)
- Peer Review (2)
- Using College Board Samples and Prompts (4)
- Rhetorical Situation (3)
- Invention (6)
- Arrangement (5)
- Style (4); Grammar (3)
- Test Prep (4)
- Teaching Modes not on Exam (4)

#### Student Preparation

- For the Course (6)
- For the Exam (4)

#### Taking the Exam (4)

#### Education

## Professional Development

- College Board
- Other

## Changes

- Values
- Practices

## Experiences

## Frustrations

## Texts Used

## Planning/Organizing

## The Exam

## Composition Instruction

- Values
- Pedagogy
- College Board Requirements

## Rhetoric

## Test Preparation

Appendix H:

A Sample of Interview Transcripts Divided into Codes

## Other Professional Development

- Experiences in

I went to a workshop where she told us and it was sponsored by the National Council for (inaudible).

I've taken a couple of writing specifically professional learning.

I tried having the kids create synthesis prompts once and I abandoned it because it flopped. But it could've just been you know sometimes things just don't work in first block that worked in second block or from one year to next and so maybe that was the thing but I was so dissatisfied with it that we put that one in a file folder and never touch it again because it was a disaster.

So that was an incredible experience (Writing Project). I mean it really was an incredible experience to work with teachers K through college you know on the issue of on composition instruction and it was one of the most you know it was just one of the most incredible experiences of learning and sharing with a group of teachers in a way that I you know. Those two experiences were what made all the difference. I really enjoyed a strong background in the teaching of composition.

But I have you know um because it was a long time ago and maybe you're gonna get to this, I don't know what the state of professional development is where you are, but around here, we just don't do it.... What we do is incestual. Because it's, we, just people in-house. Boy, when I first came here, they were willing to put me on an airplane and fly me anywhere I wanted to go.