

**Keeping Students Connected to the Power of Language: Developing Writing Skills in
Adolescents in an Age of Generative AI**

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Abstract

This paper explores the implications of generative AI writing tools on a student's ability to make meaningful connections to language, particularly through writing. It is centered on the understanding of the foundational role language plays in identity formation. As a high school English teacher, I recognize the significant impact AI writing tools are having on the way students engage in the writing process. I argue that regardless of what generative AI can do and the role it will play in the future of the high school English curriculum, it is important for English teachers to continue to foster students' personal connections to language in order for students to have a full "linguistic repertoire" (Edwards, 2009, p. 30) with which to form their personal and cultural identities. This connection between language and identity guides the literature review of the paper, which focuses on the role of language in identity formation, the connection between writing and learning, and the potential for generative AI writing tools to work against students' ability to use written language as a vehicle for human expression and identity formation. The applications presented in this paper center on non-AI mediated practices for developing students' writing skills. These practical applications focus on building a classroom writing community and fostering individual student agency in the writing process. The paper concludes with a summary of the practical and theoretical implications of viewing generative AI writing tools with a critical eye when planning writing instruction.

Keywords: English, AI, writing, writing instruction, writing skills, identity formation, adolescents

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Chapter One: Introduction

I have taught secondary English Language Arts since 2000, which has given me a front-row seat to many changes in how students write and how technology has changed their relationship to language, written English in particular. I began teaching when teenagers were just discovering MSN Messenger on their home computers. At that time, the most advanced digital writing tool students had was the spell check feature in Microsoft Word. In contrast, my young neighbour Max, who began Kindergarten this year, will never know a world without the integration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) into everyday technology. His digital world will include tools that will offer to intuit what he would like to say and then write it for him. The students I taught in 2000 were called “Digital Natives” (Prensky, 2001), having come of age with digital technology. Students like my neighbour Max are perhaps better thought of as ‘AI Natives.’ These students will arrive to my high school English classes with a different set of skills and expectations around language than the students before them.

Navigating the changing landscapes of technology, language, and writing has been a significant theme in my teaching career. With every technological shift, the way students have used and understood language has shifted as well. The frequency of non-standard, digital shorthand in students’ academic writing is a reflection of this. The 2022 launch of the AI chatbot ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2022) and the addition of generative AI ‘assistants’ to many writing platforms has forced English Language Arts teachers to rethink their practice yet again. My English colleagues and I are in the midst of a paradigm shift that is causing us to recalibrate how we approach language learning in the high school classroom.

Developing an Interest in Students’ Digital Connections to Language

The learning I have done in the Thompson Rivers University Master of Education program has repeatedly taken me to the intersection of digital tools and language. My first foray into research led me to an exploration of students’ use of texting language in their academic writing. This resulted in a new approach to teaching standard English in my classes. Instead of

teaching students that “text speak” (Turner, 2009) is an incorrect version of English, I began teaching about the regularities of texting so that students could understand how to code switch to standard English (Turner). This research made me look more closely at the underlying ways digital tools can change students’ relationship to language.

In Designing Multimedia for Curriculum, I learned how people read differently on a screen than on a page (Cohn, 2021). This challenged assumptions I had about the reading material I gave my students, as I believed the only difference was where the information was accessed, not how the information was read. Even font choices in these two media differ because of what the eye requires: on paper, serif fonts help guide the reader’s eye along the page (Gutierrez, 2014). On screen, sans serif fonts keep the words from blending together, making for an easier reading experience (Gutierrez). It was in this course that I began to think more about the parts of the brain that are engaged when students interact with language in digital and analogue environments.

During my time in The History and Philosophy of Education, I was introduced to the work of John Dewey (1929/2017) and Nel Noddings (2005). Reading Dewey’s ideas highlighted for me the importance of learning by doing (Dewey). Like Dewey, I believe the classroom is not just a place of learning, but a smaller version of society as a whole, where students learn to build community (Dewey). It is partially through this lens that I have come to view students’ relationship with generative AI, particularly regarding how they will add their own voices to bigger conversations in society. Nel Noddings’ book, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education* (2005) introduced new ways for me to think about the bigger purposes of education. Her understanding of caring for people and ideas have helped frame my approach in my own English classes. It is Noddings’ notion of caring for ideas that has made me think more deeply about the ways in which generative AI writing tools teach students to care for their own ideas and the ideas of others.

Marshall McLuhan (1964/1994) writes that “in operational and practical fact, the medium

is the message” (p. 7). My learning in the Masters of Education program has shown me that the medium through which students interact with language has its own impact on how students come to understand and use language for themselves. McLuhan’s point – that a new piece of technology alters aspects of life irrespective of what people use the technology for – is particularly relevant for high school English teachers reckoning with the arrival of generative AI tools into the writing environment.

Clarifying AI Terms

While conversations around AI use in education have intensified since ChatGPT arrived online, AI is already used in writing tools that have become standard on digital platforms. Common forms of AI writing tools include predictive text (Eye on Tech, 2022) and autocorrect (The Wall Street Journal, 2022) on smartphones, spelling and grammar check tools embedded in word-processing applications like those found in Microsoft 365 (Microsoft, 2024), and virtual editing apps like Grammarly that follow users as they write online (Grammarly, 2024) . These tools have their own issues in terms of how they affect students’ language use, but they are not generally included in current discussions about AI use in education. The generative AI writing tools on English teachers’ minds are those like ChatGPT that use large language models (LLMs) to predict text (Lee & Trot, 2023). These tools are trained to recognize text patterns in order to create written output that mimics human writing (Lee & Trot). LLMs use sophisticated mathematical relationships to accurately predict the next word needed in order to create a coherent written response to a user’s prompt (Murgia, 2023).

For the purposes of this paper, it is important to distinguish between these older AI-driven writing tools and generative AI chatbots such as ChatGPT. Although all these tools use machine learning to refine users’ experiences, older AI writing tools differ from AI chatbots in the way their users interact with language. With traditional AI writing tools, the user is responsible for writing content on which the digital tool then makes suggestions. With generative AI chatbots such as ChatGPT, the process is reversed: it is the user who makes content suggestions (by

way of a writing prompt) and the chatbot that does the writing. For the purposes of this paper, the term *AI* will be used to describe generative AI writing tools like ChatGPT, which respond to writing prompts in order to generate complete texts.

The Significance of the Topic

The topic of AI use in education is broad: the accuracy, bias, ethics, and privacy of these tools are currently being discussed among educators (Elgersma, 2024), in addition to issues surrounding academic integrity and AI use (Blose, 2023). My focus on the use of AI in the English classroom centers on its effect on students' relationship with language. This is a significant area of focus because AI has the potential to shift students' understanding of language. Generative AI can produce written work that is grammatically accurate and free of punctuation errors, allowing students to short-circuit the process of learning how to write accurately or with their own individual style. In the high school English classroom, a writing assignment is not an end unto itself. It is a way for students to practice using language in order to grow their capacity. The written content has significance primarily because of the student who created it. Students' ability to express their own ideas is important because language is a key way that people form their individual and cultural identities (Gleitman & Papfragou, 2005). Any tool that has the potential to change how people use language has the potential to affect how they form their view of themselves.

AI is already positioned to play a significant role in education. This year, my school district put ChatGPT behind its internet server's firewall to prevent students from using it, but other AI tools are still available as standard features on several of the platforms used by the district's devices. The question is not whether AI should or will be used by students. The question is how English teachers in this AI environment can create learning opportunities for students that foster deep language connections so that students can use language with increasing confidence.

Argument

In this paper I argue that it is important for English teachers to continue to foster students' personal connections to language outside of AI-mediated interactions. Language plays a key role in personal and cultural identity formation (Edwards, 2009). Fostering connections to personal and cultural identities is a core competency of the BC English Language Arts curriculum (Province of British Columbia, 2024). This argument is supported by evidence from research on the links between language and identity (Edwards; Joseph, 2010), the effect of writing on learning (Mateos et al., 2014; Pedago, 2022), the ability of digital tools to change language use (TED, 2013), and the benefits and limitations of generative AI (Farrokhnia et al., 2023). My claim is contestable by the argument that AI can be used to enhance language learning (Song & Song, 2023).

Overview of the Paper

This paper begins with a review of the literature on the role language plays in identity formation. It then reviews literature on the effect of writing on learning and the ability of digital tools to change language use. The literature review concludes with an exploration of the benefits and limitations of AI when used in language learning, particularly writing instruction. The paper then turns to applications for English teachers in the classroom, focusing on strategies for creating a classroom environment designed to support writing instruction, as well as ways to develop students' individual writer's voices. To conclude, the paper provides a summary of findings and implications for teaching practice.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The importance of fostering non-AI mediated language connections for students is predicated on the understanding that language is fundamental to identity formation, and that AI writing tools create distance between students and their ability to use language in meaningful ways. The following literature review begins with an exploration of the connection between language and identity formation. The connection between writing and learning is then established in order to create a foundation from which to explore the way AI impacts students'

language learning. As an example of how digital tools can impact language, the case of texting and text-speak is presented to open the argument that AI will also have consequences for students' understanding of language. The benefits of AI for language learning are then presented as a counterargument to the proposition that AI has the potential to interfere with students' abilities to form strong language connections. The literature will show that AI presents a limited tool for facilitating language connections for students.

Language and Identity Formation

Humans possess a unique capacity to create and use language (Gleitman & Papafragou, 2005), as they have the ability to create multiple languages and use them in ways that transcend time and space (TED, 2018). Language is at the center of how people come to understand who they are (Joseph, 2010) and it is through discourse that people construct their identities (Fuller, 2007). This interactive aspect of language is fundamental to language learning, as people are born with the capacity to communicate with language, but they must hear language spoken in order to learn it and use it (Stangor & Walinga, 2014). Boroditsky's (2011) research into how language shapes thought reveals that not only does language shape people's understanding of who they are, but also how they think. Boroditsky (TED, 2018) has found that people think about concepts like time, numbers, and colour differently based on the language they speak and how that language describes these concepts. Boroditsky's research shows that when people learn new ways to speak about concepts, they change their ability to think about them as well. Applied to a classroom setting, Boroditsky's research suggests that having students increase their language capacity would also expand their ability to think in that language, which would in turn expand their ability to think about their identities.

Language and Personal Identity

Language is flexible (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004), and people make nuanced choices about language use in order to build and express their identities. Speakers intuitively code-switch depending on the situation (Edwards, 2009), using language to bring out different aspects of

their identity in different settings (Edwards; Fuller, 2007). Edwards refers to this as a speaker's "linguistic repertoire" (p. 30), while Boroditsky (2011) refers to this capacity as a speaker's "cognitive toolkit" (p. 65). It is this individual and context-specific approach to language use that can be affected when students choose to use AI to write. AI can create grammatically accurate responses, and it has the capacity to create 'playful' responses when prompted correctly, but it does not use language in an individualized way. AI's responses are humanesque, but not human. Language, as it is used to construct and maintain various identities, is a uniquely human construct (Edwards). Using AI has the potential to distance students from the discursive nature of identity formation and the ways in which language is used to create and express their own identity.

Language and Cultural Identity Formation

Language plays a central role in how cultural identity is constructed, both at a personal and collective level (Bucholz & Hall, 2004; Edwards, 2009; Gleitman & Papafragou, 2005; Joseph, 2010). Language is a key way people connect to their own culture (Gleitman & Papafragou, 2005) and a key way culture is transmitted from one generation to the next (Gleitman & Papafragou; Joseph). Bucholtz & Hall (2004) call language "the most flexible and pervasive" tool for the "cultural production of identity" (p. 369). Joseph (2010) highlights that language is used to "actually create, maintain, and perform the bonds" (p. 10) between community members. The BC English Language Arts curriculum (Province of British Columbia, 2024) points to the importance of students developing a positive cultural identity in their ability to contribute to the well-being of their communities and society. Having a strong understanding of language gives students a stronger way to form their cultural identity.

The centrality of language to identity formation can be seen in the movement to revitalize Indigenous languages in Canada. Residential schools in Canada played a significant role in Indigenous language loss (The Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Culture, 2005) because in them, students were not permitted to speak their home languages (Rice et al.,

2023). Part of Canada's process of truth and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is an intentional effort to revitalize Indigenous languages (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Indigenous language revitalization is based on the premise that for Indigenous communities, language is inextricably linked to identity (Galley et al., 2016; The Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Culture). In its interviews with Indigenous people across Canada, The Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures found that “many [people] stated that the ability to speak one's own language helps people understand who they are in relation to themselves, their families and communities, and to Creation itself” (iv). Rasmussen and Akulukjuk (2009) write about the interconnectedness of Indigenous languages. Rasmussen (2002, cited in Rasmussen and Akulukjuk, 2009) refers to Indigenous languages as “the language of the land – spoken through the culture and language of the humans who have lived there for thousands of years” (p. 287). This understanding of language is echoed by Boroditsky (2011), who writes that each language in the world “contains a way of perceiving, categorizing, and making meaning in the world” (p. 65). The key role language plays in the identity of Indigenous people is reflected in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action* (2015) and the subsequent *Indigenous Languages Act* (Government of Canada, 2019), which provide frameworks for Indigenous language revitalization efforts in Canada. The BC curriculum (Province of British Columbia, 2023) includes courses in twenty different Indigenous languages. These efforts to ensure that generations of Indigenous peoples are able to communicate in their home languages is a recognition that it is through increased connections to language that strong personal and cultural identities are formed.

The BC English Language Arts curriculum recognizes the connection between language and identity formation (Province of British Columbia, 2024). A key curricular objective throughout secondary English courses is for students to “explore how language constructs personal and cultural identities” (Province of British Columbia). In this way, the BC English Language Arts curriculum seeks to connect students to their uniquely human ability to use

language to form and express their different identities (Edwards, 2009). Language plays an everyday role in communication (Edwards), but it also carries symbolic value because embedded in it is a culture's shared understanding of itself and its history (Edwards). Edwards highlights that it is this symbolic function of language that connects people to one another. Increasing students' capacity to use language is then not only about increasing their technical skill level, but also their ability to connect with others and form community.

The Effect of Writing on Learning

Whether students' use of AI affects their ability to form individual and cultural identities through language rests in part on how students make connections to language through writing, as it is the writing ability of AI that is poised to impact language learning in the English classroom. If students' ability to write affects their ability to make connections to language, then it is important for English teachers to continue to foster the development of writing skills, even as AI tools become ever more available and able to engage in the writing process on the students' behalf. Literature on the effects of writing on learning – how the brain learns to write, how writing helps with vocabulary acquisition, and how writing impacts cognition – reveals a positive connection between a student's ability to write and a student's ability to use metacognitive strategies to process information (Myhill et al., 2023).

A human's ability to write depends on the use of several neural systems. While the visual and auditory systems of the brain are activated when reading, writing also activates the motor system of the brain (Pedago, 2022). Pedago calls this a "multisensory advantage" (p. 4), which uses the plasticity of the brain to enable a person to understand the correspondence between written letters and their sounds (Pedago). The brain's ability to build these connections has a deep impact on cognition (van Atteveldt et al., 2004, as cited in Pedago, 2022). Pedago highlights that the brain changes when a person learns to write, and these new neural connections then change a person's ability to understand information. This suggests that for students, the process of writing develops neural pathways which then work to deepen their

ability to understand language.

Written tasks can have a positive effect on students' language development. Dikilitaş & Bush (2014) write that written tasks are beneficial to vocabulary development because writing gives students more time to try out new words than they might have when speaking. Written tasks also help students retain new vocabulary (Hulstijn & Laufer, 2001, as cited in Dikilitaş & Bush, 2014), as writing allows for "deep involvement" (p. 46) with language, which improves retention. In a study done by Hulstijn and Laufer, a group of students who wrote letters retained twice the vocabulary of their peers who completed a fill-in exercise with vocabulary. Writing helps students use and retain vocabulary, particularly when the task requires more thoughtful uses of language, such as the letter-writing task in Hulstijn and Laufer's research.

The literature suggests that writing provides opportunities for students to become better learners overall. This capacity to learn through writing appears to rest on two conditions: the writing task itself and the instruction students receive on writing strategies (Klein et al., 2014). Writing tasks that are more complex, such as synthesis writing where students are asked to incorporate information they have read into their own written responses, use more complex cognitive processes (Del Longo & Cisotto, 2014), which facilitate deeper learning (Mateos et al., 2014). Research on the way students learn to write for content retention, commonly called "writing to learn" (Van Drie et al., 2014), reveals that writing can be a particularly valuable learning tool when students are also given instruction in specific writing strategies (Del Longo & Cisotto, 2014; Klein et al., 2014; Mateos et al., 2014). These strategies, which English teachers commonly call the writing process, include a wide range of skills, such as planning an approach to a writing task, evaluating source material, and writing and revising drafts. Van Drie et al. state that these strategies provide tools for students to acquire knowledge and deepen their thinking skills. Mateos et al. also found that writing is more helpful for learning when students are given choices for how they want to approach the task. It is the students' use of these metacognitive strategies that make writing a powerful learning tool (Mateos et al.). This is a salient point when

considering whether to have students use AI to construct text, particularly because AI is able to provide users with responses for all of the parts of the writing process, from planning and outlining to drafting and editing, which means it has the potential to take these learning moments away from students. If a key learning benefit of writing is the decision-making that happens within the writing process, students need opportunities to practice these skills.

Writing is neurologically complex (Pedago, 2022). The ability to write and read enables humans to think in new ways and process information over time and space (Pedago). When writing, students use metacognitive strategies to combine and transform ideas in new ways to express their point of view (Del Longo & Cisotto, 2014). While there is no direct correlation between students being able to write and students being able to form strong individual and cultural identities, being able to write is itself an expression of students' human identity – out of all living things, humans are the only ones who can write (Pedago). Even AI can only write because it has been programmed by humans who can. Writing, as an act of meaning-making, remains an important skill for students to learn because it gives students cognitive processes that can be used to deepen their understanding of the world and their place in it.

The Ability of Digital Tools to Change Language Use: Texting and Text-speak

The ability of AI to perform writing tasks brings up questions around how digital tools affect language use. If digital writing tools impact students' ability to use language, then teachers must take those impacts into consideration when planning their instruction, particularly when the purpose of the instruction is to foster students' identity formation. While research around AI writing tools in the classroom is still in its emergent stages, a look at another now-common digital writing medium – texting – provides proof that digital tools are able to change language.

Secondary students do much of their everyday writing on messaging apps on their cell phones. Radesky et al. (2023) report that 43% of 8-12 year olds have a smartphone, with the number increasing to 88-95% between ages 13 and 18 (Rideout et al., 2022; Pew 2022, as

cited in Radesky et al.). Texting, which is a form of communication completely mediated by a digital interface, can be thought of as a linguistic chameleon: it is written in format, but resembles speech in syntax. Linguist John McWhorter refers to texting as “fingered speech” (TED, 2013), which reflects texting’s position as both a new way of speaking and a new way of writing. The introduction of texting into the everyday communication environment is an example of how a digital tool has changed language.

Because my career as an English teacher has largely tracked with the rise of instant messaging and texting, I have watched as the inclusion of text-speak, a form of non-standard English, has increased in my students’ academic writing. This trend has been noted in literature surrounding language learning in the classroom (Al-Sharqi & Abbasi, 2020; Cingel & Sundar, 2012; Cladis, 2018; Turner, 2009; Turner et al., 2014). Research into students’ use of texting reveals that text-speak follows its own set of conventions (Crystal, 2001, as cited in Turner et al., 2014; TED, 2013), which are more suited to the speed with which people communicate in digital environments (Al-Sharqi & Abbasi; TED). Turner et al. show that students make choices when using text-speak to conform to these conventions, and they also adjust their use of text-speak based on their audience.

Lotherington’s (2004) assertion that languages change over time gives room for the emergence of text-speak as its own form of English. Al-Sharqi and Abbasi (2020) broach the idea that text-speak can be thought of as a dialect of English. McWhorter (2013), in his TED talk on texting, also views texting as a new form of language. In literature where text-speak is considered its own form or dialect of English, discussions about text-speak and academic writing center on teaching students how to code-switch from text-speak to standard English as necessary (Cingel & Sundar, 2012; Omar & Miah, 2013; Turner et al., 2014). This represents a marked shift for English teachers, as it means incorporating explicit teaching on the conventions of text-speak to help students code-switch correctly based on the requirements of a writing task. In the case of texting, the effect of the digital tool is easy to see. A body of literature has built up

around various aspects of texting that shed light on how technology has created this new form of English. Given that ChatGPT was launched recently, in 2022 (OpenAI, 2022), it is more difficult to see long-term trends of AI's effect on how students understand and use language. As research about texting shows, digital language tools have the capacity to make big impacts. It is therefore unlikely that AI will prove to be a neutral agent in the learning environment as it pertains to students' use of language.

Generative AI in the Classroom

The core of AI's capability with language is its ability to generate text. This has implications for students in English, who are actively engaging in the process of learning to write. While research shows potential benefits to the use of AI for language learning, the limitations in this same research reveal significant concerns about the effect of AI-mediated interactions on students' ability to make authentic language connections.

Counterargument: The Benefits of AI to Language Learning

One cited benefit of AI for language learning is the ability of AI to provide personalized feedback for students (Beck & Levine, 2024; Farrokhnia et al., 2023; Song & Song, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Students themselves cite AI's ability to provide grammar and punctuation support as one of its benefits (Schiel et al., 2023). This use of AI is not novel, as it mirrors grammar and spell check functions available on common writing platforms like Microsoft Word and Google Docs. AI can provide detailed written output in very short periods of time (Kumar, 2023 as cited in Farrokhnia et al.), which means students can get instant editing feedback, as opposed to having to wait for a teacher to provide feedback on their writing. This could open up opportunities for students to have more time for drafting their written responses or for taking part in the editing process. The editing feedback provided by AI is personalized in the sense that it is specific to the written input, but it is not personalized in the more general sense: it does not know the student who is submitting the text for editing. For more entrenched editing issues, such as a student's repeating punctuation errors, teacher feedback may prove more helpful.

The teacher can work with the student to get to the root of why the issue is occurring and then work with the student to correct the problem.

Another commonly cited benefit of AI for language learning is its capacity to act as a collaborator for students (Beck & Levine, 2024; Farrokhnia et al.; Schiel et al., 2023; Song & Song, 2023). In Schiel et al.'s review of students' use of AI, students list AI's ability to provide them with ideas and essay outlines as a key benefit of the technology. Song & Song highlight the dynamic nature of AI's ability to act as collaborator, calling it a "virtual peer" (p. 3) for students. Even Grammarly (2024) highlights this feature of its AI writing assistant in an advertisement targeted to students. A character in the advertisement states, "Grammarly's AI helps you get unstuck, and it doesn't just write everything for you" (0:23). The potential benefit of using AI is highlighted: it is a helper for times when a student needs it. The potential for misuse is downplayed. AI can indeed 'just write everything' for students, which is why using AI for increased language learning requires a student to be committed to their own learning process. Song & Song, whose research found tangible benefits when AI was used for Chinese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, still needed to include discussions about AI and academic integrity with their research participants to prevent their undergraduate volunteers from using AI output without modification. The high school English classroom is not a controlled research environment, and the ease with which students can use AI to write for them complicates the task of having students use AI as just a collaborator. When discussing AI's collaborative capabilities, Beck & Levine include the caveat that AI works best if a student is at the center, guiding the process. They highlight the importance of students retaining their "agency" (p. 9) in the writing process even when using AI for its benefits. This reflects the understanding that it is the students' use of writing strategies that is valuable for language learning (Van Drie et al., 2014).

AI as a Disruptive Agent in Language Learning

All the reviewed literature includes cautions about the potential for students to become

dependent on AI (Beck & Levine, 2024; Farrokhnia et al., 2023; Song & Song, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). One research participant in Song & Song's study reported they found it hard not to rely on ChatGPT for every sentence, which "hindered [their] own creativity and thinking" (p. 10). Song and Song conclude that relying on ChatGPT may hinder students' own writing abilities. They reiterate the need for students to become self-regulated learners (Song & Song). Farrokhnia et al. suggest that an overreliance on AI can also negatively affect student motivation for writing tasks. Because writing is a complex skill, student motivation for writing can be an issue regardless of the digital tools available (Myhill et al., 2023). If AI is able to provide written responses without effort from the student beyond the input of a prompt, then AI can act as a ghostwriter (Hsiao et al., 2023) for students, who then only have to approve what AI produces. This lack of engagement with the writing process can contribute to a decrease in student motivation to write (Myhill et al.), which then affects students' use of the cognitive processes that lead to language learning.

Another commonly cited limitation to the use of AI for language learning is the potential negative effect of AI use on students' higher-order cognitive skills (Farrokhnia et al., 2023; Susnjak, 2022 as cited in Farrokhnia et al.). Beck & Levine (2024) found that students tend to think of AI output as factual, but AI output is prone to "hallucinations" (p. 9), where the AI tool creates references that do not exist (Beck and Levine; Farrokhnia et al.; Wang et al., 2024). Beck and Levine conclude that using AI requires a "vigilant skeptical stance" (p. 9). In a study on students' abilities to evaluate online content, Johnston (2020) found that students did not check for accuracy or authenticity when viewing content online. This habit puts students at a disadvantage when they are evaluating written output created by AI. If students are using AI in ways that disengage them from their critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Farrokhnia et al.), their ability to engage in deeper learning is impacted.

In addition to disconnecting students from the writing process, using AI for writing tasks also disconnects students from their creative use of language. Students find that AI models lack

a unique style (Schiel et al., 2023) and cannot reflect a student's personality (Schiel et al.). The students in Schiel et al.'s study cite this lack of personalization as a reason some of them avoided using AI to write their college admission essays. AI does not consider the context of the student when generating a response (Beck & Levine, 2024), which has implications for the identity formation that results from language use, as identity is formed from a person's personal and cultural context (Bucholz & Hall, 2004; Edwards, 2009; Gleitman & Papafragou, 2005; Joseph, 2010). AI can lack a deep understanding of vocabulary (J. Gao et al., 2023, as cited in Farrokhnia, et al., 2023). If students depend on AI's lexicon to form their ideas, they miss out on the creative flexibility of language afforded to them when they are in control of their own vocabulary. AI's potential to limit students' creativity (Farrokhnia, et al; Utami & Winarni, 2023 as cited in Song & Song, 2023) is significant because limiting creativity limits students' abilities to use language to form their identities.

The potential limitations of students using AI to write are connected to the areas of learning, particularly language learning, that are essential for students: agency (Beck & Levine, 2024), self-efficacy (Farrokhnia et al., 2023), critical thinking skills (Beck & Levine; Farrokhnia et al.), and creative engagement with language (Beck & Levine). In Beck & Levine's study, students viewed ChatGPT as an "outsider" (p. 5) to their community. These students viewed writing as a way to connect to community (Beck & Levine), which echoes the premise that language is used to construct cultural identity (Joseph, 2010). Beck and Levine highlight the need for teachers in the current AI environment to "help students recognize their agency in writing, and appreciate how their essentially human, experiential contributions cannot be – and should not be – outsourced" (p. 8). Research on the benefits and limitations of AI use in writing reinforces the importance of students remaining at the center of the learning process (Beck & Levine; Song & Song, 2023; Wang et al., 2024), regardless of the role AI takes in the writing process.

Summary

The uniquely human ability to use language is foundational to people's understanding of who they are (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Edwards, 2009; Joseph, 2010). It is through language that culture is both created (Joseph) and transmitted from one generation to another (Gleitman & Papfragou, 2005). Because AI is a tool for creating written output, the area of language learning at highest risk of being impacted by AI is writing. Writing is a learned skill that requires the use of several neural systems (Pedago, 2022). As students build these neural connections, they are able to process language in new ways (van Atteveldt et al., 2004, as cited in Pedago, 2022).

Digital writing tools are not neutral in their impact on the writing environment. Textspeak, a written language that has resulted exclusively from the use of digital tools, has taken on a life of its own and is now considered by some to be its own form, or dialect, of English (Al-Sharqui & Abbasi, 2020; TED, 2013). AI is a much newer technology (OpenAI, 2022), but it has had an immediate impact on education that has caused educators to take a closer look at its benefits and limitations. The literature shows that AI has the potential to provide students with personalized feedback (Beck & Levine, 2024; Farrokhnia et al., 2023; Song & Song, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). It is also able to provide ideas for students, acting as a digital collaborator in the writing process (Beck & Levine; Farrokhnia et al.; Schiel et al., 2023; Song & Song). While there are potential benefits to the use of AI in the English classroom, many of the same authors who explore these benefits also list noteworthy limitations to students' AI use: the potential for overreliance on the AI tool (Song & Song) and the potential of AI to limit students' critical thinking skills (Farrokhnia et al.) and creative use of language (Beck & Levine). In light of these limitations, the applications set forth in the following chapter seek to connect students with the writing process in ways that give them tools to use language to express their own identity and build connections with others.

Chapter Three: Application

The applications for teaching practice presented in this chapter are situated within the context of the British Columbian secondary English classroom. The BC secondary English

curriculum (Province of British Columbia, 2024) is broad in scope. A case in point is the Literary Studies 12 curriculum (Province of British Columbia). In this one-semester course, students are asked to be able to comprehend, create, analyze, and respond to a range of text types, including “written, oral, visual, and multimodal texts” (Province of British Columbia). They also need to be familiar with the writing process, writing conventions, literary devices, and citation conventions (Province of British Columbia). Because BC high school English classes are so multi-faceted, teachers need to be clear about which learning outcomes they are aiming for in each lesson. The presence of AI in the writing environment means that teachers need to give extra attention to how the tools they are using move students towards or away from the intended learning target.

In the first months after the launch of ChatGPT in November of 2022 (OpenAI, 2022), my English colleagues and I were focused on how to identify and mitigate the ways in which students were using the platform to cheat on written assignments. As the 2022/2023 school year progressed and we became adept at ‘hearing’ ChatGPT’s narrative voice, our focus shifted, and we began asking how we were going to continue to build students’ written language skills even as AI tools became more commonplace. For my English department, this meant a return to learning activities that had been somewhat sidelined in the drive to equip students with digital literacy skills: journal-writing, vocabulary-building, oral recitation, collaborative editing exercises, and in-class writing assignments have now re-established footholds at my school.

The learning activities my colleagues and I began integrating into our classes focused on two ideas: creating an atmosphere of language learning and building students’ writing skills. While our approach may have felt novel to us, it mirrors what other teachers and researchers have learned about creating a classroom environment that fosters the development of students’ writing abilities (Aikens, 2023; Graham, 2018; Cardamone, 2024). In the current discourse around the impact of AI on writing instruction, there is discussion about how best to harness AI when teaching students to write (Cardamone, 2024; Furze, 2023; Song & Song, 2023). The

topic of AI integration into the English classroom, while relevant to discussions about AI's impact on English education, is outside the scope of this paper. The suggestions for classroom practice presented in this chapter are given with the understanding that teachers are also considering the role AI will play in helping students reach the learning outcomes of their particular English course. Because AI can cause issues with students' ability to express themselves in writing (Farrokhnia et al., 2023), the applications explored in this chapter focus on the two themes my colleagues and I have focused on in our teaching practice: how to create a classroom atmosphere that encourages writing and how to build individual students' writing skills.

Developing a Positive Atmosphere for Writing

Strengthening language connections for students includes strengthening students' connections to one another. Dewey (1929/2017) emphasizes that education is a social process and that education is inextricably linked to community. Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective connects language development to a person's participation in social interactions (McLeod, 2024). These perspectives, together with Joseph's (2010) assertion that language is a vehicle through which cultural bonds are created, provide a base for building learning activities that help students develop their written language skills in ways that also strengthen their ability to build relationships. The ability of a class of students to create meaning together is a powerful learning tool that is difficult for AI to replicate.

Shared Relationships

Graham's (2018) model for writing instruction, called the "writer(s)-within-community model" (p. 258), proposes that the development of a student's writing ability happens as a consequence of that student's participation in the writing community. The capabilities of the writing community depend on the relationships within it (Graham), so building relationships between students is essential. Liljedahl (2021) and Myhill et al. (2023) note that students need opportunities to learn together without the teacher jumping in to give answers or solve problems for them. This requires a teaching approach that makes space for students to regularly engage

in learning together. This can be as simple as giving students time to discuss texts (Warren, 2023) before writing about them, or as complex as a whole-class reading of a play. These types of student-to-student learning opportunities provide students with space to grow their relationships with each other, which then helps them develop the necessary shared practices (Graham) for a writing community to function. Regardless of the activity, building a class community centered on language learning includes a teacher intentionally providing the scaffolding necessary for students to strengthen their bonds with one another.

Shared Practices

Shared practices and routines are another hallmark of the writing communities described by Graham (2018). Having the teacher as a fellow learner in these practices is one way to show students that language learning is not limited to them (Aikens, 2023; Myhill et al., 2023; Schrodtt et al., 2022), but is a lifelong pursuit (Graham, 2019). Writing routines that all community members participate in provide a way for classes to build a shared history and identity (Graham). In my classes, my students and I write in journals each Friday, with the goal to write for ten uninterrupted minutes. This routine builds the culture of our writing community: everyone writes at the same time, regardless of their ability. It also builds each student's capacity to write for sustained periods of time, as students begin at their current skill level and increase their ability to write for longer. I also work to develop a culture in which students feel free to share their writing. Students share their journal entries in small groups, but the most engaging part of journal-writing is when students are encouraged (with a small prize) to share their writing with the class from a lectern in my room called 'The Podium of Power.' Even self-proclaimed shy students seem to find their way to the podium at some point in the semester. Shared practices can be integrated in other ways in the high school English class. A practice I have found helpful when teaching grammar and punctuation comes from Liljedahl's (2021) method for creating "thinking classrooms" (p. 2). In Liljedahl's method, which is focused on math instruction, students work in groups of three at whiteboards around the room to solve problems. When my

students are learning grammar or punctuation, they solve problems and create sample sentences together on whiteboard spaces around the room. The process itself has its own routine: the class and I decide beforehand on a ‘magic’ word or phrase that must appear in everyone’s work. Once everyone is done, we physically ‘tour’ all the work to see how groups solved the problem and where corrections need to be made. Warren (2023) suggests that writing is improved when students are engaged in dialogue, taught about grammar and syntax, and given feedback on their work. Using Liljedahl’s method creates a community-oriented way to engage in this type of language learning. Shared routines give students a visible reminder that everyone is working on their writing skills.

Shared Writing

A defining feature of a writing community is that the writing in it contains a collaborative element (Aikens, 2023; Graham, 2018; Cardamone, 2024; Myhill et al., 2023). Aikens and Cardamone point to the richness of human interaction and collaboration as a reason why it is important for students to have writing experiences that are not mediated by AI. Creating an environment of revision (Aikens), where students learn to give and receive feedback, opens opportunities for students to build one another’s skills. This also helps students see writing as “iterative and recursive” (Aikens). This changed focus on writing instruction will be a part of my teaching practice moving forward, as I have always thought of the writing process as important because of its ability to help students get to a final written product. Moving to more collaborative, process-focused writing instruction would mean reducing the number of finished writing assignments students hand in overall. The benefit of this approach is that my students would spend more time together in the aspects of writing that facilitate deeper learning, which are the critical thinking and metacognitive aspects contained within the writing process itself (Del Longo & Cisotto, 2014; Mateos et al., 2014). A collaborative writing community encourages groups of students to strive for deeper learning in their writing process.

Developing the Individual Writer’s Identity

The introduction of AI has not diminished the need for students to know how to write. As shown in the literature review, the ability to write language is a uniquely human skill (Pedago, 2022). It is the result of different neural systems working together to create new connections that allow people to deepen their understanding of language (Pedago, 2022). People use language to form and express their identities (Edwards, 2009), and language allows people to connect with others and form communities (Edwards). Teaching students to write is an act that physically changes their brain structure to allow them to use language in transformative ways that help foster deep connections to the world around them. Writing instruction that is focused on the student's development, as opposed to the final written product, will be focused on finding the most effective ways to build these strong neural connections.

Teaching writing to high school students presents its own set of challenges. Aside from the wide variety in the types of texts students are asked to write, there is also the issue of students' willingness to engage in the writing process. This can partly be attributed to the sometimes disinterested nature of high school students in general, but Graham (2018) suggests that writers in a community are also influenced by a variety of other factors, from their physiological state to their beliefs about writing. Myhill et al. (2023) write that the motivation to write decreases for students as they move through school. Myhill et al. suggest that this decrease in motivation is due in part to an increase in the number of restrictions teachers put on writing assignments – writing tasks can become more prescriptive as students progress to the older grades and are asked to learn more formal academic texts. It is easy to see how this creates ideal conditions for students to turn to AI to complete writing tasks. When looking at non-AI mediated ways to teach writing, teachers must look for ways to reconnect students to their own ability to use written language to shape and transform ideas.

Setting up Authentic Writing Tasks

In order for students to become good writers – the kinds of writers who are able to use language to make strong connections to the world around them – they need to be actively

engaged in developing their own writing skills. To foster this engagement, teachers must be intentional about the writing tasks they assign, as their choice can either encourage or discourage a student's motivation to write (Myhill et al., 2023). Warner (2024) suggests that in order to foster engagement in the writing process, students should not be given writing tasks that can be replicated by AI. In the high school English classroom, this means de-emphasizing the standard academic essay (Aikens, 2023; Beck & Levine, 2023), which is easily handled by AI, and bringing to the forefront writing tasks that are more meaningful for students. My colleagues and I are in the midst of this shift. In my school, the comparative literary essay has always represented the apex of a semester's writing instruction for senior students, and I am accustomed to using it to assess students' abilities to analyze and synthesize texts, integrate quotes to provide support for ideas, and follow conventions for constructing a comparative argument. Warner's (2024) argument challenges my assumptions about the status of the literary essay, but it has become obvious that the ground under the academic essay has shifted. Since the arrival of ChatGPT, when I look for evidence of these skills in students' essays, I am increasingly finding AI-generated text. In order for students to be able to demonstrate their authentic ability to perform higher-level thinking skills and construct a coherent, organized text, I need to change my approach.

The importance of giving students authentic writing tasks is a strong recurring theme in articles about how to help students become better writers (Aikens, 2023; Beck & Levine, 2024; Farrokhnia et al., 2023; Graham, 2019; Myhill et al., 2023; Rosenzweig, 2023; Warner, 2024). Myhill et al. emphasize that writing is "fundamentally about meaning-making" (p. 3). For students to use writing as a vehicle for identity formation, they need to write about topics that are personal and relevant to them (Aikens) and are connected to real life (Farrokhnia; Graham). The goal is to help students view themselves as having agency in the writing process (Beck & Levine). If students can come to see their writing as an authentic expression of their ideas, there is more of a chance they will hesitate to outsource those ideas to AI (Beck & Levine;

Rosenzweig). The more engaged students are in their writing process, the more likely their writing ability will improve, even on more prescriptive tasks (Schrodt et al., 2022). If teaching students to write in more authentic, meaningful ways has a positive effect on their self-efficacy as writers, it opens up possibilities for students to use language in transformative ways to express their personal and cultural identities.

Valuing the Process

The deep learning that occurs when students write happens in the writing process (Graham, 2018; Mateos et al., 2014). In my classes, students often balk at the idea of taking time to plan, draft, and revise their writing – it seems like extra work. This attitude reveals that for my students, writing is often about the product I am asking them to produce and not the learning that happens in the process. When writing is viewed through this lens, it is no wonder students choose to get to the end product as quickly as possible, either by jumping straight to a final draft or by using AI to produce the final product. The writing process helps develop students' identities as writers (Aikens, 2023). The process of writing is what Rosenzweig (2024) calls “productive friction.” It takes work, but it is productive in the sense that it teaches students to apply strategies in order to refine their thoughts (Rosenzweig). Because high school students are still developing their identities as writers, they may require the teacher to provide scaffolding while they work through the writing process (Aikens). A part of this scaffolding could include breaking down a complex writing task and asking students to show their understanding in the component parts before they create a final draft.

Aikens (2023) suggests that teachers should explicitly teach the benefits of writing to their students. As I shift my focus in my teaching practice from the written output to the writing process, it will be important for me to teach my students about the brain development they are experiencing as they write (Pedago, 2022), as well as the increases in their critical thinking and metacognitive skills that come when they think about their own writing process (Del Longo & Cisotto, 2014; Mateos et al., 2014). I will also need to place more value on the learning that

happens inside the writing process (Warner, 2022), which means taking more time for student self-reflection. Having students reflect on the ways they have engaged with drafting, editing, and revising is one way teachers can assess students' engagement with the process of writing, as opposed to placing the value of the writing solely on the finished product. Short-circuiting the writing process may seem easier for students in the short term, but it slows down the development of deep language connections, which are important for students as they express themselves in writing.

Developing the Writer's Voice

The practices I have focused on thus far, from building a writing community to choosing authentic writing tasks, serve to create a foundation for the individual student to grow in their ability to use written language as a medium to share ideas. Writing is not a purely utilitarian exercise. People write for a variety of purposes: creative, communicative, and reflective (Graham, 2019). To use AI to produce these types of writing misses the point of how language shapes identity and builds relationships. The goal of non-AI mediated writing in the classroom is to grow a student's "linguistic repertoire" (Edwards, 2009, p. 30) so they can develop deep connections to language and, as a result, deep connections to their own personal and cultural identity. This is the most important reason to have students engage in AI-free writing practices.

Students' words should matter to them (Rosenzweig, 2024). Their vocabulary gives them a particular way of seeing their world (Boroditsky, 2011). Aikens (2023) suggests that when students use AI, it "contributes to a loss of language diversity" because students do not always evaluate the vocabulary they are offered by AI. In my experience, vocabulary development plays a minor role in high school English classes. Students learn literary terms, and they may be given vocabulary lists from texts they are reading, but these lists are not student generated. Decontextualized words such as these are difficult to integrate into everyday use (McKeown, 2019, as cited in Copper, 2023). Aikens recommends that students be given opportunities to explore language in ways that are connected to their context. This is an echo of

Ashton-Warner's (1963) idea of the Key Vocabulary, where students develop a vocabulary list directly related to their lived experiences. In order for students to develop their vocabulary, they need practice integrating new words into their writing. Copper recommends a method that has students create a personal glossary of unfamiliar words from texts they read. Students work to create operational definitions from the context of the word in the text, then move outward to using the word to make meaning in their own contexts. Copper also explores a vocabulary-building method where students describe their vocabulary words to one another in small-group settings. This method marries language and community, as it connects the individual student to new vocabulary and then to the wider writing community. It allows students to teach one another new ways of perceiving the world (Boroditsky). Outsourcing the production of written text to AI does not build students' identities in this way.

Improving a student's writing ability means encouraging the development of the student's writing voice. It is a student's particular way of writing that allows their personalities and perspectives to come through in writing tasks. Rosenzweig (2023) points out that although AI can generate words, it cannot generate a student's words. AI can create output that is novel, in the sense that it has never existed before, but it does not create anything new, as it is restricted to predicting probable connections based on language and ideas that already exist (OpenAI, n.d.). New ideas, new words, and new ways of using language belong first to humans. When students keep their agency in the writing process (Beck & Levine, 2024), they can write words into existence, as Shakespeare did with *dwindle* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023) and *dauntless* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024). When students are at the center of their writing process, they can break conventions in novel ways, as E.E Cummings (1952) does in his famous poem, "i carry your heart with me:"

i carry your heart with me(i carry it in
my heart)i am never without it(anywhere
i go you go,my dear;and whatever is done

by only me is your doing, my darling) (1-4)

Bucholtz and Hall (2004) highlight that language is a “flexible and pervasive” (p. 369) tool for identity formation. As students take ownership of their written voice (Aikens, 2023), they become a part of the ways in which language develops over time (Pedago, 2022).

In the classroom setting, students develop their written voice through practice. Graham (2019) emphasizes the importance of time in the development of writing skills, which means that if a teacher is aiming to develop a student’s identity as a writer, the student needs to be writing regularly. When students demonstrate creative uses of language, the examples should be shared and celebrated. Luther (2022) offers the example of a “Beautiful Language Wall” in his classroom as a way to celebrate particularly noteworthy student writing. In my classroom, I have a ‘Wall of Haiku’ that showcases the best haiku poetry produced by my students over the years. Students work hard each year to get their poems on the wall, and when they find themselves in my room in the years after having my class, they go straight to that wall to find their poem, often showing it off to their friends with pride. Highlighting how students are using their writer’s voice in creative ways allows students to see that their writer’s voice matters. The hope is that as students participate in non-AI writing tasks, they will come to value their own writing voice and its ability to express who they are.

Summary

The practices suggested in this chapter have sought to strengthen the human connection to language as a way of building students’ writing skills. Classroom practices that support identity formation through strong connections to language focus on process, creativity, and community. These practices also present solutions to the key limitations of the use of AI in the language learning process because they increase students’ agency, self-efficacy, critical thinking skills, and creative engagement with language. The English classroom provides an environment where students’ individual identities can be formed inside of a writing community. In it, individuals work to use language in new ways, and students explore ideas together,

thereby encouraging language learning in one another. The goal for me and my colleagues is to keep the power of language with the student, as opposed to outsourcing it to AI technology (Rosenzweig, 2023; Beck & Levine, 2024). Preserving students' roles as agents in their writing processes (Beck & Levine) fosters their ability to use language as a tool for identity formation. Written language is a powerful tool for making meaning (Beck & Levine), and it is only humans who have the capacity to use it (Pedago, 2022). As my colleagues and I seek to develop students' individual writing identities, we aim to show students that "their essentially human, experiential contributions cannot be – and should not be – outsourced" (Beck & Levine, 2024, p. 8). They can use language in new ways to express their ideas, as humans have been doing for thousands of years. Regardless of the ways students come to incorporate AI into their academic and personal lives, their own ability to use language will play a key role in the construction of their personal and cultural identities.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

I have argued that in light of the increasing influence of AI in education, it remains important to foster strong, non-AI mediated connections to language, particularly written language, in English Language Arts. Written language is more than the sum of its mechanical parts. Language is a uniquely human vehicle for the formation of culture and personal identity (Joseph, 2010). AI has the potential to change students' relationship to language because it can produce written content with little language processing on the part of the student. The content is mechanically accurate, but without the human agency that turns writing into an act of meaning-making (Myhill et al., 2023), AI is restricted to creating detailed shadows of human thought. When choosing whether to use AI as a part of writing instruction, teachers need to remain mindful of their end goal and the potential impact AI can have on their instructional practice.

Connections between Literature and Application

It is difficult to overstate the role language plays in identity formation. Language affects how individuals perceive the world (Boroditsky, 2011; TED 2018). People express who they are

through language (Edwards, 2009; Fuller, 2007), and culture is created and maintained through the use of language (Joseph, 2010). The centrality of language to a culture's understanding of itself can be seen in the focus on language revitalization in Canada's Indigenous communities (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015; Government of Canada, 2019). The Indigenous understanding of language as culture (Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005) is a reminder that language is entwined with human existence in a fundamental way.

The BC Language Arts curriculum (Province of British Columbia, 2024) recognizes the important role language plays in identity formation with the inclusion of learning objectives for students to “explore how language constructs personal and cultural identities” (Province of British Columbia). As English teachers consider how they are going to cultivate students' writing abilities, they need to be aware of the potential for AI to dehumanize the act of writing. Digital tools are not neutral agents in the writing process, as my literature review on texting and text-speak shows (Al-Sharqi & Abbasi, 2020; Cingel & Sundar, 2012; Cladis, 2018; Turner, 2009; Turner et al., 2014). In the case of texting, the digital tool created a way of communicating that is now considered by some to be its own dialect of English (Al-Sharqi & Abbasi; TED, 2013). The change in language brought on by texting is visible because of the length of time texting has been present in the digital environment. The change brought on by AI is harder to see because the tools have been in common use for only two years (OpenAI, 2022). It is therefore up to teachers to look beyond the capabilities of AI to the potential impacts it might have on student learning.

When a student writes, it is more than just an act of recording thought. The neurological complexity of writing (Pedago, 2022) requires the use of separate systems in the brain, and as students learn to write, they are deepening their ability to understand language in a way that only humans can (Pedago). If students give the task of writing to AI, they miss out on opportunities to strengthen these neural connections. The literature review has demonstrated that AI has the capacity to limit students' self-efficacy (Farrokhnia et al., 2023), critical thinking

skills (Beck & Levine, 2024; Farrokhnia), and creative engagement with language (Beck & Levine). These are serious limitations, especially considering the focus on these skills at the secondary English level (Province of British Columbia, 2024).

To mitigate the limitations of language learning created by AI, English teachers need to focus on writing instruction that values the writing community, the writing process, and the individual writer's identity. Keeping relationships at the center of the writing process amplifies the human aspect of language learning. A classroom writing community of shared relationships and shared practices (Graham, 2018; Myhill, 2023) offers students the opportunity to engage in the writing process in ways that build their relationships with others. In order for students to be engaged in the writing process, they need to write on topics that are meaningful to them (Aikens, 2023; Beck & Levine, 2024; Farrokhnia et al., 2023; Graham, 2019; Myhill et al., 2023; Rosenweig, 2023; Warner, 2024). Students need time to write (Graham), which means teachers need to value the steps of the writing process as much as the final written product. Taking time with the writing process provides the "productive friction" (Rosenzweig 2024) needed for students to develop their own writing voice. As Rosenzweig (2023) points out, AI can generate words, but it cannot generate a student's words. An individual writer's voice reflects their personality and way of seeing the world, so it is important for students to keep their agency as writers (Beck & Levine, 2024). When students use language in their own ways for their own purposes, they are treating language like the "flexible and pervasive tool" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 369) that it is: able to change to suit the individual's ideas and capable of expressing the complete range of human thought. It is in these human-connected ways that language becomes a powerful tool for identity formation.

Theoretical Implications

Adding to the Discourse on AI in the English Classroom

The success of my paper rests in how it has added to the greater conversation about the use of AI in the English classroom. I have focused on the way AI impacts the ability of students

to form their personal and cultural identities. In this exploration I have, as McLuhan (1964/1994) suggests, examined the inherent message of the medium of AI as it pertains to language learning in the secondary English classroom. This differs from much of the current conversation about AI and education, which tends to focus on the uses of the tools and how these uses provide benefits or limitations to the learning environment. The message of AI, which some might call its promise, is that people can offload their fundamentally human prowess with language to a technology that can communicate on their behalf. The issue is, of course, that this digital ghostwriter (Hsiao et al, 2023) has no connection to the user, but only to the mathematical relationships of one word to another in its vast lexicon, which is itself limited to the data sets on which it has been trained (OpenAI, n.d.). I have pushed back against this message by showing how humanity's ability to use language is indispensable to how students form their identities and build and maintain their cultural communities. My paper calls on teachers to keep the development of students' abilities at the center of writing instruction, which means keeping the underlying message of AI in mind as they plan their instructional approach.

Adding to the Discourse on Language Learning

This paper adds to a broader conversation about the ways English teachers engage students in language learning. Fundamentally, how teachers engage their students is based in the philosophies of education that guide teachers' practice. My paper reflects Dewey's understanding of the centrality of community in education (Gutek, 2011). According to Dewey (1929/2017), learning is a social process. Because language is so important to cultural formation, I centered the practical applications within a classroom writing community so that students can build their written language skills as they also build relationships with their classmates and their teacher. These applications also reflect Noddings' (2005) perspectives on caring for others and caring for ideas because they value the process of idea formation in both the individual student and the classroom community as a whole. Research shows that identity formation is a discursive process (Fuller, 2007). Cultural formation happens from within a

culture, with other members of that group (Edwards, 2009). All of this identity formation is done through the conduit of language (Joseph, 2010). This should give English teachers pause before they entrust a student's language development to AI.

Final Thoughts

I have discovered in writing this paper that the topic of AI use in education rarely elicits a neutral response. While there are educators who view AI as I do, there are many others who have willingly countered my claims, offering up AI's ability to act as editor or collaborator (Farrokhnia et al., 2023) as proof of why AI should play a role in language instruction. AI can indeed do these things, and will likely improve in its ability to do them, but it will do them without fostering human connection. While this may be a worthwhile trade, it will be up to educators to evaluate its effectiveness. The enthusiasm with which my colleagues and I are discussing the use of AI in the classroom is an indicator that we understand the seismic impact this technology is having in education. My paper is a reminder that educators need to continue to think critically about the integration of AI in the learning environment.

The learning I have done while writing this paper has changed my perspective on what constitutes effective writing instruction in secondary English. While I have valued the writing process in the past, it has only been as a way to get to a final product. Understanding the deep learning that occurs when a student is engaged in the writing process has encouraged me to rethink my approach so that the process of writing comes to the forefront. Focusing less on the finished academic essay opens up opportunities for me to engage students in writing tasks that are more meaningful to them, which in turn has the potential to increase their motivation to spend time in the writing process. I look forward to seeing how the change in my teaching practice will impact my students' ability to write.

This paper has shown that the way forward in an increasingly AI-saturated learning environment includes a look back to practices that value the centrality of writing in the English classroom setting and the value of writing to a student's overall development. In the past year, it

is these practices that my colleagues and I have turned to as a way to reconnect students with the power of written language. Regardless of which learning activities teachers settle on in their practice, this paper calls for teachers to approach writing instruction with an intentionality that respects the role language plays in the human experience and the role it plays in their students' personal and cultural identity formation. The hope is that as students are empowered to use language in new ways, they will come to understand that language, centered as it is in their human existence, is unparalleled in its ability to help them understand their own identity and their place in the world.

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