ABSTRACT

CHRISTIANSON, CHRISTINE JEANETTE. Adolescent Authors: A Case Study of One Urban High School English Teacher’s Memoir-Writing and Publishing Curriculum. (Under the direction of Drs. Angela Wiseman and Ruie Pritchard).

The purpose of this study was to investigate how a writing instructor makes personal writing a regular part of the curriculum and navigates occurrences of student self-disclosure. Rose, the purposefully selected participant in this study, taught experience-based writing using a studio workshop approach in her ninth grade English Language arts classes at a urban magnet school for the arts. Rose’s students consisted of economically and racially diverse adolescents, many of whom elected to publish their personal stories (“memoirs”) in digital and hard copy formats. Case study methodology and the method of qualitative content analysis guided the examination of a corpus of texts and interview transcripts. Cultural Historical Activity Theory provided a lens with which to conceptualize the codes, which were collapsed into four themes. The first theme focuses on how the teacher’s educational philosophy guided her instructional practices for acknowledging students’ funds of knowledge. The second theme focuses on the teacher’s use of writing processes and transferrable strategies instruction. The third theme explains the teacher’s support structure for anticipating and navigating the occurrence of sensitive topics in students’ memoirs. The final theme focuses on the topics that students elected to write and share in public media. The findings from this study validate existing research on expressive pedagogical practices and effective writing strategies such as the writing process approach and strategies instruction. The findings also highlight the importance of support systems both in and outside the classroom when teachers encourage students to make connections between home and school in their writing.
Adolescent Authors: A Case Study of One Urban High School English Teacher’s Memoir-Writing and Publishing Curriculum

by
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DEDICATION

To Nathan, Shanna, and Sierra. Your love, support, and encouragement mean everything to me.

To Scott and Charles P. Here’s looking at you, kid.

d. 05/01/2004 & d. 02/26/2014
BIOGRAPHY

Christine was born in southwestern Virginia to hardworking parents who raised her and her five sisters to be independent, strong women. A first generation college student, Christine attended Wytheville Community College then transferred to Radford University where she received her bachelor’s degree in English with secondary teaching endorsement. During her 10 years as a high school English teacher, she earned her master’s in English from Radford University. After working as an educator in New Zealand for two years, Christine returned to the United States to pursue her dream of becoming a teacher-educator. Her research interests include written expression, trauma studies, the integration of writing and technology, formative assessment, and teacher education.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I announced to my husband, Nathan Anderson, that I thought I would enroll in a PhD program, he said, “That’s quite an undertaking.” I’ve since decided that was the understatement of the decade. It has proven to be a challenging journey, and I have reached the goal because of his love and support. To Nathan, I express my sincere gratitude and unwavering love. Throughout this process, you encouraged me, told jokes to me, listened to me when I needed to vent, sat with me on the porch swing, and walked with me to see the butterflies. Now, let’s get our feet back on the dance floor, the boats back on the water, and the bikes back on the trail. And there will be music. Lots of music.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................... xi
LIST OF FIGURES ......................................................................................................... xii

CHAPTER 1:  INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................... 1
  Background .................................................................................................................. 1
  Statement of the Problem ............................................................................................ 4
  Purpose and Research Questions ................................................................................. 13
  Significance of the Study ............................................................................................. 14
  Definition of Terms ...................................................................................................... 15

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .................................................................. 17
  Introduction to the Chapter .......................................................................................... 17
  Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................... 17
    Three Generations of CHAT ....................................................................................... 19
    Applications of CHAT ............................................................................................... 24
    CHAT in Teacher Education and Pedagogical Practice Research ......................... 25
    CHAT and Written Communication Research ....................................................... 30
    Historical Context of Expressive Writing Research ................................................ 38
  The Current State of Expressive Writing Research .................................................. 59
    Sensitive Topics ........................................................................................................ 60
    A Neglected Aspect of ELA Teacher Education ...................................................... 64

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY ......................................................................................... 69
  Research Design and Method ...................................................................................... 70
    Case Study ................................................................................................................ 71
    Content Analysis ....................................................................................................... 73
  Case Selection and Purposive Sampling ..................................................................... 80
    The School Context ................................................................................................... 82
    The Teacher ............................................................................................................... 82
    The Curriculum ......................................................................................................... 85
  Data Collection ........................................................................................................... 86
    Artifacts .................................................................................................................... 86
    Interviews ................................................................................................................. 90
  Data Analysis .............................................................................................................. 90
    Developing a Coding Frame and Conducting the Analysis ....................................... 91
    Phase 1: Creating the Coding Frame ....................................................................... 93
    Phase 2: Conducting the Main Analysis .................................................................... 103
  Trustworthiness ......................................................................................................... 104
    Credibility ............................................................................................................... 104
    Transferability ......................................................................................................... 106
    Dependability .......................................................................................................... 106
    Confirmability ......................................................................................................... 106
  Ethical Assurances ...................................................................................................... 107
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>Chapter Summary .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111</td>
<td>CHAPTER 4: Findings.......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114</td>
<td>Research Question 1: How does one high school English teacher describe her instructional practices for teaching a memoir-writing curriculum based on the personal experiences of ninth grade students? .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>134</td>
<td>Research Question 2: How does one high school ELA teacher navigate the occurrence of sensitive topics in students’ written work in a memoir-writing curriculum during her first three years as a classroom teacher? .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>Research Question 3: What Themes Emerged in These Ninth Grade ELA Students’ Published Memoirs? .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>162</td>
<td>Chapter Summary .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>164</td>
<td>CHAPTER 5: Conclusion .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>164</td>
<td>Introduction to the Chapter .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>165</td>
<td>Summary of Methodology .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>166</td>
<td>Summary of Findings .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>166</td>
<td>Theme 1: The Teacher’s Instructional Practice Evolved .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>166</td>
<td>Theme 2: The Teacher’s Instructional Practices Blended Expository and Expressivist Writing Pedagogies .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>166</td>
<td>Theme 3: The Teacher Intentionally Implemented Diverse and Supportive Approaches to Teaching Writing .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>167</td>
<td>Theme 4: Memoir Volumes Contained Increasingly Diverse Themes .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168</td>
<td>Discussion .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>171</td>
<td>Connecting Findings to Previous Research .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>173</td>
<td>Written Communication Research .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>173</td>
<td>Expressivist Pedagogical Practices .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>176</td>
<td>Lack of Preparation for Sensitive Topics in ELA Teacher Education .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>178</td>
<td>Implications for Policy .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>179</td>
<td>Implications for Practice .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>181</td>
<td>Implications for Research .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>182</td>
<td>Concluding Thoughts .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>184</td>
<td>REFERENCES .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>213</td>
<td>APPENDICES .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>214</td>
<td>Appendix A .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>215</td>
<td>Appendix B .......................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>216</td>
<td>Appendix C .......................................................</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Development of three generations of Activity Theory (Engeström, 1996) ............ 23
Table 3.1 Memoir lesson plan postings and embedded supporting materials by academic year. ......................................................................................................................................................... 89
Table 3.2 Overview of the steps used in conducting a content analysis in two phases. ....... 92
Table 3.3 Example from initial coding frame used to determine relevant and irrelevant data. ........................................................................................................................................................................ 94
Table 3.4 Segmentation and nodes within books of memoirs. .............................................. 103
Table 4.1 Complexity and number of writing revision tasks Rose implemented by year. .... 125
Table 4.2 Rose’s development as a writing instructor during the memoir unit by academic year. ......................................................................................................................................................... 126
Table 4.3 Number of opportunities for in-class writing revision and feedback by year. ..... 131
Table 4.4 Support systems established inside and outside of Rose’s ELA classroom by year. ........................................................................................................................................................................ 135
Table 4.5 Students who participated in publishing their memoir by year. ......................... 142
Table 4.6 Themes represented within each volume of memoirs. ........................................... 150
Table 4.7 Percentage of themes containing chapters that are potentially sensitive or deeply personal........................................................................................................................................................................ 160
LIST OF FIGURES

*Figure 2.1* Vygotsky’s mediated action triangle (Engeström, 2001).......................... 20
*Figure 2.2* Expanded triangular representation of human activity (Engeström, 1993). ....... 21
*Figure 2.3* Triangular representation of activity systems analysis (Engeström, 1996, 2001). 22
*Figure 2.4* Second generation CHAT model based on the current study ...................... 36
*Figure 3.1* Single-case embedded design. ...................................................................... 72
*Figure 4.1* The activity system of the current study and the predominant analytical components represented in the findings.......................................................... 113
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Our sense of the normative is nourished in narrative, but so is our sense of breach and of exception. Stories make ‘reality’ a mitigated reality” (Bruner, 1993, p. 97).

Background

The teaching of writing is an integral yet challenging component of English language arts (ELA) curricula. Middle and high school ELA teachers are tasked with instructing students in the development of communication skills and knowledge for a variety of purposes, modes, and audiences in conjunction with literature and language studies, among other major components of ELA curricula (Dawson, 2013). Given that the broad goal of writing instruction is rhetorical in nature and that effective instruction emphasizes a recursive process, literacy scholars continue to weigh in on best approaches to, and influences on, writing instruction (Applebee & Langer, 2009, 2011, 2013; Graham & Perrin, 2007; Hillocks, 1986). Relevant to the present study is considerable disagreement on what type of writing students should engage in school (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Dawson, 2013).

High school language arts courses emphasize writing instruction that includes a range of modes that can inform and enrich adolescents’ lives as well as prepare them for careers and college. The modes of writing commonly taught include exposition, description, narration, and argumentation. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association [NGA] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CSSO], 2010) for ELA advocates a similar set of writing modes: narration, exposition, explanation, and argumentation. Within these basic modes exist a variety of writing subtypes (e.g., classification, persuasion, cause-effect, poetry, reflective, expressive), and ELA instructors
typically have the option to select what type and how much writing their students will undertake. The National Study of Writing Instruction (NSWI; Applebee & Langer, 2013), a large scale study of writing and writing instruction in middle and high schools that have local reputations for excellence in writing instruction, found that English teachers in the United States ranked personal writing as one of the top five types of writing important to their curricula. In other large-scale studies, the creative modes (poetry, expressive writing, fictional narratives) also took the top spots as ELA teachers’ most important writing tasks (ACT National Curriculum Survey, 2012; Addison & McGee, 2010).

In ELA classrooms, the study of literature and different genres of writing readily lends itself to making personal connections. Secondary English teachers teach several types of expressive writing that can tap into students’ personal experiences and emotions, such as journaling, poetry, and autobiography. For example, during reading, journal writing can be used as a thinking tool for students by making connections with literature to their own lives (Bonissone, Rougle, Langer, & NRCELA, 1998) or as a means to process emotions about personal incidents (Wissman & Wiseman, 2012). Poetry can provide adolescents with a way to engage in self-expression and identity exploration (Oates, 2001; Wiseman, 2007, 2009; Wiseman & Wissman, 2012; Wissman & Wiseman, 2011). Autobiographical writing, such as memoir, offers adolescents an opportunity to engage in literacy practices while also affording opportunities to describe their lives and their thoughts about their experiences. Researchers have found that pairing the reading of memoirs with memoir writing worked well in educational settings (K. Bomer, 2005; Kirby & Kirby, 2007, 2010). Research has also shown that the study of memoir has helped learners to understand broader social and political
realities (K. Bomer, 2005; Guillory, 2012; Miller, 2005); to engage in identity exploration (R. Bomer, 1995; McCarthey, 2001; Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, & Collazo, 2004; Moje & MuQaribu, 2003; Street, 2009; Tatum & Gue, 2010, 2012); and to draw upon out-of-school experiences in order to engage with school-based literacy practices (Singer & Shagoury, 2005; Skerrett & Bomer, 2013). When reading and writing curricula have a connection to students’ lives, students’ personal experiences become a shaping force in making literacy learning more meaningful (Prentiss, 1995).

Life writing scholars Smith and Watson (2010) asked, “What could be simpler to understand than the act of people representing what they know best, their own lives?” (p. 1). Many scholars agree that making personal connections between home and school is important (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Moje, 2000; Moll & Diaz, 1987; Smagorinsky, 1997), yet for decades a debate has persisted around the legitimacy and the ethics of assigning expressive writing (c.f., Bartholomae, 1995; Berlín, 1982, 1988; Elbow, 1995; Failgley, 1986, 1992; Hood, 2005). When youth share their perspectives on, and experiences with, their difficult lived experiences, this calls to question what is appropriate for sharing in academic spaces (Dutro, 2008, 2009, 2010; Dutro & Zenko, 2008; Jones, 2004, 2012; Wissman & Wiseman, 2011), thus problematizing the teaching of expressive writing (Wissman & Wiseman, 2012). However, studies show that whether or not ELA teachers explicitly call for students to draw upon personal experiences, some students inevitably volunteer their personal stories (Dutro, 2008, 2009, 2011; MacCurdy, 2007). Research is needed to understand issues specific to ways in which teachers foster connections between home and school through expressive writing as well as how they cope with and respond to students’ personal written stories.
Statement of the Problem

Elbow (1973) uses the terms personal and expressive writing in reference to an autobiographical approach that students may take in response to written assignments. Such personal writing typically takes the form of a narrative in which the writer describes a moment of personal insight or reflection regarding a significant experience or relationship. Derived from a variety of sources, expressive writing’s theoretical center is underpinned by the expressive function in Britton (1970) and colleagues’ (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975) developmental taxonomy (i.e., transactional, poetic, and expressive functions). Expressive writing opened the doorway to different approaches to writing instruction that sanction writing for the self and not just for the traditional teacher-recipient of transactional or “school writing” (Britton et al., 1975, p. 178). Applebee (1981, 1984) adapted Britton’s taxonomy but renamed the categories as informational, personal, and imaginative; he also refined and extended the system with subcategories to more accurately represent writing in American schools.

Over the last four decades, expressive (i.e., personal) writing has expanded from informal exploration and discovery (Britton, 1970; Britton et al., 1975; Elbow, 1973; 1981; 1991), to writing with a more formal emphasis on personal connections and experiences to curriculum content in the field of composition and rhetoric (e.g., Berman, 2001; Bishop, 1990; Paley, 2001; Spigelman, 2001), to therapeutic purposes in clinical research (e.g., Boals & Klein, 2005; Klien, 2003; Pennebaker, 1989, 1991, 1997; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker & Chung, 2011; Pennebaker & Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988; Pennebaker, Mayne, & Francis, 1997; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). Scholarship on expressive writing in
K-12 settings is less common and not easily identified due to varying names assigned to such writing (e.g., writing-to-learn approach, freewriting, personal narrative, journaling, memoir, creative nonfiction, dialogic notebooks). Expressive writing scholarship in K-12 ranges in scope from observation and analysis of writing workshops in elementary schools (e.g., Jones, 2004; Lensmire, 1994), to the use of dialogue journals in high school science (e.g., Fulwiler, 1987; Malachowski, 1988), to reading-response journals (e.g., Reynolds and Pickett, 1989) and memoir writing in secondary English (e.g., Kirby & Kirby, 2007, 2010). To a lesser extent, experimental expressive writing has been implemented with K-12 populations, commonly in special education (e.g., Walker, Shippen, Alberto, Houchins, & Cihak, 2005) and alternative education programs (e.g., Kliwer, Lepore, Allison, Meyer, Sullivan, Greene, 2011).

A recent and growing interest in personal writing has rekindled ethical issues surrounding expressive writing pedagogy and has reopened discussions about expressive writing in education (e.g., Gilmore, 2001; Kirby & Kirby, 2007; O’Connor, 2011; Smith & Watson, 2010; Spigelman, 2001). Nationally, literary nonfiction, such as memoir, has gained canonical status in secondary and post-secondary institutions (Couzer, 2012). In a 2011 issue of *Horn Book Magazine*, children’s book author Partridge (2011) stated that the strengths of narrative nonfiction are appealing because they feature “all the best techniques of fiction writing: plot, character development, voice, and theme” (p. 69), thus making reading and writing nonfiction more interesting for adolescents. Although “memoir booms” (Couzer, 2012, p. 141) have occurred at various points in the last several decades, never has memoir writing been encouraged among youth to the extent it is in recent years (Couzer, 2012; Kirby
& Kirby, 2007; O’Connor, 2011). This rekindled interested in personal life writing provides an appropriate time to investigate ways secondary ELA teachers incorporate the personal into the writing curriculum and navigate the occurrence of sensitive, personal topics in students’ writing.

Many youth face social instabilities and personal crises, such as poverty, lack of social supports, dysfunctional home environments, homelessness, personal illnesses or other traumatic experiences (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Taylor, 2006). Youth living in inner cities often face those stressors in addition to exposure to violence (Tolan, Guerra, & Montaini-Klovdahl, 1997). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), reported that in 2013, fifty-one percent of school children in the United States lived in low-income households, an increase of thirteen percent since 2000. Students from low-income households tend to have more medical problems or behavioral issues than those from middle-class and affluent families, thus impacting school attendance, participation, and learning (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Children living in poverty may need more academic help than their wealthier peers, and their schools are left to fill in the gaps (NCES, 2013). It stands to reason that given the opportunity, adolescents will share their experiences and perspectives in school, and some of these stories may not align with “mainstream and ‘acceptable’ or ‘appropriate’” classroom topics (Jones, 2012, p. 135).

In The Need for Story: Cultural Diversity in Classrooms and Community (Dyson & Genishi, Eds., 1994), Heath pointed out that since the publication of James Britton’s Language and Learning (1970), young children’s stories have been “described,” “celebrated,” and “praised” (p. 206) in a vast number of books and articles, yet
little glory has come to the stories of young people--defined here as adolescents, teenagers, or young adults. Admittedly, it is and has always been far more romantic to talk of children than those in the awkward transition between childhood and adulthood. But what of the stories told by young people? (p. 206)

Bridging this gap is an important aspect for creating a curriculum that can be permeated by teachers' and children's language and experiences (Dyson, 1993). Such a curriculum can forge connections between teachers and their students through literacy practices that reflect student diversity and “the commonalities of the human spirit” (Dyson, 1993, p. 3). In ELA classrooms, connecting literature with students’ lives provides rich opportunities for youth to craft their own experiences on paper.

Expressive pedagogy, one of several composition pedagogies, assigns highest value to the development of the whole person and is concerned with how that development influences individual consciousness and social behavior (Burnham & Powell, 2014). Expressive pedagogy was derived from “counterapproaches” (Burnham & Powell, 2014, p. 113) to current-traditional pedagogy. Murray (1968, 1980), Macrorie (1970, 1974), Elbow (1968, 1973, 1981, 1991, 1994), and W. E. Coles (1974, 1978) promoted these counterapproaches in nontraditional textbooks that were aimed at writing teachers as well as student-writers. Teachers who engage in expressivist pedagogical practices are open to the use of narrative with the writer’s own experience as its focus, thus encouraging a sense of writer presence in a range of informal to research-based writing.

The benefits of acknowledging personal stories in school settings have been widely documented. Calkins (1994), Dyson and Genishi (1994), Graves (1994), Kirby and Kirby
(2007, 2010), and Moje (2000) are among many educators and scholars who have helped to legitimate “the call of stories” for adolescents, a call that psychologist R. Coles (1989) advocated for adults. According to Calkins (1994), developing a writing community in the classroom helps students to experience countless instances of “that happened to me, too” (p. 30) when sharing personal stories. Writing communities can help to establish the supportive environment that encourages risk-taking and strengthens literacy learning. Dyson and Genishi (1994) observed that youths’ personal stories have the power to shape and reshape their perceptions of everyday experiences of the past and of what they believe is possible in the future. Graves (1994) recommended that teachers write and learn alongside their students, a task that he deemed “the single most powerful thing” (p. 42) teachers can do to help their students learn to write in a writing community. Kirby and Kirby (2007, 2010) and Moje (2000) also recommended the construction of classroom communities where students feel safe to share their stories with each other and the teacher.

Previous studies of expressive writing have shown how reflective and experience-based writing benefits students, although studies of expressive writing with adolescent participants are limited. In an observational and empirical analysis of the writing adolescents students do in school, Britton and colleagues (1975) found that expressive writing provides a mediating role between the roles of participant and spectator. Engaging in expressive writing enhanced adolescents’ ability to think and to learn during the composing process. Prater (1985) examined the mode of discourse on the quality of adolescents’ writing in English classes and found that adolescents’ expressive writing received higher ratings than either their persuasive or expository writing, thus experiential demand appeared to be a significant
predictor of writing quality. Tchudi (1987) analyzed 860 letters written by students in grades 6-12 and found that although students had a wide range of audiences and topics from which to choose, content of the letters were dominated by information about the adolescents’ immediate experiences and feelings. Further, the intended audiences of the letters were trusted friends and family members, and the openness of the writings surprised Tchudi (1987) given that students knew a researcher would be reading and cataloguing the writings. In other words, the students shared personal thoughts and feelings with an unknown person (the researcher). Tchudi (1987) concluded that expressive writing provided a welcomed means for the young adults to work through ideas, concepts, and theories.

Some researchers have observed that expressive writing in classroom settings can have harmful impact on students. Lindner (2004) found that expressive writing could prompt symptoms of post-traumatic stress in college students and block learning. In Lensmire’s (1994) work with elementary students in writing workshops, he observed that some third-grade students used their writing to control others. For example, students wrote about controversial topics, then shared that writing with peers as a form of intimidation. Schaafsma (1996) and colleagues struggled with a moral dilemma when a group of eighth grade girls engaged in a project about teenage sexuality and pregnancy in English class because the writing was intimate and stretched the boundaries of what was accepted practice in an English class. Moje, Willes, and Fassio (2001) found that even though they advocated that adolescent participants--diverse, seventh grade ELA students--draw upon personal experiences in writing workshops, some students were not willing to make their experiences—and literacies—public. O’Brien, Moje, and Stewart (2001) summarized these
issues with expressivist literacy pedagogies as “potentially oppressive” (p. 35) because they privilege practices of White, middle-class students and promote the status quo (c.f Berlin, 1987; Dressman, 1993; Lensmire, 1994). For example, often the experiences of students of poverty are not valued over students whose experiences are valued in the culture of power (Delpit, 1988).

Tensions surrounding expressivist pedagogy have been debated publically in scholarly journals and offered in response to publications supporting expressive writing (c.f. Berman, 2008; Hood, 2008). Critics of expressivist pedagogy often use tones of dismissal and shame (Paley, 2001). For example, Bartholomae (1990) said that teaching writing as an expression of individual thoughts and feelings makes students "suckers" and "powerless" (p. 128). Bizzell (1982, 1986) reasoned that when expressivist writing instructors fail to teach students to use academic language over informal, personal language, they put students at a disadvantage when they must write within the academic discipline, therefore limiting students' chances to develop ways of thinking that are valued in academia. Further, in a critical blow to high school English teachers who teach personal narrative, Coleman (2011) stated in a speech to educators that not only did personal writing not prepare students for college or careers, but also that “as you grow up in this world you realize people really don’t give a shit about what you feel or what you think. What they instead care about is can you make an argument with evidence.” Such as statement from the lead architect of the Common Core State Standards (and, later, President and CEO of The College Board) is controversial to say the least.
Despite such attacks leveled at expressive pedagogy, Dutro (2008, 2009, 2011) and MacCurdy (2007) argue that even in classrooms where teachers are more cautious than others in the selection of assignments, some students will write personal stories whether or not they are invited to do so. Moreover, certain curriculum materials, such as the study of poetry or the Holocaust, may explicitly draw upon students’ lived experiences. The CCSS (NGA & CCSO, 2010) for ELA correspond to the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards and include the writing of narratives “to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.” In other instances, district-mandated curriculum materials may elicit unintended personal responses by asking youth to define and personalize concepts such as “hard times” (Dutro, 2010, p. 256).

Boundaries between expressivist and socio-epistemic texts are not easily delineated, and some scholars and educators advocate both approaches to writing (Elbow 1995; Halpern, 1975; Harris, 2001; Spigelman, 2001). However, the harsh and ongoing criticism of expressive pedagogy and the increasing pressures of curriculum standards, accountability, performance evaluations, and testing have created an atmosphere wherein educators are left to wonder how to navigate a territory of student self-disclosure and how to cope with the emotional work required to support students who self-disclose in writing. Not surprisingly, few educators have openly expressed a lack of understanding of how to address personal disclosure in students’ writing (e.g., Jones, 2004, 2012). Jones (2012) argued that the unspoken and taken-for-granted rules (“nomos”; Bourdieu, 2000) of teacher education contribute to this phenomenon. Jones (2012) draws upon the construct of nomos to explain
how, in teacher education, implicit practices result in particular beliefs. In the instance of written autobiographical accounts of students’ difficult lived experiences, the nomos privileges “academic language practices, the reading of educational research and classroom practice texts, middle-classed polite ways of interacting in the classroom” (p. 134), thus reinforcing what Sumara, Davis, and Iftody (2006) argue as “the normalizing structures of teacher education” (p. 61). Sumara et al. (2006) believe that these normalizing structures explain why their English education students do not engage in rich, meaningful conversations about personal topics in literature.

Research has shown that when teachers and students address sensitive topics openly and in developmentally-appropriate contexts, they take measures to avoid the perpetuation of shame, secrecy, or stigma associated with such topics (Becker-Blease & Freyd, 2007; Jolly, 2011). In order to construct communities where students feel safe to share their opinions and experiences and build on personal identities (Paley, 2001), teachers need to understand how to support marginalized youth and respond sensitively and genuinely when they share personal topics. Educators are trained in child development at relevant grade levels and learn to draw upon their professional judgment regarding texts and written assignments selected for classroom use, yet they may be ill-prepared to address students’ personal stories. Lack of teacher preparation for the occurrence of sensitive topics in students’ writing may result in a teacher’s confusion, inappropriate responses, or silence (Dutro, 2008, 2010; Jones, 2004, 2012; Paley, 2001; Wissman & Wiseman, 2010, 2012). It is important that educators know how to cope when they receive such personal pieces. With the exception of guidance from a handful of empirical studies (most notably, Dutro, 2008, 2010; Jones, 2004, 2012; Paley,
2001; Wissman & Wiseman, 2011, 2012), unanswered questions remain regarding ways teachers can address issues related to students’ written self-disclosure of such sensitive, personal topics.

Given that the personal narrative is assigned in English Language Arts curricula and that the study of literature may invoke personal responses, it is concerning that no parallel pedagogy is defined for how ELA teachers can receive, and respond with sensitivity to, adolescents’ personal writing. Specifically, research is needed to address how teachers can support students and when they share sensitive, personal topics in their writing (Dutro, 2008, 2009, 2010; Jones, 2004, 2012; Wiseman, 2009, 2011; Wissman & Wiseman, 2011, 2012). The present study addresses both needs in research by investigating an ELA teacher’s instructional practices in, and reflections on, a memoir-writing curriculum for racially diverse, ninth grade students.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand one teacher’s memoir-writing curriculum unit and how she navigated sensitive topics in ninth grade students’ published memoirs. The teacher-participant for this study, Rose Clearwater (pseudonym), is a White female who teaches English at a racially diverse, urban magnet school for the arts where approximately 40% of the children received free or reduced lunch. Research has shown that magnet school teachers report more frequent contact with parents and more innovative teaching strategies, and students who attend magnet schools report feeling a stronger sense of safety and belonging than do students in non-magnet schools (Cobb, Bifulco, & Bell, 2009).
Rose’s school and community supported her in implementing a memoir writing and publishing curriculum for her freshmen classes as part of the ninth grade English Language Arts program of study. The present study describes the curriculum components and explains how Rose prepared for and addressed sensitive, personal topics in students’ memoirs by answering the following research questions:

1. How does one high school English teacher describe her instructional practices for teaching a memoir-writing curriculum based on the personal experiences of ninth grade students?
2. How does one high school English teacher navigate the occurrence of sensitive topics in students’ written work?
3. What themes emerged in these ninth grade ELA students’ published memoirs?

**Significance of the Study**

The present study contributes to the field of literacy by demonstrating how a teacher integrated home and school connections in literacy learning and supported students who engaged in writing about their personal experiences, which included self-disclosure about sensitive topics. Using case study methodology and the qualitative content analysis method, the researcher applied a cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) theoretical lens to explain how the teacher purposefully drew upon students’ personal experiences and how she navigated the occurrence of sensitive topics in students’ written work. Literacy researchers and practitioners who seek to welcome youths’ stories in the classroom will find this study relevant as it provides a unique portrait of a teacher who balanced the cognitive and
emotional challenges that emerge when students engage in writing about personal topics. The findings highlight how one teacher made decisions that illuminate the hidden curriculum of knowing and understanding how to address issues that arise when students bring their personal experiences into classroom spaces, yet they also suggest some problems that teachers may encounter when engaging in expressive pedagogical practices. Moreover, this study extends existing research on the roles of teachers in a permeable curriculum and contributes to the growing body of research on expressive writing in English Language Arts classrooms.

**Definition of Terms**

Select terms used in this study are defined below for clarity.

**Activity:** Action undertaken as response to a societal need and driven by an objective or motive.

**Activity System:** Comprised of the analytical components of *subject, mediating artifacts (signs and tools), object, rules, community, and division of labor* (Engeström, 1987; Cole & Engeström, 1993).

** Appropriation:** The developmental process about which socially-formulated, goal-directed, and tool-mediated actions are adopted (Wertsch, 1991) through the process of participating in an activity (Rogoff, 1995).

** Community:** The social group that the subject (or actor) belongs to while engaged in an activity (e.g., club, classroom, school, or family).

** Context:** The setting, history, and other conditions of all of the components of the activity system (Nardi 1996).
**Division of labor:** How tasks are shared among the community participating in the activity.

**Expansive learning:** The result of internal tensions and contradictions of an activity system when they motivate change and development in the actor(s) (Engeström, 1987).

**Expressivist Pedagogy:** A theory for teaching writing that focuses on the personal experiences of the student and acknowledges that the student is an authority on his or her own truth. Lessons focus on individual narratives and observations as an entrée to the writing process.

**Mediating artifacts:** Material or conceptual tools (e.g., texts, rules, computers) and social others (e.g., peers, mentors) that act as resources for the actor(s) of an activity.

**Object:** The goal or motive of the activity, which results in an outcome.

**Rules:** Any implicit or explicit regulations or conditions that affect how and why the subject acts in certain ways (e.g., rules for responding to peers in writing workshop).

**Subject:** The individual or groups of individuals involved in the activity, such as a teacher and students. Also called *actor(s).*
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"Writing is alive when it is being written, read, remembered, contemplated, followed --when it is part of human activity. Otherwise it is dead on the page, devoid of meaning, devoid of influence, worthless. The signs on the page serve to mediate between people, activate their thoughts, direct their attention, coordinate their actions, provide the means of relationship. It is in the context of their activities that people consider texts and give meaning to texts. And it is in the organization of activities that people find the needs, stances, interactions, tasks that orient their attention toward texts they write and read." (Bazerman & Russell, 2003, p. 1)

Introduction to the Chapter

Chapter 2 presents Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as the framework for this study and analyzes existing research on expressive writing. First is a discussion of how CHAT, including understandings of teacher education and written communication, informs this study. Second, the historical context of expressive writing research is presented beginning with Britton’s work in the 1970s to present day research on autobiographical genres. Then a summary of what researchers have concluded about expressivist pedagogical practices is presented and followed with the major influences on expressive writing pedagogies. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Theoretical Framework

Historically, sociocultural, cultural-historical, and cultural-historical activity theory are linked to the social learning perspective of Russian scholar Vygotsky (1978, 1986), whose philosophical framework views learning and development as mediated processes in cultural contexts. In the decade from 1924 and 1934, Vygotsky (1978, 1986) and two of his
colleagues, Luria (1976) and Leontiev (1978, 1981), developed what we now know as *cultural-historical theory*. Their works, which were translated during the 1970s and 1980s, have had profound influence on pedagogical practices in contemporary learning environments. Primary themes that characterize cultural-historical approaches include the grounding of higher mental process in social origins (Vygotsky, 1981), the development of human thinking on both the individual and social levels (Vygotsky, 1978, 1981), and the mediation of human activities by technical and psychological tools being used in particular social and cultural contexts (Leontiev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978).

A fundamental assumption of cultural-historical theory is that human development is socially situated and mediated by cultural tools (Wertsch, 1985). Cultural tools may be psychological (e.g., goals) or material (e.g., written language) (Vygotsky, 1981). In literacy classrooms, individuals interact within social contexts and participate in knowledge practices; therefore, learners can support each other (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Such models of behavior and knowledge construction aid the individual in internalizing and, ultimately, achieving mastery of literacy practices. According to Corno and Mandinach (2004), learners are influenced by the specific context of the learning community, such as the accepted and expected ways of being and knowing and the essential customs and conventions. In other words, people do not become products of their environment, rather they co-construct the environment through their actions and contributions (Perry, Turner, & Meyer, 2006). Leontiev (1981) posited that both mediation by signs and by subject–subject relations play an important role in learning because human knowledge of the world is mediated by interactions
with it. Development occurs when individuals undertake, and master, an existing set of cultural tools (Wertsch, 1998).

Leontiev (1978, 1981) expanded Vygotsky’s work on social and semiotic mediation and posited that activity is undertaken as a response to a societal need; therefore, the objective or motive drives the activity. Leontiev (1978) further argued that motive behind the activity breaks down the distinction between the world of internal phenomena and the external world. In other words, the components that comprise an activity include the internal tensions and contradictions of the individual and collective actors in the activity as well as the cultural and social mediated tools and conditions of the action. Leontiev’s work (1978, 1981) distinguished the individual subject’s activities from the collective subjects’ goal-oriented activities.

**Three Generations of CHAT**

The idea of an *activity system* comes from the work of Scandanavian researcher Yrjö Engeström (1987, 1993), the leading contemporary theoretician of activity theory. Engeström (1987, 1993) drew from Leontiev’s (1978, 1981) work and developed the concepts of activity further by introducing activity systems analysis (Cole & Engeström, 1993; Engeström, 1993). Engeström (1987) used activity systems to map the interaction between individuals or groups of individuals and the environment (Engeström, 1987). In his later work, Engeström (1996, 2001) identified three generations of activity theory, which he referred to as *cultural-historical activity theory* (CHAT). He referred to Vygotsky’s (1978) work on the mediated action triangle (Figure 1.1) as the first generation CHAT. The mediated action triangle consists of the subject, the object, and mediating artifacts. Mediating artifacts are signs and
tools that humans create “in order to regulate their interactions with the world and each other” (Cole, 1999, p. 90). A simple example of the mediated action triangle would be a writer (subject) seeking to find a synonym for a word (object) and using a thesaurus (mediating artifact) to determine the appropriate word.

Figure 2.1. Vygotsky’s mediated action triangle (Engeström, 2001).

Second generation CHAT was attributed to Leontiev’s (1978, 1981) work on the collective nature of human activity and Engeström’s (1987) work on activity systems (Figure 1.2). This generation contextualizes learning in an activity system (Leontiev, 1978) and builds upon the first generation’s triad by adding contextual elements: rules, community, and division of labor (Engeström, 1987).
In Engeström’s (1987) second-generation, triangular representation of an activity system, the unit of analysis is a bounded system referred to as the *activity*. The *activity* is comprised of the analytical components of *subject*, *mediating artifacts*, *object*, *rules*, *community*, and *division of labor* (Cole & Engeström, 1993; Engeström, 1987). All of the components of the activity system provide the *context* (Nardi 1996). The *subject* is the individual or groups of individuals involved in the activity, such as a teacher and students. The *mediating artifacts* include material or conceptual tools and social others that can act as resources (e.g., language, texts, computers, or peers) for the individual or group of individuals participating in the activity. The *object* is the goal or motive of the activity, which results in an *outcome*. The *rules* are any implicit or explicit regulations or conditions that affect how and why the subject acts in certain ways. For instance, a female student who does not consider engineering as a college major may be guided by societal norms that engineering is a male-dominated field; or, a teacher who focuses her assessments on
informational texts may be following state-mandated learning standards. The *community* is the social group that the subject belongs to while engaged in an activity, such as a club, classroom, a school, or family. In educational contexts, the community is often referred to as a *community of practice*. The *division of labor* refers to how the tasks are shared among the community members. The *outcome* of an activity system is the end result of the activity. Any internal tensions and contradictions of an activity system have potential to motivate change and development called *expansive learning* (Engeström, 1987).

Engeström (1996, 2001) called his own work on the activity systems model in developmental and interventionist research as *third generation CHAT*, which is also referred to as *activity systems analysis* (Figure 1.3). Third generation CHAT highlights interactions and negotiations among multiple agencies or networks.

*Figure 2.3.* Triangular representation of activity systems analysis (Engeström, 1996, 2001).
Both second and third generation CHAT take into account inherent tensions and contradictions within activity systems. The largest distinction between second and third generation CHAT is that the third generation (activity systems analysis, to include expanded learning theory) is most appropriately applied to larger systems, such as institutions and organizations, and typically involves a participatory and interventionist role in networks of interacting systems (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Third generation activity theory allows networks of activity systems to interact, a process that can produce expansive learning (Engeström, 2001). Table 1.1 shows the origins and features of each generation of CHAT.

Table 2.1 Development of three generations of Activity Theory (Engeström, 1996)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Origins</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st generation</td>
<td>Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) cultural-historical theory.</td>
<td><strong>Mediated Action:</strong> Subject(s) (individual, dyad, group); Mediating tools (psychological and material tools); Object/Motive→outcome(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd generation</td>
<td>Leontiev’s (1974, 1981) collective nature of human activity and Engeström’s (1987) activity systems. Activity theory renamed “Cultural historical Activity Theory.”</td>
<td><strong>Activity System:</strong> Emphasizes internal and external activities; Tensions and contradictions act as driving force of change (and thus, development); Subject (individual, dyad, group); Mediating tools (psychological and material tools); Rules or norms; Community; Division of Labor; Object (goal)→outcome(s).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3rd generation Engeström’s (1996, 2001) developmental and interventionist work on activity systems analysis. Referred to as “Activity Systems Analysis.”

Multiple Interacting Activity Systems:
Expanded 2nd generation to include dialogicality and multivoicedness; Focused on partially shared object between/among activity systems; Developmental and interventionist.

Applications of CHAT

In 1993, Engeström proclaimed that CHAT was “the best kept-secret in academia” (p. 64). Since then, CHAT has evolved as a major theoretical approach in such fields as pre-service teacher education (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999; Wilson, 2014), professional development (Bourke, Mentis, & O’Neill, 2013; Crossouard, 2009; Web & Jones, 2009), language socialization (Li, 2012; Tsui & Ng, 2000), written communication (DiSarro, 2014; Kain & Wardle, 2005; Russell, 1997, 2009; Zhu & Mitchell, 2012); curriculum studies (Billett, 2003; Roth, Lee, & Hsu, 2009; Spires, Rowe, Mott, & Lester, 2011); computer interface design (Gay and Hembrooke, 2004), and developmental workplace research (Engeström, 1987, 1993; Engeström & Middleton, 1996). In the United States, CHAT applications in qualitative research have been used as a conceptual framework in educational contexts to guide researchers and practitioners in their design and implementation of qualitative research studies and as an analytical tool for the analysis and development of conclusions in research studies or in evaluations of educational programs (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). CHAT aids researchers and practitioners in understanding individual’s or groups of individuals’ activities in relation to the context and how the
individual(s), activities, and the context affect one another. As such, second and third generation CHAT frameworks are particularly useful for emphasizing inherent tensions and contradictions within an activity system (Engeström, 1987, 1993).

Given that CHAT is a cross-disciplinary approach that is not domain specific and that the methodological technique is general in nature (Barab, Schatz, & Scheckler, 2004; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010), each investigation may require a tailored fit dependent upon the specific needs and focus (Engeström, 1993). Studies in educational contexts that utilized CHAT have been conducted on data gathered in the field (e.g., observations, interviews) or on extant data (e.g., previously published data, documents, Web forums, and social media). Literacy researchers typically apply CHAT as a framework when developing understandings of students’ and teachers’ processes of learning and how particular contexts mediate their practices and beliefs (Grossman et al., 1999). The following sections describe the application of second and third generation CHAT in teacher education, pedagogical practice, and written communication research and explain how this theoretical framework supports the present study. Because educational research utilizing CHAT as a conceptual framework or analytical tool are dominated by studies about pre-service teachers, those studies provide the rationale for using CHAT in this research of Rose teaching memoir during her first three years in the classroom.

**CHAT in Teacher Education and Pedagogical Practice Research**

Cultural-historical activity theorists believe that social and cultural factors mediate development in particular contexts (Wertsch 1991). In other words, learning is viewed as a semiotic or meaning-making process of mediated action in which individuals use material
and conceptual tools and resources to actively construct their knowledge in goal-oriented activities. The components of activity (see Figure 1.2) interact and mediate each other, and it is the interactions and relationships among these components that form the activity rather than the individual components in isolation (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Cultural-historical activity theorists’ interest in the relationship between human consciousness and practical activity draws upon the Marxist precept: “Consciousness does not determine life: life determines consciousness” (Marx & Engels, 1964, p. 37). Activity theory perspectives on learning have conceptualized human thinking as "mind as mediated by action" (Wertsch, 1998). It is in this way that the cultural tools can both empower and constrain educators.

Grossman, Smagorinsky, and Valencia (1999) found that using activity theory as a lens to view their data illuminated understandings of the process of learning to teach, specifically in relation to how teachers chose certain pedagogical tools to inform and enact their teaching practices. Teacher education research has shown that a disconnect often exists between the values and practices teachers learn in university teaching programs compared to their experiences in classrooms (e.g., Grossman et al., 1999; Smagorinsky & Whiting, 1995). Some research suggests that such disjunctures may be attributed to the overly theoretical nature of education coursework (e.g, Fagan & Laine, 1980) or that teachers simply abandon values learned in teacher education programs for those advocated in the school culture in which they are employed (e.g, Borko, Eisenhart, Brown, Underhill, Jones, & Agard, 1992). Grossman et al. (1999) examined the manner in which 15 pre-service teachers developed conceptual understandings and specific teaching practices across different social contexts (i.e., teacher education programs, field placements, and initial job placements). By examining
the social contexts, which often overlapped, the researchers were able to take into account how the cultural history of the settings encouraged or discouraged specific outcomes that guided action within the settings. This was useful in developing understandings of how beginning teachers such as Rose identified problems and engaged in problem-solving behavior and to what extent they appropriated or mastered (Herrenkohl & Wertsch, 1999) pedagogical and conceptual tools.

Activity theory is underpinned by the central concept of appropriation (Grossman et al, 1999; Leontiev, 1981; Rogoff, 1995; Wertsch, 1991). In teacher education, appropriation refers to the developmental process about which socially-formulated, goal-directed, and tool-mediated actions are adopted (Wertsch, 1991) through the process of participating in an activity (Rogoff, 1995). Whether or not appropriation occurs, or to what extent it occurs, is determined by the compatibility of a learner's (in this case, a teacher’s) values, experiences, and goals with a more knowledgeable and powerful other, such as a university professor or a school-based mentor teacher (see Cole 1996; Wertsch 1991). For example, in the current study, in order for Rose to competently enact a specific pedagogical practice advocated by a educational text, such as Kirby and Kirby’s (2007) studio workshop approach, she had to be actively involved in internalizing and reconstructing her knowledge during such practices before a transformation of knowledge could occur (see Cazden, 1988).

Grossman et al. (1999) identified five different levels of appropriation: lack of appropriation, appropriation of a label, appropriation of surface features, appropriation of conceptual underpinnings, and the achievement of mastery. While Grossman et al. (1999) developed the levels of appropriation based on their work with pre-service teachers, the
levels of appropriation can be applicable to any learner. Numerous reasons could explain why teachers do not appropriate a pedagogical tool. Perhaps a concept is too complex or too foreign to their schemata, or perhaps teachers reject pedagogical tools due to cultural differences (Smagorinsky, 1999). In some cases, teachers may appropriate a label, which is a superficial understanding of a tool. For example, a beginning teacher may be familiar with the term *student-centered instruction* but cannot explain how his or her instructional practice is or is not student-centered. The next level of appropriation is the appropriation of surface features of a tool; for example, a writing teacher may understand the purpose of using a rubric to evaluate and grade work, but he or she does not fully grasp how the rubric should guide her instruction and the students’ participation of the writing activity. Further, a teacher may appropriate conceptual underpinnings of a pedagogical tool. To illustrate, a teacher may recognize the value of embedded formative assessment and is motivated to use it, yet does not know the pedagogical label. Alternately, a teacher may understand and recognize embedded formative assessment in another teacher’s classroom, yet does not use it in his or her classroom. Finally, when a teacher achieves mastery of a pedagogical tool, this means the appropriation process has been completed. Mastery implies that the skills needed to use a tool effectively have been acquired and perfected over time (Herrenkohl & Wertsch, 1999).

The second and third generation CHAT frameworks can uncover and foreground inherent tensions and contradictions associated with appropriation within an activity system (Engeström, 1987, 1993). In the current study, understanding inherent tensions in the teaching of writing was important for understanding Rose’s appropriation of an expressivist pedagogical approach. Another study that employed CHAT to understand tensions and
contradictions is a New Zealand pilot study of the implementation of a professional learning and development initiative. Scholars Bourke, Mentis, and O’Neill (2011) used second generation CHAT to analyze data and capture the complexities in teacher appropriation of a narrative assessment model mandated by the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2009). Educators were expected to document “learning stories” (Bourke, Mentis, & O’Neill, 2011, p. 35) as evidence of high needs students in primary and secondary schools. Initially, the teacher-participants (subjects) indicated that they would welcome a more useful assessment approach (object) than standardized tests, yet the CHAT analysis showed contradictory evidence. Although participants seemed to have some knowledge of the narrative assessment tool (artifact) and understood the philosophy behind it, the level of appropriation (the process of participating in the activity) was, for the most part, weak due to resistance to an imposed initiative (rule) and resistance to what teachers perceived to be more time-consuming than traditional data gathering (division of labor). The CHAT findings provided awareness into ways educational reform may be impeded as well as insight into how successful execution and sustainability of future educational reform may be enhanced.

Because the current study examined a curriculum unit taught for three years, the CHAT lens was useful for highlighting resolved and unresolved tensions between elements in one system (i.e., one year) and among elements in each system (i.e., three years). Research studies that have used CHAT in such a manner include a study by Bullock (2013), who aimed to identify the challenges secondary school teacher candidates experienced during field placements. Bullock (2013) collected and analyzed blog posts written by the teacher candidates. The blog entries served to provide the teacher candidates with a shared, safe
space to document and analyze their first experiences in the classroom as well as to engage in relationship-building with their professor. Bullock’s (2013) analysis focused on the described actions taken by each teacher candidate and how their actions were “inextricably linked” (p. 136) to their emotions. The CHAT lens revealed the pressures that teacher candidates felt when expected to adopt social practices embraced in the host schools. Similarly, Stillman and Anderson (2011) examined a pre-service teacher’s experiences during fieldwork, and the CHAT lens helped researchers draw attention to the various people, norms, artifacts, and conditions that mediated a pre-service teacher’s struggles while she attempted to reconcile knowledge gained in her teacher education program with norms and practices she encountered in the field. In both the Bullock (2013) and Stillman and Anderson (2011) studies, tensions and contradictions were illuminated but unresolved.

Alternately, in Peruski’s (2003) study on faculty members’ experiences designing and teaching online courses for the first time, contradictions between elements in the activity system revealed changes to, and development in, the teachers’ practices. Although the instructors in the study had taught face-to-face for many years, they experienced anxiety and reduced confidence with regards to online teaching. The contradictions they faced served as a catalyst for change. The instructors re-conceptualized their pedagogical practice, which resulted in transformations of their online and face-to-face teaching practices. In this way, learning progressed and the contradictions were resolved.

**CHAT and Written Communication Research**

Written communication research that utilizes the CHAT framework grew out of sociological studies of science and technology (Latour & Woolgar, 1979; Merton, 1968),
studies of orality and literacy (e.g., Scribner & Cole, 1981), and college composition (Russell, 1995) and genre studies (Bazerman, 1988; Russell, 2009). In CHAT, neither the context nor the texts are separated from the activity because these human-produced artifacts are seen as mediation tools of activity. In other words, the texts are not viewed as objects in themselves, but instead as objects that are inextricable from the activities that gave rise to, and use of, them. The meanings of texts, therefore, are found in the dynamics of human interaction (Bazerman & Russell, 2003).

Writing, activity, and genre studies (Russell, 2009) that employ the CHAT framework are typically situated in workplace or educational contexts (Kain & Wardle, 2005). The CHAT lens has been used to provide insights into many aspects of written communication; for example, the teaching of genre writing and the transition to writing in the workplace (Freedman & Adam, 1996), the examination of composing processes (Geisler, 1994), the exploration of students’ motives and personal histories and how these shape their writing (Prior, 1998), and studies of how students apply teacher and peer review feedback to their writing (Prior, 1998; Zhu & Mitchell, 2012). Russell (2009) critiqued U.S. higher education assumptions that “writing is a single generalizable skill” around which composition courses are organized. Russell (1995) contended that general writing skills instructional courses could be improved with the expansion of writing across the curriculum or with its replacement by, for example, a liberal arts course that focuses on the uses of writing in society. Russell (1995) showed that the CHAT framework revealed challenges and assumptions posed by teaching writing skills in a general manner as compared to teaching writing in contexts where students can “choose, enter, [and] become a full participant in, and
eventually change for the better” (p. 69) by writing in activity systems that allow them to become insiders to workplace communication practices. In the current study, the research participant used a studio workshop approach (Kirby & Kirby, 2007; Schön, 1987) in order to engage students in the practice of creating and publishing their memoirs. This genre approach avoided what some would call the pitfalls of general writing skills instruction (e.g., Russell, 1995).

Researchers and theorists have noted that familiarizing students in writing classroom contexts with the communication practices of their future workplaces is challenging (e.g., Bazerman, 1994; Berkenkotter, 2001; Dannels, 2003), in part because the communication practices of workplace professionals occur in contexts that are more dynamic and collaborative than the contexts of secondary and post-secondary classrooms where instructors often deliver scripted objectives and activities that are enacted by students in rote fashion (Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Pare, 1999). In response to this problem, the trend in professional communication courses is to more overtly connect academic writing instruction with the audiences and communication practices of future workplaces. One such way to do this is through genre studies (e.g., Berkenkotter, 2001; Dannels, 2003; Kain & Wardle, 2005; Russell, 1997). According to Russell (1997), one must go beyond the conventional notion of genre as a set of formal, common features of certain texts and instead consider genre in relation to systems of social activity. In CHAT, genres are viewed as shared perceptions or expectations among particular groups of people regarding how certain cultural tools (e.g., a computer connected to the Internet used to compose a blog entry) may be used to act together to accomplish shared purposes (Russell, 1997). The shared purposes serve to further the
motive (i.e., motive) of the activity system. In this way, activity theory analysis of genre systems provides a “theoretical bridge between the sociology of education and Vygotskian social psychology of classroom interaction” (Russell, 1997, p. 31). In writing classrooms, genres operationalize the activity systems that are enacted by students and teachers. In the current study, the CHAT lens provided insights into the memoir genre as a means of teaching workplace writing, as a means of examining composing processes, and as a lens for viewing how motives, personal histories, and peer and teacher feedback shaped the objectives and outcomes.

Cultural historical activity theory’s focus on a collective culture allows researchers to “zoom in” on particular ways in which the collective culture (the community) takes action with physical and psychological tools (Ellis, Edwards, & Smagorinsky, 2010). Such “zooming in” is necessary when an activity setting contains nested layers of activity (Tharp, 1993), such as in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) classrooms. To illustrate, in a longitudinal ethnographic study of English as a Second Language (ESL) students in grades 7-10, Parks, Huot, Hamers, and Lemonnier (2005) focused their research on variations of students’ appropriation of the writing process as well as their collaboration within an activity system (i.e., groups creating a Web page). The teacher’s actions revealed how his systematic pedagogical approach to the writing process was both constrained and supported by contextual factors. The writing process became a psychological tool when used in conjunction with information and communication technologies (ICT). The adolescents appropriated the writing process in an ICT-rich environment as evidenced by their knowledge of terms and procedures and their ability to enact the writing process during a
major web-based project. Park et al. (2005) conducted a retrospective analysis of the ways writing process activities were structured and scaffolded in earlier grades for these students, and the analysis served to foreground or zoom in on the historically transformative nature of the learning process. In the current research, CHAT allowed the researcher to “zoom in” on the collective culture of Rose’s ninth grade ELA classroom as it was revealed through her published lesson plans and during interviews and to examine the nested layers of the represented activities; for example, teacher lectures, teacher modeling, assessment practices, writing workshops, and mentoring by non-classroom participants.

Cultural historical activity theory has been used to examine the interactive relationship among societal, institutional, and individual levels. For instance, in a case study of two elementary classrooms that examined classroom talk and the teaching of writing, Fisher (2012) found that CHAT illuminated the relationship between the climate of policy-driven curricula and the ways teachers’ practices were directed and restricted by the socio-cultural context within which it operated. In the current study, CHAT illuminated the relationship between the data-driven climate of education today and Rose’s approach to embedded formative assessment practices. In another study, DiSarro (2014) examined the ways in which “long-entrenched practices” (p. 440) in university creative writing classrooms could be viewed in a more contextualized and holistic manner. Rather than viewing creative writing in terms of the products produced in class (e.g., poetry, fiction and nonfiction narratives, etc.), CHAT enables researchers a view of the actions undertaken in classroom contexts, even those pedagogical activities that are not related to the creation of the products. DiSarro (2014) specifically focused on writing workshop practices and how CHAT provided
a comparative and reflective tool for juxtaposing his own teaching practices with that of another instructor. In the current study, CHAT aided in juxtaposing Rose’s teaching practices in the memoir unit over three years.

Researchers have sought CHAT framework heuristics to lend insights into their issues of concern. While no specific expressive writing studies could be found that utilized CHAT, literacy researchers in general have found CHAT to be a useful framework when developing understandings of students’ and teachers’ processes of learning and how particular contexts mediate their practices and beliefs (Grossman et al. 1999). Therefore, a second-generation cultural-historical activity theoretical framework was adopted to investigate one high school English teacher’s instructional approach for building upon the personal experiences of racially diverse, ninth grade students participating in a memoir-writing curriculum during her first three years as a classroom teacher.
Second generation chat was found to be appropriate because it is a robust framework capable of capturing the complex interactions in a writing classroom as well as the contexts of teaching memoir (Figure 1.4). Third generation CHAT was deemed inappropriate since this study did not include a participatory and interventionist role in the teacher’s experiences. However, third generation CHAT informed the implications for tensions and contradictions in this research study.
In the current study, the bounded system identified as the activity is teaching writing. This activity was comprised of analytical components (i.e., subject, mediating artifacts, object, rules, community, and division of labor) that provided the context for the activity system. The subject in this study is the teacher, Rose Clearwater. The mediating artifacts included material tools (e.g., curriculum documents, electronic portfolio, publishing software, etc.); conceptual tools (e.g., experiences as a student, teaching philosophy, student teaching experience, worldview, etc.); and social others (e.g., students’ parents, university mentors, etc.) that acted as resources for Rose and for her students. The object or goal of the activity included state and district goals that Rose undertook in her teaching (e.g., standards) and professional and personal goals (e.g., to teach the process of discovery through writing, to teach effective writing, to bond with students, etc.), which resulted in outcomes (e.g., mastery of standards, mastery of writing processes, self-actualization, memoir publications, etc.). The rules consisted of implicit (e.g., acceptable writing topics for school and for Rose’s classroom, other’s perceptions of writing topics, etc.) and explicit (e.g., writing group rules, studio workshop core values, NCSCS, etc.) regulations or conditions that affected how and why the Rose acted in certain ways. The community included Rose, her students and their parents, university mentors, and school faculty and administration. The division of labor included the actions undertaken by workshop groups, the publishing club, guest speakers, and of course, the teacher. Internal tensions and contradictions of the activity system with potential to motivate change and development could include such concerns or difficulties as the misalignment of curricular goals with teaching philosophy, the misalignment of teacher
education knowledge the actual experience of teaching, or inherent tensions in the teaching of writing.

In the next section, the historical context of expressive writing research is described.

**Historical Context of Expressive Writing Research**

While a number of scholars and educators have openly embraced the writing-to-learn model and the instructional and theoretical discourses that came with it, the “expressivist versus academic” debate still remains a contested issue in the twenty-first century (Carello & Butler, 2014; Hood, 2005; Mlynarczyk, 2006). The stagnation of “either/or” debates on expressive writing remains a challenge for those aiming to find support for personal narrative writing in school contexts. The potential for students to write about deeply personal or sensitive topics is one factor that has contributed to these debates. Attending to the historical context of informal, personal writing and personal narrative writing in literacy research provides insight into current pedagogical practices including expressive writing and trauma narratives.

In the following sections, the writing process movement is explained as well as how the teaching of writing has transitioned from a focus on the product to a focus on writing processes since the mid-1960s and early-1970s (Murray, 1972). Following is a discussion about the movement toward expressivist pedagogy, which started gaining attention during the early days of the writing process movement, and included the work of such scholars as Britton (1970), Elbow (1973) and Kinneavy (1971/1980). Also informing the section on expressivist pedagogy is a discussion on perspectives on narrative writing (e.g., Bruner, 2004), autobiographical research (e.g., Fuchs & Howes, 2008; Smith & Watson, 2010) and
the popularity of memoir (e.g., K. Bomer, 2005; R. Bomer, 1995; Kirby & Kirby, 2007). The current state of expressivist pedagogy research, which includes experimental expressive writing (e.g., Pennebaker, 1989, 1991, 1997; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986), writing and healing (e.g., Frank, 1995; Pennebaker, 1997), sensitive topics (e.g., Faberow, 1963; Lee, 1993; Renzetti & Lee, 1993), and trauma narratives (e.g., Dutro, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011; Jones, 2004, 2012; Wissman & Wiseman, 2011, 2012) are addressed. The section concludes with what some scholars (e.g., Dutro, 2008, 2010; Jones, 2004, 2012) state as lack of adequate attention in teacher preparation: that is, that teachers are given little—if any—guidance on what they can do to attend to students’ self-disclosures in experience-based pedagogies.

**The writing process movement.** In 1972, Murray wrote the now-famous line, “When we teach composition, we are not teaching a product, we are teaching a process” (p. 11). Today, well into the twenty-first century, composition-related (i.e., rhetoric-related) curriculum materials reflect this “paradigm shift” (Hairston, 1982) in writing and the teaching of writing. The focus on a traditional, linear approach to academic writing instruction has shifted to a focus on the circumstances that produce writing. This *process approach* can be attributed to, in part, the 1963 Conference of College Composition and Communication where educators and scholars revived discussions about rhetoric and composition theory (Clark, 2011). The conference generated a new research area on the process approach to composition, which in turn led to the development of related methods and techniques: for example, prewriting peer response, staged writing, teacher-student conferencing, invention strategies, guided reflection, and revision. During that time, the ideas of psychologist Bruner (1966) were another influence on the process approach. Bruner
viewed learning as a process, one that emphasized the role of a learner’s participation and discovery in the learning process. According to composition scholar Clark (2011), Bruner’s (1966) ideas translated into a pedagogical emphasis on “students engaging in composing activities so as to discover their own composing process” (p. 5), which meant teachers that would spend less time assigning grades and correcting grammar instead would create a facilitative learning environment to enable students with opportunities to compose.

In 1966, the Dartmouth Conference—attended by composition scholars from the U.S. and Great Britain—further influenced the emerging writing process movement. U.S. scholars conceived of English as an academic discipline with specific content to be mastered; British scholars focused less on content and more on the process or activity of writing, to include the personal and linguistic growth of the child (Appleby, 1974, p. 229). The main purpose of writing, according to British scholars, was to foster the personal development of the student (Appleby, 1974). Berlin (1990) proclaimed that the Dartmouth Conference “reasserted for U.S. teachers the value of the expressive model of writing. Writing is to be pursued in a free and supportive environment in which the student is encouraged to engage in an act of self-discovery” (p. 210). Concepts like composing processes (Emig, 1971), writing as problem-solving (Hayes & Flower, 1979), writing-to-learn (Murray, 1985), and writing to explore (Britton et al., 1975; Elbow, 1991) gradually caught on and changed writing instruction in powerful ways.

Olson (1999) stated that changes to writing instruction and writing research have “emphasized that the activities involved in the act of writing are typically recursive rather than linear; that writing is first and foremost a social activity; that the act of writing can be a
means of learning and discovery” (p. 7). Similarly, Perl (1980) asserted that the writing scene of the 1980s was “more often understood not as a room in which a writer is isolated and alone, but as a room in which many voices reside, those that both shape the writer and to which he or she responds in return” (p. xvi). Atwell (1987) and Calkins (1990) also have contributed to the creation of writing pedagogies and curricula that centered student voices, positing that focusing students’ efforts on personal narratives would make English curricula not only engaging but also relevant to students’ lives. Atwell’s (1987) *In the Middle* is her seminal description of a middle school reading and writing workshop and her successes and struggles as a responsive teacher. Atwell’s description of the adolescents in her classroom provided an insider’s view about their knowledge processes, their beliefs and values, and insights into their contributions to society. Calkins and Harwayne’s (1991) *Living Between the Lines* established courses of study in which children read and composed memoir, picture books, and nonfiction. Additionally, Calkins made a call for literacy teachers to develop new ideas about such classroom practices as engaging in writing conferences with students, undertaking more efficient record keeping, teaching writing mini-lessons, and developing innovative ways to conduct reading and writing workshops.

In the early days of the writing process model, teachers often did not engage in direct writing instruction; instead, they prescribed a model that, in retrospect, seemed like “anything goes” (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006, p. 276) in order to guide students through the linear, procedural tasks of writing, sharing, and peer reviewing their written work. In a literature review of more recent research reports that explored the writing process, Pritchard and Honeycutt (2006) found that when teachers gave students more direction in the writing
process, their students’ writing quality improved as well as their perceptions of themselves as writers. In contemporary ELA and composition classrooms, the teaching of writing includes such instructional features as idea generation and prewriting, writing processes, scaffolding, strategy instruction, inquiry tasks, collaborative writing, the study of writing models, and the use of rubrics to guide writing and evaluation of writing. Scholars agree that a combination of these instructional features along with teaching various modes of writing for different purposes comprise effective writing instruction (Applebee & Langer, 2013; Graham & Perrin, 2007; Langer, 2002; Marzano, 2001, 2007; Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2007).

A common feature of writing classrooms is the reading-writing workshop (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986). Research has shown successful writing as a recursive process involving brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Atwell (1987) found that workshop pedagogy in middle school classrooms encouraged the sharing of students’ diverse experiences while also developing their self-awareness and self-esteem. Her popular workshop approach draws upon expressivist philosophies that promote self-expression as a way of learning about the self (Elbow, 1973; Ward, 1994). As with the writing process approach, the teacher’s position in a classroom featuring writing workshop is less that of an evaluator and more of a facilitator who provides feedback during writing conferences (Boscolo, 2008). Teachers encourage students to take risks and assume more authorial responsibility for their personal and unique life stories. Moje, Willes, and Fassio (2001) and Willis (1995) caution, however, that writing workshop is not a panacea. Sharing and publishing in writing workshops can be inhibiting for some students. The unequal power
relations among students and between students and their teacher may influence students’ experiences and actions (Finders, 1996; Lensmire, 1994).

Understandings of research on the writing process, writing workshop, and other features of effective writing instruction have informed the current study. Rose, a ninth grade ELA teacher at an urban arts magnet school, implemented the writing process approach and writing workshop as regular features of the memoir curriculum unit. The next section discusses the historical context of expressivist pedagogy and explains how expressivist pedagogy informs the current study.

The movement toward expressivist pedagogy. Scholars Britton (1970), Elbow (1973, 1986, 1991), Murray (1982), Kinneavy (1971/1980), and Macrorie (1970) have argued that writing is a personal act that aids students to better understand themselves and their cultural communities. Personal life writing, also called expressive writing, is often associated with the initial phase of the process movement (Emig, 1971), and it opened the doorway to different approaches to writing instruction that would permit students to write for themselves and not just for the traditional teacher-recipient of school writing. In The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18) (Britton et al., 1975), Britton and his colleagues focused on writers’ roles when producing language, situating the role of participant on one end of the continuum and the role of spectator on the other. From the participant role, Britton derived transactional writing; from the spectator role, he derived poetic writing. By mediating the two categories of writing, Britton established a third category, expressive. The expressive function serves a mediating role in which the writer is both participant and
spectator. This taxonomy significantly influenced writing research, including Elbow’s (1986, 1991) work on freewriting and Murray’s (1980) work on process writing.


Features of contemporary classrooms in which ELA teachers subscribe to such pedagogical practices vary depending upon factors too numerous to list, but such a classroom may be described as having an environment that welcomes the sharing of personal narratives but does not necessary require it (Paley, 2001); draws upon students’ *funds of knowledge* (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992); combines content and skills learning within both personal and academic contexts (Sullivan, 2012); and utilizes writing processes instruction, to include writers workshop and small group dialogic collaboration (Burnham & Powell, 2014). While some post-secondary composition instructors may identify as “expressivist” (e.g., Berman, 2001, 2004; Bishop, 1993, 2003), more often than not, secondary ELA teachers will find themselves somewhere along the expressivist / socio-epistimic continuum,
many using expressive pedagogical practices in conjunction with other tools in the classroom.

Advocates of expressivist writing practices criticize traditional writing instruction for its emphasis on the products of communication using standard academic language with a focus on correct grammatical form (Burnham & Powell, 2014). LeCourt (2006) contended that traditional academic writing privileges white, middle-class youth and alienates marginalized groups who must think and write like the dominant culture if they are to succeed. Heath (1993) argued against practices that position the classic English essay as “elitist” or as a “gatekeeping mechanism” (p. 116). According to Heath (1993), such practices exclude a significant portion of the school population whose skills could be shown through alternative written forms (Heath, 1993). In a world of poverty, racism, violence, and indifference, through these alternative written forms, teachers can learn about and more deeply understand the complex, and often troubled, lives of their students (Noddings, 1988). Pedagogical practices combined with the unique aspects of the school curriculum can create a bridge between students’ unofficial worlds (i.e., home, community, peers) and the official world of formal schooling (Dyson, 1989, 1993). In the current study, Rose employed expressivist pedagogical practices in the teaching of memoir by making connections between students’ experiences outside of school and their experiences in school. Further, students explored topics about their lives, which sometimes included experiences, thoughts, and feelings about issues important to them. The next section focuses on narrative writing, which is a common feature of ELA curricula, then transitions to life writing and memoir.
Narratives. Humans have a fundamental need for organizing lived experiences into stories (Britton et al., 1970; Bruner, 2004; R. Coles, 1989; Dyson & Geneshi, 1994). Narrative serves children and adults alike in myriad ways: to construct a life through the organization of memory (Bruner, 1993, 2004); to become situated in the sociocultural landscape (Bakhtin, 1981); and to test relationships, form bonds, and compare experiences with others (Heath, 1994). Psychologist R. Coles (1989) said that personal narratives give us a fuller understanding of our experiences and the experiences of others. He observed that stories serve the purpose to broaden or heighten the perception of our struggles rather than to provide “solutions” or “resolutions” (R. Coles, 1989, p. 129). Psychologist Bruner stated that while self-narratives are not reality but “a version of reality” (1991, p. 4), they nevertheless represent “lived time” (2004, p. 692). Our self-narratives are culturally, relationally, and linguistically influenced, giving us the means to structure perceptual experience, to organize, and to build and self-select the events of a life (Bruner, 2004). In effect, our personal stories have “the power to shape and reshape our perceptions of everyday experiences of the past and of what we believe is possible in the future” (Dyson & Geneshi, 1994). Literacy can provide a bridge for youth to record their own stories or to find refuge in stories of others’ experiences. MacGillivray, Ardell, and Curwen (2010) emphasize that when teachers take time to learn about the lives of all students in their classrooms, they are better positioned to assist them in working through challenging times.

Features of stories are integrated into the human mental schema that we draw upon for perceiving and interpreting the social world (Bruner, 1986). The narrative mode of thought is fundamental to social-psychological meaning making (Bruner, 1986, 1990; Gergen
& Gergen, 1988). Thus, stories are one way that individuals and cultures attribute meaning to human action, intentions, and experiences. By engaging in the composition of personal narratives, adolescents can increase their sense of purpose, connection with others, and individuality (McAdams, 1993; Nelson & Fivush, 2004). As a consequence of learning the strategies for creating high quality narratives, students are afforded opportunities to contribute to the very body of literature that they will study (Hillocks, 2007). The writing techniques that adolescents learn in this manner will be applicable to other kinds of writing, including techniques used by professional writers, such as writers of nonfiction, including memoir.

*Autobiographical writing.* Hampl (1983/1999) dates the first Western autobiography to Augustine’s confessions in 397 A.D. Since that time, it has become common practice for presidents and celebrities to write their autobiographies, otherwise know as “the memoirs” (Kirby & Kirby, 2007). Contemporary usage of autobiography and memoir positions the terms as interchangeable; however, memoir denotes writing that focuses on a segment of a life whereas autobiography denotes writing that focuses on the life span (Smith & Watson, 2010). Both memoir and autobiography fall under the term life writing, which is writing that is authored by the subject and is written using first person point of view.

Over the last thirty years, life writing has greatly expanded and is widely taught, mostly in postsecondary institutions (Fuchs & Howes, 2008). Writing one’s autobiography serves many purposes. For example, life writers may want to create an historical document, chronicle an event, justify their perceptions, uphold their reputation, dispute the accounts of others, and convey cultural information (Smith & Watson, 2010). Smith and Watson stated
that constituents of autobiographical subjectivity include memory, experience, identity, spatial location, embodiment, and agency. In “Life as Narrative,” Bruner (2004) stated that “in the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we ‘tell about’ our lives” (p. 15). Therefore, a lot is at stake in writing an autobiography because the author sets about remaking himself or herself through memories and the retelling of a lifetime of experiences.

Lejeune’s (1971/1989) seminal essay, “An Autobiographical Pact,” described the relationship between author and reader as one of trust based on the author’s signature: “What defines autobiography for the one who is reading is above all a contract of identity that is sealed by the proper name. And this is true also for the one who is writing the text” (p. 19). Therefore, when a reader sees the author’s name on the title page of an autobiography, readers expect that the narrator or central figure of the text (the autobiographical “I”) is that same person and that the life experiences described are, in fact, a true representation of what happened. However, in recent years, a few published authors of autobiographical texts have been at the center of controversy surrounding the genre (e.g., Frey, 2003; Jones, 2008; Mortenson and Relin, 2006). One very prominent case was that of Frey’s (2003) A Million Little Pieces. The author depicted his account of substance abuse and rehabilitation that the press exposed later as mostly fiction. In a qualitative study of the fallout that ensued, Dahmen (2011) found that writers like Frey sell “false truth” (p. 125) in part because of the demand for stories of reality that today’s voyeuristic audiences crave.

Memoir genre. Also referred to as contemporary memoir, memoir is a narrative that features “a mere slice of ordinary life—a certain time period, a special relationship, a particular theme or angle on a life” (K. Bomer, 2005, p. 4). Some features that help a memoir
achieve its goals are voice, tone, and metaphor (Iverson, 2004); honesty and reflection (K. Bomer, 2005); and narrative structures (Kirby & Kirby, 2007). The memoir genre offers an entry point into literacy instruction wherein students reflect on experiences and patterns in order to find meaning (Kirby & Kirby, 2007, 2010; K. Bomer, 2005); to understand broader social and political realities (K. Bomer, 2005; Guilla, 2012; Miller, 2005); to engage in identity exploration (R. Bomer, 1995; McCarthey, 2001; Moje, 2003; Moje et al., 2004; Moje & MuQaribu, 2003; Street, 2009; Tatum, 2010, 2012); and to draw upon out-of-school experiences in order to engage with school-based literacy practices (Singer & Shagoury, 2006; Skerrett & Bomer, 2013). The memoir genre invites writers to engage in meaningful work about what is important to them.

Memoirs are intended to depict real events, experiences, and people in book length and form (e.g., *Angela’s Ashes* by Frank McCourt, 1996) or essay length (e.g., *Naked* by David Sedaris, 1998). According to K. Bomer (2005), readers of memoir must “suspend disbelief and presuppose honesty” (p. 9). Books in the memoir genre have skyrocketed to the top of bestseller lists more and more frequently in recent years (Yagoda, 2007). High school literature and composition departments typically offer such nonfiction titles as *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Frankl, 1946), *Night* (Wiesel, 1958/2006), *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (Angelou, 1969/2006), *Girl, Interrupted* (Kaysen, 1993), *A Child Called “It”* (Pelzer, 1995), *Angela’s Ashes* (McCourt, 1996), *Naked* (Sedaris, 1997), *The Glass Castle* (Walls, 2005), and *Wild* (Strayed, 2012), among others.

Current book lists of best-selling memoirs reveal topics that include authors’ self-disclosures as participants and/or observers of experiences involving some kind of conflict or
tension, which can be presented with an array of humorous and somber tones. The conflicts may range from mild (e.g., adventures, unusual undertakings, coming of age) to traumatic (e.g., abuse, poverty, drug use, alcoholism, dysfunctional families, psychological or physical illness, or war). Gilmore (2001) has noted that trauma is the defining subject of memoir’s boom since the 90s. Through in-depth analysis of the genre, Gilmore (2001) deduced that “the cultural awareness that something significant was happening around and through memoir crystalized in the relation to the recognition of trauma’s centrality to it” (p. 129). In other words, Gilmore’s meta-analysis reveals that stories of trauma are central to the elevated status of memoir.

Even though modern memoir has become increasingly popular, in educational settings it has been cast as “the black sheep of the literary family” (Mendelsohn, 2010, n.p.), due in part to criticism that it is “Self-Help 101” (Brown, 2010, p. 122), “confessionals” written for “an audience of voyeurs” (Atlas, 1996, p. 25), and written by authors who are narcissistic (Mendelsohn, 2010). However, even though many scholars, educators, psychologists, doctors, and ordinary citizens extol the virtues of story and particularly the personal narrative (e.g., Alvermann, 2002; Atwell, 1998; Bruner, 1990; Calkins, 1983; Elbow, 1973, 1995; Freire, 1970/2000), over the past few decades, the debate about the place of personal writing in academic settings has continued (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000; Applebee, 1980; Bartholomae, 1980; Berlin, 1988, 1996; Berman, 2001, 2004; Bishop, 1993, 2003; Fishman & McCarthy, 1992, 1995; Hillocks, 1979; Hood, 2008; Newkirk, 1997; O’Donnell, 1996; Schaafsma, 1996). Of particular concern are students’ stories that reveal
traumatic or otherwise highly sensitive personal content with a focus on the personal over the academic.

Despite this criticism, the genre has found a place in high school and university curricula. With the widespread use of social media and the popularity of reality TV, there is little wonder that personal writing, especially memoir, is finding an eager audience in today’s adolescents. Teens increasingly share personal information on social media sites, a trend that is likely driven by the evolution of the sharing platforms teens use as well as changing norms around sharing (Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith, & Beaton, 2013). In classroom settings, advances in technology and access to the Internet provide teachers and students with the invitation and a means to share information with a public audience (see De Souzaa & Dick, 2009; Gross & Acquisti, 2005; Hollenbaugh & Ferris, 2014; Jordán-Conde, Mennecke, & Townsend, 2013; Lenhart & Madden, 2007). The popularity of personal weblogs (“blogs”), the use of “wiki-spaces,” self-publishing software, and vanity presses are also directly related to the phenomenon of adolescents self-disclosing about their personal experiences, opinions, and feelings (Gill, 2008; Yagoda, 2007).

In the current study, Rose explicitly stated that Kirby and Kirby’s (2007) work on contemporary memoir and the studio writing classroom influenced her teaching. When Kirby and Kirby (2007) first conceived of contemporary memoir, they had been seeking out literary genres for use in their high school ELA classrooms that had not already been overanalyzed by literary critics. Particularly, they wanted to find literary works that connected directly with students’ lived experiences. Baker’s (1982) Growing Up provided Kirby and Kirby (2007) with the inspiration to assist their students in exploring and preserving their own past.
experiences as well as envisioning their future through writing and reading memoirs. Addressing critics who would label memoir as a *confessional genre* (e.g., Atlas, 1996), Kirby and Kirby (2007) emphasized that the best contemporary memoirs “do not read like pages from tabloids, but rather like the rich stories of literary novels” (p. 3). Kirby and Kirby (2007) advocate a “so what?” approach to writing memoirs, which challenges adolescents to consider their intentions for writing about selected topics and the personal learning and insight they would like to resonate with readers. Further, for those critics who have questioned how truthful memoirs are (e.g., Hood, 2008), they say that memory and interpretation are both flawed instruments; therefore, “any memoir is at least in part an invention” (Kirby & Kirby, 2007, p. 3). Contemporary memoir is a flexible and forgiving genre in which novice and expert writers can engage.

*The studio workshop.* Kirby and Kirby (2007) established the studio workshop approach over more than two decades of teaching writing. Studio workshop is not just “writing workshop.” The studio workshop framework is a comprehensive, carefully planned, and fully orchestrated approach that is theoretically grounded in phenomenology (i.e., real world events have significance and meaning), epistemology (e.g., if one wants to become a writer, one must behave like a writer), and constructivism (e.g., a learner constructs knowledge in a social setting). These theoretical groundings underpin the philosophical tenets of Rose’s memoir curriculum.

According to Kirby and Kirby (2007), the establishment of six specific values will assist teachers in making the classroom space operate like a studio workshop:
1. Work: Students need to read memoir, write memoir, and think like a reader and writer.

2. Practice and Experimentation: Students need to explore their memories, their voices, and a variety of approaches to writing. Short exploratory pieces are called “spider pieces” (p. 29).

3. Individual visions and versions: Students need to study the craft and technique of memoir by reading excerpts of published memoirs as models yet strive to find their own distinctive writing voices and writing styles.

4. Decision making about options and choices: Writing is not regulated and prescribed; instead, students are faced with myriad choices and decisions about their final pieces.

5. Working and writing within a community of learners: The goals of the classroom community are to establish shared common values, to adhere to rules of professional conduct, to support each other’s efforts and written work; to provide praise and support for risk-taking; and to show sincere interest in each other’s writing.

6. Reflection and self-awareness: Teachers must foster and develop students’ self-awareness and group responsibility as part of the accepted modus operandi of the class. Standards for conduct, writing responses, for work, and for productivity must be implemented in a manner that nurtures and encourages self-awareness and accountability. Students can monitor their progress, growth, and development by engaging in self-reflection and self-assessment practices.

Kirby and Kirby (2007) believe this approach to teaching memoir helps to solve “several of the dilemmas faced by teachers who want to motivate student writers” (p. 34). The studio
workshop approach affords learners opportunities to work like memoirists through guidance and modeling in an interactive and social environment. Through a consistent approach to writing instruction that is grounded in theory, learners are aided in connecting reading and writing in powerful ways and provided many opportunities to engage in writing for an authentic audience and for revising pieces in a supportive environment. Bazerman (1994) said genres are not textual forms, rather, they are "forms of life, ways of being, frames for social action" (p. 1) that create environments for learning and teaching activities. In the current study, contemporary memoir was complemented by the studio workshop framework.

Overall, expressivist pedagogy research attends to the influences of the writing process approach, life writing, and genre studies (e.g., memoir). In the next section, I topics in expressive writing research relevant to the current study are presented.

*Experimental expressive writing.* Pennebaker’s (1982, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1997) expressive writing paradigm offers unique insights into the reasons people share their personal stories. While expressive writing conducted for experimental purposes is not a part of the current study, it is important to consider that offering students an outlet to write about their experiences is compelling for many educators. In the current study, Rose expressed a belief that students need and want to share their stories. Therefore, a discussion of on experimental expressive writing is needed in order to understand why some students feel compelled to share deeply personal topics in school writing assignments—as opposed to writing about topics that are experienced-based but not deeply personal.

& Beall, 1986; Pennebaker, Mayne, & Francis, 1997; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999;
Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser 1988), was originally called *self-expressive writing*
expressive writing in experimental research involves participants writing their deepest
thoughts and feelings about traumatic experiences for approximately twenty minutes per day
for four consecutive days. The impact of the expressive writing paradigm has been studied
extensively in the fields of medicine, social work, and psychology, and to a lesser extent, in
education. Findings suggests that favorable emotional, cognitive, and health outcomes are
associated with expressive writing, and participants who have benefitted most from
expressive writing used particular patterns of linguistic style such as predominant first person
pronoun usage or past tense verbs (e.g., Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005; Chung & Pennebaker,
2007; Friscina, Lepore, & Borod, 2005, Horowitz, 2008; Kacewicz, Slatcher, & Pennebaker,
2007; Neimeyer Van Dyke, & Pennebaker, 2009; Pennebaker, Chung, Ireland, Gonzales, &
Booth, 2007; Smyth & Pennebaker, 2008; Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010).

Only a few experimental expressive writing studies have been conducted with
adolescents, and results have been mixed. While some studies have shown positive effects of
expressive writing on somatic symptoms among eighth-grade adolescents (Soliday, Garofalo,
& Rogers, 2004) and older adolescents (e.g., Parker, Stewart, & Gantt, 2006; Taylor,
Wallander, Anderson, Beasley, & Brown, 2003; Warner et al., 2006), other studies have
found either null or negative effects of expressive writing (e.g., Gallant & Lafreniere, 2003;
Smith, 1991). For example, in an experimental study by Gallant and Lafreniere (2003), pre-
ten and adolescents of alcoholics were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: an
emotional writing group, a non-emotional writing group, and a non-writing group. While findings showed that the contents of emotional and non-emotional conditions differed significantly, students who disclosed emotional information did not exhibit health or psychological benefits over time as hypothesized.

*Writing and healing.* Research shows that the developmental periods between adolescence and adulthood are critical times for the development of self and identity (Bochner, 1997; Dusek & McIntyre, 2003; Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Habermas, Ehlert-Lerche, & de Silveira, 2009; Harter, 1998; Kroger, 2003; McLean, 2005; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009), narrative identity (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McLean, 2005), and autobiographical memory (Holmes & Conway, 1999; Rubin & Schulkind, 1997). Some youth experience physiological, psychological, and social challenges with relative ease, while others experience emotional confusion and unrest (Simmons, Blyth, Van Cleaves, & Bush, 1979). Without opportunities to make personal connections in school, adolescents may feel their lives and experiences are removed from the school curriculum (Dutro, 2008; Tatum & Gue, 2010; Wiseman, 2007).

According to Frank (1995) and Pennebaker (1997), talking or writing about trauma is a natural human response to a lived traumatic experience. The wounds exposed in those stories become shared in the telling and give a voice to the storyteller. Klein (2003) explains that attempting to silence thoughts forces them to remain in memory as fragmented sensory images, and they are therefore more likely to be activated by internal or external stimuli. The nature of memory fragments can be altered by converting them into narrative form (Felman & Laub, 1992; Frank, 1995; Pennebaker, 1997). It is the act of verbalizing the memories that
embeds them in a story, which in turn reduces the memory to a state of nonactivation. As a result, when students are not provided opportunities to verbalize stressful events, their physical and psychological health may suffer, and they may experience reduced working memory capacity (Boals, Rubin, & Klein, 2008; Daiute & Buteau, 2002; Klein & Boals, 2001b; Klein & Bratton, 2007; Pennebaker, 1990, 1997).

Pennebaker (1997) published groundbreaking research on the hidden price of silence in his studies about writing and healing. In *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions*, he reports that early in his career while teaching at University of Virginia, he became interested in seemingly unrelated phenomena: the joy of talking, the nature of lie-detection, and the role of self-understanding (1997, p. 2). He learned from his psychology students that they loved to talk about themselves—and the students who talked the most during group work felt that they learned the most in class (1997, p. 3). Additionally, Pennebaker learned that people have a need to confess. He conjures images of strangers oversharing with people sitting near them on busses and airplanes and of people’s experiences with lie detector tests who confessed that they did not think the machine could read their minds, but noted that the more they tried to hold back the truth, the more their bodies betrayed them through increased sweating, faster heart rate, and other physiological symptoms (Pennebaker, 1997, p. 4-5). It is through the hard work required to suppress thoughts, Pennebaker found, that the body undergoes stress. When the troubling thoughts are finally given an outlet, the person feels relief both emotionally and physically. Therefore, he concluded that traumas kept secret can adversely affect the immune system (Pennebaker, 1997). When a person actively represses or inhibits thoughts, the body reacts to this
physiological work with increased perspiration, elevated heart rate and blood pressure, which can create possible long-term stressors on the body that can cause both physical and psychological problems. Research shows that openly writing or talking about stressful thoughts can neutralize many of these problems (Pennebaker, 1982, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1997; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker, Mayne, & Francis, 1997; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser 1988).

Expressive writing may, therefore, provide one means of supporting students’ physical and psychological health. Educator and psychologist Klein (2003) called the healing effects of expressive writing about traumatic lived experiences “remarkable” (p. 69). In research studies involving student populations (Boals & Klein, 2005; Pennebaker, 1986, 1997), college students in expressive writing groups compared to those in control groups who did no writing exhibited improved physical health, psychological well being, and cognitive function for up to four months after writing. The researchers concluded that expressive writing or structured verbal disclosure can increase students’ ability to give their stories of trauma narrative coherence (Klein, 2003, p. 71). Pennebaker’s (1997) research on expressive writing suggests that feelings of relief that follow expressing painful emotions are generally accompanied by more efficient cognitive processing and improved wellbeing.

Kliwer et al. (2011) conducted a school-based randomized controlled trial to test the efficacy of two expressive writing interventions among African-American youth living in high-violence urban neighborhoods. Findings showed that youth who had experienced and witnessed violence or had been victimized by peers improved on teacher-rated aggression and other problem behaviors relative to controls after participating in the expressive writing
program. The findings confirm positive results from other studies (e.g., Haraway, 2003; Soliday et al., 2004) that explored expressive writing as an effective way to help students cope with stressors they are experiencing.

Long and Davis (2011) implemented a quasi-experimental study in which they examined the effects of an expressive writing intervention on male juvenile offenders. Emotional disclosure is often a common feature of most alternative literacy programs (Long & Davis, 2011), and in this study, 25 male youth who were housed in Division of Youth Services group homes participated in one of three writing conditions: life goals, gratitude, and expectations (control group). Results indicated that juveniles in the two experimental groups (i.e., life goals and gratitude) showed significant improvement on two of three measures of emotional and psychological well being, and positive mood and hope.

The Current State of Expressive Writing Research

A recent and growing interest in personal writing, writing and healing, and memoir has rekindled ethical issues surrounding expressivist writing pedagogy and what its place is in education (e.g. Gilmore, 2001, Spigelman, 2001; Kirby & Kirby, 2007; Smith & Watson, 2010; O’Conner, 2011). It is important to point out that the teaching of personal narratives in the writing curriculum has received its share of criticism over the past few decades and continues to do so today. Such scholars as Stotsky (1995) and Faigley (1992) have argued that an excessive emphasis has been placed on personal experience-based writing and such an emphasis may devalue the informational writing undertaken in other content areas, such as science and technology. Others argue that required or careless use of expressivist writing pedagogies in academic settings is not only inappropriate, but also risky (Alcorn, 1995, 2002;
Bartholomae, 1995; Berlin, 1988; Bizzell, 1982; 1986; Hood, 2008; Perillo, 1997). Tensions surrounding expressive pedagogical practices include concerns of teachers casting themselves in the role of therapists (Alton & Pfeiffer, 2003), teachers requiring students to reveal emotional information (Hood, 2008, 2011; Swartzlander, Pace, & Stamler, 1993), youth being (re)traumatized through sharing difficult experiences (Johnson, 2014; McKinney, 2007), and the ethics regarding personal stories submitted for a grade (Alton & Pfeiffer, 2003; Bartholomae, 1995; Hood, 2008, 2011; Swartzlander, Pace, & Stamler, 1993).

The following two sections address sensitive topics, specifically, trauma narratives. Research on trauma narratives inform the current study in that some of Rose’s students elected to write about sensitive topics or traumatic experiences in their memoirs.

Sensitive Topics

Research of sensitive topics can raise questions about what is ethical or permissible in schools. Of the few studies that define sensitive topics, sensitive topics are described in the context of topics considered socially sensitive, such as research on sexual activity, sexual behavior, physical abuse, drug abuse, and death, to name a few (Lee, 1993; Lee & Renzetti, 1993; Liamputtong, 2007). Overall, research suggests that what is considered sensitive is subjective. Lee (1993) stated that the extent to which research encroaches on people’s lives can determine whether the research is sensitive. Farberow (1963) identified sensitive topics as those that are considered taboo by society. Other scholars have identified sensitive topics by their potential to create consequences or pose a threat to participants (e.g., Dickenson-Switf, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2008; Sieber & Stanley, 1998). Renzetti and Lee (1993) said that “topics that are intimate, discreditable or incriminating” (p. ix) are sensitive because
such topics are based on insider knowledge gained through personal knowledge. In the current study, three published volumes of students’ memoirs included topics that other researchers have classified as “sensitive” based on a combination of the above descriptions.

**Trauma Narratives.** The American Psychiatric Association (Trauma, 2013) described traumatic experiences as an emotional response to a terrible event such as an accident, rape or natural disaster that may result in shock and denial. The psychological effects of trauma may result in longer-term reactions ranging from moodiness and flashbacks to such physical symptoms as headaches and nausea. More severe psychological effects may manifest in what is know as *Post-traumatic Stress Disorder* (PTSD), which is an anxiety disorder that develops in some people after they experience extremely traumatic events (e.g., combat, crime, an accident or natural disaster). While feelings of anxiety, stress, or disruption to one’s life are considered normal in such circumstances, some people have difficulty moving on from the traumatic event and managing their emotions (Trauma, 2013). However, it is important to note that all those who experience traumatic events do not develop PTSD or necessarily identify with having been traumatized as a result of such experiences (Trauma, 2013).

Trauma studies (Felman & Laub, 1992) is an interdisciplinary field wherein scholars examine trauma and memory and how these are represented (Caruth, 1995). The term *trauma theory* derives from Caruth’s (1991) work that engages Freud’s theory of traumatic neurosis and latency. In literacy research on trauma narratives, scholars seek to understand how students’ personal stories of trauma are elicited and what functions these serve. Dutro (2008) defines trauma narratives as those true stories of trauma that occur as a response to literature
in classroom contexts as well as discussions of experiences related to highly visible disasters or less visible trauma that “lurks in the everyday lives of children and youth who suffer from private, personal difficulties” (p. 424). Trauma narratives may occur with or without provocation and may be delivered orally or in writing and represented in a variety of forms (e.g., art, plays, nonfiction narratives, poetry).

Dutro (2008, 2009, 2010) is the first scholar in literacy studies and poverty studies to combine trauma studies with critical theories of literacy, which examine the role of challenging life experiences on children’s literacy practices as well as on their relationship to schooling. In Dutro’s (2009, 2010) research on trauma narratives, she borrowed the metaphors “testimony” and “critical witness” from literary trauma studies to describe the acts of sharing and hearing stories of trauma (Dutro, 2011). Literary trauma studies is a field that examines trauma in literature, film, and significant cultural-historical events (Hartman 1995; Leys 2000; Whitehead 2004; Yeager 2002). Dutro (2009) contends that school children are “everyday documentarians” (p. 231), and her research largely focuses on youths’ trauma narratives that occur in response to reading. In her 2009 study of children’s testimonies in high poverty urban schools, Dutro found that children drew upon their difficult lived experiences--their “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992) –as a primary resource for their school-based learning. The children’s documentation of their economic and emotional challenges provided insight into their relationship to school. For example, in the case of Molly, an 8-year-old student who frequently missed school due to moving so often, her classmates (and ultimately, the school) assumed Molly’s sporadic absences occurred because she had chosen to opt out of school (Dutro, 2009). Molly’s talk in
interviews revealed the emotional dimensions she maneuvered as a result of so many moves (e.g., worries that her father would not be able to find her), while also revealing the need for her teachers to pay attention to her relationship with the academic and social aspects of schooling.

Educational researchers have identified literacy as an entry point into studying the lives of children and adolescents. Taylor’s (2006; Taylor & Dorsey-Gains, 1988) work encourages conversations about lives of Black urban poor families and families who have been displaced due to natural disasters and personal, economic, and social crises. Lycke (2010) examined the literacy practices of teenage mothers and found that they required responsive pedagogical approaches, such as scaffolding, to support their shifting literacy and identity development throughout their pregnancies. Wissman and Wiseman (2011) presented case studies wherein two middle school students each created poetry as testimony to trauma. Through poetry, the adolescents were able to take “narrative control” (Wissman & Wiseman, 2011, p. 243) of what happened to them by using language “to claim the right to name their own experience and to shape their own understanding of traumatic situations and experiences” (Wissman & Wiseman, 2011, p. 243). Writing poetry allowed the teenagers to reshape their stories of trauma in a way that they deemed appropriate at the time.

As Dutro (2009, 2010) indicated with her research on trauma narratives, educators face challenges in determining how to best support students who have experienced traumas while also not blurring the line between teacher and therapist. Dutro (2008) advocates that educators “think carefully about how students’ hard stories are welcomed or silenced in classrooms and that we consider what it even means to take students’ difficult responses
seriously in our work” (p. 433). It is important for educators to understand how students can best be supported. Stephanie Jones (2004) contends that classroom teachers can begin the dismantling of the systematic inequities marginalized youth face in school by acknowledging topics embedded in their lives. Bullying, for example, has become an acceptable topic to address in school because of widespread anti-bullying campaigns (see Jones, 2004), but topics like homelessness or domestic abuse are still shrouded in shame and silence. Although in the context of schooling, sensitive topics are recognized, the research on how classroom English teachers manage the occurrence of personal topics in writing is still lacking. The next section raises issues that are often unaddressed when official school knowledge and personal and communal knowledge are blended (Dyson, 2003; Gritter, 2012).

**A Neglected Aspect of ELA Teacher Education**

In *Private readings in public: Schooling the literary imagination*, Sumara (1996) wrote that

the classroom cannot merely be seen as a place where subject matter is mastered, where curriculum is covered, or where learning is tested. The classroom is the site for complex, interwoven relationships: between teacher and students, students and each other, teachers and texts, students and texts. (1996, pp. 5-6)

These interwoven relationships are critical to providing supportive spaces for shared testimony and witness (Dutro, 2011). Dutro (2011) challenges the use of the deficit model with which to view children’s difficult experiences because it “call[s] into question the impulse to speak as though we know about a life or an entire community of lives, when all we know is the facade that has been narrated and re-narrated in the image and voice of the
materially privileged” (p. 196). In other words, by challenging the deficit model, classroom teachers may be afforded better understandings of who their students are and how their experiences affect their learning in literacy classrooms.

Limited studies exist that examine how teachers can create classroom contexts for students to share their difficult lived experiences or what teachers can do when students feel vulnerable and emotional. While it is not the intention of this study to advocate for the circumvention of school protocols for addressing situations in which students are in danger or extreme distress, it is noted that the literature provides very little guidance for writing instructors who engage in expressivist pedagogical practices. For instance, Pennebaker (2004) suggested that if his university students feel that writing about a particular event will push them “over the edge” in any way, they should not write about that event (p. 26). It was through his discovery that active inhibition of one’s thoughts, feelings, or behaviors requires physiological work that he realized the potential dangers of releasing those emotions in a forced way (Pennebaker, 2004). Taylor (2006) advised that teachers should not ask children to reveal emotional information, but if they volunteer it, then teachers should simply listen. Wissman and Wiseman (2011) and Kirby and Kirby (2007) also encouraged teachers to provide non-judgmental and compassionate listening. Dutro (2008) called for a more responsive pedagogy because, ultimately, it matters whether students who have difficult lives and hard stories to share are made to feel welcomed or silenced. Still, “well-meaning teachers” (Jones, 2004, p. 464) may silence students by using practices that privilege beliefs interwoven with their own social class positioning.

Jones (2012) has maintained that addressing difficult lived experiences of characters
in literature in a distanced way is more acceptable in some classrooms than addressing issues experienced by real humans. Jones (2012) argued that the unspoken and taken-for-granted rules ("nomos"; Bourdieu, 2000) of teacher education contribute to inadequate guidance regarding students’ self-disclosure in educational contexts. Jones (2012) noted that in teacher education, implicit practices result in particular beliefs. The unspoken rules, the “nomos,” privilege “middle-classed polite ways of interacting in the classroom” (p. 134), thus reinforcing what Sumara and colleagues (2006) argue as “the normalizing structures of teacher education” (p. 61), and their research findings indicate that these normalizing structures control the nature and depth of classroom interactions and activities.

Paley (2001) pointed out that one can see further evidence of this normalizing structure in Bartholomae’s (1995) and Elbow’s (1995) published debate about academic and personal writing. In the discussion of how each would address a student’s written disclosure about her parents’ divorce, Bartholomae wrote that he would “begin by being dismissive” (p. 85) and Elbow countered that if that were the student’s first essay of the semester, he “would give no response at all” (p. 91). In a critique of these statements, Paley (2001) posited that neither man wanted to talk to the student or to the intended audience of the article (i.e., readers of *College Composition and Communication*, 1995) about their discomfort with the personal topic. Responses like Bartholomae’s and Elbow’s are not uncommon.

Numerous examples can be found in written discourse based outside of the classroom that demonstrate dismissiveness or aversion to bringing the personal into the writing curriculum (e.g., Faigley, 1992; Lindner, 2004; Perillo, 1997; Swartzlander, Pace, & Stamler, 1993) or otherwise express a lack of understanding of how to address issues surrounding
personal writing (e.g., Jones, 2004, 2012). In Kirby and Crovitz’s (2013) *Inside Out: Strategies for Teaching Writing*, the authors warn teachers that they should “move slowly with this self-disclosure business. Remember that you are teaching writing, not conducting psychoanalysis” (p. 54). While Kirby and Crovitz are in the minority of writing strategies authors to address concerns of self-disclosure, their commentary about self-disclosure, privacy, and district policies covers little more than half a page of text.

Panofsky, Eanet, and Wolpow (2001) reported that social and emotional issues are rarely addressed in teacher education programs. They attribute this problem to the “much larger avoidance in the dominant traditions of western science” (n.p.), and as a result, issues of feelings, emotions, or affect have become devalued in both research and practice. While teacher education literature contains some writing focused on affective domains (e.g., Witte, 2013), Panofsky, Eanet, and Wolpow (2001) posit that educators “have not paid adequate attention to the role of the affective in learning and to the social-emotional needs of all students” (n.p.). Such a statement is an invitation to consider how teachers who engage students in personal and meaningful written work can best acknowledge, encourage, and support them.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter elaborates on how Cultural Historical Activity Theory informs this study and addresses the complex nature of expressivist writing pedagogical practices. The debate about the most appropriate type of writing in which composition students should engage has remained largely consistent since the 1990s, and expressive writing still has its critics except for the more recent popularity of the memoir genre. Nevertheless, many researchers agree
that students benefit when making personal connections to schooling; however, teachers are hard pressed to find guidance on ways to address what some call the risky territory of personal narrative writing. More research is needed that investigates how teachers navigate the teaching of writing that may evoke highly personal or sensitive pieces from students.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

“To educate is to take seriously both the quest for life’s meaning and the meaning of individual lives” (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 3).

This qualitative case study investigated how one high school English teacher described her instructional practices in teaching a memoir-writing curriculum based on the personal experiences of ninth grade students. Qualitative data collection methods allowed the researcher to capture the participant’s reflections about her teaching practice as well as to gather previously published curriculum materials and students’ written work from the Internet. Over a three-month period, the researcher interviewed the teacher and examined her self-published lesson plans, teaching philosophy statements, and classroom teaching materials that resulted in the published memoirs of her ninth grade ELA students. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How does one high school English teacher describe her instructional practices for teaching a memoir-writing curriculum based on the personal experiences of ninth grade students?
2. How does one high school English teacher navigate the occurrence of sensitive topics in students’ written work?
3. What themes emerged in these ninth grade ELA students’ published memoirs?

Chapter 3 begins with the research design and conceptual foundations for the method of this study, followed by an overview of the participant and describe her publically available teaching portfolio website on the Internet. Next, data collection and data analysis procedures are outlined along with the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of
the study are addressed, and the final section includes limitations of the study and the researcher’s subjectivity statement.

**Research Design and Method**

Given that the purpose of this qualitative study is to inform the education community about one teacher’s memoir-writing curriculum unit and her description of how she navigated sensitive topics in ninth grade students’ published memoirs, a qualitative research design was selected as the most appropriate. Qualitative researchers are concerned with how individuals make sense of their world and their experiences, and they seek “the social meaning that people attribute to their lived experiences, circumstances, and situations, as well as the meanings people embed into texts and other objects” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 4).

The extent to which qualitative research designs are pre-constructed, constructed, and reconstructed is determined by the amount of flexibility the researcher deems necessary to answer research questions and advance goals (Maxwell, 2012). Although there are benefits to such flexibility, the research design must provide “methodological congruence,” a concept advocated by Richards and Morse (2013), meaning that the components of design decisions should create “congruence of research question, research data, and processes of analysis that will strengthen and drive the project” (p. 1). The research was conducted as a case study that followed a single case design with embedded subunits (Yin, 2014). Like qualitative research on the whole, case study research is empirical, interpretive, and empathetic (Stake, 1995). The data analysis method was adapted from models of qualitative content analysis described by Krippendorff (2013) and Schreier (2012).
Case Study

A qualitative case study was selected for this research in order to provide a holistic description of one high school English teacher’s approach to teaching memoir across three years and to discover and understand the recurring themes that emerged in her students’ published memoirs. Merriam (1998) defined a qualitative case study as one that provides an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 16). Case study research, therefore, starts with delimiting the object of study (Merriam, 1998), which results in an intrinsically bounded case (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Stake (1995) referred to the case as “an integrated system” with “a boundary and working parts” (p. 2). For the proposed case study, the ‘case’ was limited to one high school English Language Arts teacher’s self-documented and publically published approach to teaching a memoir curricular unit across three years, which included three publications of her students’ memoirs. Yin (2014) pointed out that single-case designs can have subunits embedded within them, and due to the nature of the data selected for this study, an embedded design was deemed the most judicious choice for this research (Figure 1). The three subunits are as follows: 1) 2009-2010 memoir curricular materials and 2010 student publication; 2) 2010-2011 memoir curricular materials and 2011 student publication; and 3) 2011-2012 memoir curricular materials and 2012 student publication. Providing further context for the case were data such as teaching philosophy statements and course syllabi.
According to Yin (2014), a case study design is appropriate for “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 16). Context, in part, refers to the “larger economic, cultural, and historical forces that shape and are shaped by local encounters” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 9), making the phenomenon being studied inextricably linked to the context (Cronbach, 1975; Yin, 2014). Yin further explained that in order to better understand a real-world case, researchers must consider the important contextual conditions that are relevant to the case. For this study, the contextual conditions involved one ninth-grade ELA teacher’s approach to engaging students in literacy practices through a memoir curricular unit and her students’ interpretations of the assignments within this unit of instruction. The teacher placed all
curricular materials and students’ memoirs in publically accessible spaces on the Internet. This single-case study is instrumental in that it is designed to inform other studies related to expressivist writing pedagogy and practices (Stake, 1995). The case serves to help the academic community understand certain issues or problems within it (Stake, 1995).

**Content Analysis**

Qualitative approaches to content analysis have their roots in literary theory, the social sciences, and critical scholarship (Duke & Mallette, 2006). Content analysis is a flexible research method that aids in the study of documented human interactions, whether those interactions occur through interviews, books, websites, or artwork (White & Marsh, 2006). Kohlbacker (2006) and Bowen (2009) argued that qualitative content analysis as a research method is complementary to case study as a research strategy for both collecting and examining data material. In qualitative case studies and qualitative content analyses, researchers are concerned with the meaning people make of their lives in very particular contexts (Kohlbacker, 2006). Content analysts collect and interpret data sources such as texts and “evidence people leave behind them in various ways as they traverse their physical environment” (Lee, 2000, p. 1). Krippendorff defined content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p. 24). In this sense, *texts* refer to printed matter, recorded speech, visual communications, works of art, websites, and cultural artifacts (Krippendorff, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Schreier, 2012). Qualitative content analysis provides a systematic way of describing the meaning of the qualitative material (Schreier, 2012).
Content analysis has been more widely known as a positivist methodology originating in communication studies where it was most often utilized to count manifest textual elements (Neuendorf, 2002; Weber, 1990). Content analysis is typically classified as a quantitative or a qualitative method, but Krippendorff (2013) questioned “the validity and usefulness of the distinction” because “ultimately, all reading of texts is qualitative even when certain characteristics of a text are converted to numbers” (p. 22). George (1959), Groeben and Rustemeyer (1994), and Holsti (1969)—among others—also argue that distinctions between a qualitative and a qualitative type of content analysis is merely a matter of degree. Since World War II, content analysis has expanded to qualitative applications in anthropology, sociology, and psychology (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). These interpretive approaches include discourse analysis, social constructivist analysis, rhetorical analysis, ethnographic content analysis, hermeneutic analysis, and conversation analysis, each of which offers a systematic way of exploring texts (Krippendorff, 2013). Characteristics of interpretive approaches comprise a close reading and interpretations of textual matter (Krippendorff, p. 23). Distinguishing features of qualitative content analysis include a focus on manifest content, consideration of context, and variability in carrying out the steps (Schreier, 2012).

The primary data sources for content analysis research often consist of texts that were generated independent of the researcher’s involvement. Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest (1966) stated that unobtrusive methods are particularly appropriate when the data have not been influenced by researcher interaction, a feature that gives the data a “unique level of authenticity” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 228). The main data sources I examined were publically available lesson plans and other teacher artifacts (e.g.,
brainstorming worksheets, assignment instructions, example documents, teaching philosophy, course syllabi, etc.) published on the World Wide Web as well three books of students’ memoirs for sale on Amazon.com, on a popular on-demand publishing website, and at local bookstores. Existing artifacts allow the researcher to avoid a “reactive situation” and therefore “preserve validity of the research” (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 45). Put another way, the researcher’s presence in the classroom while students write personal stories has potential to make participants react differently than they would if the researcher were not present (Lee, 2000; Webb et al., 1966). The researcher may make participants feel uncomfortable or even influence changes in their behavior (Charmaz, 2006; Lee, 2000; Prior, 2004; Webb et al., 1966). Further, Orne (1962) noted that research subjects might behave in ways that they presume would make the research study successful. Additionally, participants’ anticipation of the researcher’s intention to read documents (e.g., curriculum materials and student products) could influence the data produced (Lee, 2000).

While content analysts often manage to avoid intruding upon the social setting, they do not deem unobtrusive measures an alternative to participant-observation and interviewing as much as they see it as complementary to those types of direct elicitation methods (Lee, 2000). As such, additional data sources that are frequently subjected to content analysis include interview data (Krippendorff, 2013). The transcripts of open-ended interviews provide the researcher with a data source from which to make qualitative inferences. The current study included six semi-structured interviews with the sole participant, and content analysis was performed on the transcripts of the conversations. While content analysis can be—and often is—conducted on texts alone (i.e., without interviews or other data collection
techniques), the current study was designed to include interviews of the teacher for the purposes of respondent validation. As a context-sensitive method, content analysis of interview transcripts allows the researcher to process data that are “significant, meaningful, informative, and even representational to others” (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 46). When content analysts interpret and draw inferences from data using context-sensitive methods, the likelihood of those inferences being relevant to users of the analyzed texts is greater.

Content analysis assumes familiarity with the language of the analyzed texts; therefore, content analysts are more likely to be successful if they have a heightened awareness of context, language, and discursive conventions. This familiarity and awareness in the current study was achieved through the researcher’s background knowledge and experience as a former high school English teacher as well as her interest in memoir and other personal writing approaches. Further, through immersion in the data over seven months, the researcher gained a familiarity and awareness of the data specific to this case.

Content analysis has broad applications in the study of language and literacy and has been used for a variety of purposes in numerous literacy and curriculum studies (e.g., Aulls, 2003; Beach et al., 2009; Hiebert, Martin, & Menon, 2005; Sipe, 2000; Wilson et al. 2011). The foci of research studies using content analysis of curriculum materials have included the analysis of basal readers or content area textbooks (e.g., Baker et al., 2010; Marino, 2011), teacher guides (e.g., Archbald et al., 1994; Garcia, 2010), children’s books (e.g., Taylor, 2009; Wagner, 2013), course syllabi (Homa et al., 2013; Martin & Turner, 1988), and scholarly journals (Walsh & Petty, 2007; Wilson et al., 2011). In recent years, applications of qualitative content analysis can be seen more widely in social research (Kohlbacher, 2006;
Krippendorff, 2013). Krippendorff stated that this increase is due in part to the current culture of computation, which involves vast amounts of textual data generated in digital form, thus “moving content analysis into a promising future” (p. 22).

Beach et al. (2011, 2012) and Helman et al (2013) reported the specialized language used in empirical research studies in English language arts increasingly includes tags such as computers, online writing, digital divide, technology tools, asynchronous, forums, message boards, blogs, wikis, mobile devices, video, digital media, social networking, laptops, and information literacy. Considering the wealth of digital data available, it is little wonder that demand for computer-aided content analysis is on the rise (Krippendorff, 2013). When large volumes of textual matter are the focus of study, such as in the current research, computer-aided qualitative text analysis software is often employed. In the current study, NVivo, a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software package was used to assist in the efficient organization, management, and coding of qualitative data. This was particularly advantageous since all but one data source (interviews) were already in digital form. QDA software like NVivo utilizes “raw text, words, and character strings of which documents consist” (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 213) in order for the analyst to manually assign sections of text to categories or codes, which can be preassigned or created “on the fly” (p. 260).

**Conceptual foundation.** When researchers believe texts can answer epistemic questions about currently inaccessible phenomena, events, or processes, they select a problem-driven approach as the entry point into the analysis (Krippendorff, 2013). Therefore, content analysts believe that the systematic reading of texts may provide the answers to the research questions. Conceptual frameworks explain information about what is
being studied and the presumed interrelationships among those things and therefore provide a focusing function (Miles, Huberman, Saldaña, 2014). The conceptual foundation of qualitative content analysis has interpretation at its heart (Schreier, 2012).

Krippendorff (2013) outlined six epistemological tenets that underpin the method of qualitative content analysis, these are summarized below. Because the approach to qualitative content analysis also has been influenced by the work of Schreier (2012), indicated are points of alignment between the guiding principles of Krippendorff and Schreier:

1. People bring meanings to texts. The texts themselves do not inherently hold meanings (Krippendorff, p. 28). Schreier said that “data never speaks for itself” (p. 2); therefore, humans construct meaning.

2. Texts can be read from different perspectives; therefore, texts can have multiple meanings (Krippendorff, p. 28). Schreier pointed out that in qualitative research, texts can have multiple meanings and interpretations and that “these can shift over time and across different people” (p. 21).

3. While intersubjective agreement may seem ideal, it rarely exists because meanings invoked by texts are subjective (Krippendorff, pp. 28-29). Schreier posited that making interpretations “plausible and convincing to others” (p. 170) could mean something as simple as having discussions between coders to use in combination with interpreting a coefficient of agreement.

4. Meanings of textual content speaks to something other than the given data (p. 29). Schreier stated that researchers co-produce data because they “bring their own background and own assumptions to any act of understanding” (p. 32).
5. Meanings of a text are relative to the context that guides the researcher’s inferences, such as specific situations, intentions, problems, disciplines, or theories (pp. 29-30). Schreier asserted that qualitative content analysis is context-specific because researchers have to “explicitly take context into account” (p. 31) in arriving at their interpretations.

6. When the researcher constructs a particular context for systematically analyzing the text, the text will lead the researcher to draw inferences from the text in order to answer the research questions (pp. 30-31). Schreier stated that by systematically examining all relevant data, by consistently following a sequence of steps, and by checking coding for consistency, the researcher would avoid making a “‘leap’ beyond the analysis” (p. 181) and therefore create valid answers to research questions.

Based on these epistemological tenets, the conceptual framework for content analysis serves prescriptive, analytical, and methodological purposes (Krippendorff, 2013).

The content analysis design for the current study involved the following components: a body of text to be analyzed; research questions that may be answered by examining the body of text; a context for making sense of the body of text; an analytical construct or “coding frame” (Schreier, 2012, p. 58); inferences intended to answer the research questions; and validating evidence. As a research technique and scientific tool, content analysis has the potential to clarify problem situations, to broaden worldviews, and to increase our awareness of what we already know (Richardson & Morse, 2013), therefore providing new understandings of particular phenomena as well as helping to inform everyday actions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Krippendorff, 2013).
Case Selection and Purposive Sampling

The research problem this study investigated relates to how teachers can navigate issues of student self-disclosure when students choose to write about sensitive, personal topics in ELA classrooms. The researcher was open to working with participants who would be interested in engaging in expressive writing practices somewhere along the expressive writing continuum, which ranges from writing to explore to writing to heal. For example, Elbow’s (1973) model of self-expression as a way of learning about self might be on the exploration end of the continuum, Boals’ (2012) concepts of expressive writing and meaning making and Klein & Boals (2001a, 2001b) application of expressive writing to free working memory capacity and improve academic performance might be in the center, whereas Pennebaker’s (1991) expressive writing paradigm that explores health benefits might be on the far right of the continuum. Because many quantitative studies already exist on expressive writing, a qualitative study was chosen to provide a rich, in-depth exploration and understanding of the phenomenon of teaching expressive writing and its contexts.

Researcher-interaction and observations would potentially inhibit participants’ activities or make them feel that their privacy was being invaded (Merriam, 1998). To address these concerns, the researcher started with situations where personal writing was commonplace. In order to seek out potential participants, the technique of snowball sampling was employed, which is an approach for locating information-rich informants or “critical cases” (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2014). The researcher emailed a well-situated colleague to inquire if she knew of any teachers who taught a reading or writing curriculum that was conducive to the sharing of personal stories or if she knew of any projects in school settings where personal life stories
came out as the result of activities implemented in the curriculum. The colleague’s response was immediate and promising. She provided the name of a teacher who not only taught expressive writing as an entry point into literacy engagement, but also went one step further by establishing a publishing club that aided in publishing students’ memoirs in books for sale over the Internet and in local book stores.

This teacher participant’s usual practice was to create space in the curriculum for students to engage in writing activities that draw upon students’ personal stories. The researcher initially considered the teacher’s suitability by reading information about her work online. After an initial examination of search engine results (e.g., a public weblog or “teaching portfolio” that also served as an assignment resource for students and parents; four published books of students’ memoirs; and some news articles that either Rose or her students authored), the researcher emailed Rose using the email address published on her website and briefly exchanged messages and informally discussed the possibilities of having her participate in a research study. Upon hearing more about the research study, Rose expressed her desire to become involved with enthusiasm and fascination. She gave permission to examine her memoir curriculum and students’ published memoirs. She noted that many, but not all, of her students had chosen to write under the protection of pseudonyms. Because her first three years of teaching occurred at the same school, those three years were selected to study those three years for this study and did not include data from her forth and fifth years at two different schools. Because all but interview data for these three years already had been created, classroom observations were not required.
In July 2015, North Carolina State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted permission to conduct this research study (see Appendix A). After receiving copies of the approved research protocol, recruitment letter (see Appendix B), and informed consent document, Rose formally agreed to participate in this study.

The School Context

Arts Magnet School (AMS) is an urban public magnet school for grades 6-12 located in a mid-sized city in the southeastern United States. The student population of approximately 1500 students is racially diverse (66% minority enrollment) with approximately 40% of the children receiving free and reduced lunch. Historically, magnet schools tend to attract more highly qualified teachers who have advanced degrees from more selective colleges than traditional public schools (Cannata, 2012; Fuller et al., 1999). At AMS, approximately 50% of the teachers have advanced degrees and nearly 25% have obtained National Board Certification. Most magnet schools report higher levels of parent and community involvement than traditional public schools (Poppell and Hague, 2001). AMS is no exception; it has established community partnerships with local private universities, a performing arts center, and a dance academy.

The Teacher

The teacher-participant for this study, Rose Clearwater, is a white female in her late twenties who received her first full time appointment at AMS as a ninth grade English teacher in August 2009. Rose had just completed her fourth year teaching when the present study commenced. Rose grew up in the midwestern part of the United States in a family that she considers to be “pretty solidly middle class” (interview, August 13, 2014). She perceived
her hometown as a “culturally aware, literate community” (interview, August 13, 2014). Even though her family did not have a lot of money, she said that she always understood that she was privileged to be able to attend a private boarding school for the last two years of high school, then later attended an Ivy-league college. During her undergraduate program, she studied abroad in France for a year. After receiving her bachelor’s degree in English Literature, she worked at various part-time venues and ultimately decided to enroll in a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program.

Coming from a family of teachers, coupled with her own experiences as a student, made Rose want to enter the teaching profession (interview, August 13, 2009). To a large degree, she said she identifies with her students’ struggles to understand the “abstract kind of thinking associated with reading” (interview, August 13, 2014). She said that when she attended a boarding school for the arts for her last two years of high school, she learned to make personal connections to texts in order to understand them better. Previous to that time, she felt lost in efforts to understand the meaning of figurative language in poems, for example.

Rose teaches English not just because she loves it, but because she struggled with it when she was in high school (interview, August 13, 2009). It was not until her junior year in high school that she learned to make personal connections with texts in order to better understand the latent meanings in them. For example, *Crime and Punishment* (Dostoyevsky, 1866) was much more relatable once Rose realized that annotating the book by writing her friends’ names beside characters’ descriptions helped her to visualize and understand the story. This epiphany helped her to enjoy literature and also informed her decision to major in
literature in college and, ultimately, to become an English teacher. Rose’s decision to incorporate personal experiences into her own teaching, then, is the result of having struggled to understand abstract concepts in literature that seemed divorced from her own reality as an adolescent.

For many years, Rose has had an interest in the connection between literature and the arts because she had taken high school English classes at an arts school and noticed that every once in while, there was a crossover, but it did not happen all the time. This prompted her to consider how the two are connected. As a teenager and then as a college student, Rose tried to work those connections into her own artwork, so the transition to becoming a teacher working at an arts school and integrating arts into her English classes just came naturally. She saw that the content area classes she had taken at art school could have done more to integrate the arts; therefore, she wanted to do that and help make those connections for her own students.

Rose’s teaching philosophy has centered around personal experiences since her early days in the classroom as a student teacher. In spring 2009, as part of Rose’s MAT coursework and student teaching, she was required to write her teaching philosophy in installments and to publish them to an electronic portfolio, which later became her ELA course website. Adept at using technology, Rose’s electronic portfolio later became a teaching blog and provided her with a means of sharing her philosophical beliefs and teaching activities with an Internet audience.
The Curriculum

The district in which AMS is located has a coordinated curriculum that is implemented across all schools in the district. Data collected for this study ranges from April 2009 to May 2012. The school years during which Rose taught memoir began in August 2009 and ended in May 2012; therefore, the curriculum documents Rose used for the memoir unit are based on the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCS). In the weeks before school started in August, rising freshmen at AMS were given a summer reading assignment that consisted of students choosing a memoir or an autobiography and keeping a response log that would ultimately consist of at least 25 entries. During the first two weeks of school, students finished reading and responding to the book and also referred to it in response to other assignments.

The NCSCS goals and objectives for ninth grade ELA included that students should be able to express reflections and reactions to print and non-print text and personal experiences (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2009) by reading, composing, and analyzing narratives individually and in groups. Districtwide, therefore, all ninth grade students engaged in some form of personal writing, and for Rose’s students, this happened with intensity during the first five to six weeks of each new school year. In addition to responding reflectively to a variety of expressive texts, students also were expected to consider audience reaction, to attend to story structures and elements, and to evaluate and analyze an author’s craft and style, which included understanding commonly used literary terms and concepts. Rose taught writing using a writing process approach within a studio workshop framework. Students practiced and experimented with writing using
different strategies for idea generation. At the end of the memoir unit, students who wished to publish their polished pieces of writing submitted their work to the publishing club for publication through an on-demand press that resulted in both online and hard copy formats.

**Data Collection**

Merriam (1998) stated that the predominant characteristic of case study research lies in defining the object of study, therefore bounding the case. In content analysis, the research must have a body of text (Krippendorff, 2013). This study involved collecting data about one English Language Arts teacher’s memoir-writing curriculum and students’ published memoirs from August 2009 to May 2012. As a result, two types of data served to inform the research questions. The main corpus of data collected consisted of data created prior Rose’s involvement in this research project, such as electronic lesson plans, curricular materials such as assignment instructions and worksheets, teaching philosophy statements, course syllabi, video and audio files, and three books of students’ memoirs, all of which were publically available on the World Wide Web. The second type of data collected was teacher interviews conducted with Rose.

**Artifacts**

Krippendorff (2013) used the term *texts* to refer to printed matter, recorded speech, visual communications, works of art, websites, and cultural artifacts, while Merriam (2009) used the term *documents* as an umbrella term that includes *artifacts*. In the current study, the terms *text, documents, materials*, and *artifacts* were used interchangeably to refer to all data sources, which if not already in digital written form, were converted to digital written form.
The raw visual and written electronic artifacts were accessed via public domains on the World Wide Web. First, students’ memoir collections were available for digital download or hardcopy purchase through a popular online bookseller and a popular on-demand publishing company. Second, Rose’s self-created teaching portfolio was posted as a weblog on a publically accessible domain (i.e., a website consisting of a series of entries about a variety of topics arranged in reverse chronological order). The electronic portfolio (hereafter referred to as teaching blog and electronic portfolio interchangeably) featured several subpages that ranged in topic from Rose’s professional affiliations and former coursework to past and current lesson materials. While the electronic portfolio was originally created as a requirement in her MAT program, the researcher accessed the website well into its evolution from MAT portfolio into a blog intended for students and parents to access for classroom updates and homework. The curriculum materials were stored as daily lesson plan posts that contained hyperlinks of downloadable documents as well as external websites. Rose created posts several times per week that contained summary lesson information and assignment links for one or two school days at a time (such as Monday and Tuesday). In most instances, posts contained information for both Standard English I and Honors English I students because these groups of students were enrolled into the same class periods. Content for Standard English I and Honors English I was identical but differed in terms of depth, complexity, and rigor.

By clicking hyperlinks in the various assignment posts on the blog, the researcher was able to find and download lesson plans, assignment instructions, example documents, and worksheets. Some assignment posts on the blog contained images or embedded video clips,
such as art used to inspire writing assignments or commercial and/or homemade video clips to illustrate themes in a literature assignment. The current course syllabus, hyperlinks to selected works of literature and literature-related notes, and grammar and vocabulary handouts were found under other sections of the site. For example, one subpage on the blog included hyperlinks to students’ memoir collections, which were available for digital download or hardcopy purchase through a popular online bookseller and a popular on-demand publishing company. Another subpage on the blog contained Rose’s curriculum vitae complete with hyperlinks to presentations, teaching philosophy, awards, workshop materials, conference presentations, and publications. The following items were relevant to this research and downloaded from the website: 90 lesson plan summaries and 78 pages of supplemental materials (such as rubrics, assignments, example documents; see Table 3.1); three course syllabi; 1 Youtube video; 3 news articles; 2 teaching philosophy statements; and presentation materials delivered at an education conference (i.e., a Power Point and 30 pages of information on teaching memoir).
Table 3.1 *Memoir lesson plan postings and embedded supporting materials by academic year.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number of entries</th>
<th>Number of embedded documents (e.g., worksheets, instructional documents, examples)</th>
<th>Number of in-class days represented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memoir Portfolio Entries, Year 1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memoir Portfolio Entries, Year 2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memoir Portfolio Entries, Year 3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of the memoir curriculum materials were posted during the first 25 to 29 school days of each fall semester. The data were captured in a variety of ways, such as through screen capture, by using keyword searches of the website, and by downloading electronic files. All of these publically available, electronic artifacts were saved to the researcher’s personal computer’s hard drive, which is password-protected. Only that data deemed necessary to answer the research questions for this study were collected. As artifacts were collected, they were added to a well-organized research study database, which was created to increase reliability for the qualitative study (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2014). Electronic data were categorized using the computer’s “save as” function and assigning each a file name (e.g., “memoir lesson plans Aug 18 & 19 2009”), thus enabling each file to be easily categorized and moved to an appropriately labeled electronic file folder (e.g., “Lesson plans 2009-2010”). The name and location of each artifact were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet.
for organization and easy retrieval. Each artifact was annotated (Yin, 2014), and memo-
writing was undertaken to capture themes and ideas (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Yin, 2014).

Artifacts provided valuable data on the context within which Rose operated while
teaching the memoir-writing curriculum across three years. These artifacts also provided a
means of tracking change and development, wherein even slight changes gleaned across
time could have implications (Yin, 2014). For example, an analysis of Rose’s teaching
philosophy statements revealed insights and provided context for changes to her
pedagogical approaches reflecting growth from novice to experienced teacher. Further, the
context afforded by the artifacts provided historical insight about the conditions under which
her students created their memoirs.

** Interviews**

Interview data can provide explanations to corroborate evidence from other sources,
such as documents (Yin, 2014). Interview data from Rose consisted of six semi-structured,
face-to-face interviews that lasted approximately 60-90 minutes each. Rose was asked to
choose a location that was convenient, such as a coffee shop or a library. Interviews were
captured using a hand-held audio digital recording device, and then interviews were
transcribed verbatim; two by the researcher and four by a professional transcription service
provided through NVivo software. When clarifications were needed post-interviews, a total
of six emails and four phone calls were used for this purpose.

**Data Analysis**

Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Merriam (1998) stated that the right way to analyze
data in a qualitative study is during data collection. This ongoing analysis helps the
researcher remain focused while efficiently managing data throughout the research process. Qualitative analysts act on emerging hunches and insights during the interactive process of collecting and analyzing data, thus several options for conducting qualitative content analysis exist (Krippendorff, 2013; Lee, 2000; Merriam, 1998; Schreier, 2012). To account for this flexibility, researchers should be transparent by systematically documenting procedures (Krippendorff, 2013; Schreier, 2012; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

**Developing a Coding Frame and Conducting the Analysis**

Krippendorff (2013) and Schreier (2012) warned that—with regards to content analyses—while the design stage is recursive, the execution of the analysis is fixed. Qualitative content analysis experts have described myriad ways to design content analysis studies and have outlined a number of components or steps necessary to executing a content analysis, some of which are general and others that are specific. In the current study, qualitative content analysis was conducted in two phases, each with distinctive steps. Phase one served to focus the analysis by building and trying out a coding frame. Phase two served to conduct the main analysis on the body of data in order to interpret and present the findings. The nine steps that comprised phases one and two and that were utilized in this study (see Figure 3.2) and were adapted from Krippendorff (2013) and Schreier (2012).
Table 3.2. Overview of the steps used in conducting a content analysis in two phases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1: Creating the Coding Frame</th>
<th>Phase 2: Conducting the main analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Preparing the data</td>
<td>Step 7: Conducting the main analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant material</td>
<td>Step 8: Interpreting the findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3: Unitizing the data</td>
<td>Step 9: Presenting the findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4: Structuring and generating the main coding frame</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5: Testing the coding frame</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 6: Evaluating and modifying the coding frame</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Function of the coding frame. Schreier (2012) stated that a coding frame acts like a filter by providing a way to structure or view material. A coding frame consists of main categories and subcategories around which data are selected and coded. Main categories are aspects about which the researcher would like to know more—i.e., the relevant material. Subcategories specify what is said in the data about the main categories, and subcategories can vary in complexity depending on hierarchical levels. In other words, a main category constitutes a first, higher level, and each subcategory under it constitutes a lower level (Schreier, 2012). In this way, coding frames in qualitative content analysis provide a filter for viewing data and for selecting material and therefore reducing data. A content analysis may have more than one coding frame to be used with different data sources, or the same coding frame can be used across sources. Coding frames may have varying levels of complexity (e.g., simple, medium complexity, high complexity); the level of complexity is determined by how many main categories and subcategories contained in the coding frame (Schreier, 2012). How the coding frame is constructed depends largely on the research questions. During phase 1, main categories and subcategories that comprise a coding frame are not set
in stone (see Step 6), and the decision about the structure of the coding frame depends on the research questions and the researcher (Schreier, 2012).

Once the coding frame was constructed for this study, the researcher applied it to 20% of the total data in order to trial the coding frame. She then conducted a consistency check by both comparing coding with another coder (i.e., a doctoral student trained in qualitative analysis and who used Nvivo) and engaging in double-coding (i.e., coding the same section again at another time in order to compare the two instances of coding). Adjustments to the coding frame were made as needed, based on the research questions (Schreier, 2012).

**Phase 1: Creating the Coding Frame**

**Step 1: Preparing the data.** In this study, the qualitative data analysis (QDA) software NVivo was used to aid in analysis; therefore, all texts were prepared by ensuring they were in digital written form (Krippendorff, 2013). This was done manually by importing documents into NVivo or typing directly into NVivo or by using the copy/paste functions of the computer (i.e., copy text from a website and paste it into the appropriate field in NVivo).

**Step 2: Distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant material.** Because qualitative data analysis is a method that aids in analyzing large amounts of data, it is used to make data more manageable by reducing material. The coding frame cannot cover all of the material, so this step forces the analyst to select key aspects on which to focus (Schreier, 2012). This step involved creating an initial coding frame consisting of “relevant” and “irrelevant” categories in order to (later, see Step 4) create a “substantive coding frame that applies only to the relevant parts” of the selected data (Schreier, 2012, p. 82). The category “relevant” was
broadly defined to err on the side of caution (Schreier said, “if in doubt, consider it relevant!” p. 83). The category “irrelevant” is narrowly defined because the analyst does not want to accidently discard material that may have bearing on the research questions (Schreier, 2012). The defining factors of the categories were taken from the research question(s), previous research, or theory, or a combination (Schreier, 2012). Figure 2 below shows an example of this initial coding frame when applied to individual memoirs within one book of memoirs. The initial coding frame does not contain subcategories, only descriptors that aid the analyst in identifying relevant and non-relevant materials.

The initial coding frame served to reduce data by guiding the analyst in selecting relevant data. Once the simplistic coding frame above was applied to individual lesson summary postings on the teaching portfolio weblog, only those posts that contained information pertaining to experienced-based activities were used for further analysis and coding.

Table 3.3 Example from initial coding frame used to determine relevant and irrelevant data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevant</th>
<th>Irrelevant</th>
<th>Unclear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily lesson summary that contains instructions about experienced-based writing.</td>
<td>Daily lesson summary that contains instructions for stand-alone grammar exercise.</td>
<td>Daily lesson summary that does not contain enough information to show a relationship to experienced-based writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: <em>Connecting to the Text:</em> Today students brainstormed by connecting their life story to the</td>
<td>Example: <em>Today students reviewed parts of speech in groups.</em> Students all received a handout for this purpose.</td>
<td>Example: <em>Today we covered word parts 1 – 5.</em> We discussed WordUp</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Daily lesson summary that contains instructions about experienced-based writing.**
- **Daily lesson summary that contains instructions for stand-alone grammar exercise.**
- **Daily lesson summary that does not contain enough information to show a relationship to experienced-based writing.**
- **Example: *Connecting to the Text:* Today students brainstormed by connecting their life story to the**
- **Example: *Today students reviewed parts of speech in groups.* Students all received a handout for this purpose.**
- **Example: *Today we covered word parts 1 – 5.* We discussed WordUp**
Then, students chose a story to practice identifying parts of speech on. Choices are linked below.

poster presentations and vocab instruction.

We took our time understanding how and why WordUp works.

**Step 3: Unitizing the data.** Once the relevant material was selected for further analysis, otherwise undifferentiated text was divided into units of analysis and units of coding (i.e., segmented into smaller pieces) in order to “increase the productivity, efficiency, and reliability of content analysis research” (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 98). By defining and identifying relevant units of texts, researchers make a large volume of text manageable. In the current qualitative study, three types of units of analysis were defined: units of analysis, units of coding, and context units.

*Units of analysis.* Units of analysis (also known as sampling units) refer to units that are distinguished as included in an analysis (Krippendorff, 2013). In the current study, the selected data were limited to data that comprise the “case” (Yin, 2014), which included six interview transcripts and the individual units of digital data that were a) physically distinguished by publication dates falling between August 2009 and May 2012; b) syntactically distinguished as “natural relative to the grammar of the medium of the data” (Krippendorff, p. 105, italics in original), such as books, book chapters, websites, individual blog posts, digital document files, newspaper articles, videos, and audio files; and c) categorically distinguished by membership in a class or category, such as lesson plan and memoir (Krippendorff, p. 108). While the initial units of analysis included all available data
previously outlined (see “Data Collection” section), the units of analysis going forward were those that were selected for inclusion using the initial coding frame, “relevant/not relevant” (as depicted in Figure 2).

*Units of coding.* A unit of coding is contained in a unit of analysis (Schreier, 2012). The text of a unit of coding may be distributed throughout a text, such as a character’s traits that develop over time across several chapters in a novel (Krippendorff, 2013). Units of coding are significantly smaller than units of analysis, are placed in categories, and may form inclusion hierarchies. For example, one memoir in a book of memoirs is considered a unit of analysis, therefore a unit of coding within that memoir could be a word or word groupings, such as the theme of *coming of age* or euphemisms for death. In the current study, units of coding were thematically distinguished by “storylike” material, such as themes, motifs, and imagery (Krippendorff, p. 108). A label or code was assigned to individual words or a chunk of text that was large or small “as long as that chunk represents a single theme or issue of relevance” to the research questions (Zhung & Wildemuth, 2009). Units of coding are those parts of the units of analysis that were interpreted as meaningful and were used to create subcategories in the main coding frame in phase one (more on this in step 4) as well as the main analysis in phase two.

*Context units.* Context units set the boundaries for units of coding. For example, if a document (unit of analysis) is coded for the theme of grief (unit of coding), in order to fully understand the context of the coding unit, one would look to the sentence or paragraph in which it occurs (hence, “context unit”). As explained by Krippendorff (2013), context units should be “as large as is meaningful and as small as is feasible” (p. 102). Doing so will aid in
the validity and reliability of the study (Holsti, 1969). Schreier (2012) stated that context units are not actually marked in the material that is being coded; however, analysts should specify which parts of the context will be examined should the meaning of a unit of coding not be clear. In the current study, context units were identified by formal criterion, such as those features that were already inherent in the material, starting with the smallest criterion that provided adequate context (e.g., letter, word, phrase, clause, sentence, paragraph, page, chapter, book).

The computer text analysis software NVivo was used to document, code, and track sampling units and coding units. Both manifest and latent content were analyzed and coded.

**Step 4: Structuring and generating the main coding frame.** Creating a coding frame is a complex process, but when approached systematically, the process can produce a tool that will aid in reducing data and answering the research questions. Structuring and generating the main coding frame involved using both concept-driven and data-driven strategies, defining the resulting categories, and stepping back to revise and expand the coding frame.

*Concept-driven and data-driven strategies.* Qualitative content analysis can be conducted using deductive or inductive approaches or a combination of the two. Structuring the coding frame by creating main categories and generating subcategories (that define or describe the main categories) are closely related tasks (Schreier, 2012). Schreier recommends drawing upon research questions to construct the main categories: “…where main categories are concerned, the research questions point the way” (p. 61). With regards to main categories and subcategories, these may also be generated from the data. Concept-driven (deductive)
and data-driven (inductive) approaches are commonly used together in qualitative content analysis.

In the current study, a combination of concept-driven and data-driven strategies were used in order to develop the main coding frame. Key concepts from existing theory and prior research regarding the phenomenon of interest (i.e., personal stories and stories of trauma in classroom contexts) were used to create the research questions; therefore, these concepts in the research questions were used to inform some of the initial coding categories. For example, concepts from Cultural Historical Activity Theory, such as appropriation, were used to inform category creation. If drawing upon the research questions and existing theory had seemed inefficient, Schreier (2012) recommends drawing upon prior research, everyday knowledge, logic, and interview guides. This deductive approach (Mayring 2000) served to validate or conceptually extend an existing theoretical framework or theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Because researchers do not enter into research with a “completely blank and empty mind” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 326), they link or relate concepts through interpretation.

Purely concept-driven coding frames are rare in qualitative content analysis but common in quantitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012). Therefore, by working inductively, the researcher generated sub-categories “from the bottom up” (Creswell, 2012, p. 45), using what was written or said in the material as a means of describing the material. Coding from grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was adapted as the inductive coding procedure. While coding in grounded theory consists of open, axial, and selective coding, only open coding was used in this study. Open coding is a strategy for discovering concepts in the data.
In qualitative content analysis, open coding is used for descriptive purposes and not for generating theory (Schreier, 2012). An open coding scheme means the researcher is “open to anything” (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). During open coding, the raw data were clustered into chunks of assigned concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researcher determined the concepts by questioning the data (e.g., trying to understand the material by wondering, “What is going on here? How is this happening?”). Similar concepts were then grouped together into categories and defined based on their similarities and variations. In defining these categories, the coding frame was structured (Schreier, 2012) so that the main categories and subcategories could be built. Other basic rules for coding frames include that main categories should have at least two subcategories; every hierarchical level of the coding frame should have a “miscellaneous” category (Schreier, 2012, p. 93) to handle any unanticipated information; and coding frames can be built and adjusted at any point during phase one but not during phase two. These were all considered in the current study.

*Defining categories in the coding frame.* A crucial step in creating a coding frame is creating category definitions, which are the rules that the analyst uses for coding the data (Schreier, 2012). Category definitions include the category name, a description of what is meant by the name, examples of the category, and decisions rules (if these are deemed necessary).

*Revising and expanding the coding frame.* Before testing the coding frame, Schreier (2012) recommended that analysts take a critical look at the coding frame in order to ensure that it will cover all the variation in the data.
**Step 5: Testing the Coding Frame.** Coding a sample of data is the appropriate process to refine and validate a coding scheme (Schreier, 2012; Neuendorf, 2002; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). In this step, the researcher tried out the coding frame on a selection of material (Neuendorf, 2002), followed by a consistency check and slight adjustments to the coding frame (Schreier, 2012).

**Step 6: Evaluating and modifying the coding frame.** After the coding frame categories were applied to a portion of data, a consistency check was necessary before continuing with the main data analysis.

*Blind coding.* One way to conduct a consistency check is to enlist the help of an independent coder. Miles and Huberman (1994) and Krippendorff (2013) recommend practice coding to improve inter-rater reliability; therefore, an independent coder familiar with NVivo software was recruited for this purpose. The coder was provided information on the study’s coding process and the coding frame, including relevant terms, concepts, and issues pertinent to the research questions, data collection, and expressive writing, particularly trauma narratives. The independent coder was asked in advance to write down any issues she had during coding. Then, the coder and researcher coded the material independent of each other using the same coding frame without knowing how each was interpreting or assigning meaning to the material (i.e., blind coding). Afterward, the two created comparative coding sheets, discussed any issues, and compared the coding for consistency. In this scenario, the percent of agreement was acceptable at 94%. The units of coding that were interpreted differently were discussed and adjustments to the coding frame and category descriptions were made, such as clarifying the difference between trauma and a sensitive topic.
Double-coding. Another way to check for coding consistency is to recode the data after approximately 10-14 days. The process of “double-coding” aids researchers in comparing the two instances of coding, thus enabling him or her to assess the quality of the coding frame if an independent coder is not available. Comparative coding sheets were made on approximately 20% of randomly selected data in order to document the instances of coding that were the same and different for the same coder. No adjustments to the coding frame or category descriptions were necessary, and the coding categories were determined to be reliable.

Formal assessment. Reliability and validity are the common criteria for carrying out an assessment of quality (Creswell, 2012; Krippendorff, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Schreier, 2012). In this case, the coding instrument is called reliable “to the extent that it yields data that is free from error” (Schreier, 2012, p. 167). An instrument is considered valid to the extent that it does what it set out to do—in this case, that the categories “adequately represent the concepts under study” (Schreier, 2012, p. 175). The coding instrument was deemed reliable and valid because the researcher determined that it adequately represented the concepts under study, as discussed later in Chapter 4: Findings.

Reliability. The two types of consistency checks previously discussed are also known as measures of internal reliability (Bryman, 2008). In other words, making comparisons across coders or making comparisons to coding across time are both ways of assessing reliability of the coding frame. Reliability is a matter of degree; in other words, it does not mean that comparisons of coding have to show 100% agreement; it means that a low consistency is an indicator of flaws, which would in turn require an examination and revision
of the coding frame. Krippendorff (2013) stated that while intersubjective agreement may seem ideal, it rarely exists because meanings invoked by texts are subjective. Schreier (2012) posited that making interpretations “plausible and convincing to others” (p. 170) does not have to mean scrapping part of a coding frame or choosing an either-or stance; it could mean something as simple as having discussions between coders to more fully understand the interpretive nature of the categories. Formal comparisons can be calculated using coefficients of agreement (Krippendorff, 2013) or having discussions among coders (Schreier, 2012). In the current study, the researcher and an independent coder opted to discuss the units of coding that were interpreted differently and the researcher made minor adjustments to the coding frame and category descriptions. After some time had passed, the researcher followed the instance of blind coding with double coding.

Validity. Krippendorff (2013) asserted that an instrument is valid only to the extent that it captures what it set out to do. In this case, the coding frame accurately categorized the concepts in the research questions. Like reliability, validity is not an all or nothing concept; the coding frame was deemed valid for the purposes of this study.

Once the coding frame was trialed and any necessary changes made to it, the main analysis occurred in phase two. Changes to the coding frame included clarification of category descriptions (e.g., trauma versus sensitive topics) and inclusion of decision rules (e.g., trauma: one-time disrupting event or situations that appeared to cause long-term, negative mental or physical effects; sensitive topics are perceived to be personal or touchy).
Phase 2: Conducting the Main Analysis

The final version of the coding frame was used to code all of the mediating artifacts in the research study. During phase two (i.e., steps 7-9), no changes to the coding frame were made; otherwise, all of the coded data would have had to be recoded to accommodate the revisions (Schreier, 2012).

**Step 7: Conducting the main analysis.** During the main analysis, the data (i.e., mediating artifacts) were read and coded piece by piece according to the categories in the coding frame. Coding at this stage progressed quickly since all of the coding categories were already made and NVivo provides a means to “drag and drop” text into coding categories called nodes (see Table 3.4).

### Table 3.4: Segmentation and nodes within books of memoirs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Total pages</th>
<th>Number of individual memoirs</th>
<th>Number of “chapters” or sections within memoirs</th>
<th>Nodes (i.e., codes, including subcodes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memoir Volume 1, Year 1</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memoir Volume 2, Year 2</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>983</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memoir Volume 3, Year 3</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>1376</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Step 8: Interpreting the findings.** To interpret the findings, the results of coding the smaller pieces had to be transformed to the level of units of analysis because units of coding were the smaller pieces that made up each unit of analysis. NVivo aided this process. Initially, the main coding frame consisted of 32 codes with each code having at least two subcategories. After the main analysis was completed, the codes were reduced by conceiving of them in broader terms. After six sessions of peer debriefing, two themes were developed for the first research question, one theme was developed for the second research question, and eight themes were developed for the third research question. These findings are discussed in Chapter 4.

**Step 9: Presenting the findings.** Themes are described using summarization and quotations. The findings are discussed in Chapter 4.

**Trustworthiness**

Interpretivist methods can be evaluated for trustworthiness through four areas established by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I will address each area below.

**Credibility**

Credibility may be addressed in a variety of ways, including prolonged engagement with the data, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

**Prolonged engagement.** During data analysis, the researcher in this study engaged in communication with the research subject (classroom teacher, Rose) for a period of
approximately 12 weeks, during which time the classroom teacher was formally interviewed six times. In order to provide this sustained period of interaction the researcher contacted Rose by phone and by email for informal communications and member checks. Communication between the researcher and the participant at times other than just during the interviews resulted in a mutually trusting relationship.

**Triangulation.** Qualitative research must yield valid results. Validity refers to the quality of research that compels others to accept the results as being true (Krippendorff, 2013). Ethical obligations dictate that researchers make every attempt to “minimize misrepresentation and misunderstanding” (Stake, 1995). Researchers can apply qualitative protocols of triangulation to gain validity. This study utilized triangulation protocols of data source triangulation (interview data, extant data, and researcher memos) and methodological triangulation (double coding or independent coder) (Patton, 2002).

**Peer debriefing.** The researcher regularly met with—or talked with by phone or Skype—two peers who were not involved in the research. These peers were fellow doctoral students knowledgeable about qualitative research and familiar with the study. They raised questions that helped to reveal meaningful perspectives and interpretations.

**Member checking.** Merriam (2009) stated that conducting member checks is a common strategy for ensuring internal validity. This technique involves informally soliciting the reactions of participants in order to reassure accuracy of the interview transcripts and research report. Throughout the study, Rose provided feedback on the accuracy and completeness of the researcher’s interpretations and assumptions regarding her lesson plans, teaching philosophy statements, and students’ published work.
Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which results can be transferred to other contexts or settings. In other words, research results extend beyond the current study and are therefore applicable to others rather than just being of interest to the researcher (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). By providing detailed information about the data and rich, thick descriptions of the case in the research report, the likelihood of transferability was increased.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the extent that the same results can be achieved by independent researchers. In the proposed study, inter-rater reliability served this purpose as well as an audit trail of all procedural steps and decisions. Additionally, audit checks were utilized wherein data were compared with research findings and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). An external auditor (i.e., a peer with experience in qualitative research) was sought to serve this purpose.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the data supports the researcher’s conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the current study, this factor was strengthened because the main corpus of data was publically available on the World Wide Web. Documents carry a level of objectivity that interviews or observations do not (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By including interview data in this research, the content analysis findings are more likely to accurately and objectively represent the emic perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Verbatim quotes from the analyzed texts also serve to support the researcher’s interpretations (Creswell, 2013).
Ethical Assurances

The data for this study posed ethical issues (Krippendorff, 2013). The main data sources examined were public artifacts; however, these artifacts were not created with the intention of being analyzed for research purposes. By carefully weighing multiple factors, present prior to this study, the researcher addressed this potential ethical issue: the teacher in question had a) openly published her lesson plans and b) openly discussed the memoir project with reporters and conference attendees, and c) all students made conscious decisions to publish with either a pseudonym or real name, and d) some students had appeared in a publically available Youtube video about their published memoirs, and e) some students had shared their work at public readings at local book stores. These factors were addressed with Rose as well as concerns for her privacy and that of her former students. Rose volunteered that the open culture of the memoir writing and publishing process was part of its success.

When researchers seek human subjects for the purposes of research, the researchers must protect research participants from physical and psychological harm. Informed consent from Rose was required and obtained. Ethical principals were established to guide the conduct of research with human subjects. By being thorough and careful during documentation and analysis of the textual data, the researcher provided a transparent account of the research methodology, which in turn has helped her present the material as accurately as possible (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

The inclusion of public documents in research studies does not require informed consent. However, care was taken in the interpretation of the data in an attempt to be as objective as possible. A concern of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was that the
published memoirs were not intended for researcher examination, and as such, students (and in some cases, parents, since some of the students would still be minors at the time of this study) would need to be consented in order to use the materials. Even though the memoirs were published on the Internet and for sale in bookstores, the IRB felt that the students were third party participants. Therefore, the IRB approved the study with the caveat that the students’ published work of individual students would not be quoted and information about specific students would not be requested from Rose. To discuss the themes of the memoirs, at least three memoirs had to be categorized as representing a given theme without distinguishing among specific students. To maintain the integrity of the IRB, then, the researcher adopted a vignette technique (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to illustrate students’ written work in Chapter 4. By writing vignettes that were representative of clusters of students’ work, the researcher could still discuss the themes and provide examples of the students’ chosen memoir topics.

**Researcher Subjectivity**

A broad set of values is included in the sphere of research ethics, and avoiding researcher bias is but one consideration. The best intentions will be negated if the researcher is not aware of, and openly honest about, potential biases (Yin, 2014). Therefore, it is important for the researcher to address any personal biases, experiences, and beliefs that may influence the findings of this research (Merriam, 1998). The researcher provided this personal profile with relevance to this study:

I am a White, over 40 female who grew up in one of the poorest regions of Appalachia, and my travels and educational experiences have broadened my world view to one of curiosity and openness. For the past 17 years, I have taught a
combination of high school, community college, and university courses that include journalism, composition, literature, research, and assessment. I give reading and writing instruction equal value in my classroom, and assignments with real-world applications foster ownership that emphasizes both culture and the social nature of learning. I provide many opportunities for my students to share their personal stories and experiences by facilitating meaning-making through discussions, activities, and written assignments.

Outside of the classroom, I place a high value on writing personal stories. Since I was a little girl, I have loved to write about my experiences. I often felt that writing helped me to make sense of the world, my thoughts, and my feelings. I have kept a personal journal off and on for the last twenty-five years, and in recent years I began publishing my work on both private and public blogs on the World Wide Web. I first became interested in writing and healing when my late husband became ill with cancer in 2003. I found that writing on message boards on cancer support websites were a welcoming and appropriate place for writing about my questions, concerns, and experiences as a caregiver of someone dying of cancer. After my husband’s death, I found a widow support forum online that allowed me to both express my grief as well as reminisce about the wonderful experiences we had. In addition to writing about my thoughts, feelings, and experiences, I benefitted from reading and interacting with other people who had experienced traumas.

My experiences with writing and healing happened during the middle of my teaching career, and at that time, I taught mostly high school students. As a result of my heightened awareness, I contemplated the reasons I wrote and the impact of reading about and writing personal stories on my approach to writing instruction. Through my own informal action research, I wove personal writing into the traditional academic writing instruction that was prevalent in the department. I received promising results from students who previously disliked writing or seemed uninterested. It became my regular practice to use personal writing as an entry point into academic writing instruction. My students knew that I valued them, that I held in high regard their experiences and their evolving identities that were represented through poetry and through stories.

Merriam (2009) stated that because the researcher is the instrument in qualitative research, the research is susceptible to bias. Because this researcher values personal writing
in this ways described, she understands that she had to be careful when making assumptions and interpretations in the research. To combat any potential issues, she abided by the four areas of trustworthiness, described previously, established by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, case study methodology and the method of content analysis for this qualitative study were examined for how one English Language Arts teacher described a memoir-writing curriculum, created support systems she put into place in anticipation and response to students’ personal stories, and preserved the written texts students produced. In qualitative designs, the research questions guide the methodological approach. This design is appropriate for this research because the study consists of a bounded system (Merriam, 1998) and a corpus of texts (Krippendorff, 2013) with research questions that focus on written expression. The chapter describes how analysis was conducted in two stages, first using a coding frame (Schreier, 2012) to determine what data were relevant, and second, using open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to look for emerging themes in the selected data. After explaining the steps in the data analysis, finally interpretivist methods used in the study were evaluated for trustworthiness through four areas established by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These four areas also aided in addressing researcher bias.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

“Writing and reading decrease our sense of isolation. [...] We are given a shot at dancing with, or at least clapping along with, the absurdity of life, instead of being squashed by it over and over again” (Lamott, 1995, p. 237).

Introduction to the Chapter

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the present study, which investigated how one high school English teacher described her instructional practices for teaching a memoir-writing curriculum based on the personal experiences of ninth grade students. Specifically, this chapter includes each of four themes resulting from content analysis (Krippendorff, 2012; Schreier, 2012) of qualitative data (e.g., the teacher’s self-published lesson plans, interview transcripts, and her students’ published memoirs) collected over a four month period on the Internet and through interviews with Rose, the ELA teacher. Understandings of Cultural Historical Activity Theory framed this study and informed the data analysis process. All data related to curriculum materials and interview transcripts were collapsed into three themes related to Rose’s pedagogical decisions and answered the first two research questions:

1. How does one high school English teacher describe her instructional practices for teaching a memoir-writing curriculum based on the personal experiences of ninth grade students?

2. How does one high school ELA teacher navigate the occurrence of sensitive topics in students’ written work?
Data analysis of the three volumes of students’ memoirs resulted in one theme, which represented eight broadly conceived memoir topics, thus answering the third research question:

3. What themes emerged in these ninth grade ELA students’ published memoirs?

Because this study sought to understand Rose’s expressive pedagogical practices and how she navigated students’ disclosure of sensitive topics, the findings discussed in-depth this chapter are not all-inclusive of those that supported the ways in which Rose engaged in accepted and research-based practices of writing instruction as discussed in Chapter 2. The themes discussed in this chapter were selected because they highlight the unique features pertaining to Rose’s case, specifically in the context of teaching potentially sensitive narrative writing. Figure 4.1 represents an overview of the findings within the CHAT framework.
Figure 4.1. The activity system of the current study and the predominant analytical components represented in the findings.
Research Question 1: How does one high school English teacher describe her instructional practices for teaching a memoir-writing curriculum based on the personal experiences of ninth grade students?

Two themes answer the first research question in the present study. First, the data showed that over the course of three years, Rose’s teaching philosophy not only guided her in the evolution of her teaching practices, but also provided her with a touchstone for reflective practice. Second, data analysis showed that Rose increasingly and intentionally implemented a blend of expository and expressivist pedagogies across her first three years as a classroom teacher. In the following sections, these two themes and related subthemes are described.

Theme 1: The Teacher’s Instructional Practice Evolved

Rose became better equipped to teach literacy skills to racially diverse, 9th grade learners at an urban arts magnet school with the aid of her teaching philosophy as a touchstone for professional development and growth. Her teaching philosophy did not change but her personal values and beliefs were confirmed and provided a rationale for her teaching practices. Therefore, her conceptualization of her teaching philosophy had a direct impact on her instructional practices (interview, October 23, 2014). The CHAT lens provides a framework for viewing Rose’s teaching philosophy as both a material tool and conceptual tool. As such, her teaching philosophy serves as a mediating artifact that provides context for the activity under examination (i.e., teaching writing through experienced-based pedagogy). As a material tool, Rose’s teaching philosophy serves as a public record of her beliefs about, and reflections on, teaching. She chose to publish her teaching philosophy on the Internet, thus it provides former and current professors, employers, and students and their parents with
information and insights about her educational beliefs. As a *conceptual tool*, Rose’s teaching philosophy embodies the principles, frameworks, and ideas that she holds about teaching, learning, and ELA skills acquisition. This embodiment serves to guide her instructional practice as she learns and grows as an educator.

Rose expressed awareness that over the years, her teaching philosophy has not changed (interview, August 13, 2014). During her student teaching and MAT coursework, she wrote detailed and thoughtful statements about her teaching and learning experiences and how these informed her classroom practices as a beginning teacher. During interviews in the current study, she frequently drew upon her experiences as a high school student, graduate student, and as a beginning teacher in order to describe the development of her teaching philosophy. This is unique in that many teachers are hard-pressed to articulate their teaching philosophy, yet early in Rose’s teaching career, she held a clear vision of the values that influenced her teaching:

Responding to student interests, moods, queries, and biases creates an authentic learning environment in which classroom discussions relate to personal beliefs. While teachers often speak of ‘a teachable moment’ as the mishap-turned-miracle that occurs in a flash of brilliance, every minute in the classroom can be just as productive. Watching for raised eyes, listening for the hush of fascination or the silence of confusion allows me to maximize my students’ educational experience by showing them how their lives play into education. Addressing students in the moment, I believe, leads to the most compelling educational experiences. (artifact, April 9, 2009)

In this excerpt from Rose’s teaching philosophy crafted during her student teaching experience, she identified some of the core principles that guide her teaching: relating schoolwork to students’ personal beliefs and lived experiences, being receptive and
responsive to nonverbal and verbal cues, and addressing the day-to-day educational needs of her students in personally meaningful ways. These core principles showed up in various ways throughout the three years of data examined and highlighted Rose’s growth from a beginning to an experienced teacher. Some examples include that course content was purposefully taught in the context of students’ lives; students were placed in writing groups with supportive peers; and the teacher’s own stories of struggle and triumph were shared with students in order to create an environment of respect and trust. By reflecting on her own experiences of schooling, Rose has developed a deeper understanding of her role as an educator (interview, August 13, 2014).

Rose readily relates her teaching philosophy to self-identified situations that have influenced her beliefs about the purpose of schooling. For example, when she attended high school, she said she did not consider herself to be a reader, and she often felt confused by English class because of the abstract thinking required to analyze and understand literature. During an interview, Rose recalled a pivotal incident in ninth grade that involved reading *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1967). During a test on the novel, one question about Frost’s (1923) poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay” baffled her. Rose said:

> I had no idea what the poem meant, and it really upset me, and I had to ask my friends, and they explained it to me. It was really just reading for what the teacher was looking for that frustrated me as a young adult. (interview, August 13, 2014)

This example illustrates the disappointment Rose experienced as a result of her high school ELA teacher’s stance on learning, which in this instance indicates that a question about an abstract poem can have a right or wrong answer. This *taken-for-granted* rule of demonstrating knowledge (i.e., identifying *the* right answer to a question about a poem)
alienated Rose and made her feel confused. While it is not uncommon for ELA teachers to test students with objective questions on subjective content, such practices can negatively impact learning since students are influenced by the specific context of the learning community, such as the accepted and expected ways of being and knowing (Corno & Mandinach, 2004). Reflecting on such past experiences helps Rose to confirm her philosophical perspective and to guide her actions in creating practical activities that inform and measure student learning.

Rose’s awareness of the *taken-for-granted rules* of education influenced her instructional practice in ways that helped her to think critically about the purposes of schooling. Particularly, in ELA certain practices are followed because they have always been conducted in a specific manner. For example, Rose expressed concern that many ninth grade ELA teachers start the school year with a list of literary terms, which are a standard component of ELA curricula, for students to memorize. In the following interview excerpt, Rose explained her perspective on teaching such course content by contextualizing it with the aid of personal writing:

> It hurts me to think of literary terms in the backs of books. I hated the idea that students would have to identify a literary device, so I wanted to contextualize it in terms of how you make a term work and why you use it. So, if students are using foreshadowing, they know how it works and they can spot it better in things that they read. But I really don’t think spotting foreshadowing is really our goal as teachers. (interview, August 13, 2014)

Here, Rose described how rote memorization does not make the curriculum more accessible to students. Such an approach bothers her because it indicates that “there’s one golden meaning to something that students have to guess” (interview, August 13, 2014). Her goal is
to avoid such practices and instead challenge students “through reading high quality texts that are important to them and through lots of different kinds of writing for different audiences” (interview, August 13, 2014). This perspective demonstrates the value Rose places on putting personal connections and responsiveness at the center of the curriculum in order to achieve academic goals and objectives (Leontiev, 1978).

The teacher honored students’ funds of knowledge. Rose’s teaching practices evolved in how they honored students’ funds of knowledge—which are their cultural resources, past experiences, personal identity, relationships, and languages. These inform the stories they construct about themselves, which can be represented in verbal and material textual form (hooks, 1994; Moll, 1992, 2000). In Rose’s classroom, learning is a meaning-making process of mediated action in which individuals use material tools (e.g., texts, rubrics) and conceptual tools (e.g., personal experiences, memoir framework) to actively construct their knowledge in goal-oriented activities.

Because the activity setting (a classroom in an urban arts magnet school) has a cultural history and encourages particular social practices, the setting is therefore central to the successful outcome of the memoir unit (Wertsch, 1985). The setting enables Rose to maximize certain goals and behaviors within activities that take place in this setting. In this way, the object (i.e., goals) and the outcome (i.e., motive) of the memoir unit help students understand the value of their funds of knowledge. Rose stated that other than to achieve the objectives as outlined in the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCS), the goals and motive of the memoir unit are as follows:
It’s to help students think about who they are and what their place is in their lives, like in their families and social circle. I do want them to use [the memoir unit] to work through their issues if they have issues. I also want them to see how their life experiences are different from others’ life experiences within the classroom community and writer’s workshop. (interview, August 13, 2014)

However, Rose disclosed that some adolescents in her classroom have difficulty seeing how their life experiences fit into schooling. Each year, some students are hesitant to share personal experiences and beliefs during writing activities, at least at first (interview, September 13, 2014). For example, English Language Learners may feel shy about revealing they help their non-English speaking parents manage the utility payments, or those students who experienced a life-altering event, such as a house fire or a parent losing a job, may wonder if anyone else has had to rebuild their life. Ultimately, Rose said that through the memoir unit and the welcoming atmosphere of the classroom and the school, students are emboldened to draw upon their personal experiences and share them with their community of practice (interview, September 13, 2014).

Analyzing Rose’s teaching philosophy and memoir curriculum materials through the CHAT lens enabled the researcher to understand how funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992) were used as a mediating tool in determining Rose’s practices. In her teaching philosophy, she wrote, “I found that students respond most to lessons that reinforce my deepest pedagogical beliefs. That is, when I have a personal conviction at stake in the classroom, students do, too” (artifact, April 2, 2009). The personal convictions Rose most often shared in her lessons stemmed from relationships. Specifically, she frequently drew upon her relationship with her father to illustrate how students can explore a
relationship and dig deep into their own personal repertoire of experiences and beliefs. For example, Rose feels strongly that those who write should strive to identify as writers (interview, August 13, 2014). She cites her relationship with her father and how special she felt that he wrote a picture book with her when she was six. After many years working in a factory, his retirement has given him time to write poetry, and to Rose, it is very important that her father has come to identify as a writer even though he has never published his work (interview, August 13, 2014). Her hope is that students in her classroom will begin to see themselves as writers as well. Rose feels she can better understand her students’ relationship with the academic and social aspects of schooling by providing them with their own opportunities to draw upon their funds of knowledge as a primary resource for their school-based learning (interview, August 13, 2014).

In the analysis of the writing activities that Rose assigned in each of three years, she frequently drew upon her personal experiences as a mediating tool in order to elicit the sharing of students’ experiences in their writings. To encourage students to genuinely consider their own personal experiences and beliefs, Rose modeled her thought process behind topic-generation. In other words, when Rose assigned a writing activity that required personal experiences and beliefs, she first shared her own as an example. An example of a writing activity that Rose modeled for students is an assignment called “Stones in the River” (artifact, August 31, 2009; August 27, 2010; September 9, 2011). This individual activity was created to aid students in thinking about life events, a “river of life,” by drawing a river and placing “stones” in the river to symbolize significant people, places, events, and other memories that could be used as a springboard to writing memoir. The topics in Rose’s
example ranged from “saying goodbye” to “coffee on Sunday mornings” to “constant noise.” While negative or positive experiences might be inferred from such topics, the stories themselves remained private unless she chose to expound upon them. Likewise, students had the option of keeping their stories private unless they chose to expand on them in writing to be shared later.

When drawing upon her own funds of knowledge, Rose modeled for students the accepted ways of being in her classroom, which provided them with a core value for conduct in her classroom. Rose said she demonstrated a given activity while using a think-aloud process to model for students how to undertake the given task. In the process, she revealed what is acceptable to write about in her classroom. In the following transcript excerpt of a reenactment that Rose performed during an interview with the researcher, a representative topic-generating lesson about life-changing experiences is described:

Well, my parents are divorced and that was important. My grandma died and that was something that's really clear in my memory. And I remember that my boyfriend took care of her in her final days, and there's one day that we picked all of these flowers and brought them to her, and then she got really upset about all of the flowers, and it was confusing. And then all my uncles came and then they were bickering in the car, and they were talking about what quilts they were going to get. And then at one point they were talking about smoking weed together and it was really upsetting me. And then all I remember when I was 16, my brother left for college and that really affected me. (interview, September 13, 2014)

This excerpt shows that by sharing stories about her life, Rose demonstrated what is permissible to discuss and write about in the classroom. Rose explained that when she engaged in a think-aloud for students, she tried to put herself back into that time when she was an adolescent. During such a session with students, she said once she has written down
everything she can think of about—in this case, “life changing experiences”—she then narrowed the topic to one aspect, which in turn she expanded by quick-writing every single memory that she could recall about the story (interview, September 13, 2014). Rose stated that she attempted to show students that anything can be material for their memoirs, an especially important message for those students who did not feel they had interesting life experiences to share (interview, August 13, 2014).

Rose’s facilitation of identity exploration was intended to help the adolescents in her classroom embrace their search for identity through the examination of a variety of viewpoints found in nonfiction literature and through the examination of their own and others’ opinions and experiences (artifact, April 20, 2009). Identity work included the incorporation of literature models. One representative example is a short piece called “My Name,” an excerpt from *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984). Rose employed the piece as a means for students to discuss whether changing one’s name can change one’s identity. An extensive activity related to the reading of “My Name” was a name chart students created to explore the suitability of a given name by brainstorming the different memories, feelings, sights, sounds, thoughts that come along with each of our many names:

> We all have many names: our full name, our pet names, our home name, our name our friends call us. In the name chart students write down whatever they know, think, or feel about each of their names. (artifact, August 30, 2010)

This activity served not only to help students engage in identity exploration, but also to generate ideas for possible expansion in their memoirs. When creating a name chart, students were encouraged to “reveal your identity little by little by telling your reader about your name” (artifact, August 31, 2010). As a material *mediating tool*, the name chart aided
students in exploring the conception of their many names and how their names are perceived by friends, family members, and so on.

For Year 3 students, the previously published student memoirs served as *mediating artifacts* that aided in identity exploration. Because the first volume of memoirs was not published until the end of the Year 2 memoir unit, the Year 2 students only knew of the publication, but they did not get to view it until after their own memoirs were completed. Therefore, Year 3 students had the benefit of viewing both the Year 1 and Year 2 memoirs, which were made available in Rose’s classroom as well on the shelves in the AMS library. Some of the published stories were classified by Rose as “strikingly personal” (artifact, November 13, 2011), especially in the third volume, and she believes that this was due, in part, to students having access to previous students’ written work and identifying with the stories of their peers (interview, August 30, 2014).

** Appropriation of Pedagogical Tools.** Cultural Historical Activity theory allowed the researcher to focus on ways Rose adopted (*appropriated*) certain practices. In the current study, Rose’s development as a teacher was observed across the three years of data. Her teaching practices and content knowledge were shaped and organized by relationships among the mediating elements of action within the community *context* (i.e., an ELA classroom in an arts magnet school), the *rules or norms* (e.g., state standards, curriculum guides, culturally acceptable behaviors and practices), and the *division of responsibilities* among community *members* (i.e., the teacher and her students). Rose’s use of *cultural tools* (e.g., course textbooks, advice from department chair, current worldview) was the means by which her mental action was mediated.
CHAT is underpinned by the central concept of *appropriation* (Grossman et al, 1999; Leontiev, 1981; Rogoff, 1995; Wertsch, 1991), and in teacher education, *appropriation* refers to the developmental process about which socially-formulated, goal-directed, and tool-mediated actions are adopted (Wertsch, 1991) through the process of participating in an activity (Rogoff, 1995). As indicated by the CHAT framework, Rose’s appropriation of instructional practices depended on the compatibility of her values, experiences, and goals with a more knowledgeable and powerful other (see Cole 1996; Wertsch 1991). Rose frequently referred to supportive colleagues, administration, parents, and former professors during interviews with the researcher. For example, Rose referred to former professors and mentors in the MAT program as educators who inspired and motivated her to pursue creative outlets in her teaching, and years later, they coordinated with Rose to have writing scholars visit her classroom (interview, August 13, 2014).

In the current study, in order for Rose to competently enact a specific pedagogical practice advocated by an educational text, such as Kirby and Kirby’s (2007) studio workshop approach, she had to be actively involved in internalizing and reconstructing her knowledge during such practices before a transformation of knowledge could occur (see Cazden, 1988). CHAT perspectives on learning have conceptualized human thinking as "mind as mediated by action" (Wertsch, 1998). It is in this way that the cultural tools Rose used had potential to empower or constrain her. With regards to the studio workshop model, Rose purposefully and actively sought to perfect her use of it in the memoir curriculum because she understood the connection between research-based practices (e.g., writing groups, rules) and the success of the memoir unit.
Grossman et al. (1999) identified five different levels of appropriation: lack of appropriation, appropriation of a label, appropriation of surface features, appropriation of conceptual underpinnings, and the achievement of mastery. When analyzing Rose’s curriculum materials with appropriation in mind, the researcher identified that from Year 1 to Year 3, Rose achieved either appropriation of conceptual underpinnings or appropriation of mastery with regards to writing tasks. For example, in Year 1 Rose incorporated writing revision activities throughout the memoir unit demonstrating that she understood that revision work was an important component of the writing process model, yet compared to Years 2 and 3 when the number and complexity of revision activities increased, it is evident that in Year 1 she understood the conceptual underpinnings of revision work but did not approach mastery until she gained experience teaching (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Complexity and number of writing revision tasks Rose implemented by year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Rose’s teaching philosophy, she stated, “It is my goal to unite student identity and interests with content in order to emphasize relevance while maintaining rigor” (artifact, April 20, 2009). This statement demonstrates that Rose held a complex understanding of her teaching goals even as a beginning teacher. She was empowered to consider students’ interests, course content, and relevance to their lives and to schooling, all the while maintaining rigor. Her actions—and her perception of how these were received and whether they were successful to certain goals—were mediated by these notions she held (i.e., those stated in her teaching philosophy). However, data show that Rose was constrained by unknown factors, such as classroom management or just being a new teacher, as evidenced by the low number of scaffolding activities that Rose implemented in Year 1 compared to Year 3. That is not to say that scaffolding provides the measure of a teacher’s capabilities, but it is compelling to note the dramatic increase in the number of scaffolding instances over three years. Table 4.2 also shows that Rose included multiple perspectives and approaches to teaching writing, and her approach can be seen as developing complexity and rigor from Year 1 to Year 3.

Table 4.2. Rose’s development as a writing instructor during the memoir unit by academic year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Connect ELA and the Arts</th>
<th>Identity Exploration</th>
<th>Writing Processes</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Scaffolding (inclusive of all columns except summative assessments)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1: August 25, 2009 to September</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Preassessment: 3 Formative assessment, incl. activities: 20</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Content analysis showed that while Rose increasingly focused on connecting ELA and the arts as well as identity exploration each year, she also incorporated more activities in which students learned to write. These activities included those related to the writing processes (e.g., idea generation, revision work) achieved through scaffolding (e.g., writing groups, close readings). Rose attributes this increase in instructional complexity to her development as a teacher (interview, August 13, 2014).

**Theme 2: The Teacher’s Instructional Practices Blended Expository and Expressivist Writing Pedagogies**

Rose’s intentional pedagogical decisions to merge expository writing (e.g., writing that explains or informs, such as a research paper) with expressive writing (e.g., experienced-based writing, such as a personal narrative) are guided by her teaching philosophy. A key philosophical tenet that guides this practice is the provision of opportunities for students to express their personal experiences in writing, and such opportunities included tasks intended to improve writing through effective writing instruction as prescribed by the curriculum.
The CHAT model allows for “zooming in” on his dual approach (Tharp, 1993), highlighting it as a unique feature in that many writing instructions teach expository writing (e.g., research report) skills in isolation from expressive writing (e.g., personal narrative) skills. Rose, however, taught a blend of expository and expressive writing skills throughout each of the three memoir units.

The curriculum (i.e., grade-level content, standards, etc.) provided the rules or guidelines by which Rose designed and taught the memoir curriculum. Data analysis of interview transcripts showed that Rose made intentional pedagogical decisions to create a trusting and open environment that she felt aided students in learning as well as to make the NCSCS more comprehensible. For example, Rose expressed concern that her students did not always understand how to apply knowledge (October 23, 2014). Therefore, she opted to take a two-sided approach by asking students to closely examine how a particular literary term was used in a classic or contemporary narrative then to apply the term in their own narratives in order to set up the reader to experience the concept in the context of their life. A representative activity occurred when students were tasked to examine how an author used irony in a nonfiction piece, then they wrote their own narrative using irony (artifact, September 6, 2009). In this way, Rose felt students were more likely to understand a literary term such as irony through composing their own texts (artifact, September 6, 2009). Rose shared her belief that when she elevated personal writing, in turn the academic work was enriched (interview, August 13, 2014).

Once students developed several pieces of writing, Rose incorporated language lessons and revision activities into the memoir lessons. For example, in a lesson on mood,
Rose asked students to use a colorful marker to underline all the verbs in one section of their memoir. They then were tasked with checking their work with a partner to ensure that all verbs were connected to the mood the piece was intended to convey (artifact, September 1, 2010). In another lesson, Rose asked students to select a memoir piece for revision. Students then read examples of six different beginnings, and they rewrote the beginning of their memoir piece using one of models as a guide (e.g., the hook, scene setting, dialogue) (artifact, September 11, 2009). By opting to take a two-sided approach (i.e., expository and expressive), Rose provided students with opportunities to closely examine how course content, such as literary devices and writing strategies, connected to their experiences.

**Process writing.** Rose, like most contemporary writing instructors, believes that writing is comprised of recursive stages: planning, drafting, revising, and editing (interview, August 13, 2014). While some ELA teachers have an “anything goes” (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006, p. 276) approach to writing instruction, Rose’s practice was to incorporate nested stages of writing throughout the memoir unit. Rose employed a recursive, non-linear approach that called for interrupting a particular stage (such as a draft) with more planning or revision. The process writing approach meant that students had several pieces in various stages of progress at any given time. Rose taught the students the standard rules for peer response such as focus on the writing, not the writer; start with positive comments; take turns in responding; the writer should remain silent as he or she gathers response; and readers tell the writer where in the piece they were most engaged or where they found a shared experience (Elbow, 1998). Near the end of the memoir unit, Rose asked students to take stock of their pieces and make decisions about which pieces to develop more fully, which
ones to revise, and so forth. In each of the three student groups (i.e., Year 1 group, Year 2
group, etc.), students typically submitted one memoir containing several chapters or sections
containing mini-stories that were developed from various writing strategies. Put another
way, each student submitted one memoir that contained several mini-chapters that started as
individual pieces and were developed at various points during the memoir unit.

**Transferrable strategy instruction.** Rose sought to facilitate student achievement of
state and district instructional goals by teaching transferrable, real-world literacy skills in the
context of personal narrative writing. Early in her teaching career, she recognized that as a
member of an English department, she held a responsibility to teach the foundations of
literacy that would make students more successful in all classes as well as for the future job
market (artifact, April 2, 2009). Rose’s curriculum materials show that students are taught
reading and writing skills that are applicable within and beyond the school walls. For
example, by writing and publishing their memoirs, students engage practically in literacy
skills as collaborators, authors, editors, and technical writers. Because students’ language
abilities may be judged by the student body, faculty, future employers, and the wider
community, Rose required that students participate in peer group critiques that were rigorous
and motivating. For example, across the three years of lesson plans, Rose provided an
increase from nine opportunities for critique and feedback compared to seventeen
opportunities in Year 3 (see Table 4.3).
Table 4.3. *Number of opportunities for in-class writing revision and feedback by year.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer review,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individual revisions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conferences</td>
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Rose incorporated such instructional practices in order to help students identify the skills they needed to improve their written communication. She then set about working with students to improve those skills in contexts that honored what students valued in language while also aligning with the NCSCS (artifact, April 2, 2009).

Rose incorporated strategy instruction as a *mediating tool* for teaching idea generation, writing and vocabulary skills, and critical thinking. Across the three years, Rose implemented a wide variety of activities in order to inspire students to write or to help them improve their writing with a personal narrative writing focus. Using brainstorming lists, charts, quick writes, freewrites, and other means to get ideas on paper, Rose incorporated strategies one might think typical of today’s high school English classes. However, the extent to which Rose provided such idea generation and writing practice (i.e., an average of 20 times) for such a short span of time (i.e., approximately 5 weeks in classes 50 minutes in length), is noteworthy, especially because such complex layers of writing instruction occurred in the context of personal narrative writing. This is important because many writing
instructors use experienced-based writing as an opportunity to take a break from rigorous writing instruction.

Many of the students’ published pieces reflected in-class activities, thus demonstrating that they learned to apply concepts learned in class to their published pieces. For example, in each of the three volumes of memoirs, the influence of in-class activities is evident because numerous memoir pieces reflect the activities in class used for idea generation: place, facial expressions, inciting incidents, and so forth. Rose stated that such an approach sometimes “feels restrictive or cookie cutter” (interview, September 13, 2014), but it works for those students who need the guidance and structure of activities that are prescriptive in nature. For others, especially those students who are strong writers, their pieces more creatively reflected their unique perspectives, challenging life experiences, and other issues related to the search for identity.

As students tried to understand how to generate memoir topics, how to develop memoir topics, how to write well, and how to prepare polished pieces of personal writing for submission (and for some, for public consumption), Rose consistently provided scaffolded writing instruction. For example, Rose used a traditional plot diagram model that is typically used in ELA classrooms to understand short stories as a means for students to generate and develop topics in Years 2 and 3. In effect, such scaffolding aided students in engaging in a variety of strategies, and at the end of the memoir unit, they had several pieces to choose from for their memoirs.

Another transferrable skill Rose implemented in the memoir unit was close reading of mentor texts. Across the three years, Rose consistently and intentionally used certain pieces
of classic and contemporary literature as mentor texts to inspire and improve students’ writings. The mentor texts provided opportunities for students to dig deep into the writer’s craft. Rose learned that students were better inspired to understand how certain authors’ treatments of memoir features could inform their own writing practices when they had a model from which to work (interview, September 13, 2014). Mentor texts that Rose used across the three years included excerpts from longer works. In most instances, she provided several selections for students to choose from during a given assignment (e.g., “Select one of the four excerpts to annotate”), and by Year 2, she assisted students in choosing the best mentor piece by providing information on difficulty level of the piece. Since both standards and honors students attended the same classes, such information aided students in making more informed decisions. Classic and contemporary mentor texts consisted of both student-selected texts and teacher-selected texts. A range of non-fiction pieces was incorporated into the curriculum for use as mentor texts and a partial listing can be found in Appendix C.

Data analysis showed that a consistent use of mentor texts was to examine, “How does the author do this thing we are trying to do?” (interview, August 30, 2014). Therefore, in addition to close reading, imitation was a staple of writing instruction in Rose’s classroom. Data analysis of Rose’s curriculum materials showed that she used imitation as a strategy (i.e., mediating tool) to scaffold students’ understandings of language. For example, in an effort to understand how different authors relate to place in their writings (as opposed to just describing place), students examined three literature excerpts and examined each for clues. In the excerpt of a lesson plan summary posted to her blog, Rose described conclusions made in class about the first few pages of Dreams from my Father (Obama, 2004) and prompted
134

students to consider how such an understanding could be used to apply to a figurative place to their own stories:

Obama writes about Harlem, which many students described as ‘crowded,’ ‘bustling,’ and ‘dirty.’ Students contrasted the bustling nature of Harlem with Obama’s solitude, which he describes as ‘the safest place I knew.’ We discussed how solitude can be a safe place, similar to a bedroom or home. In your solitude, you have total control over the environment. There are no outside stresses. People become ‘unnecessary distractions,’ as Obama writes. What kinds of figurative places do you go to? Why are they important to you? (emphasis in original; artifact, September 9, 2009)

This example demonstrates how Rose scaffolded students’ understandings of complex concepts, such as figurative place, with a close examination of literary models.

In the next sections, the second research question is addressed, and the theme represented in the data shows how Rose attended to the occurrence of sensitive topics in students’ written work.

Research Question 2: How does one high school ELA teacher navigate the occurrence of sensitive topics in students’ written work in a memoir-writing curriculum during her first three years as a classroom teacher?

Theme 3: The Teacher Intentionally Implemented Diverse and Supportive Approaches to Teaching Writing

Rose’s pedagogical practices combined with the unique aspects of the school curriculum created a bridge between students’ unofficial worlds (i.e., home, community, peers) and the official world of formal schooling (Moje, 2004). One theme in the current study answered the research question that examined how an ELA teacher can navigate the occurrence of sensitive topics in students’ written work in a memoir-writing curriculum. The
analysis of data showed that Rose anticipated the occurrence of sensitive topics through establishing a classroom climate that offered social and emotional supports. Data analysis showed that such supports increased significantly between Year 1 and Year 3. These supports are summarized in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4. Support systems established inside and outside of Rose’s ELA classroom by year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing groups</td>
<td>Personal profile</td>
<td>Meet and greet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop rules</td>
<td>Writing groups</td>
<td>Personal Profile</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop activities</td>
<td>Workshop rules</td>
<td>Writing groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishing club (after the memoirs were completed)</td>
<td>Workshop core values</td>
<td>Workshop rules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher conference</td>
<td>Workshop activities</td>
<td>Workshop core values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher conference</td>
<td>Teacher conference</td>
<td>Workshop activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishing club</td>
<td>Publishing club</td>
<td>Teacher conferences</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Publishing club</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supports Outside the Classroom</th>
<th>Guidance office</th>
<th>Guidance office</th>
<th>Guidance office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>School community (students, faculty, administrators)</td>
<td>School community (students, faculty, administrators)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishing club</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Publishing club</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Publishing club</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Publishing club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>Librarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University writing students</td>
<td>University writing students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local booksellers</td>
<td>General readership</td>
<td>General readership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(locally and virtually)</td>
<td>(locally and virtually)</td>
<td>(locally and virtually)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The support systems that Rose implemented were conceived of in terms of what is unique about her practices. Therefore, four broad subthemes resulted from collapsing the codes for support systems. These four unique subthemes are as followed: outside/inside expansion of audiences, transparency of practices, writing and sharing rules, and non-judgmental demeanor. In the next section, the permeable nature (Dyson, 1993) of Rose’s memoir curriculum is discussed, as well as how she put into place a network of social and emotional supports that sustained her students as they wrote their personal stories.

**Outside/inside expansion of audiences.** The idea to publish students’ memoirs beyond the classroom—and beyond the school—came to Rose prior to working at AMS. Rose stated that when she was enrolled in the MAT program, one of her professors and mentors shared ideas about different projects that they (students in the course) could undertake in their teaching (interview, August 13, 2014). She described how he held up a book of student writing that a high school teacher in the county had published of his students’ work. Rose said the professor passed around the book and asked if it looked like a real book, then commented that it was self-published. It was then that Rose had an “ah-ha” moment about publishing, and upon realizing the high school teacher her professor mentioned also taught at the school where she was student teaching, she arranged to sit in on the class to learn about the publishing process (interview, August 13, 2014). Therefore, Rose’s professor and colleague served as social others who aided her in discovering a better way to connect with, and teach writing to, adolescents (interview, August 13, 2014).

From the beginning, Rose said she felt that allowing public access to the memoirs created a sense of appreciation for students at AMS so that students and faculty could better
understand the individual adolescent experience (artifact, November 10, 2010). Further, Rose noted that the students who published their work in the books seemed to have “gained a sense of importance, a pride in their writing and their work: they are published authors!” (artifact, November 10, 2010). After the first publication, Rose reported that students at AMS were “clamoring to read the writing of their peers” (artifact, November 10, 2010). She was aware that students passed the first volume between friends in the hallways to be shared between classes, and students saw that their own writing could affect readers in a real way (interview, August 30, 2014). As a mediating tool, the published memoir collections served to strengthen and expand Rose’s community of practice.

Data analysis revealed a notable change to studio workshop occurred in Year 3 of the memoir curriculum: workshop meetings increased in frequency, and Rose expanded the community of practice by adding guest speakers on those days. Current and former AMS students and university writing scholars were invited to support Rose’s current ninth grade ELA students. The student guests included AMS sophomores who had written and published their own memoir pieces the previous year. They read excerpts from their published pieces, talked about what the experience was like planning and publishing their work, and answered questions (artifact, September 9, 2011). Other student guests included publishing club staff members who offered to serve as student mentors (artifact, September 23, 2011). The university guests included members of a professional writing class at a local, elite university, and they visited twice during the Year 3 memoir unit. These university scholars sat in on workshops and gave advice to students on improving their writing (artifact, September 16, 2011; artifact, September 23, 2011). Finally, on the same day when both the publishing club
staff and university scholars visited, Rose addressed parents in a post on her portfolio site: “Ask your child about it. It was super-cool! And the upperclassmen really enjoyed helping out” (September 23, 2011). This comment demonstrates the success Rose perceived in adding the university writing scholars and student mentors as support for the studio workshop activities.

Due to the parent interest in the memoir publications, Rose was able to arrange for students to participate in public coffee-house style readings at a local bookstore in Years 2 and 3. Additionally, hard copies of all three volumes were placed for sale on the bookstore shelves. Several local media outlets covered the readings, and it was noted in news articles that the turnout included parents, sisters, students, and strangers who came to hear AMS students share their personal stories (artifact, November 10, 2010; artifact, September 28, 2011; artifact December 8, 2012). Five students participated in the Year 1 readings; twelve students participated in the Year 2 readings; and 10 students participated in the Year 3 readings. Rose described the experience of the first public reading in the second volume of memoirs in the preface of one of the memoir volumes:

That night, students who had simply written a memoir for a classroom assignment read their works to an audience, gave voice to their fears and concerns and joys as young people. Shamelessly articulate, they answered questions about drafting, writing, and editing. And then they declared they would do it all again. (artifact, Volume 2, 2011).

The excerpt shows that by expanding the audience for the students’ writings, they had an experience that most students who write a story for a class assignment do not experience: authentic feelings of pride and appreciation from a live audience beyond the teacher and
other students. Rose said that when students received praise and encouragement at the coffee house reading, it in turn seemed to provide support for them as they completed the final step in their first publishing experience through the public sharing of their writing (interview, September 13, 2014).

**Transparency of practices.** From the beginning of Rose’s teacher career, her electronic teaching portfolio (i.e., teaching blog) served as a bridge between the classroom and students’ families. By using the electronic portfolio as a teaching blog, Rose opened herself up to criticism, which many teachers might find risky. Content analysis of the teaching blog revealed that Rose involved families in their child’s education in multiple ways. At times, it was as simple as acknowledging them and reporting on progress, “Hello parents, students, and families! The first day of school was glorious in [my classroom]!” (artifact, August 25, 2011). At other times, she directly addressed parents and asked them to get involved in helping their child with the topic selection for the memoir. A representative example occurred at the beginning of Year 1 when students were told to make connections between all the different pieces they had written over the first three weeks of the memoir unit and to select pieces that had a common theme. Rose wrote the following in a lesson plan update on her teaching blog:

Parents, please ask your student what they are choosing as their focus! This will 1) help them remember to do their homework, and 2) help them articulate their goals to another adult. (artifact, September 18, 2009)

The excerpt demonstrates that Rose wanted to involve families in her curriculum; therefore, students would be aware that family members knew the nature of work they were completing
in ninth grade English. Rose also encouraged students to ask family members for help with assignments. In directions for turning in a revised narrative, Rose wrote that students should “run spellcheck, ask a parent or sibling to read, reread the piece aloud to yourself to make sure everything makes sense” (artifact, September 4, 2009). Further, she prompted students to include family experiences and revelations in their memoirs. In one instance, she wrote about teaching epiphanies and asked students to recall doing something routine when an epiphany occurred: “Maybe one time you realized that you were actually turning into your parents. This should be an internal realization, not an external oddity” (artifact, September 17, 2009). More often than not, Rose included examples from her own family experiences in lessons such as these to inspire students to draw from their own family histories.

A major benefit of Rose’s transparent practices was that parents have been very supportive of the memoir curriculum, and the books of memoirs have been very popular with them. Of one of the volumes, she said, “A parent told me that they were passing it around to different neighbors, and everybody read it cover to cover” (interview, August 13, 2014). Rose thought there were different reasons why parents were so interested in the collections of memoirs:

I think for every parent, they’re going to be interested in the one that has their kid’s story in it and their kid’s friend in it, so I think they look forward to that. (interview, August 13, 2014)

Rose said parents are supportive of her instructional practices. She believes that from the parents’ perspective, she is a challenging, reliable teacher who assigns a lot of writing in class (interview, August 13, 2014). Considering that research has found that nationally,
students in English classes “are not writing a great deal” (Applebee & Langer, 2011, p. 15), such a perspective is a positive one. Research shows students who have a supportive parent at home are more likely to succeed in school (e.g., see Henderson & Berla, 1994), and Rose’s awareness of this research was evidenced in our interviews and in the analysis of the data (artifact, August 13, 2014).

Writing and Sharing Rules. Rose understands that in a classroom environment where students will be sharing personal information, rules are necessary. She also understands that rules are taught, practiced, and conveyed in multiple ways. Content analysis of the activities Rose implemented during the memoir unit in each of three years showed that she consistently and increasingly incorporated rules. For example, peer group work can be an inhibiting factor for students, especially when writing personal narratives. From Rose’s perspective, the degree to which students share personal information in her class is always in the control of students (interview, August 30, 2014). She set up writing workshop groups with the knowledge and understanding that peer group compositions required input from students and from her. Both she and the students abided by the tactful rules for responding to their peers’ writing (Elbow, 1998). Each year Rose asked students to provide details for her to consider regarding the writers with whom they would like to be grouped (interview, September 13, 2014). If a student suggested working with all girls, for example, Rose then looked at several pieces of information to create a group of 2-4 female students. The number of students in a writing group depended on many factors, such as diagnostic test scores, the personal profile, student input, writing samples, and other factors Rose may have noticed.
about work habits and personalities (interview, August 30, 2014). She felt that when students are so thoughtfully grouped, opportunities to develop trust and to provide support increase.

While many students ultimately opted to publish their work (see Table 4.4), the decision to publish did not occur until the end of the memoir unit. Therefore, personal stories were treated with privacy concerns in mind during classwork.

Table 4.5. *Students who participated in publishing their memoir by year.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Total student enrollment in the course</th>
<th>Percentage of students who elected to publish memoir</th>
<th>Diversity of authors</th>
<th>Number of publishing club members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>Asian: 2.3%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Black: 32.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic: 13.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed: 9.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>White: 41.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>Asian: 9.8%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Black: 37%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic: 7.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed: 9.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>White: 34.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>Asian: 1.7</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Black: 25.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic: 19.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed: 7.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>White: 36.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In each of the three memoir units, once students were placed in groups, they remained with those students for the rest of the year unless there was an issue that could not be resolved. Rose said that being familiar with people and procedures (e.g., always joining the same group on workshop days) also helped to limit confusion, but more importantly, the writing
group students were the only students who would read written work besides her—unless students opted to publish their work (interview, September 13, 2014). Rose said that when students worked in writing groups, they did not just help each other expand and revise each other’s stories; they also learned about each other through the sharing and planning of stories to include in their memoir (artifact, September 1, 2011).

In Year 3, Rose wrote a teaching blog entry about the issue of respect and privacy regarding the sharing of personal experiences. Before the first workshop of the semester, she asked students to consider the importance of developing a community of trust. This meant agreeing not to tell stories that were not their place to tell. In the following lesson plan summary published to her teaching blog, Rose shared the following:

Since we’ll be talking about some personal experiences in our writings, we made a pact in our writing groups not to speak about our partners’ experiences outside of the classroom. Also, we agreed to encourage our group mates to write about deeply personal issues that they care about. We will support them. Groups also reviewed the core values of the workshop and decided which value would be most important for them. (artifact, September 1, 2011).

This excerpt shows the straightforward manner in which Rose addressed sensitive issues. In her classes, she said she tried to demonstrate the manner in which topics can be shared and discussed within a community of professional writers (interview, August 30, 2014).

Data analysis showed that Rose aimed to support students by welcoming diverse perspectives in her ELA classroom (artifact, April 2, 2009), and she attempted to achieve this aim in multiple ways. She nurtured a sensitivity and responsiveness to such differences as racial, cultural, linguistic, gender, and special learning needs by modeling how to receive and respond to diverse perspectives; for example, she described how the placement of the memoir
unit at the beginning of the school year allowed her to openly discuss the diversity represented in the room (interview, August 13, 2014). She said that many students did not perceive of what they had to offer, so the memoir unit served to “teach difference and literary devices” (interview, August, 13, 2014). Rose also carefully selected a range of exceptionally written nonfiction texts that represented diverse perspectives. Excerpts of texts by Alexie (2007), Staples (1987), and Cisneros (1984), for example, provided contexts for discussing race, culture, addiction, and stereotypes (artifact, September 8, 2010).

The studio workshop model (Kirby & Kirby, 2007), much like writing workshop commonly used in writing classrooms, features professional guidelines, writing and publishing tasks, and multiple and varied opportunities for feedback and revision that serve to create a supportive classroom environment. Rose utilized studio workshop rules and values because “students need routine, clear expectations, and consequences” (artifact, April 2, 2014). The rules suggested by Kirby and Kirby (2007) are in alignment with those rules for peer response established by other scholars previously noted (e.g., Elbow, 1998). One of the benefits of the studio workshop is that it put into place standards for conduct, for responses to writing, and for productivity (Kirby & Kirby, 2007). It was very clear from Rose’s lesson plan summaries and from interview conversations with the researcher that the studio workshop model provided a supportive environment for writing, sharing, revising, and publishing personal stories.

Rose implemented workshop rules in all three years. The rules were intended to organize the workshop activities and to keep the feedback focused on the writing, not the writer. In a typical workshop in Rose’s classroom, the writer sits in the author’s chair and
reads the paper out loud; the editors take notes using a plus /delta system on the back of the author’s cover sheet. After the author finishes reading, the editors tell the author what words or phrases worked well, and the writer then underlines those words or phrases. The editors also tell the writer what they thought the main idea or feeling of the piece was, and the writer either confirms or denies and adds to their “to do” list accordingly. Next, editors tell the writer what more they would like to hear about (e.g, what to add), and finally, editors tell the writer what to cut and what did not work. If workshop time remains, the editors and the author work together to make the changes agreed upon (artifact, September 16, 2011).

In Year 3, Rose expanded the workshop rules to include core values. Because workshops are based on professional relationships between an author and an editor, core values comprise an important part of successful working relationships. The core values given to students in class and published on the blog are as follows:

- We focus on the writing, not the writer.
- We share our work boldly. Our classmates will respect us for being confident enough to tell about personal experiences.
- We respond to work boldly. Writers do not want to hear “Good job.” They do not want to hear about typos at this point, either.
- We value work ethic. We craft our writing through many drafts into a final product. We are never satisfied with the first draft.
- The author has the final say. The pencil/pen/marker stays in the author’s hand, not the editor’s. (artifact, September 1, 2011)

Workshops were a very important component of Rose’s classroom and increased in number and complexity across the three years. In Year 1, students met in their writing groups three times during the memoir unit, and general rules and guidelines were implemented; in Year 2, students met in their writing groups five times and specific workshop rules and core values
were implemented; in Year 3, students met in their writing groups six times and even more specific rules, guidelines, and core values were implemented.

Rose said that one aspect of the core values that has always worked extremely well is the focus on the writing, not the writer (Kirby & Kirby, 2007). By focusing on the writing, a level of control and professionalism has been maintained during writing workshops. Rose expounded on this:

We’re not going to ask more details about [a story]. We’re not going to say, ‘Wow, that’s awful,’ or ‘Wow, that’s cool.’ So we say, “What did you do in the writing that communicates this feeling to the reader, or where can you add more details? What do we want to know as readers?’ Then [authors] decide whether they want to leave certain parts out so we definitely try to focus on the writing. (interview, August 30, 2014).

Similarly, the publishing club had rules to follow as well. Rose used her role as executive editor and faculty advisor to train the publishing club in best practices for writing and sharing and ethical conduct. For example, publishing club members were not allowed to make commentary about the grammar abilities or word choices in a students’ memoir submission in a way that could be deemed as unfairly critical or derogatory. She said on occasion she heard a club member ask something like, “What does this even mean?” when reading a word or a sentence in a student’s story. Rose quickly reminded the editor, “We are here to facilitate someone’s story. You do not make fun of how people spell things. If you have trouble figuring out the meaning, read it out loud and get suggestions from the group” (interview, September 27, 2014). All conversations had to be related to the writing or the publication itself, therefore adhering to appropriate professional rules of conduct.
Between Year 1 and Year 3, Rose progressively and intentionally established supports to bolster students’ efforts to establish their place in the world of stories. In the preface of one of the memoir volumes, she summed up the experience best when she celebrated the overall support that led to the publication of her students’ work:

That’s what I call a partnership between a school and community! DSA’s students, parents, and principal have taken this book of memoirs from a little idea for a project to a professional publication that has now reached beyond our school’s walls. (artifact, November 10, 2010)

By studying the writer’s craft in light of their lived experiences, these students’ written work and collaborative efforts in writing groups became significant mediating activities for a permeable curriculum.

Non-judgmental Demeanor. One might expect that a classroom in which such personal sharing occurred would have been one dominated with expressions of sadness or overwhelming emotions. Rose said this is not the case. Weeks before she shared with the researcher what her classroom environment was like (“high energy, fast-moving, fun”; interview, September 13, 2014) the researcher documented in a research memo that Rose had a particularly unique manner of sharing information. For example, on the day when she performed a retrospective think-aloud of a writing activity for me in which she shared sensitive information about her relationship with her family, the researcher wrote the following: “Rose speaks in a matter-of-fact tone. Engaging but not emotional. Fast-paced, lilting in just the right places, melodic, but definitely not what I expected for someone speaking about personal topics” (memo, August 30, 2014). The researcher asked Rose if the
manner in which she relayed information during the think-aloud was really how she spoke in class. She said,

In the classroom, I want to model and encourage [students] to talk about their experiences, in terms of the planning process, in a matter-of-fact way because this is our material, and we are trying to craft this into something. I just want to show that everything is material, and we are going to think about it analytically. We have that emotional distance from the moment, which is going to create better writing if you can create the distance, and that will help them be more reflective, too, if they are not caught up in the feelings of it. And it’s really more about having the reader feel something than having them feel something, so I often talk about feelings you want your reader to feel as they are reading a piece. (interview, September 13, 2014)

This example shows that Rose does not intend to overstep her role as educator by trying to psychoanalyze or counsel students. While acknowledging that the rules for response by guidance counselors and therapists differ from those of a classroom teacher, Rose said that she openly talked to her students about “whatever, about abusive relationships or whatever they need to talk about” in a manner that is professional and straight-forward (interview, August 30, 2014).

According to Rose, for students the emotional, introspective moments usually happen when they are not in class, such as when they are alone writing. She said that males and females have shared with her over the years that they cried when writing their story. When such information has been shared, Rose said she acknowledged the telling without making her comments personal, which is her usual action. For example, on written work, Rose provided feedback about the writing but not about the writer, a rule that the writing workshop students adhere to as well. She showed the researcher some anonymous exemplars of graded work that she had kept from years previous, and she reviewed those comments and grading
rubric with the researcher. One of the examples contained a story that described trauma. The following is an excerpt of the transcript of Rose’s conversation with the researcher:

Christine: I noticed that you didn’t write anything about—you didn’t make it personal. You didn’t write, ‘I’m sorry this happened to you,’ or ‘I’m glad you came through it’—

Rose: No.

Christine: I think some teachers struggle with how to respond.

Rose: Right. I don’t even touch that because that’s not….I’m teaching literary devices in writing.

Rose believes that her straight-forward delivery of stories about her own life and the professional manner in which she helped students focus on improving their writing carried over to her students. She gave an example of when a student called her over for a conference in the computer lab. The student wanted to understand how to punctuate a sentence in which she was trying to communicate a certain message. Rose said she probed the student to consider the reader:

‘What feeling do you want to get across right now?’ and ‘Was this a good moment for you or a bad moment for you? What do you want to do for the readers here?’ Rather than getting lost in the sorrows of their experience, we’re trying to create something for someone else. (interview, September 27, 2014)

Overall, Rose communicated to the researcher a great concern for her students as individuals who have had unique experiences and as groups who have been successful at engaging in planning, composing, sharing, and revising their memoirs. Over the course of the current
study, Rose demonstrated a caring and democratically minded attitude as she relayed information that showed she is a dynamic and challenging teacher of English Language Arts.

In the next sections, the third research question is discussed and the themes represented in students’ memoirs.

**Research Question 3: What Themes Emerged in These Ninth Grade ELA Students’ Published Memoirs?**

**Theme 4: Memoir Volumes Contained Increasingly Diverse Themes**

Content analysis of the three volumes of memoirs revealed that students’ memoir pieces represented diverse themes that increased in complexity and expression from Year 1 to Year 3. The texts that students produced revealed the kinds of knowledge that students—and their teacher—valued in this ninth grade classroom in an urban arts magnet school (see Table 4.6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celebrations</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges leading to self-actualization</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Life</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journeys</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For students who chose to publish, they had the option to publish under a pen name. These students also elected to change names and identifying details of any people included in
their work. Rose said that the decision to publish has been easy for most students, although there were some who said they did not want to publish at first, then they changed their mind on the day that the sign-up sheet was distributed in class. Rose said she helped students make an informed decision:

We briefly talk about pen names and why they might want to use a pen name in order to keep certain things private or, you know, do you want to change some of the names of people in your story? So we talk about, ‘What’s a pen name? Who are some authors with pen names?’ Some people use pen names because they are private. Some people use pen names because they don’t want people to know they are female. For some it’s just fun. (interview, September 20, 2014)

Rose said that in each of the three volumes of memoirs analyzed for this study, a consistent, low number of students have requested to use a pen name.

Individual student memoirs often contained several segments or mini-chapters. This structure was Rose’s intentional design due to several pertinent factors. First, while she felt the chapter design seemed restrictive or cookie cutter in some ways, it worked well for students because they were better able to focus on specific scenes. Second, writing in small chunks helped to break up the work into manageable pieces since each chapter consisted of one page or less. Third, some pieces were based on a plot diagram students created to plan their pieces, so one chapter might have been written about the climax while another was written about falling action. Finally, writing in response to a variety of activities helped students to zero in on particular moments. In this way, across several weeks, students produced several pieces from which to select a few for inclusion in their final memoir (interview, August 30, 2014). On average, an individual memoir contained seven pages.
divided into five mini-chapters. In all, the three volumes contained 241 memoirs containing 1062 mini-chapters that totaled 1460 pages of data.

Data analysis showed that very few segments (i.e., “chapters”) within a given memoir were written about the same topic. The topics were often connected in some way, but because many of the memoir segments were written at different points during each memoir unit, the researcher treated each segment as one coding unit. In other words, one memoir containing seven chapters could result in each chapter receiving a different code in the coding frame. Once all memoirs were coded, codes were collapsed into the following eight themes: celebrations, challenges leading to self-actualization, diversity, everyday life, identity, journeys, relationships, and trauma. In the following sections, these eight themes are described and representative vignettes are provided for each. Vignettes were created to represent student voices since actual student memoirs could not be quoted. Vignettes were created by selecting at least three memoir chapters from at least three different students’ memoirs and imitated the writing style. The chapters selected for this purpose exhibited topics and features that the researcher felt were “representative, typical, or emblematic” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 81) of the overall description of the theme category while also trying to avoid selecting only those pieces that were sensational examples or unique exemplars (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While the researcher did change identifying details, she tried to keep the essence of the experiences as described in the adolescents’ stories. At the end of this section, sensitive or deeply personal topics are addressed because these were remarkably prevalent in Volumes 2 and 3.
Celebrations. Memoir chapters belonging to this category included stories where the author engaged in or observed activities that were celebratory in some way. The adolescent may have attended such events out of respect, for festivity, or in recognition of accomplishments. This category was represented the least in Volumes 1 and 3. The vignette below represents three students’ voices.

I took the cute new dress off its closet hanger, gingerly handling the gauzy material as I stood in front of the full-length mirror. I could hardly believe that I was officially done with middle school. Finally, I would go to my favorite restaurant for dinner. For a brief instant I closed my eyes, reliving the walk across the stage to accept my certificate in front of hundreds of adoring friends. It had felt amazing to run out of the auditorium to hug my parents as they congratulated me.

Challenges leading to self-actualization. Memoir chapters falling into this category included episodes depicting physical and emotional challenges that caused anxiety or caused the author to question who he or she was as an individual. The author described some form of transcendence, realization, or growth regarding such challenges. The vignette below represents three students’ voices.

As time went on, my bully became disinterested. Probably because I was being less reactive as I got older, and he couldn’t really get any satisfaction picking on me if I wasn’t bothered. I wasn’t. Not anymore. I felt more in control, and being around my friends at school helped me to forget that this bully had tried to intimidate me. My Mom stood up for me and helped me overcome my fears. My fear is gone now. Faith pushed it out, and never again will I obsess about this sad person who so obviously disliked me for no reason. I have no time for hate. I can breathe again. I am me, the real me. I can catch a glance of my face in the mirror and smile at myself, for I know that this bully isn’t going to affect my life going forward. I ended that story a long time ago when I decided to take back the thoughts in my head. And my new perspective is just getting started.
Diversity. Memoir chapters belonging to this theme featured issues of race or ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation. The most prevalent topics in this category were religious views, immigration, cultural issues, poverty, and learning considerations. The vignette below represents four students’ voices.

It was not until Dad started being home so much that I realized he had lost his job. He usually traveled a lot, but gradually he was hanging around the house more because the company he worked for was sold, and everyone who had been a loyal employee for all these years got pushed out. They made my dad’s job unbearable until he quit, which meant no benefits. We were stuck to make ends meet on my mom’s check from Dollar Tree, which was a fraction of what Dad made. It took a while for me to completely grasp what was happening because my parents tried to protect me from the things only grownups should worry about. During these months of struggle, I learned what charity means, and I learned about healthy food because we didn’t have any. The days passed blissfully when I could forget out Dad’s lack of a job and just enjoy being with him. Every Sunday we would go to church, and people would pray for us. People would ask me, “You believe in God, right?” and then they would tell me if I would turn over my struggles in prayer, God would do the worrying for me. By the time summer was over, we had found more help keeping the pantry stocked. The Food Bank gave us boxes of supplies, and even though what we received seemed like someone else’s pantry leftovers, I knew we could not be too picky. And I decided I wasn’t really too sure about this thing about God, and I was OK with that. When my family immigrated to America, we had had to learn how to read English, how to talk, how to write, how to get along with people who were very different from us. That was 10 years ago, and we had come so far because of my parents’ relentless efforts to make a life for us here.

Everyday life. Memoir chapters fitting into this theme featured customary ways of behaving, such as the author going through the motions of certain activities or depicting actions that resulted in little or no conflict. Memoir chapters in this category relayed stories about what it was like to go through a typical school day, descriptions of family members,
time spent with friends or in certain places, and philosophizing about life in general. The vignette below represents two students’ voices.

The morning started off like any regular school day. My alarm obnoxiously broke into my dreams of escaping math class and having a new motorcycle. I kicked the tangled blankets off me but was not mobile for a few seconds. I tripped over the pile of discarded clothes never seemed to get put away. My digital clock blinked 7:29 a.m. The bus would be here in 30 minutes, so I had no time to spare. Before I knew it, I was dressed and waiting by the curb, eating a cold pop-tart. When I arrived at school, a girl from my math class approached me like a cheetah on a gazelle. It was a little weird to be asked for help with homework the minute I got to school, but once I got my bearings about me, I sat down near our lockers and helped her, one again, with her Algebra homework.

**Identity.** Memoir chapters included in this theme focused on teen internal life, such as concerns of self-image, self-acceptance, strong identification with or connection to people, places, ways of being, hobbies and interests, or material items. In Volume 1, identity was the most represented theme. Stories that depicted identity most commonly featured identification with a person, such as a family member; identification with church and community; identification with a place; and identification with a hobby or interest, such as playing music. In the following representative vignette, three students’ voices are represented.

I remember what it felt like to say goodbye to my neighbors when I moved away from Athens. My whole childhood life was spent in Athens, Ohio. That place was my identity—it represented me at my core. That place was my hometown. It still is, but only in my heart. Snowy in the winter, warm in the summer, neighborhood filled with kids laughing, my mom’s kitchen filled with love and the smell of sugar cookies. My private tree house, undisturbed by others, made me feel like a monkey in the jungle. In my mind’s eye, I can still see the curve of the driveway to our house, the geese scuttling to cross in front of my mom coming home from work, waiting till the last second to move out of the way of her bicycle. Now that I live in North Carolina, I have to figure out the new me. Sometimes, I feel at odds with life here, but I know that will change. Leaving Athens was the end of an era. My feelings about my new
life go up and down like the hills of my new town, but over time, I’ll reinvent myself. Getting accepted into the school jazz ensemble will be the first step to creating the new me.

**Journeys.** Memoir chapters in this category featured the author’s progression from one place or stage to another. The journeys included traveling on vacation, riding in a car to visit a friend or family member, or moving to a new house or school. The three most common journeys included flying on an airplane, moving from one house to another, and transferring from one school to another, usually to AMS. The following vignette is representative of three students’ voices.

My mother took me to the airport and quickly walked with me to the Delta counter to get my boarding pass. When I got to the point where my mother could not proceed with me through security, we hugged tight and she nearly lifted me out of my sparkly flip-flops. I have flown may times alone to visit my dad back in Key West, so I felt comfortable making my way to the gate alone. Passengers were soon milling around like sheep, and finally it was time to move into a single-file line down the jet bridge to the plane. The plane was what my dad calls a puddle jumper. If that plane took the End-of-Course Test, it would have barely passed. It looked like an antique; its once shiny wings were now just dull metal. Finally, I boarded and found my seat. I must have fallen asleep as soon as I buckled in because the next thing I was aware of was the tiny aircraft bumping along a sky road filled with potholes. I thought we were going to crash land, but we finally touched down and made our way slowly towards the gate. I grabbed my zebra roll-a-board and followed the crowd. I walked to the shuttle in the arrival area, where I saw my dad waiting for me outside of the sliding doors. This was the beginning of my first whole summer with my dad.

**Relationships.** Memoir chapters falling in this category focused on family life or family member(s), friendships, or romantic relationships. Stories featuring relationships with family members most often included either a developing relationship with an estranged parent or a new stepparent. Stories featuring relationships with friends typically depicted best
friends in terms of long-term friends or new friends. Stories featuring romantic relationships included a parent’s new boyfriend or girlfriend and also the author’s love interest. The vignette below represents three students’ voices.

By then, the conversation in the minivan had gotten all emo because of all the love that was being spread around. My brother and I tried to change the subject numerous times to no avail: girls, baseball, hotdogs, L’il Wayne. Something manly. We did not want to talk to Dad about the reasons he and mom decided to live in separate houses. We knew he loved us, but it was just weird having this conversation out of the blue. We never talked about this stuff, and it was awkward to suddenly talk about it now. Luckily my parents never really fought. I wasn’t involved in what happened. They just stopped doing things together, and with us. I do not want to make their problems my problems. I am more focused on just trying to do well in school, and now that they each have a place to live, it’s like they can’t tell us enough how much they love us. I’m glad, but it’s still hard to talk about it all without feeling awkward. I guess you could say that my new relationship with my parents is still a work in progress.

Trauma. Memoir chapters in this theme include experiences of adolescents and their families in crisis through divorce, violence, bullying, accident, death, grief, estrangement, abuse, self-abuse, neglect, abandonment, or illness. Traumatic events included one-time disrupting events or situations that appeared to cause long-term, negative mental or physical effects. This theme was represented more than any other theme in all three volumes of memoirs. Divorce was the dominant category with death of a family member or friend following. Illness was also highly represented.

Rose said that for some students, choosing what to write about was difficult because they did not want to talk about certain issues. For example, a student who missed his father initially expressed not wanting to write about that, but upon reading other adolescents’ stories about the complexities of parent relationships, he wrote a powerful story about his
relationship with his father. Rose feels that for students such as this one, it can be freeing to
read about other students who have written about traumatic experiences, “so it just gives
them permission” (interview, September 13, 2014). In the following vignette, eleven
student’s voices are represented.

I endured horrible things that no child should have to experience. I had hopes and
dreams of a happy life like my friends had, but instead my days were filled with stress
and worry. I abhorred my life. I hated being the total fake who acted like life was fine
when on the inside I was screaming because no one around me had an inkling of an
idea what I was going through. During that time, I often wondered how could I carry
on with such a loathsome existence. I did not deserve the unforgivable pain I was
given. Then the day that my mother’s purse strap broke across my shoulder after
being repeatedly struck against me with whip-like blows, I did not think I could take
any more. I could anticipate the next purse-slap before it hit, the fake leather’s
stinging sensation continuing as repeated punches and smacks came at me in the
repetitive pacing that she had perfected. As I tried to protect my head from her never-
ending strikes, I stole a look at the face of this person who had become so evil. The
anger in her eyes told me I might die this time, and her usual overly made-up face
looked so grotesque and distorted with hatred that I barely recognized her. I had no
choice but to believe her threats to “show me” how serious she was, and I just prayed
that I would survive the onslaught. I felt so empty, and all I could do was stare at the
cold tile floor while I waited her out. All I cared about was how to survive. I know
now that none of this was my fault, but grief washes over me even though that part of
my life is behind me.

**Deeply personal or sensitive topics.** Research in which there are “potential
consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the
class of individuals represented by the research” (Sieber & Stanley, 1988, p. 49) is deemed
socially sensitive. Lee (1993) identified three areas in which such research potentially poses a
threat to those involved in it: an intrusive threat of privacy; a threat of sanction; and the threat
of power. Because of the socially sensitive nature of the current research, the researcher has
taken careful measures to protect the identities of students whose work is represented in the three volumes of memoirs. This includes the anecdotes and experiences that Rose shared with the researcher during interviews. In this section, the issue of deeply personal or sensitive topics in students’ writings is discussed in addition to how Rose navigated them. The researcher has changed some of the details in Rose’s examples (such as gender, names, and specific situations) to reflect a more general telling that still contains the essence of her experience.

When discussing the range of topics students wrote about, Rose noted that topics had changed over time and there was an increase in what she referred to as “high-risk topics” (interview, August 30, 2014) or “deeply personal” (artifact, volume 3, 2012). In Year 1, she observed that many stories were about something fun, like a fun vacation, or a story of a best friend, then in Year 2, “I’m not sure what happened in the second year, but a lot of students chose to write about sensitive topics. Then in the third year, a lot more people were writing about sensitive topics” (interview, August 30, 2014). Data analysis of students’ published memoirs revealed that an increase in topics of a deeply personal nature appeared in each volume of memoirs (Table 4.7). The researcher confirmed this finding with Rose during the last interview, and she said she had also documented the trend toward more deeply personal topics when she prepared materials about her students’ publications for a poster presentation at a local university (interview, October 23). While she did not calculate numbers of topics that included sensitive or deeply personal information, Rose noted elsewhere that students were “emboldened” and “compelled” to write about more complicated, personal issues (interview, September 27, 2014).
Table 4.7 *Percentage of themes containing chapters that are potentially sensitive or deeply personal.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Memoir Themes</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celebrations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges leading to self-actualization</td>
<td>41.66%</td>
<td>31.57%</td>
<td>3.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
<td>8.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Life</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
<td>3.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journeys</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rose attributed students writing about more high-risk topics by the third year to things like “being a better teacher and being more comfortable with students” (interview, August 30, 2014). She said it has become her practice to pick up one of the published volumes and carry it back and forth in the classroom during a motivational speech, saying something like,

Now let me tell you about [so-and-so], and he really didn't know what he wanted to write about, and he said my life is difficult enough, and I don't want to write about things that are upsetting. And I said, OK, that's fine, you just write about what you want to write about. (interview, August 30, 2014)

She said that sometimes students read stories in the published volumes and try out ideas in their writing groups. In one particular instance, a student, Zev (pseudonym), felt lukewarm about a chosen topic, and the writing group asked questions to prompt him to think about other life experiences that were important. When Zev stumbled upon something that made his eyes light up, the group said, "You should try writing about that!" (interview, August 30,
2014), and he went home that day and wrote his first chapter and emailed it to Rose. Rose said it was nearly two pages of single spaced prose that used imagery, foreshadowing, and suspense and was “incredibly written” (interview, August 30, 2014). She replied to Zev that he had exhibited particularly good writing using several literary devices they had learned in class. The next day, Zev said he was not even thinking about how to write the story; that was just the way it came out (interview, August 30, 2014).

The story, a trauma narrative, showed insight, resilience, and grief in progress. It is stories such as these that have prompted Rose to send messages to school guidance counselors as a heads up (interview, September 27, 2014). She said, “I just tell guidance, ‘Hey, would you just check in on this student and get to know them because this happened to them and they just need to talk about it’” (interview, August 30, 2014). Usually such conversations are brief, but Rose feels this adds a measure of assurance that issues are addressed per the school’s protocol and her professional and ethical responsibility. Often, the stories that students wrote about in the three volumes happened in middle school and guidance counselors or other teachers were already aware (interview, August 30, 2014).

Rose expressed concern that a student might experience repercussions regarding a published story. For example, she said she has worried that a parent might read a memoir volume cover to cover and figure out which story belonged to their son or daughter even if the adolescent used a pen name and changed some of the details. She said, “Ultimately, I convince myself that it’s actually a really good thing because now the parent and the child are forced to have a conversation or not have a conversation” (interview, August 30, 2014). Rose summarized representative example situations when students had opted to share their
difficult stories with their parents. In such cases, students who were preparing to graduate or had already graduated high school had conversations with their parents and used published stories as a starting point for difficult conversations (interview, August 30, 2014).

Because some topics are so sensitive, especially stories of trauma, Rose said she has encouraged students to consider changing the names or some of the details in a piece, particularly “if they think that something is going to hurt someone” (interview, interview, September 13, 2014). In some cases, she has told students, “You know, this could be published, and I just want you to think about changing some of the details to keep it anonymous so that you don’t have to deal with too many repercussions” (interview, September 13, 2014). By explaining to youth about the possible consequences of publishing their written work, Rose helped them make more informed decisions.

In other instances, the stories of consideration were not traumatic but still sensitive or controversial. For example, students had shared with Rose of their LGBTQ (i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning) status, and with their permission, Rose grouped them to work together. That way, the only person besides the teacher to read their stories was another LGBTQ student. What they chose to share and whether to publish—and whether to use pen names or real names, etc.—was always in the students’ control (interview, September 13, 2014).

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter 4 included the findings for this study and answered the research questions about how this high school ELA teacher described her instructional practice for building upon racially diverse, ninth grade students’ personal experiences in a memoir curriculum unit
during the first three years of her teaching practice as well as the themes about which her students wrote. It was concluded that the core values of Rose’s teaching philosophy included valuing students’ funds of knowledge as well as the intentional integration of expressivist pedagogy through identity. Further, it was concluded that Rose’s practice was to blend the expository with the expressivist pedagogies. Her expressivist pedagogical approach to teaching writing ensured that her students had multiple, diverse means of learning and practicing writing strategies through an iterative writing process. Finally, by establishing diverse and supportive approaches to teaching writing, Rose created a curriculum for her students that drew upon out of school experiences in order to engage with school-based literacy practices. The diverse themes that students undertook for the memoir publications demonstrated a range of topics important to adolescents’ lives. In Chapter 5, these findings are discussed in relation to existing research and implications for practice and future research.
CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

“This is the reason I am alive” (Rose Clearfield, 2014).

Introduction to the Chapter

The purpose of the present study was to investigate one ELA teacher’s memoir-writing curriculum and the published work of her students. The researcher’s interest in expressivist pedagogy was inspired by the work of Dutro (2008, 2010); Wissman and Wiseman (2010, 2012), and Jones (2004, 2012) who questioned the ways in which students’ difficult experiences were often silenced or met with shame or other inappropriate responses. The researcher found it particularly compelling to investigate how a teacher who makes personal writing a regular part of the curriculum navigates occurrences of student self-disclosure. As a result, the researcher designed an instrumental case study investigating a memoir-writing curriculum that Rose, a ninth grade ELA teacher at an urban arts magnet school, taught for three years and resulted in increased student participation in the publication of their work.

This study is comprised of five chapters. The statement of the problem and significance of the study are the foundation of Chapter 1. A review of the literature related to teacher education and written communication, expressive writing, and sensitive topics is included in Ch. 2. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and describes the qualities of the case. Each of four themes resulting from content analysis is described in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, the present study is summarized and situated within existing research on teacher education and expressive writing. Also, the implications on policy, practice, and research are discussed and the researcher closes with her final thoughts about the study.
Summary of Methodology

Case study methodology and the method of qualitative content analysis allowed the researcher to examine a corpus of texts and interview transcripts in order to understand how one English Language Arts teacher described a memoir-writing curriculum she implemented and what students wrote about in response. This study was bound to Rose, her memoir curriculum taught for the first 5-6 weeks of each of three academic years, three volumes of students memoirs published from work created during those time periods, and interview data with Rose that the researcher collected for approximately three months. The researcher purposefully selected Rose as the teacher-participant because of her excellent reputation as a high school language arts teacher who teaches personal narrative writing and publishes her students’ work. Rose’s students were part of a racially diverse, urban magnet school for the arts. Throughout the study, the researcher gathered data sources consistent with qualitative research (i.e., textual artifacts, memos, and interviews). All data were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis method and CHAT framework. The researcher conducted analysis in two stages: first, a coding frame (Schreier, 2012) helped to determine what data was relevant, and second, open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) aided the researcher in finding emergent themes in the selected data. Ultimately, all codes were collapsed into four themes that answer the three guiding research questions:

1. How did one high school English teacher describe her instructional practices for teaching a memoir-writing curriculum based on the personal experiences of ninth grade students?
2. How does one high school English teacher navigate the occurrence of sensitive topics in students’ written work?

3. What themes emerged in these ninth grade ELA students’ published memoirs?

**Summary of Findings**

All data were collapsed into four themes, which are summarized in this section. The first three themes focus on the teacher’s pedagogical decisions, and the fourth theme summarized the topics that students wrote about in their memoirs.

**Theme 1: The Teacher’s Instructional Practice Evolved**

The data analysis showed that over the course of three years, Rose’s teaching philosophy guided her in the evolution of her teaching practices and also provided her with a touchstone for reflective practice. She used her own experiences as a student and as a student teacher to adopt certain instructional practices and to craft an expressivist pedagogy that aided in the alignment of the school curriculum with her own values and beliefs. This alignment occurred through Rose valuing students’ funds of knowledge and through her intentional integration of identity work.

**Theme 2: The Teacher’s Instructional Practices Blended Expository and Expressivist Writing Pedagogies**

Data analysis showed that Rose increasingly and intentionally merged expository and expressivist pedagogies across her first three years as a classroom teacher. Her classroom was not an “anything goes” classroom in which the teacher tries a variety of unconnected activities with the hope that something works. Instead, Rose implemented the writing processes approach, including transferrable strategy instruction, along with expressivist
pedagogical practices. The result was a hybrid discourse that blended the personal with the academic, which supported expressive writing and effective writing instruction as prescribed by the NCSCS.

**Theme 3: The Teacher Intentionally Implemented Diverse and Supportive Approaches to Teaching Writing**

Rose intentionally established social and emotional supports outside and inside the classroom. Content analysis of curriculum materials show that she increased the social and emotional supports as she gained experience and grew as a reflective practitioner during the first three years as a classroom teacher. Rose’s pedagogical practices combined with the unique aspects of the school curriculum created a bridge between students’ unofficial worlds (i.e., home, community, peers) and the official world of formal schooling (Dyson, 1989, 1993). Rose accomplished this through expanding the audience for her teaching practices and students’ written work, by creating transparency of practices, by setting up writing and sharing rules, and by adopting a non-judgmental demeanor.

**Theme 4: Memoir Volumes Contained Increasingly Diverse Themes**

Students’ published memoirs represented diverse themes that increased in complexity and expression from Year 1 to Year 3. The texts that students produced revealed the kinds of knowledge that students—and their teacher—valued in this ninth grade classroom in an urban arts magnet school. Findings show that the topics changed over time and there was an increase in high-risk or deeply personal topics between Year 1 and Year 3.
Discussion

The findings from this study support existing research that illuminates the process of learning to teach writing, specifically in relation to how ELA teachers develop conceptual understandings and specific teaching practices across different social contexts (e.g., teacher education programs, field placements, and initial job placements). The social contexts and the cultural history of the setting (in this case, an ELA classroom in an urban arts magnet school) encouraged specific outcomes that guided Rose’s self-documented and self-described actions as an English teacher. In other words, Rose’s background, the state and district learning standards, and the accepted and expected ways of being and knowing at AMS supported her in her expressivist pedagogical practices.

Further, the findings from this study illuminate ways learners may be influenced by the specific contexts of a learning community. The studio writing classroom framework provided Rose with the structure to create an a writing curriculum for an authentic audience that engaged students in state and district learning goals while also tapping into their funds of knowledge. Rose acknowledged students’ personal stories, and by modeling behavior and knowledge construction, she aided students in internalizing and achieving mastery of literacy practices in a supportive environment. For example, from Year 1 to Year 3, data show that Rose streamlined her lessons by making stronger connections between curriculum materials and students’ lives. Data also show that as Rose put more support systems into place, more students responded with stories of a deeply personal nature.

Researchers have recognized that experienced-based writing in classroom settings can benefit students (e.g., Boals, Rubin, & Klein, 2008; Dutro, 2008, 2010; Jones, 2004, 2012;
Pennebaker, 1989, 1991, 1997; Wissman & Wiseman, 2010, 2012), yet other scholars have expressed concern that expressive writing positions students in harmful ways (e.g., Alcorn, 1995, 2002; Bartholomae, 1995; Bizzell, 1982, 1986; Faigley, 1992, Lindner, 2004; Perillo, 1997). Dutro (2008, 2009, 2011) and MacCurdy (2007) argue that even in classrooms where teachers are more cautious than others in the selection of assignments, some students will write personal stories whether or not they are invited to do so.

Rose expressed a rationale for how she responded to sensitive topics emerging in students’ writing. Her responses were guided by research in education that indicates ways to respond in classroom contexts. Her responses included: 1) establishing a broad community of practice that includes students, parents, and others inside and outside the school; 2) developing a classroom climate where students feel safe to share; 3) demonstrating a non-judgmental demeanor; 4) practicing self-disclosure; 5) establishing rules for peer response, which include discussing the writing not the writer, giving feedback where events in the writing speak to the reader’s experiences; 6) purposefully grouping students with peers who have compatible dispositions; 7) allowing students choice in whether or not to share publically; 8) suggesting that students can use pen names and can also change revealing information in the writing; and 9) when deemed necessary, alerting school guidance counselors that a student might approach them. Rose implemented pedagogical practices that have been confirmed in educational literature; however, educators are not provided specific advice in the professional literature for responding to sensitive and emotional topics that arise. It is out of the domain of a classroom teacher to offer therapy or counseling beyond a student’s educational goals. Rose’s approach capitalized on the affordances (e.g., knowing
one’s students, allowing students to be experts on their own topics, etc.) that undergird memoir writing, while taking into account the considerable constraints (e.g., how to be objective when topics are not just sensitive in nature but also potentially dangerous and/or threatening). Where is the balance between affordances and constraints? This research cannot answer this question, which must be negotiated between a teacher and his/her students, nor can this research address when self-disclosure does not serve an educational goal.

By looking at the entire context of this unit of study through the lens of CHAT, the constraints became apparent, such as a lack of guidance for teachers in addressing individual issues. The CHAT lens revealed the numerous supports that Rose enjoyed in creating the memoir unit; a CHAT lens applied to a less supportive environment might reveal a teacher’s struggles. An English teacher can be fully confident in teaching voice, topic development, tone, and other aspects of writing; but an English teacher does not have ready tools for addressing the personal problems of writers. In Rose’s case, Rose’s teaching philosophy was her touchstone for guiding her decisions. It is concerning that the field has not adequately addressed how to prepare teachers for the occurrence of sensitive topics in students’ writing. In Rose’s case, she received no specific instructional preparation for how to address issues that might arise while teaching the memoir genre to racially diverse ninth grade students. She did, however, benefit from an arts education and supportive colleagues, administration, parents, and the greater community. Through the aid of such supports, her understanding of reflective practice, and the benefits of experienced-based writing, Rose constructed classroom communities where students could share their opinions and experiences, build on personal identities, and communicate effectively.
This study connects to literacy research that acknowledges that social and emotional issues are rarely addressed in teacher education. The unspoken and taken-for-granted rules of teacher education contribute to this phenomenon. By addressing the role of the affective in learning and the social-emotional needs of students, educators may more deeply consider how they can engage students in personal and meaningful written work. In the following sections, the themes evident in the literature are revisited: the social and cultural factors that mediate development; ELA and the teaching of expressive writing; and the hidden curriculum in ELA teacher education—and discuss the current findings in relation to extant research.

**Connecting Findings to Previous Research**

The findings from this study support existing research on the social and cultural factors that mediate development in teacher education and written communication research; ELA and the teaching of expressive writing; and the acknowledgment of personal narrative writing in ELA teacher education. In the following sections, the findings from the present study are discussed in relation to the themes of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

**Teacher Education Research**

Researchers agree that social and cultural factors mediate development in particular contexts (e.g., Grossman et al., 1999; Wertsch, 1991). In teacher education, various factors impact whether the appropriation of pedagogical or conceptual tools occur, such as lack of understanding, individual differences and values, and the social contexts of learning (Grossman et al., 1999). When Rose drew upon her experiences as a student, a student-teacher, and as a beginning teacher, she was actively involved in internalizing and
reconstructing her knowledge. She showed evidence of appropriation (Leontiev, 1981; Rooff, 1995; Grossman et al., 1999; Wertsch, 1991) of conceptual underpinnings of writing instruction in Years 1 and 2, and she showed evidence of the achievement of mastery (Grossman et al., 1999) of specific pedagogical practices in Year 3. For example, in Year 1 Rose set up writing groups because she understood that writing workshop was an important component of a writing classroom, but it was not until her second year teaching that she introduced students to the core values of workshop conduct and not until Year 3 that she modeled how to converse and receive feedback in a writing group. The developmental process of Rose’s socially formulated, goal-directed, and tool-mediated actions were adopted (Wertsch, 1991) through the process of participating in an activity—in this case, through enacting expressivist pedagogy as it aligned with her values, experiences, and goals.

Alternately, findings from this study uncovered inherent tensions associated with the students’ appropriation of the studio workshop. As an activity system (Engstrom, 1987, 1993), the studio workshop framework operated under rules and norms (e.g., state standards and culturally acceptable behaviors and practices). When Rose added the core values in Year 2, she indicated a need for students to understand the basis for ethical actions within the writing groups. Had she not experienced tensions with writing groups in Year 1, the need for core values might not have appeared necessary. Likewise, in Year 3, Rose modeled how to converse and receive feedback in writing groups, which indicates that it was necessary to establish acceptable behaviors and practices for peer feedback in writing workshops. Rose’s actions revealed how her pedagogical approach in previous years was both constrained and supported by contextual factors of the studio writing classroom.
Written Communication Research

Researchers suggest that familiarizing students in writing classroom contexts with the communication practices of their future workplaces is challenging (e.g. Bazerman, 1994, Berkenkotter, 2001; Dannels, 2003). It is challenging because the communication practices of workplace professionals occur in contexts that are more dynamic and collaborative than, for example, the contexts of secondary ELA classrooms where activities are typically enacted in rote fashion (Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Pare, 1999). However, in Rose’s ELA classroom, she incorporated the studio workshop (Kirby & Kirby, 2007) with the memoir genre in order to overtly connect academic writing instruction with the audiences and communication practices of certain, potential, future workplaces. Namely, students enacted the professional relationship between an author and an editor, such as those who work together on writing for newspapers, magazines, stories, blogs, novels, and memoirs. The findings suggest that as a social activity, the memoir genre operationalized shared expectations among students and their teacher regarding how certain cultural tools (e.g., curriculum materials, stories) could be used to accomplish shared purposes (Russell, 1997).

Expressivist Pedagogical Practices

Researchers agree that when teachers make strategic connections between home and school, they develop social networks that connect classrooms to communities (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Moll & Greenburg, 1992). In this study and in other studies examining expressivist pedagogical practices in writing classrooms, experienced-based writing was shown to make curricula not only engaging but also relevant to students’ lives (e.g., Atwell, 1987; Britton et al., 1978; Calkins, 1990; Long & Davis, 2011; Murray, 1985).
By bridging the divide between students’ worlds and the world of schooling, Rose provided her students with opportunities to increase their sense of purpose, their connection with others, and their individuality (McAdams, 1993; Nelson & Fivush, 2004). She also positioned herself to better assist students in working through challenging times (MacGillivray et al., 2010). She established support systems outside and inside the classroom though the involvement of families, community members, colleagues, guidance counselors, and administration. Additionally, by acknowledging personal stories, Rose let her students know what she valued—their lives, their experiences, and their contributions to the ELA curriculum.

According to Hillocks (2007), creating high quality narratives affords students opportunities to contribute to the very body of literature in which they will study. Rose adopted this practice by forming a publishing club, publishing students’ memoirs, and in Year 3, using those students’ memoirs as mentor texts. The writing techniques and processes that adolescents learned in this manner were relevant to other kinds of writing; for example, invention strategies, the writing process, strategies for expanding and improving writing, and collaboration with other writers to revise, edit, and publish their work could be applied to any genre study. This stands in contrast to the concerns of critics who reason that expressivist writing instructors are disadvantaging their students by limiting their academic development (e.g., Bartholomae, 1990; Bizzell, 1982, 1986). Rose’s writing pedagogy included features of effective writing instruction as established by such scholars as Applebee and Langer (2013), Graham and Perrin (2007), Langer (2002), and Marzano (2001, 2007). The findings from this study showed that Rose taught a combination of idea generation and prewriting, writing
processes, scaffolding, strategy instruction, inquiry tasks, collaborative writing, the study of writing models, and the use of rubrics to guide writing and evaluation of writing. Scholars also agree that a combination of these instructional features along with teaching various modes of writing for different purposes comprise effective writing instruction. Rose’s course syllabi show that she taught various rhetorical modes throughout the school year, but in Year 3, she incorporated the four modes of expressive writing into the memoir unit (e.g., exposition, description, narration, and persuasion) in order to broaden students’ understanding of written modes.

**Trauma narratives and sensitive topics.** Some scholars suggest that stories of trauma are central to the elevated status of memoir (e.g., Berman, 2008; Gilmore, 2001; Henke, 1998). Popular contemporary memoirs, like good fiction, involve some kind of conflict or tension. Findings showed that Rose elicited more deeply personal or sensitive stories from students in Years 2 and 3 of the memoir unit than in Year 3. Whether this can be accounted for based on differences in student groups each year cannot be known. One reason may be that Rose emphasized the need for literary conflict more to make a story interesting for the reader. Another reason may be that as she gained experience and became a more responsive and reflective teacher, her ability to articulate and enact the memoir curriculum improved therefore eliciting more personal stories from her students. By highly valuing personal experiences and perspectives and by straightforwardly addressing sensitive issues, Rose modeled the reciprocal nature of sharing and learning. By sharing her difficult stories (e.g., breaking up with an abusive boyfriend, having an alcoholic father), Rose authorized students’ personal topics.
Lack of Preparation for Sensitive Topics in ELA Teacher Education

Eanet (2001), Panofsky (2001), and Jones (2004, 2012) reported that social and emotional issues are rarely addressed in teacher education programs. Educator and scholar Elizabeth Dutro (2008, 2010) raised concerns that a lack of teacher preparation for the occurrence of sensitive topics in students’ writing may result in confusion, inappropriate responses, or silence. In the current study, Rose revealed that she did not have explicit training in anticipating, or responding to, deeply personal topics in students’ writing, yet over the three school years of data examined, she developed her own approach attending to adolescents’ stories of trauma. She relied on her experiences as a student, the support of colleagues and school guidance counselors, the transparency of her teaching practices, and a memoir writing strategy text as the means of navigating sensitive topics. Interestingly, two axioms that seemed to guide her response to students’ work and her students’ responses to each other’s work were “focus on the writing, not the writer” (Kirby & Kirby, 2007) and “what do you want the reader to feel?” (interview, September 13, 2014). Therefore, Rose’s classroom approach was to maintain a level of emotional distance from deeply personal topics in order to practice nonjudgmental professionalism. The findings show that Rose’s delivery of the personalized curriculum demonstrated the reception of, and respect for, students’ personal stories.

Only a handful of empirical studies have addressed ways teachers can navigate issues related to students’ written self-disclosure of sensitive, personal topics (e.g., Dutro, 2008, 2010; Jones, 2004, 2012; Paley, 2001; Wissman & Wiseman, 2010, 2012). Researchers have suggested that teachers should provide non-judgmental and compassionate listening when
students share stories of trauma (e.g., Kirby & Kirby, 2007; Taylor, 2006; Wissman & Wiseman, 2011). Dutro (2008) suggested that “a circle of testimony and witness” (p. 428) is necessary in classrooms to ensure that difficult stories are acknowledged rather than met with silence or steered to safer ground. Findings in the current study show that Rose encouraged personal stories and enacted reciprocal listening and sharing—a circle of testimony and witness—in order to ensure that all stories were acknowledged with compassion and respect.

Jones (2012) suggested that teacher education programs should prepare future teachers by disrupting the nomos (Bourdieu, 2000), the “unspoken and taken-for-granted rules of the game of an academic space” (Jones, 2012, p. 133). Traditionally, the unspoken rules in ELA classrooms position students as those who critique characters’ actions and motives and connect them to their own lives in a distanced way. In the current study, there was evidence that Rose drew upon academic distancing (Jones, 2012) to an extent in order to provide non-judgmental and compassionate listening to her students stories of trauma when she relied upon the axioms “focus on the writing, not the writer” and “what emotions do you want the reader to feel?” However, evidence shows that she otherwise disrupted the nomos in Year 3 by using previous student publications to elevate the status of deeply personal stories for those students like Zev, who thought he had nothing important to write about. These conflicting actions—that is, using academic distancing on the one hand and elevating the status of sharing personal stories and unique experiences on the other—show that Rose aimed to suspend any assumptions students had about the types of stories that were welcomed in school. She emphasized—multiple times and in various ways—that all experiences were appropriate and welcomed in her classroom. The increase in sensitive and
deeply personal topics by Year 3 may indicate that students in the first two groups were uncertain (or disbelieving) about what was really acceptable to write about considering that most papers written in school are traditional, “safe” academic topics (Jones, 2012). However, having the opportunity to view the previously published works, which increasingly included traumas and other sensitive topics, Year 3 students may have felt emboldened to write about their difficult lived experiences.

**Implications for Policy**

The North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCS) was completely overhauled in 2011 and changes were implemented in the 2012-2013 school year; therefore, the ELA standards in place during Rose’s first three years of teaching covered by this study are no longer in place. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS; NGA & CCSO, 2010) are the current standards in place in North Carolina. The CCSS for grade 9 ELA lean away from drawing upon students’ prior knowledge and experience by calling for students to provide evidence from text-based readings. However, findings from Rose’s lesson plans and activities demonstrate that her preparation of students for grade 9 reading and writing standards could stand up to the preparation needed for CCSS today. For example, the Reading Standards (NGA & CCSO, 2010) call for students to “analyze in detail how an author’s ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text” (p. 40). Rose’s writing instruction included the reading of texts in such a manner as to learn the writer’s craft. To illustrate further how the memoir unit aligns with CCSS, the Writing Standards (NGA & CCSO, 2010) call for students to “write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-
chosen details, and well-structured event sequences” (p. 46). Again, Rose’s writing instruction can easily be applied here to meet the requirements of the CCSS. Perhaps those educators who believe that personal connections have been eliminated by the CCSS can more deeply consider how to create a rigorous and relevant curriculum such as Rose created.

The results from this study support existing research that challenges the deficit model with which to view adolescents’ difficult experiences (Dutro, 2008, 2010). The findings demonstrate that Rose’s instruction was geared toward helping students achieve the course objectives through exploration of identity and unique experiences while also supporting them by building on their strengths and interests. She did this by beginning each new school year by building upon students’ current knowledge, that is, their funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992). She included a learning inventory as part of the personal profile data she collected from them. The personal profile also included goal setting and personal interests. By gathering this positive data, by making her curriculum transparent through her teaching blog, and by helping her students share their stories in published books and public readings, Rose contributed to the educational experiences of students. In so doing, she acknowledged the social and cultural capital present in the school community and in students’ lives (Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Gonzalez, 2005; Yosso, 2005).

**Implications for Practice**

Considering the harsh and ongoing criticism of expressivist pedagogy and the increasing pressures of curriculum standards, accountability, performance evaluations, and testing, an atmosphere has been created wherein educators may be hesitant to engage students in risk-taking such as in Rose’s memoir-curriculum. Rose demonstrated, however,
that rigorous and frequent assessment does not have to mean “teaching to the test” in the sense of formal, multiple-choice tests that imitate high stakes tests. Research on formative assessment has shown that when formative assessments are used to improve instruction, instruction does improve (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Popham, 2013). Rose incorporated a range of assessment types in her memoir-writing curriculum, and the findings in the current study show that she focused heavily upon formative assessment, which is the process of checking for student understanding and providing feedback during instruction. While the memoir unit each year contained very similar elements and overall structure, many features were added or adjusted, and notably, Rose more than doubled the number of formative assessments from Year 1 to Year 3. Rose self-reported that achievement scores on the memoir project for each group of her students increased roughly by 10% over the previous year’s students (artifact, October 2012). She attributed this increase in student achievement to the increased motivation of the writing and publishing process.

Rose incorporated features of effective writing instruction into her regular practice while engaging students in the examination and writing of nonfiction narratives. By blending the academic with the personal, she created a hybrid curriculum wherein students were given permission to undertake identity exploration without sacrificing the literacy knowledge that could be gleaned from purely “academic” content. Some scholars and educators have advocated both expressivist and socio-epistemic approaches to writing (e.g., Elbow 1995; Halpern, 1975; Harris, 2001; Spigelman, 2001) while others remain firmly situated in advocating socio-epistemic approaches only (e.g., Atlas, 1996; Bartholomae, 1990; Hood, 2008). In the findings of this study, Rose’s memoir curriculum demonstrated cognitive
engagement through challenging close reading and revision work as well as the development of positive self-concepts through the sharing and publishing of students’ written work. She also demonstrated evidence of holding students to high expectations through the professional writing processes in which they enacted the studio writing workshops. Additionally, Rose’s students engaged in critical thinking as they logically and analytically compared, questioned, and evaluated other’s work as well as their own. It is clear that Rose’s memoir writing curriculum demonstrated instructional practices based in research.

While there may be myriad reasons why some ELA teachers avoid assigning personal narrative writing or assigning texts about sensitive social issues (e.g., poverty, abuse, depression, prison), research suggests that one reason may be that educators have internalized the mainstream, acceptable ways of being in today’s classrooms (Jones, 2012; Sumara et al. 2006) and, therefore, do not feel comfortable discussing potentially controversial topics. Jones (2012) argued that one way to address this issue is to “resist the urge to make things comfortable in the teacher education space” (p. 151) by engaging pre-service teachers in practices that will help them confront trauma narratives openly and therefore creating an orientation around witnessing and testifying to difficult lived experiences early in the teacher-education process. Dutro (2008) called for a re-visioning of the classroom space, one in which students are not left to wonder if anyone even heard or cared about their experiences.

Implications for Research

The present study answered three questions: 1) How does one high school English teacher describe her instructional practices for teaching a memoir-writing curriculum based
on the personal experiences of ninth grade students? 2) How does one high school English teacher navigate the occurrence of sensitive topics in students’ written work? 3) What themes emerged in these ninth grade ELA students published memoirs? The findings raised new questions about teacher education and professional development. Future studies should consider the following questions:

- What can we learn from teachers who are publishing work on the Web? How can we encourage Web publication and how can we develop online communities of practice?
- What can we learn about teaching and learning from examining online artifacts? How could this help us in methods courses?
- What can we prepare teachers for the emotional labor of teaching through teacher preparation and professional development?
- What does it mean that adolescents can be published authors? Or share stories online?

**Concluding Thoughts**

Rose shared with the researcher that she loves teaching memoir and that a big part of her life outside of school revolves around helping students publish their work. Each year, she spends many days after school and on Saturdays working with the publishing club to prepare students’ stories for publication. Each summer, she has worked alone to read the entire proof, looking one last time for comma errors and typos and questionable formatting. While she thinks there may be smarter ways of doing it, that part of the process is just one aspect of the hard work involved in creating the student publications. In the two years following the data examined for this study, Rose helped two more ninth grade student groups publish their work, and she has plans to continue doing so for future student groups. It was the sheer
volume of memoirs in the Year 3 book (117, nearly 700 pages) that led her to add jurying to the future volumes of memoirs in 2012. Therefore, since the Year 3 publication, all students who wish to publish their work submit their story to the publishing club, and publishing club members select a percentage of those submissions for publication. Rose said they strive to represent their community faithfully, so they select a variety of stories. They do not just accept stories based on “whoever is a good writer” (artifact, September 20, 2014). Instead, they focus on stories that are not normally told.

Overall, the findings from this study show that Rose is a dedicated, motivating, and effective ELA teacher. The writing her students produced in all three years was interesting, powerful, and sophisticated, particularly in the Year 3 volume when Rose made the most changes to her instructional practice and added the most support to the memoir curriculum. The results of this study add to existing research that supports expressivist pedagogy and provides a counter-story to previous research that questioned the legitimacy of personal life writing.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

From: Deb Paxton, IRB Administrator

North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board

Date: July 21, 2014

Title: Self-disclosure as an instructional tool: A qualitative case study of one urban high school English teacher

IRB#: 4123

Dear Christine Christianson,

The project listed above has been reviewed by the NC State Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research, and is approved for one year. This protocol will expire on 7/11/15 and will need continuing review before that date.

NOTE:

1. You must use the attached consent forms which have the approval and expiration dates of your study.

2. This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.

3. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

4. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website.

5. Your approval for this study lasts for one year from the review date. If your study extends beyond that time, including data analysis, you must obtain continuing review from the IRB.

Sincerely,

Deb Paxton
NC State IRB
Appendix B

Recruitment Material

Sample Teacher Email

Dear (teacher),

My name is Christine Christianson, and I am a doctoral student and researcher at North Carolina State University, as well as a former high school English teacher. I am conducting a research study entitled Self-disclosure as an instructional tool: A qualitative case study of one urban high school English teacher. The purpose of this project is to gather information about how high school English teachers teach an autobiographical writing curriculum and respond to students’ writing. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a high school English teacher who has taught an autobiographical writing curriculum within the last three years and aided students in publishing their work on the Internet.

For this project, there are two components. I will interview you 6-8 times, and each interview will last around 90 minutes and occur between June and October 2014. During the interviews, I will ask you about your decision-making process in creating and implementing an autobiographical writing curriculum. I will also ask you about some of your students’ writings that are published on the Internet. I will also ask you to participate in informal interviews as needed for short discussions either by phone, email, Skype, or in person. The second component of the study pertains to your past students’ writings that were published on the Internet. I will ask you to reflect on how you guided students in writing and their topic selection process. I will collect copies of relevant instructional materials that may include copies of worksheets, lesson plans, assignment handouts, etc.

There is a consent form for you that describes details of the project and explains that participation is optional, and there will be no consequences for withdrawing from the study. Overall, this project will require approximately 16-18 hours of your time. All information will be kept confidential unless you give permission to use your real name and other identifying information. No identifying information will be collected about you in field notes or other materials. If it the information is shared, no identifying information will be included unless approved by your express written consent.

If you are interested in participating in this research project or would like to know more about it, please email Christine Christianson, christine_christianson@ncsu.edu, 919-699-XXXX.

Sincerely,
Christine Christianson
Appendix C

A partial list of mentor text excerpts Rose used in her lessons is listed below in the order in which they appeared across the three years:

- “My Name” (Sandra Cisneros, 1984);
- *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* by Robert Pirsig (1999);
- “Reminiscences” by Virginia Woolf (1978);
- *The Color of Water* by James McBride (1996);
- *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie (2007);
- “You Can’t Kill the Rooster” by David Sedaris (1998);
- *It’s a Slippery Slope* by Spalding Gray (1997);
- *Dreams from My Father* by Barack Obama (2004);
- *An American Childhood* by Annie Dillard (1988);
- “Black Men and Public Space” by Brent Staples (1987); and