Synopsis of April, 2025 Webinar, “Writing to Think and Thinking to Write: Teaching New Teachers about Writing in the Age of AI”
Panelists: Dr. Bronwyn LaMay and Dr. Scott Jarvie
Moderators: Dr. Brent Duckor and Dr. Carrie Holmberg

Writing to Think, Thinking to Write: Teaching New Teachers About Writing in the Age of AI

The conversation hosted by Brent Duckor and Carrie Holmberg featuring Bronwyn LaMay and Scott Jarvie took a profound dive into the complexities of writing education today, especially in the emerging age of artificial intelligence (AI). Against a backdrop of rapid technological change, the discussion focused on reviving joy in writing, fostering authentic thought processes, and navigating the philosophical challenges AI presents in both K-12 and higher education.

Rediscovering Joy in Writing

LaMay set the tone early, identifying a sobering reality: "Middle school is often when the joy of writing dies." Many students, once eager creators and storytellers, disengage when writing becomes formulaic, task-driven, and rubric-obsessed. "I'm not a writer" becomes a pervasive self-concept, eroding students' confidence and voice.

Her solution? "We have to make the metacognitive process visible," LaMay emphasized. Teaching students to see writing as thinking—an organic process of forming and revising ideas—is crucial. This approach doesn't merely teach structure; it restores ownership and agency, reminding students that "thoughts should shape structure, not the other way around."

Teachers as Writers: Modeling the Craft

A key principle LaMay championed is drawn from the National Writing Project ethos: "Teachers who see themselves as writers will teach writing differently." When teachers reclaim their own joy and voice as writers, they model for students a vibrant, living relationship with words, one that transcends mechanical tasks and invites genuine exploration.

"There is something transformative about writing when you're allowed to engage deeply," LaMay reflected. "It's not just about the final product—it's about the process and how it can change you."

Writing as Inquiry, Not Just Argument

Scott Jarvie expanded on this vision, challenging the narrow conception of writing—particularly academic writing—as merely "making an argument." Drawing on Elaine Richardson's insight

that "writing is not the transfer of thought to the page, but the site of thought itself," Jarvie emphasized writing as a space of inquiry and surprise.

"When we frame writing only as argument, we limit its power," Jarvie argued. "It can be creative, playful, deeply personal. It can change who we are."

He urged educators to embrace multimodality, encouraging students to compose not just through text but also images, videos, and other artistic forms. In a world saturated with digital communication, "writing" must be understood broadly, encompassing diverse modes of meaning-making.

Teaching the Iterative Nature of Writing

Both panelists emphasized that writing is inherently cyclical, not linear. Pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing are not neat steps but messy, recursive acts of thought.

LaMay stressed the value of "descriptive feedback" over traditional evaluative feedback. "We need to move from grading to active listening," she said, advocating peer workshops that focus on writerly moves and intentions rather than mechanical errors.

"Revision," LaMay added, "should be seen as a life practice, not just correcting grammar."

Dr. LaMay noted:

> Giving really strong feedback is [essential to becoming a writer]. But at each level, when we engage with something as a teacher, we signal its value to students. So, I think that that's one way that we can definitely encourage [the writing process and feedback loops]. A big thing to me and it's maybe an obvious one, but I think it's, I think we have to remind ourselves how valuable this is it's to make space for this work in the classroom. Right? So if we want to value this process, we provide students with time. To do this, we need to, we need to assign it and we need to account for it in our curriculum in the way that we and the way that we make requests of students.

Jarvie underscored the importance of "making space" for process work in classrooms. If educators truly value iteration, they must allocate time, design curriculum accordingly, and assess not just final products but the process itself. Importantly, he cautioned against rigidly prescribing steps. "Writing is messy. It's okay if students don't follow a perfect cycle."

AI in the Writing Classroom: Threat or Opportunity?

Turning to AI, the panel explored its profound implications. LaMay recounted a student's creative use of AI: generating a paragraph on social media via ChatGPT—then pausing to

critique it and offer her own authentic perspective. This, LaMay suggested, exemplifies a healthy, critical engagement with AI.

"The danger," she warned, "is outsourcing the thinking process itself."

Dr. Jarvie noted about the evolving uses of AI in pre-service teacher field placements in credential programs such as San Jose State University's single subject program:

> I think that AI is being used, as far as I can tell, widely by students to complete writing assignments in their courses. That's from reports from the students who I work with who are in teaching placements themselves in this area, as well as speaking with actual high school high school students in particular today. I know it's something that the teachers who I work with are trying to learn how to teach, really struggle with feeling like, you know, to Brent's point, feeling like the work of writing is being outsourced and therefore the thinking and learning that might occur through writing is being outsourced to these technologies. So, I mean, one maybe obvious shift that I see that I'll share here is that I think you're seeing a shift towards analog technology as a way to sort of get away from the increasing omnipresence of these technologies and the availability of them that students have in the classroom.

Dr. Jarvie agreed with Dr. LaMay, noting that "students are widely using AI," in middle and secondary school often without guidance from educators or clarity on fair or ethical uses. He observed a troubling trend: "Assignments perceived as busywork are outsourced to AI. Creative, authentic assignments are more likely to be done by students themselves."

Rather than banning AI, both panelists advocated for deep conversations about its affordances and limitations. As LaMay put it, "We must help students see what AI can and cannot do. It doesn't think. It doesn't feel."

Ethical and Philosophical Questions

Duckor and Holmberg encouraged the panelists to probe deeper: How does AI reshape our fundamental understanding of learning, thinking, and writing?

Jarvie noted that AI forces a "renewed urgency" around foundational educational questions too often neglected: "What is the purpose of writing education? Is it workforce preparation? Personal formation? Civic engagement?"

Duckor raised an unsettling prospect: AI as a new, stealthy form of accountability. As AI becomes ubiquitous in workplaces including our TK-12 public school classrooms (not to mention universities, as seen in the California State University system's partnership with OpenAI), will educators be subtly pressured to conform to efficiency metrics rather than nurture human creativity and thought?

"Our classrooms are one of the last spaces where we can examine this," Jarvie said. "We can—and must—assert our values" as experts in the field of writing as we engage the next generation of student writers.

Upsides and Downsides of AI for Developing Writers

Jarvie articulated a useful metaphor: using AI to complete a writing assignment is like driving a mile in a car instead of running it. "You arrive at the same destination, but you miss the process, the struggle, the growth."

Among the upsides, he acknowledged AI's potential to democratize access to ideas, assist in brainstorming, and model different rhetorical styles—if used critically and creatively.

But he cautioned against overlooking broader risks: "AI relies on mass data capture, with major implications for privacy, ethics, and environmental sustainability."

LaMay added that AI's very efficiency could erode the artistry of writing if educators aren't vigilant. "We risk producing automated writers who lose the ability to think deeply and originally."

Advice for Teachers Feeling Overwhelmed

For teachers grappling with the AI tidal wave, Jarvie offered empathetic advice: "Start with skepticism, not fear. Healthy techno-skepticism is wise."

He encouraged teachers to set clear boundaries in their classrooms—using analog writing practices when necessary—and to maintain agency over their curriculum choices. "You don't have to embrace every new tool. Reflect first on what serves your students' growth as thinkers and writers."

Above all, Jarvie counseled, "Don't suppress your instincts. If you're uneasy, that's a valid feeling—and an important critical lens."

Looking Ahead: Hope and Caution

The panel closed on a note of cautious optimism. "If everyone is using AI," Jarvie mused, "authentic human writing will become even more valuable."

LaMay and Jarvie both underscored that educators must lean into this moment not by retreating from technology, but by doubling down on what makes human thinking and writing irreplaceable: authenticity, inquiry, creativity, and voice.

"Philosophical foundations," in the age of AI in public education Duckor concluded, "are not an academic luxury anymore. They're the heart of the work ahead."