

8-1-2020

## Do the Verb. Become the Noun: Writing Towards a New Identity

Mary K. Tedrow

Adjunct: Lord Fairfax Community College, Shenandoah University, Johns Hopkins University,  
mary.tedrow@verizon.net

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.vccs.edu/inquiry>



Part of the [Adult and Continuing Education Commons](#), [Educational Methods Commons](#), [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#), and the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Tedrow, M. K. (2020). Do the Verb. Become the Noun: Writing Towards a New Identity. *Inquiry: The Journal of the Virginia Community Colleges*, 23 (1). Retrieved from <https://commons.vccs.edu/inquiry/vol23/iss1/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ VCCS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Inquiry: The Journal of the Virginia Community Colleges by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ VCCS. For more information, please contact [tcassidy@vccs.edu](mailto:tcassidy@vccs.edu).

## DO THE VERB. BECOME THE NOUN: WRITING TOWARDS A NEW IDENTITY

MARY K. TEDROW, M.ED., NBCT

### ABSTRACT

The initial composition course in the community college has the potential to be a transformative space for the identity formation of adult learners towards the linguistic signifier of *scholar*. Freshman students of variable ages enter a new culture which demands the negotiation of an alternative academic language, an adaptation to the post-secondary culture, and the development of the critical thinking required for academic work. All of these factors can destabilize identity as students confront long-held beliefs and biases in their studies (Bartholomae, 1985; Tingle, 2004; Bracher, 2006). Students who are unable to adapt to the new environment are likely to leave without realizing personal goals. Adjusting pedagogy to support students through a transformative stage will increase student success.

In this study, freshman composition students reflect on their identities as writers in both pre and post treatment writings which were controlled within the classroom by the instructor. In the treatment, student identity threat was protected through multiple low-risk opportunities, as Peter Elbow (2000) recommends, in order to increase engagement in writing without fear of evaluation. This practice is described as doing the action of the curriculum (the verb) to create a sense of one as writer (the noun). Opportunities to write without the threat of evaluation were offered multiple times at each course meeting. In-class prompting encouraged students to reflect on readings and experiences while writing in their own home language, the language of thought. Post treatment reflections revealed a shift in linguistic identity markers, with 85% of students

exhibiting language supporting an increased sense of agency and control over their written products and a rising confidence in their sense of self as a writer. Few, however, claimed the identity of *writer*, though most exhibited control over their writing destiny through definitive goal statements. This increase in confidence and control indicates that thoughtfully applied pedagogy can shift student identity to that which supports successful post-secondary learning.

## INTRODUCTION

The local community college is home to a number of non-traditional students as well as the more traditional freshman who arrive in the college setting directly following high school. There are a number of reasons a student might choose a community college. Among them are cost—the community college is more affordable than a four-year college; accessibility—a locally convenient location which requires only a high school diploma and placement exam for matriculation; or self-improvement—many adults return to the school setting to improve their earning power.

Though the reasons vary, many share a similar history: a disaffection with earlier schooling that manifests as a poor self-image of *student*. In the composition class this is translated into a self-image as that of a poor writer. This does not make the community college student unique since “[m]ost people have had bad experiences with writing” (Elbow, 2000, xiv). I call these students *wounded writers*, those who left school with an abiding belief that they are and always will be poor writers. It is these students who are the focus of this study.

Student attitude, like that expressed above, can be a barrier to later success (Bakar et al., 2010; Bracher, 2006). To help students succeed in an introductory composition course, and in college in general, it is helpful for students to visualize themselves as capable writers who can and will improve with effort and attention to the composing process. In fact, the freshman

composition course is key to success in accessing the language and norms of the academic community (Bartholomae, 1985; Rose, 1989; Tingle, 2004). Since “[n]early half of community college students (47%) drop out entirely” (Cooper, 2017) a focus on mentoring students into this new and challenging learning environment should drive pedagogical decisions.

The purpose of this article is to provide a brief summary of the factors which contribute to transforming adult learners into new visions of themselves, and proposes low-risk, high frequency writing in a composition course as a pedagogical method for enhancing this transformational process. Frequent low-risk writings are an attempt to do the action (the verb) of the discipline and subsequently act as writers throughout the course. The study which follows examines the question: What is the effect of high-frequency, low-risk writing on an adult writer’s self-identity as *writer* in an introductory composition course at a community college?

Because the inquiry question attempts to examine the effect of a specific pedagogical practice on the formation of identity—that of writer—two threads bind the research question: the definition and practice of low-stakes, high-frequency, expressive writing (Elbow, 2000) and the notion that a composition course is ideally suited to serve as a transformative space to shift student identity into accepting an academic signifier that would enhance success at the post-secondary level. For that reason, it is necessary to explore expressive writing—the chosen classroom intervention—and its relationship to transformational experiences which might reconstitute student identity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Though some educators focus on the attainment of knowledge as the primary goal of education, other theorists posit that identity development should be prioritized because “[t]here is

no more legitimate aim or feasible function for education than the development of students' identities, if the fundamental purposes of education are indeed to promote learning and understanding" (Bracher, 2006, p. 5). Identity is defined as "one's sense of oneself as a force that matters in the world" (Bracher, 2006, p.6). This positive view of one's identity increases a sense of agency, or the ability to control the acquisition of new skills and knowledge.

The formation of identity rests on Lacanian psychology and is referenced frequently in the philosophies of compositional theorists (Elbow, 2000; Tingle, 2004; Bracher, 2006). Jacques Lacan, a post Freudian psychologist, theorizes that the primary goal of existence is to maintain an identity (Lacan & Wilden, 1968). Since the ultimate identity eraser is death, it is a natural outgrowth of the universal desire for a continued ego to marshal resources around identity maintenance. This manifests in an ongoing desire for "recognition, validation, affirmation of the self—even of malignant qualities" (Bracher, 2006, p.7). We hunger for recognition and will go to great lengths to have aspects of our identity affirmed. Witness the rise of social media and the motivation to accumulate *likes* and *retweets* as evidence of the strong desire for the recognition we crave.

According to Lacanian psychology, our identities are expressed in three codes: the real, the imagined, and the linguistic (Lacan & Wilden, 1968). Linguistically, we label aspects of our identity through the verbal signifiers we accept and strive to maintain: *smart*, *athletic*, *manly*, *nurturing*, and so forth. As individuals grow, learning can either threaten or support an identity described through language. When learning supports or enhances identity, it is accepted. When knowledge threatens identity, it is vigorously rejected (Bracher, 2006).

In my teaching, there is clear evidence of students experiencing both identity threat and identity affirmation. Students who experience learning as identity affirming seek to excel in

school to further strengthen an identity as *scholar*, *learner*, or to be considered *smart*. Labels affixed to students at an early age, for instance being repeatedly identified as *below grade level*, can drive students to reject schooling altogether. Some students reject the label of failure and will expend energy in developing an identity even if it is malignant. *Class clown*, *bully*, or *anti-intellectual* are a few malignant identities students may embrace in a rejection of the school culture. Some community college students arrive on campus with these identifiers in tow.

In addition to any existing malignant identities, some degree of identity destabilization occurs to all who enter post-secondary education. This is a natural consequence of the emphasis on critical thinking which may engage students in examining long held beliefs about themselves, their culture, or their own skills and knowledge (Bracher, 2006; Tingle, 2004), and these discussions and queries can destabilize the identity. Instructors are challenged by the need to mitigate the threat to identity that some learning poses while also moving students forward into the realm of critical thought. We can thoughtfully adjust pedagogy to support a positive identity outcome by looking to those who have examined the nature of learning and define a structure for successful transformation.

John Dewey's (1923) view of education as both personal and resulting from active participation affirms some of the observances of identity formation Jack Mezirow (1997) outlined in his theory of adult transformational learning. According to Dewey (1923), as we enter into new situations, we feel destabilized, but as we become attuned to a new situation or transformative idea through repeated experiences, we learn to both adapt and absorb the experiences into our selfhood (Dewey, 1923, p. 47; Bracher, 2006). The new identity feature is enhanced through the reiteration of specific self-states—those that affirm the emerging identity

linguistic signifier. As we do, we become. Our actions (the verb) translate into naming ourselves with new signifiers (the noun).

Mezirow (1997) defines ten distinct transformational phases resulting in both small and large gains in the restructuring of adult thinking which mirror Dewey's observations. The phases extend through successive stages: a disorienting dilemma; self-examination; a critical assessment; recognition; exploration; planning of a course of action; acquisition of knowledge; building of competence and self-confidence; and a reintegration.

Effective teachers create transformative spaces where student identity is given reign to develop (Tingle, 2004). The two key factors in identity development that can be enacted in a classroom space are public and personal recognition of desirable traits and the provision of repetitive experiences that develop desirable self-states and affirm the targeted linguistic labels. Two such classroom activities that provide these self-states are small and large group discussion, wherein student ideas are affirmed and recognized by sustained attention and implicit approval while engaging *vernacular intellectualism*—ideas framed in the student's home language (Elbow, 2000). Opportunities to share and receive both tacit and overt feedback that support desirable academic performance can be provided both orally and in writing (Bracher, 2006; Elbow, 2000; Turner and Paris, 2004). Instructor feedback that accelerates transformation is a focus on responding to the ideas students are developing, even if those ideas are couched in non-academic language.

The entry-level composition course is ideally situated to transform the identities of novice scholars (Tingle, 2004). The College Composition course, in fulfilling its role as an introduction into critical thought, lends itself to moving students successfully through the destabilization of the self, brought about naturally through induction into the world of academia, and into an

acceptance of the new linguistic signifier of *thinker* and *writer*. We can make pedagogical decisions which support this transformation.

When teacher aim is to transform the identity of the student, then reiterative processes which engage students in the activities of the discipline (i.e. acting as a historian, acting as a scientist, acting as a writer), will both develop and confirm the nascent identity. In the world of composition, this stance is often described as “teaching the writer, not the writing.” The canard, repeated by process-oriented instructors, focuses on the changes instructors hope to evoke in writerly behaviors rather than in managing writerly products. Dewey’s (1923) criteria for learning suggests a combination of personal and repetitive practices which develop the new identity. Low-risk, high-frequency expressive writing provides this structure while also serving the goals of the composition course: to extend skill in written discourse.

### **Low-Risk, High-Frequency Writing**

The notion of low-risk, high-frequency writing was developed by Peter Elbow (2000) after examining his own failure to succeed at the graduate level. His definition encourages employing a great deal of writing that does not carry the stigma of grades on a measured scale. The goal of the writing is to overcome the resistance of the learner who must *give up* some of his identity to conform to the needs of academia. Because it is ungraded, the writing provides space for student identity to play out in reaction to new learning. High-risk writing, that which is graded against the demands of academia, is delayed until the learner has been exposed to many low-risk opportunities. The writings enhance student opportunity to develop ideas without threat. “As teachers we can empower our students. We can help them like writing” (Elbow, 2000, p.xv) through these repetitive, unevaluated free writes. Thus, the identity threat of the new demand is allayed.



All of the low-risk writing activities encourage composers to use expressive writing, defined as that which is nearest to speech, as a method for formulating and examining ideas before transforming these writings into transformative writing, primarily designated to transmit information; or into poetic writing whose primary purpose is to stand alone as a work of art (Britton, 1982, p. 158). This recently defined compositional style—expressive—is accessible to nearly everyone. If you can talk or think, you can write expressively.

It is these expressive writings which are the substance of the high-frequency, low-risk writings examined in this study. Elbow (2000) argues that expressive writing assists students in dabbling in *vernacular intellectualism*, or a process wherein students are able to access and examine their own thinking. Feedback which affirms the thinking of the writer in the low-risk environment provides the recognition desired by the ego to incorporate a new linguistic signifier into the identity. *Thinker, intellectual, student, and writer* are all positive identity labels which enhance a student's sense of stability and worth in the post-secondary setting. Elbow recommends responding to the written message as an interested reader (2000, p. 351-359) to provide the recognition students need to stabilize the identity as one worthy of entering into academic dialogue.

Reflective writings which ask students to engage in their own processes and methods of arriving at a truth further add to the student's self-awareness as a possessor of the needed skills and dispositions for scholarly work. These brief and personal writings overtly tie linguistic signifiers to the repeated behaviors and habits instructors wish to develop in the student.

## Summary

Though there are many transition points in a lifetime wherein identity shifts due to changes in the body image, circumstance, or intention none can be more important to a learner than to align oneself with the authorial demands and expectations of the collegiate environment. Should a pedagogical practice be found which can support learners in this important transition, it behooves instructors to make the most of the time and opportunity they have in an introductory composition course to develop and support these new signifiers.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Overview**

In this study I was primarily interested in working with the last three phases of Mezirow's (1997) transformational process: the provisional trying on of roles, building competence and self-confidence through repeated practice, and examining whether the new identity feature is integrated into the student. One might assume that for many entering the post-secondary system, the shift in culture provides the disequilibrium necessary to inspire a disorienting dilemma that Mezirow (1997) mentions as the precipitating event for adult learning. Matriculation into this dilemma may also account for the high attrition rate among first-year students unable to make the transition from a perceived dilemma into the self-examination necessary for transformation and success in the post-secondary climate.

In previous classrooms, I observed that many students claimed to have a shift of viewpoint around the task of writing after repetitive, low-risk writing activities. When feedback was limited to recognition and support of student thinking, it appeared that students became more engaged in using writing to examine thinking, and their self-confidence grew. The study was devised to formally test this observation in an effort to determine if frequent, low-stakes writing shifts student self-image.

## Research Design

This study was limited to two freshman composition courses led in a single semester in 2018 at Lord Fairfax Community College: English 111, College Composition I and English 112, College Composition II. The demographics of this rural community college reflect the mix of traditional and non-traditional students attracted to educational gains. Traditional students, those entering shortly after high school, make up 51% of the student body and fall into the 17 to 21-year range. A full 30% of students are in the 22-59-year range with dual enrollment students taking classes in the high school environment comprising the rest of the student body. Additionally, more of the enrollees are part-time (72%) than full-time students (28%) (Lord Fairfax Community College, 2018).

The English 111, College Composition I course met face-to-face, twice a week for 75 minutes. The English 112, College Composition II class met one evening a week for 90 minutes and was almost entirely comprised of working adults. The focus of College Composition I is on developing an argument supported with credible sourcing. College Composition II immerses students in both a research project and an overview of literary criticism. Knowledge and control over aspects of academic writing is an expected outcome for successful students.

The study was prepared prior to the commencement of classes. All procedures involving human subjects were reviewed and approved by the Murray State University Institutional Review Board. This included securing permissions from Lord Fairfax Community College and individual students for data collection.

On the first day of class, prior to any instruction, both classes received the same pre-treatment reflective question: *Complete the stem with your own thoughts. "When I think about writers I..."* and *"When I think about myself as a writer I..."* At the end of the ten-week study

period, both classes received the same follow up, post-treatment reflective question: *Please write the number of words you estimate you have written to this point in the course. Then answer: After reviewing the written work that you have produced thus far in this class, what is your current view of yourself as a writer--one who makes meaning in text?* (The estimated word count was a homework assignment as a requirement for the end-of-course portfolio. Students were asked to come prepared to share their word count.) The two prompts were answered on 3x5 cards and turned in as an attendance artifact.

The treatment consisted of routine, ungraded responsive writings conducted within the class time period which could be observed and controlled by the instructor. Topics for the prompts were related to readings, life experience, and the use of writing to support learning. (For a full listing of the prompts see Appendix I.) After exposing all students to frequent writing, the post treatment prompt was assigned at the end of ten weeks. Only the pre and post treatment responses were analyzed and coded.

### **Data Collection**

All responses to the pre and post treatment prompts were written on 3x5 cards signed and dated by the student and collected and secured for later coding. All opportunities offered for low-risk writing were recorded and dated by the instructor. Both classes wrote a minimum of twice during scheduled meetings. The Composition I class, which met twice-a-week, was exposed to approximately twice as many writing opportunities (54) than the once-a-week evening Composition II course (26). At every meeting, class began with prompted writing on a 3x5 card which was turned in as an attendance verification. These responses were stored and reviewed for further responsive instruction in class meetings. Student names were replaced with a numerical coding and all identity markers were obscured on the data collection spreadsheet.

## Data Analysis

Pre and post treatment student responses were compared for linguistic markers which might indicate a shifting attitude toward the identity of *writer*. The responses were categorized based on linguistic signifiers present in the writing. Only students who were present for the entire study and who agreed to the data collection are represented in the results described here.

Some pre-treatment responses indicated that the student had little to no relationship to the role of writer. These were coded as “no relationship to writer identity.” Most responses revealed that students felt a lack of agency or an ability to exert control over the task, often viewing writing as something done *to* them rather than an action under their control. Exemplary comments coded this way include:

“I think that I just try my best to have a well graded paper, and am just trying to get it over with.”

“I think of a person who is unable to express my thoughts into a form of writing.”

“I think of something that’s difficult for me. I take time to come up with a thought, let alone write a book.”

A second category identified pre-treatment responses where the student appeared to express some ownership and agency around the task of writing. These students seemed to have already adopted a relationship to the role of writer and were coded “identifies as writer.” The following are two responses coded this way from the opening prompt:

“I think I attempt to do my best to express & explain how I feel.”

“I think I am very good but there is much room for improvement.”

After the treatment, many more students exhibited ownership, seeing writing as a controllable task by using language which included a self-evaluative statement coupled with a goal statement. These coupled responses, which appeared with remarkable frequency in spite of the fact that the prompt did not request a goal statement, indicate that the student has begun to assume a sense of control over the writing task and were coded as “ownership of identity.” Though not overtly claiming the identity of *author*, as appeared in studies done at the elementary level after younger students were exposed to frequent, low-risk writing opportunities over a similar ten-week period (Davis, 1990; Edwards, 1995; Gau, Hermanson, Logar & Smerek, 2003; Knight, 2008), these students express an awareness of their ability to control a product through the writing task. There was a surprising consistency in the pattern of evaluative statement followed by goal statement. The following are two statements which exhibit this consistent pattern:

“After reviewing all of my written work, I think that I have improved since taking ENG 111. I do think I need some improvement. I would like to improve the flow of my writing.”

“As a writer I think I'm finding better ways to make my words a bit more meaningful. I need to not use so much slang and maybe enhance my vocabulary a bit.”

These students exhibit a self-evaluation followed by an articulation of next steps to improvement which clearly mirrors Mezirow's (1997) transformative stages of a recognition of dissatisfaction, an exploration of alternatives, and a plan for action.

## College Composition I

In the twice-a-week Composition I class, 24 students began the semester but only 18 lasted throughout the study period. Of those 18 only 13 successful pre and post-treatment responses were recoverable due to absences. Seven students initially indicated no connection to the identity of writer.

Five identified as writer and these identities were maintained throughout the treatment. One responded to the act of handwriting and the initial pre-treatment prompt was unusable.

After ten weeks and 54 ungraded, low risk writing experiences, 12 students identified more closely as writer by using language indicating a sense of agency over the writing task. One student remained resistant. Two of the 12 students who claimed a sense of agency also expressed an unprompted, positive affect toward the act of writing.

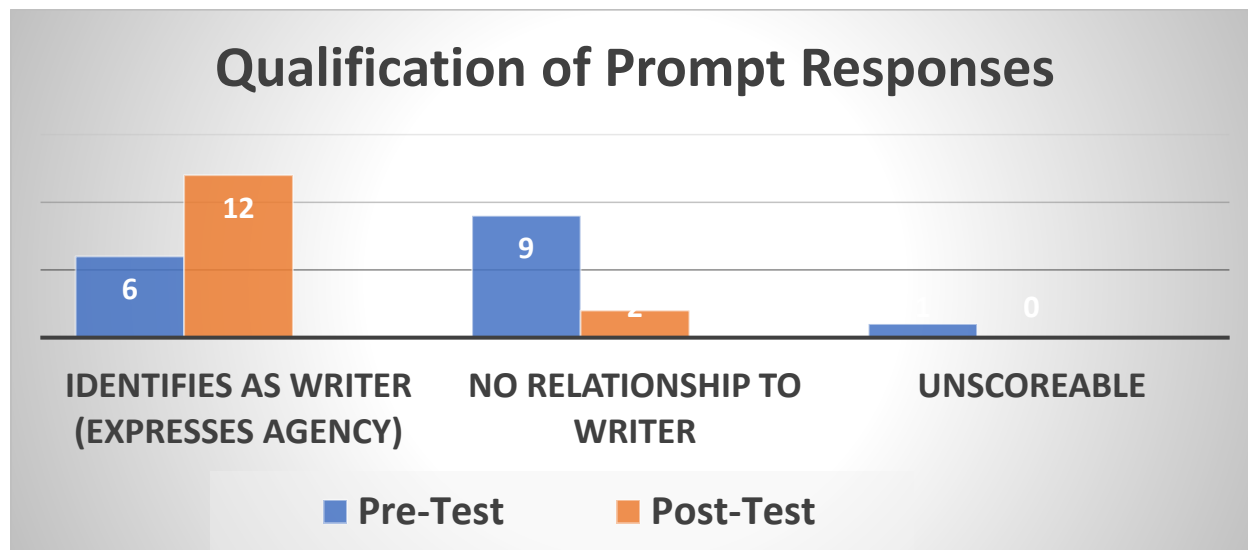
## **College Composition II**

Because of the nature of the once-a-week meeting, these students were exposed to far fewer of the controlled prompts provided within the meeting time. Attrition was also extremely high. Twenty students began the course and only 11 lasted through the study period. Of those 11, three denied the use of their collected data. Of the remaining eight students, one pre-tested as a resistant writer; one identified in the pre-test as a writer and this identity was maintained; six pre-tested with no expressed identity related to writer.

After ten weeks and 26 ungraded, low-risk writing experiences, six students used language indicating a connection to the role of writer by expressing a sense of agency over the writing task while two students stated clear resistance (one shifting from an unclear identity to resistant).

Though the sample size is very small for both classes (12 in the College Composition I course and eight in the College Composition II course) the resulting shift in language among the students of the study is comparable. A majority of students subjected to frequent, expressive writing opportunities expressed a more positive attitude toward writing in general over the initial pre-treatment inquiry around writing. In the Composition I course, those with a more positive connection to writing shifted from 38% to 92% over the ten week period. In the evening Composition II course, attitude and ideas around writing shifted from 12% positive view to a 75% positive view. Additionally, student responses indicated a new understanding of what it means to write, making more references to getting their thoughts right over comments on surface features like spelling or punctuation. (See Table 1).

**Table 1**



Eighty-five percent of the 18 students who made it through the complete study included language which indicated a growth in agency over the writing task. All of these responses included a self-evaluation of writing skills (“I feel like I have become more of a sophisticated



writer”) followed by some kind of goal statement (“I view myself as a pretty decent writer, but I could be better if I took more time while writing”). Two students expressed an increased pleasure in writing over previous experiences.

The responses imply that the students have begun to see themselves as actors in the quality and skill development of the academic writing task. This shift could result from prompts which ask students to routinely reflect on their writing process and to explore the development of high-risk writing assignments. Mezirow (1997) indicates that true transformational learning must include some reflection on tasks completed. Many of the prompted writings asked students to do that thinking in writing.

#### LIMITATIONS

It must be stated that the classroom setting has a number of variables which affect student attitude and these variables are not included in this study. Students in both classes were exposed to models of excellence in writing for both argument and academic research. Discussions in class included awareness of the recursive nature of writing and methods for managing the task, the importance of initially privileging idea formation over form, and the connection of academic writing to lived experience. These variables could be controlled by employing the pre and post treatment prompts in two classes: one designed around frequent, low-risk writing and one where regular low-risk, high-frequency writing opportunities are not a pedagogical practice.

Because the night class met only once-a-week, this limited the number of controlled writings. High absenteeism among some students further reduced the number of writing opportunities. It could be assumed that this would affect the outcome. Unlike the earlier studies in elementary classrooms where attendance is routine and mandatory (Davis, 1990; Edwards, 1995; Gau, Hermanson, Logar & Smerek, 2003; Knight, 2008), frequent absenteeism in both

classes affected the number of writings. Additionally, the small sample size in both classes could lead to highly variable outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

It appears that the continual, low-risk nature of the writings had a positive effect on most of the students. The repeated practice under low threat allowed students the time and space to both recognize their own vernacular intelligence (Elbow, 2000) and to develop an understanding of writing as another expressive tool for examining and clarifying thinking. By consistently focusing on the thinking revealed in the writing, students gained confidence in their role as participant in academic discourse.

As is reflected in the national data, both classes in the study saw declining enrollment as the course progressed. Nearly half of community college students (47%) drop out according to the National Student Clearinghouse (Cooper, 2017, December 19). This is nearly double the dropout rate for four-year public schools and is well above the 31% drop out rate for all four-year schools. Forty-four students in the study began the semester, and 23 successfully completed the two courses. This 52% drop in enrollment is a concern for any college community. Enrollment attrition was highest in the evening class where working parents expressed frustrations in dealing with the pressures of full-time work, full-time parenting, and college course requirements. Perhaps other supports need to be in place to increase attendance and success rates. Adjusting instruction to accommodate a shift in identity will increase the likelihood of student success and impact these high attrition rates.

The high attrition stresses the importance of these freshmen level classes to accommodate shifting student identities to those aligned with the academic community. As has been suggested

in earlier studies and commentary (Bartholomae, 1985; Rose, 1989; Elbow, 2000; Tingle, 2004), entrance into postsecondary education is just the sort of destabilizing experience Dewey (1925) and Mezirow (1997) observed as prompting new learning. Surely in the community college setting, the cultures of the working class and academic community clash (Rose, 1989) and a space must be provided for reflection and integration of new, foreign skills. Thoughtfully applied pedagogy in the College Composition courses can serve the dual purposes of reflection and skill integration. Any new learning can be scaffolded and supported through repeated, low-risk practice. Other disciplines can incorporate reflective writing to support student identity formation in their fields. Low-risk written reflections are a further tool for encouraging reflection on any learning. Students can see and name what they are experiencing and integrate it into their identities.

It is suggested that all instructors would benefit from engaging students in doing the verb of their discipline: Mathematicians acting as mathematicians; historians immersed in examining history; scientists engaged in meaningful science. Not unlike apprenticeships of old, where initiates work alongside mentors, we can purposefully transform student identity and thus their success by immersing students in the work of the discipline in an inviting and welcoming manner. Transformative learning would be enhanced with the integration of reflective writing throughout the disciplines where low-risk writings support the development of desirable traits.

## REFERENCES

- Bakar, K. A., Tarmizi, R. A., Mahyuddin, R., Elias, H., Luan, W. S., & Ayub, A. F. M. (2010). Relationships between university students' achievement motivation, attitude and academic performance in Malaysia. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 4906-4910.

- Bartholomae, D. (1985). *Inventing the university*. New York: Guilford.
- Berlin, J. A. (1982). Contemporary composition: The major pedagogical theories. *College English*, 44(8), 765-777.
- Bracher, M. (2006). *Radical pedagogy: Identity, generativity, and social transformation*. Springer.
- Britton, J. (1982). Spectator role and the beginnings of writing. *What writers know: The language, process, and structure of written discourse*, 149-169.
- Cooper, P. (2017, December 19) College Completions Rates are Still Disappointing. *Forbes*. Retrieved: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/prestoncooper2/2017/12/19/college-completion-rates-are-still-disappointing/#7eb17f65263a> 22 October 2018.
- Davis, B. H. (1990). *The effects of expressive writing on the social studies achievement, writing fluency, and learning retention of fourth-grade students* (Doctoral dissertation, Texas Tech University).
- Dewey, J. (1923). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. Macmillan.
- Edwards, L. (1995). *Improving Student Writing Skills and Attitude through the Increase of Writing Experiences*.
- Elbow, P. (2000). *Everyone can write: Essays toward a hopeful theory of writing and teaching writing*. Oxford University Press on Demand.
- Gau, E., Hermanson, J., Logar, M., & Smerek, C. (2003). *Improving Student Attitudes and Writing Abilities through Increased Writing Time and Opportunities*.
- Knight, A. K. (2008). Finding the Center of Gravity: Unexpected Benefits of Non-graded Writing. *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*, 24(1), 4.

- Lacan, J. & Wilden, A. T. (1968). *The language of the self: The function of language in psychoanalysis*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lord Fairfax Community College. (2018) SCHEV Fall Enrollment Trends by Age Range. About LFCC. Research, Analytics, and Data Systems. Enrollment. Retrieved: <https://lfcc.edu/about-lfcc/research-analytics-and-data-systems/enrollment/> 18 October 2018.
- Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New directions for adult and continuing education*, 1997(74), 5-12.
- Rose, M. (1989). *Lives on the Boundary. The Struggles and Achievements of America's Underprepared*. The Free Press, Macmillan, Inc., 866 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022.
- Tingle, N. (2004). *Self-development and college writing*. SIU Press.
- Turner, J., & Paris, S. G. (1995). How literacy tasks influence children's motivation for literacy. *The reading teacher*, 48(8), 662-673.

APPENDIX I

Instructor Prompting for Low-Risk Writing

**ENG 111 (75 minutes, twice a week)**

Date	Writing	Risk
8/21/18	3x5 card "When I think about writers I..." "When I think about myself as a writer I..."	Ungraded
	Brain Dump - 4.5 minutes - write what you are thinking	Ungraded
	Expressive writing - write about your name (used Sandra Cisneros "My Name" as model) 7 min.	Ungraded
	HW: Plan the ideal schedule. Write about challenges to the schedule and how to resolve them	Ungraded
8/23/18	3x5 card Locate 2 Challenge's you imagined that might hinder you in your ideal weekly schedule. Write them on the card.	Ungraded
	Lesson on writing daily for mental health and practice	Ungraded
	Annotation with article.	Ungraded
	Responsive notemaking	Ungraded
8/28/18	3x5 card--copy your MLA citation from the top of your notes to the card.	Ungraded
	Invitational sentence practice followed with writing on selected topic.	ungraded but shared

8/30/18	3x5 card: List two issues you have uncovered in observations since the last class.	ungraded but shared
	Responsive notemaking	ungraded
	Invitational sentence practice followed with writing on selected topic.	ungraded but shared
9/6/18	3x5 card Copy the MLA citation from the top of your paper for the reading you completed "But What Do You Mean?"	ungraded
	Process Log #1How did you get your idea for your paper? Be sure to explain where your idea came from and why you chose it. Consider writing about what you think you already know or hope to learn.	ungraded
9/11/18	3x5 card: Describe one source you have located around your chosen issue.	ungraded
	Write for a few minutes in your notebook: What makes the Alfie Kohn article a Researched Argument? What is his claim (opinion)? Can you find a sentence where he states his opinion clearly? How does he support his opinion? What is your response to his claim? Does anything in your experience agree or disagree with his statements?	ungraded but shared
	Drones: Write for a few minutes.... What is your current opinion on drones? What is your current opinion on drones? Share the flyer. Look at Bedford Reader page 23 (examining an image) Revisit your opinion on drones. Do you want to add or change anything?	ungraded but shared

9/13/18	Students took the Information Literacy pretest	<b>INFO LIT TEST</b>
9/18/18	3x5 card: Write your claim about drones on the card. These will be shared in a stand and deliver.	ungraded but shared
	Journals for each essay we have read in the text (We're Not, Peculiar Benefits, But What do you Mean? The Crummy First Draft)	ungraded
	Process Log #2 Describe an interesting problem you encountered in your research this week. Be prepared to share this with the class.	ungraded
9/20/18	3x5 Card: Describe your method for preparing your Process essay. Did you take any specific steps to getting the assignment completed on time?	ungraded
	Invitational sentence practice followed with writing on selected topic.	ungraded but shared
	Process Log #3 Consider the sources you have located to this point. What views do they represent? Do you have any holes in your resources? Do you need to do more research?	ungraded
9/25/18	3x5 Card - What seems easy for you? What difficulties are you having?	ungraded
	From the sheet, write 100-200-word annotation explaining the article.	ungraded but shared
	Invitational sentence practice followed with writing on selected topic.	ungraded but shared
9/27/18	3x5 card: You should have six good sources by now. Quickly list the different claims (opinions) you have found about your issue. Do you have a variety?	ungraded



High engagement	Survival activity: Individually choose your seven survivors with a "reason" Look at your reasons. Are any of them pathos, logos, ethos?	ungraded but shared
10/2/18	3x5 card - what will you be arguing in your researched argument paper? Write a single sentence.	ungraded
	Going over the Example essay and the essay "Black Men in Public Space" What makes the author especially credible in the essay? What is his claim? Have you ever altered public space?	ungraded but shared
	Write for a few minutes about homework you did in k-12 grades. What kinds of homework were you asked to do? Do any particular assignments stand out? Which did you think was helpful? Which wasn't?	ungraded but shared
10/4/18	3x5 card: How many sessions did you have on your Example essay during drafting?	ungraded but shared
	Practice with sentences (not much writing)	ungraded but shared
	Process Log #4--In your process log, write about your experiences in the peer response group. How is working or not working for you? What have you learned about collaborating around writing? Can you use anything you have gained in working on other papers?	ungraded
10/9/18	3x5 card: How many journal entries have you made in your reading?	<b>Ungraded MID TERM-- First High Stakes writing</b>
10/11/18	3x5 card What were your thoughts about Jocks vs. Nerds?	ungraded but shared
high engagement	Downdraft found poem with sharing	ungraded but shared

10/16/18	<p>3x5 card: Think about the last time you had to support a claim when arguing with someone to convince them to agree with you. What claim were you arguing? How did it turn out?</p>	ungraded but shared
	<p>#1 Zero Draft: Introduction, Body of the paper, Conclusion</p>	ungraded
	<p>Process Log #5: In your process log, write about your experiences in the peer response group. How is working or not working for you? What have you learned about collaborating around writing? Can you use anything you have gained in working on other papers?</p>	ungraded
10/18/18	<p>3x5 card: Write a question you have about the sample essay you read on page 513-519.</p>	ungraded with questions shared
	<p>Process Log #6: Reflect on the zero draft. How did it work or not work for you? What have you learned about this step in composition and its usefulness--or waste of time--for completing future papers and writing assignments?</p>	ungraded
10/23/18	<p>3x5 card: How does the essay "How to Identify Love by Knowing What It's Not" fit the criteria for a definition essay?</p>	ungraded
	<p>Looking at sentences: Modeling from Augustus Burroughs long followed by short, dramatic sentences</p>	ungraded but shared
10/25/18	<p>3x5 Card What did you choose to define? Why did you select this?</p>	ungraded
	<p>Write about a song you like at the current time. What does the music say about you? Share your writing with a partner.</p>	ungraded but shared

	Working with sentences: Model sentence about the punctuation of titles and names.	ungraded but shared
	Process Log #7: In your process log, write about your practice essays. In your reflection, consider the following: You have written four. Has the process gotten easier? Harder? Why? Of the essay types, which do you find easiest? Hardest? (we have done narrative with compare/contrast, process, example, analysis, definition) How have the practice essays impacted your Researched Argument?	ungraded
10/30/18	3x5 card: Please write the number of words you estimate you have written to this point in the course. Then answer: After reviewing the written work that you have produced thus far in this class, what is your current view of yourself as a writer--one who makes meaning in text?	ungraded

**ENG 112 (90 minutes once a week)**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Risk</b>
8/20/18	3x5 card "When I think about writers I..." "When I think about myself as a writer I..."	ungraded
	Brain Dump - 4.5 minutes - write what you are thinking	ungraded
	Expressive writing - write about your name (used Sandra Cisneros "My Name" as model) 7 min.	ungraded but shared
	Annotations as a record of your thinking.	ungraded
	Write out your ideal schedule for the week - Reflect, what are challenges to the schedule?	ungraded
	Literacy Narrative - in letter format write a narrative of your literary history. End with three questions about your history?	ungraded with questions shared

8/27/18	3x5 card Describe two challenges to your schedule and two solutions	ungraded
	Response writing in response to an article	ungraded
	Brainstorming quick write in response to Questions for Memoirists	ungraded
9/10/18	3x5 card What are some keywords you are using to search for articles on your selected research topic	ungraded
	Personal memoir piece shared in small groups	ungraded
9/17/18	3x5 card: Describe three sources you have found.	ungraded
	Downdrafts: practice a new beginning for memoir. Practice an exploded moment.	ungraded
	Create a plan for Primary Research - shared with group and instructor	ungraded
9/24/18	3x5 card: What is your plan for Primary Research?	ungraded
	Read article-write one paragraph summary and share	ungraded
	Downdraft of the process used in Primary Research	ungraded
9/1/18	3x5 Card: What have you learned from your Primary Research?	ungraded
	Downdraft of the entire Research paper with teacher modeling	ungraded
	Reflective writing on the peer response groups	ungraded
10/8/18	3x5 card: List the days and times you worked on your research paper. Have you started your Lit Terms guide?	ungraded
	Cover Letter: Reflective writing on the Research paper (Elbow) What do you see as your main points? How did you go about completing the writing and what helped you along the way?	
10/15/18	Which parts are you most satisfied with?	ungraded
	Which parts are you least satisfied with?	
	What questions do you have for me as a reader?	

10/22/18	3x5 card Which of the short stories did you find the most satisfying to read? Why?	ungraded
	Choose a song and analyze what it says about you. Wrote for seven minutes and shared with partner	ungraded but shared
	Three reads of "Story of an Hour" with development of a thesis based on one sentence--discussion and share out	ungraded but shared
10/29/18	3x5 card: Please write the number of words you estimate you have written to this point in the course. Then answer: After reviewing the written work that you have produced thus far in this class, what is your current view of yourself as a writer--one who makes meaning in text?	ungraded

APPENDIX II

Pre and Post student responses.

Each pre and post responses

ENG111	2 x week	Identity Markers	Post Treatment	Code
201	When I think about myself as a writer, I think about the ways I choose to express myself, and what that says about me.	identifies with writer	8,500 words. I feel like I have improved, but also that I have more to improve on, as well. I have started to like writing more, but I see now that I should take things further and work on expanding on my ideas a bit more.	ownership of identity
202	When I think about myself as a writer, I think of a person who is unable to express my thoughts into a form of writing.	no relationship to writer identity	6,000 words. I view myself as a better writer than before I entered this class.	ownership of identity
203	When I think of myself as a writer, I think that I just try my best to have a well graded paper, and am just trying to get it over with.	no relationship to writer identity	5,750 words. As a writer I am very straight forward with my beliefs and my claims. I view myself as a pretty decent writer, but I could be better If I took more time while writing.	ownership of identity
204	When I think about me as a writer, I think I am very good but there is much room for improvement.	identifies with writer	12,000 words. I think I am quite an elegant writer having detailed writing in some scenerios [sic]. I do however tend to venture off at the end.	ownership of identity
205	When I think of myself as a writer, I think of my bad handwriting.	seeing writing as physical task	More than 6,500. I still have room for improvement and to better myself.	ownership of identity
206	When I think about myself as a writer, I think about writing papers for different classes and looking up research for those papers.	no relationship to writer identity	8,736 words. My current view of myself as a writer is that I have imporved in my writing skills but also in the meaning of what I have written. I have realized that it's important to write what you are passionate about.	ownership of identity

207	When I think about myself as a writer I think it is hard for me to get my fast-thinking thoughts on to paper.	no relationship to writer identity	7,000-10,000 words. I actually enjoy writing a little more. My essays are always a little short thought. I feel like writing something on demand is easier.	ownership of identity/positive affect
208	When I think about myself being a writer, I think how can I get as good as the rest?	accepting of identity potential	6,000 - 8,000 words. After reviewing the work I have written in this class so far, I realized I'm starting to grow as a writer. My essays are becoming more in detail as I go along	ownership of identity
209	When I think about myself as a writer, I think of having ideas, but unable to transfer those thoughts into a fluent story.	no relationship to writer identity	1300-1500 words (researcher remark: way underestimated) I feel like I am a decent writer, but I still have a lot to learn before I am a good writer.	ownership of identity
210	When I think about myself as a writer, I think that I want to expand my strengths and build upon my weaknesses to create more strengths.	accepting of identity potential	12,182 words. I think my writing is in an appropriate spot for my level. There are of course things I need to approve and expand on, but I'm not behind. I find that I elaborate, use strong vocabulary words, and maintain an appropriate flow throughout my writing.	ownership of identity
211	When I think about myself as a writer I can see that I am average. I don't have the knowledge of many words to express my thoughts.	no relationship to writer identity	10,000 words. In high school I struggled to get 200 words in my writing assignments, now I write 400 or more in each essay. It's a huge step for me.	ownership of identity
212	When I think of myself as a writer I think of nothing due to my limitations subconsciously.	no relationship to writer identity	7,723 words. I have honestly surprised [sic] myself in the amount of effort I've been able to put in. Just that alone has improved my writing in the class	ownership of identity
213	When I think about myself as a writer, I think I attempt to do my best to express & explain how I feel.	accepting of identity potential	8,500 words. I've learned and improved as a writer and have discovered a new love of writing. I hope I'm making my grandfather proud because he was a English teacher & professor.	increased positive affect
<b>ENG 112</b>	<b>1x week</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>POST treatment</b>	<b>Code</b>
101	When I think about myself as a writer I think that I am not that great at writing.	no relationship to writer identity	7,403 words. I did not notice that I have wrote so much during this class. I do not really see myself as a writer.	resistant to identity

102	When I think about myself as a writer, I think that I wish I had the capacity to write like "really good" writers	no relationship to writer identity	3,518 words. After reviewing all of my written work, I think that I have improved since taking ENG 111. I do think I need some improvement. I would like to improve the flow of my writing.	ownership of identity
103	When I think about myself as a writer, I think poorly of it. I'm never really satisfied with my writings and I always second guess what I put on the page. I can speak well, but putting it on paper is the hard part for me.	no relationship to writer identity	About 6,837. I still have a hard time getting my writing to portray the image in my head, but the class is helping me think differently and find new ways to do things.	ownership of identity
104	When I think about myself as a writer, I think that I'm slow to write because I must to translate my ideas Spanish to English.	identifies with writer identity	6,123 Words. My current view as a writer is that I can write a little more ease and faster than before.	ownership of identity
105	When I think of myself as a writer, I think of something that's difficult for me. I take time to come up with a thought, let alone write a book.	no relationship to writer identity	7,000 words. I feel like I've written a lot more than that. I feel like I have become more of a sophisticated writer, especially with my job and taking classes. I have improved a lot.	ownership of identity
106	When I think about myself as a writer, I think about writers block and not what to do with I have. I think about potential to do more.	resistant to writer identity	5,300 words. I think that so far in the class I have come to better understand critical reading and how its more than just reading. I think that I can better put my thoughts on paper now.	ownership of identity
107	When I think about myself as a writer I think I am to busy with words, and add to much drama	no relationship to writer identity	4,000 words. My work is never good enough, it could always be better. Though I find the more I pull it aprt the worse it gets. With myself I just don't ever think I am good enough.	resistant to identity
108	When I think of myself as a writer I tend to lean towards fiction or real life experiences. As a writer I wish there'd only be on text format. Grammar's also important!	no relationship to writer identity	6,000 words. As a writer I think I'm finding better ways to make my words a bit more meaningful. I need to not use so much slang and maybe enhance my vocabulary a bit.	ownership of identity



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary K. Tedrow taught in the high school English classroom beginning in 1978, ending her career as the Porterfield Endowed English Chair at John Handley High School in 2016. She is currently the Director of the Shenandoah Valley Writing Project at Shenandoah University in Winchester, VA and a DA candidate in English Pedagogy at Murray State University. Tedrow adjuncts at Lord Fairfax Community College and Johns Hopkins University and is the author of *Write, Think, Learn: Tapping the Power of Daily Student Writing Across Content Areas*.