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What Do Students Say about Writing? How Student Experiences Can Inform Canadian Writing Studies Pedagogy

Christopher Eaton, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Hibbert, Kathryn, *The University of Western Ontario*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on Canadian Writing Studies by working with students as co-constructors of knowledge. It stems from my pedagogical and personal desire to understand how students built their knowledge of writing in my first-year writing classroom. By working closely with ten former students, the study explored how their experiences in my writing course at Conestoga College (otherwise known as COMM1085) could inform writing pedagogy. To accomplish this, the study combined Academic Literacies Theory with Rhetorical Genre Theory as part of a larger Critical Narrative Inquiry into the students' narratives of experience. Simply put, these theoretical and methodological frameworks enabled me to consider student experiences with writing in relation to wider social contexts, and then ask what these experiences said about writing pedagogy on many levels. I have organized the results into three levels: the writing classroom, writing programs, and Writing Studies as a field. The results papers are organized such that the first paper looks at classroom-level pedagogy and curriculum, the second paper examines Writing Studies program staffing in relation to conversations with students, and the third paper synthesizes certain themes that emerged from the research that may inform Canadian Writing Studies pedagogy more broadly. I zoom out with each successive paper to explore a broader element of the conversations and how they inform my position as a Canadian Writing Studies researcher and teacher. Each strand that emerges from these papers adds one more piece to an ever growing disciplinary puzzle that is forming in the Canadian Writing Studies community.

Keywords

Writing Studies, Canada, Academic Literacies, Rhetorical Genre Theory, Student Participants, Narrative Inquiry

Summary for Lay Audience

This thesis explores how writing is taught at the post-secondary level in Canada. More specifically, it looks at how writing is taught and how writing is built according to ten of my former students from Conestoga College. These former students taught me how their own writing processes can benefit future students who take my classes. They also told me a lot about how contract labour, which is so prominent in post-secondary institutions today, undercuts the very teaching practices that allow learning to flourish. These former students also made me think about my field differently. I used to worry, like many of my colleagues, that Writing Studies was dominated by a desire to build skills quickly but not always efficiently. While this is true, my participants showed me that skill building has its place and that it may even provide opportunities to discuss those wider processes that make my teaching so successful.

Co-Authorship Statement

This research was collaborative in several ways and would not be the same without the support of many people around me. I collected data, engaged with participants, started to analyze the data, and wrote preliminary drafts of each manuscript. Deeper analysis and writing derived from the numerous conversations and collaborations with my supervisor Kathy Hibbert. They were further enhanced by Lorelei Lingard's keen eye for analysis and understanding stories. Anton Puvirajah added one more layer to the feedback to ensure that the manuscripts were as concise, coherent, and cogent as they needed to be.

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It would take me too many words to properly express what I want to say here. Instead, I rely on few words that carry significant meaning both on the surface and below.

I start with Mom, full of great advice and the perfect sounding board for good decisions.

My grandmothers, of course, who keep things in perspective through weekly video chats.

Then there's my brother, Jonathan, who took his own path to resounding success. Whether we're laughing, complaining, or commiserating, things are right when we're together.

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You give life purpose.

Justin and Kailee, a special line for the special people;

You define friendship, whether we're adventuring, kicking back, or delving deeply into life's most important conversations.

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You have instilled me with a lifelong desire for learning opportunities

And you have given me a perfect model for how I can be successful in this academic world.

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The one who has been there through it all.

We've grown enormously over the past four years.

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Preface

I approached this study feeling great tension between my experience as a writing teacher and what I read as a writing scholar. As a scholar, I found hope in the wide-ranging discussions of Writing Studies' goals. I was particularly attracted to Smith's (2006) notion that Writing Studies' ideal function was "to improve the ability and confidence of all Canadians to discover and disseminate knowledge and to participate fully and responsibly in a global society, sustaining it, critiquing it, and transforming it positively through the skillful use of written language" (p. 326). Roen, Daly Goggin, and Clary-Lemon (2009) set equally high hopes, deferring to ancient rhetoricians' goals for pedagogy as preparing "ethical citizens for civic action" (p. 369). But my experience as a writing teacher made me uneasy about these ideals. My experience has taught me that this idealism does not translate well into practice. There are days when I cannot get my students to understand the difference between expository writing, an opinion piece, and a persuasive piece, or how any of that applies to their everyday lives. As novel as it is for Writing Studies scholars such as myself to champion communicating globally, my pragmatic side says that what I really want is for my students to become more comfortable with writing. I want them to build on what they already know rather than adhering to the rote models that they learn at other levels. As a teacher, I want to leverage their experiences to make the work relevant to their needs and, where possible, to get them thinking about how they read, write, and communicate beyond the classroom.

As a teacher-turned-researcher (or even as a researcher-turned-teacher), I want to apply an Academic Literacies model to my teaching because it allows me to consider the broader contexts in which students write and learn new genres; this model focuses on students' wider social experiences rather than just the skills that they build in the classroom. In order to do that, I

need to understand the wider contexts with which I am working. I need to understand how my students approach Writing Studies rather than assuming that I know what they require. This can help me to define what I do and why I do it. It can help me to understand how my students translate their experiences and genres across boundaries. And that is what prompted me to embark on this journey that has been a PhD in Writing Studies.

Chapter 1

1 Who Composes

1.1 A Story about Writing Pedagogy

This is a story about writing pedagogy. It is built upon strands from the many stories that ten of my former first-year writing students told me as we analyzed their experiences with writing both in my classroom and in the various social contexts where they write. Together, we scrutinized how writing pedagogy could better support their learning, particularly since many students receive only one semester of writing instruction during their programs. This discussion prompted me to reflect upon and analyze writing pedagogy on many levels. It pushed me to re-think my own assumptions about teaching and learning in the writing classroom and it helped me to alter my teaching to accommodate a greater range of students. The relationships that I built with these former students also encouraged me to think about how larger programmatic and institutional realities could impact student learning and undermine the pedagogical processes (such as scaffolded writing) that make writing pedagogies successful. And, if nothing else, this study accentuates the role that students can play in helping Canadian writing teachers and scholars to articulate the value of what we do, how we do it, and how our work impacts the thousands of students who enter our classrooms every year. This conversation is still developing in a Canadian context, with many scholars acknowledging that we are still mapping a landscape (Clary-Lemon, 2009; Mueller et al., 2017; Paré, 2017; Wetherbee Phelps, 2014) and others calling for more student voices as part of this mapping (Klostermann, 2017). This dissertation will add one more piece to this ever-evolving puzzle about Canadian Writing Studies.

1.2 Something isn't Right

I came to this project feeling that something was off with my position as a writing teacher. Intuitively, I felt that I did not fully understand how my teaching helped (or did not help) my students despite receiving strong teaching reviews year over year. I also felt frustrated that my most successful teaching lessons moved away from the programmatic curriculum outlined by Conestoga College's Faculty of Communications where I taught a first-year writing course, COMM1085. Conversations with colleagues revealed that our approaches often differed drastically. During these conversations, I would be troubled by the way students and student writing were discussed as deficient and inept. I attended the 2017 College Association for Language and Literacy conference and noticed that there was much discussion about program building and teaching resources, but little about how students informed the discussions that were transpiring.

In most of my professional experiences, it seemed that students were always discussed as objects who received information in the classroom and responded to assignment parameters. Often, they were discussed when faculty members complained about student work or how students approached the class—equally frequent were frustrations that students simply did not show up for class. I was curious about how little students participated in these conversations—it was always how a faculty member interpreted student writing or experiences with students. In short, it seemed like I was only getting half the story.

My own experience in the classroom suggested that students had strong ideas about writing and how it was taught. I also had good attendance and many students seemed engaged in the material. I wanted to know what they could contribute to how writing pedagogy is

implemented at the post-secondary level, particularly how it helped them to build their knowledge of writing for various social contexts.

1.3 Research Questions

This project is inspired by a desire to understand how students built their knowledge of writing in my first-year writing classroom. This overarching idea prompted many questions.

- 1) How do students build knowledge in the first-year writing classroom?
- 2) How can conversations about writing in one classroom context inform ways to refine writing pedagogy more widely?
- 3) How can students' experiences inform composition curriculum building at the post-secondary level?
- 4) What do students' stories about their writing tell writing teachers and researchers about the role that Writing Studies plays in Canadian post-secondary institutions?

The first question about building knowledge in first-year writing classrooms is a core question that runs through the entire project. It acts as a prompt for more specific questions about how individual narratives of student experience can be expanded to inform and possibly even alter classroom learning opportunities, writing program building, and even how they may inform conversations about Canadian Writing Studies. These questions pushed my participants and me to new depths as we opened new angles to scrutinize writing instruction. They positioned us to work as co-constructors of knowledge who were working in a reciprocal relationship. Each party, the participants and I (the researcher), brought unique insight to the project that enriched the discussions that we had.

All participants had taken my COMM1085 course as part of their wider programs: some were studying computer programming, some were future police officers, one was a pre-service

firefighter, one was in food processing. Some had started working in their field and applying the ideas that we covered in class to their vocation. By exploring these questions and compiling narratives of individual student experiences, I aimed to better articulate students' roles as knowledge makers in writing classrooms (Kinhead, 2011; Klostermann, 2017). These questions focus on students' stories, probing what they know, how they know what they know, and how they understand the process of building their knowledge about writing. The questions account for a three-dimensional view of students and their learning because it investigates their past experiences, their experience in a post-secondary composition classroom, and even their experiences since completing the course.

1.4 Conestoga and COMM1085

I began working at Conestoga College in 2015-2016. Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning is a community college in Southwestern Ontario, Canada. It is growing quickly, with a full-time student population around 16,500 and over 38,000 part-time students. Students are dispersed across the college's numerous satellite campuses.

I have worked as a partial load faculty member for COMM1085 for the five years I have been at Conestoga. The course spanned most programs at the college to ensure that students met communication requirements outlined by the province. When I first began, I taught at the engineering and technology campus exclusively. One of the reasons for this was that the Faculty of Communications struggled to get young men engaged in a writing class. Being a young man who came from the same blue-collar background as many students in these programs positioned me well to build relationships with these students and work with them. The experiment has been successful, and I continue to teach these cohorts predominantly even though I have branched out to teach police foundations students, business students, and pre-service firefighters.

COMM1085 is designed around a single course outline that acts as a general framework for all sections across campus. This document standardizes the weekly topics that the course covers, it ensures that all students complete the same quizzes, and the same assignment types means that students work with the same genres. Instructors are responsible for creating lesson plans around the course material, and the Faculty of Communications offers teaching resources and suggestions to assist their instructors, most of whom work part-time.

1.5 Why the College?

Colleges have not been studied extensively in Writing Studies literature, which concentrates on universities primarily. Canadian Writing Studies communities have struggled to form in general (Graves & Graves, 2006; Smith, 2006; Wetherbee Phelps, 2014; Paré, 2017), and for colleges this is especially true since they do not have the same research capacity as universities. While debates about belles-lettres and composition raged at the university level (Johnson, 1988; Graves & Graves, 2006; Miller, 1991; Procter, 2011) during the twentieth-century, colleges received little attention. The studies discussing composition's history, such as North (1987), Russell (2002), and Skinnell (2016), focus on how these movements impacted university funding. Skinnell's discussion about schools using composition to gain status (Harvard and Kansas went from colleges to universities) suggests that, historically, being labeled a "university" indicated elevated status. The university label allowed institutions to attract more funding and more funding allowed them to attract more students. Colleges served a different purpose, serving more as teaching institutions which attracted fewer research dollars.

As community college education expands in Canada, so does the need to scrutinize pedagogical/curricular practices, and this scrutiny has already begun in Ontario. Recent movements in Ontario highlight that college literacy practices have been omitted from most

scholarship. Graves (2011) mentioned that writing program administrators are now responding to the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents' (OCAV) guidelines for undergraduate degree level expectations. The college level has faced similar OCAV scrutiny, and with it has come an increased emphasis on research relating to college practices. Increased administrative scrutiny about college level writing and communication skills prompted the College Association of Language and Literacy (CALL) to establish their own peer reviewed journal about "language and literacy-based education in the Ontario college sector" designed "to highlight the important work being done by our peers and researchers in higher education language and literacy instruction" (CALL, 2017). This desire to establish a college-level language and literacy journal in Ontario, the growing prominence of community college education worldwide (Collini, 2012), and the growth of programs like COMM1085 suggest that college Writing Studies warrant discussion.

The Ontario college context is quite different from the university context, especially in terms of the freedom for academics to design their own course material. Programmatic curricula at the college level are predominantly the course outline. Frequently, like in COMM1085, this outline is designed by a team of full-time faculty and disseminated through multiple sections of the course, many of which are taught by contingent faculty. Whereas university-level professors in Ontario have a relatively high degree of freedom in their course design, pedagogical experimentation, theoretical ideas, and course instruction, college-level instructors must adhere to more rigid guidelines. Like myself, they may design their own lesson plans and manage their classrooms, but they must do so within the confines of a more fixed programmatic curriculum. Their lessons interpret this programmatic curriculum and adapt it to the classroom context, but

this marginal level of freedom leaves little space for theoretical and pedagogical experimentation.

Because of these key differences between the college and university level, the college offers new ways of seeing Writing Studies and understanding those who compose, especially because courses like COMM1085 are based on a more universal programmatic model where a single syllabus crosses most of the institution. This understanding could help writing teachers and scholars to refine discussions of Writing Studies' role in students' education, offering new student demographics and program clusters through which to scrutinize how writing pedagogy is taught and learned at the post-secondary level.

1.6 Canadian Writing Studies

A core part of my identity as a Writing Studies teacher and researcher is that I am a Canadian working in a Canadian context. This is notable because, historically, many Canadians who were interested in Writing Studies pursued degrees in the United States (Smith, 2006) because Canada lacked the programmatic and disciplinary structures to support graduate work in Writing Studies.

Writing Studies has typically been marginalized across North America (North, 1987; Skinnell, 2016). This is especially true in Canada (Giltrow, 2016; Landry, 2016; Paré, 2017), where writing instruction has typically existed outside of English departments (Clary-Lemon, 2009; Graves & Graves, 2006), if at all. As Clary-Lemon (2009) pointed out, Canadian post-secondary institutions typically rejected writing and composition as a reaction against the American system of writing. Instead, they turned to a belles-lettristic tradition (Brooks, 2002; Johnson, 1988) that focused on literature and positioned writing instruction as less intellectual grunt-work taught to remedial students.

This situation is changing slowly. Graves and Graves (2006) noted that “rate of change seems to be increasing, not slowing, as post-secondary institutions grapple with the demands and opportunities that teaching writing presents” (p. 19) and that this change could open avenues for Writing Studies. Historically, post-secondary institutions have turned to composition to accommodate public pressure for increased communication skills (Russell, 2002; Skinnell, 2016). Increased public pressure, coupled with the challenges that modern universities and colleges face—decreased budgets, increased demand for tangible learning objectives, pressure to equip students with “skills” for the workplace (Bryant, 2017; Klostermann, 2017; Landry, 2016; Wetherbee Phelps, 2014)—means that Writing Studies may gain increased attention from post-secondary administrators. This scrutiny is a benefit because it can facilitate appeals for increased writing programming, but it also accentuates the need to build strong programs and understand the relationship between pedagogy and research so that writing teachers may do their jobs well within a challenging environment.

Over the past decade, Canadian Writing Studies has grown. Landry’s (2016) dissertation found that, although Writing Studies is still marginalized in many post-secondary institutions, the situation is slowly beginning to shift. Clary-Lemon (2009) and Mueller et al. (2017) have framed Canadian Writing Studies as an emergent field that is slowly building networks of researchers and teachers who are well-positioned to scrutinize how we may increase our visibility in the Canadian landscape. Canadian Writing Studies organizations, such as the Canadian Association for Studies in Discourse and Writing (CASDW) and the Canadian Writing Centres Association (CWCA) seem to be gaining more traction and stability, offering writing teachers, researchers, and practitioners space to meet, form communities, collaborate on research, strategize about how we can gain more recognition (see the CASDW Statement on Writing Centres and Staffing,

2016), and exchange pedagogical insight about implementing writing instruction in 21st century Canadian classrooms.

Issues still exist despite some progress. Contract labour remains a problem (Crowley, 1998; Hansen, 2011; Landry, 2016; Wetherbee Phelps, 2014); there are limited full-time positions available; many positions are teaching-based rather than research-oriented; and there are not many graduate programs designed for Writing Studies (although Mueller et al. (2017), particularly Clary-Lemon's chapter, outlined many programs that have become more established over time, even if they remain imperfect). There also remains the challenge of unsettling the writing as a skill narrative, as Bryant (2017) and Klostermann (2017) resist, that devalues the role of students as knowledge makers in the classroom and that assumes that writing is a skill that can be learned once and for all. Both issues permeate this dissertation and play a central role in the discussions that follow.

1.7 What can Students Contribute?

Writing researchers have long acknowledged the need to work with students to inform research. Ruggles Gere (1996) argued that “our former students can tell us about what leads them to join with others to improve their writing, what motivates them to write when neither teachers nor employers require it, what benefits—social, material, psychological—writing confers on their lives” (p. 131). Ruggles Gere identified students' experiences both in and out of the classroom as central to how composition programs are constructed. Students can provide insight that impacts future curricular and pedagogical decisions made by teachers, program designers, and institutions. This need still exists today. Klostermann (2017) alluded to institutional administrative needs that marginalize students' thinking and knowing as part of their writing practices, subtly excluding “students from the university, and undervalues their thinking,

knowing and writing practices” (p. 21). Student experiences remain on the fringes of both scholarship and of post-secondary writing instruction, which Kinkead (2011) acknowledged by asserting that “students can and do join us as makers of knowledge” (p. 137). Students come to the writing classrooms with myriad writing experiences, and they draw upon this knowledge (often implicitly) when they write. Understanding these experiences more profoundly can help researchers and teachers understand how students build knowledge about writing.

1.8 Previous Work with Students

A few studies have explored students’ experiences with composition. Most studies were longitudinal and focused on a wide range of participants. All focused on an American context. Sternglass (1997) conducted a longitudinal study that studied composition’s effects beyond a single semester. This approach allowed her to “follow students through several levels of instruction” (p. 114). Sternglass collected partial data on large student groups while also examining nine students’ writing specifically. She traced how students’ engagement with writing caused students to “reflect more deeply on the materials and ideas they encountered and to develop a critical consciousness” (p. 52). Many of her conclusions formed questions about student-teacher relationships and how assessment can accommodate complex student identities. She acknowledged that these complex questions could not be answered even within the scope of a longitudinal study.

Soon after, Herrington and Curtis (2000) explored how students adapted to composing in and throughout university. Their longitudinal study followed four students’ journeys writing at the post-secondary level from the transition to higher education through the varieties of written assignments that the participants encountered throughout their undergraduate careers. Their aim was “to show what we can learn from students when we accord them the same respect and the

same authority we would established authors” (pp. 41-42). By using this approach, Herrington and Curtis were able to trace students’ growth as writers and as people.

Despite the understanding that came from this research, they concluded that much work remained to understand how this knowledge contributes to education. Herrington and Curtis (2000) suggested that researchers “should trust our students enough to bring them into such debates regarding both disciplinary and classroom genres—in first-year writing courses and courses across the curriculum” (p. 388). There remained many questions about how this knowledge translated to pedagogy and curricular change. Students can offer insight into teaching practices and course design, but they are not frequently brought into discussions about how writing curricula may be altered to enhance students’ growth and to better accommodate their needs as writers.

Accommodating these needs can be complicated, especially given the complicated relationships that students have reported having with writing. Sommers and Saltz (2004) conducted interviews and survey responses that focused on first-year composition. They wanted to understand “what lessons do students offer us about why writing matters” (p. 126). Their study showed that “freshmen themselves wonder about the usefulness of writing papers their first year” (p. 133) but concluded that students can come to see that “writing is not an end in itself but is a means for discovering what matters” (p. 146). Their conclusions led me to question how instructors could facilitate this transition from ambivalence to understanding writing’s potential. It also prompted me to understand what experiences led to this ambivalence and apathy in the first place and how they could start to see writing’s value beyond just completing an assignment.

Some of these elements resonated in Eodice, Geller, and Lerner’s (2016; 2019) discussions of the Meaningful Writing Project. Their longitudinal study traced students’

experiences with writing not just in composition but across various disciplines. They claimed that few studies examined “how students use (or do not use) those funds of knowledge in disciplinary learning and writing” (p. 5). They also concluded that more work was necessary in this area. They characterize this type of work with students as an “ongoing discussion of how, why, when, and where students find meaning in their writing” (p. 140) that must be explored in various consequences beyond a four-year university undergraduate degree. They questioned how these relationships would work at other universities, in two-year community college programs, in military academies, and culinary institutes. To fully understand how students can contribute to knowledge-making in Writing Studies, it is necessary to study a large spectrum of student experiences.

These studies have added much to the conversation surrounding teaching and learning in composition. They’ve also all, to some degree, suggested that more work was necessary in this field. Whereas Eodice et al. (2016) made these approaches explicit, the need for further research is implicit in Sternglass’ (1997) assertion that even a longitudinal study could not answer all the questions that still remained about students’ learning. It was also evident when Curtis and Herrington (2000) highlighted the need to bring students into disciplinary and generic conversations.

It is notable that few Canadian studies reference these works despite calls for more knowledge of students as knowledge-makers. This is not a criticism, but rather it indicates that these American contexts did not really factor into how Canadian writing scholars and educators understood students in relation to writing, or simply that Canadian Writing Studies research is still developing to understand how these ideas fit into our teaching and research. Canadians can also benefit from work with students in our contexts. As an emerging field (Mueller et al., 2017),

Canadian Writing Studies can learn much from the primary stakeholders in the work that we do. Although Canadian research has emphasized the need for this research (see Klostermann, 2017), working closely with students to understand how they can inform Writing Studies in our context remains a gap in the Canadian Writing Studies literature. By bringing former students into research as co-constructors of knowledge, Canadian Writing Studies can explore their experiences and understand their roles as knowledge makers in the classroom. These discussions about knowledge building in Writing Studies can then place us in a better position to make administrators “see and know the value of our work” (Paré, 2017, p. 6) and to refine the pedagogical and programmatic discussions that influence the work that we do.

1.9 A Tangled Web of Meaning

When I began this project, I quickly realized that Writing Studies was difficult to define. Writing Studies is most often referred to as composition (its traditional term), which has its own terminological issues that I will unpack in the following paragraphs. As if that was not difficult enough, many of the people that I was reading and who inspired my teaching practice (particularly Mary Lea, David Barton, Roz Ivanic, Brian Street, and Theresa Lillis) were talking about something larger than just one composition experience: they were discussing literacy. Composition was a part of their discussion, but it was not the centerpiece of their arguments. Not by a long shot.

The terms “literacy” and “composition” are also complicated by the fact that they each carry multiple meanings that can be misinterpreted among discourse communities (even between some closely aligned discourse communities such as English Literature and Rhetoric). The many applications of the term “Composition” include music composition, speech composition, a work of art, and, indeed, writing in its various genres: essays, novels, short stories, poetry, newspaper

articles, magazine pieces, and op-eds. Turning to “Literacy” offered me little relief. Just thinking about literacy’s various uses highlighted several meanings: there is the traditional view of literacy as being able to read and write; there is an entire field of multiliteracies, multimodality, and technological literacy; literacy in science and mathematics has its own nuances; and how people adapt to new social contexts constitutes a different branch of literacy altogether. Barton (2007) presented an even more diverse list of literacy’s various branches. I even tried to make a strange, convoluted argument about social literacy in my master’s dissertation that I am still uncertain I understand (but I hold out hope that it represents a brilliant part of my own journey as a writer rather than the hot mess that it probably is).

1.10 Untangling the Web

Pinpointing how literacy and composition interact and what I mean by them in this project is difficult. To approach a working definition of how literacy applies in this context, particularly in terms of the academic literacies literature that I use as an analytical lens, it is important to see literacy in terms of how people apply their reading and writing skills in the classroom and beyond. Barton et al. (2007) offered a starting point for defining literacy when they situated literacy practices as a way of “conceptualising the link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structure in which they are embedded and which they help shape” (p. 15). Literacy in this context relates to how people enact their ability to read and write in diverse social situations. People read and write with a specific purpose that is rooted in a larger social context. This context simultaneously influences and is influenced by how people read and write.

Literacy is complex because it shifts from person to person, context to context. Barton and Hamilton (2012) provided a strong outline of how texts intertwine with people's activities as part of their social practice:

Literacy is primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people's heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as texts to be analysed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people. This book is a study of what people do with literacy: of the social activities, of the thoughts and meanings behind the activities, and of the texts utilised in such activities. It is about how a particular group of people use reading and writing in their day-to-day lives. (p. 3)

In this interpretation of literacy, reading and writing are not abstract skills that must be learned. Rather, literacy involves how people enact reading and writing in their everyday lives. This project assumes that students have a basic reading and writing foundation that they have acquired through previous experiences either in school, in the workplace, or in their social lives. As they approach their post-secondary studies, they often take a composition course which helps them to refine these skills, enhance their capacity to write across genres, and to enhance these skills to facilitate their future endeavours.

Although reading is acknowledged as a primary literacy component, writing seems to be the dominant skill that literacy scholars examine. This focus on writing eventually filters down to composition curricula, which situates writing as the dominant medium used in classroom assignments. Reading remains an important component, especially for writers, but writing is a focal point because this is how students enact, organize, participate, and engage with their social

surroundings. Ivanic (1998) juxtaposed writing and literacy, explaining that “literacy has two meanings...the ability to use written language and the ability to change written language from place to place” (pp. 57-58) and she argued that literacy (in the sense of using written language) “serves some specific social purpose: it is used in order to respond to some particular life demand, not practiced for its own sake” (p. 61). Literacy and, more specifically literacy through writing, is seen as a principal tool that people can use to engage in society. Literacy allows people to participate in larger social relationships and to act within these relationships. Learning to write well is central to developing literacy.

Composition is nested within the larger literacy umbrella. Composition emerged in the nineteenth-century as education systems began moving away from the memorization models which dominated literacy education at the time (Russell, 2006). Composition offered a wider range of educational practice which involved creating texts and which situated writing at the centre of student learning. This legacy persists today as post-secondary composition courses seek to enhance students’ writing skills so that they can become more capable, literate citizens who can translate their skills more ably to wider social situations. According to Wetherbee Phelps (1988), composition develops along three lines: “writing, or literate behavior; teaching; and inquiry” (p. 42). All three of these lines can relate to wider literacy practices. Teaching helps to enhance students’ writing skills and inquiry can help them to think more critically about the social situations in which they enact their literacy skills.

It is notable that Wetherbee Phelps identifies writing as “literate behavior” which suggests that writing is not merely the act of putting pen to paper. Rather, writing also involves acting through what is written. As the New London Group’s (1996) pedagogy of multiliteracies highlights, being literate and developing something in writing does not mean that it must be

represented only as an essay or a piece of writing. Barton (2007) clarified what is meant by writing or producing a text: “other aspects of communication come into play with written language. Most significantly, it is visual; it is laid out in some way and displayed. The importance of the role of design, layout and other aspects of the physical context should be self-evident, and they form part of what is meant by writing” (p. 43). There are a multiplicity of modes through which students may enact their writing and apply the skills that they learned in the composition classroom: a video or an oral presentation (for which there is usually a script), a poster, some photographs, even memes can represent ways that people can translate Writing Studies teachings into action.

Literacy represents the ability to translate writing skills to wider social contexts, and post-secondary composition classes facilitate this process by giving students skills and strategies to act upon their writing skills. Translating composition’s teachings into tangible social action is an ideal to which many composition researchers strive. Cushman (1996) considered composition as a means to “enable someone to achieve a goal” and to “facilitate actions-particularly those associated with language literacy” (p. 13) and Feldman (2008) alluded to composition’s service-oriented nature wherein students can take their teachings beyond a university or college to create meaning and to engage with the world.

Researchers also get impatient when programs focus on standardizing what is taught in composition because it limits students’ abilities to translate their writing skills to new social contexts. Fosen (2006) derided his institution’s composition curricula, which “presumes foundational standards for literacy by constructing students as basic writers” (p. 16) rather than considering them as complex social beings who can use their literacy competency to act beyond the classroom. Similarly, Bartholomae (1996) highlighted the problem between composition as

institutions consider it and composition as those who teach to and research see it. He saw composition as a way for institutions to “organize and evaluate the writing of unauthorized writers, to control writing in practice, and to define it as an object of professional scrutiny” (p. 11-12). By seeing composition as a way to standardize and evaluate student competency, it seems that institutions limit composition’s ability to impact students and to help them apply their writing beyond the classroom.

These competing ideals may never be reconciled completely, but this does not mean that common ground cannot be reached. Teachers, researchers, program administrators, governments, and the public seem to share a common goal: they hope that composition can help students become more literate citizens who can write well and who can use these skills in many contexts. They differ in how they evaluate success. Institutions, governments, and the public seem interested in quantifying how literacy is enacted while teachers and researchers contest that the classroom is more complex than administrators’ evaluation systems, such as those outlined by White et al. (2015), can quantify.

1.11 Writing Studies

These administrative tensions, these terminological discrepancies, and the myriad ways that similar activities, particularly writing, have been interpreted in the literature have made it difficult to identify what people are doing when they are working in “Writing Studies.” It is almost impossible to avoid term slippages when discussing the subject: in this study, my participants refer to our course as “English” class; I work in the Faculty of Communications; COMM1085 is a “college reading and writing” course; the literature I read uses Writing Studies and composition interchangeably; I often say that I teach writing. Terminological variations make it difficult to articulate the value of the work we writing teachers do to administrators who

control our budgets. This challenge contributes to the fact that Canadian writing professionals “remain largely untethered in the academy and are too often seen as service units and not centres of scholarship” (Paré, 2017, p. 2). Having the right language to identify the work that we do as a discipline can go a long way to orienting discussions about how the work that we do adds value to post-secondary institutions.

One term that is growing in prominence, particularly in Canadian circles, is Writing Studies. It is the term used most frequently at academic conferences. Most recent literature (Bryant, 2017; Downs & Wardle, 2007; Klostermann, 2017; Landry, 2016; Mueller et al., 2017; Wetherbee Phelps, 2014) use Writing Studies to describe the field. Given that much of the work that we do examines, teaches, and scrutinizes writing, the term makes sense. It is a common term that can bring together a community of practitioners who exist across many disciplinary interests. Landry (2016) synthesized Writing Studies as a term, explaining that

“respondents made clear that the term, ‘Writing Studies,’ means different things to different people in different contexts, but that there are three uniting themes prevalent: Writing Studies is the study of the teaching and learning of writing in predominantly academic contexts, the study of the sociality of language through specific theoretical frameworks, most commonly genre studies, rhetoric, and discourse studies, and that its breadth includes a number of other areas and fields.” (p. 154)

Writing Studies accounts for writing pedagogy and research, focusing on the socially situated nature of writing and writing instruction. A wide community may draw upon this term but we share similar interests in writing and how it applies across a range of contexts.

Like my Canadian colleagues, I will use Writing Studies throughout this dissertation. Term slippage is inevitable, but “Writing Studies” offers a home base to describe the work that I

do and to synthesize the conclusions that are drawn. This, for me, is a story about Writing Studies across many levels. It is about Writing Studies in my participants' lives. It is about Writing Studies in the classroom. It is about the Writing Studies pedagogy on a programmatic and institutional level. And it is about Writing Studies as an emergent field in a Canadian post-secondary landscape that is changing quickly.

1.12 Dissertation Structure

To explore aspects of all these Writing Studies dimensions, I have structured this dissertation along three lines: the classroom level, the programmatic/institutional level, and the disciplinary level. The first manuscript examines how an Academic Literacies framework can help writing teachers overcome the limiting skills narrative that permeates post-secondary institutions. The paper explores how Academic Literacies can help instructors draw upon students' wider social experiences in the classroom and how these wider social experiences can inform teaching and learning at the classroom level. Using this framework, teachers and students can cultivate a positive relationship that makes the writing classroom iterative and reciprocal. Teachers can move beyond course objectives through a scaffolded process based on dialogic feedback, and students can inform the ways that teachers can maximize opportunities to offer this feedback and tweak lessons to suit the diverse range of students who enter first-year writing classrooms every year.

The second manuscript explores this iterative process on a programmatic and institutional level. Looking closely at the experiences of two participants, the paper explores how contingent labour can undermine the scaffolded, iterative writing process that students and scholars deem crucial to student learning in the writing classroom. The participants highlighted the complicated relationship that students and teachers have with wider institutional measures. My former

students provided insight into the tensions that exist between institutional objectives and teaching practice, as well as how these factors negatively impact the pedagogical practices that are fundamental to teaching and learning in the writing classroom.

The third manuscript zooms out to examine Writing Studies as a field. This paper tackles the thorny issue of how teachers and scholars can resist the skills narrative that permeates many aspects of our work. It focuses on the tension that participants reported between the skills-based units of COMM1085 and the process oriented aspects of our course. The paper centers on the idea that the skills narrative may not necessarily need to be dismantled, but rather it could be a way to open more conversations about what resources we writing teachers need to do our jobs well. The paper uses this position to explore how students can help to articulate what post-secondary writing teachers and scholars do, how we do it, and how it impacts students, teachers, and institutions alike. This work adds one more piece to an ever-growing puzzle that aims to define and refine discussions about Writing Studies and its position in post-secondary institutions.

Brought together, these strands will tell a multifaceted story of Writing Studies from ten students and one teacher at an Ontario College. The story takes one locality as “a starting place from which connections will be traced outwards” (Hamilton, 2015, p. 112) into the wider world of Writing Studies as it is enacted in the classroom, in institutions, and in the field. It draws upon the prior experiences that each participant brought with them to the writing classroom. It focuses on what is personal in each person’s writing journey, understanding that each person contributes particular expertise to the conversation that can enhance knowledge building for the classroom, for programs, and for the field as a whole. By focusing on what is personal, this story moves away from the skills that students are supposed to learn to explore the complexities of their

journeys and of our own journeys as Writing Studies teachers, scholars, students, and knowledge builders.

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Chapter 2

2 What Does it Mean When People Say Writing is Social and Complex?

The project uses two theoretical lenses: Academic Literacies and Rhetorical Genre Theory (RGT). Simply put, Academic Literacies concentrates on pedagogy—how writers learn to write in context—and RGT considers writing conventions in context. Both lenses situate writing as a complex, socially situated practice that shifts from context to context. The genre demands of each writing activity shift from similar writing tasks that the writer has experienced previously, yet the writer draws upon this experience as they adapt to new genre demands. The lenses have a synergy that allows them to feed into each other: I often found myself thinking about the teaching-oriented nature of Academic Literacies as I contemplated how participants adapted to the genre demands of their writing practice, and I often thought of RGT as I reflected upon how students channelled previous experiences when they adjusted to new genres they encountered in COMM1085. Because this project focuses on pedagogy prominently, Academic Literacies is used more overtly throughout the manuscripts. RGT is a more implicit partner, but it nevertheless played a crucial role in how I thought critically about my participants as writers. This chapter outlines the principles from each of these theories that influenced my thinking.

2.1 Academic Literacies

The Academic Literacies model provided a lens through which I could examine what knowledge and skillsets participants had before COMM1085. This model allowed me to analyze their experiences on two levels: 1) to account for the knowledge about writing that they had prior to COMM1085 and how they drew upon that knowledge in the classroom; 2) to understand what knowledge they brought to the study as they reflected on their experiences in COMM1085. Both

dimensions allowed me to view my participants as knowledge-makers in the classroom and in the study. Although their role as co-constructors of knowledge will not be elaborated upon fully until I discuss Critical Narrative Inquiry (see chapter 3, methodology), it is important to establish that this view of participants as knowledge makers is predicated on the assumption that they entered the classroom and this project with a range of experiences that they could draw upon as they developed their writing abilities. This lens allowed me to analyze the participants' narratives in terms of how they moved beyond the skills-based narratives that pervade post-secondary writing classes. It also helped me listen to their suggestions about how classroom pedagogy can make up for many challenges created by institutional and programmatic demands.

2.2 The Study Skills Model

Academic Literacy responds to two pedagogical models that are used most frequently in writing program administration: the study skills model and the socialization model. These approaches fulfil administrative desires for one-size-fits-all instruction that can easily articulate a program or teaching unit's value. Under these mindsets, writing pedagogy becomes a set of skills to be learned (Barton, 2007; Bryant, 2017) rather than prioritizing how students use writing as a learning tool. Despite pushback from scholars and instructors, the skills and socialization models persist because of their convenience and their wide applicability.

The study skills model is the most prevalent of the frameworks. Lea and Street (1998) asserted that "the study skills approach has assumed that literacy is a set of atomised skills which students have to learn and which are then transferable to other contexts" (p. 158). The skills approach has been a useful model to focus Writing Studies because it allows administrators, curriculum designers, and teachers to establish and pursue the same program goals. This

approach allows Writing Studies practitioners to articulate what the program does and how its assignments will benefit students.

In theory, this model should help to articulate what Writing Studies does for students and how it helps them to translate their writing from the classroom to other contexts. However, in practice, the atomized nature of the skills model does not always capture the complex process that occurs in the writing classroom. Lillis and Turner (2001) cautioned that the study skills approach is too focused on individual elements of learning and Brent (2011) asserted that “writing inevitably collapses into a set of skills so generalized as to be meaningless” (p. 280). The broad objectives established using a study skills approach may benefit writing pedagogy on a program level because it can help establish broad parameters for instruction. However, these objectives are often interpreted too literally even though they do not accommodate the complexities of classroom curricula, which are predicated largely on teacher-student relationships.

The model is limiting because it focuses on deficit. It establishes baselines for what students should learn, but it does not account for the various pathways that students take to learn. Lillis (2003) argued that this approach focuses more on critique than design. It focuses on what students cannot do rather than the competencies that they bring with them to the classroom. The study skills model becomes a deficit model (Badenhorst et al., 2015; Lea, 2004, 2013; Lea & Street, 2006; Street, Lea, & Lillis, 2015) by focusing on student writing as something “deficient” that must be “fixed.” Focusing on deficit assumes that teachers can judge good and bad writing based on standardized conventions because students take the same approach to writing and have the same skillsets prior to a class.

The complexities of the writing process get lost using this skills-based approach. The tensions that this approach produces has been prominent in Canadian Writing Studies literature. This writing as a skill narrative dominates the Canadian context, and many scholars have seen it as a primary element in Canadian Writing Studies' ongoing marginalization because it devalues the nature of the work teachers and scholars do. Klostermann (2017) asserted that "writing and writing instruction are social and institutional practices – not particular skills or strategies that can be mastered once and for all" (p. 20). This narrative situates Writing Studies practitioners on the edges of the academy, providing a valuable service but ultimately never gaining disciplinary status. Writing Studies is often there to "fix" student deficiencies in writing, ideally in as little time as possible. Similarly, Bryant (2017) emphasized how the study skills model undermines the view of writing as "an ongoing social process that is not learned once and for all" (p. 14)" and called for empirical research that would "interrupt this dominant narrative of writing that permeates so many corners of the university context" (p. 16).

2.3 Academic Socialization

In order to move beyond the skills-based model, it is important to account for another model that is closely related: the academic socialization model. Academic socialization "is a conceptualization of literacy based on the belief that there are different literacies in different contexts, so that students need to learn the specific characteristics of academic writing, and of the disciplinary culture into which they are entering" (Ivanic, 2004, p. 222). The socialization model's strength is that it considers context more broadly than a study skills model does. Lea and Street (2006) asserted that academic socialization focuses on generic writing by emphasizing disciplinary discourses so that students can learn one model and reproduce it flawlessly. Students

learn the dominant genre in their field, which allows them to build knowledge in their particular community and communicate this knowledge to their colleagues.

The socialization model has been criticized because it limits writers to a limited range of discourses. Like the study skills model, it assumes that students will learn a set of writing skills and translate them flawlessly to other writing contexts. Russell et al. (2009) explained that the socialization model “assumes students need to be acculturated into the discourses and genres of particular disciplines” (p. 400). This happens despite knowledge that students must write broadly across academic disciplines. Under the socialization model, a student may learn the generic conventions of their discourse community, but they may not develop the ability to translate those conventions to other genres.

2.4 The Academic Literacies Framework

Academic Literacies responds to the limitations of the study skills and socialization models by emphasizing how the knowledge and experiences that students bring with them to the classroom allows them to adapt to the complex social situations in which they write. At its core, Academic Literacies emphasizes “the broader, social uses of literacies with which their students will come” (Street, 2013, p. 61) and it prioritizes the wider implications of students’ literacy experiences. As Lea & Street (1998) explained, it views student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skill or socialisation” (p. 159). Lillis et al. (2015) synthesized Academic Literacies as “a critical approach to the researching and teaching of writing and literacy and to the role and potential of these activities for individual meaning making and academic knowledge construction in higher education. In broad terms, ‘Academic Literacies’ draws attention to the importance, for research and pedagogy of adopting socially situated accounts of writing and text production” (p. 4). Research and pedagogy are inextricably

linked using this model. Knowledge is built through the intersection of these two elements and, through this knowledge, both teaching and research practice may be refined by accounting for the range of knowledges that factor into designing texts. Academic literacies offers a framework to move beyond rigid skill-building curricular models to understand the range of social contexts which students draw upon when they write.

2.5 Academic Literacies—Writing as Social Practice

Academic Literacies situates writing as a social practice. It shifts the focus from the text itself to the text as something created from a writer's wider social practice (Lillis & Scott, 2007; Murray & Nallaya, 2016; Paxton & Frith, 2014). Badenhorst et al. (2015) explained that the “shift from skills to social practice relocates literacy not as an individual, neutral, cognitive issue but as always rooted in a social worldview and embedded in discursive practices” (p. 2). Epistemology is at the heart of this social practice: by emphasizing writing as a knowledge building practice that draws upon a broad range of previous knowledge building experience, Academic Literacies gives writers the dexterity to write in a variety of contexts.

This understanding of writing as a social practice also informs writing pedagogy. It prompts teachers to take the long view (Bazerman et al., 2017, 2018) of writing to see it not as a practice learned in a twelve to fifteen week writing course but to see it as something developed over time. As Street et al. (2015) discussed, Academic Literacies prompts researchers and teachers to slow down and think through how program and teacher expectations can blend with students' prior knowledge. It prompts them to consider what students bring into the classroom and how that knowledge and that experience can inform pedagogy.

This thinking was at the heart of my work with participants. I approached the work understanding that my participants had not only their COMM1085 experience to draw upon, but

also a variety of prior experiences that informed their reflections and insights during the study. These collections of experiences acted as reference points, implicitly and explicitly, as they made sense of their experiences and used them to discuss their journeys as writers. For some participants, high school English was their primary reference point. Others spoke of their various experiences writing in previous post-secondary studies. Many discussed writing for previous work experiences and how writing fit into their future aspirations. Although each of these threads seem distinct, they intersected in various ways and pushed me as a researcher to explore how this diversity of experience influenced not only their learning but also future pedagogical developments at both a classroom and programmatic level.

2.6 The Personal in Academic Literacies

The personal is crucial in Academic Literacies. Burgess and Ivanic (2010) have shown, a “person may “inhabit” a particular discourse by consciously or subconsciously taking to themselves its ways of thinking, valuing, acting, speaking, and using other semiotic resources” (p. 237). Accounting for the variety of ways a person may inhabit these discourses is an important component of writing pedagogy. Teaching students writing skills is only part of writing pedagogy. Academic Literacies allows teachers and scholars to focus on the broader implications of writing, particularly how students may take these skills and draw upon them in the multitude of situations (Lea & Street, 1998) that they will write both in and beyond the academy. In this sense, the role of “the personal in knowledge-making” (Scott & Turner, p. 156) is essential to students developing their writing.

Rather than seeing just how students adapt or fail to adapt their writings from school to other contexts, an Academic Literacies approach positions teachers and researchers to see the broader implications of Writing Studies. Barton and Hamilton (2012) assert that writing and,

more generally, literacy practices are “internal to the individual, at the same time, practices are the social processes which connect people with one another, and they include shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities” (pp. 6-7). On one level, this perspective considers how a writer interprets and sees their surrounding context. The writer interprets this context by using the tools that they currently have available, which includes previous experiences, opinions, models, and personal background. What a student brings to a writing course (such as expectations for the course, expectations about how they must write, writing strategies from other levels, concepts and misconceptions from these levels) all inform how that student is positioned to write in that context. Throughout a writing course, these ideas should evolve and, regardless of teaching or effect, they combine with those previous experiences and ideas to inform how the individual will communicate beyond the classroom.

On another level, what a student brings to a course and what a person brings to a project contributes to a larger social narrative that is occurring in that context. The writer’s experiences and interpretations of a literacy activity (be it writing, working multimodally, delivering a presentation, etc.) simultaneously accommodates and helps to develop the ideological, social, and cultural milieu in which that person is situated. Their individual experiences become part of a larger discussion about writing at the post-secondary level, and how they use their learning is “realised in social relationships” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p.13). Students bring experiences to Writing Studies classes, and these experiences simultaneously change and are changed by the context in which students write.

In this sense, students and participants are knowledge makers in the writing classroom and in research. By drawing on Academic Literacies, I could tease out things that were less visible about my own teaching and about writing programs as they relate to the institutions that

govern them. This model provides space for these voices to contribute to the larger conversation. For me as a researcher who also teaches first-year writing, working with former students made me scrutinize my own teaching practices, my feelings about teaching, and the external factors that impact my teaching approach. Academic Literacies positioned me as a participant whose experiences intersected with the former students' experiences and insights. Together, we contributed to wider discussions about writing and writing pedagogy.

2.7 A Dialogic Process

This shared positioning situated me in relation to my participants. We engaged in a dialogic research process that was iterative and process oriented. As I will explain in the methodology chapter, we often returned to previous discussions to scrutinize not only the conversation but also the way it was interpreted.

For now, I wish to accentuate dialogism as central to pedagogy which uses Academic Literacies. A core Academic Literacies idea is that writing instruction should engage students in a dialogic process (Lillis, 2003; Paxton & Frith, 2014) which allows space and time for feedback (or talk-back as Lillis describes it) and redesigning ideas. This dialogic process is central to the way writing pedagogy is designed using Academic Literacies. Academic Literacies offers students and teachers a transformative writing process (Lea, 2004; Lillis & Scott, 2007; Paxton & Frith, 2014) by implementing dialogue as part of the course design. Writing is not finished after one level of design using Academic Literacies; rather, it transforms over time through a conversation that develops between a teacher giving feedback and a student responding to that feedback. This dialogic process extends to a meta-level where teachers and researchers are invited to scrutinize their pedagogical practice to refine the way that they engage with students in this iterative process.

The dialogic process was discussed repeatedly throughout the research process. Participants all identified the final project for COMM1085 as the primary learning experience in the course. However, they disrupted the narrative about process writing and feedback in many ways, pushing me as a researcher to refine my analysis and reflect upon my own position as someone who adopts this approach in my teaching. Working with these participants as co-constructors of knowledge allowed me to explore what I may take for granted and how I can step away from these assumptions to develop my pedagogical approach to writing.

2.8 A Challenge with Academic Literacies

An Academic Literacies framework is useful to move beyond the skills-based discourses that permeate many post-secondary institutions. The way that it accounts for the personal and the dialogic relationships that can be formed between students and teachers allows writing pedagogy to be more individualized. It has, however, not really been taken up at an institutional level. It is reasonable to ask: if Academic Literacies is such a useful framework, why have departments and institutions not adopted it over a skills model?

There are many possibilities for why Academic Literacies has not been adopted more widely. One possibility is that the skills discourse responds to wider pressures. While Academic Literacies is a useful method espoused by a select group of scholars (such as Mary Lea, Theresa Lillis, Brian Street), the skills discourse is a reaction to a more overarching public narrative about institutional effectiveness and job-readiness. In a Writing Studies context, this pressure is what many departments and institutions are reacting to (Graves & Graves, 2006; Wetherbee Phelps, 2014) when they concede (Skinnell, 2016) to writing classes. This is exacerbated by Writing Studies' reliance on contingent labour (Arnold et al., 2011; Lamos, 2016; Meloncon and England, 2011), which means that many teachers do not have job stability and many are not

directly involved in program building more widely. This reliance on contingent faculty could mean that it often becomes easier for teachers to teach towards objectives rather than bringing in a more individualized and time consuming framework like Academic Literacies.

A more measurable issue with Academic Literacies is that it is individualized. It is ironic that the attribute that makes it a useful pedagogical and research framework is also what prevents it from being accepted more widely. While the framework works best on a local level (Lea, 2004), it is difficult to translate what works in one context to a wider programmatic design framework. Wingate (2012) argued that “it seems unlikely that there can be a one-size-fits-all model of writing instruction, given the diversity of higher education institutions; it is equally unlikely that writing pedagogy can be based on one theoretical framework. Instead, a mainstream pedagogy must consist of a package of various approaches and methods from which the most suitable for the given context can be chosen” (p. 27). Academic Literacies is best used as part of a larger network of methods and approaches. The focus on individualization, what students bring with them to the classroom, and how pedagogy can build with and upon their experiences are all excellent principles to resist the skills narrative. When used in conjunction with frameworks that work more broadly to focus on pedagogy more holistically, teachers and scholars can overcome the limitations of Academic Literacies while still building upon its most promising ideas.

2.9 Rhetorical Genre Theory

RGT is an appropriate framework to accomplish the more holistic view that can complement Academic Literacies. Because RGT focuses broadly on the wider social dimensions of writing, it is commensurate with Academic Literacies. It goes one step further than Academic Literacies because it is concentrated on big ideas like the place, context, translation, space, and circumstance in which discourses develop. Academic Literacies is useful to design pedagogies in

localized contexts. RGT is a useful complementary framework because it scrutinizes these localized contexts in relation to broader social contexts in which students write beyond the classroom. In this section, I will outline the central ideas of RGT. After this outline, I will discuss how it intersects with Academic Literacies and how the two frameworks complement each other for a project that focuses on writing pedagogy.

RGT played a central role in how I interpreted and analyzed my participants' experiences in COMM1085. RGT positioned me to see them as writers writing in a specific context, adhering to rhetorical characteristics defined by course and assignment parameters. They were also drawing upon implicit knowledges of genre from previous writing experiences. A prominent way to understand genre is not as a rote set of conventions that writers reproduce for specific contexts, but rather as a set of socially-situated rhetorical actions (Kress, 1993; Miller, 1984; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011; Wilson et al., 2005) that adapt through a writer's interpretation of the context in which they write.

2.10 Genre as Social Action

This approach to genre was first presented in Carolyn Miller's seminal paper "Genre as Social Action" (1984), which grounded genre in rhetorical practice, rendering it "consequently open rather than closed and organized around situated actions" (p. 155). Using this perspective, genres can be defined as "social actions or rhetorical responses to recurring situations or contexts" (Freedman, 1994, p. 194). As Bawarshi (2003) highlighted, the viewing genres as social action prevents them from becoming "merely artificial and arbitrary systems of classification, positioning instead that genres are dynamic discursive formations in which ideology is naturalized and realized in specific social actions, relations, and subjectivities" (pp. 7-8). Genres are not defined by a rote set of characteristics that writers must replicate in their

writing. They are dynamic and flexible parameters which inform how writers adjust to the demands of the writing contexts in which they work.

Writing and genre are inextricable. Genre conventions form parameters for writing in specific contexts. Simultaneously, as a person adapts writing to new contexts, their writing shapes new genre conventions that can help them make sense of recurring rhetorical contexts. Paré and Smart (1994) outlined four dimensions of genre which translate well to what occurs in a writing classroom. For them, genre is “a set of texts, the composing processes involved in creating these texts, the reading practices used to interpret them, and the social roles performed by writers and readers” (p. 147). The writing classroom helps students to engage in each of these dimensions. Students taking composition produce multiple texts, such as an expository paper, a persuasive paper, a summary, a journal, a cover letter, or a research paper, and they engage in the process that is required to produce these texts. They interpret the instructions and generic conventions laid out in class, and they engage in a larger social dynamic as they submit their work for revision and feedback.

2.11 Genre and Iteration

This process of interpreting instructions, receiving feedback, and revising work is common in scaffolded writing projects like the final project in COMM1085. English (2011) mapped out this process, adapting parameters outlined in Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001). Students receive design from a teacher, and this design outlines assignment parameters and genre conventions that they must follow. Students interpret the design and redesign it as they create their writing. They then distribute this writing to a larger audience when it is complete (see Figure 1).

Design	Redesign	Production	Distribution
What the teacher wants/envisages/desires—and why	How the student understands and (re)interprets—and why	What the student produces—how and why	How the produce is ‘delivered’ and ‘received’ and what is done next

Figure 1. A vision of the writing process (Adapted from English, 2011)

This model resonates with Motta Roth’s (2009) description of RGT in the classroom where writers engage in both contextual and textual spaces, “fostering their curiosity and critical eye about how texts are essentially related to the social practices of the given context, recreating it, recontextualizing it, in a resemiotization of previous experience” (p. 330). These understandings of genre will be central to the second manuscript where scaffolded writing is discussed in relation to post-secondary institutions’ dependence on contingent labour. The model prompted me to scrutinize how these ideals for writing development, particularly how students adapt to genre conventions through iteration, are undermined by the staffing limitations of modern post-secondary institutions.

Genres may develop out of recurring social situations, but knowledge of one genre or of how a genre works in a particular context can influence how a writer can adapt to a new genre and/or a new context. For this reason, Devitt (2004) proposed that “genre be seen not as a response to recurring situation but as a nexus between an individual’s actions and a socially defined context” (p. 31). This approach to genre leaves space for people’s previous writing and social experiences over time. It accounts for the recurring nature of genres and contexts while situating the individual writer in the wider community and how they the writer implements genre conventions.

2.12 Genre, Community, and Knowledge-Making

Genres are interpreted, often implicitly, in relation to wider communities. Genre's ability to bring communities together through writing is often cited as one of RGT's principal functions. Cope and Kalantzis (1993) explained that genre "in its most powerful moments establishes a dialogue between the culture and the discourse of institutionalised schooling, and the cultures and discourses of students" (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993, p. 17). Not only is genre socially situated, but it also brings together people who think similarly. It situates them in similar social contexts, facilitating the communities that they form and the discourses that derive from these communities. Genre brings together people who hold a "particular configuration of knowledge-for-the-world" (Giltrow and Valiquette, 1994, p. 48). Genres bring people who hold similar ontological and epistemological positions together. RGT considers writing as a response to specific readers in specific contexts (Clark, 2003) by identifying "the linguistic ecology of discourse communities, making the notion of community more tangible for teachers and students" (Devitt, Bawarshi, & Reiff, 2003, p. 542). Sometimes these communities form because of mutual interest. In COMM1085, students were not there because of mutual interest in Writing Studies (unless a mutual dislike for "English" united them) but rather because they chose to pursue similar programs. They were still immersed in similar disciplinary communities who were brought together in the same writing class where they participated in the same writing genres. The way they interpreted and implemented genres in COMM1085 both shaped and was shaped by the class ethos, the way we approached genre, the way we sometimes mocked genres (I had to get them to buy-in somehow!), and the way they challenged my thinking about their final projects.

Genres represent the repeated textual practices that writers engage in “because they produce material, intellectual, ideological, and/or relational outcomes valued by the collective or a sub-group within the collective” (Paré, Starke-Meyering, & McAlpine, 2011, p. 220). Adapting to a genre allows writers “to stake a claim to membership of those communities” (Murray & Nallaya, 2016, p. 1289) in which they write. In this sense, genres form a foundation upon which knowledge can be constructed and disseminated within a collective, such as a company or a classroom, or from one collective to another, such as a group of students engaging in the same first-year writing course. In my classes, for example, students both collectively and individually shape meaning through the way they discuss genre. Rauen (2009) explained that “by using texts, human beings create realities of meaning, social relations and knowledge” (p.64). They can bring people together under similar understanding of knowledge and ways to communicate that knowledge, but, as Paré (2014) discussed, “the repeated texts we assign or investigate are merely the centre of much larger patterns of typified action” (p. A91). Students experience a limited range of genres in a classroom, yet they apply a range of broad genre concepts that they can add to their repertoire of writing tools that can be used in other contexts. Some have even said that “skilled writers seem to employ stored representations of text structures that may also include audience knowledge, in terms of the expectations of members of a disciplinary discourse community” (McCutchen, Teske, & Bankston, 2008, p. 460). As writers become more skilled and more adept at interpreting genre conventions, they are better positioned to adjust to new genre demands in new contexts.

Genre elements of the classroom implicitly shaped my participants’ experiences, informed how they discussed those experiences, and influenced how I analyzed their experiences. As a researcher, I could analyze our discussions with prior knowledge of how

students performed in the classroom and a general understanding of their experience with genres. This prior knowledge inevitably influences the analysis, but it also provided common ground from which participants and I could discuss their experiences and challenge the patterns that we saw emerging.

2.13 Adapting to Genre

Despite having models of how genre can be implemented in teaching, it is not possible to predict what genres students will require from one context to the next. Devitt (2009) explained that “we don’t have that knowledge and they don’t have the skill to switch between genres with aplomb” (p. 340). That genres have shifting roles in shifting contexts (Devitt et al., 2003) complicates how teachers can anticipate what conventions students will use and how students can adapt genres. It is also difficult to assess what level students are at in their knowledge of genres. As Artemeva and Fox (2010) explained, teachers risk alienating students either if they assume that students do not have prior genre knowledge or if they assume that they have extensive experience with genre. Teaching genre requires a dexterous teacher who can quickly assess and adjust to students’ learning needs.

Since every context places new demands on writers (Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011), writers must always adapt their approaches to suit the context. Students need a broad foundation of experiences working with many genres to develop their writing toolkits so that they can become adept at switching between genres. Learning genre takes time, and a big part of analyzing former students’ experiences involved understanding how much time they had to learn genre conventions and how broad their experiences were. Acknowledging that the four months students and I spent together in COMM1085 was insufficient to make them proficient at switching between genres allowed me as a researcher to instead focus on the processes that they

used to adapt to the genre demands of COMM1085 and, in turn, develop small aspects of their writing toolkit that they may employ in various contexts beyond first-year writing.

Seeing genre as social action means understanding that context and genre are reciprocal components of writing. Bremner (2018) synthesized this two-way street: “not only does the social context influence the shape of the genres that emerge, but these genres also contribute to the construction of those social context and communities” (p. 17). While situations determine how genres are repurposed, interpreted, and applied in various contexts, such as the workplace, previous genres also help to shape these contexts. For this reason, Bremner argued that genre teachers should raise awareness about genres as a primary pedagogical method, giving students “the necessary tools to analyse them” (p. 27). The genre-knowledges people bring with them to different contexts shape how they react to their new environment and how they ultimately adapt their work to suit the new generic demands that they face.

2.14 Genre and Academic Literacies

Bremner’s discussion of analytical tools and the reciprocal relationship between experience and genre brings me to the similarities between RGT and Academic Literacies. English (2015) argued that the skills-based mindset of post-secondary institutions means that genre instruction is reduced to a template of genre elements that students must implement. The focus is on text production rather than knowledge production. English emphasized the relationship between content and form to foreground writing as an epistemological activity. She explained that “it is here that an academic literacies perspective can intervene by offering a critique such [skills-oriented] thinking, foregrounding writing as knowledge making instead of transmission...and in so doing, offer a thicker description of what it means to write as a university or school both in the context of research and pedagogy” (p. 246). This thinking

concentrates on writing to invite, develop, refine knowledge making in post-secondary institutions. It shifts the focus from genre as an output of disciplinary conventions to genre as a process through which writers adapt prior knowledge to create new knowledge.

Fusing Academic Literacies and RGT gives everyone a space in this knowledge-making circle. All writers are knowledge-makers from this perspective: teachers, scholars, and students contribute their own expertise that can enhance the process of developing ideas. Bringing together these two theoretical frameworks positioned me to see my project as an epistemological space where all participants—my former students and myself—were co-constructors of knowledge. This lens allowed us to challenge assumptions together, explore areas where the research foundation may have had blind spots, to ask difficult questions (e.g., what allowed you to build knowledge in a course like COMM1085?) that we may never answer adequately, and ultimately to build and scrutinize stories together that may contribute to the broad and messy conversations about post-secondary writing pedagogy.

Academic Literacies and RGT are rarely combined in writing research. Elements of each—especially their focus on writing as a socially-situated practice—overlap, but they derive from different traditions. Academic Literacies, the newer framework, derives primarily from a British language education background, and RGT is rooted in a long-standing North American tradition that emphasizes rhetoric and linguistics. Russel et al. (2009) explored Academic Literacies in relation to genre, rhetoric and Writing across the Curriculum and alluded to the lack of collaboration between these various theoretical and pedagogical frameworks. When English (2015) examined Academic Literacies and RGT, she asserted that Academic Literacies was an epistemological position that genre could enact in the classroom. Her work also asserted that Academic Literacies could help teachers and scholars by providing “new ways of looking at old

questions” (p. 254). Longstanding genre questions about how writing transfers from one context to another and how students can enact writing pedagogy in their social activities can be approached from new questions that are framed around what students already have with them before entering the writing classroom.

RGT is used in an unbalanced way throughout the dissertation. Typically, RGT stems from the texts that students wrote, but this dissertation does not branch out from the writing itself. The dissertation is more pedagogical, leaning on Academic Literacies more so than RGT. Those who study RGT and work with it in their research may even argue that the dissertation does not maximize the use of RGT. The broad frameworks, particularly the way scaffolded writing processes are discussed in the analysis chapters, are drawn upon but they are gateways into more pedagogical and curricular discussions.

Academic Literacies was the central lens when I began the project, and RGT came in later as I worked closely with participants and analyzed their stories. As the project progressed, however, it became clear that I could not ignore RGT's influence on my thinking. As themes emerged through conversations with numerous participants, I realized that they were often discussing RGT even though they did not recognize it as such. The way they described their processes and explained their journeys as writers and as learners in COMM1085 made it impossible to discount discussions of genres. Participants would articulate their learning through a genre lens, and this lens influenced how I "saw" my participants as meaning makers in the classroom.

My blending of these theoretical perspectives does not necessarily focus on new ways of asking new questions or using genre to enact epistemological position like Academic Literacies. In this dissertation, the balance was shifted such that genre offered a way of thinking about writing and the processes that students undertake when they write—the nuances of written genres and writing processes were still important elements but they were not the focal point. Academic Literacies was the primary lens that allowed me to focus more on the students and how their experiences impacted these nuances. This was a product of wanting to work closely with students as co-constructors of knowledge, which will be elaborated upon in the following chapter. Academic Literacies offered the pedagogical lenses necessary to work closely with students as they worked through the nuances of the various genres that they encountered when they wrote. In a reflection on how students build knowledge in the writing classroom, a close focus on Academic Literacies gave me the tools to approach students, focus on their experiences, and then cross-reference these conversations with the processes and discussions that are prominent in RGT.

The next chapter addresses how these participants were brought into this conversation. The methodological chapter unpacks the multiple steps involved in bringing former students into a research project as co-constructors rather than just as participants. It outlines the steps that I took as a researcher to invite participants into complex pedagogical discussions and to ensure that our work together was open, interpretive, and, ultimately, trustworthy.

2.15 References

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Chapter 3

3 Critical Narrative Inquiry

At the beginning of my PhD journey, I was preoccupied with including more “student voices” as part of the scholarly and pedagogical conversation for Writing Studies. At the time, I had little evidence to substantiate that these voices were even missing from the conversation. It was more a gut feeling that I got whenever I went to work and interacted with colleagues. It was the impression I received during water cooler conversations where teachers often complained about students. It was as if students were external to the teaching and learning process rather than co-constructors of knowledge in the classroom. Like they were students who received knowledge but who did not build it through their writing.

But I am getting ahead of myself. I did not have the language to express this three years ago. I merely had anecdotal evidence based on personal experience. In fact, the scholarly conversation had included students, with studies like Sternglass (1997), Herrington and Curtis (2000), Beaufort (2007), and Eodice, Geller, and Lerner (2016) leading the way. Many of these studies traced student experience over long periods of time and crystallized students’ journeys as writers in post-secondary. However, just because these experiences had been traced in other contexts did not mean that my anecdotal experiences as a teacher were not valid.

The way these studies discussed teaching and learning in post-secondary writing classrooms made me question why the ideas about learners developing their writing over time and at variable rates were inconsistent my experience at Conestoga College. As I read research on Canadian Writing Studies, I realized that our context was fundamentally different than the American contexts in which these other studies were conducted. Composition has long been a core post-secondary course in America, but, as Anthony Paré discussed in an interview for

Williams (2017), Canadian Writing Studies lacked the same “historical sediment” (p. 57) that informed program building. As an emerging field (Clary-Lemon, 2009), we are still situating ourselves as teachers and scholars in this context (see Bryant, 2017; Landry, 2016; Paré, 2017) and trying to establish increased disciplinary status within Canadian post-secondary institutions. As Klostermann (2017) stipulated, a logical next step in these disciplinary conversations would be to include more work with students that could help articulate the teaching and learning experiences they encounter in this emerging discipline. Conestoga College, being in the early stages of its COMM1085 initiative, coincided with this narrative.

There was, and remains, room for students to join us as knowledge makers along this wider Writing Studies movement in Canada. Knowing this, I needed a way to gather, organize, analyze, and discuss narratives of student experience so they could contribute to knowledge building both in the classroom and in the field more broadly. Critical Narrative Inquiry (CNI) gave me the language to express what these narratives mean in context and how they can help with meaning making in Writing Studies research and pedagogy. It offered me a framework to organize my interactions with former students and the methods necessary to collect, organize, and interpret their narratives so that they could contribute to wider pedagogical and scholarly conversations.

This chapter explores what it means to do CNI in a Canadian Writing Studies context. Although Writing Studies research uses narratives frequently, narrative inquiry is rarely used as a methodological framework. Instead, Writing Studies research draws upon case study, ethnography, and participatory research most often. Researchers commonly use narratives to report results within these frameworks, but there have been concerns (Journet, 2012) about how these narratives are used as knowledge-building tools in the field. These concerns center on

common assumptions that narratives are knowledge in themselves. Another criticism is that researchers are often not self-reflective about the narratives they relate and how these narratives contribute to knowledge in the field (Journet, 2012). CNI can provide Writing Studies researchers with a reflexive framework to analyze narratives, and it can allow us to use these narratives as tools for knowledge building. This methodological framework offers Writing Studies researchers the chance to invite participants into our research as co-constructors of knowledge who offer new ways of seeing and understanding the world in which we work, allowing us to reach new depths of understanding about how we use narratives in the field.

3.1 Narratives and Writing Studies Research

Narratives capture personal experience. They accentuate the socially situated, context specific characteristics of people's lived experiences. For this reason, they are useful tools to communicate research results and represent disciplinary knowledge. Garbati and Samuels (2016) argued that narrative inquiry offers "the possibility for deep understanding of complex situations as details of particular stories are considered from the perspective of a variety of interpretive lenses" (p. 335). Because of narrative's frequent use in writing research, "the history of composition research is, in part, the history of coming to terms with narrative" (Journet, 2012, p. 13). With the correct framework, narratives may also be a way to both build and scrutinize disciplinary knowledge, pushing researchers to view personal experience from many angles and make visible the biases/things they take for granted.

However, writing research often focuses more on representing disciplinary knowledge than scrutinizing how narratives represent, build, and challenge disciplinary knowledge. At conferences and in publications, it is common for writing researchers to draw upon narratives to

highlight pedagogical successes. While narratives are useful tools to accomplish goals in these forums, they can offer more than just ways to represent experience.

Narratives have been limited to this use in writing research because researchers often do not scrutinize why they use narratives or why they choose the narratives they use. Narratives in themselves are not authentic accounts of research or knowledge. Because of this, it is “it is important to articulate what qualities of observation, analysis, or representation we require if we are to accept any particular narrative account as a persuasive instance of research” (Journet, 2012, p. 17). It is necessary to make visible how narratives are built and interpreted throughout the research process. This means accounting for the limitations of narrative, understanding that narratives offer only one account among a multitude of possible interpretations. It also means finding ways, through the research process, to be rigorous about how researchers implement narratives and use them to build disciplinary knowledge.

Writing research that relies on narratives has often lacked this rigor. This problem prompted Journet (2012) to challenge researchers with a series of questions about the nature of the narratives that are used. The questions were:

1. What kinds of stories have we learned to tell?
2. How are stories shaped by disciplinary preferences as well as cultural or theoretical commitments?
3. How do the positions from which we write—particularly those of researcher or teacher—affect the kinds of stories we tell?
4. What ethical obligations do we have to the people whose lives we narrate and the readers whom we are addressing?

5. What qualities of observation, analysis, or representation should we expect if we are to accept any particular narrative as ‘research’? (p. 21)

These questions help to position narratives differently in writing research. They encourage researchers to move beyond seeing narratives simply as a tool for conveying research results. They push researchers to consider the processes through which narratives are selected, how narratives are written/communicated, who is involved in constructing narratives, what role people play in building narratives, how narratives count as disciplinary knowledge (if at all), and how researchers may articulate the rigor of their research methods when they use narratives.

3.2 Critical Narrative Questions

Many of these questions resonate with the questions that CNI asks. CNI scholars like Gubrium and Holstein (2009) discussed questions about how texts are produced and received in society. They queried who produces stories in different contexts, the circumstances behind their storytelling, and the contexts in which they are received, accepted, and challenged. These lines of inquiry are all designed to understand “how storytellers assemble stories that make sense to themselves and others” (p. 31). Inevitably, CNI interprets participants’ experiences to form a narrative around the stories that they tell (Clandinin, 2006; Huber & Clandinin, 2002). A researcher influences meaning making in narratives as they assume the role of the narrator (Caduri, 2013; Clandinin, 2013; Moss, 2004; Smythe & Murray, 2000). For this reason, researchers must be vigilant in owning and acknowledging how researchers may influence narrative construction. It also accentuates the utility of including participants as co-constructors in narrative construction to ensure narrative trustworthiness. CNI offers a useful methodological framework to investigate how narratives can be used to build meaning in Writing Studies

research. This framework helps to situate researchers and participants in relation to each other, positioning them as collaborators in the meaning making process.

CNI allows researchers to account for the ways that their own experiences and positions as researchers influence narratives. CNI prompts researchers to question what they take for granted and to embrace “an epistemology of doubt” (Hendry, 2010, p. 3) that is “essential to creating and re-creating” (p. 3) meaning as narratives shift over time, space, and experience. This means “struggling between knowing with certainty and accepting uncertainty” (Horan, 2013, p. 179). The goal is to “capture the fluidity, meaning-in-motion, and uncertainty” (Shaafsma & Vinz, 2011, p. 17) by embracing the messiness of narrative and accounting for the complex social, semiotic, and semantic processes behind the narratives.

In the following sections of this chapter, I will report on my experience using CNI in research with ten former writing students from Conestoga College. I will discuss how this methodological approach allowed me to work closely with participants and give them opportunities to co-construct their narratives with me. I will highlight how the methodology helped me to employ various methods and to ensure research rigour and trustworthiness.

3.3 Knowledge Building in Writing Studies

Social constructivism positions me ontologically and epistemologically to see my participants, interpret their narratives, and communicate my research results to a wider scholarly community. My research is influenced by Vygotsky’s (1978) idea that knowledge is co-constructed between many parties in a classroom. An individual may learn both from independent problem solving and “in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). Learning derives, in part, from the collection of experience and knowledge in the classroom. While the teacher may have expertise in curricular content, this expertise is complemented by knowledge

gained from peers. This approach acknowledges that there are multiple ways of knowing something and that composition is not a one-size-fits-all model. For me, a writing classroom should encourage students to draw on multiple resources. A teacher plays a vital role in facilitating activities that promotes this multiplicity of perspectives.

My overarching research questions, my theoretical frameworks, and my methodology are informed by constructivist ideas. My overarching research question about how students build knowledge in the writing classroom positions me to see knowledge as something that is constructed through writing and writing pedagogy. It also implies that I believe my students are primary contributors to building this knowledge. Their insights, experiences, and learning approaches work alongside my own pedagogy—predicated on a combination of Academic Literacies and Rhetorical Genre Theory—which focuses on the socially situated nature of writing. By using this approach, I consider how knowledge is built in the writing classroom through the myriad experiences that teachers and students bring with them as they collaborate in a socially-situated writing environment. CNI, with its focus on developing narratives and interpreting results in relation to participants (Gergen & Gergen, 2011; Striano, 2012), allows researchers to incorporate co-construction and communal thinking as central aspects of the methodology.

My research is predicated on the notion that writing pedagogy is at its best when students can draw upon multiple resources to develop meaning. This idea is consistent with other Writing Studies scholarship which emphasizes the value of community and collaboration. As Bremner (2018) demonstrated, viewing the classroom as something that constitutes many communities of learners coincides with social constructivist principles. This perspective can help researchers account for the complex communal dynamics that produce knowledge in a particular context.

These dynamics do not just simply belong to a given community: “they contribute in a mutually constitutive way to the shaping of the community” (p. 16). Bremner related these notions to the workplace primarily, but he also considered the pedagogical and knowledge-forming dimensions of social constructivism. This logic considers how a teacher may design a classroom activity and they may direct the students, but students play a large role in how teachers facilitate activities in each learning environment. Each classroom has a specific culture that influences what teachers say, how they interpret students’ learning needs, and how the learning opportunities are coordinated in a classroom.

In this sense, teachers must maintain a fluid classroom that adapts to ever-changing learning conditions. As Bazerman (2009), who was influenced by Vygotsky, explained, learning is something that happens in the moment. It is something that shifts over time as people’s social perspectives change. Bazerman discussed how learning material gets “added up, reorganized, and reintegrated at a different level, so it becomes seen in a different light. This enables reflection on knowledge, perception, and understanding from a new perspective” (p. 284). The brain reorganizes information so that it is relevant in a new context. It draws on previous experiences and previous learning material to create new ways of knowing.

Extending this understanding of teaching and learning to my research, the overarching programmatic structures that determine which knowledge is imparted in the classroom, how the classroom is structured, and, to a certain degree, how a teacher approaches the classroom should take into account students’ experiences. Since students are primary stakeholders in classroom learning, then their narratives can inform future pedagogy and how this pedagogy can fit larger programmatic and institutional requirements.

Paradigmatically, the dissertation is a bit more complicated than this. The project bridges these ideas of knowledge building between individuals in a classroom, constructivism, with questions adhering to a more critical paradigm. A critical current flows through each of the analytical papers because of the CNI research process. This more critical lens asks how those negative water cooler conversations that I often overhear when I'm among other faculty or the general frustration with skills oriented discourses can be approached differently by working closely with student participants. It asks not just how students build knowledge working together in the classroom but also asks how student experiences may inform the complicated conversations about skill building in writing studies.

3.4 CNI and Pedagogy

CNI is conducive to research about teaching and learning in the classroom. Kim (2016) outlined that CNI researchers strived “to honor teaching and learning as complex and developmental in nature” (p. 18) so that the stories from the classroom can be a “key device in understanding the complex nature of a classroom” (p. 18). CNI allows researchers to see “the unfolding (temporal), situatedness (place) of stories to live by” (Clandinin & Huber, 2002, p. 167). By understanding these complexities and the temporality of personal experience, researchers can focus on the process of learning rather than the outcomes from learning. Because outcomes are always shifting with participants’ experiences, narrative inquiry is best used to investigate teaching and learning in a complex situation that is ever evolving even as participants leave the primary context being examined.

3.5 Ethics and Participant Selection

I sought and received ethical approval from both Western University and from Conestoga College, with explicit permission to republish the college's name in research publications. The ethics committees determined that speaking of the college and COMM1085 generally was acceptable, and they accepted that participant pseudonyms were sufficient to maintain anonymity. Given how many students I have taught over my career at Conestoga, it would be difficult to identify a single student based on a pseudonym. Over my five years at the college, I have taught over 600 students. I chose the Fall 2017-Winter 2018 school year as the year for which I would send a call for participants because this was the most recent school year at the time, many of these former students would still be at the college, and because it was my first year teaching with a full course load. By using this year, I had a larger group of potential participants and there was less chance that participants' identities would be discovered inadvertently during research dissemination. It was also the year where I taught in a larger variety of programs, so students would not be clustered in one stream. I could trace patterns across many college programs, which was important given how widespread COMM1085 is at Conestoga.

The call for participants was sent to seven sections of COMM1085 using Conestoga's LMS system. Approximately 175 participants (25 per course section) received the call, but it is likely that some students were no longer at the college and therefore did not see the call. Of these, 14 students responded. After I sent potential participants a more thorough breakdown of the project, four determined that they could not dedicate the time necessary. This left ten participants.

I originally planned for a smaller number of participants. I based this decision on Wells (2011) who explained that some narrative studies conduct in-depth analyses with only one

candidate, and that five participants “is sufficient for most studies involving complex analyses” (p. 20). The smaller number of candidates—hopefully five—would fit better with the in-depth approach that I would take to analyze participant narratives. However, the ten participants who remained contained a diverse set of backgrounds. They spanned policing, firefighting, computer programming, engineering, and business programs. Some had previous post-secondary experience and some did not. Some had worked for numerous years and some came straight from high schools. I decided that, although I would have more participants than anticipated, including all ten participants would allow for a greater mix of ideas. This group would better reflect the diversity and multiplicity of students who entered my classroom every year.

3.6 Five Stages of the Project

The study occurred in five broad stages, which are outlined in the infographic below (see Figure 2). Working with ten former students over a six month period (September 2018-February 2019), my research built upon a four month relationship that we established in COMM1085 the previous year. Some participants were from the Fall 2017 semester; others were from the Winter 2018 semester. This meant that participants were between six months and one year removed from our course during the study. As a result, many participants reflected on their experiences in COMM1085 in relation to the rest of their disciplinary coursework and the experiences that they had since the course.

The participants and I met for two hour-long individual interviews and an afternoon focus group. Nine of ten participants participated in both interview stages. One participant had to leave the study following the first interview for personal reasons unrelated to the study. In total, I spent between 7 and 10 hours with each of the nine participants who participated in the full study. The primary data for my research derived from these interviews and the focus group. There were also

brief online interactions with some participants that clarified interview comments. My personal research journal, which I will discuss later, also factored into the research process. The online interactions and the journal added context for when the participants and I constructed and analyzed the narratives.

Four participants participated in the focus group. The others encountered scheduling conflicts. Although I attempted to hold a second focus group for participants who could not attend, conflicting schedules did not make it viable. Instead, I asked the five participants who could not attend the focus group if we could spend an extra 30-45 minutes at the second interview so that we could discuss the ideas that arose in the focus group. All five participants spent the extra time, and, as I will explain when I discuss the focus group stage, it was useful to have individual perspectives to complement and cross-reference with the group discussions from the focus group.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS: 5 STAGES



Figure 2. A snapshot of my research process

3.7 Stage 1: Interview 1

All participants had an individual, hour-long, semi-structured interview at the beginning of the project. They were asked a series of wide-ranging questions, which are outlined in Appendix A. These questions were fluid. Typically, the questions offered a baseline to begin conversations and then the participant and I would explore their experiences more in-depth. As Wells (2011) outlined, researchers “typically work hard to create a space in which interviewees have control of the stories that they tell” (p. 30). This was an ongoing process throughout the project, from allowing participants to select a quiet place on campus where they would feel comfortable talking to developing an ongoing consent process (Kim, 2016; Wells, 2011) that was established at the beginning of each research stage.

This first interview stage offered the participants and me a chance to re-establish our relationship and reflect on the course. The questions asked at this stage established a foundation to explore the first two research questions:

- 1) How do students build knowledge in the first-year writing classroom?
- 2) How can conversations about writing in one classroom context inform ways to refine writing pedagogy more widely?

Tracing participants’ experiences with writing before COMM1085, during COMM1085, and after COMM1085 allowed me to situate each participant within the social contexts in which they write. These individual contexts opened avenues to discuss pedagogical practice more broadly. These questions returned throughout the other research stages, but the first interview established the ideas about knowledge building in the writing classroom for the more specific programmatic and social discussions that arose in subsequent stages.

Many of the questions that Journet (2012) asked about narratives in writing research focused on how the researcher is positioned to see and interpret stories of student experience. This first stage of the interviews positioned me to discuss pedagogy and theory in relation to participants' specific experiences throughout the interview (see Appendix A). By establishing this baseline, I was in a position to work on both micro and macro levels of participants' experiences: we could discuss and analyze their individual experiences and how these experiences impacted their learning, and then we could use these analyses to discuss writing pedagogy more widely.

Between the first interview and the focus group, the participants and I tried to engage in ongoing online dialogue through Western's OWL system (a secure LMS system for the university). The ongoing dialogue was intended to follow up with context-specific questions that would allow me to clarify parts of the participants' first interviews as I organized and analyzed our discussion to write the preliminary narrative. The dialogue generated was inconsistent for several reasons, such as participants getting busy as the semester developed and assignments took precedence or the fact that the dialogue occurred in a system (OWL) that students did not use regularly. Because results from this section were not as extensive as I anticipated at the start of the study, they were used more as a complementary piece that could inform future conversations in the subsequent interview and in the focus group.

3.8 Stage 2: Three-Dimensional Inquiry

After the initial interview, I drew upon Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional inquiry to organize the conversations that I had with each participant. Clandinin and Connelly laid out "terms" for narrative inquiry that allow researchers to investigate people's experiences as ongoing, multilayered, and contextualized events. This metaphorical space

considers “interaction, continuity or temporality, and situation through personal practical knowledge and the professional knowledge landscape of the individual” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 342). It allows researchers to examine relationships between people’s feelings and their larger social lives, it accounts for current experiences in relation to people’s past and how these experiences could shape their futures.

This approach allows for four directions of inquiry: inward, outward, backward, and forward. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained this approach:

By inward, we mean toward the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions. By outward, we mean toward the existential conditions, that is, the environment. By backward and forward, we refer to temporality—past, present, and future. We wrote that to experience and experience—that is to do research into an experience—is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways and to ask questions pointing each way. Thus, when one is positioned on this two-dimensional space in any particular inquiry, one asks questions, collects field notes, derives interpretations, and writes a research text that addresses both personal and social issues by looking inward and outward, and addresses temporal issues by looking not only to the event but to its past and to its future. (p. 50)

The first two dimensions of this approach focus on the inward experiences and environments that inform participants’ responses. These include the ideas that they bring to the study about writing and their experiences both in COMM1085 and prior to the course. They involve the research environment, the college environment, and the settings that informed COMM1085 for these students. The backward and forward aspects of these dimensions involve participants’ experiences with writing over time.

The third dimension considers what is unsaid. It considers “the ambiguity, complexity, difficulty, and uncertainties associated with the doing of the inquiry” (p. 55). This approach, which is applied in Clandinin and Huber (2002) to “see the unfolding (temporal), situatedness (place) of stories to live by” (p. 167), enables researchers to examine participant stories in terms of both personal and social complexity. It allows researchers to consider events beyond the present experience. It also allows researchers to explore the research process, implementing a degree of reflexivity and flexibility to adapt to the shifting nature of the personal experiences that influence the stories and data collected. It was particularly important when I was revisiting transcripts and conversations before the focus group and the second interviews. Considering what was unsaid or implied allowed me to generate new questions and to follow up with participants to generate deeper discussions on topics where we may have touched only the surface in our initial discussions.

This three-dimensional inquiry was used after each interview. After an interview was transcribed, I organized a chart with columns indicating forward, backward, inward, and outward. I then organized quotes from the transcripts into these categories. The reasons for this approach are three-fold. First, organizing the chart and using it to develop the preliminary narrative allowed me to organize questions and activities for the second interviews and for the focus group. The patterns traced using the three-dimensional framework influenced what thematic links participants and I discussed in subsequent research stages.

The second reason was that it allowed me to see where participants were inadvertently telling me what I wanted to hear and where I, lost in the enthusiasm of the conversation, may have inadvertently encouraged them to answer in this way. This was particularly true whenever we compared my COMM1085 class more favourably than other writing classes they had taken.

While these aspects of our conversations stroked my ego, they never went beyond surface-level analysis. Applying three-dimensional analysis allowed me to recognize what was happening and design my second interview questions and focus group activities more broadly so that we focused less on my teaching successes and more on factors related to programmatic curricula, such as rubrics, iterative writing opportunities, and grade distribution. I also encouraged participants to discuss moments in the previous discussions where they seemed overly-diplomatic in their responses; where it seemed like they were stopping short in an answer because they did not want to insult me or the course. In this sense, the research process extended to the third dimension (what is unsaid/silent) because it pushed the participants and I reflect critically about the experiences we discussed.

The third reason I used this three dimensional approach is so that I could make my analytical methods overt for participants. I used the chart that I produced in relation to the preliminary narrative so that participants could see how the narrative was constructed and how the analysis materialized. This allowed us to scrutinize the narrative on more equal footing where both parties understood how their words were interpreted for the narrative.

This three-dimensional inquiry was useful through the first interview, my analysis, as well as two elements that I will discuss in stage five: creating the preliminary narrative and scrutinizing this preliminary narrative. This approach also helped to refine my approach to the second interview and focus group activities. Since these two stages built upon the three-dimensional framework, the results were added to the pre-existing framework to analyze the new results. The three-dimensional inquiry evolved beyond finding patterns and making research visible to participants. It became a way to trace changes in the themes and to scrutinize where they overlapped.

3.9 Stage 3: Focus Group

Using three-dimensional inquiry allowed me to keep those first two research questions at the forefront of my discussion through every research stage. Because each stage built on the analysis established in stage one, these questions remained central to future discussions. Using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional inquiry as a framework to organize data from the first interviews allowed me to notice patterns in participant responses. I used these patterns to develop three key activities that four participants and I explored during an afternoon focus group (which lasted 2-3 hours approximately). In these activities, participants examined and expanded upon a framework taken from English (2011) to outline how they built their writing skills throughout the course, they scrutinized how the rubrics evaluated their writing in comparison to their priorities as writers, and they re-worked the course structure to emphasize more of their priorities in the learning process.

This stage continued the discussions about the initial two research questions on building knowledge and how individual experience could inform classroom pedagogy more widely. A sample of guiding focus group questions can be found in Appendix B. The activities in this section allowed the discussions to look more broadly at writing program building and writing at an institutional level because students were encouraged to collaborate by implementing various disciplinary perspectives. These wider conversations allowed participants to also address the other two major research questions:

- 3) How can students' experiences inform writing curriculum building at the post-secondary level?
- 4) What do students' stories about their writing tell writing teachers and researchers about the role that Writing Studies plays in Canadian post-secondary institutions?

This meant that the focus group covered a broad range of topics focused on knowledge building in post-secondary writing classrooms. The broad range of questions (see Appendix B) allowed participants to discuss their individual experiences while also cross-referencing these experiences with a larger context that included other participants' experiences, programmatic discussions, and institutional patterns. Although participants may not have had information specific to programmatic and institutional administrative decisions, their wider experiences at the college could still situate COMM1085 within wider Conestoga programming. These experiences generated a variety of discussions among the participants who often asked questions amongst each other to explore their comments more extensively. They debated their approaches to learning and to writing, shifting between reflections on COMM1085 and writing in courses related to their respective programs.

3.10 Stage 4: Interview 2

The second interview stage, ranging from 1-2 hours depending on the participant, built upon the analysis from the first interview and from the focus group. It addressed all four research questions in relation to individual experiences. This way participants could revise our previous discussions and expand on key ideas from the initial interview. It also allowed us to discuss changes in their experiences in the time between the initial interview during the Fall semester and the second interview during the Winter semester.

This stage was especially important for us to scrutinize the responses and discussions from the first interview. One element that emerged through the three-dimensional inquiry stage was that many participants sometimes deferred to me and resorted to complimenting my teaching. Although this was an inadvertent consequence, it became clear that there were moments where our relationship as teacher and student remained in-tact; I was still an authority

figure and they were still in a “student” position. This meant that, at certain moments during the initial interviews, the conversations would produce a fantastic compliment of my teaching but would touch only the surface of what this meant pedagogically, how students learned to work across genres or through a genre approach, or how they applied their previous experiences to their work in COMM1085.

The focus group also accentuated flaws in the initial interview. As participants discussed their experiences with writing and their writing process amongst each other, it became clear that they were more critical about what their experiences meant for learning to write and how these lessons could be applied to teaching and learning in the writing classroom. As such, participants offered more complex discussions about writing pedagogy. Recognizing the difference between their conversations collectively and the individual interview I had with each participant previously, I revisited the transcripts and the three-dimensional analysis before the second interviews to identify moments where conversations may have touched only the surface of the conversation.

The second interview stage offered an opportunity for the me and the participants to delve more deeply into these conversations that initially touched only the surface of students’ reflections. We were able to scrutinize what these ideas meant for writing pedagogy. Using the list of instances where I felt we could have discussed an idea in more depth, we were able to build upon the previous interview and, in some cases, reflect on this interview in relation to the focus group.

For participants who could not make the focus group, we spent extra time (45 minutes each approximately) during the second interviews to complete the focus group activities. This process was unexpected, but it added another dimension where I could analyze patterns between

what the group said in the focus group alongside what individual participants said during their interview. It added another level to my analysis whereby I could look at group results in relation to individual results so I could bring together many contexts of student experiences in my analysis. The time between the focus group and the second interviews (2-3 weeks depending on the participants) also gave me more time to dwell in my data, think about it, scrutinize discussions, and reflect on conversations as they occurred. This created an ongoing dialogue that allowed a deeper analysis of the focus group discussions than they would have allowed on their own. Although it was unexpected, it was a beneficial component of the research process.

3.11 Stage 5: Beyond Member Checking

To ensure a rigorous research process, I drew upon Harvey (2015) who suggested that researchers should go beyond member checking. Instead of giving students the transcripts and narratives to confirm their accuracy, going beyond member checking involved allowing participants an opportunity to add to these narratives and encouraged them to reflect upon the analysis of their experiences. This involved giving participants an opportunity to scrutinize their transcript from the first interview during the second interview. This allowed them to analyze how data was interpreted. This type of collaboration allows participants to influence and refine data analysis process (see Barton & Hamilton, 2012). This approach is consistent with Daiute (2011) who offered suggestions achieving more profound relational narrative analysis with participants, including getting them to narrate more than once, engaging them with various contextual considerations, giving them an opportunity to revisit their narratives, and focusing on details in those narratives.

However, only four participants reviewed their transcripts when I asked them to do this electronically, and none offered semantic changes to the documents. Knowing how important it

was to include them as part of this process, I brought their transcript and analysis chart to the second interview and used these to open conversations about themes that arose in these interviews. This allowed participants a chance to engage with the transcripts dialogically and use these previous conversations to develop new ideas.

Between the first and second interviews, I also used the analysis chart from the first interviews to design a preliminary narrative for each participant. This narrative traced their experiences with writing before, in, and after COMM1085. During the second interview, I asked participants to analyze the preliminary narratives, which allowed me to ensure the quality of the narrative (Moss, 2004) that was being analyzed. As Ross (2017) discussed, participants do not always get an opportunity to open up and provide in-depth analysis during research. Offering them the space and time to do this in relation to a document with their reflections allowed us to explore their experiences more profoundly in relation to teaching and learning in the writing classroom.

This process also gave me an opportunity to ask participants critical questions that I had as I was designing their narrative. I could get them to examine specific points in the narrative where I was uncertain about the analysis. I could invite them to expand upon their observations with more specific examples of how they experienced elements of the class. I often had to prompt participants with questions that I had about the analysis. This prompting opened avenues for continued dialogue between us, and participants typically used these discussions to ask their own questions and share other thoughts about the narratives. With these reflections, we could re-write parts of the narratives or add to the ideas, which gave us opportunities to account for how the interview discussions changed over time as students reflected on their experiences with COMM1085 further.

3.12 Relational Co-Constructors

I could bring participants in as co-constructors of knowledge. Establishing trustworthiness through the methodological process allowed me to position myself in relation to participants, seeing them as knowers and contributors in the writing classroom. From the committee meetings prompting me to go deeper, to the personal journal which helped me to position myself in the project as a researcher-participant, to going beyond member checking with students, I was able to position the participants and myself as co-constructors of knowledge.

Making of the narratives that participants tell and understanding the complexities of the classroom means being critical about the researcher's position in relation to the participants. As Kohler Riessman (1993) outlined, narrative researchers do not give voice to their participants. Rather, they hear their voices and interpret them. How we interpret these voices is crucial to how research is received. Positioning the self as researcher in relation to others as participants (Dillon, 2011; Hermans, 2003) opens a more dialogical research space where teaching and learning to write in a first-year context could be scrutinized. As Clandinin et al. (2010) explained, "narrative inquiry is the study of people in relation studying the experience of people in relation" (p. 82). Both stakeholders in the research process, participants and researcher, occupied unique positions in relation to COMM1085. The participants saw the course from a student perspective that was more focused on learning. The researcher considered the course from a design process focused on teaching and knowledge dissemination. Both parties experienced this context in relation to each other as teaching and learning came together in the context.

Both researchers and participants offer different ways of seeing a first-year writing course. Their perspectives could combine and complicate the discussions in the research process. This is consistent with Striano (2012) who described narrative as a method "intended as a form

of negotiation and active participation in social discourse and as a way of constructing new social discourses” (p. 153). To construct these new discourses about teaching and learning in the writing classroom, it was important to invite these participants into the research process more as co-constructors of knowledge who could participate in the analytical and interpretive process of building narratives and using them to build new knowledge for Writing Studies. This could only be achieved through a “collaborative speak/response relationship” (Gergen & Gergen, 2011, p. 379) that saw both parties working together in dialogue.

The co-construction was not perfect because of the relationship that I had with the participants. There was an inevitable power dynamic that influenced the discussions, results, and the narratives we created together. I was their former teacher and the principle investigator in the study. I held a position of authority. They were my former students and, although we had a positive, cordial, and professional relationship, the nature of that relationship would inevitably impact the results. I previously discussed how the participants seemed to defer to me during the initial interview stage. Although the focus group, second interviews, and our work together on their narratives attempted to mitigate this power dynamic, it was inevitably a factor in the discussions. The collaborative relationship that Gergen and Gergen (2011) discuss means that participants and researchers work in relation to each other. Our relation in this study meant that power was always a factor in our discussion. Working in relation means embracing that negotiation and active participation that Striano (2012) emphasized was key to constructing discourses in CNI. The results, therefore, represent only one interpretation among many possible interpretations. This interpretation of the results was a result of the negotiation and collaboration that occurred between me and the participants at each stage of the project, especially when we were working together to analyze and refine their narratives.

3.13 Trustworthiness

Going beyond member checking encouraged reflexivity for both the participants and for myself. We could reflect upon both their narratives and the research process. In CNI, reflexivity and co-construction help to establish trustworthiness. When Writing Studies scholars like Journet (2012) discussed scrutinizing how narratives count as disciplinary knowledge, this really means examining and making visible how trustworthy the accounts are. If narratives are deemed trustworthy through a rigorous methodological framework, then they can contribute to the knowledge that is being built in the field. Through trustworthiness, narratives extend beyond accounts of research results; they become data that scholars may scrutinize, derive themes, and discuss ideas in relation to other research.

Establishing trustworthiness is central to CNI (see Gottlieb & Lasser, 2001; Moss, 2004; Smythe, 2000). In order to be critical about the contexts being researched, researchers must be critical about their research process. To ensure that my research could see beyond a skills narrative to understand participants as knowledge makers in the classroom, I had to ensure that the methodological framework allowed them to describe their experiences freely, help analyze and write their narratives, and inform the analysis.

3.14 Lincoln & Guba's Criterion for Trustworthiness

To ensure that the work that I did with participants was rigorous and trustworthy, I turned to Lincoln and Guba (1985) who established broad parameters for achieving trustworthiness. Although Lincoln and Guba acknowledged that the criteria is not perfect, it offers a suitable framework to see how knowledge is constructed (Loh, 2013). Lincoln & Guba (1985) stipulated that the following elements help to establish trustworthiness:

- 1) Prolonged engagement with participants
- 2) Persistent Observation
- 3) Triangulation
- 4) Peer Debriefing
- 5) Referential Adequacy (archiving)
- 6) Member Checks
- 7) Reflexive Journal

The following section will outline how each criterion was met during the research process.

3.15 Prolonged engagement with participants

Research was conducted over six months, building upon a pre-existing four month relationship established with participants in COMM1085. Each participant was involved in the study for 7-10 hours. Over 25 hours of transcribed data was collected, and many informal/non-recorded conversations helped to inform the study and establish a deeper relationship with participants

3.16 Persistent Observation

Numerous data collection methods offered many opportunities to engage with participants and ask them questions about their answers as the project evolved and new themes emerged.

3.17 Triangulation

Interviews, the focus group, and the personal narratives were triangulated data sources. How participants described their experiences in the interview were discussed in a critical

analysis of their narratives, which in turn helped to inform and were informed by the focus group activities where participants could offer suggestions for programmatic alterations that could better accommodate their personal experiences as learners.

3.18 Peer Debriefing

Numerous meetings with the supervisory committee (individually and collectively) allowed me to scrutinize research processes and how I interpreted data. These sessions helped me to understand what may be taken for granted and how data could be interpreted differently by various audiences.

3.19 Referential Adequacy (archiving)

Interviews and focus groups are audio recorded. Verbatim transcripts for each are available. The preliminary narratives and the three-dimensional framework are also recorded and saved.

3.20 Member Checks

I went beyond member checking (Harvey, 2015) by including participants in the analytical process of preliminary narratives. This included them as co-constructors of knowledge in the study.

3.21 Reflexive Journal

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Smythe and Murray (2000) both consider the reflexive journal imperative to reflecting upon and making visible the potential ways that researchers may influence the research process and the participants. While my reflexive journal offered me the

opportunity to record my methods and think through ways that I was potentially influencing the research, it was most useful during the analytical stages. As I will discuss soon, it is important for a narrative researcher to consider themselves as a potential participant in the inquiry, particularly when they have a pre-existing relationship with participants.

I struggled with this element early in my analysis. I approached my analysis more objectively because I was concerned about how my own experiences would influence my interpretation. But the opposite was true: I could not avoid influencing the interpretation because my experiences were a necessary and inevitable part of the analysis. Samah (2013) described self-study as a process that “enables the researcher to unpack and portray the complexity of teaching and learning about teaching...[which] leads to deeper understandings of practice” (p. 90). Seeing the self in relation to the study allowed me to own and acknowledge personal influence as a factor but then contemplate how this factor influenced the participants’ experiences. It helps researchers decide if they are interpreting through their own experiential lens, or if they are maintaining the vigilant subjectivity (DeLuca, 2000) that allows them to interrogate their assumptions and interpretations to arrive somewhere new. The journal provided an outlet to reflect on how my own story compared to their experiences as learners and the different types of knowledge that we contributed to the research. Many of these reflections factored into the paper and they also influenced how I approached questions in the later stages of the research process, particularly during the second interviews and the narrative analysis. This approach made me focus on the relationships that I was building with participants and how these relationships allowed analysis to evolve so that I could extend beyond my own interpretations of how they experienced writing at the post-secondary level.

3.22 Conclusion

CNI is a methodological framework through which I could scrutinize how knowledge was built on three levels: in the classroom, in programs, and in the field of Writing Studies. It allowed me to approach my work epistemically, exploring how knowledge was built through narratives while simultaneously building knowledge in the process. It positioned me to work in relation with my former students to not only ensure that the narratives behind the study were trustworthy, but to scrutinize and develop new forms of meaning that could inform teaching and writing in the first-year writing classroom. CNI offers something different for Writing Studies because it allows researchers to continue using the narratives that are frequently used to report results while also establishing more rigorous parameters to implement narratives as part of our research.

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Chapter 4

4 Academic Literacies in a Canadian Writing Classroom

4.1 Interlude

Now that I have established the terminology, theory, and methodology that buttresses this research, I move into three papers which discuss various ideas that emerged from my research. The papers are organized such that the first paper looks at classroom-level pedagogy and curriculum, the second paper examines Writing Studies program staffing in relation to conversations with students, and the third paper synthesizes certain themes that emerged from the research that may inform Canadian Writing Studies pedagogy more broadly. I zoom out with each successive paper to explore a broader element of the conversations and how they inform my position as a Canadian Writing Studies researcher and teacher.

The first paper, “Academic Literacies in a Canadian Writing Classroom,” demonstrates how an Academic Literacies framework can help writing teachers translate individual pedagogical successes into broader pedagogical opportunities. Given the increased focus on skill-building and course objectives in post-secondary institutions, there is a risk that pedagogy can become rote and transactional. The paper demonstrates how adopting a framework like Academic Literacies can help writing teachers to build relationships with students and use these relationships to inform pedagogy more widely. Instead of being limited by skills, the framework allows teachers and students to work as co-constructors of knowledge in the classroom. The paper draws upon narratives from two participants (pseudonyms Clara and Kent) to present ways that teachers may use an Academic Literacies framework to draw upon students’ wider social experiences in the writing classroom and to show how these wider social experiences can enhance teaching and learning in the writing classroom. It ultimately concludes that Academic

Literacies, with its focus on the individual and on dialogic feedback, can push teachers and scholars to adapt with evolving classroom contexts and re-evaluate their teaching practices; that teachers may use dialogue and feedback to develop a wider range of pedagogical tools that can help them adapt to changing student needs by offering them more paths through which they may draw upon their previous experiences to learn writing for new contexts; and that pointing to how teacher-students relationships can inform research on writing pedagogy, teachers and researchers may put themselves in a better position to challenge the skills narrative.

4.2 Introduction

As an emerging field, Canadian Writing Studies is often impacted by a skill building narrative that stems from administrative requirements to quantify the value of instruction. This narrative can limit writing pedagogy because it contradicts notions of writing as “an ongoing social process that is not learned once and for all” (Bryant, 2017, p. 14), and there is risk that “writing inevitably collapses into a set of skills so generalized as to be meaningless” (Brent, 2011, p. 280) if skill-building is interpreted too rigidly by writing teachers. Ironically, in their desire to quantify which skills students obtain in the writing classroom, institutions and administrators undermine the teaching practices that achieve improved student writing and communication skills. Working more closely with students may open avenues for pedagogy to move beyond course objectives and inform learning and teaching in the writing classroom. As teachers, we know that writing pedagogy is more complex and contextualized than course objectives articulate. As scholars who research writing as a complex social process, we should consider these objectives as a baseline from which we extend pedagogy. Academic Literacies (Lea & Street, 2006; Lillis et al., 2015) can help teachers extend pedagogy by working more

closely with students, inviting them to become co-constructors of knowledge who can inform pedagogy.

In this paper, I report on efforts to situate Writing Studies within an Academic Literacies framework integrated in a first-year writing classroom at Conestoga College, a community college in Ontario, Canada. Academic Literacies allows students to incorporate wider social experiences (Paxton & Frith, 2014) in a way that expands our knowledge of teaching and learning in the writing classroom. I focus on the experiences of two participants (pseudonyms Clara and Kent) to explore how students can extend conversations about teaching and learning writing in a classroom that uses Academic Literacies as an overarching framework.

4.3 Study Skills in Canada and Beyond

The skills narrative is particularly strong in Canada where I work and research in a Writing Studies field that is still mapping a landscape (Clary-Lemon, 2009). Canadian writing teachers and scholars have lacked “a broad, stable instructional platform that would provide a critical mass of practitioners with a common curricular mission and location from which to launch a disciplinary enterprise” (Wetherbee Phelps, 2014, p. 5). The inability to form strong communities of practice in Canada has helped the skill narrative (Bryant, 2017; Landry, 2016) to develop because writing teachers and scholars have been unable to articulate what we do, how we do it, and what value it offers students and institutions. Often, other stakeholders have defined our practice and our mission according to institutional needs. As Landry’s (2016) respondents pointed out, many Canadian academic institutions have identified that students must write well, but they view writing instruction as a “quick fix” (p. 216) without providing resources to facilitate teaching.

This trend is not exclusive to Canada. It is becoming increasingly prevalent across North American post-secondary institutions. As Langer and Applebee (2016) explained, skills and standards take precedence over the “substantive ideas and concepts of the course work” (p. 341). They also argued that there is a risk that the standards become the teaching goal rather than focusing “on teaching to the course material” (p. 341) with the help of standards. Instead of focusing on the standards as ends in themselves, teachers and scholars can improve teaching and learning in the classroom by focusing more on the course material and how individual teaching moments can inform how this material can apply across a larger group of students.

4.4 Beyond Skills: Academic Literacies

Academic Literacies can help to shift this focus away from the skills narrative towards a better understanding of how students can inform teaching and learning in the classroom. An Academic Literacies pedagogical approach encourages researchers and teachers to examine what students bring into the classroom and how they use their experiences to make meaning (Lea, 2008; Paxton & Frith, 2014). This central premise resonates with the idea that “students can and do join us as makers of knowledge” (Kinkead, 2011, p. 137) in the writing classroom. The participant-focus of literacies in higher education “is not concerned with making judgments about what participants should do but with the practices of teaching and learning and how these might be articulated in a range of ways” (Lea, 2013, p. 108), especially with how teaching and learning can help students to make personal connections between their experiences and their writing (Eodice, Geller, & Lerner, 2019). An Academic Literacies framework emphasizes how relationships between students and teachers impact pedagogical practice, and it can accommodate the growing number of students who enter post-secondary education with prior work experience, which provides a foundation for this relationship to build.

Academic Literacies is pedagogically oriented. The framework assumes that “teachers have a great impact on how their students use language and perceive writing” (Street, 2013, p. 59). Academic Literacies is designed to develop socially-oriented models for teaching writing which challenge dominant institutional narratives, such as the study-skills model which focuses primarily on students as deficient writers (Lea, 2004; Street, 2013). Teachers using this framework often adopt a dialogic process (Boyd & Markarian, 2015; Lillis, 2003; Wells, 2006) that emphasizes feedback and process as crucial elements to writers’ development. This dialogic process centers on the complex social practices that impact students’ writing, which relocates literacy “not as an individual, neutral, cognitive issue but as always rooted in a social worldview and embedded in discursive practices” (Badenhorst et al., 2015, p. 2). The dialogic feedback process allows pedagogy to be more context-specific than a skills framework allows. It accommodates a greater range of experiences and learning needs to help students situate their practice as part of their wider post-secondary experiences.

One challenge with Academic Literacies is that it does not always extend beyond a single pedagogical context. Academic Literacies is best applied and studied in specific contexts (Lea, 2004). This allows teachers and researchers to focus on individualized and socially-situated writing contexts. Wingate (2012) argued, however, that this localized and individualized approach may hinder how it is disseminated more widely, which, ironically, may prompt post-secondary institutions to rely on a study skills framework that is more conducive to standardization. This challenge was present throughout the study.

4.5 Conestoga College and the Skills Approach

Conestoga College offers an example of how institutions apply skill building in a writing context and how teachers may work within this environment to encourage more individualized

and co-constructed classroom pedagogy. Its introductory writing course, COMM1085, spans across most college disciplines and is implemented at several campuses around the Kitchener/Waterloo area. The course acts as a catch-all where students are introduced to writing, grammar, citations, library research, and process writing. Each course section (approximately 25 students) uses the same curriculum and objectives.

This uniformity can provide programmatic and institutional direction for writing instruction. Instructors follow the same learning objectives and they issue the same assignments. Each section uses the same grammar quizzes and rubrics. Each unit identifies key concepts that students are taught, such as learning “analytical writing patterns,” “developing body paragraphs,” creating “point form outlines,” or understanding the “building blocks of English grammar.” These units relate to wider course objectives, such as students building the “reading, writing and critical thinking skills needed for academic and workplace success” through developing the ability to “analyse, summarize, and discuss a variety of readings and apply the steps of planning, writing, and revising in response to written prompts” (COMM1085 Course Overview). The curriculum compartmentalizes and quantifies how the first-year writing course meets larger institutional and government standards.

However, objectives are construed broadly so instructors can impact student learning beyond “skill development.” Despite the standardized programmatic curriculum, COMM1085 instructors may develop their own teaching activities. This flexibility allowed me to adopt an Academic Literacies approach to teach my sections. Because there is no one-size-fits-all framework which accommodates the diversity and complexity of writing pedagogy, research must present “a package of various approaches and methods” (Wingate, 2012, p. 27) which can be adapted to suit new contexts. This paper extends this repertoire of approaches and methods by

showing how curricula developed through an Academic Literacies approach could apply more broadly across a classroom and program, meaning that Academic Literacies may benefit students and teaching practices even if course objectives seem rigid.

4.6 Turning to Narrative

Clara's and Kent's stories offer two examples of how an Academic Literacies approach can benefit students with writing at a community college. On one level, these stories articulate how students best develop their skills in the first-year writing classroom. On another level, these stories highlight how Academic Literacies can help teachers move beyond rigid course structures while developing a clear idea of how students may inform pedagogy.

These stories emerged from a larger project which involved interviewing ten of my former students. Drawing on Critical Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016), I invited students to explain how they built knowledge in our classrooms. Using narrative inquiry for writing research not only allowed me to organize stories of student experiences, but it also allowed me to capture what Graves (2011) called the "rhetorics of change: passion, emotion, language, and narrative and how these are used to convey our practices in the writing, rhetoric, and technical communication programs we inhabit" (p. 375). Scholars must make visible the complexities of writing classrooms so institutions can reflect this complexity through increased support for writing pedagogy. Narratives of student experiences can help articulate these complexities (Del Principe & Ihara, 2017).

Adopting a Critical Narrative Inquiry approach allowed me to develop relationships that I had with former students. Over six months, we examined our COMM1085 experience. I conducted two one-hour interviews with each student, email dialogue with each student at each stage of the study, and one focus group with four students. We discussed writing pedagogy, how

students learned best, how they developed their writing skills, how successful teaching strategies could be translated more broadly to impact future students, and how less successful teaching modules could be altered.

Narrative is a relational process that “gives rise to stories about self and the world” (Gergen & Gergen, 2011, p. 379), not something “we have as a private possession but something that we do in relational participation” (p. 380). My approach was grounded by a multiplicity of tools and perspectives because narrative “cannot be seen as de-contextualized and un-situated” (Striano, 2012, p. 148). I—the teacher/researcher—was implicated in the relational process: the stories that emerged from the study were not just from the participants; they also involved how participant stories related to my own.

This produced a dialogic research process where I, as a narrator and a researcher, had to reflect upon my experiences too. Hermans (2003) called this the “self as project: the self-in-relation-to-the-other is a form of social exploration and discovery as part of an unfinished dialogue” (p. 104) that can help to see the reciprocal and relational nature (Daiute, 2011; Dillon, 2011) of the stories. This reciprocal relationship allowed me to understand participants’ stories and apply them to my own teaching and research.

Critical Narrative Inquiry is interpretive, so researchers must ensure that narrative interpretations are trustworthy. As Caduri (2013) argued, if researchers aim to “draw logical connection between personal and practical knowledge” (p. 42), they must focus on life stories as well as “specific actions in their professional practice” (p. 49) and scrutinize these actions in practice. For this reason, I included my participants as co-constructors of knowledge throughout the research. After students verified transcripts from the first interview, I analyzed each transcript according to Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three-dimensional analytical approach,

organizing their comments according internal feelings about COMM1085, outward/existential/environmental conditions surrounding their experience of the course, and their temporal (past/present) experience of the course, and how writing factored into their future aspirations (if at all). From this framework, I developed a preliminary narrative synthesizing our initial interview and I asked them to analyze the narrative. At the second interview, we scrutinized how I interpreted our previous discussion. We adapted these initial stories, updated their narratives based on recent experiences, added new ideas as they emerged, and omitted ideas that participants felt did not reflect their experience accurately.

Throughout this process, it became clear that I was equally scrutinized throughout this process. Reflections from my former students allowed me as a researcher to examine my teaching critically. This process involved “seeing differently and probing those places and events overflowing with cluttered meaning” (Shaafsma & Vinz, 2011, p. 17). As Samah (2013) articulated, narrative inquiry pushes researchers and teachers to confront the things that they take for granted in their teaching. As researchers explore students’ prior experiences, these experiences become the foundation upon which our own teaching practices can be evaluated and re-evaluated.

My participants were not just reporting experiences. They prompted me to reflect upon the conditions surrounding teaching and learning at the college, including course structure, teaching practice, administrative decisions, and student participation. Clara’s and Kent’s stories can highlight how students might inform teaching and ultimately help writing teachers (Canadian, American, and beyond) to better articulate what we do, how we do it, and how we can accommodate the great diversity of students who enter our classrooms every year.

4.7 Clara and Kent

Let me introduce you to Clara and Kent.

Clara has large ambitions. She is scientist who is passionate about food and agriculture. Raised in Uganda, she has extensive international experience. She obtained her Master of Science in the UK. She spent eighteen months working with smallholder farmers in Kenya. She came to Canada to study Food Processing and Supply Chain Management before she pursues either a PhD or an MBA. After she executes what she calls “my twenty year plan,” she intends “to go back home.” She hopes to spearhead change in African agriculture: “I intend to work for the UN or a food and agriculture organization, so that’s why I say 20 years. It’s a lot, but that’s...in the long run I want to combine my food industry experience with agriculture.”

Kent is ambitious and hard working. He wants to be a police officer because he enjoys helping people. His path to reach this point has not been straightforward. He describes how he “dropped out of high school cause I figured it wasn’t important. Rather be making money.” He worked in factories around Guelph, Ontario where he grew up. After several years of 60-80 hour weeks and little pay (“10 bucks an hour”), Kent decided that change was necessary, so he came to Conestoga College to study Police Foundations. Since then, he has worked twelve hours per day, three or four days weekly to make ends meet while taking a full course load.

Clara and Kent are from seemingly different worlds, yet both took my first-year writing class in Winter 2018. They were in separate sections, but they encountered the same lessons. They endured the same groupwork. They even laughed at my jokes—although they were probably being polite.

But neither wanted to take COMM1085. Clara acknowledged that she thought the class would be boring and wondered “what are you going to tell me that is REALLY going to help me at this point?” She admits that she thought the course would waste her time. Kent was equally

blunt: “when I first came and found out I had to take an English class, I was like ‘are you fucking serious? I’m here for Police Foundations and I have to take another English class.’”

By the end, they both reported profound shifts in how they viewed Writing Studies as part of their larger personal and intellectual growth. Kent describes the course fondly: “it was definitely a learning process. And it was really neat to be able to take your [class] was a whole learning experience. Something new that I hadn’t done before and I could do it and it wouldn’t be an issue.” Clara’s outlook on the course was also transformed: The course made it seem—it’s not just a language, it’s beyond that. You have to take part of it to sort of express yourself or bring out what you want in whatever field you [work]. And that’s what the course was doing.

4.8 Beyond “Skill” Building

What prompted this transformation? What does it indicate about teaching and learning in the first-year writing classroom?

For one, I sympathized with their apprehensions. Many others will too. People who have grappled with writing and who have experienced the transition to post-secondary writing can understand the frustration and confusion that comes from doing the same thing repeatedly. I remember the eleventh grade when I wondered why we had to take English every year during high school. Why did I need to write essays with five paragraphs? How would that help my career? I remember the freedom that I felt when I went to university where I could experiment with my writing. And I remember my confusion/frustration when, in my second year, a professor told me that my paper’s “argument didn’t hold water” and that I should stick to five paragraphs. I felt like I was being shoved back into a box that I was only starting to escape.

My own experiences inform why I am sensitive to the skill narrative and why I try to focus more on what happens in the classroom between students and teachers. That is, after all,

where the learning happens. From experience, I understand that “English” classes are restrictive if they are boiled down to a set of rote skills. As a teacher and writer, I also understand that this does not have to be the case. The documents that outline learning objectives do not represent the whole picture.

My background as a writing instructor and scholar who also studies writing pedagogy and curriculum positions me to see how learning to write is about more than just the programmatic curriculum outlined in an instructional plan. Students learn and build skills through the way curriculum is enacted in the classroom. This enacted curriculum, which occurs between students and instructors in a classroom, is “a fluid and highly sophisticated form of practice” (Dillon, 2009, p. 358) that requires relationship building and individualized instruction. I often draw upon this idea as I enact the fluid and individualized Academic Literacies approach in COMM1085. In this approach, I find it useful to understand that “congruence between educational outcomes and curriculum documents is virtuous; but when curriculum design is seen as the moral and political endeavour that it is, the issue takes on deeper significance” (Petrina, 2004, p. 83). As writing instructors, we move beyond the curricular document through relationships with students, helping them to make more personal connections between their wider experiences and their writing. As Eodice et al. (2019) have asserted, the power of personal connections “is a key factor for developing and sustaining student agency and identity in higher education” (p. 336). Curriculum can be enacted so students may draw upon larger experiences. This enacted curriculum allows room for interpretation, and it offers a multiplicity of learning paths. The enacted curriculum can show how people bring complex emotions and preconceptions to their writing. People work through these elements as they write. As an instructor, I know that I

can harness these experiences, these emotions, these ideas. Academic literacies provides a framework to accomplish this.

4.9 An Academic Literacies Approach

Academic Literacies allowed me to accommodate Clara's and Kent's individual pathways and experiences as part of their wider learning. The instruction maintained the same curriculum and met course objectives, but it allowed students the space to develop their own projects and ideas.

Clara highlighted how stepping beyond the course mould benefitted her the most. Giving her the space to step beyond course conventions and objectives allowed her to develop her ideas more elaborately. She acknowledges that she was "more hungry" for information than the course offered.

For me, because of the class, it sort of limits you. And then again it goes to the one-on-ones because I think you gave me more information because I was more hungry.

Academic literacies allowed me to sympathize with Clara's frustrations and find alternative pathways for her. As Street, Lea, and Lillis (2015) discussed, Academic Literacies allows instructors to negotiate with students, curricula, and themselves. It challenges them to step back, look at students' expectations, examine the instructor's ideas of strong writing, and discuss "how the two can mesh together" (p. 389). Understanding Clara's desire for more allowed me to adjust course parameters (which required that she write a 5-page final paper integrating 3-5 secondary sources) to work with her ideas. Clara had a range of experiences that she could draw upon. She had specific ways of understanding writing in her field. She could use this foundation to write a final paper related to her aspirations.

With this in mind, we formulated a plan to develop what would be the equivalent of a writing sample for a PhD program proposal about using apps in rural African agriculture. The proposal would still meet course objectives because they required that she work with a complex social issue, integrate source material, cite using APA format, guide the reader through a critical conversation, and develop through multiple stages (paper proposal, paper outline, peer review, and final draft). However, Clara would have more freedom to expand her ideas and more space to experiment (her paper was 12 pages).

Building and re-building ideas was integral to Clara's work. This notion of re-building resonates with Wingate's (2012) models for applying Academic Literacies in the classroom, and it is consistent with the way that Academic Literacies prioritizes practice over text (Lillis & Scott, 2007); the process is more important to learning than the product. In the end, Clara developed a project that extended beyond the course. She described her process as a journey. She likened it to the journey that many plants take as they grow.

It's sort of a growing thing. You know you start off as a seed and you water it and you water it and give it all this information and it grows. So, for me, journey-wise I mean growth in what we're talking about. We talked about the topic in-depth and we sort of formed questions towards something. So for me it wasn't like a moment. It was like, every time we met up, there was something new and a bigger idea and we'd sort of move towards that. So it wasn't a specific moment where it was like "oh my god" lightbulb. It was mind maps after mind maps to go to where we're going.

Clara worked in increments, developing a mind map before every class meeting. When the topic became unruly, she sought feedback. She reconfigured her mind map and accommodated new ideas. Each successive mind map facilitated her process by integrating critical feedback and

pushing her thinking. By the end of the course, she had written a paper that she could take and submit as part of her PhD proposal.

The challenge is that this approach worked for an individual student rather than for a class more broadly. This was a way to work with an individual student who sought help. While Academic Literacies works well for individual cases, there is a challenge for instructors to apply it more broadly (Wingate & Tribble, 2012). If pedagogy is going to achieve the transformative approach (Paxton & Frith, 2014; Wingate & Tribble, 2012) that Academic Literacies proposes, it cannot limit itself to an individual teaching moment. Many positive instances of Academic Literacies pedagogy focus on individual students like Clara. Individual students benefit the most from this approach, but “administrators may argue that the necessary resources are not available in mainstream higher education” (p. 484) to implement Academic Literacies across programmatic curricula. The challenge is to implement these successful models across broader contexts in ways that appease administrators and their budgets.

One way to accomplish this may be to look inward and see individual student experiences with writing to inform broader teaching practices; the goal is to engage students not just as learners but as knowledge builders who can impact various dimensions of the classroom. To accomplish this reflexivity, I drew on Mitchell and Scott (2015) who argued that Academic Literacies can be “a framing of pedagogy which keeps the questions open and keeps questioning, even itself” (p. 122). In Clara’s case, the question was how to translate these mind maps to more holistic knowledge-building in the classroom. Looking inward allowed me to see how Academic Literacies could take students’ knowledge-building processes and use my experiences engaging with them to create new pedagogical knowledge in the classroom.

Something about the mind map might be useful to their other courses. Reflecting on my experience working with Clara, I thought her insight could help other students build knowledge in the writing classroom. In this sense, Clara's process for personal knowledge-making became a means through which pedagogical knowledge could be build and disseminated across a larger body of students. The following school year, I implemented a module where students could create mind maps to organize their research. They could engage with the process-oriented nature of Academic Literacies and work through their research questions. They could develop big ideas in small increments. The mind map helped them develop their ideas and solicit feedback. It employed Clara's individualized iterative process to more members of the class.

The activity is not perfect, but it is a start. Having a more informal class structure for this module can sometimes lead students off topic, and some students struggle with the immensity of the task. But I can emphasize the value of process over grade. The mind map has become a foundation for how I teach students process writing because it acts as a home-base from which they can develop their ideas.

My experience working with Kent also allowed me to understand how success with an individual student can be applied more broadly. Like Clara's work with mindmaps, Kent's experiences offered insight into how knowledge could be built both for his success and for a larger classroom. Whereas Clara's journey involved working on the same project, Kent did not know what he wanted to write about. However, the flexible course structure allowed him to draw upon his interests before coming to the course and the fact that the course did not limit him to a formal academic style enabled him to draw upon his curiosity.

Kent did not enjoy high school, but he enjoyed English class. He would read ahead of the class in high school and he relished the opportunity to discuss the novel.

I finished the whole book in the first week and have to wait six weeks for everyone else to finish. At the end of the time we get to converse and discuss the book and what we like/what we didn't like and I enjoyed having arguments with people you know: who was the antagonist, who was the protagonist. Who was good who was bad. I enjoyed doing that.

Kent's love of reading extends beyond the classroom. He reads history or science fiction because he likes the stories. He used to write poetry for his mother but explained that it was "just for fun. My mom liked poems so I wrote her poems."

This passion came into his writing for COMM1085. Kent asserts that his love of reading and his ability to build upon these passions helped his success in this course: "I enjoy reading a lot of books and I think that helped me a lot with my writing in English." He first wrote about hypothetically killing vampires. For the research project, he explored the possibility of humans colonizing Titan, one of Saturn's moons.

Kent drew upon his passion for science fiction during these papers and complemented it with research. He combined passion with research to develop his ideas. The tiered writing process was instrumental for Kent at this stage. He wanted feedback so that he could improve.

I want to know what I got wrong. So in order to see what I did wrong and what I can improve, I take that criticism really well cause then I know for next time that's how I can improve my work and essays and stuff. Cause I hate—say I get an 85, that's a good mark—but I still want to know what could I have done in order to get a higher mark.

What did I do wrong or what could I have fixed or expanded upon.

By engaging in what Boyd and Markarian (2015), Lillis (2003), and Paxton and Frith (2014) define as the dialogic process, Kent could refine his ideas and develop a better paper. He relished

the feedback, and he would email me frequently to ask questions about the feedback I provided and how he could improve.

During smaller class activities, he would ask me about specific aspects of his writing. This part was perplexing for me as an instructor. Kent is not the only student who would stray from the class activities to ask me questions about the paper or assignments. Although I have always answered these inquiries, I have often worried that students will miss a key component of the class in order to meet assignment criterion; by focusing on one aspect, they may miss something else that is equally important to their process. Kent was not always engaged in groupwork, yet he provided strong insight. When I questioned him about this in our interview, he highlighted that the flexibility during class time was important for him. He saw these as moments where I, as an instructor, “made sure that everyone understood [the material], or if somebody was too nervous to raise their hand in front of the class they were able to email.” Rather than seeing these moments as times when students transgress course lessons or course lesson fail, they can become opportunities to have dialogue about assignments. Assuming a dialogic stance in teaching, as Boyd and Markarian (2015) advocate, can open ways for students to play with course structure, to adapt their thinking by making connections with the material, their experiences, and their writing to render their work more personal and to tailor their learning to their strengths and needs as students. These are moments where the course can extend beyond programmatic or administrative guidelines to focus on individual needs and develop the relationship between teachers and students.

Again, the risk here is that Kent’s process is individualized. Much of Kent’s success derived from his own initiative, which many students do not have. Some students are simply distracted during groupwork. This is where Clara’s use of the mindmap is beneficial. Providing

students with a mind-mapping activity and highlighting this work as a crucial part of their final project has allowed me to balance student needs with course requirements. While I push them to consider research, genre, and audience in their mind maps, students may also ask questions about their project and work through individual challenges. The mind map acts as a fluid component of the writing process that allows students to shift as their thinking evolves; at the same time, designing the mind maps develops a dialogic process between instructors and students which challenges how both parties understand their role as knowledge makers in the classroom.

4.10 Discussion

Clara and Kent offer prime examples of how the individualized pedagogy promoted by Academic Literacies can prompt instructors to turn inward to inform future pedagogy that applies more broadly across classrooms. Although Wingate & Tribble (2012) have argued that Academic Literacies has struggled to develop beyond specific contexts, exploring writing pedagogy with Clara and Kent demonstrates that Academic Literacies offers much to Writing Studies both in terms of extending individualized moments into new pedagogical opportunities for classrooms.

COMM1085 offers more than just another context to highlight how Academic Literacies can benefit students because of its focus on individualized instruction. Clara implemented her own mind-mapping process that was not part of the established course or class curriculum. Kent challenged my approach to groupwork, using it instead as a time to build upon previous feedback and to refine his writing. In both cases, individualized instruction opened doors for individual meaning making processes to inform larger classroom practice. Both challenged me as a teacher to not only adapt to the individual student, but to adapt in relation to my own teaching approaches. This prompted me to reconsider how I approached teaching the writing process so

that students could implement more of their own tools for making meaning through writing at each stage of their projects.

In this sense, individualized meaning making processes are not isolated to an ephemeral classroom context. Both Paxton and Frith (2014) and Lea (2008) have argued that the strength Academic Literacies is that it promotes student experiences as essential to their meaning making and learning in the classroom. The lessons learned from Clara and Kent suggest that, while students do benefit from drawing on these experiences, the way students respond to new classroom pedagogies in relation to these experiences also offer teachers and scholars ideas about how writing can be taught and developed across a larger student body. Because of my experiences working and researching with Clara and Kent, I am in a better position as a teacher to offer my classes more pathways through which they can adapt their own experiences to make meaning. Whether it is the mind mapping or my new understanding of how multifaceted groupwork can be for student learning, I carry these lessons beyond a single context.

For Writing Studies in particular, these lessons are useful because they suggest ways that teachers can move beyond skill building. Bryant (2017) has challenged Writing Studies practitioners to “begin dismantling the dominant position” (p. 17) of the skills narrative so that we can start promoting the value of the work that we do and highlight specific examples of how it benefits students. The individualized, fluid nature of dialogue that occurred between myself and Clara and Kent helped us to implement individualized pedagogy that still met course objectives. The value of writing pedagogy for Clara and Kent was not simply the assignments and their structure; it was that they received an opportunity to engage in a process, receive feedback, and tailor their learning to suit their writing style. They each built upon their previous writing experiences, but they did so by using class structures and opportunities offered by myself

as an instructor to develop their own way to build meaning in the classroom. When teachers and students are given the time, space, and resources to build a rapport, challenge classroom and programmatic curricular structures, and find new ways to approach the writing process, they both learn new ways of seeing and doing writing pedagogy in the modern academy.

This also moves beyond feedback. Although Clara and Kent confirm that a dialogic feedback process helps students develop their writing, the dialogic process offered through an Academic Literacy approach offered a different mindset—a dialogic instructional stance (Boyd & Markarian, 2015)—that students and teachers alike can use to learn writing. Bartley (2016) described that mindsets can make all the difference in a dialogic process because approaching writing as a journey can transform “student attitudes about writing, encouraging them not only to imagine themselves as agential, knowledgeable guides, but also to respect their own ideas” (p. 200). I would push this one step further to highlight that this process can also challenge ideas about writing and writing instruction that can benefit both students and teachers. Dialogism goes both ways, and we grow together through the framework. By engaging in this process, we were all forced to think differently about our practice in the writing classroom. Because of their experience working through this process, Clara and Kent now have a deeper understanding about how writing can be adapted for various contexts, and they have a stronger idea of how they can tailor their writing process so that they build on their strengths. I also benefit because I have a better understanding of how I can get students to focus less on the grade and think more about the process, which makes my own teaching more adaptable to evolve with changing contextual demands.

4.11 Conclusion

This discussion ultimately offers Writing Studies a series of key ideas for how Academic Literacies can benefit our classroom and programmatic discussions.

1. Academic Literacies, with its focused on the individual and on dialogic feedback, can push teachers and scholars to adapt with evolving classroom contexts and re-evaluate their teaching practices.
2. By re-evaluating teaching practices according to individual student experiences in writing classrooms and teacher experiences with students in writing classrooms, we can develop new methods to teach writing to larger groups of students.
3. As these methods evolve, teachers develop a wider range of pedagogical tools that can help them adapt to changing student needs by offering them more paths through which they may draw upon their previous experiences to learn writing for new contexts.
4. The more that teachers and scholars can make visible the benefits of the teaching and learning process that occurs in classrooms, particularly how the individualized approaches that Academic Literacies offers can benefit pedagogy more widely, the more language and examples we will have to show the value of our work and challenge the skills narrative.

Academic Literacies offers Writing Studies more than just a framework to focus on context and students' previous experiences. It offers a mutually-beneficial and reciprocal relationship between students and teachers. It helps students to expand their repertoire of writing skills while allowing them to inform teachers about what teaching methods are conducive to this development. It situates students less as receivers of knowledge and more as builders of knowledge. They have more of a stake in the classroom and in curriculum building for writing

pedagogy. Academic Literacies can situate teachers as reflexive practitioners who inform and are informed by students' writing experiences. Stories like the ones that Clara, Kent, and I shared show that, the more we can work with students and open dialogue, the more spaces we can open beyond what is quantifiable to show students, fellow teachers, and possibly institutions the interactional, iterative, dialogic, and connective work that occurs in Writing Studies classrooms.

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Chapter 5

5 “I Don’t Know if That Fits Inside Your Contract.” Student Insights about Contingent Labor in the Writing Classroom

5.1 Interlude

After a discussion about how Academic Literacies can help teachers enhance classroom pedagogy by focusing more on how individual students inform pedagogical practice, I now move into a more programmatic discussion about Writing Studies, students, and staffing. My conception of Academic Literacies becomes a bit broader, focusing more on the dialogic, iterative process that scaffolded writing process that is so useful for students to immerse themselves in when they’re learning new genre conventions. The paper focuses on how this process can be undermined by Writing Studies’ dependence on contingent labor. This argument stems from conversations that I had with two participants, Mark and Victor, who both challenged a model that I presented them which outlined the scaffolded writing process from a genre and dialogism perspective. Both challenged that the model was an ideal to which teachers may strive, but their personal experiences gave them reason to believe that the ideal may not be realistic in current university structures. The one reason that kept arising as we delved deeper into why they thought this was contingent labor, which is why it is the primary factor that I focus upon in the following paper.

5.2 Introduction

Writing pedagogy is often staffed by contingent faculty or graduate students. This is especially true at the first-year level (Russell, 2002). Scholars have discussed the impact that relying on contingent labor can have for program building (Bretz, 2017; Field et al., 2014), especially how contingent labor impacts writing pedagogy and program growth (Landry, 2016;

Meloncon & England, 2011; Scott, 2007). Most of these conversations consider how systemic limitations impact teaching and learning, particularly how these limitations impact the growth of Writing Studies as a discipline. While these limitations impact how writing courses are staffed and how writing programs may develop, they also impact students. Students have the most to lose by higher education's dependence on contingent labor because staffing challenges hinder the teaching practices that allow students to learn best, particularly the scaffolded and iterative writing process that is central to writing pedagogy. But students have largely been left out of discussions about contingent staffing in writing classrooms. Bringing students into this discussion and understanding how contingent labor impacts their education would be a useful addition to this conversation so that we as writing teachers and scholars can highlight, specifically, the challenges that students encounter in these environments. How students discuss their experiences in a writing classroom taught by contingent faculty can complicate discussions about contingent labor's impact on higher education and can open new avenues for discussing the importance of staffing writing courses in the modern academy.

This paper derives from a larger study where I worked with former first-year writing students from Conestoga College in Ontario, Canada to understand how they built their writing skills in COMM1085, our introductory reading and writing course. Here, I examine the experiences of two former first-year writing students (pseudonyms Mark and Victor) to critique the ways that systemic/institutional constraints produced by contingent labor in Ontario community colleges undermine the scaffolded writing processes that are crucial to student learning.

The way Mark and Victor discussed their experiences in COMM1085 prompted me as a researcher to contemplate how contingent labour can impact the consistency and quality of

instruction that occurs in classrooms with similar course structures. Although there are several factors that influence classroom pedagogy (e.g., classroom environments, student cohorts, assignment structures, personal circumstances for both teacher and students), my conversations with Mark and Victor always seemed to return to contingent labour as a catalyst that could exacerbate these factors. They both pointed to strict course and assignment guidelines that could be interpreted too literally in the classroom. They both pointed to a lack of relationship between themselves and many of their teachers, and they attributed this to teachers not having the time necessary to focus on building relationships with their students. Within these discussions about relationships and writing pedagogy, Mark and Victor highlighted consequences of contingent labour that hinder teaching and learning in the writing classroom and, more widely, that negatively impacted their experiences as post-secondary students.

5.3 Contingent Faculty and the Students They Teach

Writing scholars have long discussed contingent labor. The more institutions move away from tenure stream to alternative staffing structures (e.g., teaching stream, continuing lecturers, adjuncts), the more prominent and important these conversations become. In their introduction to the 2011 *College English* special issue, Palmquist and Doe (2011) highlighted the rapid increase of positions off tenure line. Lamos (2016) has since explored job security for teaching track faculty, arguing that changing the discourse around teaching stream work and paying more attention to the affective dimensions of this labor can increase job security “until such time that the full protections of tenure might be realized” (p. 380). Along similar lines of changing discourse to strengthen solidarity among contingent faculty, Rushing (2017) demonstrated how theories of precarity can help “cultivate spaces of security at the site of the university” (p. 77).

The impact that contingent labor has on faculty is one angle to a larger conversation about staffing in higher education. Another implication is how this labor arrangement impacts teaching. Meloncon and England (2011) acknowledged that the “institutional positions” that contingent faculty occupy could inhibit their ability to adequately prepare for class, support students beyond class times, or stay current in their fields (p. 405). Although they are speaking from a technical and professional communication perspective, their concerns apply more generally to issues that many contingent faculty face. At the 2011 Forum on the Profession, Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano acknowledged that it was unrealistic for contingent faculty to fully participate in the culture and life of a writing department (see Arnold et al., 2011, p. 410). This idea resonates with Nathalie Singh-Corcoran’s and Laura Brady’s contribution at the forum, which stipulated that programs had to establish a culture where not only full-time and part-time faculty were more collegial but also where other stakeholders, including students, were more immersed in department culture. Without immersion and without this community, student learning suffers.

The lack of relationship between faculty on different streams coincides with more limited relationships between faculty and students. It also hinders developing institutional relationships and broad oversight that could help build better programs and relationships. Scott (2007) acknowledged this, stating that “at stake with any expansion of postsecondary writing education is not only the status of writing teachers and the discipline of rhetoric and composition, but the vital relationship between the consciousness of students and the socio-material contexts of their literate development” (p. 82). Teaching and staffing challenges work their way into the classroom, and they can hinder students’ growth as writers and communicators not just in one

classroom, but more broadly in their educational and professional lives. As writing programs shift and labor becomes increasingly precarious, so do the conditions under which students learn.

These conversations that have developed about contingent faculty and Writing Studies have focused primarily on this from a programming and staffing perspective. The forum on the profession (see Arnold et al., 2011) centered primarily on staffing and programmatic development in relation to contingent faculty. Bryant's (2017) discussions about the precarity of Writing Studies, particularly in the Canadian context in which I work, focused on how teachers and scholars can enhance our disciplinary status. Similar conversations by Meloncon and England (2011) and Lamos (2016) have been directed at how contingent labor impacts teaching and the teacher's ability to teach. The conversations that they present about contingent faculty center on possible/probable impacts in the classroom.

Yet student voices remain largely absent from these discussions. This is something that Klostermann (2017) identified as a next step for Writing Studies—including more student voices to inform these larger teaching and learning conversations in an environment that often depends on precarious labour. Bringing students into this conversation can shed light on the impacts of contingent labour. Students can provide a new angle from which we can view this relationship between teachers, students, and learning to understand how these relationships manifest in the current higher education climate.

5.4 Contingent Labor and the Skills Narrative

Depending on contingent faculty to teach writing both derives from and perpetuates composition's marginal space in higher education (Skinnell, 2016) as a service-oriented pedagogy meant to correct deficits in student writing (Downs & Wardle, 2007). This marginalization often positions writing classes as one-off milestones that students take in their

first year. By situating writing pedagogy in this ephemeral context, institutions undermine the socially situated nature of writing and do not consider how writers develop over a degree or, more broadly, over a lifetime, not just during the twelve to fifteen weeks that they are in first-year writing courses.

Writing teachers and scholars are partially to blame for this marginalization. As Bazerman et al. (2017) explained, “because educators lack agreement on an integrated framework to understand lifespan development of writing abilities, high-stakes decisions about curriculum, instruction, and assessment are often made in unsystematic ways that may fail to support the development they are intended to facilitate” (p. 353). Extensive contingent labor, skills-oriented curricula, one-off workshops, and remedial writing tutoring are all consequences of what Paré (2017) argued was our inability to properly articulate the value of the work that we do as writing teachers and scholars. Lamos (2016) echoed these issues, asserting that higher education’s current neoliberal climate, which standardizes curricula around skills and outcomes, undermines how contingent faculty can create and capitalize on unique spaces in their teaching.

These challenges have produced a writing as skill narrative. Rather than considering how “students borrow words, ideas, practices, and voices from previous texts, they use them in their own way to accomplish their own goals, whether those goals are personal, social, or academic” (Wynhoff Olsen et al., 2018, pp. 61-62) or that “possibilities for selfhood that are socially available in any social space will transcend the act of writing, being in circulation both before and after it, and are likely to change over time” (Burgess & Ivanic, 2010, p. 283), this skills narrative reduces learning to a transactional and temporal event in students’ wider education. The consequences of this narrative can hinder wider institutional goals. As Bryant (2017) argued, this narrative can often place teachers and writing practitioners at odds with administrators.

Klostermann (2017), echoing Bryant, highlighted that “writing and writing instruction are social and institutional practices – not particular skills or strategies that can be mastered once and for all” (p. 20), but relying on this skill narrative undermines the wider institutional and social practices that impact student learning.

5.5 Contingent Labor in Canadian Writing Studies

Issues of Writing Studies’ status, staffing, and the narratives that hinder our work are particularly prominent in the Canadian context of this study. Canadian Writing Studies/composition has long lacked programmatic and disciplinary status (Clary-Lemon, 2009), making it difficult for scholars to form communities, discuss writing pedagogy, and advocate for increased recognition and funding. Although Canadian Writing Studies is slowly emerging (Landry, 2016; Mueller et al., 2017), Landry’s (2016) participants revealed that labor is still precarious, with limited full-time faculty teaching introductory writing courses. Like the United States, many Canadian writing programs/English departments rely on contingent labor and graduate students to teach first-year writing.

Conestoga College, where Mark and Victor took my first-year writing course—COMM1085—faced these challenges. COMM1085 was designed to consolidate writing pedagogy and to establish common objectives that would prepare students to read and write at the post-secondary level. Writing pedagogy, particularly COMM1085, is best described as a service-oriented component of students’ education, ensuring that they receive grammatical support, writing skills, critical reading skills, research skills, library skills, citation skills, and review skills. The course, which is taught largely by contingent faculty (myself included), is designed to teach students numerous “skills” and, although they are not framed as such, it is easy to see how much the college responds to parameters outlined by the Ontario Ministry of

Training, Colleges and Universities (2018), such as employment rates, student/graduate satisfaction, and employer satisfaction. These parameters offer a baseline for understanding the college system on a macro-level. They also contribute to a writing as skill narrative that pervades COMM1085, the Faculty of Communications, and the Conestoga College more widely. This skills narrative, as Mark's and Victor's narratives will highlight, often undermine the very pedagogical practices that will maximize the college's ability to meet Ministry parameters.

5.6 Critical Narrative Inquiry

As a contingent faculty member and PhD student in Writing Studies, I was curious about how my students at Conestoga College were impacted by these wider skill-building narratives and the prominence of contingent labor. These were two facets of a larger project where I tried to understand their experiences building knowledge in the writing classroom. To scrutinize these experiences, I turned to critical narrative inquiry.

Critical Narrative Inquiry (CNI) allowed me to explore narratives from ten of my former students, juxtaposing their experiences and reflections with my own experience as contingent faculty at Conestoga. Narratives are central to writing research. They are often used as primary ways to communicate qualitative results stemming from classroom practice and experience. However, narratives should not be considered a form of absolute meaning. Ingraham (2017) discussed how using personal narratives in writing scholarship can be limiting semantically if they are viewed as truth in themselves. Juzwik (2010) cautioned that, although narratives are important for how people make sense of the world, they also “involve reducing experience” (p. 377) and researchers must avoid inadvertently letting a narrative stand as a holistic representation of a situation or context. Given the prominence of personal narratives in writing

research, Journet (2012) asserted that it is crucial for researchers to scrutinize the validity of these narratives and their role in writing research and pedagogy.

CNI allowed me to work deeply with my participants and navigate these pitfalls of personal narratives. Over six months, my participants and I built upon a four-month relationship that we had already established when we were in COMM1085 together the previous year. Through two one-hour interviews, an afternoon focus group, and short online dialogues, we scrutinized their experiences as students and we reflected on their roles as knowledge builders in the writing classroom. Using CNI allowed me to explore how narratives of student experience could help scrutinize classroom pedagogy and programmatic curriculum for COMM1085. Mark and Victor were not simply participants who told their stories that I interpreted; Mark and Victor were co-constructors of knowledge who contributed to discussions about my teaching, program design, and pedagogical change.

CNI situated participants and myself as co-constructors of knowledge. I, as a researcher and teacher, had expert knowledge about Writing Studies pedagogy. They, as former students, could reflect on the course and provide insight about how programmatic/institutional curricular initiatives were actualized in the classroom. Both the participants and I contributed expert knowledge from a social perspective that we could not access individually. This rendered our relationship reciprocal and facilitated our roles as co-constructors of knowledge. Narrative, in this sense, situated us in “relational participation” (Gergen & Gergen, p. 380). Working as co-constructors allowed us to rethink “the boundaries and barriers that permeate the master narrative of research and function” (Hendry, 2010, p. 73) and push against our own experiences to understand what this meant for pedagogy.

To ensure narrative trustworthiness (Loh, 2013), participants had multiple opportunities to provide feedback on the research process. After our initial interview, participants were given the transcripts to member check. To offer more opportunities for the participants and I to collaborate, I designed a preliminary narrative for each participant's initial interview. This narrative was designed according to the three-dimensional narrative structure outlined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), which organizes participant experiences by looking forward at their future aspirations, backward at their previous experiences, inward at their beliefs, and outward at the environmental/circumstantial conditions that influenced their experiences. At the second interview, each participant and I worked through the narrative to scrutinize what should be changed to reflect their ever-changing interpretation of their COMM1085 experience. Going through this process allowed me to go beyond member checking (Harvey, 2015) and scrutinize my own research process. It also allowed them as participants to have more control over how their experiences were interpreted.

5.7 Mark and Victor

Mark's and Victor's narratives reflected their vastly different experiences with writing before COMM1085. Mark was returning to school after three years working in technical support. He completed a previous college program where he took two introductory writing courses. He believes his writing ability stems from a high school teacher who made him understand the value of applying more effort to his writing. Mark explains that it was "eye-opening that what I am writing can mean more than just answering a question. And I think that made more of a difference than anything is like I should be putting extra effort to make what I'm writing enjoyable to read." He carried this positive experience into his college writing classes where he

transitioned from a five paragraph model to writing for more contextually-situated purposes and audiences.

Mark already knew the essentials of COMM1085, but he was still interested in the content because he had “always had an interest in writing and, you know, writing is the one thing for me where I can get a really critical piece of feedback...and just want to do better.” Through his school and work experiences, Mark has come to see writing as an essential part of both his education and his professional life. For him, “whatever I’m going to do is going to include some writing, so I had better be good at it.” Since COMM1085 was “a bit of a refresher,” he had a unique perspective on the course because he also perceived how the writing was taught.

He also had unique insight on higher education. At his previous institution, he experienced three strikes “that totalled 6 weeks...over the two years” he was in college. At Conestoga, we had a six week strike that interrupted his section of COMM1085. Over his academic career (from elementary school through two college programs), he experienced six faculty strikes. He often referred to these strikes in relation to labour issues and the “time crunch” associated with catching up on material. The impact of these labour issues on his education has given him a negative view of how academic institutions are staffed. As such, he is very critical about the institutions, contingent labor, as well as teaching and learning in these environments.

Victor is an international student from India. At his high school, he slowly honed English writing and language to the point where he excelled in the classroom. He credits this success to the positive relationship that he developed with his teachers who encouraged subjectivity and interpretation. He explains how he was “privileged enough to have [the] kinds of teachers” who gave him confidence in his ability to develop his English language skills. He explains that

struggled to learn English initially, but the teachers helped him “learn the language and they helped me learn as a person.” He learned to see writing as something deeply personal. For Victor, “how you write as a person” was extremely important to developing language skills.

Over time, he contributed to the editorial team for his high school’s English magazine. He acted as a mentor and developed friendships with other members of his writing community. He explains how he enjoyed reading submissions because they seemed “deeply touching and maybe deeply important and deeply personal” for the writer and for him as a reader. Writing was a way for students to share and learn from collective experiences, opening Victor “to things that [he] probably wouldn’t have known” otherwise.

Victor seemed surrounded by a supportive environment in which he could share his ideas and develop his English. This experience shaped his view of teaching and learning English as something that was relationship driven and that connected the people (students, peers, teachers) involved in the process. His transition to COMM1085 was smooth because the scaffolded writing assignments allowed him to develop this process. Victor emphasizes how the course structure and the teaching approach was “similar to school [high school] and I like that” because it allowed students “to build on our own ideas and guide us from there. Like be your own self, be your own author.” The process allowed Victor to build a relationship between his ideas and me as a teacher, focusing on new structures while also developing his own voice within those parameters.

5.8 Understanding Scaffolded Writing

The importance of scaffolded writing was a common thread through the first interviews. Every participant focused on the scaffolded final writing project as their core learning instrument for the course. COMM1085 has a capstone project where students work with the same subject

for numerous weeks. They write a proposal and receive feedback, they implement that feedback as they build an outline, they participate in peer review, and then they submit the final paper. Theoretically, the project checks all of the boxes that White (2006) outlined as crucial elements to student writing development: “writing on a topic of interest to them, after some reading and reflection, with some time for feedback and revision, for an audience of peers and professors with some genuine interest in what the writer has to say” (p. 247). Participants all suggested that working through writing using this process facilitated their learning and it removed emphasis from the grade and placed it on developing ideas and thinking critically. One participant, John, explained it best: “when you got to the final paper, it’s like yes I have an idea I really like and I’ve explored a bit in my proposal and outline, the professor’s on board. We have our sources we’ve got everything together. All we need to do is mix it together.” The final submission built upon their previous work. John’s comments suggest that this model does not leave the student to their own interpretations of assignment parameters; it is a collaborative and iterative process. The previous stages establish a foundation for ongoing dialogue that allows students to develop their ideas and adjust to new writing genres gradually.

In the second interviews and during a focus group, I asked participants to discuss how this scaffolded assignment helped them to grow as writers. We discussed the process that they undertook and which aspects of that process helped their writing the most. As a baseline, I drew upon a model (Figure 3) developed by English (2011), which was inspired by parameters outlined by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001). Kress and Van Leeuwen presented this model to understand the design and redesign process as part of multimodality, and English used the model for genre theory to understand what happened between designing and producing a paper.

Design	Redesign	Production	Distribution
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What the teacher wants/envisages/desires—and why	How the student understands and (re)interprets—and why	What the student produces—how and why	How the produce is ‘delivered’ and ‘received’ and what is done next
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Figure 3. Scaffolded writing model (English, 2011)

This model provided a platform to discuss their experience with scaffolded writing in COMM1085. It allowed us to concentrate not on the essay genre itself or its effects but rather, as English (2011) articulated, on how knowledge was produced. We could complicate our initial discussions about the scaffolded project being a primary learning tool to understand what made it a primary learning tool. In the focus group, we explored nuances of what happened between students’ initial approach to their topic and their final submission. The model that the participants described is highlighted in Figure 4.

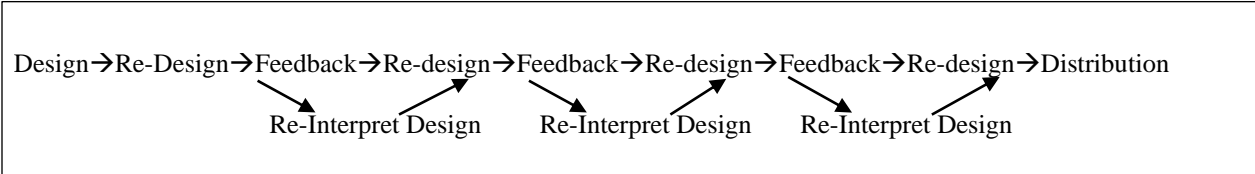


Figure 4. Participants redesign the model

Students complicated the model for our context, highlighting the iterative process that they engaged with in COMM1085. They noted the chance that they had to receive feedback and re-interpret their original design multiple times. Each time, they achieved new depths and refined their thinking. Scaffolding allowed students to step away from the transactional nature of grades to focus on their growth as writers, how they adapt to their genre, and how they explored/narrowed/articulated their ideas.

5.9 Divergent Thinking: Mark and Victor

Mark and Victor disagreed. Like John, they appreciated the collaborative and iterative writing process. But both students had wider experiences that made them skeptical about whether the model was too idealized and whether this was really what happened in many writing classrooms.

5.10 Mark: “I Don’t Know if That Fits Inside Your Contract”

Mark had previously experienced scaffolded processes that work well for his learning. The problem, he explained, is that iteration is not always structured as a mandatory part of the writing process:

Not to say that that isn’t available in today’s classroom. Like when you give an assignment, if I wasn’t doing it the night before, I would be able to email you and ask.

But it’s not built into the inherent process, so it’s not almost forced upon something.

The process and framework exist, but it often favours students who seek feedback rather than making it a crucial part of any classroom dynamic between students and teachers. In many scenarios, if students do not seek feedback, or if instructors do not implement the process so that students can engage fully in all stages, then the system falls apart.

Mark appreciated the scaffolded model, but he argued that it had one fundamental flaw: “The only issue that you’ll run into there is *your* time.” This comment made me question the model that was getting such positive discussion from other participants. It made me as a researcher and teacher reflect on how I may take for granted the fact that I believe iteration and scaffolding are essential to writing pedagogy. It made me ask: how realistic is this model in practice given the way post-secondary programs are constructed and funded today?

Mark pinpointed institutional approaches to education, particularly depending on contingent faculty, as the culprits who undermined this model. The following exchange accentuates the challenges that Mark saw:

Mark: And especially on contract, it's going to be tough. You only get x amount of hours to do stuff. So ideally that [second model] makes more sense. Doing that for, what's your average class size, 20?

Chris: 20-25 yeah.

Mark: Yeah. Doing that for 3 classes of 25 or however many classes you have, I don't know if that fits inside your contract.

Mark's comments highlight that students may also recognize that the scaffolded writing approach, an ideal to which teachers may strive, may not be realistic in a teaching environment that relies on contingent labor. Time constraints make it unrealistic to implement this model. COMM1085 classes are large and faculty teach three or four classes per semester. As Mark highlights, it is implausible that faculty can consistently dedicate the time and energy to actualizing the ideal scaffolded process.

5.11 From Scaffolded Process to Transaction

The problem is amplified with contingent faculty because time is limited. It can create a cycle that undermines the writing process:

The same way where if I'm not putting in the effort, you're not going to put in the extra hours afterwards to give me feedback, right? So if I'm not coming to class and shit's getting submitted late, how can I possibly expect you to put in the extra effort? If things aren't graded, I'm going to focus my efforts in another class.

Classroom curriculum becomes more fragmented since the relationship between faculty and students breaks down. When this relationship is not at its strongest, it becomes easy for both students and teachers to concentrate on deadlines. Rather than iteration and process, teaching and learning becomes transactional. The ideal scaffolded process that should help students develop their writing becomes reduced to a design, re-design, and submit process that allows less time for reflection, iteration, and dialogue.

The disintegration of the iterative process is connected to both sides taking short-cuts through the stages. It is easy to assign blame through this process, but the reality is that both sides can justify taking short-cuts. Faculty, particularly contingent faculty, can cite time constraints, a lack of job security, other professional ventures, and lack of pay as reasons that they cannot dedicate time to the scaffolded process. In turn, students can argue that the course is not part of their discipline, they do not perceive a lot of engagement from the instructor, and the feedback does not really help them to build from one stage to the next.

5.12 Checking Out

More is affected in this scenario than just the classroom curriculum. Curriculum theorists have long demonstrated that the classroom curriculum is connected to wider programmatic curricula like course objectives, syllabi, and instructional approach. These programmatic parameters derive from and respond to wider institutional curricular initiatives that can relate to numerous factors, such as funding, political atmosphere, public pressure/discourse, and enrollment trends. Cornbleth (2008) described this as an “echo effect” (p. 2150) wherein curriculum responds to larger social and institutional demands, becoming re-interpreted by each successive level of curriculum, be it the institutional curriculum, a programmatic curriculum, or the classroom curriculum that is enacted through the relationship between teachers and students.

But this connection can also work in the reverse: a breakdown on the classroom level hinders departmental/faculty programmatic approaches, and this disconnect and inability to effectively implement programmatic and classroom initiatives undermines institutional goals.

Mark's reflections of COMM1085 show this breakdown. He is dedicated to his education and believes that a scaffolded writing process is the best way to teach the core concepts that students require for both school and the life beyond academe. But he also does not believe that this is plausible with the way the institution is constructed currently. He admits to "checking out" by the time the final paper came around, and he explains that many of his classmates did as well because their disciplinary courses demanded so much of their time. If students and teachers "check out," the implications are graver than just the classroom context. Since curriculum helps to construct community (Franklin, 2015), a breakdown in the curricular practices that are most conducive to students learning, such as the scaffolded writing process, result in a wider communal breakdown.

5.13 Victor: "I Didn't Get Anything"

Victor had a positive experience in COMM1085 because it coincided with the more individualized writing instruction from his high school, but he was more cynical when he discussed a writing course he took after COMM1085. Victor questioned why paper writing criterion were so rigid in this other class. He did not understand why the instructor seemed to follow the guidelines absolutely and assumed that the guidelines outlined in rubrics or assignment descriptions were sufficient to explain project nuances to students. He questioned:

Is it because the college is forcing teachers to go a certain way and they're tying their hands and telling them this is how you grade and that's it? We don't want you, we don't expect you to do anything else. And that's it. Maybe it's the college or maybe it's just the

teachers who, that even if they have the option they think it's too much work for them because they think it's harder to grade. I don't know.

Victor surmised that his struggles derived from larger systemic issues where instructors implemented programmatic guidelines too literally and did not leave room for the relationships that were fundamental to his learning. The iterative process broke down as a result. Even as he contemplated whether the issues come from individual teachers and their pedagogical approaches, he alludes to time and workload being the primary factors in this debate. Even for someone who was not aware of how much post-secondary institutions depend on contingent faculty, labor dominates the discourse and plays a primary role in writing pedagogy conversations.

Victor's journey showed how this process can work to the student's advantage in one class and how it can disintegrate in another class within the same department. The result was not just a more fraught relationship with Writing Studies but also with how institutions implement programs and support students. As his previous comments established, Victor thrived in a relationship oriented environment that encouraged communication between the student and teacher. He learned best when he could implement subjective ideas and receive feedback to refine those ideas in the specific genres in which he was writing (e.g., a technical report, a story, a research paper). This allowed him to thrive in high school, and it benefitted his learning in COMM1085.

Victor often discussed how he did not feel the course structure and culture of his second writing course provided him with the support that he required. Numerous times throughout our interviews, Victor returned to how difficult his second writing class was:

It's just: here this is what is expected of you, this is how you write a report, that's an example. I'm not going to tell you anything about writing a report. You just have to go figure it out yourself and we're going to grade you on it, so...good luck!

It would be easy to dismiss this comment as just a bad experience, but Victor is tracing curricular patterns that impacted his learning. He emphasized a focus on the design process, that initial assignment and the parameters. He points to an example of how to redesign the project, but what he lacked was an explanation of the genre conventions that would enable him to redesign the project according to his own learning process. What seems to break down in this scenario is the iterative feedback and redesign process. Instead, the model that this class employed was more transactional: there is a design, the student redesigns according to a model, and there is a submission for a final grade.

Victor's learning experience also became transactional. He asserts that he struggled both academically and personally under this model.

So not just mentally and academically—it was bad on both parts. It's not only that my marks went down. It's that I wasn't really interested and I didn't want to excel at it because I didn't get anything. It was like: how do I go about it? It's not just academic...it's not just the academic part, but it's like I don't want to do this anymore... And you're graded on something that we assume that you know how to write about. If you're not, you don't get good marks. You don't get a second run.

Similar to Mark "checking out," Victor's effort waned as the project became more obscure and he felt like he was guessing. There was no opportunity for a "second run" to improve the grade or build upon feedback. Victor felt like the course privileged those who could interpret the instructions properly rather than the instructions acting as a pathway to discussion. From here,

Victor became confused, he tried less, his grades dropped, and his motivation dropped further in turn.

5.14 It's Not All About the Grade

It is true that we do not know the other teacher's pedagogical approach. It is possible that Victor struggled because he gave up when the grades did reflect what he anticipated. Victor may not have adjusted sufficiently to a different model of writing pedagogy that did not accommodate his subjectivity and provide him with a version of feedback that he had come to expect from writing classes. This teacher may have provided feedback and guidance. Victor's comments do not indicate that the course pedagogy was poor or that the teacher was inadequate.

But these possibilities do not mean that we can dismiss Victor's comments. Victor excelled in writing both in high school and COMM1085. He was an engaged and methodical student who embraced feedback. He wrote in many genres both for class and for the student magazine. He was a peer mentor in high school. It is notable that this normally dedicated student noticed a different learning environment in a writing class and believed that it negatively impacted his learning. These possibilities are worth exploring more deeply to understand what Victor perceived as different in this new environment in which he was less successful.

Victor asserts that the decreased grade was not the primary issue—it was a symptom of a larger issue where the writing process was diminished and learning was hindered. He questioned the value of writing pedagogy. As the semester progressed, Victor wondered what the point of attending classes was.

There was a point where I thought even if I am attending classes, is this really helping me because even after the classes I'm still guessing. I did ask a lot of questions and I tried my best to not have a communication gap, but after a certain point I'm going—yeah it's

not really helping me. Because maybe it's their style of teaching, I don't know, but I just thought that what the college or the board wanted of them, they just reflected that. It wasn't...I didn't see the teacher. I just saw the notes from the PowerPoint.

Victor never felt that he formed a relationship with the teacher. The communal aspect of the writing process that brought him success in other writing classes did not develop, and he argues that the environment may have met learning objectives but, for him, it did not encourage iteration. As a result, the course did not provide Victor with the co-constructed knowledge that can derive from a robust scaffolded writing process predicated on dialogue and feedback.

The relationship breakdown was also partially a programmatic and institutional issue. Victor's comments about not seeing the teacher suggest that the interactive classroom dimension was missing. Victor perceived a more rigid "skill building" and learning objective-oriented approach mandated by the college. For Victor, guidelines for the assignment and for the class came from wider institutional and programmatic curricular demands that limited the course structure and did not leave sufficient space for teacher and student agency. A lack of agency prevents teachers from building community with students and using this community to help students develop their writing.

5.15 Looking Inward

Mark's and Victor's comments prompted me to reflect on my own position as a contingent faculty member who has engaged students in research to improve teaching practice. I was part of the same faculty strike that interrupted Mark's COMM1085 semester. When the strike ended, the new agreement required that the college re-calculate faculty pay levels. The calculation did not allow people to "double count" experiences. This meant that people going to school and working jobs simultaneously (as I have) can count only one of them as experience.

This meant that people with multiple jobs, as many contingent faculty do (including myself), could count only one as experience.

I ended up at step five, the lowest step that exists on the pay scale. I ended up at step five, despite having worked at the college for three years previously and despite my previous writing centre work. I ended up at step five, despite doing a doctorate in Writing Studies and implementing emerging research in my classrooms. My chair fought for me and they bumped me up to step six, but this experience produced a litany of emotions that persist today.

How have these struggles impacted my teaching? How many times, on the worst days where I felt undervalued, have I taken a shortcut to answer a student question or pushed them aside inadvertently? Did students notice? Or is my acting good enough to mask my deficiencies? Either way, my students may not have received my best. How often have I recycled material that I knew needed modifications because I did not have time? How frequently has my mind wandered in class and thought of other professional/business ventures that I have undertaken to help pay bills? How many times have I foregone professional development activities, faculty meetings where—with my expertise—I could contribute to program building, or engage with my colleagues from whom I could learn immensely?

And I am dedicated to my job. I dedicated a PhD to improving my practice and exploring ways to enhance teaching and curriculum practices more widely. My teaching evaluations are strong. I have done research with my former students. I have bought into this career and I am eager to learn more so that I can help people maximize their abilities as writers and lifelong learners. If I have all these negative emotions, feelings, and situations that impact my teaching, how do other contingent faculty react when they are not as enthusiastic about Writing Studies? How does it impact their teaching?

What helped my own thinking was Victor turning the tables on me as an interviewer. I had to think through these issues impromptu. As we discussed skills-oriented pedagogy, he asked:

Why do you think this is? Is it because the college is forcing teachers to go a certain way and they're tying their hands and telling them this is how you grade and that's it?...

Maybe it's the college or maybe it's just the teachers who, that even if they have the option, they think it's too much work for them because they think it's harder to grade.

Victor pushed me to consider teacher motivation and college motivation in a way that I had never considered before. Much of his question focuses on stakeholder's intentions as part of curriculum making at all three level of curriculum. My answer focused on circumstance. I answered that it was, in part,

because there's so many prescribed outcomes. We're seeing college and university life almost as...a breeding ground for the workforce. It's like "you're here, and we need to get you there" which is partially the goal. I get that. But all of a sudden, there are structures. They are trying to prescribe everything so that everyone gets the same education and standards are upheld across the board. They're upholding standards.

In hindsight, I would clarify the component of the "breeding ground for the workforce" to acknowledge less about the workforce and more the demand for quantifiable, objective skills that teachers, programs, and colleges are using to reflect Ministry (2018) standards. These structures are designed as broad parameters and they can provide excellent guidelines, but they can also undermine the learning process if they are interpreted rigidly.

The second component of my answer focused on staff. One of the first places my mind went in relation to how these standards get interpreted rigidly was through the staffing realities of these courses.

The other thing is that they don't necessarily have the staff. They do not have the staff because they're not paying [many] full-time people. People can't commit to you. You have people on contract after contract. Sometimes people will teach in the first semester, the fall, and then there's no work in the winter and summer. So year over year you're not going to get the same staff. You hope that you're getting staff who are willing to come back.

Staff instability makes it difficult to build programs. If there is little commitment from institutions, there is little commitment from contingent faculty. If teachers are hired without a strong background in what they teach, it is logical that they would rely more on outcomes. If teachers do not have time to create strong lesson plans, it is logical that they would aim to meet objectives rather than engage in the more complex, iterative, time-consuming writing processes that are most conducive to student learning. This situation is less about people/institutional intentions: it is about the programmatic structures and staffing realities of modern postsecondary institutions and how all curricular parties accommodate these challenges.

5.16 Discussion and Conclusions

Narratives from two students and one teacher in one Canadian context are only one piece of a larger disciplinary puzzle that resonates across North American Writing Studies. How can other student experiences help writing scholars and teachers make visible patterns between staffing and classroom challenges and wider institutional goals? How can these patterns be used to advocate for institutional change?

Many of the conversations about contingent labour in Writing Studies have concentrated on how job security may be improved and how a lack of job security could hinder writing pedagogy (Lamos, 2016; Meloncon & England, 2011; Rushing, 2017). One prominent position is that contingent faculty cannot participate fully in the culture of a department (Arnold et al., 2011) or program because of the lack of job security and all that it entails for personal and professional lives (e.g., demands on time, second jobs, course load, morale). What my conversations with Mark and Victor highlight is that these factors can also inhibit students from fully participating in their learning and in their relationship with the teacher. Although there are many factors that can lead to a fractured relationship in the classroom, contingent labour can catalyze many of them.

In an outcomes-based environment, it is important to scrutinize how contingent labour impacts staffing or program building. To advocate for increased security, it is equally important to show how these work conditions impact course and programmatic outcomes. Bryant (2017) called for ways to move beyond a limiting skills narrative that can enhance the disciplinary status of Writing Studies. One way to accomplish this is to include students in conversations about writing pedagogy because they can show contexts where “skilling” simply is not enough. Pointing to situations like the ones that Mark, Victor, and even I (as a teacher reflecting on the profession) can show that teaching and learning in the writing classroom is hindered when it is reduced to being a set of writing skills provided by a teacher and received by a student.

To achieve the outcomes and skill building that institutions, governments, and even us teachers desire, writing pedagogy cannot be transactional. Student narratives can help us to critique the transactional pedagogy that can derive from precarious labor conditions. Comments from top students like Mark and Victor who feel like they want to “check out” of our classrooms

say something about the current state of institutional relationships with teachers and students. When Victor says that he “didn’t see the teacher,” it indicates that teachers and students in that environment are not co-constructors of knowledge, as we have long believed was best practice in writing pedagogy. When Mark asks whether that “fits inside your contract” as we discuss a model for how writing pedagogy can be enhanced, it shows that current labor structures can undermine the very practices that make writing pedagogy successful.

Mark’s and Victor’s narratives reveal another crucial component to the scaffolded writing project: relationships. Although it is an intangible element of the process, the relationship between teacher and student is vital to forming the dialogic feedback process that allows students to grow as writers and become more dexterous writers across numerous genre contexts. Simply adding a scaffolded writing project with many chances for feedback is only part of the discussion. It can help students develop their writing skills, but to maximize the model, writing pedagogy must move beyond the process as it is outlined. What is required is that the teacher and students form a relationship that allows feedback that can open new dialogue. The model outlined by English (2011) and the model that my participants expanded may serve as baselines for understanding feedback and iteration, but without the space and time to engage in dialogue and build upon this feedback—to go beyond the feedback provided on the page—then the iterative process can accomplish only so much. To do this, faculty and students must be placed in a position to build their relationship and work through the process.

This has implications for Writing Studies more broadly. Contingent labour is a reality in the profession (Russell, 2002; Skinnell, 2016). Although there are increasingly more teaching stream positions that exist off the tenure-track today that could offer more stability for instructors long-term (albeit that is not a guarantee), the current emphasis on budgets and cost-

consciousness in post-secondary environments today means that contingent faculty will continue to be relied upon, especially in large first-year writing initiatives like COMM1085.

This means that, to advocate for improved work conditions, teachers and scholars could benefit from more student voices. By drawing stronger links between faculty job status and student learning, we may be able to develop new dialogic positions that reinforce our advocacy. By pointing to situations where students like Mark and Victor recognize that institutional structures limit their education and how their education is limited, then we can establish clearer links between programmatic staffing and classroom pedagogy. These connections can put us in a better position to push for increased resources and to emphasize the time and relationships necessary for writing faculty—contingent or otherwise—to do their jobs well. The more links between student learning and classroom pedagogy that we teachers and scholars can make, the stronger our arguments for increased professional development, better pay, more time to emphasize feedback, and for increased job security will become.

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Chapter 6

6 What Can Students Tell Us about “Skill Building” in Canadian Writing Studies?

6.1 Interlude

The final paper in this dissertation zooms out to look at Canadian Writing Studies more generally. As a Canadian Writing Studies researcher and teacher who is entering this emergent field, I couldn't help but reflect on my conversations with this as a lens. I have been steeped in the literature, the conversations, and the ideas that Canadian Writing Studies scholars have put forth, and I am joining these circles with my research. As such, I felt it pertinent to write about the lessons that I was learning from my participants and how they informed this context.

This final paper pulls together the most prominent thematic ideas that emerged during my discussions and collaborations with my participants. It is intended for publication in the Canadian Journal for Studies in Discourse and Writing. The paper reflects upon what these ideas can tell us about Writing Studies. The big idea that emerged as the participants and I worked together was the tension between the way they described process and skill building in COMM1085. They emphasized that process and scaffolding were integral to their learning, but they equally emphasized the one-off, skills-oriented components of the course. Much of the conversations in Canadian Writing Studies contexts have focused on dismantling or resisting the skills narrative, but the tension in the participants' responses prompted me to think about this differently. The paper explores the tension between skills and process to argue that perhaps skill building has its place in our contexts, and that we as writing teachers and scholars must think about it differently in order to articulate the value of the work that we do. If we can use the skills-oriented components of our courses to open spaces to discuss the less quantifiable

elements of our work that often get overlooked (i.e., scaffolding), then we may put ourselves in a better position to advocate for increased resources and funding.

6.2 Introduction

The writing as a skill narrative permeates many post-secondary institutions, and it is increasingly prominent in conversations about Canadian Writing Studies. Most of us working in the field have encountered the notion that writing is a skill that can be learned once and for all, which is a common narrative that affects institutional and administrative decisions about writing initiatives and programming. Recent discussions in the Canadian Writing Studies community have challenged this narrative, with calls ranging from increased emphasis on writing as a social process, to questions about how we may disrupt the skills narrative, and even for research that helps dismantle the narrative altogether. But instead of dismantling the skills narrative, it could be more prudent to use it to advocate for the less quantifiable elements of the work that we do. By showing how we writing teachers and scholars can help students develop their writing “skills,” we might open space for discussions about the importance of process and iteration in the writing classroom. If we can open more of these spaces, then we will be in a better position to show administrators the value of the work that we do, how we do it, and how it impacts our students.

This argument derives from research that I conducted with ten former students about their experiences with writing in our first-year writing course at Conestoga College. During our discussions, we experienced conflicting narratives about the value of the writing instruction and how students learned best in the classroom. One of these narratives was that participants emphasized how much they learned through our scaffolded research paper because of the opportunity to receive feedback and integrate it in subsequent drafts of their work; they could

experiment in a low-stakes environment and engage in an iterative feedback process. But many participants also highlighted how the smaller skill-building units often helped their understanding of the larger writing processes that they engaged in throughout the class and beyond. This paper will interrogate these seemingly conflicting narratives and explore how we in the Writing Studies community might make sense of these narratives to enhance our positions within post-secondary institutions.

6.3 The Skills Narrative in Canada

The consequences of the skills narrative for Canadian Writing Studies has been a major conversation topic in recent years. Many discussions scrutinize how, as a Writing Studies community, we have contributed to the marginalization of Writing Studies in our institutions by accommodating administrative desires for “quick fix” workshops, one-off writing camps and courses, and singular classroom presentations. While these initiatives have their merits, Giltrow (2016) has discussed how they work against our attempts to establish disciplinary status within institutions because they adhere to an overarching skill-building narrative (Bryant, 2017) that contradicts the process-oriented and socially-situated complexity of writing and writing pedagogy. Paré (2017) argued that “we in Canada have, by and large, failed to convince university administrators and colleagues in the disciplines of the essential value of our work, and we need to ask ourselves why that is so” (p. 2). He called for arguments which draw upon both research and practice to support our claims about writing as well as supporting “claims for the efficacy of our teaching and tutoring with evidence that will sway budget-conscious administrators and dismissive colleagues” (p. 6). The skills narrative hinders pedagogy and student growth. It seems that it is also a central factor in Writing Studies’ status (or lack thereof) in Canadian post-secondary institutions. To benefit from the little funding and opportunities that

we have, such as teaching first-year writing classes or running one-off workshops, those working in Writing Studies must adhere to the skills-oriented agendas that allow this funding to exist. The more that Writing Studies teachers adhere to the narrative, however, the more engrained it becomes in our institutions.

It seems like an impossible situation: the “skilling” mindset that opens spaces for writing pedagogy simultaneously hinders this pedagogy from taking root in the way that best practices (such as process, context, and iteration) require. The impact of this tension is best explained in Landry (2016), whose respondents indicated that “institutions want students to write effectively, but they do not want to support ‘the teaching and research that would ensure this.’ If writing instruction is perceived as a quick fix, if it is decontextualized and not informed by research, then it will continue to be ineffective” (p. 216). The skills narrative promotes a desire for quick fix writing approaches that cannot accomplish the transformation in mindset that is required for students to develop writing strategies that will work long-term.

In this sense, it is logical that we seek ways to resist the skills narrative and advocate for better resources, better funding, and better opportunities that will allow us to move beyond skills. Bryant (2017) established a series of questions aimed to promote research that may overcome the skills narrative, asserting that “we as a research community [must] engage in empirical work that can begin to interrupt this dominant narrative of writing that permeates so many corners of the university context” (p. 16). Echoing Bryant and Graves (1994), Klostermann (2017) argued that we must a move away from the idea of writing as something that can be learned once and for all. Both Bryant and Klostermann promote a shift towards writing pedagogy that focuses on writing as a socially situated process, which is supported by a wide array of Writing Studies literature (e.g., Badenhorst et al., 2015; Paré, 2009; White, 2006).

6.4 Is Resistance Futile?

It is unclear how this dismantling of the skills narrative can be accomplished or how meaningful change may occur. The desire exists among teachers and scholars who understand the benefits of process and iteration. The challenge is that the skills narrative has long been entrenched in post-secondary institutions, especially when it comes to writing pedagogy. As much as writing as a social process has deep roots in the literature, it has not taken hold in wider institutional or administrative circles, where budgets and funding are often linked to the tangible “skill-building” that occurs through writing instruction. Despite our knowledge of genre as rhetorical and social action (Freedman, 1994; Miller, 1984; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011), the skill narrative still dominates. Seeing writing as a social practice may have “thoroughly challenged this view of the writer and writing” (Bawarshi, 2003, p. 5) by emphasizing less about writer cognition and more about the social actions writers engage in when they write, but this knowledge has been primarily limited to the genre and Writing Studies scholarly/pedagogical communities. These ideas may benefit our teaching and pedagogy, but they have not really improved our position within academic institutions. Here, we remain largely marginalized.

A broader look at the skills narrative in wider literacy research shows similar trends. For example, Barton and Hamilton (2012) advocated for a view of literacy as a socially-situated practice and use this lens to great effect in their scholarship. Yet frameworks like Academic Literacies (Lea, 2004; Lillis, Harrington, Lea, & Mitchell, 2015; Lillis & Scott, 2007) have long advocated for this socially-situated approach. These authors promote teaching and scholarship that prioritizes building on the wider social experiences that students have had and using these experiences to enhance their writing and literacy development. The framework is designed to resist the study skills model (Lea & Street, 2006, 1998; Paxton & Frith, 2014). Yet it has not taken hold beyond individualized contexts (Wingate, 2012), which is part of the reason that the

study skills model still proliferates writing and literacy at the institutional and administrative level; often, research says one thing, and implementation does another.

There is also the irony that Writing Studies benefits from the skills narrative. Although I have already touched upon this briefly, it is worth exploring this irony more deeply to show how difficult it is for us to dismantle the skills narrative. As historical studies by Russell (2002) and Skinnell (2016) have shown, institutions have often turned to composition/writing pedagogy to attract more funding and to respond to public narratives for improved literacy skills. These appeals usually follow changes to the number of people pursuing post-secondary studies (such as when Baby Boomers entered post-secondary studies) and in situations where government funds promoted initiatives to increase literacy (such as the G.I. Bill in America did following WWII). Institutions also used composition to earn accreditation. As both Russell and Skinnell demonstrated, institutions like Harvard and the University of Kansas used composition as a primary pillar to gain university status back when they were designated colleges. If they could show that they were teaching students vital writing and literacy skills, they could enhance their case for increased funding and status. As the demand for better writing and literacy skills increases, so too does the funding available for writing programming.

6.5 Turning Challenge into Opportunity

Writing Studies and the skills narrative are closely related, which makes dismantling the narrative difficult. We may not like the skills model, but we benefit from institutional, public, and administrative desires to demonstrate the value of post-secondary studies through the tangible skills that students learn, such as writing. As Landry (2016) highlighted, there seems to be increased recognition for Canadian Writing Studies as a field, but budgetary restrictions, the desire for quick fix writing solutions, and marginalization still hinder our work. Given the

increase in students who attend post-secondary institutions (especially the growing number of international students who pursue studies in Canada) and the neoliberal thinking that influences budgets, this paradox makes sense. There is a desire for writing pedagogy, but it seems that this desire can be limited to how this pedagogy benefits university reports and evaluation metrics.

It seems that the skills narrative will not go away, and maybe we in the Writing Studies community don't want it to. Maybe we can use this narrative to our advantage by showing, through the type of research that Bryant (2017) calls for, that we meet skills-oriented objectives in order to open discussions about the more process-oriented aspects of writing pedagogy that are necessary for us to do our jobs well. Perhaps if we think about the skills narrative differently, we can use it to our advantage.

For the remainder of this paper, I will discuss one research project where I encountered the tension between process and skill-building when I worked closely with former students. I will then use the paradoxes that we experienced to open a discussion about how the tensions between these narratives may benefit how we in Writing Studies can better articulate the value of our work and use this value to enhance our status. The goal is that this discussion may contribute one more piece to the ever-growing puzzle that is trying to shape and understand Writing Studies in Canada.

6.6 Working with Students

As I outlined at the beginning of this paper, institutional desires for skill building contradict scholarly and pedagogical knowledge about process and iteration. The positions are “at odds” (Bryant, 2017, p. 16), which makes it difficult to move beyond the current tensions. For this reason, it would be useful to extend this discussion beyond a community of experts or administrators to understand the value of what we do from another perspective. Inviting students

to participate in research and reflect on their learning in post-secondary writing classrooms could accomplish this. Students, the primary stakeholders in the work that we do, can help us to articulate what happens in the classroom and what they find most useful to their journeys as writers.

Students are an underrepresented group in Canadian Writing Studies literature. As Klostermann (2017) argued, we need to better acknowledge the role of “students as knowers and contributors” (p. 21) and see them as part of the community. This project worked closely with students as co-constructors of knowledge to understand how they built knowledge through writing pedagogy. Students were positioned not only as knowledge buildings in the classroom, but also as research contributors who could provide broader insight that could benefit Writing Studies as a field.

6.7 The Place and the Project

Over six months, my participants and I delved into their experiences with writing both in Conestoga College’s COMM1085 and more widely (high school, college, work). We explored how their experiences can inform teaching and learning. Each participant took COMM1085 in their first year at the college. COMM1085 was introduced through the School of Language and Communication Studies whose faculty (myself included) taught the course to discipline-specific cohorts. The course covered expository writing, writing about research, persuasion, and summary. It also taught core grammatical concepts, building through basic parts of speech and extending to larger concepts like passive and active voice or dangling modifiers. The course also served as a repository for many “academic” skills that the college requires students to develop, such as research skills, using the library, and academic integrity. The primary project for the course included a scaffolded research project which required that students write a proposal, an

outline, and participate in peer review before submitting their final research paper. This is the assignment that most participants in the study used as a focal point for their reflections. The syllabus, lesson topics, and assignments were fixed, but teachers had freedom to design lesson plans and select readings so that they related to students' disciplines.

The course tried to accomplish a lot—Writing Studies researchers and teachers might say too much. Nevertheless, this was the course that was established. These challenges and inefficiencies made it a good location to study how students experienced this model and how they could inform teaching and learning in this environment. As the research developed, I noticed that many of my participants spoke more generally to the value of this type of course and how it contributed to their broader education. I am still interested in their role as knowledge builders in the classroom, but, through two interviews, private online conversations which persisted for five months, and one focus group, it became clear that they can also help an emerging field like Writing Studies. So, I asked them to describe the class as they would to an incoming student. They could discuss what to expect in the class, what students would learn, and what value—if any—the class had for their learning. As we worked together, we started to reveal the various layers that defined not just individual students' experiences but that characterized their experience in the writing classroom.

6.8 Scrutinizing Narratives

I turned to critical narrative inquiry (CNI) to understand how these students' experiences could inform teaching and learning. Narratives have long been central to Writing Studies research and teaching. Journet (2012) argued that narratives are “conventionalized ways of representing disciplinary knowledge” and that “narrative is valorized as a way of paying attention to the local and specific characteristics of experience, particularly as they are situated

within social and cultural contexts. Indeed, one might say that the history of composition research is, in part, the history of coming to terms with narrative” (p. 13). These local, social, and cultural dimensions of narrative are central epistemological tools for building knowledge in Writing Studies. They can also help to obtain and scrutinize disciplinary knowledge, which highlights their epistemic power if they are deployed in a critical way to question, challenge, shift, develop, and articulate disciplinary ideas.

However, narratives are not always used critically. Journet (2012) contests that narratives do not automatically constitute knowledge for the field, arguing that “personal narratives in composition are not inherently more authentic than other research modes” (p. 17). The challenge is seeing beyond narratives as static, fixed, and authentic tools to consider them as ways to question the truths, assumptions, and disciplinary values that researchers and teachers understand. As Journet asks: “by what criteria do we evaluate personal narratives in order to determine how ‘truthful’ or ‘correct’ they are” (p. 19). Narratives should move beyond ways to communicate knowledge; rather, they can be used to scrutinize our epistemologies as they relate to ontological and axiological positions to create new understanding. Exploring student narratives can provide powerful insight that can help articulate disciplinary knowledge and value for Writing Studies, but only if these stories are examined from a methodologically sound position that scrutinizes all dimensions of the stories rather than what is convenient for promoting the work that writing teachers and scholars do.

6.9 Critical Narrative Inquiry

CNI can facilitate this knowledge building. Narrative inquiry focuses on the socially situated nature of learning (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Horan, 2013; Kim, 2016), which allows researchers to understand people’s stories in terms of their larger social and educational

practices. For Writing Studies, this means that writing and writing pedagogy is not something that only happens in the classroom, but rather it is a multifaceted endeavour that incorporates students' previous experiences which inform their writing, how they adapt to new written genres, how they engage with classroom teaching, and how they ultimately enact this pedagogy beyond the classroom as they learn new approaches to writing.

Narratives of human experience should not be considered knowledge in themselves. A single narrative cannot account for all the complexity that occurs as students engage in Writing Studies. However, CNI is reflexive (Kim, 2016), which facilitates scrutinizing narratives more critically so that narratives do not stand alone as truth in themselves. Using CNI as a methodology allows researchers to develop a version of the truth that includes both pedagogical success stories and discussions about pedagogical challenges. Narrative inquiry allowed me as a researcher to understand not just the positive value that students see in Writing Studies but to examine how teaching can improve areas where they struggled or disengaged.

This reflexive approach that CNI espouses prompted me as a researcher to examine myself and my research practices in relation to participants through our dialogic interactions. CNI is a dialogic methodology which involves “a form of negotiation and active participation in social discourse and as a way of constructing new social discourses” (Striano, 2012, p. 153). Creating new social discourses through narratives involves collaboration through what Gergen and Gergen (2011) called a “relational process” which “gives rise to stories about self and the world” (p. 379). Dialogism between the researcher and participants can build knowledge while acknowledging that this knowledge is constructed through the interaction. Dialogism offers researchers the liberty to own, scrutinize, and implement the interpretive nature of their work as part of the systematic study of human experience. Although results offer only one version of the

truth, the collaboration and dialogism that created this version of the truth reflects the systematic study of not only of participant experience but of participant experience in relation to my own experience as a teacher and researcher in Writing Studies.

Reflexivity and dialogism were central to every stage of the research process. Throughout the research, my ten participants engaged not only as research subjects but as co-constructors of knowledge. During the first stage, an hour-long interview, participants and I discussed their experiences writing in COMM1085, their experience with English and writing before and after COMM1085, and how they believed writing factored into their future goals (if it did at all). This interview established a foundation through which reflection could begin. After each interview, I organized the conversation according to Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) 3-dimensional inquiry model.

Over a six-month period, we engaged in an initial hour-long interview, an afternoon focus group involving half of the participants (scheduling conflicts prevented full participation), and a follow-up interview which included time for discussion, follow-up questions about the initial interview and focus group, member checks, and narrative scrutiny. After the initial interviews, I used Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) 3-dimensional inquiry as a model to organize my analysis. This model allowed me to organize participant responses participants' internal feelings about COMM1085, the outward/existential/environmental conditions that impacted their learning, and the temporal (past/present/future) circumstances that inform where students came from, where they were currently, and what their future goals were.

This approach allowed me to trace patterns between narratives. Drawing on themes that emerged from this organization, I found that, initially, participants seemed eager to compliment the course and my teaching. Much of this seemed to relate to the fact that I had a good working

relationship with my participants, having already bonded over our four month course. To counteract this challenge, I used these themes from our interviews to develop activities for our afternoon focus group, which was the next stage of the research process. These activities were designed to scrutinize course construction and pedagogy. When I met with five participants for the focus group (scheduling restrictions prevented full participation), we were able to explore both why they had a positive experience and areas where their Writing Studies course did not contribute to their learning as much as it could have. Instead of focusing on the positive individual relationships between myself and participants, we instead focused on areas where individual experiences differed and what this meant for participants and myself as a collection of people discussing Writing Studies pedagogy.

6.10 “I Didn’t See Myself Changing”

Most participants explained that, as students, they resisted the course initially. Many had experienced four years of high school English and saw a college writing class as an extension of that work. One participant, Kristen, explained that she “had just done fours years of English—I was so tired of it.” She explained that, after her high school experience, “I didn’t see myself changing” at the college level. Kristen did not see COMM1085 as an opportunity to develop her writing because she did not believe that she had grown in high school.

Other participants, like John, noted how they were anxious about taking the class because they always struggled with the subject. He described how “[English] was the only course that I took at university level that I was never confident that I could perform at that level.” He struggled throughout high school and in his first post-secondary program in technical writing. Typically, he required tutoring to support his journey through English. Every time he had to take another course, he would dread it, thinking “it’s that time again.” As a result, his initial impulse

coming into COMM1085 was to drop the course and find something else. He explained how it took several weeks of seeing how different the course was from his other ventures with writing classes, coupled with some coercion from his friends, to convince him to stay.

Other students had an emotional reaction to a course like COMM1085. Clara explained how “some people really do believe that they thought it would be a waste of time...I thought it was going to be a waste of my time.” Clara came to the program with a master’s degree. A first-year writing course may have seemed elementary for her, but her sentiments were shared by many participants who struggled to engage fully in a course that is not associated with their program directly but that still demands significant time. The result is that students often have an emotional reaction to the course that hinders their ability to get on board with the teacher or programmatic curriculum at first, regardless of the design.

Many students struggle to overcome their previous experiences and conceptions of writing. Some, like John, thought they could not grasp the course concepts. Others, like Kristen and Clara, thought that writing courses would repeat the concepts that they had already covered. They saw little opportunity for growth. In all three cases, COMM1085 was a milestone course that they had to complete but did not want to engage with. They needed the credit to satisfy institutional requirements and then they could move on.

6.11 Offer Something Different

One of the things that helped them overcome these barriers to learning was seeing the course as something different than what they experienced before. The primary pedagogical approach that allowed them to do this was the scaffolded research project that they did throughout the semester. Engaging in the process and building their ideas over time with the support of constructive feedback was something new for many students.

The process allowed them to see their growth as writers. One participant, Kara, described this best. She, like many other participants, resisted the class initially, but eventually came to see herself growing through the process. When asked to describe COMM1085, Kara characterized the class as

essentially an English class. It has all the requirements and expectations of a previous course you have taken. The difference, however, is that it is taught to learn instead of taught to test—it focuses on improvement rather than getting a mark... [it] is more like do what you can. You started here. I want to see you grow more. I want to see you get better.

Kara is referencing our final project in which students complete a proposal, a draft or outline (their choice), engage in peer review, and submit a final paper on a topic of their choosing. For Kara, the scaffolded nature of the assignments, where projects had numerous rounds of feedback and re-design, helped her to engage with writing in a way that she never had before. The focus was on the ideas and developing them according to her own style rather than accommodating some prescribed rubric like she had in high school. This allowed her to overcome the barriers that she had to learning and engaging in this process.

6.12 Feedback and Process

Kara was not alone. Nine of ten participants cited feedback and process as the most essential macro-level components that helped them develop their writing. Sam differed from the others, claiming that he focused on each assignment individually to master the genre conventions of a proposal or final research paper. But even Sam considered the feedback and writing process essential despite taking a different approach: “I was more motivated when I got the feedback. I was challenged a little bit and it gave me motivation to go deeper and actually get it right.” Sam

often claimed that he wanted to “get things right,” namely to achieve a high grade by trying to perfect the genre in which he was writing. But, even though he considered each assignment as its own individual challenge and did not look at scaffolding the same way other participants did, he still saw the feedback that he received between assignments as an essential element to getting things “right” on subsequent assignments as he adjusted to new genre conventions.

The other participants all described the course as an opportunity to build their writing and communication through a process rather than writing something once for a grade. Victor, for example, discussed how he liked the

whole [writing] process. When I say the whole process, I mean having your ideas and having to filter down to the best ones, even if you think you have the best one, it’s always good to have a second set of opinions, so yeah. And just getting down and jotting those points, refining those ideas, and then you’re getting on to the writing part.

Victor alludes to the time and space to contemplate ideas that the course offered. He had too many ideas to fit into one paper (don’t we all?) but having the space to refine those ideas before writing allowed him to select the best ideas to make his argument. Victor highlighted how writing and critical thinking intersect. To develop a strong piece of writing and to engage in a strong writing process, Victor required space, time, and a second set of opinions to refine his ideas before putting them onto paper. Giving him this time maximized his learning experience in COMM1085.

6.13 Scaffolding: Taken-For-Granted

Writing scholars understand that scaffolded writing, feedback, and process are essential elements to student growth. White (2006) framed repeated writing and feedback as best practices that most writing teachers could use. Lillis (2003) and Paxton and Frith (2014) have identified

the dialogic feedback process as central elements to writing pedagogy. At conferences, it is common pay lip-service to scaffolding and process orientation as if they were taken for granted. However, just because these are commonly accepted features that contribute to “good” writing pedagogy does not mean that people beyond our circles know this or understand their value. In fact, taking scaffolding, dialogic feedback, and process for granted may hinder our attempts to articulate the value of what we do in Writing Studies.

Scaffolding and feedback is not as common as we may think. Eight participants highlighted that they had not encountered this process in other writing classes. Victor was the only person who had engaged in similar processes before college. Another participant named Mark had previous experience with post-secondary writing courses before COMM1085. Even students like Clara, who had extensive writing experience and a master’s degree, did not have previous exposure to scaffolded writing assignments. Clara was adept at writing disciplinary genres for her food science community, but she struggled to expand her writing to suit larger audiences. Engaging in this process, receiving feedback, and developing her analysis were crucial to her going from seeing the course as a waste of time to understanding its wider goals and how they applied to her writing:

It’s not just college reading and writing. It had a different approach to developing my writing skills and analytical skills. The informal and formal feedback helped me shape my topic or idea into something that one would like to read. The structure of the course gave room to develop different skillsets in my writing.

Clara identified iteration and audience awareness as crucial elements to her growth. Having a course structure which allowed this gave her time to analyze her ideas and tailor them to

different audiences. Even with her previous experience, she benefited from an introductory writing class because it offered her time, space, and direction to consider new genres.

These reflections were enhanced by the work that she did with Kara in the focus group. When they were asked to explain what other students can expect from this course, they both emphasized the role of feedback and process to help them build upon what they already knew:

You go into the course with very low expectations, thinking this will be just another English class. But it was more aimed at developing our writing style. The structure was aimed to help us improve from our current writing ability. The way it [feedback] flows through all the topics helps you get the best final product.

Clara's and Kara's definition suggests that process, time, and feedback enable students to build upon the foundations that they already have. Writing was complex and iterative, and this enabled them to grow as writers. There was more than just skill-building through a single unit. The skills building happened over time and with significant collaboration.

Being able to show this through student reflections, particularly when those students were reluctant participants initially, can be useful to articulate the necessity for proper funding that allows time, space, and expertise to implement these processes. Comments from students like Victor, Clara, and Kara can help instructors demonstrate the value in scaffolding, feedback and process. They articulate the value in having time to build their writing and develop their ideas to achieve a stronger writing style that is accessible to a wider range of audiences. Macro-level discussions about course structure, process writing, and feedback enable writing teachers and scholars to express the importance of this process over the quick fix solutions that institutions favour.

6.14 Minutiae: The Other Side of the Narrative

On the surface, this emphasis on scaffolded writing, feedback, and iteration is positive for Writing Studies and our arguments against the skills narrative. The students themselves confirm that what we scholars and teachers believe are the most important elements to writing pedagogy are indeed the elements that help them learn most. However, as we kept discussing the participants' experiences, a key tension arose.

As much as participants highlighted the scaffolded research process as central to their learning, they also emphasized the role of the basics that COMM1085 offered, such as grammar lessons, discussions about formatting, and units about implementing references to strengthen arguments. I have often minimized the emphasis of these elements because they are the more rote components of student writing. I still teach the concepts, but my approach to COMM1085 prioritizes process and feedback rather than the stylistic components of student work. However, the “skill” building components of the course were just as integral for students and scaffolding.

It was not until I spoke with my participants that I understood how these elements impacted their learning. Most of my participants had little grammar or stylistic instruction prior to college. Kent and Sam, for example, explained that they had never encountered formatting or instruction on conducting research. They explained that these elements were required in their other courses, but instructors assumed that students grasped these concepts because they were “basic.” Without COMM1085, they would not have had this foundation that impacted projects in their disciplinary courses.

Even students who had learned grammar in high school found it useful to go over these concepts again. Victor outlined how it was important to “go back and revisit basics before you get technical and things get difficult with each level. There was a very practical course delivery.” The minutiae built into the larger writing process that Victor benefitted from in the course. The

practicality of these elements allowed him to give structure to the abstract ideas that he was writing.

Practicality was echoed during the focus group when John and Sam collaborated on defining the course: “This course is designed to strengthen the ability of students’ reading and writing. And to enhance their ability to write a professional research paper and develop practical skills such as learning tone, style, and how to write with purpose.” Their focus group discussion focused more on the minutiae than Clara and Kara did. John and Sam highlighted the final product, but they spent more time exploring how stylistics contributed to their learning. They emphasized the pragmatism associated with these smaller elements that allowed them to have a clearer understanding of the mechanics behind their writing. Taking time to emphasize these ideas helped them to develop the larger product because they understood why they wrote they way they did.

Process and feedback are integral elements to teaching writing. Smaller elements, such as grammar, research skills, and referencing, are easy to overlook as core components of first-year writing courses. Conestoga College has implemented many of these basic elements, including grammar and citations, as big components of COMM1085 to accommodate growing international student cohorts and increased emphasis on academic integrity. COMM1085 is the place where these lessons have been implemented so that students can have these basics before they move into their more advanced disciplinary work. These units are the “discrete skills and strategies” (Paré, 2017, p. 6) that can be frustrating for instructors and students alike. But they have value for students. The “basics,” as Victor called them, build into the larger process. The elements that John and Sam described—tone, style, writing with purpose for a specific audience—derive from these smaller strategies that may seem menial at first. Students may not

see the value of these lessons immediately, but, like Victor, John, and Sam, they can come to realize how these elements build into bigger, more technical concepts that they can implement in their own disciplinary and professional discourse communities.

Are there other ways that these could be implemented as part of orientation? Perhaps. But it is more likely that first-year courses like COMM1085 will continue to be handed these skills-based units that students must be taught. It is therefore useful to understand the value that these elements provide students and the knowledge that can be built. By giving students the tools to dissect the language, understand its components, and use this to develop a structurally sound paper, they receive more tools for building, thinking, and articulating their thoughts in a critical way not just in the introductory writing classroom but also in their disciplinary coursework.

6.15 Discussion and Conclusion

The question becomes: what do we make of the tension between skills and feedback? The participants' discussions of scaffolded writing offer rich descriptions of how they learned through this process. But the value that they place on grammatical, formatting, and other more workshop-like components of the course plays right into the narrative that writing is a skill to be learned.

The conversation has never been about one component over the other. Both elements, process and skill building, have their place. Rather, the challenge is that the conversation has been unbalanced, with the skills approach dominating the institutional conversations. Since the dominant narrative influences the administrative and budgetary decisions that impact our work, it is responsible for many of the staffing challenges and marginalized positions that writing teachers occupy in our institutions. However, the emphasis that my participants placed on skills means that dismantling the study skills narrative may not be viable or even desirable. Dismissing

these elements as one-off writing strategies that lack iteration and process does a disservice to the way that they impact student writing development, even in small ways.

The goal is to determine how conflicting student reports can still benefit our attempts to re-balance the conversation between the writing as a skill narrative and the writing as a complex social process narrative. How can the tension between these narratives help us to articulate the value of what we do, how we do it, and how our work impacts the students who enter our classrooms every year? Perhaps instead of dismantling the dominant narrative, it would be more useful to become comfortable working within this tension and working to tailor the narrative such that the needs of both narrative positions are met when we discuss writing pedagogy and Writing Studies.

This tension is not limiting. Instead, it presents an opportunity for communicating our needs while also fulfilling administrative desires for skills, checkboxes, and confirmation that students are learning what many writing teachers would call the basics. We can show that the students value skills-based components of the classes and that we writing teachers accommodate the administrative need for those skills. Being able to report these things and confirm that students believe these elements benefit their writing can open avenues for other discussions as well.

Once the demands of the ever-present desire for skills are met, charted in curriculum plans, and reported in program reviews, we can use this as an opportunity to highlight our emphasis on process. By opening spaces to discuss the importance of process in conjunction with skill building, especially how students discuss both as critical elements in the development as writers, we can give credence to the less quantifiable components of our work.

Demonstrating "skill building" may open spaces for communicating other academic, programmatic, and pedagogical needs. In this sense, it may be beneficial to combine the skills narrative with tangible results for the opposite; essentially, give administrators what they want so that we can gain the things that we need. By flipping the requirement to report and identify skill building into an opportunity to promote other elements of our work, we can show how students may better develop these skills with the right tools and processes. With the right resources, the right staffing structure, the right mindset, teachers may both meet and move beyond the skills-based narratives that permeate writing pedagogy. This strategy may help us to show not only the value of what we do but also show how we may increase our value if we are provided the necessary resources to work beyond the skills in the ways that we need to be successful teachers and scholars.

Studies like this one at Conestoga College can begin doing this. Future research with students and with different first-year programmatic structures at other institutions would be useful additions to this conversation. The more examples that are available to communicate this value, the stronger our cases will be for balancing the narratives. It would be equally useful to see how these ideas hold up in writing classes/programs beyond the first-year, where the "basics" have been covered and the course targets have shifted.

The skills narrative that fulfils administrative requirements and the writing as a social process approach may always be in tension for Writing Studies. Working in opposition has, so far, not diminished the dominance of the skills narrative. By approaching our advocacy differently as Writing Studies initiatives develop across Canada, and by becoming comfortable working with this tension rather than resisting it, we may open spaces and opportunities that can benefit our pedagogy and our status. The situation may never be perfect and things may never be

fully balanced, but if we approach the tension differently than we have so far, we may make tangible progress as teachers, scholars, and (more widely) as people who are linked in the Canadian Writing Studies community.

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Chapter 7

7 Wrapping Things Up

7.1 Introduction

I began this dissertation by saying that it was a story etched from various narratives.

These narratives informed classroom pedagogy and wider disciplinary conversations. From the start, the one constant has been an overarching question that positioned me to see, interpret, and scrutinize these narratives: How do students build knowledge in the first-year writing classroom? It's a big question; I know. It is not really a research question, but it is a pedagogical question that I ask myself constantly as I teach. It is also a question that cuts to the heart of discussions about teaching and learning in the writing classroom, provoking my curiosity and pushing me to delve more deeply into my research with more specific questions. This broad question led to more specific questions that helped to frame interview and focus group discussions:

- 1) How can conversations about writing in one classroom context inform ways to refine writing pedagogy more widely?
- 2) How can students' experiences inform composition curriculum building at the post-secondary level?
- 3) What do students' stories about their writing tell writing teachers and researchers about the role that Writing Studies plays in Canadian post-secondary institutions?

These questions put me in a position where I could examine pedagogical moments with individual students, ask how these moments can inform my own teaching and how they can extend to more students across my classroom, and what these experiences mean for writing at the programmatic level and as a field.

This research was also conducted against a wider backdrop of an emerging Canadian Writing Studies field (Clary-Lemon, 2009) that is trying to better articulate the value of the work that writing teachers and scholars do and how this work impacts institutions (Paré, 2017). In the back of my mind as I wrote this dissertation was this notion that narratives of student experiences can help us teachers and scholars to refine and articulate what we do, how we do it, and how our work impacts the thousands of students who enter our classrooms every year. When I try to characterize this project, I see the small components (every interview conversation, every pedagogical reflection, every narrative of student experience portrayed in the papers) informing this bigger picture in some way. As much as it was important for me to explore ways that students could inform pedagogy in the classroom, it was equally important for me to zoom out and ask what this means for Canadian Writing Studies and program building as well.

7.2 Theoretical Positions and Implications

Academic Literacies and Rhetorical Genre Theory (RGT) positioned me to see in this project. The following section will examine how my research used, interpreted, and enhanced these theoretical frameworks in the papers. I will then briefly examine the narrative frameworks and relationship building that stemmed from this position and how these elements allowed me to analyze and discuss the ideas that emerged.

7.3 Academic Literacies

Researching through an Academic Literacies framework meant that I was focused on what students brought with them into the classroom (Lea, 2008; Paxton & Frith, 2014) and using these wider experiences to inform teaching and learning. Although it is best used in context-specific situations (Lea, 2004; Wingate & Tribble, 2012), particularly for individual students, scrutinizing individual moments of experience can open broader conversations about writing

pedagogy. These ideas are central to my research questions, which used individual experiences as a way to expand into wider conversations about curriculum building in the classroom and more widely in programs (i.e., how institutional and program structures can impact teaching and learning in the classroom).

Honouring the emphasis on individualized learning moments and the notion of participants as meaning-makers means listening to every aspect of their conversation, even if it complicates the overarching theoretical position. Academic Literacies typically resists the skills narrative (Lea & Street, 2006; Paxton & Frith, 2014), which is a primary reason that I chose it for this project so that I could account for what the participants brought to the study and to COMM1085. But this approach in some ways pushed me back towards the skills narrative, prompting me to consider skilling in higher education differently for Writing Studies contexts.

The core of Academic Literacies can benefit Canadian Writing Studies. The study's focus on students and meaning makers not only resonates with Klostermann's (2017) appeal for a greater acknowledgement of students and knowers and contributors in research and pedagogy, but it also provided instances where this individualized work can benefit the work that we do. Working closely with Clara and Kent in the first paper demonstrates this. So too did conversations with Mark and Victor in the second paper. In both papers, paying attention to individualized moments in research and in pedagogy opened space for discussions about improving pedagogy and program staffing. The hyper-individualized focus of Academic Literacies can benefit Writing Studies because it allows us to work closely with students to understand how personal experiences can be extended to improve classroom pedagogy and to benefit our arguments against contract labour.

What shifts for our contexts in Canadian Writing Studies is how the skills narrative may be positioned within our own research and in relation to discussions with former students. In our attempts to push against the skills narrative, we also need to heed the idea that we are, in many ways, building skills through the work that we do. This is a central part of our work, and the one-off workshops and lessons have a prominent place in student learning. They're an essential piece of the puzzle, albeit just one piece.

In a sense, resisting the skills narrative has been futile for Writing Studies so far. Regardless of how much we resist, the skills narrative becomes more engrained. Institutions increasingly adopt a skills-oriented approach, and, as the third manuscript demonstrates, students also see through this lens somewhat. Students value the less process-oriented dimensions of the class just as they emphasize how much they learn from scaffolded writing processes. Perhaps instead of resisting the skills narrative, an Academic Literacies framework may provide a framework to work closely with students to show ways we can move beyond the narrative or re-balance the narrative to allow more spaces to advocate for less quantifiable and less skills-oriented dimensions of our work. Academic Literacies provides a framework not necessarily for resisting the skills narrative, but rather for seeing past the narrative and finding ways to communicate beyond it. This might open spaces to express programmatic/pedagogical needs while still working within the skills narrative that isn't going away.

This idea was evident throughout the study. Academic Literacies gave me the framework and thought process to work closely with students to not only see the skills that they acquired but to also explore the less quantifiable ways that they learned and the processes that facilitated these pathways. A great tool for advocacy is to show not only that students are meeting administrative criterion and accommodating public narratives for tangible skills but also to show how, with the

right tools and processes, students may better meet these criteria with the right processes. With the right resources, the right staffing structure, the right mindset, teachers may both meet and move beyond the skills-based narratives that permeate writing pedagogy.

7.4 Rhetorical Genre Theory

RGT was used more implicitly than Academic Literacies in that it is something that emerged from the conversations. Whereas Academic Literacies, with its focus on understanding student experiences and what they can contribute as co-constructors of knowledge, was a primary lens, RGT's role became more defined as I began organizing the conversations and tracing scaffolded writing processes through each conversations that I had. RGT allowed me to scrutinize these conversations and leverage these ideas for future conversations, delving more deeply into how teachers, programs, and institutions could facilitate more opportunities for these processes.

English's (2011) (see Figure 5) RGT model for scaffolded writing was central to my thinking about scaffolded writing in all papers. The model is applied most overtly in the paper about Mark and Victor, but it is central to discussions about how this is the model that students identify as their preferred way of Writing and how, through this process, they began to see "English" class as something different from what they had experienced previously. Even the third paper, which has a broader focus than the first two, used this type of process and iteration process as a backdrop as I contemplated the tension between scaffolded and iterative processes and skill building.

Design	Redesign	Production	Distribution
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What the teacher wants/envisages/desires—and why	How the student understands and (re)interprets—and why	What the student produces—how and why	How the product is ‘delivered’ and ‘received’ and what is done next
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Figure 5. Scaffolding writing model (English, 2011)

The model is an ideal to which writing teachers may strive, but it can quickly become less about iteration and more about production, particularly in environments which depend on precarious labour. When applied well, however, students like Clara and Kent can find space to implement their own writing processes and the previous genre characteristics that they learned elsewhere. They can do so in an environment that is collaborative, that allows them to make mistakes and experiment, and ultimately develop a project of which they can be proud and learn much about their ability as writers.

Genre is socially situated (Freedman, 1994; Miller, 1984; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011), and the classroom is a key space for students to implement these wider social characteristics. By allowing students the space to bring in their experiences and to position them as knowledge makers in the classroom, teachers can facilitate knowledge building as a social enterprise rather than a skill-building initiative. As Bryant (2017) and Brent (2011) highlighted, the skill-building narrative threatens to undermine and devalue the work that teachers and scholars do in the writing classroom. Students learning genres and learning how to work across genres are best suited to accomplish this when they are co-constructors of knowledge in the classroom. When students recognize that their ideas have validity and that they have a host of previous writing skills that they can build upon for their new contexts, then they are more likely to engage in the

class and see value in the work that they do. In turn, they will see increased value in the work that we do.

What I did not anticipate was how students would be able to contemplate and discuss notions of genre and how it applied to their writing processes/education. RGT allowed me and the participants to discuss programmatic and conceptual ideas about writing in ways that expanded the scope of the study. When I began the research, I intended to focus closely on the classroom and how a class like COMM1085 could help students develop their abilities as writers. The questions about program building and about Writing Studies emerged as the research process developed and I saw how adept students were at discussing writing in relation to college programs and writing pedagogy on a more theoretical level. Whereas I began with an expectation that student participants would be able to provide information from their perspective as learners and as writers individually, this expectation evolved to see students as co-constructors of knowledge both in the classroom and in writing program building.

It would have been sufficient to focus on how students can inform classroom pedagogy. The Canadian Writing Studies context lacks unified approach to writing theory or pedagogical approach (Paré, 2017). So developing a repertoire of teaching approaches (Wingate, 2012) that can facilitate individual pathways for meaning making in the classroom, like Academic Literacies espouses, would have benefitted the discussions. Yet only one paper, the first manuscript, does this.

The other papers focus more broadly because of the way genre emerged in our conversations. As the participants contemplated scaffolded writing models, such as English (2011), the discusses expanded naturally to wider social contexts and how these social contexts impacted student writing and writing pedagogy. This is most evident in the conversations with

Mark and Victor who challenged genre given the current employment climate in post-secondary institutions. Discussions about genre also prompted me to think differently about skills-oriented tasks in the writing classroom. Interviews with Kent and Sam, for example, alluded to how fundamental skills, such as formatting, referencing, and grammar translated to their other courses. They both highlighted how these elements allowed them to adjust to genres in those classes more quickly since they had fewer initial hurdles to learning new genres in their disciplines. Given that their other instructors expected them to already grasp these elements made it all the more important that they learn these elements in a class like COMM1085.

In a wider Canadian Writing Studies context, the way that these participants discussed genre is encouraging for future work with students. It is easy to assume, as I did, that working with student participants as co-constructors of knowledge would best provide information about teaching and learning in the classroom. Genre conversations would be limited to how they adjusted to and learned new genres in a class like COMM1085 and how their writing approaches might inform future pedagogy. But student participants should also be seen as co-constructors of knowledge who can inform both classroom pedagogy and writing program building. They can discuss genre as it relates to wider social processes beyond just their own learning and experiences.

Seeing them as co-constructors means also valuing their knowledge of how writing in various genres is impacted by the wider social climates that influence the courses they take. Students are key stakeholders in the work that writing teachers do, but this role as a stakeholder is not limited to their experience in the classroom. They may provide insight that can improve programmatic curriculum building, inform program reporting and evaluations, and create tangible examples that we can use in negotiations and advocacy with institutional administrators.

One of the things that I am working through now as I plan my future program of research and adapt my analysis for publication is the role that RGT plays in the ideas that have emerged from the dissertation. For example, my current thinking re-examines Clara's discussion of the mind-mapping process through a meta-genre lens. Blending English's (2011) genre model for scaffolded writing with a discussion of meta-genres (Giltrow, 2002; Lindenman, 2015; Pantelides, 2015, 2017) opens rich avenues for understanding how the mind-map helped Clara (and the students who have participated in the mind-mapping process since). By stepping back and recognizing patterns in their own writing in conjunction with the feedback, students are called upon to recognize the overarching discourses that inform their work and that influence their re-design processes. The approach allows students to view the process more broadly and trace patterns in their work from one level of scaffolded writing projects to the next, making their writing processes more visible as they work through them.

Another example of how RGT factors into my current thinking is the way RGT can help crystallize what happened when Mark "checked out" due to the faculty strike and institutional politics. This is an example of a student whose writing was negatively impacted by factors beyond his own control. By his own admission, there was little growth in the latter part of the course and he did not really hone his writing through the scaffolded project. This dimension of the discussion raises several questions that I am contemplating: how do wider sociopolitical factors of an institution impact the way students work with and experiment with genres? How might a complex project involving many genres be undermined by factors beyond students' control? How might genre theory help students overcome these institutional and curricular limitations?

Certainly, students share responsibility for how they engage in a classroom, but RGT demands that we pay attention to the host of factors that influence writing in various genres. Miller (1984) called upon a genre approach wherein researchers "to take seriously the rhetoric in which we are immersed and the situations in which we find ourselves" (p. 155). The situations that influence writing genres and the way writers interpret them impact the way texts are written. As Miller explains "before we can act, we must interpret the indeterminate material environment; we define, or 'determine,' a situation" (p. 156), and we "cannot fully understand genres without further understanding the system of commonality of which they are a constituent" (Miller, 1994, p.72). When Mark and other students "check out" of a class, they do so because their interpretation of their social surroundings creates a disconnect between them and the material of classroom and programmatic curricula. As they begin to prioritize which assignments have the most "value" to their futures in a shortened semester, their relationship with a mandatory, non-disciplinary writing course becomes fractured and--by extension--so too does the way they work with and learn from particular genres.

If we take this one step further and ask, as Reiff and Bawarshi (2011) do, what "discursive resources that students bring with them" (p. 313) to first-year writing classes, we get a better grasp on how genre can influence Mark's writing. When Mark admits that he grew little in the final part of the course, he does so acknowledging that it was a conscious decision. This decision stems from his interpretation not only of the course but of the institutions that govern his education. As a student who experienced numerous strikes and whose education always seems to be interrupted by politics, Mark has a fractured relationship with the institutions. He is highly critical of these institutions and the way they are staffed. He can draw complex connections to how this staffing affects education, and these evaluations all factor into how he

interpreted his assessment of the strike at Conestoga. A fractured relationship with post-secondary institutions led to a fractured relationship with his coursework, which led to a fractured relationship with a "refresher" course like COMM1085 and the ways that he could refine his writing before he moved into the public service job that awaited him post-graduation.

Although these reflections are preliminary, the narratives of participants like Mark and Clara achieve new depth and analysis when an RGT lens is applied. These interpretations of the narratives remain largely pedagogical, but they offer new insights into the complexities involved in teaching and learning genres in a first-year context.

7.5 Narratives and Writing Studies

In the methodology, I claimed that narratives can allow Writing Studies researchers to both build and scrutinize disciplinary knowledge. In Writing Studies, narratives are in part “conventionalized ways of representing disciplinary knowledge” (Journet, 2012, p. 13), but it is equally important to scrutinize the value of these narratives and how what kind of truth they represent (Journet, 2012; Smythe & Murray, 2000). Critical Narrative Inquiry (CNI) as a methodology gave me a framework to build critical self-reflection and collaboration between myself and my participants as inherent parts of the research process. Using these two elements, I could approach my research understanding that participant narratives represented only one version of a complex truth that is ever changing with student experiences. Knowing this pushed me to consider the research as a “relational process” (Gergen & Gergen, 2011, p. 379) through which knowledge was constructed collaboratively. Participants and I were co-constructors of knowledge who could scrutinize narratives and themes from several ontological and epistemological positions, first as we worked one-on-one and then as these conversations were opened up to themes presented to the larger group of research participants.

This is where CNI has value for Writing Studies research. It opens a dialogical space (Dillon, 2011) between researchers and the participants whose narratives we draw upon to articulate teaching successes and pedagogical ideas. The researcher in this space can embrace the multiplicity of interpretations (Striano, 2012) available and work with participants to explore this multiplicity. With this lens, researchers can examine participant narratives of experience not only as artifacts for close examination from which we draw conclusions, but rather as fluid conversations which also implicate researcher experiences in relation to participant experience.

The combination of these positions can provide a more rigorous research analysis. The CNI process that I undertook allowed me to go beyond individual narratives of student experience. Clara's mind mapping process, when seen individually, may offer only so much for pedagogy. What worked for Clara may not work for another student who did not seek more individualized instruction. Instead, CNI prompted me to question what Clara's individual writing process using mindmaps meant for my own pedagogy. I could question whether this mind mapping process could help me with challenges that I experienced in the classroom, such as opening up avenues for more individualized instruction and helping students with emergent issues.

This relational process also permits researchers to account for their analytical choices. Because they are interpretive, analyses and conclusions derived from narratives can often prompt the question: why this interpretation and not others? This element is central to Journet's (2012) questions about narratives in writing research. That risk exists in this project. For example, the struggles that Victor encountered or Mark's disillusionment with higher education are influenced by several factors beyond contingent labour. Similarly, people could question why I chose certain thematic ideas (i.e., student apprehensions about Writing Studies, struggles with

groupwork, scaffolded writing processes) over other possible ones that do not factor into this dissertation; for example, participants and I had several discussions on multimodality in the writing classroom and we also discussed writing in relation to their future employment.

Using CNI, I can acknowledge that these are interpretations. These interpretations, however, are co-constructed through a dialogic process between me and the participants. These are the factors that became the most prominent topics of conversations between our collective experiences and our collaborative interpretation of these experiences with writing classrooms and writing pedagogy. Other similar projects about different classroom and programmatic experiences will yield different thematic connections that can contribute new angles to these conversations. Conducting CNI is not about being comprehensive or definitive; it is about putting forward new angles that can contribute to the emergent conversation that is occurring in Canadian Writing Studies scholarship.

7.6 Bringing them Together: Academic Literacies, RGT, and CNI

I combined Academic Literacies, RGT, and CNI because they all focused on socially situated practice, with each perspective offering me a lens or approach to analyze and report writing research differently. Academic Literacies emphasized individualized meaning making, RGT allowed for broader analysis of participant narratives in relation to wider social practice, and CNI provided a framework to critically examine participant narratives and include participants as co-constructors of knowledge when I was reporting on research. The lenses are not combined frequently in Writing Studies research, but this study indicates that they may offer Writing Studies scholars new ways of seeing and understanding the work that we do.

Initially, I anticipated Academic Literacies being a primary lens because I was focused on individualized knowledge-making in the classroom. As a result, the emphasis on Academic

Literacies and RGT in this study was unbalanced. This balance increased as the study progressed. RGT was more commensurate with Academic Literacies than I anticipated. Academic Literacies allowed me to see individualized moments as opportunities to inform wider contexts, which often led to increased consideration of genre and social practice in various environments. The theories intersected to allow me to tackle a broader range of research than I anticipated; they opened new pathways to see beyond my own assumptions about what student participants could contribute. Instead of focusing on the classroom, I could work individually with participants and see these individualized moments as opportunities to reflect on program building in Writing Studies more generally.

RGT has typically gained more attention in North American writing communities. Other than discussions by Russell et al. (2009), few conversations have contemplated genre and Academic Literacies despite the resonances between the frameworks. Given the ways they combined to balance notions of individual meaning making with writing as a social practice, it seems that there are extensive opportunities for more research with these.

CNI was more than just a complementary piece to the theories that helped to report results. CNI allowed me to integrate the close individualized processes of Academic Literacies and RGT notions of writing as a social practice into the research framework itself. CNI provided a methodological framework that helped to map individual moments with wider genre contexts. It also allowed me to take this mapping with a three-dimensional framework and develop methods that would invite participants to help construct meaning in the project itself. CNI provided a framework that allowed me to embody the theoretical principles that attracted me to Academic Literacies and RGT as I did my research.

7.7 A Story about Relationships

Little did I know when I began this PhD journey that studying how students build knowledge in the writing classroom would become so fixated on relationships. It seems that writing pedagogy, when it's at its strongest, can foster relationships on many levels. It also depends on these relationships forming, evolving, and sustaining themselves over time, space, ideas.

The most obvious level that these relationships form on is between the teacher and student. Each of the papers in this dissertation focus in large part on how these relationships can inform pedagogy. The first paper reflects how strong relationships between myself and Clara and Kent, respectively, allowed me to better understand Academic Literacies in my pedagogical context. In turn, these relationships produced discussions and reflections that could inform pedagogy more widely so that Academic Literacies could accommodate more students, especially as they adapt to the new genres they encounter in first year writing.

The relationships formed with Victor and Mark prompted an open conversation about Writing Studies staffing. Both participants felt comfortable to air their grievances and doubts about pedagogical approaches in the writing classroom. It is also notable that these relationships allowed us to move beyond these grievances to scrutinize and better understand why these circumstances existed, particularly how depending on contract labour may undermine the scaffolded writing processes that help students learn. The depth of the ensuing conversations allowed us to step away from individual issues to explore the impact that contingent labour could have on student-teacher relationships and, by extension, student learning in the writing classroom.

The third paper on students valuing Writing Studies brings together a collection of relationships that I formed with former students. The paper depends on collaboration; this is the

paper where students are situated most broadly as co-constructors of knowledge who can inform teaching practices and how students are implicated in the work that we do. The relationships that we build with students can provide both feedback and ideas on how they see, interpret, receive, and react to the work that occurs in the classroom. In a Canadian Writing Studies landscape that is still forming, the insights drawn from relationships like these can add many elements to the disciplinary puzzle that we are creating to articulate the value and place of the work that we are doing within Canadian post-secondary institutions.

This idea of relationships and their value for research prompts me to consider what this means for Canadian Writing Studies research. As I argued at the beginning of this dissertation, students have tremendous value as research participants who can inform our knowledge building in Writing Studies; many/most scholars would agree. To maximize our learning from their contributions, however, Writing Studies scholars may benefit from reconsidering our relationship to these students as participants. So often, students are seen as being distant in a research sense. They are in the classrooms with us, but they are often seen as learners, not necessarily as potential collaborators who can inform research and program building. The extent of our relationships with them often remains teacher and pupil where one party imparts knowledge and the other party receives knowledge. The relationship is more complex than that, and in this complexity, there is opportunity for deeper understanding of our pedagogical and research practices.

Students may lack the disciplinary expertise that writing teachers and scholars have, but they have a host of things they can tell us about teaching and program building. For example, our arguments for more permanent positions will be strengthened by the way we understand things like contract labour from a student perspective. It is too simple to say “they might not know who

is on a contract and they might not care so long as they get an education.” They do care because it impacts their education, and being able to point to their thoughts on these complex disciplinary issues can enhance our discussions with institutions and administrators. Similarly, more work with student participants, where the relationship is more balanced so that they are co-constructors of knowledge, can help us to understand how a skilling narrative impacts education and what role it might play in our pedagogy. This need not be solely on a classroom level but also on a larger program building level where we’re trying to argue for increased spaces, funding, and resources for Writing Studies research and teaching.

7.8 Future Directions for Research

The project opens several avenues for future conversations and there remain many elements that I could expand in future research. Time constraints, methodological choices, and theoretical frameworks inevitably produce limitations. While these elements help to narrow the project’s scope, they also limit other elements. Ideally, I would have conducted a more immersive ethnographic study where I traced my participants’ journeys over a long period of time. After all, this is what worked well for Beaufort (2007), Eodice et al. (2016), Herrington and Curtis (2000), and Sternglass (1997). Replicating more elements of their studies would have provided me with a deeper understanding of my participants’ experiences because I would have been immersed in the field for a longer period (years instead of months). It would have also fit well with Academic Literacies, which Lillis (2008) explained has a strong ethnographic component. But a time limited PhD project did not leave space for this type of extensive immersion. The focus necessarily had to be a few students and one class experience.

I also acknowledge that ten participants cannot provide a holistic understanding of teaching and learning in the writing classroom, even at one Ontario college. That and working

with former students means that there is always a power dynamic between the researcher and participant that must be managed. That said, a limited number of participants allowed for the immersive and relational (Striano, 2012; Wells, 2011) work that makes narrative inquiry so useful for Writing Studies research, especially because it allows researchers to work closely with participants while allowing participants opportunities to actively create their narratives. Moreover, much of the work with writing students (see Beaufort, 2007; Herrington and Curtis, 2000) also concentrates on research depth with a few participants. This CNI was not designed to generalize results. Rather, I see it as a useful tool to begin exploring the experiences of a few participants to provoke dialogue about bigger ideas in Canadian Writing Studies so that I may add another layer to our teaching and research conversations.

On the topic of layers, an integrated article dissertation brings together several layers of analysis that may not always share the same thread despite deriving from the same study. Research processes are messy, and the range of analysis in this dissertation reflects the multifaceted layers and messiness of my own research process. The analytical papers in this dissertation may seem incongruous as a result. The first two papers scrutinize and push against the skills narrative. The third paper could be considered as something that strays from this thread. It seems to argue that the skills narrative is here to stay and that we cannot do anything about it.

Upon further reflection, however, the third analytical paper takes the scrutiny from the first two papers and critically analyzes how we as a field may achieve an environment where the problems from the first two papers, rigid course structures and a dependence on contingent labour, are placed into a bigger context of the skills narrative.

The papers from this perspective are united by a desire to move beyond the skills narrative. The first paper seeks ways that classrooms may overcome problems of skulking in the classroom. The second paper channels conversations with Mark and Victor to contemplate ways that pedagogies and the knowledge building that they promote are undermined by not just contingent labour but the rigid objective oriented teaching that stems from these structures. The third paper acknowledges the reality of the skills narrative and asks what can be done within this reality to overcome the narrative.

I see these limitations as opportunities to explore the thoughts and questions that persist beyond the dissertation. This project is comprised of numerous small stories. They are a selection from an even larger pool of stories that inform my thinking as a teacher and as a researcher. In the following section, I will reflect on my current thoughts that stem from these limitations to indicate possible research areas where these stories may take me in the future.

7.9 Alternate Forms of Knowledge Building

As I reflect on the type of knowledge building discussed in this dissertation—from the class-level discussions from the first analytical paper through to the more disciplinary inferences of the third paper—I am considering the other types of knowledge creation/meaning-making that were not included in this dissertation. To limit the scope of the study, I chose to analyze participant narratives in relation to my own practice. The study stems from my pedagogical approach in a specific college context. However, this approach meant that I focused on the specific assignments and course structures, which do not always account for the complex ways that texts are created and interpreted in modern literacies practices.

Conversations promoting a wider view of literacy are increasingly common, and conceptions of literacy have become more plural and multimodal. I acknowledged this briefly in

the literature review as I situated "writing studies" in relation to literacy and composition. This expanded view of literacy conceives of texts differently, accounting for more than just written components. Audio, video, images, and materials can all comprise and contribute to a person's literate activities. Multimodal pedagogies help to situate students as "knowledge-producers, drawing together a range of available knowledge resources, instead of being knowledge-consumers fed from just one source" (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p. 11). Multimodal literacies position writers so they can "take advantage of whatever mode best suits the audience, purpose, context, and genre" (Arola, Ball, & Sheppard, 2014, para 8) in which they communicate, offering a greater range of possibilities through which students may compose texts and create new meaning. Indeed, multimodality has opened more spaces for creative and innovative meaning making through the way people compose texts. In a teaching and learning context, this expanded view of literacy has opened avenues for teachers to support students who struggle with traditional notions of writing which prioritize the formal expository writing that is common in research genres.

As I move beyond this dissertation, I am thinking of the instances where participants discussed various ways they engaged in multimodal meaning making beyond COMM1085. In particular, I think of John with whom I spent considerable time during the second interview hypothesizing about ways more multimodal pathways could be opened to students in a first-year writing context that uses a universal design like Conestoga College. John, who struggled with writing formal expository and research papers, had extensive knowledge of coding and working with genres in a computer science context. What if this situation were flipped, where John was not necessarily expected to reproduce genres from COMM1085 elsewhere but rather was offered

pathways wherein he could bring his knowledge of coding practices and use them to compose in a writing class?

Multimodal tools allow writers a host of new ways to create meaning and build knowledge in the writing classroom. Despite the prominence and importance of research writing, it is important that first-year writing classes begin working beyond traditional written genres and open a greater multiplicity of pathways for students to learn writing. Such approaches can have great benefits for students. Multimodal tools help writers “to participate in generating, gathering, linking, structuring, and presenting information in accessible and interactive ways” (Bell, 2017, p. 21), offering students increased agency “because they are positioned as authors making their own design decisions in the context of a public-facing text with a life beyond assessment” (Bell, 2019, p. 52). This agency allows more people to participate in meaning making that is personal, draws on their strengths, responds to cultural and social realities both in and beyond the classroom, and challenges them to think differently about the ideas they’re communicating and how they’re communicated. As I work through the next iterations of data analysis and apply elements of this study to my pedagogies, I am increasingly scrutinizing the ways that first-year writing courses can facilitate meaning making that better reflects the wider social and multimodal experiences that students experience.

7.10 What I am Thinking about Now

I am contemplating how this research can be extended to a high school context. Seven of my ten participants commented on how different COMM1085 was compared to high school and how this difference made it easier for them to engage. Each of the three who did not make this comment had unique circumstances. Fatima found this course completely new because she had never received this type of instruction in high school. However, she described how the content

she learned was new for her compared to any other writing styles that she had learned previously: “It was completely different. I erased what I learned before so I started from scratch to learn over again.” Students must often adapt to new genres in the classroom, but this notion of starting from scratch is disturbing. The learning curve associated with college writing can be steep, but the more synergy that can be obtained between different writing curricula, the easier this curve will be. If we can find more ways to collaborate with other levels of instruction, then we can better accommodate people like Fatima.

Victor was the sole student who claimed that he had a positive high school experience. The issue is that this was in India, not in Canada. He expressed admiration for the way that his teachers encouraged discussion, debate, and opinion. He recounts how the “our teachers were so welcoming about it. They were like ‘it’s okay as long as it’s not vulgar or anything. We want you to share your views.’” The openness was liberating and benefitted the way that he wrote and thought creatively. This was not the case for most participants, so this willingness to engage in ideas and give students freedom to write their thoughts may also play into future curricula improvement.

Mark explained that he still had to adjust to new writing contexts (not the hamburger paper, as he calls it) when he first went to college. His positive experience came primarily from a grade 11 teacher who pushed him to think beyond the curriculum and to focus on process and the final product rather than just the grade. He describes how “for me, that was eye-opening that what I am writing can mean more than just answering a question. And I think that made more of a difference than anything is like I should be putting extra effort to make it that what I’m writing is enjoyable to read, not just facts or fiction.” This is a specific circumstance of a teacher who motivated a single student to improve his work. These moments happen frequently from day to

day. Most teachers can recount at least a few of these moments. Most students can as well. But are there ways that we can channel the ethos that these teachers bring to the classroom and apply them more broadly across curriculum?

This question applies to all my participants. It applies to the positive experiences that Mark and Victor had. And it speaks to something that lacked for the other participants who found the transition to college writing so great. Their concerns speak to a larger body of literature that has emerged from across North America which promotes collaboration between high school and post-secondary teachers. The goal is to avoid playing what Kittle (2006) called the “blame game” (p. 135) where post-secondary teachers blame high school teachers for students who are inadequately prepared to write at college or university, and where high school teachers blame post-secondary teachers for not clarifying their expectations for post-secondary writing. These anxieties that high school teachers often feel about not understanding post-secondary expectations are articulated in Jordan et al. (2006), and the confusion was resonated with Patterson and Duer’s (2006) overview of what high school and college teachers prioritize. Dennihy (2015) argued that post-secondary teachers blame high school teachers without understanding what they teach or why they teach it.

The reality is that high school teachers and post-secondary teachers want the same things for their students (Dennihy, 2015; Patterson & Duer, 2006). Instead, standardization often interferes with how much flexibility high school teachers can offer students as they develop their papers. This is where the “SAT essay,” as Smith (2006) called it [the five paragraph essay] becomes a useful pedagogical tool. Even within this restrictive model, however, Dennihy (2015) and Schulster (2012) have developed workshops through which high school teachers may collaborate with post-secondary teachers to refine curriculum, achieve common ground, and

share experiences that lead to stronger practice that can benefit students' transition from high school writing to post-secondary writing.

These opportunities exist in Canada. The level of standardization (SAT level) does not exist in Canada. Moreover, as Brooks (2002) and Clary-Lemon (2009) highlighted, Writing Studies/Composition has not taken hold in Canada like it has in the United States. The idea of Writing Studies' practicality and utility that they describe does exist in Canada, but our high school curricula are still rooted in the belles-lettristic tradition. Certainly, developing writing skills is a goal, but the types of standardized testing that the United States experience are not as prominent in Canadian contexts.

Ontario is a prime example. Beyond the Grade 10 Literacy Test, there are no standardized tests for which students must prepare. This means that two years of high school curriculum may build upon the foundation that the five-paragraph essay establishes (Smith, 2006) and open new avenues for thinking and writing. This is where collaborative workshops like those that Dennihy (2015) and Schulster (2012) designed can be useful to produce collaboration between writing instructors at levels that have hitherto been isolated from each other. If this collaboration can be positive, perhaps small tweaks in the curriculum can slowly change the narrative that dominates students' experiences as they transition from high school English to post-secondary English.

I can envision new directions for research which focus on student experiences longitudinally in a Canadian context. The longitudinal studies of student growth in writing programs (Beaufort, 2007; Eodice et al., 2016; Herrington & Curtis, 2000; Sternglass, 1997) focus on American contexts. The increased focus on Writing Studies in Canada may open similar opportunities to examine students in our context. With increased attention on writing and communicating across the lifespan (see Barton & Hamilton, 2012; Bazerman et al., 2017;

Hamilton, 2015), it is becoming increasingly important to see writing and literacy as something that is learned across a long period of time rather than in a few post-secondary classes. As more hubs for Writing Studies emerge in Canada, longitudinal studies of student experiences over time, from the first-year level through their programs and possibly even into the workforce, would offer tremendous insight into how Writing Studies programming informs their learning across a long period of time.

I am also preoccupied with the voices that were not heard in this context. I think of the young men that I teach regularly in Conestoga's Faculty of Engineering. The faculty comprises young men primarily. The only time in my teaching career that I have not taught in this Faculty was the year in which I issued my call for participants. At this time, I was teaching groups in food processing, policing, and firefighting which have more proportionate ratios of men to women.

But these young men have a story to tell and, based on my experience teaching these young male electrical or mechanical engineers/welders/robotics technicians, they have much to teach us Writing Studies practitioners about what we teach and how we teach it to audiences who are not usually interested in the content. So much of the literature focuses on university-bound or university-level students. The reality is that much of Canada's population remains rural. Many young men are like myself: first generation students who come from blue collar communities.

They come from a different way of life and they are exposed to topics and ideas that they never encountered previously. Many hated English because it focused on Shakespeare and put them into a five-paragraph box. Many don't want to take my classes because they think it will be more of the same. Many want to write papers questioning why our writing courses exist. Others want to write about hunting, cars, and renewable energy. When they submit their final papers, I

frequently receive critical reflections on how we can transform to renewable forms of energy, that question the education system and how it can better accommodate students, that question how the media can better represent people's interests, and that strategize ways that competing interest groups can develop more synergy and rational conversation.

These young men question me about why I would want to teach them writing and communication when the task seems futile (from their perspective, not mine—I happen to see great potential here, obviously). They challenge me to get creative in the classroom and find new ways of getting them to improve their writing, even just a bit. They challenge the ways that I see “good writing” in context and they show me new avenues for teaching and thinking about writing. These students are increasingly coming to post-secondary education—often to trades-based programs offered by community colleges—and they are an important demographic that we will have to engage in the future. There is a learning opportunity here for all involved, and I hope that I can work with these students more extensively in future research.

This leads me to a final blind spot in Canadian Writing Studies research: the community college. At the 2019 *Canadian Association for Studies in Discourse and Writing* (CASDW) conference, only four out of 106 presenters listed college affiliations (CASDW, 2019). One of these presenters listed an affiliation to both a college and a university. Ironically, I did not list Conestoga College as my institutional affiliation because Western is where I was completing my PhD. Even if I am included, 5/106 presenters at the primary Canadian Writing Studies community gathering is telling.

It suggests that our colleges do not have a large research base. Mueller (2017) highlighted the various networks that exist across borders between Canada and the United States. Research

links, influences, and networks form between borders. This data from CASDW could add to this conversation by showing an important link that is not so strong.

I could argue that colleges may be considered “second class” compared to the university English programs that formed in the previous century. It is possible that the belle-lettristic focus that Canadian English departments adopted (Clary-Lemon, 2009; Johnson, 1988; Smith, 2006) situated “English” as a literary, canonical venture that existed in universities primarily. The skill-building focus that colleges typically adopt would focus more on technical writing/traditional composition, if they existed at all. While literary studies grew at the universities, college English may have been more focused on the “dirty work” (North, 1987, p. 13) of academic writing. Add in the fact that most major Canadian Writing Studies research focuses on universities, and it is clear that colleges are still developing their space in Writing Studies; they are a marginalized space in an already marginalized field. Clary-Lemon (2009), Mueller et al. (2017), Paré (2017), and Wetherbee Phelps (2014) focus primarily on Writing Studies in a Canadian university context. Our colleges do not really receive attention in these discussions—they may be implied or looped into the wider Writing Studies fields, but they have their own needs.

This blind spot makes sense given that our few research circles (see Mueller et al., 2017) are in universities. They apply to Social Science and Humanities Research Council grants and their immediate contexts are the university. In my five years at Conestoga, I never saw a call for research or for funding to conduct research. As a contract faculty, I could not apply even if I wanted. Although colleges receive research grants, this participation does not often extend to contingent faculty. Any research funding (travel, grants, program funding) that I could access was offered through Western University and it could, by extension, flow to the college through my project. A unique set of circumstances—a Writing Studies PhD student working at a college

and interested in working with students—led to this project. It was not because there was a burgeoning research community. In this sense, it is no surprise that colleges are underrepresented in the Canadian Writing Studies literature.

As my work with former COMM1085 students shows, knowledge making in college contexts can be just as profound as those which occur at universities. The stories that Kara, Cynthia, Kent, Victor, John, Mark, Fatima, Sam, Kristen and Amber tell show that writing skills are built and disseminated through the colleges as well. This is a nuance that deserves definition and attention because they can tell scholars and teachers much about teaching and learning writing at the post-secondary level.

7.11 References

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Chapter 8

8 Epilogue

My work with former students in this project has contributed to understanding what exactly students can contribute to wider pedagogical and disciplinary discussions. When I look at my own growth as a researcher and as a teacher over the past four years of my career, I have a better understanding for how students act as collaborators who can inform our own experiences teaching and researching Canadian Writing Studies. It is easy to think, particularly for those of us who are adjuncts, that our own experience and the things that we read in our research communities can be enough to teach a strong writing curriculum and to build writing programs. This expertise is important.

But the students are right in front of us. For some people like myself, students are our main and sometimes only point of contact in the workplace. The strongest relationships that we build are with students in the ephemeral space we call the classroom. When I say that I love my job and the people I work with, what I'm really saying is that I love going into the classroom and both working and learning alongside students. These relationships and experiences develop, and then they dissipate. What if we could harness just a bit more from these relationships? What if we can ask what it truly means to enter into a partnership with our students (rather than the "contract" that the syllabus supposedly represents), to learn from them and to understand what it says about us as teachers and scholars in this field? If nothing else, I hope that I have called attention to how the less quantifiable, reflexive moments where students are offering us feedback can offer stronger platforms to discuss Writing Studies in a Canadian context.

Appendix A: Guiding Interview Questions

1. What kind of writing have they experienced before coming to the college?
2. How did these writing experiences compare to the composition classroom?
3. What kind of writing support did you receive?
4. What kind of writing do they do beyond school, if any (jobs, family, extra-curricular activities)?
5. What they thought of the introductory college comp coming into college?
6. What they thought after taking the course?
7. What role do they see the course playing for them beyond the institution?
8. How would they change the course/concept of an introductory college class?

Appendix B: Guiding Focus Group Questions

1. What were your initial impressions of this course?
2. How did the syllabus influence your learning?
3. Which resources, if any, did you consult to complement your learning in this class? If you did not consult any, why or why not?
4. What are your impressions of the prescribed course learning outcomes? Did they influence how you approached the course?
5. What other on-campus resources (such as the writing centre, the library, the APA resources) did you consult, and how did they influence your learning in this course?
6. How can this course better enrich your college learning?