

NEGOTIATING PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVES: THRESHOLD CONCEPTS AS A
SHARED LANGUAGE FOR WRITING INSTRUCTION

by

Morgan Hanson

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

Middle Tennessee State University
May 2018

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Julie Myatt, Chair

Dr. Kate Pantelides

Dr. Eric Detweiler

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to my wonderful committee for their dedication to this project. I extend special thanks to my dissertation chair, Dr. Julie Myatt, who taught me to love rhetoric, composition, and writing studies. Thank you for putting in countless hours to help me grow as a scholar. I would not have wanted to do this project with anyone else. I also thank my readers, Dr. Kate Pantelides and Dr. Eric Detweiler. Dr. Pantelides, your guidance, encouragement, and mentorship have made for a great graduate experience. Dr. Detweiler, your calm and collected responses during my stressed out moments got me through the most difficult part of drafting. Thank you both for your patience and your wisdom.

Also, I thank my colleagues and friends. Thank you for cheering me on throughout this graduate program, and thank you for taking the time to listen as I worked out research ideas and vented about the difficulties of writing. I could not have made it through this program without your love, support, prayers, and encouragement. In particular, I would like to express gratitude toward Hillary Yeager and Maggie Collins Katamay. You both provided keen insights into my argument and cheered me on while I wrote, and I am so thankful for your friendship.

I extend a very special thank you to my family. I would like to thank my sister, Michelle Abt, for always inspiring me and encouraging me. I would like to thank my first teachers: my parents, Michael and Jackie Abt. Dad, you taught me the joy of hard work and how to have a good time wherever I go. Mom, you encouraged me to always write, and because of that encouragement, I knew early on that I wanted to be a writing teacher.

Thank you for homeschooling me and for letting me study writing and literature and only minimal amounts of calculus.

Finally, I could not have finished this degree without my husband, Stuart Hanson. Stu, thank you for taking care of me by feeding me, doing my laundry, listening to me, and supporting me. Thank you for being my biggest fan and for always reminding me that I can achieve anything. I love you.

ABSTRACT

Matthew Abraham (2016) argues that the field of rhetoric and composition can only be legitimized, and thus end labor issues within the field, via a national credentialing system based on threshold concepts of writing studies for first-year composition (FYC) instructors, as such a system both unifies the field around writing studies and addresses its labor issues head-on (94). Throughout his discussion, Abraham cites Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's field-defining text, *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* (2015), as their compilation of threshold concepts and support essays by leading scholars provides a current definition and demarcation of the field at present. I extend the conversation on the shared language of threshold concepts by examining a local, diverse general education writing program (Middle Tennessee State University's General Education English program), as many instructors in this department have varying knowledge of writing studies theory and practice. I argue that writing program administrators (WPAs) of diverse departments need to take instructor prior knowledge into account when preparing faculty professional development workshops on threshold concepts.

In this ethnographic study, I examine how threshold concepts of writing studies can inform the teaching of writing and the development of a shared vision for writing instruction in a small, local context. Likely, the demographic makeup of MTSU's General Education English faculty is similar to that found in many institutions, and thus it provides a strong starting point for examining the viability of a threshold concepts framework for faculty professional development. In order to establish how threshold concepts can inform the instruction of writing and a shared vision for writing, I examine

instructors' prior knowledge of writing studies theory, their current approaches and practices in the classroom, and how they see threshold concepts relating with their theories and approaches. I find that instructors struggle with attaining praxis, a struggle which stems both from the need for a foundational knowledge of RCWS theories and performance anxiety. I conclude with recommendations for incorporating threshold concepts into departmental student learning objectives (SLOs) and developing professional development workshops that stress a *what/why/how* approach, using threshold concepts as the bridging theory between what instructors and WPAs know about writing pedagogy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURESxi
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
Genesis of the Study	1
Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies Overview	3
Threshold Concepts and Faculty Professional Development	7
Purpose of the Study	13
Organization of the Study	21
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	24
Introduction	24
Threshold Concepts: A General Overview	24
Faculty Professional Development	31
Putting the Pieces Together: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies, Transfer, and Prior Knowledge	39
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	49
Introduction	49
Qualitative Research and Ethnography: A Brief Review of the Literature.	50
Role of the Researcher.	53
Reliability and Validity.	55
Sampling Method.	56
Procedure.	57
Participants	59

Setting	59
Survey Participants	60
Interview Participants	64
Data Analysis	66
Coding	70
Coding Process	71
Limitations and Potential Research Bias	75
CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS	78
Introduction	78
Theory and/versus Practice: Finding Praxis	81
99 Theories but Process Is the One	88
Performance Anxiety and a Preference for Practice	95
Performance for Rehire: Labor Concerns for NTTs	96
Problems with Theory and Preferences for Practice	104
Experience Is the Best Teacher: Instructors' Past Experiences as an Approach to Writing Instruction	107
Conclusion	113
Student Learning Objectives as a Site for Theory Acquisition	114
Faculty Perceptions of Student Learning Objectives	115
2013 MTSU Student Learning Objectives Analysis	119
Theories Encouraged by Student Learning Objectives	126
Conclusion	133
First-year Composition as a Service Course	134

First-year Composition as a Service Course: A Critical Overview	136
Process, Transfer, and the Problems with Skills and Strategies	139
Conclusion	142
CHAPTER V: RECOMMENDATIONS	145
Introduction	145
Threshold Concepts and Burkean Identification	146
Threshold Concepts as a Unifying “Language”	148
Threshold Concepts and Comfort Zones	155
Threshold Concepts and Student Learning Objectives	157
Student Learning Objectives: A Brief Overview	160
Threshold Concepts and the Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement	163
Revising Student Learning Objectives with Threshold Concepts	165
Threshold Concepts and Faculty Professional Development	177
Professional Development: A Brief Review	178
Instructor Recommendations for Professional Development	180
What/Why/How and Threshold Concepts	183
Conclusion	191
WORKS CITED	194
APPENDICES	201
APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS	202
APPENDIX B: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES	203
APPENDIX C: MTSU ENGL 1010 SLOs (2012)	206

APPENDIX D: MTSU ENGL 1020 SLOs (2012)	207
APPENDIX E: MTSU ENGL 1010 SLOs (2013)	209
APPENDIX F: MTSU ENGL 1020 SLOs (2013)	212
APPENDIX G: MTSU ENGL 1010 AND ENGL 1020 SLOs (2017)	215
APPENDIX H: IRB DOCUMENTATION	218

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: <i>Description of Interview Participants</i>	65
Table 2: <i>Final Coding and Stats from NVivo</i>	74
Table 3: <i>MTSU ENGL 1010 and ENGL 1020 Student Learning Objectives (2013 Revision)</i>	121
Table 4: <i>MTSU ENGL 1010 and ENGL 1020 Teaching Objectives (2013 Revision)</i> ..	124

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: <i>Number of Years Teaching (19 out of 28 participants responded)</i>	62
Figure 2: <i>Instructor Preparation (20 out of 28 participants responded)</i>	62
Figure 3: <i>MTSU General Education Courses Taught (20 out of 28 participants responded)</i>	63
Figure 4: <i>Recommended ENGL 1010 SLOs with Threshold Concepts</i>	171
Figure 5: <i>Recommended ENGL 1020 SLOs with Threshold Concepts</i>	172
Figure 6: <i>Workshop Flowchart</i>	186

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Genesis of the Study

I first encountered Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's *Naming What We Know* (2015) (*Naming*) in the spring of 2015, when Elizabeth Wardle spoke at the Peck Research on Writing Symposium. She introduced the idea of threshold concepts, and, from what I remember, explained that the purpose was to unify the field for both practitioners and stakeholders. I remember being particularly intrigued by the idea of sharing writing studies with stakeholders, as I had not thought about the necessity of advocating for writing studies' place in the university. So instead of leaving the symposium with newfound knowledge of threshold concepts, I left with questions related to sharing writing studies inside and outside of my immediate local context, the English Department at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU).

I revisited threshold concepts by reading and discussing *Naming* in Dr. Julie Myatt's English 7530: Studies in Composition and Rhetoric course, and it was through the conversations on *Naming* and from my previous experience with threshold concepts in 2015 that I began to question ways to share threshold concepts of writing studies within our diverse English department, one that is diverse because of the varying generational, educational, and pedagogical differences within the department. How would faculty respond to threshold concepts of writing studies as presented in *Naming*? Would they be able to take the ideas and use them, or would they need them explained in a different way? How should threshold concepts of writing studies be shared with a diverse department? What would work for them? Also, how might TCs allow

departmental administrators to address the challenges of providing PD for such a large and varied group of instructors?

Using these questions, I began to create my dissertation topic. Originally, and rather idealistically, I had just assumed that faculty could attend workshops on threshold concepts, and then they would immediately be converted to the magical world of teaching with threshold concepts, and live happily ever after. However, after reviewing the literature on faculty professional development, and after a failed attempt at a faculty professional development workshop on threshold concepts, I quickly learned that such an idealistic jump from not-knowing threshold concepts to “Let’s use threshold concepts for everything!”—especially after just one workshop—was not realistic, even in the wildest of fairy tales.

I then began to modify my approach, fortunately around the same time as Matthew Abraham’s article on threshold concepts and a national credentialing system. While threshold concepts certainly define a field in that they combine the field’s wide knowledge on the subject, not all participants in the field may possess that knowledge, especially in English studies, a field in which many instructors who have only a cursory knowledge of RCWS. As Adler-Kassner and John Majewski illustrate in their chapter in *Naming What We Know*, “Extending the Invitation: Threshold Concepts, Professional Development, and Outreach” (2015), threshold concepts establish a solid foundation for departmental unification even in programs in which faculty members draw from differing pedagogical perspectives. A key goal in the Adler-Kassner and Majewski study was to have faculty members gather to discuss threshold concepts important to their program.

However, I find that Adler-Kassner and Majewski overlook a step: threshold concept buy-in. In their study, the faculty have bought into threshold concept theory as an organizing principle for their courses. However, I began to wonder how faculty, especially faculty from a diverse department with competing theories of writing instruction, understand and accept threshold concepts as a unifying theoretical lens for writing instruction. In order to create more effective faculty professional development that aids instructor buy-in for threshold concept theory, I elected to perform an ethnographic study, one that uses surveys and interviews as quantitative and qualitative tools in order to understand the formal and informal ways instructors were prepared to teach, faculty theoretical prior knowledge, their approaches to the classroom, and how they viewed threshold concepts as tying into their present courses. In an English department, where competing theories of writing abound, faculty prior knowledge must be taken into account when conducting professional development workshops so that the content in the workshops might resonate with the knowledge faculty already have, and thus would more effectively promote uptake of threshold concepts theory.

Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies Overview

In their edited collection *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* (2015), Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, along with twenty-nine other prominent rhetoric, composition, and writing studies (RCWS) scholars, established threshold concepts for the field, identifying one meta concept (Writing Is an Activity and a Subject of Study) and five major concepts with their subconcepts. Adler-Kassner and Wardle define threshold concepts as “concepts critical for continued learning and participation in an area or within a community of practice” (2). Threshold concepts define

a field because they are an “articulation of shared beliefs” (Yancey xix).

In the introduction to *Naming*, Adler-Kassner and Wardle explain that they selected threshold concepts as their lens for disciplinary definition and explanation precisely because they see threshold concepts as speaking “both to and beyond our disciplinary community” (3). With much of RCWS scholarship focusing on field best practices or field demarcation, Adler-Kassner and Wardle see that a threshold concepts framework grants them the ability to identify the field’s scholarship to a wide audience, one that spans any potential stakeholder (student, instructor, administrator, etc.) so as to expand field definition beyond RCWS scholars. Threshold concepts allow for wider comprehension with their comprehensible language, as threshold concepts were originally designed by Meyer and Land (2003) to help students understand and enter into a new discipline. In fact, Adler-Kassner and Wardle composed the threshold concepts in such a way that audience members both within and without the discipline could understand the theories of RCWS (3).

One of the hopes Adler-Kassner and Wardle have for their threshold concepts is that they “can provide a basis for writing studies professionals to describe what we know in ways that are accessible to educated readers (and listeners) who are not necessarily specialists in our discipline” (6). Adler-Kassner and Wardle, though, acknowledge that only a select group of RCWS scholars created these concepts, and so they may need to be translated for non-RCWS scholars (6-7). In this dissertation, I consider how these threshold concepts work within a local setting. Are the ideas of the field already articulated for this local audience, or do these threshold concepts need to be reframed? What threshold concepts are privileged within the department based on instructors’ prior

knowledge and SLOs? How will instructors take up this new knowledge of threshold concepts? What must WPAs take into account when preparing workshops on threshold concepts of writing studies?

Adler-Kassner, Wardle, and others developed RCWS threshold concepts based on the work of Jan H. F. Meyer and Ray Land, economics professors who desired to discover a way to help their students understand economics as a discipline. In 2003, Jan H. F. Meyer and Ray Land introduced threshold concepts in a report for the Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses Project (or, ETL), a project that strove to “identify factors leading to high quality learning environments within five disciplinary contexts across a range of higher education institutions” (“Threshold Concepts” 1). Meyer suggested threshold concepts as a way to differentiate between those student learning outcomes (SLOs) which help students view disciplinary material in a new light and those that do not (1). For Meyer and Land, threshold concepts are core ideas for a discipline that are often troublesome for students to learn as these concepts are the esoterically constructed ideas of a (largely unfamiliar) discipline. They first define threshold concepts as

akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. It represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress. As a consequence of comprehending a threshold concept there may thus be a transformed internal view of subject matter, subject landscape, or even worldview. This transformation may be sudden or it may be protracted over a considerable period of time, with the transition to understanding proving troublesome. Such a transformed view or landscape may represent how people “think” in a particular discipline, or how they perceive, apprehend, or experience particular phenomena within that discipline (or more generally). (“Threshold Concepts” 1)

While lengthy, Meyer and Land's definition introduces and establishes a definition for threshold concepts. Fascinatingly, their future work (and the work of others) continues to use this definition, which indicates just how thorough Meyer and Land were with establishing threshold concepts. Two key words jump out from this quotation: transformed and troublesome. The purpose of a threshold concept is to transform the learner's understanding of a subject, altering the way the student views either the discipline or world. But this transformation is not an easy one; rather, it is troublesome, as such a shift in worldview can rarely be simple. While some scholars argue about the characteristics of threshold concepts (as noted below), troublesome seems to appear quite frequently in the literature, and Meyer and Land often turn their focus to the ways in which crossing a disciplinary threshold can be quite troublesome, as any such journey through a threshold places the learner in a liminal position for a brief (or lengthy) moment of time.

Simply put, then, threshold concepts are the ideas that compose a discipline. By framing curricula around threshold concepts, instructors can teach students about a discipline rather than focus on seemingly acontextual skills that could be learned by rote. Any practitioner within the discipline must initially learn these ideas to play an active role in the discipline. But threshold concepts are not a one-and-done "skill" to be learned. Threshold concepts don't magically transform a practitioner into a guru of the field. Instead, practitioners must wrestle continually with these ideas as they practice within their disciplines. However, the struggle is not as great nor is it as troublesome as it was when the practitioner first encountered, considered, and finally embraced the disciplinary

ideas, for the practitioner's worldview has already been transformed by threshold concepts. In fact, practitioners might often enjoy the struggle that comes with these ideas, as they know that such a struggle indicates active participation in the field.

While there are many characteristics used to describe threshold concepts (which I further discuss in the second chapter), one of the chief descriptors of threshold concepts is *liminality*. Using Van Gennep's concept of the rite of passage, Meyer and Land explain that when students learn about the threshold concepts of a particular discipline, they enter a liminal state, neither fully within nor outside of the discipline. Students inhabit both worlds; at times, they have glimpses of the new worldview provided by threshold concepts. Other times, they return to a middle state, where they grapple with the competing worldviews, the new and the old (Meyer, Land, and Baillie, in particular, expand on this liminal learning process in their preface to *Threshold Concepts and Transformational Learning*, 2010, xi). Much of the scholarship focuses on how to help students move through liminality as they learn about threshold concepts, an idea I delve into more in the second chapter. However, not much scholarship explores faculty acquisition of threshold concepts, and so I aim to begin filling in that conversation gap by starting with faculty prior knowledge as it relates with those threshold concepts of writing studies as articulated by Adler-Kassner and Wardle in *Naming*.

Threshold Concepts and Faculty Professional Development

Because threshold concepts theory takes into account student liminality when learning about a field, I believe that threshold concepts will work in the same manner for faculty. In their introduction to *Threshold Concepts and Transformational Learning* (2010), Jan H.F. Meyer, Ray Land, and Caroline Baillie explain the journey through the

preliminal, liminal, and postliminal states a student inhabits when encountering new, transformational learning (xi). Throughout the liminal learning process, a student encounters new knowledge and then grapples with it in the liminal state, trying to balance the new with her prior knowledge. Eventually, the student reaches the postliminal state when her worldview has been permanently transformed by the new knowledge. Like the writing process, transformative learning via threshold concepts acts as a recursive process, with the learner moving back and forth between phases until the learner fully integrates the knowledge into her worldview. Because of the liminal learning embraced by threshold concepts scholarship, scholars focus heavily on ways for mitigating liminality for students as they work through threshold concepts.

However, the idea of threshold concepts as a pedagogical framework is troublesome in and of itself. Most threshold concepts scholars (both those in general and in writing studies) barely address how faculty members engage with TCs as they consider, adopt, and integrate TCs into their pedagogical philosophies and practices. More often than not, these scholars seem to present a linear model of faculty acquisition of threshold concepts, with minor difficulty only in naming threshold concepts for their field or department. Meyer briefly explores faculty learning of threshold concepts in his “Variation in Student Learning as a Threshold Concept” (2012). In this article, Meyer argues that faculty create a “mental model” of how their students learn, and so he wants to transform their mental model to more closely reflect student learning as articulated in threshold concepts. Meyer chose to hone in on faculty prior knowledge in order to reflect on their understanding of how two hypothetical students moved through understanding a given topic. He remarks that the faculty struggled with articulating student learning, and

so he argues that threshold concepts provide a language for that learning. He states that the faculty entered into a liminal state when beginning to understand variations in student learning (10). He then lays out a trajectory for how faculty move through acquiring the concept of “variation in student learning,” transitioning from “no initial agreement” on the concept, to beginning to describe and then embracing the topic, concluding with conscious reflection on the idea (11). Even though Meyer argues that faculty experience liminality with the topic, his trajectory indicates that faculty may move through this liminality quite easily. Moreover, Meyer does not delve into the theoretical knowledge of the teachers. Rather, he relies on teachers’ past experiences with student learning. Of course, theory does play some role, but his activity certainly encourages instructors to consider the experiential aspect of student learning.

Often, the scholarship seems to demonstrate a rather linear process for faculty use of threshold concepts. The literature recommends faculty meeting together to articulate the threshold concepts of their discipline (or within their local context). Once the threshold concepts have been articulated, instructors share the threshold concepts with their students. Finally, instructors reconvene to discuss best practices for introducing students to threshold concepts and strategies for helping students through liminality. Much of the scholarship, though, comes from more homogenous departments where faculty have similar theoretical foundations. In Adler-Kassner and John Majewski’s chapter in *Naming*, for example, the faculty profiled are all history professors, and as such, they have similar theoretical, practical, and methodological backgrounds, with differences only in eras of specialization. In many writing programs, though, instructors come from more diverse backgrounds, with several writing instructors holding degrees in

literature rather than in RCWS. In a heterogeneous department, then, the theoretical, practical, and methodological approaches can vary greatly, with instructors not being able to effectively engage with each other on theoretical prior knowledge. I extend the conversation by exploring how theoretical prior knowledge impacts faculty liminality.

Both Meyer and Adler-Kassner and Majewski present an idyllic and systematic approach to threshold concepts and faculty professional development. For these scholars, faculty professional development regarding threshold concepts consists of faculty discussion groups in which participants either work with traditional definitions of threshold concepts (in Meyer's case) or identify the threshold concepts of their field (as Adler-Kassner and Majewski demonstrate). These scholars gloss over faculty liminality, almost taking it for granted and trusting that faculty can move to a place of postliminality merely by grappling with the threshold concepts. In fact, even though Meyer does acknowledge that faculty enter into a liminal state (10), he provides steps for faculty acquisition of threshold concepts, which seems to indicate that, unlike student liminality, faculty liminality is a linear process. Of course, faculty probably do move through liminality easier than students, since they spend their careers wrestling with the unknown, but faculty liminality cannot be so black and white as Meyer and Adler-Kassner and Majewski suggest, especially when considering a diverse department, in which most writing instructors do not have specializations in the field. Adler-Kassner and Majewski, for example, worked with history professors, all of whom had degrees in history. Both Meyer and Adler-Kassner and Majewski were working with homogeneous faculty groups. The history department Adler-Kassner and Majewski explore seems to have an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the field, as evidenced by how the

instructors debated the threshold concepts. Even though they had some struggles in naming the theory, the instructors in Adler-Kassner and Majewski's study did not have to come to a collective understanding of what they knew.

The views of threshold concepts and faculty professional development have extended, at least in RCWS, to the issue of field legitimacy through definition and labor. In a recent issue of *College Composition and Communication*, Matthew Abraham (2016) argues that concerns about "rhetoric and composition's status and legitimacy as a discipline are tied up with the labor conditions in first-year writing (FYW)" (69). Throughout his discussion on the legitimacy-through-labor issue, Abraham cites Linda Adler-Kassner and Wardle's *Naming* as he argues that their compilation of threshold concepts provides a current definition of the field, and supporting essays by leading scholars further demarcate the field at present. Abraham concludes that the field can only be legitimized via a national credentialing system based on threshold concepts of writing studies for first-year composition (FYC)¹ instructors, as such a system both unifies the field around writing studies and addresses its labor issues head-on (94).

For Abraham, a credentialing system based on threshold concepts solves the field and faculty status situation. Abraham sees Adler-Kassner and Wardle's threshold concepts as the harmonious force for field rebranding: "The transformation of rhetoric and composition into 'writing studies' and the development of 'threshold concepts,' as envisioned by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, provides a route through which to increase the disciplinary standing of writing teachers by 'naming what we

¹ For the first-year writing course, scholars typically use either FYC or first-year writing (FYW).

know,' restructuring the FYW class as a site of exploitative working conditions, and demarcating the knowledge domains that establish the teaching of writing as necessitating the training and recognition of certified experts" (71). To boost the political-economic labor of the field, Abraham believes the field must center on an identity in order to coalesce what students learn in the classroom so that external stakeholders can see a "unified approach to the teaching of writing" (74). Ultimately, Abraham concludes that a credentialing system based on threshold concepts of writing studies should be put in place for all FYC instructors.

Abraham is not the first scholar to claim that instituting a way to credential all FYC instructors would solve the field's legitimacy problem. Michael Murphy, for example, argues for a credentialing system in his article "New Faculty for a New University: Toward a Full-Time Teaching-Intensive Faculty Track in Composition" (2000). Abraham is, though, among the first to provide a curriculum for such credentialing via threshold concepts. While I believe that threshold concepts can be used to help establish unity in the field, I do not see that threshold concepts should be immediately adopted as the standard for a credentialing system. Abraham's claims move to an almost fanatic level by an immediate and unquestioning acceptance of threshold concepts as the way to define the field and, in a move that stems from his acceptance, the call for a mandate to credential all FYC instructors. Before establishing a credentialing system, before even considering such a system, we must first see how faculty members respond to and incorporate threshold concepts of writing studies into their own course designs. These threshold concepts are new to writing studies, and, moreover, have only been established by thirty-nine writing studies scholars. I'm not at all questioning the

validity of Adler-Kassner and Wardle's threshold concepts of writing studies, but I do question how a wider group of FYC instructors respond to and implement threshold concepts. I call, then, for baby steps.

In order to begin establishing threshold concepts as the central force in disciplinary unification, we must first begin at the departmental level. As Adler-Kassner and John Majewski illustrate in their chapter in *Naming What We Know*, "Extending the Invitation: Threshold Concepts, Professional Development, and Outreach" (2015), threshold concepts establish a solid foundation for departmental unification even in programs in which faculty members draw from differing pedagogical perspectives. As I see it, threshold concepts uniquely grant both a theoretical and practical framework for instructors while still allowing instructors to integrate their personal and professional interests into their writing courses, thus providing democratic solidarity within a department. Unlike learning objectives, which provide an almost skills-based, decontextualized approach to teaching and learning, threshold concepts "bind a subject together, and ... are fundamental to ways of thinking and practising in that discipline" (Meyer and Land, 2005, 1). Thus, threshold concepts illustrate the fundamental aspects of a discipline from which instructors can then build their courses. As such, threshold concepts allow for instructor agency while working to unify departments.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to examine how threshold concepts of writing studies can inform the teaching of writing and the development of a shared vision for writing instruction at Middle Tennessee State University, as few studies have been conducted on the ways in which threshold concepts can enhance instruction, especially in

regard to novice teachers and first-year composition (FYC) instructors who have specialties in other areas (e.g., literature). Not only do MTSU's General Education English instructors have degrees of employment in the department, they also have vastly different backgrounds, with most focusing on some period of literature or popular culture instead of a background in rhetoric, composition, and writing studies. Likely, this demographic makeup of MTSU's faculty is similar to that found in many institutions, and thus it provides a nice starting point for examining the viability of a threshold concepts framework for faculty professional development.

I extend the conversation on threshold concepts and faculty professional development by examining a local, diverse general education writing program, as many instructors in this department have varying knowledge of writing studies theory and practice. Here, diversity is a positive aspect, as the varying generational, educational, and pedagogical differences within a department establish the uniqueness of a local context. I argue that writing program administrators (WPAs) of diverse departments need to take instructor prior knowledge and instructor liminality into account with preparing faculty professional development workshops on threshold concepts.

In this study, I use threshold concepts as a lens through which to understand best practices for instructor professional development throughout a local department, namely via SLOs and workshops. As I see it, threshold concepts uniquely unpack RCWS theory and practice in a way that students, instructors, scholars, and administrative stakeholders can understand the central tenets of RCWS as a discipline. I follow Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's articulation of threshold concepts in order to embrace a discipline-wide approach to threshold concepts as a means to see how a national standard

applies within a local context. In the introduction to *Naming*, Adler-Kassner and Wardle explain that they selected threshold concepts as their lens for disciplinary definition and explanation precisely because they see threshold concepts as speaking “both to and beyond our disciplinary community” (3). With much of RCWS scholarship focusing on field best practices or field demarcation, Adler-Kassner and Wardle see that a threshold concepts framework grants them the ability to identify the field’s scholarship to a wide audience, one that spans any potential stakeholder (student, instructor, administrator, etc.) so as to expand field definition beyond RCWS scholars. Threshold concepts allow for wider comprehension with their comprehensible language, as threshold concepts were originally designed by Meyer and Land (2003) to help students understand and enter into a new discipline. In fact, Adler-Kassner and Wardle composed the threshold concepts in such a way that audience members both within and without the discipline could understand the theories of RCWS (3).

In the local context for this dissertation, though, while all instructors have advanced degrees in English (or are at least working towards an advanced degree), most writing instructors have specializations in literature, and not in RCWS. Because of a “lack” of disciplinary knowledge, many writing instructors most likely need threshold concepts to be grounded in their prior knowledge of RCWS theory and practices. Moreover, if writing instructors are encountering disciplinary theory for the first time, their liminality with the material may be greater. And even though SLOs could provide a site for departmental unification around certain RCWS theories, some instructors may still view SLOs as a mere checklist, and not as a site for understanding pedagogical praxis. Thus, WPAs must consider the ways in which instructor liminality can appear as

well as the pedagogical tensions stemming from prior knowledge. By considering these issues, WPAs can then create effective professional development workshops for their local contexts.

To begin establishing how threshold concepts can inform the instruction of writing and a shared vision for writing, I examine instructors' prior knowledge of writing studies theory and their current approaches and practices in the classroom, and I also investigate how instructors see threshold concepts relating with their prior knowledge. While threshold concepts of writing studies certainly can be used for instructors beyond the English department, this study will focus on faculty members teaching MTSU's General Education English curriculum, as a single department filled with a variety of pedagogical approaches is the most natural place to begin an investigation into the potential unifying power of threshold concepts, rather than an immediate move to national mandates like those called for by Abraham.

Instructor prior knowledge comes from three main sources: teacher preparation/faculty professional development, experience as a teacher, and departmental guides (namely, student learning objectives, or SLOs). For this dissertation, I explore faculty prior knowledge by studying instructors' views of the theories that inform their approaches to writing instruction, and I query how instructors use SLOs to inform their theoretical and practical approaches in the classroom. In keeping with threshold concepts theory, I also consider instructor liminality with their prior knowledge. How does an instructor's grasp of praxis (the conscious understanding of the relationship between theory and practice) become a site for liminality? At the heart of these questions lie labor concerns, as labor shapes the ways in which instructors participate in professional

development. Furthermore, labor concerns could put undue pressure on instructors' perceptions of their performance as instructors, particularly contract employees whose renewals depend upon their success in the classroom.

Many writing instructors receive initial training via a graduate seminar in teaching composition. These courses, though, do not have a standardized approach, with some emphasizing practica (a teaching methods course) and others emphasizing theoretical underpinnings for practices in the writing classroom (a theory seminar) (Latterell 15-17). In a teaching methods course, the main objective for the course is to prepare teachers for a particular program's approach to the instruction of writing (Latterell 15). Often, in a teaching methods course, future instructors participate in the same writing activities that they will share with their students, and the theory presented within these courses typically supports the pedagogy presented within the department (Latterell 15). In a theory seminar, on the other hand, the course focuses on the major theories of writing studies, often tracing the development of the field. Because of the focus on theory, very few practical classroom concerns are broached so that instructors might speculate on the theories underlying their own classrooms (Latterell 16-17). Most instructors in these courses are graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), who receive further training in their programs in the form of shadowing instructors and GTA orientation. These courses, though, only span the length of a semester, typically. One semester likely is not enough time for a new instructor to grasp the nuances of praxis or even the best practices of writing studies within the classroom. New instructors certainly receive a foundational understanding of theory and practice, but I suspect that there are often lingering questions

before the instructor enters into the classroom.

Other forms of instructor preparation come in the form of faculty professional development workshops. WPAs typically host workshops on the theories and practices privileged within their particular writing programs. Occasionally, these workshops are hosted by other faculty, including NTT instructors. But, as Hilda Borko notes, faculty professional development occurs in many other forms, including personal development, conference attendance, and even conversations with other instructors (4). Even though instructor professional development appears in multiple ways, it often covers the same material within graduate seminars on teaching composition: theories and practices within the field. However, the scholarship diverges a bit in that faculty professional development scholars often emphasize the importance of community and collegiality in faculty development. When faculty members work with each other, a community of practice begins to emerge, and so instructors can continue to encourage growth among each other. As such, successful professional development fosters ideas for best practices within the field via conversations with other instructors.

Beyond only foundational introductions to theory and practice as presented in teaching seminars or professional development workshops, instructors acquire pedagogical knowledge from their own experience as teachers. Through the act of teaching, reflective instructors learn what works in the classroom and what does not, and through those experiences, instructors can come to some theoretical conclusions about pedagogy. I question, then, if instructors struggle to learn about new theories of writing just as much as their students do? How do instructors mitigate their own struggles with

praxis? I take these questions up in the fourth chapter, in which I analyze my findings.

Instructors may also receive theoretical and practical training from another departmental source: student learning outcomes (SLOs). In SLOs, departments and programs articulate what they want their students to leave their courses understanding. Rarely are these SLOs created in a vacuum; often, SLO creators rely on the field's best practices, and, in the case of writing studies, at least, departmental SLOs often take their inspiration from the Council of Writing Program Administrators's Outcomes Statement (WPA-OS). SLOs present a combination of theories and practices in order to articulate student learning, and so instructors learn theories and practices privileged by the department, but they also catch a glimpse of prominent theories within the larger field. On the webpage for the WPA-OS, the authors explain that the WPA-OS "articulates what composition teachers nationwide have learned from practice, research, and theory." Furthermore, the authors explain that the WPA-OS is "supported by a large body of research demonstrating that the process of learning to write in any medium is complex: it is both individual and social and demands continued practice and informed guidance." Thus, instructors experience a distilled representation of the field's current scholarly and pedagogical knowledge.

Even though SLOs can provide the theoretical underpinnings for a course, SLOs may have evolved to a list of practical skills for instructors to merely implement within the classroom. Heidi Estrem, for example, sees SLOs as focusing more on the end product rather than on the myriad ways a student can learn to achieve the desired educational outcomes. Estrem praises SLOs since they clearly articulate expectations for student learning, curriculum development and cohesion, and assessment (91). However,

she fears that SLOs can quickly become competencies due to oversimplification and decontextualization, thus leading instructors, departments, and institutions to view student learning as linear. Estrem articulates the very problems early critics of SLOs warned of: SLOs could quickly become a checklist of skills-based competencies that instructors will check off as each student completes each outcome. Like Estrem, I worry that instructors could see SLOS as a mere checklist of skills for students rather than a site for understanding the theoretical underpinnings of a course. When instructors do not see the theory, then they may not be providing their students with an understanding of the purpose for writing or the purpose of the course in general. In the end, if WPAs allow courses to be reduced to these skillsets only, then they run the risk of, at best, having to answer to other departments about why their writing students don't know how to do x task, or, at worst, having upper administration farm out writing instruction to other departments. Either way, RCWS becomes undermined if it can be reduced to a series of checklists, thus perpetuating the concept of FYC as a service course to the university.

Ultimately, I believe that threshold concepts mediate the tensions between what instructors' know about writing instruction and what WPAs' know about writing instruction and RCWS. Threshold concepts serve as a point of Burkina identification, then, by establishing a common language that can be used by the many stakeholders in FYC, including instructors, WPAs, students, and other university administrators. With their lack of jargon, their declarative "writing is" statements, and their assimilation of the field's present knowledge, threshold concepts easily express what both RCWS and non-RCWS instructors know about writing. Therefore, WPAs should explicitly use threshold concepts in their SLOs as a way to begin bridging the gaps in theoretical knowledge that

may occur within a diverse department. To do so, WPAs should also include theoretical and practical programmatic underpinnings to make that bridge more transparent for all faculty. That same transparency should occur within professional development workshops, with WPAs stressing *what*, *why*, and *how* theory and practice should merge together to create praxis. WPAs should provide examples on *what* to do in the classroom (thus responding to the practical nature to which instructors cling), combine those examples with the theory present in threshold concepts, and conclude with questions on *how* theory and practice merge together. I believe that such strategies will help a heterogeneous department begin to move toward a more homogenous one that still embraces the unique autonomy of its instructors.

Organization of the Study

In the literature review, I bring together the moving parts of the dissertation: threshold concepts, faculty professional development, and transfer theories. I begin with a section on threshold concepts, giving an overview of the theory in general, and then I describe threshold concepts of writing studies. I also review scholarship on faculty professional development in order to provide the reader with past strategies and recommendations for professionalization. I conclude the chapter by providing an overview of transfer theories of writing, as transfer studies were a gateway for threshold concepts' entrance into disciplinary conversations, and because transfer theories emphasize prior knowledge, an important part in mitigating liminality in faculty professional development.

In the methodology chapter (Chapter III), I expand on the ethnographic methods

used to create this study, as an ethnographic study embraces and analyzes the beliefs and practices of a local culture. In order to understand faculty prior knowledge and their potential uses for threshold concepts, I used a survey (distributed to all General Education English faculty), and I conducted interviews with fifteen instructors from General Education English. To establish validity and reliability, I used a triangulation of data by including a detailed analysis of departmental SLOs alongside the survey and interviews. I review my rationale and method in this chapter, including a detailed description of my coding process.

I analyze my interview responses in the analysis chapter (Chapter IV), as much of my data came from these interviews. I couple this analysis with data from the departmental survey and an interpretation of departmental SLOs (specifically, the 2013 SLO update, as the department still uses much of the 2013 recommendations). While this study began as a rather simple inquiry into how threshold concepts relate with what instructors know about writing (both in terms of theory and practice), the study began to morph into considerations of labor and how hiring practices and the stress of maintaining employment impact how instructors view and use RCWS theory in their classrooms. Because of this unexpected turn, much of this analysis is filtered through labor concerns, as the three main tensions I identified—praxis, performance anxiety, and FYC as a service course—return to labor issues. I use the findings to shape the recommendations in the final chapter.

In my final chapter, Chapter V, I provide the recommendations for how WPAs can revise their SLOs and shift their approaches to faculty professional development in order to help mediate the tensions between what instructors know about writing

instruction and what they (WPAs) know about writing instruction and RCWS. I begin the chapter by demonstrating how instructors viewed threshold concepts as truly naming what they know about writing instruction, thus creating a form of Burkean identification. Moreover, instructors saw threshold concepts as helping them consciously revise their courses in light of RCWS scholarship, moving them closer toward praxis than they had been prior to learning about threshold concepts. I then provide strategies for presenting threshold concepts more overtly in the department through the revision of SLOs. I conclude with a *what/why/how* approach to faculty professional development, one that stresses theory, practice, and praxis, and I provide sample workshop formats for WPAs. I conclude with a reflection on the relationship between threshold concepts, faculty professional development, and labor concerns.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In this section, I begin with an overview of threshold concepts as a means to orient my reader to the general critical conversations within threshold concept theory. I then move to a reflection on professional development scholarship, providing insights into best practices and critiques of the practice. I conclude the chapter by tying together threshold concepts and professional development via writing studies scholarship on transfer and prior knowledge. Through this review of the literature, I aim to demonstrate that WPAs should be mindful of instructor prior knowledge when using threshold concepts to help unify a program.

Threshold Concepts: A General Overview

In their 2003 report in which they introduce threshold concepts, Meyer and Land articulate five characteristics for threshold concepts: transformative, irreversible, integrative, bounded (limited within the confines of the discipline), and troublesome (“Threshold Concepts” 4). All of these characteristics, though, do not have to be present for a threshold concept to be, well, a threshold concept. For example, both irreversible and bounded are qualified with the words probably and possibly, respectively. In regard to bounded, Meyer and Land go so far as to write that bounded does not always occur in a threshold concept (“Threshold Concepts” 4), but this makes sense, as disciplines can overlap with each other in regard to TCs. However, Meyer and Land devote much of their article to uncovering the characteristic of troublesome, as this troublesome nature

makes a TC more than “merely an interesting issue of cognitive organization and perspective” (“Threshold Concepts” 5).

Scholars have been expanding on the characteristics of threshold concepts in order to provide a more concrete description of the abstract idea of a threshold concept.¹ Caroline Baillie, John Bowden, and Jan Meyer (2013), for example, expand the characteristics to eight, listing liminality, transformation, integration, reconstitution, irreversibility, boundedness, troublesomeness, and discourse (229). Many scholars, though, focus on two key threshold characteristics: *transformative* and *troublesome*, with *transformative* receiving the most attention. Peter Davies (2006) explains that threshold concepts, unlike other frameworks for learning, emphasize a way of thinking and practicing in a community (71). Davies’ explanation of the *transformative* nature of threshold concepts summarizes threshold concept theory: “The transformative character of threshold concepts reflects the way in which they can change an individual’s perception of themselves as well as their perception of a subject. In gaining access to a new way of seeing, an individual has access to being part of a community” (74). Caroline Baillie, John Bowden, and Jan Meyer (2013) expand on Meyer and Land’s (2003) with the creation of eight characteristics of a threshold concept, listing liminality, transformation, integration, reconstitution, irreversibility, boundedness, troublesomeness, and discourse; however, they cede that transformation is the most important characteristic of threshold concepts (229). Ray Land, Jan H. F. Meyer, and Michael T. Flanagan, in

¹ Rowbottom (2007), in particular, takes great issue with the abstract nature of threshold concepts, arguing that Meyer and Land’s original characteristics are empirically unidentifiable with the qualifiers of “likely” and “probably” (264). Moreover, because scholars have expanded on Meyer and Land’s original characteristics, including Meyer and Land themselves, “incompatible” characteristics have emerged (263). Finally, Rowbottom argues that all concepts are transformative in some way (266) and that what may be transformative for one person may not be as transformative (or transformative at all) for another (267).

their introduction to their edited collection *Threshold Concepts in Practice* (2016), attempt to put the oft-debated question of threshold concept characteristics to rest by emphatically asserting transformation as the dominant characteristic from which all other characteristics emerge: “Hence the superordinate and non-negotiable characteristic of a threshold concept is its *transformative capacity*” (xii). Transformation is what all of their characteristics lead to, and transformation is the end goal for the learner.

As I see it, *troublesome* and *transformative* adequately reflect the two-fold purpose of a threshold concept framework. First, threshold concepts reflect the particular knowledge of a field the practitioner must “cross” in order to be an active participant in the field; the student transforms into practitioner through the assimilation of these key ideas. Second, threshold concepts demonstrate the learning process the student endures to becoming a practitioner, a difficult, recursive, troublesome process. Threshold concepts are troublesome because they are transformative. Indeed, the troublesome nature of threshold concepts provides the most active description for the process of transformation required by the acquisition of threshold concepts in that it reflects the difficulty with crossing the threshold from a place of comfort, a place of ease, to a new “room” filled with new ideas that push and change worldview. Inherent, then, in the relationship between *troublesome* and *transformative* is *liminality*.

Stemming from Arnold Van Gennep’s (1960) analysis of the rite of passage, in their 2006 revision of their 2003 article, Meyer and Land first describe the process of acquiring threshold concepts as a liminal process, one that Glynis Cousin (2006) further develops: “It is an unstable space in which the learners may oscillate between old and emergent understandings just as adolescents often move between adult-like and child-like

responses to their transitional status. But once a leader enters this liminal space, she is engaged with the project of mastery unlike the learner who remains in a state of pre-liminality in which understandings are at best vague” (4). The liminal learning process involves three steps: the preliminary state, the liminal state, and the postliminal state, as Van Gennep describes in his *Rites of Passage*: “. . . a complete scheme of rites of passage theoretically includes preliminary rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation). . . .” (10). Van Gennep explains, though, that “these three types are not always equally important or equally elaborated” (10), which means that someone moving through the rites of passage in a new experience might not move through all three phases, or that she will spend the same amounts of time in each phase. He further elaborates on these three phases as a person moving through new worlds: “Consequently, I propose to call the rites of separation from a previous world, *preliminary rites*, those executed during the transitional stage *liminal* (or *threshold*) *rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation in to the new world *postliminal rites*” (21). Van Gennep explains that as a person moves through important rites of passages throughout the course of her life, such as betrothal and marriage, she experiences different states of her being, marking a mental, emotional, and physical transition from one state to another. Although Van Gennep considers major life milestones, his ideas of rites of passage can be applied to different learning contexts. A student learns differently in different situations, and no two learners approach each new learning context the same way. Learning is difficult and messy, much like any rite of passage.

In their introduction to *Threshold Concepts and Transformational Learning* (2010), Jan H.F. Meyer, Ray Land, and Caroline Baillie explain that the preliminary state begins when troublesome (new) knowledge is introduced, and this knowledge unsettles the learner with its provocative nature, thus pushing the learner into the liminal state. (Learners that do not utilize the knowledge remain stuck in the preliminal state.) In a liminal state, an integration and reconfiguration of knowledge occurs as the learner adjusts to or lets go of previous knowledge to mesh with the newly encountered troublesome knowledge. The learner spends the most time in the liminal state, as she must process how the new information works with her preconceived notions, and a change in identity often occurs. Once this process is completed, the learner enters a postliminal state, permanently transformed by the new knowledge (xi). Meyer and Land in “Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Issues of Liminality” (2006) explain liminality in Jungian terms: “During this liminal stage there is uncertainty about identity of self and purpose in life” (22). Threshold concepts are tied to identity, as the theory is that one’s identity will shift when one understands this ontological way of thinking. As Cousin notes, “Grasping a threshold concept is transformative because it involves an ontological as well as a conceptual shift. We are what we know” (“An Introduction” 4). Julie Rattray expands on the idea on the ontological transformations incited by threshold concepts: “Threshold transformations foster ontological shifts that are associated with both cognitive and affective changes in the individual. They cause the individual to view and experience the world differently in terms, not just of the intellectual understanding of an idea but also in the way they feel about, or experience, the world” (67). Thus, threshold concepts cause for a complete transformation in that the

learner sees the world in an entirely different way. It's like swallowing the red pill in *The Matrix*. Once a learner has grasped a threshold concept, she cannot see the world in any other way. The liminal learning process makes threshold concept theory a unique one for instructors in that this focus on students acquiring disciplinary knowledge in an uneven and messy way has potential to change how instructors view student learning in their classes. With such a variety of learners in one classroom, instructors may find some difficulty in creating assignments that help the students move through these liminal places. Furthermore, not all students learn at the same speed or in the same way, and so students may leave the class in a preliminal or liminal state, which could cause some frustration for both parties.

Another key implication of the liminal learning process is “stuckness,” and much of the scholarship on threshold concepts turns to strategies for helping students move more easily through liminality. Of note in this area of scholarship is Michael Nolan’s “stuckness” theory, in which Nolan defines “stuckness” as “a pattern that can emerge from the particular set of constraints and identities that are involved [in the process of creating identity and power relations]. Thus the pattern of ‘stuckness’ is as likely to have emerged from intentions to change, as it is to have resulted from efforts to stay the same” (80). For Nolan, “stuckness” occurs in organizational development, but threshold concept theorists have taken up his theory in order to describe the push and pull of liminality. When students enter into liminality, they can either actively engage with the information or they abandon the information, choosing instead to remain in the preliminary state. Ahmad Mohamed, Ray Land, and Julie Rattray (2016) explore how cadets journeyed through liminality by integrating troublesome knowledge into their prior knowledge, and

they liken this movement between prior knowledge and the new knowledge to Homi Bhabha's conception of "hybridity," in that the learner must "reinvent and re-envision such knowledge" (87). In the end, Mohamed, Land, and Rattray found that the cadet either quits the program when s/he becomes stuck and cannot reconcile the new knowledge/issues in the ways asked for by the military academy, or the cadet becomes an officer in order to resolve the issues that s/he had (88). In their study on business school students, Terje Berg, Morden Erichsen, and Leif Hokstad expand on Nolan's theory by defining the state as having a "feeling of failure, defeat and loss of self-confidence" (109). Ultimately, Berg, Erichsen, and Hokstad corroborate Mohamed, Land, and Rattray's findings that students either persevered or dropped out of the course. They expand on this theory by arguing that students who practice deep learning (full engagement with the material) perform better than those students who only practice surface learning (113). In the end, students have two choices when in the liminal phase of learning: fight or flight. They can continue to press on with the knowledge, or they can abandon for another time, or perhaps, forever. However, students who choose to press on through liminality come to a better understanding of the field they are studying through an impactful worldview change. As Jessie Moore (2012) summarizes, "Threshold concepts are not simply key ideas, but rather the core of the disciplinary worldview. Therefore, until students grasp threshold concepts, these concepts could be barriers to transfer" ("Mapping the Questions"). When students understand these concepts, then more effective transfer may occur between learning situations.

When it comes to learning about threshold concepts, scholars almost entirely focus on student learning. Very little scholarship expands on faculty learning of threshold

concepts. Faculty may have the mental capacity to move through liminality easier than their students, and so threshold concepts scholars might not feel the need to consider strategies for aiding faculty in embracing the theory. Another reason the scholarship rarely mentions faculty might be because of disciplinarity. Threshold concepts express the key beliefs of a field, and as such, faculty who name the field and participate in threshold concepts theory likely know the theories, methodologies, and practices within that field. Many faculty may come from more homogenized fields, and so the most difficult part of embracing and using threshold concept theory may simply be in naming the key concepts themselves. However, I question how instructors in a heterogeneous writing program, since these instructors have diverse theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical backgrounds (I'm mainly thinking of the distinction between literary studies and RCWS), embrace threshold concepts. Because of their differences in field knowledge (in this case, RCWS), they may have the same experiences of liminality and stuckness like their students do when learning about new theories for the instruction of writing.

Faculty Professional Development

RCWS scholarship tends to focus more on teacher preparation than faculty professional development, most likely because most writing instructors will encounter RCWS in graduate and graduate teaching assistant (GTA) programs.² Also likely, RCWS

² RCWS scholarship on GTA preparation is rather rich. For more information on the history of GTA training, please see Betty P. Pytlik and Sarah Liggett's edited collection, *Preparing College Teachers of Writing: Histories, Theories, Programs, Practices* (2002), especially Pytlik's chapter and Stephen Wilhoit's chapter, both on the history of GTA preparation. Catherine Latterell's (1996) article remains a preeminent study of GTA training, as she catalogs thirty-six GTA programs and their training methods, creating four distinct methods for TA training that remain true today. Critiques of GTA training generally comment on the lack of preparation GTAs receive. Carrie Leverenz and Amy Goodburn (1998) argue that GTA training tends to focus more on preparing graduates for their future academic careers, and Mark Long, Jennifer Holberg, and Marcy Taylor (1996) believe that GTA training serves an apprenticeship model, one that merely creates better GTAs and not better faculty members.

scholars may consider the strategies for teacher preparation can easily translate into professional development strategies. However, much of the scholarship on GTA training stresses the struggles that GTAs have with comprehending RCWS theories and the relationship between those theories and the practices within the FYC classroom. As such, some of these struggles inform methods for approaching faculty professional development in a writing program. The problems mentioned by Leverenz and Goodburn (1998) and Long, Holberg, and Taylor (1996) indicate that many writing instructors may have had a teacher preparation program that stressed professionalization and apprenticeship rather than best RCWS theories and practices for FYC. Should writing instructors have any background in RCWS from their TA preparation, it's likely that they received an overwhelming amount of RCWS theory in their seminar courses because the instructors were concerned more about field justification than in teaching their graduate students how to be reflective practitioners in the field. There's a fine line when teaching theory and practices to new instructors of writing. On the one hand, the theory can inform new instructors of writing how to approach FYC. On the other hand, the theory can overwhelm these new instructors, mainly because many of them have never encountered this new way to think about and approach writing. Most graduate students in English degree programs specialize in literature, and so the theories and methodologies of RCWS are unfamiliar territory. Leverenz and Goodburn recommend that WPAs should "distinguish how [they] might use published research and theory to prepare teachers new to composition and pedagogy to effectively teach undergraduates and how [they] use that work to introduce graduate students to the professionalized discourses of composition studies with which scholars are expected to be familiar" (23). Balancing the amount of

RCWS theory can be a challenge, but when WPAs consciously consider their purposes for theory in TA preparation, then they may be able to adjust their preparation programs toward reflective praxis.

Because RCWS scholarship tends to veer more toward GTA professionalization, much of the current scholarship on faculty professional development has been produced by education scholars who study professional development practices/offerings for primary, secondary, and post-secondary instructors. More recent work, though, is being produced by STEM scholars as they consider more effective student-centered methods in post-secondary instruction. Finally, a burgeoning pedagogical field has emerged within recent years, faculty development, with several universities creating centers for teaching and learning (CTL). Isis Artze-Vega et al. (2013) provide an overview of the burgeoning field, arguing that writing studies scholars make for strong additions to the field, as faculty development scholarship focuses on contexts and exigencies in student learning, a topic not unfamiliar to writing faculty (172).

Faculty professional development, though, appears in a myriad of forms, as Hilda Borko (2004) notes in her article “Professional Development and Teacher Learning: Mapping the Terrain”:

For teachers, learning occurs in many different aspects of practice, including their classrooms, their school communities, and professional development courses or workshops. It can occur in a brief hallway conversation with a colleague, or after school when counseling a troubled child. To understand teacher learning, we must study it within these contexts, taking into account both the individual teacher-learners and the social systems in which they are participants. (4)

Because of the many sites for teacher learning (the classroom, workshops, conferences, personal reading and research), researchers have found it difficult to pinpoint effective

ways to gauge teacher learning via professional development. For example, Suzanne Wilson and Jennifer Berne, in their article “Teacher Learning and the Acquisition of Professional Knowledge: An Examination of Research on Contemporary Professional Development” (1999), note that the field of education has had difficulty determining teacher learning “due to the scattered and serendipitous nature of teachers’ learning” in the different contexts as described by Borko above (173). Ultimately, Wilson and Berne emphasize that successful professional development occurs when it is provided over an extended amount of time and participants have more opportunities to dialogue with each other, thus making the exchange more meaningful to instructors. Bill Boyle, David While, and Trudy Boyle, in “A Longitudinal Study of Teacher Change: What Makes Professional Development Effective?” (2004) corroborate Wilson and Berne’s conclusion with their own study of almost 800 primary and secondary educators in England: “What is immensely encouraging is that respondents generally reported involvement with multiple longer-term PD activities rather than a single activity,” and that moreover, their data prove “that the majority of participants who do take part in longer-term professional development do change one or more aspects of their teaching practice” (64). These recommendations support equitable working conditions that allow TAs and NTTs time to professionalize. Because faculty report that long-term professional development aids their reflective pedagogical practices, then administrators should provide more opportunities for professional development, and they should be able to compensate their instructors either by assigning fewer courses and/or monetary reimbursement for participating in professional development. While these are idealized recommendations, they should still be considered by administrators.

Due to the multiple sites of teacher learning, including teacher preparation courses, the scholarship on faculty professional development echoes the methods outlined in teacher preparation courses, with localized/departmental workshops and reflective communities of practice as the most oft-cited forms of professional development beyond attending conferences and performing individual reading and research. Beatrice Birman et al. developed a national study to uncover the most beneficial factors for professional development, which they published in their article “Designing Professional Development That Works” (2000). They argue that a successful professional development workshop is one that focuses on specific content, engages participants in “active work,” and fosters a “coherent set of learning experiences” that “encourage continued professional communication among teachers and incorporate experiences that are consistent with teachers’ goals and aligned with state standards and assessments” (29). In short, a successful workshop moves away from traditional methods of delivery and has participants actively engage in the theory and the practice of the content knowledge (29). By engaging together, faculty work collaboratively, which enhances a “professional culture in which teachers develop a common understanding of instructional goals, methods, problems, and solutions” (32). Birman et al. do note that ideal professional development workshops are hard to pull off because of the time and funding required for such workshops (32).

Michael Garet et al. echo Birman et al.’s successful strategies for professional development (916), their article “What Makes Professional Development Effective? Results from a National Sample of Teachers” (2001). They pulled their data from the

Teacher Activity Survey from the national Eisenhower Professional Development Program, and they also randomly sampled teachers who attended the program (918-19). From their study they conclude that “higher quality” professional development is one that is “both sustained over time and involves a substantial number of hours” spent with other faculty members (933). Moreover, successful professional development emphasizes content knowledge and skills, which indicates that “activities that give greater emphasis to content and that are better connected to teachers’ other professional development experiences and other reform efforts are more likely to produce enhanced knowledge and skills” (933), and faculty are more likely to change their approaches to teaching (934). In short, professional development should focus on prior knowledge and praxis over an extended amount of time. However, as noted earlier, extended professional learning communities require a great labor commitment (especially since current writing programs likely cannot support that labor commitment through course waivers and/or monetary reimbursement). I do wonder if several workshops hosted throughout the semester with the same commitment to praxis and prior knowledge could suffice.

Like with teacher preparation, collegiality plays a large role in successful professional development workshops, as Birman et al. and Garet et al. have indicated. Linda Darling-Hammond (2005) reports that the United States needs to improve its professional development efforts by looking toward their overseas counterparts in Europe and Asia. Many of the methods she cites support a collegial atmosphere, encouraging faculty members to spend time discussing education with their colleagues. Similarly Joel Colbert et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of collegiality, arguing that faculty should

be allowed to be in charge of their professional development with each other so that it can be more meaningful (148).

However, faculty professional development does not always result in instructor change. In their article “What We Say Is Not What We Do: Effective Evaluation of Faculty Professional Development Programs” (2011), Diane Ebert-May et al. examine the effects of professional development on university Biology faculty, noting that “science is not taught as it is practiced—that is, using active, inquiry-based approaches” (550). They analyzed two national programs for faculty professional development, and they collected their data via surveys (self-reported data completed by the participants) and videotape observations of the participants (observational data completed by Ebert-May et al.). The authors found that the results varied greatly. In regard to the survey data, the participants reported “significant gains in faculty knowledge of and firsthand experience with specific aspects of reformed teaching” (554). The observational data (the videotapes of instructors teaching after the workshops), however, told a different story, indicating “that a majority of faculty (75%) implemented a lecture-based, teacher-centered pedagogy,” and that “[f]urthermore, in the two years following PD, we observed no major shift in faculty practices” (554-55). Although their data suggest that professional development has little effect on faculty, Ebert-May et al. do note that professional development can be successful, especially for novice teachers, since they will most likely implement the changes suggested in professional development workshops (557).

Unfortunately, much of the recent scholarship provides a bleak outlook on the practice. Elizabeth Evans Getzel, Lori Briel, and Shannon McManus (2003) articulate

three barriers for “developing and providing faculty development activities”: time constraints, “lack of understanding or buy in,” and “lack of administrative support” (63-64). Likewise, in the introduction to Alenoush Saroyan and Cheryl Amundsen’s edited collection *Rethinking Teaching in Higher Education: From a Course Design Workshop to a Framework for Faculty Development* (2004), the contributors emphasize the importance of a focused workshop week, in which the participants articulate how their pedagogical approaches connect with student learning and departmental needs (5). By 2016, little has changed in regard to faculty participation within professional development workshops, as Jeannie Isern et al. corroborate Getzel, Briel, and McManus’s perspective, noting that if faculty members did not find professional development workshops worthwhile, then the odds for low participation are great.

Faculty buy-in seems to be the greatest factor in the success of a professional development workshop, and this should come as no surprise since many professional development workshops are seen as optional. For example, Ebert-May et al. explain that faculty attend workshops based on dissatisfaction: “dissatisfaction with their teaching, course goals, instructional practice, or student learning outcomes” (550). As Getzel et al. note, many faculty members engage in extracurricular reading on pedagogy, which may lead faculty to think that they are aware of current approaches to pedagogy, and so they do not need to participate in professional development (66). Megan Tschannen-Moran and Peggy McMaster (2009) investigate faculty self-efficacy, “the belief in one’s abilities to accomplish abilities to accomplish desired outcomes” (228), and how self-efficacy impacts the ways that teachers take up new teaching methods (231), arguing that faculty members need to reflect on their view of self-efficacy as it relates with their actual

practice (242). Even if faculty professional development does come under fire for buy-in, the research overwhelmingly supports that departmental professional development does aid instructors, and so new strategies for delivery (short, online workshops, for example) might be a solution, especially for those faculty who cannot easily attend workshops due to labor concerns. These online workshops could be framed as digital communities, and so they could include places for instructors to discuss their experiences with each other. However, online communities also require buy-in, and so they may only help the overtaxed instructor so much. Ultimately, faculty professional development can help instructors, and so WPAs should employ professional development that increases collegiality through reflections on prior knowledge and experiences. By opening with faculty prior knowledge and experiences, WPAs can incorporate RCWS theory more effectively, since they will be able to see their program's theoretical and practical baseline. Finally, WPAs should host several workshops a semester if professional learning communities are not feasible.

Putting the Pieces Together: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies, Transfer, and Prior Knowledge

Unlike many disciplines, RCWS has the luxury of widely published threshold concepts as established by Linda Adler-Kassner, Elizabeth Wardle, and twenty-nine other scholars in *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* (2015), which puts the field of RCWS in a unique position through the wide distribution of a fairly authoritative text on threshold concepts. Rather than having to create their own threshold concepts, writing instructors can follow those set forth in *Naming What We Know*. Although debate over these threshold concepts could allow instructors in local

contexts to develop a better way of understanding and applying threshold concepts to their teaching, Adler-Kassner and Wardle's concepts serve as a strong starting point for conversations about threshold concepts and their use in the classroom. Moreover, by following this list of threshold concepts, the RCWS field may have a stronger claim for legitimacy with this visual representation of unification through current field knowledge.

Adler-Kassner and Wardle view threshold concepts as the best lens for viewing and articulating RCWS as a discipline to a wide array of stakeholders and audiences (3). Kathleen Blake Yancey, in her introduction to *Naming What We Know*, gives the scholastic impetus for the creation of threshold concepts of writing studies: field definition. RCWS scholars have debated the focus of the field, with Fulkerson concluding that RCWS has three main focuses ("critical/cultural studies [CCS]," "expressivism," and "procedural rhetoric") (655). Yancey articulates that the main assumption underlying *Naming What We Know* is that because the field is established, it is important to name the collective knowledge of the field for its many audiences (xxix). In the end, Yancey believes that *Naming* identifies several "points of agreement" across the field, including an agreement on "the meta concept that writing is an activity and a subject of study" (xxvii), a "propositional statement and heuristic for inquiry" (xxvii), and that threshold concepts provide a unique way to view the field's boundaries (xxviii). *Naming* grants students, instructors, and other stakeholders the ability to "inquire, analyze, interpret, and, ultimately, make knowledge" (xxviii). With the simple naming of the field's knowledge, Adler-Kassner and Wardle combine the over fifty years of composition scholarship into a site for articulating and analyzing the discipline's content.

Adler-Kassner, Wardle, and the twenty-nine contributing scholars articulate thirty-seven total threshold concepts for RCWS. In order to organize the identified threshold concepts, Adler-Kassner and Wardle determined one metaconcept (“Writing Is an Activity and a Subject of Study”), and five overarching concepts in which to place the thirty-seven threshold concepts. The five overarching concepts are as follows:

Concept 1: Writing Is a Social and Rhetorical Activity

Concept 2: Writing Speaks to Situations through Recognizable Forms

Concept 3: Writing Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies

Concept 4: All Writers Have More to Learn

Concept 5: Writing Is (Also Always) a Cognitive Activity

The remaining thirty-two threshold concepts fall within these overarching ones.

Threshold concepts cover an incredible amount of RCWS scholarship, naming what the field presently knows about writing. These concepts, though, are not fixed; they change as the field evolves. In 2017, Adler-Kassner and Wardle issued a call for threshold concepts revisions so that the field may be more accurately described in its current state. However, threshold concepts of writing studies, because they concisely define the field’s parameters in almost jargon-free terms, may be an effective unifying tool because even non-RCWS FYC instructors can identify with these ideas. WPAs can use threshold concepts alongside instructor knowledge and experiences to help unify a writing program.

Threshold concepts of writing studies speak to issues of field definition.

Exploring writing’s disciplinary status in 2007, Michael Carter, using Russell’s historical study of the development of the university, reads the university as dividing into specific disciplines with specific content knowledges in almost all areas except for writing studies, which has a more “generalized conception” (213), one that suggests a one-size

fits all approach to writing that works for every discipline. Carter's solution to this problem: metadisciplinarity, or "...collections of disciplines that share an emphasis on certain metagenres and are constituted by the various genres within each metagenre" (226). For Carter, a metadisciplinary approach means to see the ways in which writing links disciplines through the genres created in the disciplines, particularly by focusing on Miller's concept of genre as a social action, Bazerman's systems of genre, and Russell's genre systems (217). The boon of metadisciplinary is that it blurs disciplinarity, which opens up writing's position in the university:

Looking at the academy from the perspective of metadisciplines also tends to further complicate the assumption that disciplines are defined exclusively or even primarily by content knowledge....Thus, this broader view tends to reduce the emphasis on disciplines as domains of declarative knowledge and highlight the disciplines as ways of doing. And, in doing so, it highlights the integral place of writing in the disciplines. (227)

Moreover, Carter writes, "It may be, then, that writing is located neither fully in nor fully outside the disciplines because disciplinary boundaries themselves are porous and in flux; the disciplines are not fixed containers at all" (232). Carter's conceptualization of writing as transcending disciplinary boundaries explains the generalized nature of the discipline-shaping threshold concepts. While threshold concepts of writing studies define the field, these threshold concepts also speak to writing's extended position within and without the university.

Christopher Basgier (2016) extends Carter's concept of metadisciplinarity by using Adler-Kassner and Wardle's threshold concepts, arguing that threshold concepts of writing studies "are at work in liberal learning principles such as critical thinking" (18). As such, the ideas presented within threshold concepts of writing studies serve as a

foundation for general education threshold concepts, which will allow for general education faculty to “articulate shared, but often unspoken, ways of knowing, doing, and writing that cut across general education and the majors” (Basgier 18). Basgier concludes by merging his thoughts on cross-curricular threshold concepts with Carter’s metadisciplinarity: “...it is more important to help students engage in larger, metadisciplinary ways of knowing, doing and writing” (30). While Basgier makes an excellent point, particularly for those proponents of a revised university curriculum that pushes critical thinking, logic, and literacy, he misses the point of threshold concepts. Threshold concepts theory seeks to establish disciplines and effectively instruct students in those disciplines. In Basgier’s favor, threshold concepts of writing studies certainly do provide a general outlook on writing and learning, but threshold concepts of writing studies particularly speak to writing as a discipline in that these threshold concepts describe what writers do when they write and the knowledge writing scholars study and create when contemplating writing. Truly, threshold concepts speak to both Basgier’s and Carter’s view of writing’s place in the university, both as an independent field of study and as an active participant within the general education curriculum. Threshold concepts describe not only the practice of writing but also the concerns of RCWS as a discipline, and so threshold concepts of writing studies are in a unique position to respond to calls for unification within the discipline and among its diverse instructor base.

However, faculty members may undergo a similar liminal learning process when they first encounter threshold concept theory, as threshold concepts could themselves be, well, threshold concepts. Darrell Rowbottom’s (2007) scathing critique of threshold concept theory due to its lack of empirically-proven data highlights the potential for a

lack of scholarly buy-in, particularly when he concludes, “If there is one lesson to take away, it is that so-called ‘threshold concepts’ are not as easy to spot as anyone has previously thought, even if there are such things” (268). While Rowbottom makes accurate points, his emphasis of positivism does not necessarily invalidate threshold concepts. Rather, he may even prove that threshold concepts are threshold concepts for faculty members. Noel Entwistle (2008) explains that some economics faculty experienced some difficulty with identifying threshold concepts: “Initial discussions with staff suggested that it was quite difficult for them to grasp the essential transformative property of threshold concepts, with the term often being confused with the more commonly idea of *key concepts*” (22). Thus, faculty had to wrestle with the idea of threshold concepts in order to adequately define threshold concepts for their program. James Atherton, Peter Hadfield, and Renee Meyers (2008) explain threshold concepts as a threshold concept: “as such it is only to be expected that some people will find it hard to grasp, both because of its transformative implications but also because of its intellectual difficulty and superficial resemblance to other common-sensical sets of concepts in the notoriously fuzzily-defined lexicon of ‘education’” (4). The authors explain that faculty in “soft” disciplines, those disciplines that share knowledge with other disciplines, experience greater difficulty identifying threshold concepts when compared with faculty in “hard” disciplines, those disciplines that have a “distinctive claim to knowledge” (2). Threshold concepts can define a field, but when the field definition is already murky, faculty members in the field may experience greater difficulty in understand threshold concepts.

Transfer studies of writing may help in understanding the relationship between threshold concepts and faculty professional development, particularly via prior knowledge. In fact, early scholars of threshold concepts in RCWS first connected threshold concept theory with transfer theory, specifically the transfer of writing knowledge between FYC and other general education courses. The goal for many of these scholars is the justification for general education courses, and, in some instances, the justification of FYC. Irene Clark and Andrea Hernandez (2011) aid in the creation of threshold concepts of writing studies when they examine how genre awareness serves as a threshold concept, one that can transfer across writing situations in the academy. Transfer, of course, serves as the proof for writing instruction's place within the university. Likewise, Linda Adler-Kassner, John Majewski, and Damian Koschnick (2012) explore the similar threshold concepts of writing between both a FYC course and a general education history course, concluding that threshold concepts can boost transfer between general education courses when reinforced in those classes. Mark Blaauw-Hara (2014) builds on Adler-Kassner, Majewski, and Koschnick's research by exploring how FYC instructors can boost transfer from their courses to other general education courses through transfer and threshold concept theories. Blaauw-Hara, though, comes to the conclusion that transfer theories are far more "utilitarian" than threshold concept theories, since threshold concepts would "likely call for a whole-scale re-envisioning of the course" (360). However, he does see threshold concepts as a strong starting point for a discussion on the similarities and differences between "good" writing across the disciplines in a general education curriculum.

In her article “Designing for Transfer: A Threshold Concept” (2012), Jessie L. Moore argues that transfer theory itself is a threshold concept, as faculty members must grapple with the ideas present in transfer theory before effectively designing for far transfer in their courses. Like Basgier, Moore sees a focus on disciplinarity within general education courses as a roadblock to transfer due to the myopia involved in disciplinary concerns; faculty focus on their narrow, specialized knowledge rather than considering the ways that knowledge connects with other disciplines: “This focus on disciplinarity can make interdisciplinarity a stretch for many faculty, since they likely have less experience talking across disciplinary lines” (20). Moore’s assertion of a myopic focus certainly can hamper a department’s or a program’s relationship with other courses. However, in the case for writing studies, field definition via theory is needed to ensure that writing instructors have a similar foundation in RCWS theory. When instructors have an understanding of the discipline, then they have a higher chance of sharing that discipline with their students and other disciplines, thus engaging in interdisciplinarity.

When it comes to threshold concepts, transfer, and faculty professional development, I have been particularly influenced by Angela Rounsaville, Rachel Goldberg, and Anis Bawarshi’s article, “From Incomes to Outcomes: FYW’s Students’ Prior Genre Knowledge, Meta-Cognition, and the Question of Transfer” (2009). Even though they focus on student learning, I believe that their recommendations can be used for faculty. While several scholars explore the relationship between prior knowledge and transfer (Wardle, 2009; Nowacek, 2011, and Reiff and Bawarshi, 2011), Rounsaville, Goldberg, and Bawarshi emphasize that students need to understand the language of

writing in order to boost transfer. They interviewed freshmen about their prior work with genres before attending college, hoping that the metacognitive work of talking about genre would transfer into FYC and beyond. They conclude that while students did draw on prior knowledge of genres in their FYC course, the students could not communicate transfer, and so the authors encourage instructors to conference with their students to boost transfer language.

Like with theories on threshold concept acquisition, student learning strategies assist with ways to approach faculty learning. For faculty to successfully implement RCWS theory and best practices in the classroom, they need to understand first the language for writing studies theory. I see threshold concepts of writing studies as a shared language for writing instructors because of its accessibility. Rather than relying on the names of the many theories operating within RCWS, instructors can focus on these key beliefs of the field, and this might be particularly helpful for those instructors with only a foundational knowledge of RCWS theory. When they can effectively communicate these theories, then instructors and WPAs can come to a more unified vision for writing instruction within a program.

I extend the conversation by examining how professional development workshops on threshold concepts should be presented to a local, diverse general education writing program in order to move toward a shared understanding for writing instruction. Because of the department's heterogeneous nature (most instructors have backgrounds in literary studies with only basic knowledge of RCWS), I explore faculty prior knowledge of RCWS theory, their approaches to the instruction of writing, their use of departmental learning objectives, and their initial reactions to threshold concepts of writing studies. I

use Adler-Kassner and Wardle's list as my starting point for two reasons. First, I want to see if the list extends beyond RCWS scholars. Can writing instructors who do not have a background in RCWS employ these threshold concepts? Second, I think that these concepts make a good starting point for conversations about RCWS theory between WPAs and their writing instructors. WPAs and faculty can identify which threshold concepts speak the most to their program, and then they can begin to revise them for their local context as more and more instructors begin to relate their prior knowledge with threshold concepts. By exploring instructor prior knowledge and their prior experiences with instructing writing, I aim to identify general tensions faculty encounter with RCWS theory. I then will use these strategies to craft departmental documents (SLOs) and workshops with threshold concepts as the mediating and supplementing language between WPAs and writing faculty.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Because few studies have been conducted on the ways in which threshold concepts can enhance instruction, especially in regard to novice teachers and because FYC instructors have specialties in other areas (e.g., literature), the aim of this qualitative study is to examine how threshold concepts of writing studies can inform the teaching of writing and the development of a shared vision for writing instruction at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU). While threshold concepts of writing studies certainly can be used for instructors beyond the English department, this study focuses on faculty members teaching MTSU's General Education English curriculum, as a single department filled with a variety of pedagogical approaches is the most natural place to begin an investigation into discovering how threshold concepts of writing studies might work within a local context. In order to uncover how threshold concepts can unify a program, I followed an ethnographic approach, as I desired to uncover the beliefs and prior knowledge of a small group. In order to discern instructor beliefs and approaches to the instruction of writing, I used a survey (distributed to all General Education English faculty), and I conducted interviews with fifteen instructors from General Education English. In this chapter, I provide the rationale and method for my project. I begin with a broad description of ethnography, providing a brief history of the method and the pros and cons of such a method. I then present my reliability and validity for my method, explaining my sampling procedures, participant information, and details for conducting the survey and interviews, as well as my coding process.

Qualitative Research and Ethnography: A Brief Review of the Literature

Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln's definition of qualitative research remains a staple for social researchers:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (3)

As Denzin and Lincoln note, qualitative research methods (ethnography included) has long been engaged in a tenuous relationship with quantitative methodologies that espouse a positivist paradigm, with early qualitative studies serving as a form of light positivism, one with "less rigorous methods and procedures" (9). However, the relationship between quantitative and qualitative studies has begun to move toward a more diplomatic alliance, as more and more researchers are employing both forms in their projects (Denzin and Lincoln 2). Kristen Perry affirms that current ethnographic studies, those "reified through typical IRB guidelines," maintain their origins in "traditional positivist frameworks about research" (138). However, qualitative scholars emphasize the importance of qualitative studies in a quantitative world, since qualitative studies provide a moral, political, and philosophical way to view the world, unlike quantitative studies. For example, Clifford G. Christians argues that quantitative studies stem from the Enlightenment's "dichotomy between freedom and morality," which ultimately led to a "tradition of value-free social science and, out of this tradition, a means-ends utilitarianism" (61). As Christians sees it, "[q]ualitative research insists on starting over philosophically, without the Enlightenment

dualism as its foundation. The result is an ethical-political framework that is multicultural, gender inclusive, pluralistic, and international in scope” (61). Thus, qualitative studies delve beyond the mere numbers and statistics in quantitative studies to explore the values within a given population, values that create the meaning of a social structure.

Like Christians, John Creswell explains that quantitative studies simply do not take into account the important gender, racial, economic, and other differences within a given population:

We also use qualitative research because quantitative measures and the statistical analyses simply do not *fit* the problem. Interactions among people, for example, are difficult to capture with existing measures, and these measures may not be sensitive to issues such as gender differences, race, economic status, and individual differences. To level all individuals to a statistical mean overlooks the uniqueness of individuals in our studies. (40)

In particular, Creswell draws attention to the importance of participants, arguing that qualitative data stresses “participants’ meanings” as the end goal for the project (39). Moreover, Creswell emphasizes the holistic nature of qualitative research since it leads to an uncovering of a “complex picture”: “Researchers are bound not by tight cause-and-effect relationships among factors, but rather by identifying the complex interactions of factors in any situation” (39). Qualitative research, then, provides a venue for the oft-unheard voices to speak so as to create a better understanding of a group.

This present study aims to uncover instructors’ theories and the practices that inform their approaches to the instruction of writing in order to understand how threshold concepts of writing studies relate with those ideas and practices in an effort to create a unified vision of writing instruction in the department, and so an ethnography is the most

appropriate method for this particular project. Creswell argues that ethnography is the appropriate qualitative method “if the needs are to describe how a cultural group works and to explore the beliefs, language, behavior, and issues such as power, resistance, and dominance” (70). Originally, ethnographies provided information about unknown groups, describing their cultures. More recently, though, ethnographies have moved in a critical direction (as noted by Creswell above), exploring minorities and power struggles within a culture. Originally, this project set out to describe a community of instructors in order to provide suggestions for using threshold concepts to unify a department. However, as this project has evolved, the issue of labor in the university has emerged, and so this ethnography also explores the power struggles within a department due to labor issues.

Michael Patton sees ethnography, which originated in anthropology, as “the earliest distinct tradition of qualitative inquiry” (100), and he expounds that the central assumption of an ethnography is that “any human group of people interacting together for a period of time will evolve a culture,” and this culture of “behavior patterns and beliefs” becomes the focus of the study (100). Responding to the positivist issues in qualitative research, Martin Hammersley and Paul Atkinson (1995) hesitate to concretely define ethnography so as to prevent this qualitative method, one with values and judgments, from becoming the robotic methodological powerhouses of quantitative methodologies (23). They do, however, describe ethnographers as “participant observers,” who engage with a culture, “overtly or covertly,” in order to “throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research” (1-2).

The notion of “participant observer” is central to ethnography, as the method relies on the researcher to provide information about a particular culture. The researcher

goes into the culture, observes it, forms relationships with members of the culture, and then reports on the culture's beliefs and practices in order to provide insight into the issues within a culture. John Van Maanen (1995) stresses that the chief authority in ethnography is the observer's experience within the field: "This tight connection between authors and authored is based on the continuing faith that what is learned in the field will somehow outweigh or counterbalance the anticipation of theory and other preconceptions carried by fieldworkers" (16). Amar Dhand (2007) sees the ethnographic researcher as someone who ultimately becomes a participant in the culture, as she becomes both a recipient and a contributor to the knowledge of the culture (22).

The data in an ethnography (and other qualitative methods, for that matter) come from observing participants in their natural settings, and so field notes, interviews, and other recordings are typically used. Documents created by the participants or documents that shape the culture are also studied. Surveys can be used, but Creswell notes that most surveys are completed away from the natural setting, and so they aren't as reliable (37-38). For this project, since I wanted to uncover what faculty believe about the instruction of writing and the theories that inform their practices, I used a survey to gain a quantitative sense of what instructors believed, alongside interviews and document analysis, mixing my methods to get a better picture of the department.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher plays a significant role within an ethnography, as she enters and engages with the community. As Dhand notes, the researcher observes the knowledge of the particular culture, but the researcher can also shape that knowledge in turn (22). Unlike many ethnographers, I chronicle my own community since I have first-hand

experience as both an NTT instructor and graduate WPA (gWPA). In these roles, then, I have seen both sides in the creation of a shared vision for writing instruction. As a GTA, I experienced GTA preparation in all its forms (described below in the “Participants” section), and because I am a contracted instructor in the department, I attended faculty professional development workshops, too. As a gWPA, I aided in the WPAs in creating professional development opportunities, GTA preparation (including organizing GTA Orientation and leading a reflection group), and performing other management roles in the department, such as website creation, scheduling, and reviewing departmental documents. In my gWPA role, though, I discovered the gaps in approaches between instructors and WPAs, and so I became interested in studying how threshold concepts can aid in the creation of a shared vision for writing instruction (as noted above).

Because of my gWPA role, I was able to encourage several instructors to participate in my study. I have good working relationships with these instructors, and so I believe that they participated in my study to help me out. I even gained some unlikely participants (namely the tenured instructors) due to our connections from my gWPA work (one instructor, for example, reached out to participate in my study because of how I worked with her and her students at a departmental event). So, some participants in my study may have entered the study purely because of my relationship with them.

Another issue with my role as a participant is that I believe that many of my participants saw me as an authority figure in the department (both because of my gWPA work and my RCWS scholarship), and so they may have been uncomfortable sharing some of their experiences for fear of negative repercussions on their job statuses (mainly for NTT instructors). Also, several interview participants seemed to check if they were

giving me the “right” answers. I believe this happens in many interviews; the participants want to help the interviewer out as much as possible. However, I think some instructors were checking to see if they gave the right answers so that I would provide a favorable report to the WPAs. In fact, some instructors told me not to tell the WPAs what they had said.

From my role as a participant in the department, I try to balance these tensions of my interview participants, reflecting primarily on the material that seemed to come from the instructor’s true thoughts on the situation. Of course, no one can quite discern the truth in any statement, and so this could be a bias and limitation on my part. For more considerations of the study’s limitations, please see that section at the end of the chapter.

Reliability and Validity

Even though Creswell recommends against studying “one’s own backyard,” as such a practice can cause power struggles and employment issues due to the sensitive nature of such a project, a researcher can study her own workplace should she follow multiple validation procedures in order to provide the most accurate account possible (122). In order to maintain accuracy in my representation, I employed the following validation methods: triangulation, thorough (thick) description of the coding process, and an awareness of my own bias (which is included at the conclusion of this chapter).

For triangulation, I use three data sources: a departmental survey, interviews, and departmental student learning objectives (SLOs). While the interviews prove to be the most problematic site for this project since the participants met with me face-to-face, the survey was open to the entire department and anonymity was afforded to all respondents, and the SLOs serve as a departmental artifact to corroborate both the survey and

interview responses, since SLOs are intended to serve as another unifying document within a department.

Sampling Method

In this study, I use a volunteer sampling method, a purposive, nonprobability method that “usually involves individuals who agree to participate in research, sometimes for payment” (Jupp). Pamela Maykut and Richard Morehouse define purposive studies as those that select specific participants with a specific purpose in mind (56), rather than grabbing any person that might fit within the scope of the study, and so my study is purposive in that I narrowed my scope to General Education English faculty, who taught in the program during the 2016-17 academic year. A volunteer sample is particularly useful for a departmental study, as this method allows for the use of available and willing participants in an ethnographic study that deals with a potentially sensitive topic. In this case, instructors might find discussing the theories and practices within their courses to be sensitive in nature, particularly when their supervisor might read their comments. Eve Waltermaurer explains that a nonprobability sample purely means that the data cannot be qualitatively measured; a nonprobability sample, though, can be representative of a population for a qualitative study. In order to determine the reliability of a nonprobability sample, the researcher uses the demographic information available and compares the results of her study with that information. However, the researcher should be mindful about why her particular research group was more available than other members within the demographic. Because volunteer sampling largely relies on volunteers, there’s a chance that the volunteers do not truly represent the entire group. Moreover, as Boughner describes, researchers using a volunteer sample may demonstrate bias in which

volunteers they include or omit from the study. While these issues with volunteer sampling are valid, I believe that for my study, a volunteer sampling method served positively in that instructors could choose to participate at their convenience rather than mine. By allowing instructors to volunteer to participate, I account for the multifaceted needs within a writing department, particularly in regard to labor. Instructors could participate if their schedules and morale allowed it; instructors were not pressured to participate. Also, I had narrowed my participant field to account for the needs of my study. In regard to my own bias, I only omitted two volunteers from the study due to scheduling issues. In both cases, the interview volunteers could not attend our scheduled interview session due to unforeseen circumstances, and we were unable to find another time that would work within the timeframe of this study.

Procedure

In this qualitative study, some of my interview participants participated in professional development workshops on threshold concepts of writing studies, workshops that did not last more than an hour. Other participants were recruited for interviews so that I might gain more insight into instructor prior knowledge. During these workshops, attendees were invited to participate in interviews about their writing instruction theories and practices (their prior knowledge) and how threshold concepts relate to their pedagogies. In order to recruit participants for this study, I emailed all General Education English faculty members to inform them about professional development workshops that they may attend. They were also notified that participation in the study is voluntary, that they could withdraw from the study at any time, that interviews would be recorded, and that all identifying information would be omitted from the final report. Moreover, faculty

members were notified that they may attend the workshops even if they did not wish to participate in the study, as their responses in the workshops would not be included in the study. After the professional development workshops, I emailed workshop participants to solicit an interview. Before the interview, I explained the purpose and procedures of the study to each individual faculty member, and the participants then signed the informed consent. The interviews lasted from 22 minutes to 96 minutes. Some follow-up interviews were conducted via email.

In order to gain a broader view of the department, I created a departmental survey, which I emailed out to all General Education Faculty prior to conducting interviews. 28 instructors agreed to the terms of the survey, and approximately 20 instructors responded to the questions within the survey. I also opened up the interviews to any faculty member who wished to participate in my dissertation research, and so that call went out to all instructors via email. Like with the above workshop interviews, all identifying information was omitted from the final report.

Only General Education English faculty members and English graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) over the age of 18 were allowed to participate in the study. Eligible participants were those who had taught at least one General Education English course in the 2016-17 academic year, or be a GTA during the 2016-17 academic year. I did not anticipate removing any subjects from my study, but I reserved the option to do so if I believed a subject to be falsifying information. Participants were compensated with a \$10 Starbucks gift card.

By using surveys and interviews, I can better understand two key parts to my research question. Firstly, I can gain insight into instructor prior knowledge, both on its

own and as instructors view their knowledge in relation to threshold concepts. Secondly, I can learn strategies for using threshold concepts to create a shared vision of writing instruction, particularly when compared with student learning outcomes (SLOs) and previous departmental workshops. Faculty conversations are the best way to determine how instructors perceive the benefits and pitfalls of a threshold-concept-framed department. These conversations provide general insight into how threshold concepts are used in the departmental level. Broadly, then, this study may inform WPAs at other institutions in the departmental tensions between what instructors know about writing instruction and what WPA's know about writing pedagogy, introducing strategies for mediating those tensions with threshold concepts.

Participants

Setting

MTSU General Education English (Gen. Ed. English), a program within the English Department, houses the required three semesters of general education English requirements for the university. All students in the university must take FYC courses, both English 1010 (ENGL 1010) and English 1020 (ENGL 1020), and a literature survey course, English 2030 (ENGL 2030, a more general course) or English 2020 (ENGL 2020, a themed literature course). Approximately 100 faculty teach for Gen. Ed. English, with 27 GTAs, 41 NTTs (38 of these instructors teach full-time on three-year contracts), and 31 TT/T instructors. Normal course load for GTAs is based on departmental need, but typically, GTAs teach two courses per semester (in semesters with lower enrollment, GTAs will do a split assignment by teaching one course for the program and then either working as a University Writing Center tutor or as a research assistant). NTTs on a three-

year contract teach a 5/5 load, while adjuncts (those instructors who are hired as needed) teach no more than three classes per semester. TT/T instructors teach a 3/3 load in the department in general, and so they teach one or two Gen. Ed. English courses per semester. In this program, instructors teach a variety of courses in basic writing, FYC, and literature survey courses, as these courses fall within the university's general education program. Students are required to take two semesters in FYC (ENGL 1010 and ENGL 1020, respectively), and they are also required to take one survey of literature course, with Gen. Ed. English offering two main options for the literature requirement: ENGL 2020 and ENGL 2030. ENGL 2030 is a general survey course, in which students read poetry, fiction (often short stories, but some instructors do teach a novel or two), and drama, with a wide range for each genre (*Oedipus Rex* through twenty-first century short stories, as an example). Much like ENGL 2030, ENGL 2020 covers poetry, fiction, and drama, but the course is themed around a particular issue/idea, time period, and/or location. Beyond the general education requirements, Gen. Ed. English also offers writing support for students in ENGL 1009 (the basic writing course) and ENGL 1010K (a stretch course with an additional hour of instruction that gives students who pass credit for ENGL 1010). All Gen. Ed. English instructors can teach all of the offered courses in Gen. Ed. English, including GTAs.

Survey Participants

Since this dissertation focuses on MTSU's General Education English faculty and their beliefs on teaching writing, a convenience sampling method takes into account the scheduling demands made on faculty members, with many faculty members in General Education English teaching a 4/4 of 5/5 load. For this study, I included two participant

groups in order to attempt to capture the beliefs of MTSU's General Education English faculty. One participant group completed an anonymous survey that was sent to all General Education English faculty. Out of 100 total departmental faculty members, twenty faculty members completed the survey. The second participant group (comprised of fifteen participants) participated in in-person interviews. The interview participants were either recruited from an email to all General Education English instructors, or they were invited after attending professional development workshops (these workshops were also announced to all General Education English faculty).

All participants are either instructors (both tenure/tenure track and non-tenure track) in General Education English or Graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) in the English Department. While many of the TAs have teaching experience, some (mainly the TAs in the Master of Arts program) do not. However, I elected to include them because of their participation in the Teaching Composition seminar in which they learn about RCWS and begin to prepare their future courses. Their insights are just as valuable since they provide a newcomer's perspective to teaching FYC.

In order to keep the survey as anonymous as possible to encourage more participants, I omitted any questions that could be identifying, and so the survey sample lacks information about age, gender, and ethnicity. Some demographic information, though, can be gathered from the survey responses: number of years teaching, teacher preparation, and courses taught. In total, 28 participants agreed to the terms of the survey and viewed the survey. However, for most questions, only 19 - 20 participants responded. The remaining eight instructors chose not to answer any of the questions in the survey.

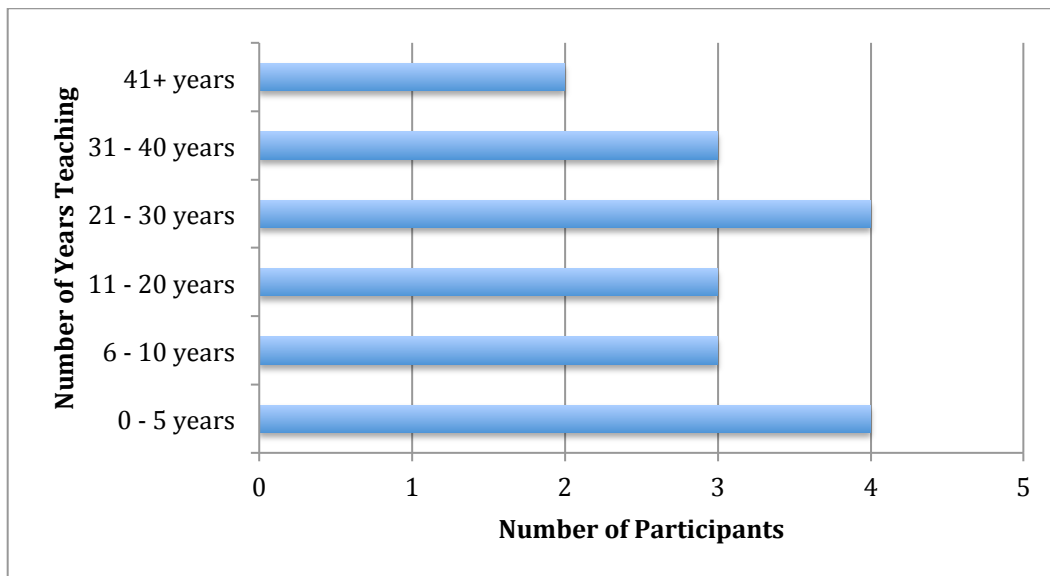


Figure 1. *Number of Years Teaching (19 out of 28 participants responded)*

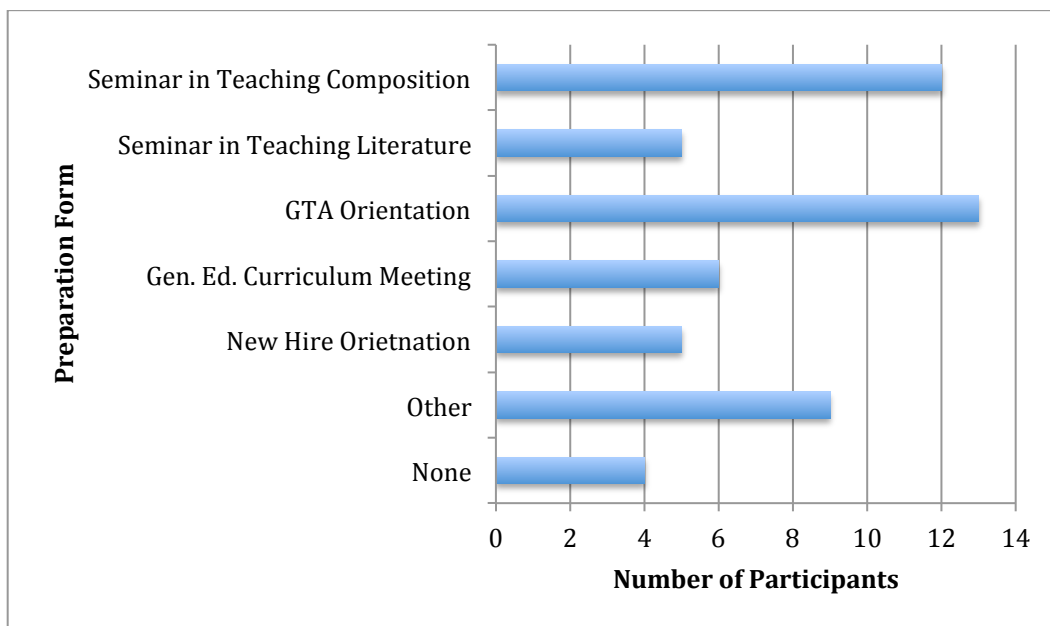


Figure 2. *Instructor Preparation (20 out of 28 participants responded)*

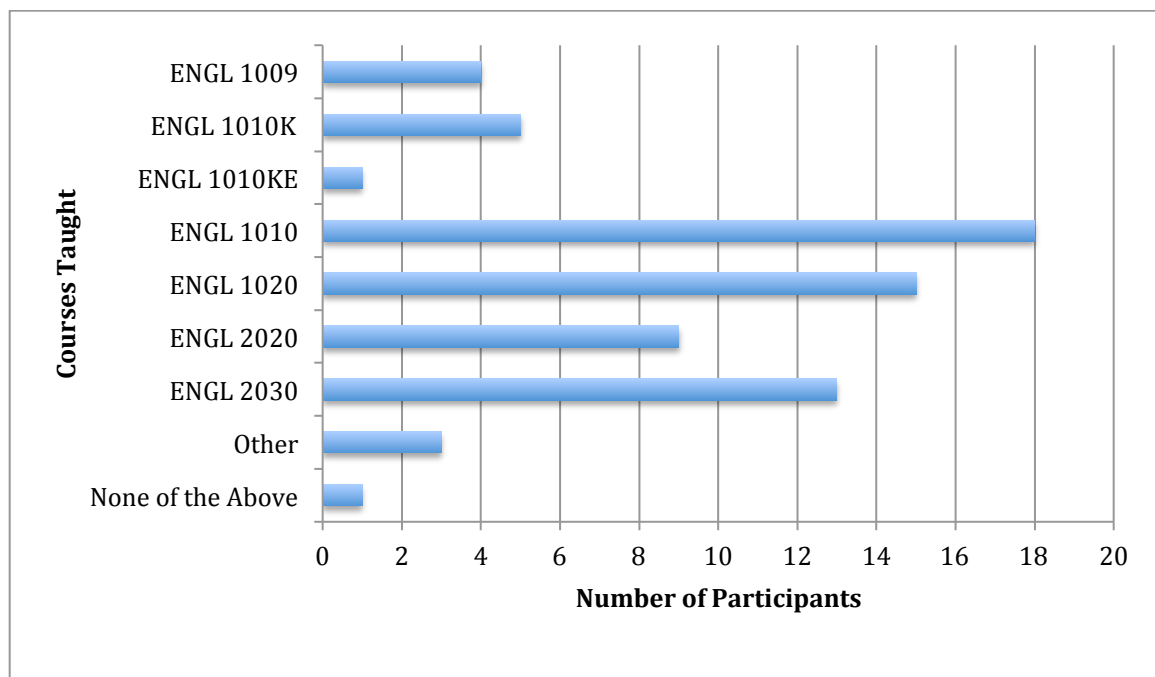


Figure 3. *MTSU General Education Courses Taught (20 out of 28 participants responded)*

Figure 1 has the most even responses, demonstrating an even range in teaching experience among respondents. In Figures 2 and 3, instructors were given options (they could select as many as applied to their situation) and they were allowed to write in “other” as well. For Figure 2, some of the “other” responses for teacher preparation include mentorships, primary and secondary education (undergraduate and graduate courses, teaching certificates, and substitute teaching), prior work experience, preparation at previous universities (including GTA Orientation and seminars in teaching), and self-preparation. For Figure 3, “other” responses for general education courses taught are honors sections of the various general education courses and a Women’s and Gender Studies general education course, and one instructor also noted that s/he had not taught

yet. As indicated in these figures, then, a wide range of instructors are represented in the survey results, with instructors with little experience (0-5 years) to instructors with over forty years of experience and instructors with a wide range of teaching preparation and teaching experiences.

Interview Participants

The interview participants ranged from ages 28 to 73, with experience ranging from 2 to 51 years (all but one participant had teaching experience at the university level). The interview participants were TAs, non-tenure track instructors (NTT) or tenure-track/tenured instructors (TT/T). In order to more effectively demonstrate positions in the university, I've chosen to label the instructors more generally, focusing on three main types of instructor, rather than labeling their specific position within the university, especially since the titles at MTSU do not always match the titles at other universities/institutions. All instructors were given pseudonyms in order to protect their identities. I have elected to remove ethnicity from the demographic in order to help secure my participants' identities, as General Education English faculty are overwhelmingly Caucasian. It might be easy to determine the identity of a participant based on ethnicity and instructor position alone. While omitting this information does erase racial differences and how they impact instructor prior knowledge, I believe that maintaining anonymity is more important for my instructors, since some of them alluded that they did not want the WPAs to know their apparent lack of knowledge. One of the tensions I discovered in this project was performance anxiety as it relates to job security, and so to speak to that tension, I believe anonymity to be the best policy.

Table 1

Description of Interview Participants

Name*	Age	Gender	Instructor Position	Teaching Experience (in years)	Gen. Ed. English Courses Taught	Teacher Preparation
Anthony	44	Male	NTT	15	1009, 1010, 1010K, 1020, 2020, 2030	Seminar in Teaching Composition, GTA Orientation, Curriculum Meetings, Shadow Program, Grade Norming, Syllabi Reviews
Beth	50	Female	TT/T	30	1010, 1020, 2020, 2030	GTA Orientation
Carol	69	Female	TT/T	22	1010, 1020, 2030	Seminar in Teaching Composition, Seminar in Teaching Literature, GTA Orientation, Graduate courses in curriculum design and modern pedagogy
Daniel	33	Male	TA	8	1010, 1020	None
Gloria		Female	NTT	8	1009, 1010, 1010K, 1020, 2030	Seminar in Teaching Composition, Substituting, Training in the private sector
Hannah	32	Female	TA		1010, 1020, 2030	
Ian	36	Male	NTT	11	1009, 1010, 1010K, 1020, 2020, 2030	Seminar in Teaching Composition, GTA Orientation, New Hire Orientation
John	58	Male	NTT	21	1009, 1010, 1010K, 1020, 2030	Curriculum Meeting, Engage Summer Institute
Kayla	28	Female	TA	2	1010, 1020, 2030	Seminar in Teaching Composition, GTA Orientation, Curriculum Meeting
Lauren	32	Female	TA	8	1010, 1020	Seminar in Teaching Composition, GTA Orientation, Curriculum Meeting, Adjunct
Olivia	52	Female	NTT	11	1010, 1010K, 1020, 2030	Seminar in Teaching Composition, Seminar in Teaching Literature, Curriculum Meeting, Writing Center Tutor
Richard	73	Male	TT/T	51	1010, 1020, 2030	GTA Orientation, Faculty mentors the first two years as a GTA)
Sonya	46	Female	TA	0	N/A	Seminar in Teaching Composition, GTA Orientation, Curriculum Meeting
Tim	44	Male	TA	2	1010, 1020	Seminar in Teaching Composition, GTA Orientation, Curriculum Meeting, New Hire Orientation, Prior experience as an adjunct
Valerie		Female	NTT	2	1010, 1020	Seminar in Teaching Composition, GTA Orientation, Curriculum Meeting

To demonstrate the demographics for my interview participants, I have completed the above table, which includes name (a provided pseudonym), age, gender, instructor position in the university, teaching experience (in years), General Education English courses the instructor has taught, and the teacher preparation s/he received:

From the survey and interview demographic data, my study gained a wide range of participants, from GTA to TT/T instructors and from instructors with no teaching experience to instructors with over 40 years of teaching experience.

Data Analysis

For this project, I used SurveyMonkey and NVivo as established instruments for data analysis. I used SurveyMonkey to distribute and analyze the surveys, following IRB procedures, and NVivo to analyze the interviews. Both instruments were used in order to provide a more methodological approach to this qualitative, ethnographic study, especially since survey information can be quantified, and interviews can be measured via coding processes.

One way to measure ethnographic data is via online surveys. Qualitative and mixed methods scholar Dhiraj Murthy (2008) encourages ethnographers to adapt digital methods for conducting their studies since the world ethnographers study has an online facet (849), particularly arguing that digital surveys can potentially reach a broader audience (842-43). Mick Couper states that there are two main forms for internet-based surveys: scrolling and paging. A scrolling survey has all of the questions on one page, while a paging survey has one question per page. I opted for a scrolling survey design so that my participants might see the entire survey at once so as to know my expectations and to complete the questions in the order that they saw fit. Couper recommends a

scrolling survey for instances where the “survey is relatively short,” if all respondents can respond to every question, and if the completion order does not matter (16-17), criteria that my survey met. All-in-all, my survey had three pages: a consent page, the survey questionnaire, and then a concluding, “thank you” page. However, as Couper notes, a scrolling survey’s disadvantages connect with the advantages: if a participant can see the entire survey at once, they can quickly decide if they would like to participate or not because of either length or question relevance (unlike in a paging survey, where the participant does not know the full demands and so may participate) (9-12). In total, I had 28 participants agree to take the survey (the first page of the survey), but 8 out of the 28 did not complete any of the survey information. The remaining 20, though, completed every question on the survey, thus providing a 71% response rate from those who consented to the survey.

Mick Couper writes that the key limitation with online surveys is access: “Key among these [limitations] is the likely coverage error arising from the fact that not everyone in the target population of interest may have access to the Internet” (2). I expand Couper’s notion of access to a matter of time, as not everyone in my target population (Gen. Ed. English) may have had the time to participate in the survey. Even though I provided an estimated completion time for the survey, some instructors may have felt that it was too much time to give, particularly when time is a particular issue in labor concerns.

For this project, I chose to use SurveyMonkey, an online platform that allowed me to create, distribute, and analyze the surveys online. I selected SurveyMonkey for two key reasons. First, SurveyMonkey is fairly intuitive and user friendly. The site provides

directions for creating the survey, and many options are provided for questions so the creator can view and test several formats for her survey. Second, SurveyMonkey complies with IRB guidelines, as the site provides thorough-yet-concise directions for creating an anonymous survey complete with a consent form. Also, SurveyMonkey provides directions for encrypting the data so as to preserve the sensitive nature of the participants' responses. A limitation with SurveyMonkey is the price. While users can create, distribute, and analyze surveys for free, those who wish to create an IRB-compliant survey must pay to use the service. SurveyMonkey monthly plans (at present) range from \$24/month to \$99/month. Fortunately, the cheapest plan (\$24/month) can be used for an IRB-compliant survey, but it must be paid while the survey is still in use ("Plans and Pricing"). It's not an exorbitant price, but it's still a downside to using SurveyMonkey. However, I have found that for a borderline Luddite, the price has certainly been worth it to create a confidential and anonymous survey that can be digitally analyzed.

Another way to measure qualitative data is through Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), software that analyzes qualitative research, such as interviews, notes, and even video recordings. One such software is NVivo, created by QSR International. NVivo touts itself as a more efficient way to organizing qualitative data, boasting that without NVivo, an investigator's research would be "more time consuming, challenging to manage, and hard to navigate" ("What is NVivo?"). Although NVivo cannot effectively code on its own, it can catch some missed moments. NVivo also allows for memos and notes while reviewing data, and it provides graphics for the data, such as word clouds. For this project, I used NVivo to code and organize my

interview data. I was able to amass all quotes for a particular code, which allowed me to see how many times the code was mentioned in one interview, and how often it appeared across all interviews. NVivo proudly advertises that an investigator can work more efficiently because she easily organize her data and access it in a more portable way.

Many researchers extol NVivo for its organizational abilities. Nancy L. Leech and Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie (2011), for example, appreciate that NVivo allows for several types of analysis, from constant comparison analysis to componential analysis, recommending school psychology researchers perform qualitative analyses with NVivo. Linnea Rademaker, Elizabeth Grace, and Stephen Curda (2012) recommend the use of CAQDAS, as these softwares do provide great organization and easy access, especially when revising coding in the middle of a project and when working with multiple authors. Finally, Mary Ryan (2009) argues that NVivo and other CAQDAS provide for greater transparency in the qualitative research process, which enhances the trustworthiness of the researcher. However, some qualitative researchers worry about CAQDAS and its impact on qualitative methods. Nigel Fielding and Raymond Lee (2002) worry that researchers that do not have training in social sciences (especially those in medicine and health) might easily adopt CAQDAS in order to quickly analyze data (203). As such, qualitative research's legitimacy is questioned (Fielding and Lee 204). If anyone can download and use CAQDAS, then theoretically, anyone can complete qualitative research. Qualitative research moves farther away from interpreting a culture. Moreover, with the quantitative element introduced via this software, qualitative research returns to the positivist base from which it has tried to move from (Fielding and Lee 201).

Beyond the theoretical limitations of NVivo, NVivo has some practical limitations. NVivo is not particularly intuitive. Users must read an accompanying guide in order to use the software, returning often throughout the coding process. Perhaps because of my novice standing with NVivo, I found that I felt separated from the data, a point that Fielding and Lee corroborate. After I had coded the data, I began to read through the nodes in order to compose my analysis of the data. The coded texts felt acontextual when pulled from the original text and plopped into a list with other similarly coded text. I needed more context for the quotes rather than just the quote itself and the coded term. The text merely becomes quantifiable quotes rather than expressions of culture. I found that I preferred going through the interviews on my own to pull data for the analysis. Finally, NVivo is also expensive. While a user can have a two-week free trial of the product, users must pay at least \$103/year (the student price for Mac users) to use NVivo for an extended amount of time. (For Mac users, a standard one-year license is steep \$1,140.) Even with these limitations, though, NVivo did provide the organization that my project needed. With a more organized project, I was able to see the coding terms that needed to be used in the final project. Also, the organization does provide transparency, as Ryan argues, which allows for an increased validity for my project.

Coding

Researchers have two main options with coding interview data. Researchers can follow Huberman and Miles' (1994) recommendation and create codes before data collection (*a priori* coding), using the initial framework for the analysis as a guide for the coding. Or, researchers can use Glaser and Strauss' (1967) emergent coding method, in which researchers create the codes after collecting the data. For Glaser and Strauss, using

a priori codes hinders the qualitative research, as it places a lens on the data before it has even been collected.

For this project, I use a combination of *a priori* and emergent coding. Since any qualitative project has assumptions at the beginning, I think it would be unethical for me to state that I did not have *a priori* ideas about the project. As a member of this group for over four years, I had assumptions about what would be revealed in the data.

Additionally, I had read literature on GTA preparation and faculty professional development before collecting the data, and I know that shaped my coding process. Even though I did have some *a priori* assumptions, I knew that my assumptions should not cloud the coding process, and so I relied more on an emergent coding method, as I wanted to try to let my participants' beliefs shape the analysis as much as possible in an ethnography.

Coding Process

After transcribing the interviews, I considered the major themes I recalled from the literature review, the survey and interview questions, and from my past experiences with the program in order to create an *a priori* list of codes. Of course, since coding occurred after interview transcription, I am sure that the interviews did play a part in this *a priori* coding; however, by creating my *a priori* list after transcription, I did not let the codes interfere with the transcription process. As such, I transcribed the interviews (fifteen in total) in full, rather than taking out only important ideas or quotes. The terms I created for the *a priori* codes were as follows:

- Theory
- Practice/practical
- Process
- Genre
- Multimodal
- Skills
- Objectives
- Student/student-centered
- College preparation
- Threshold concepts

Indeed, much of the *a priori* codes stem from the literature review and my experience within the department, as those two aspects informed the survey and interview questions.

Once I had completed my *a priori* codes, I read through the interviews again, taking general notes throughout the interviews and compiling potential coding terms and analysis questions as I read through the interviews in order to determine emergent codes before using NVivo. Since one of the downsides for NVivo is a lack of closeness with the research, I wanted to get as close as I could to the interviews before placing them into a CAQDAS. Some questions I began to develop were as follows:

- Is there a difference between strategies and skills?
- Is it a writing instructor's job to prepare students for college in the writing classroom?
- What does *theory* mean for instructors?
- Do instructors emphasize skills because of their postliminal state as writers and teachers? Or do they truly see writing as a set of skills?

I also jotted down potential codes, listing the following:

- Theory vs. practice
- Student ego
- Grammar
- Reading
- Transfer
- Texts
- Comfort zones
- Labor
- Workshops

Many of the questions and codes I noted did not surprise me, but a few did. I had not considered how an instructor's postliminal state as a writer could impact their presentation of writing, particularly their presentation of writing as a skill. I was also surprised to see *student ego* appear, as I did not expect for instructors to view their students as having an inflated sense of ego within the classroom. The most surprising terms that appeared, though, were *labor* and *job security*. Upon reflection, these terms should not have been surprising, but in the early phases of the project, they did surprise me. I had thought instructors would discuss theory, practice, objectives, and threshold concepts. I did not expect that instructors would bring up their insecurity (for NTTs) or security (TT/T) within the department as informing their pedagogical positions.

Since I explore pedagogical tensions in this dissertation, I took these lists of questions and *a priori* and emergent codes and tried to condense around major trends. I quickly found that the relationship between theory and practice appeared in many interviews, most likely because I framed the survey and interview questions around the idea of praxis in the classroom. When I first began coding in NVivo, I included several types of theories that appeared within the interviews, such as genre, multimodal, process, transfer, rhetoric, and critical pedagogies. But as I coded, I noticed that the key focus should be on theory in general, and so I condensed several of those terms into *theory*. However, I did leave some of the theories as specific codes in order to see if some articulated theories were more troublesome than others. I also chose to hone in on FYC as a service course and its relationship to issues of theory and practice. In regard to threshold concepts and the "tensions" instructors voiced, I chose to delve more into the idea of comfort zones and language for writing instruction. Finally, I focused on job

security as I was most surprised by its appearance in the interviews. In the end, the following terms appeared in NVivo (along with their NVivo statistics):

Table 2

Final Coding and Stats from NVivo

Number	Code Category	Sources Citing Code	Total Number of References
1.0	Theory vs. practice	15	118
1.1	Theory	14	85
1.2	Skills and strategies	8	19
1.3	Student-centered	8	15
1.4	Reading instruction	8	12
1.5	Grammar and style	8	12
1.6	Assessment	7	8
1.7	Practice	4	7
2.0	Impact of SLOs	15	51
3.0	Threshold concepts	15	133
3.1	Language for writing	11	32
3.2	Comfort zones	7	15
4.0	Instructor liminality	12	33
5.0	Job security	11	26
6.0	FYC as a service course	5	7

Although I did struggle with the distance of the source material within NVivo (I often felt like I could not get as directly involved with the data), I found that the notation

of sources that had the code and the number of times the code was referenced provided me with an ability to see where I subjectively privileged certain ideas, believing them to be more significant than they really were in the interviews. For example, I found that *grammar and style* did not play as big of a role as I originally thought. More often than not, instructors tended to refer to grammar and style when talking about teaching practical methods, and so it seemed as if they saw stylistic concerns as concrete examples of practical instruction. Some instructors even questioned the emphasis on grammar and style in the classroom, and so I left with the sense that instructors did not rely on issues of style as a crutch for teaching writing. Instead, it worked as a practical example for them. Assessment also did not play as prominent of a role as I thought it might. Instructors referenced assessment more as a site of confidence; they felt quite comfortable with their feedback to students.

NVivo also made revision easier since it chronicled and compiled the codes across all interviews. Whenever I needed to expand on an idea or provide a more nuanced view into an analysis, the NVivo coding system gives the user all instances for a particular code, and so I could go in and find examples without having to search through every interview. Even though I did not rely on NVivo in the original composition of the analysis and recommendation chapters (I greatly preferred my handwritten and typed notes from the interviews), NVivo did grant a more objective facet when determining important tensions and solutions for those tensions, and it also made revising more manageable.

Limitations and Potential Research Bias

One limitation is that a qualitative study, particularly an ethnography, focuses on a limited sample in order to identify beliefs, ideas, and customs of a local context. Thus,

the information garnered from such a study might not be extrapolated to a broader sense, as these beliefs, ideas, and customs could be shaped by very particular instances that occur only within the particular local context. However, some of the instances may occur elsewhere, and so perhaps certain aspects of the study and the knowledge gained could be extended to other contexts, too. I believe that some of my findings may be used by WPAs in other programs to aid them in preparing faculty professional development.

Moreover, my sample itself could be a limitation. While I do not know completely the identities of those who completed the survey, I do know the identities of the interview participants, and these participants are active instructors in the department. They participate in almost every professional development workshop hosted by General Education English and the English Department (both by attending and by presenting when able), and they provide a collegial presence among their peers, providing advice in the hallways and gladly welcoming others in to observe their classes. Not all faculty members in a department are as active as my interview participants, and so a potential limitation with this project is that the views expressed in the analysis section come from very active instructors. I should note that a lack of presence in the department does not suggest that an instructor is a “bad” employee. Many instructors cannot maintain such an active presence because of their workload or other circumstances. However, their experiences might perhaps provide a different story from what I gathered from my selection. I chose to maintain my convenience sampling of volunteers so as to support those instructors who do not need the potential stressor of a desperate graduate student in their lives.

Another problem is bias. I could be biased because of my relationship with the participants. Moreover, the participants were aware of my study, both because of my relationship with them and because I was transparent about the study with them. As such, they may have been trying to provide me with the “right” answers so that my study may result in its projected outcome. Of course, this is another side effect of an ethnographic study: the investigator becomes just as involved in the project as the participants, and so that can impact the research. However, I try to mitigate this issue by noting in the analysis section when it seems like the respondent is trying to feed me the right answers. Again, I interpret the response as trying to please me, but I feel that this transparency in the analysis can help remind the reader of the potential limitations of such a study. I have also tried to avoid such bias when possible by providing a more generalized perspective in the recommendations section, but even then, the biases might still be present.

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings from my study, one that began as a naive investigation into faculty knowledge of RCWS theory in order to determine the best methods for presenting threshold concepts to faculty members. Scholars who have studied threshold concepts and faculty professional development seem to have reached a consensus on a strategy for approaching threshold concepts professional development: create professional learning communities in which faculty discuss and articulate threshold concepts for their field and then create courses and lessons around those threshold concepts.

While such a strategy probably works well within a department with a common disciplinary vision, I believe that university departments that house FYC courses largely do not have a shared vision for writing instruction due to the diverse specializations within the department. Even though the study has shifted to an inquiry into field legitimation and labor issues, the heart of the study still remains: to determine how best to develop a shared vision of writing instruction among diverse faculty members via threshold concepts. To achieve this, one must first understand the prominent theories operating within a department. In an English department, particularly one in which most FYC instructors have specializations in other areas of English studies (namely, literature), faculty can possess varying degrees of knowledge of writing studies theory and varying degrees of teacher preparation. After discovering the theories and practices within a department, a WPA can then unite those theories and practices with threshold concepts, which provide a common language and theoretical framework of RCWS to create a more

common vision of writing instruction within the department. Thus, the original design of the study was to discover the theoretical and practical approaches to FYC and to tease out any tensions between competing ideas among faculty.

Instructors did experience tensions between theory and practice. While some faculty members could work through the tensions, and thus achieving praxis, other faculty members avoid theory either because they feel apprehensive about the theory itself or because they thought that students would not be interested in the theory. This does not mean that faculty eschew theory completely. Instructors rallied around process theory and genre theory, two theories heavily emphasized in departmental SLOs. Fascinatingly, though, the theories that faculty struggle with also appear within departmental SLOs (namely reading and multimodal theories). To supplement their lack of RCWS theoretical knowledge, instructors rely on past experiences as students and teachers to help them remember what to teach their students. A focus on past experiences further encourages instructors to embrace practice and eschew theory, as practice resonates more with what they know about writing instruction.

However, I noticed another tension underlying how instructors approached theory and practice: labor concerns. Several contracted faculty (NTTs and GTAs) noted their concerns for rehire, which indicates that instructors may struggle with theory and practice because of performance anxiety. They may stress about “correct” writing practices in their classrooms. Because many FYC instructors are contracted instructors, their livelihoods depend on adequate performance in the classroom, often determined by student evaluations and peer and administrator teaching observations. Expected practice

(either explicitly or blindly informed by theory) often resonates more with students and other observers.

Tensions with praxis return to a classic argument in RCWS: should FYC be a required course? John Trimbur argues that FYC has enabled a writing studies discipline to emerge, and so the course should continue to exist. Sharon Crowley, however, firmly believes that the FYC course requirement has led to the field's low status and its exploitation of NTT faculty. Responding to critics like Crowley, Marjoire Roemer, Lucille M. Schultz, and Russell K. Durst (1999) proclaim that FYC should remain a requirement, since that learning space has "the potential to influence very large numbers of students," and also because FYC serves as a "site of struggle and change within the institutional hierarchy of academia" (378). Finally, Linda Bergmann (1996) brings up another facet of FYC as a service course to the university: the myth of "correct" academic discourse. Bergmann explains that writing and non-writing faculty both believe that FYC should teach all university students how to write perfectly for the rest of their tenure at the university, a feat that should be the plot of the next installment in the *Mission: Impossible* franchise.

These tensions of praxis, performance anxiety, and FYC as a service course, then, shape the ways that WPAs should introduce and share threshold concepts with their faculty. Throughout the remainder of the chapter, I use responses from the interviews to explore these tensions, delving into the similarities, differences, and nuances of instructor experiences.

Theory and/versus Practice: Finding Praxis

The tension between theory and practice is at the heart of almost every interview. Faculty sense the tension between theory and practice, but, more often than not, they turn to practice rather than theory to guide how they approach and structure their courses. While practice should be a focus within FYC, as theory and practice cannot exist without each other, centering almost solely on practice can perpetuate the myth that a one-size-fits-all approach to writing exists, that the practices presented within the classroom work in almost every writing situation. I doubt the instructors believe this to be true, but their responses could reinforce this erroneous idea about writing, an idea that WPAs must fight when discussing writing with other departments on campus. By understanding how instructors view and use theory, practice, and the relationship between the two (praxis) in their classrooms and the effects of at the theory/practice divide, WPAs can better understand how to mitigate this tension in professional development workshops.

In his edited collection *Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Writing: Rethinking the Discipline* (1993), Lee Odell expresses the relationship between theory and practice as it pertains to RCWS scholarship and teaching practices: “From the perspective of this book, theory needs practice and practice needs theory; each continually challenges and refines the other. Consequently, our understanding of our discipline is not simply knowledge of theory or knowledge of practice. Our knowledge of composing consists of the claims we can make as the result of the ongoing interaction between theory and practice” (6). Odell, responding to theory critics (namely, Stanley Fish and Donald Schon) argues for the importance of theory in relation to practice, stressing that theory underlies all practice. Practitioners, then, need to be mindful of and

reflect on theory so that these general assumptions can be internalized and revised in order to create the most effective practice possible. As Odell sees it, theory differs from practice in that practice is habitual and unconscious, while theory informs and shapes practice. When a practice needs to be revised, the theory must first be revised (4).

Ultimately, Odell and the other authors in the collection call for reflective practitioners to “shape and reshape” theory and practice.

However, Odell’s firm emphasis on theory informing practice (and vice versa) could reinforce the notion that theory is somehow above practice, which, for novice instructors and for instructors with little background in RCWS theory, could be a bit off-putting. Even with the note that practice equally inspires and informs theory, theory still seems to be a lofty goal that may be difficult to comprehend, which impedes its relationship with practice for the uninitiated. While Odell speaks against Stanley Fish’s comments on theory, Fish’s explanation of the relationship between theory and practice pull theory down to a more manageable level, even if he does dismiss theory as inconsequential. In the introduction to his book *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (1989), Fish proclaims his (in some circles) infamous theory-dismissive thoughts, arguing that true theory rises above and informs every practice, regardless of local context or changes in the particulars, and Fish does not believe that any theory beyond general hermeneutics transcends all practice. When connected with practice, Fish says theory often has no import on the practice, and when it does in small instances, it’s only in a local way, not a general, overarching way (28). Fish believes that what many scholars describe as theory is really a part of practice itself; theory generalizes particular practice, and because it’s

particular, it cannot transcend the practice: “But certainly we have gone too far, and it is time to admit what everyone knows: theory has consequences; not, however, because it stands apart from and can guide practice but because it is itself a form of practice and therefore is consequential for practice as a matter of definition” (337). He concludes, then, that theory serves as a generalization of practice, and so, theory cannot ever transcend it.

Fish’s comments on theory sound remarkably like Odell’s. Theory is the generalization of practice for both scholars, but for Fish, theory should not be placed on a pedestal, and for Odell, theory appears separated from practice even if the two are in a symbiotic relationship. These two scholars, then, demonstrate why instructors struggle with theory in the classroom. Since there is a symbiotic relationship between the two, as Odell and Fish each acknowledge in their own way, then the line between the two must be difficult to find. For instructors with only a cursory knowledge of RCWS scholarship, practices in the classroom might very well seem like theories to them. However, a strong emphasis on practice can turn FYC into a course designed for success in the university rather than a site for beginning inquiry into writing studies.

WPAs may do well to consider bell hooks’s comments on theory and practice, as she unites Odell’s and Fish’s perspectives in a more amiable way for instructors. In her book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), bell hooks consistently reinforces the connection between theory and practice, which she calls praxis. For hooks, praxis is the ultimate goal. She defines theory and practice as “ways of knowing with habits of being,” and when people consciously reflect on both theory and practice, community forms (43). hooks’ push for community anchors her belief in the

importance of praxis, for reflecting on praxis should move people towards more positive action for all: “When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. Indeed, what such experience makes more evident is the bond between the two—that ultimately reciprocal process wherein one enables the other” (61). Building off theory critics like Fish, hooks explains that theory, the jargon-heavy, esoteric productions of gatekeeping academia, certainly does not serve a greater purpose beyond creating a gap between those in the know and the greater public, preserving elitism and proving the uselessness of such theory (64). For hooks, theory must reflect on and encourage positive practice in the world, and she calls for scholars and practitioners to take on the reflective and scholarly work needed to blend theory with practice. Indeed, she stresses that her most impactful feminist theories are those rooted in the “concrete” so as to “engage in the practice of feminism” (70). Theory informs practice, but only when it transparently responds to, evaluates, and pushes for purposeful practice. The conscious reflection of theory and practice, or praxis, should be the end goal for all instructors of writing, as praxis creates a more meaningful purpose for the practice of writing.

hooks’ perspective on the strained relationship between theory and practice perhaps illustrates why writing instructors grapple with theory as much as they do. My interviewees responded overwhelmingly with a preference for practice over theory, often expressing some disdain for theory, both for their own teaching practices and for their students in the classroom. My guess as to why instructors prefer practice over theory is twofold. First, instructors most likely prefer to emphasize practice because of practice’s seemingly more tangible use. When an instructor teaches practice, she provides direct

strategies for writing, which may be used in several writing situations. Second, and this might seem to be a more negative interpretation for the preference of practice over theory, many writing instructors have only a foundational knowledge of RCWS theory, which would make theory feel even more elusive. For WPAs, though, theory is second-nature, and they design their courses and writing programs on current theories of writing to provide a strong writing education for their students. However, a disconnect occurs (especially in this department) between WPA and instructor knowledges of theory. WPAs know the theories that inform their courses, and so they understand the relationship between the recommended practices and SLOs. Instructors, though, may not have the same level of praxis as WPAs (and other RCWS scholars in the department), and so they turn to established practices rather than SLO-based recommendations to focus their courses. In establishing a unified vision of writing instruction, WPAs need to consider how instructors wrestle with theory and the ways that instructors manage the theory/practice divide on their own.

Anthony's struggle with praxis serves as a good starting point for understanding the theory/practice divide. In Anthony's case, he understands the importance of theory and practice, but he's also keenly aware of the struggle in reconciling the two. When he wrestles with theory and practice, he labels pedagogy as theory:

[...] this is why I call it praxis and pedagogy. I always keep those two things in mind. I let my pedagogy inform my praxis, but I always keep them balanced because all the theory in the world is not going to help a student write better outside of the English class. And all of the practice and practicality in the world is not going to do a student a lick of good unless they understand why they're doing what they're doing.

One striking aspect in this quote is his misuse of praxis. For Anthony, praxis means practice and not the conscious reflection of the interplay between theory and practice. He also believes that writing theory cannot help a student beyond the “English” classroom, which indicates he believes that writing theory only stands within the realm of English studies; it does not have any consequences elsewhere. His comments on practice seem to support this claim, as he sees practice extending beyond the English classroom. However, he does note that such practices do need to have some theoretical support to exist elsewhere, so perhaps he does not quite believe that RCWS theory should remain only in the realm of English studies. In the end, though, he remarks that he’s “more praxis than pedagogy,” and he admits that balancing the two is difficult: “[...] again that pedagogy with that praxis together; that’s a constant struggle.” Because he focuses more on practice than pedagogy, he begins developing his courses with the practice in mind, as he will “always go with the practical and then work backwards to theory”:

This is what I want to do, this is how I’m going to do it, and here are the theories it enacts, and then if I find out that some theories are missing, I’ll scrap the practical part, I’ll scrap an assignment, and then I’ll try to create an assignment that fits at that point. So I work backwards like that.

Anthony’s struggle reinforces that he understands not only the importance of theory and practice in a writing class, but, and perhaps more importantly, theory and practice inform each other.

Anthony’s experience reveals that seasoned instructors wrestle with praxis and that they try to work through this on their own. Anthony seems fairly grounded in practice, but as the conversation evolves, as he considers the relationship between theory and practice, he begins to move toward praxis. However, Anthony does more than arrive

at these conclusions; he states that he uses practice to guide his theory, and then he lets theory develop the practice. In the end, it seems that he does achieve praxis, but he was talking through these ideas with someone whom he views as an authority in RCWS. The WPAs in this department have been good about foregrounding the theory that informs departmental best practices (a point that Anthony acknowledges), and so I think Anthony's experience reflects other instructors' experiences with praxis. He takes what he knows to do in the classroom (the practical), which has been informed by departmental guidelines (student learning objectives, or SLOs), and he researches the theories to find what works for the practice.

Instructor differences, though, most likely come in the form of researching the theories that connect with departmental best practices and the instructor's own view of those practices. Because many writing instructors are NTTs and teach as many as five classes per semester, they might not have the time to research RCWS theories, which means that their movement toward praxis could be inhibited solely because of their employment status in the department. Beyond the time issue, instructors might not build upon their existing theoretical foundations because of their teacher preparation. For many instructors in the department (at least from the survey results), the main forms of preparation are a graduate seminar in composition and GTA Orientation, two infrequently occurring forms of preparation that typically only offer brief theoretical guides to composition pedagogy. Beyond their brief introduction to RCWS theories during graduate school, many NTTs have little time for personal professional development in RCWS. In order to balance the struggle for praxis, instructors rely on past experiences with writing and student learning objectives (SLOs) to establish the theories and practices

that define their approaches to writing instruction. Throughout the remainder of this section, I address the theories employed by instructors in order to provide a snapshot of the competing and unifying theories in the department.

99 Theories but Process Is the One

The survey results demonstrate the multiplicity of theories present within the department. Twenty instructors provided responses to the question “What theory (or theories) of writing currently inform your teaching of writing?” Respondents were able to fill in their answers to this section, and so the responses varied. Some instructors listed one or two theories, while other instructors explained their theoretical approaches. Additionally, some instructors named theorists and/or their works. In compiling their responses, I have combined some answers (for example, I included responses that listed *genre* within *rhetorical genre studies*), and instead of naming theorists, I placed them within the theories for which they are most often associated (for example, any references to Peter Elbow were placed under *expressivism*). Finally, I used all theories mentioned within the survey, regardless of whether an instructor listed multiple theories.

- Rhetorical Genre Studies
- Rhetoric
- Process/Postprocess
- Transnational
- Critical Pedagogy
- Writing about Writing
- Writing Center Theory
- Writing Program Administration
- Outcomes-Based Education
- WAC/WID
- Expressive
- Speech-Act
- Collaborative Learning
- Cognitive

In total from the pared down list, fourteen theories inform how instructors approach their courses. Process was the most cited theory, with nine instructors directly stating process in their responses (that's almost half!). Rhetoric and expressivism were equally cited with five mentions each. Genre came in third with three mentions. The remaining ten theories appeared no more than twice each. From the survey, then, several theories inform how faculty approach the instruction of writing within their courses, but some similarities can be found. The remaining theories deal with how writers process writing on their own and with others, and so perhaps the five key theories within the department are process, rhetoric, expressivism, genre, and social theories of writing.

Much like the survey responses, my interviewees identified many theories, listing a total of seventeen theories that inform their approaches to the instruction of writing:

- Writing Workshops
- Genre
- Rhetoric
- English as a Second Language (ESL)
- Student-Centered
- Outcome-Based Education (OBE)
- Cognitive
- Process
- Assessment
- Social constructivism
- Expressive
- Transnational
- Critical Pedagogy
- Postprocess
- Universal Design
- Multimodality
- Discourse Communities

This list mimics the survey responses, and it should. Since twenty people responded to the question and I interviewed fifteen instructors, I have a feeling that most of the survey responses came from the same instructors who participated in the interviews. The

differences in the two lists could be on account of the time between the survey and the interview. During that time, instructors could have thought more about the theories that inform their courses. Also, I know that some interviewees prepared for the interview by trying to determine the types of questions I would ask them (because I wanted the interviews to move more like a conversation, one that would occur “on the fly” in the halls of the university, I did not give my interviewees the questions in advance. For more on my method, please see the methodology chapter). I estimate that some considered the survey questions (perhaps they were some of the eight participants in the survey who did not respond to any of the questions), and so because of that consideration, they added to their theories.

I should note that these were the theories that instructors directly cited. Other theories inform their approaches to the classroom, as evidenced by their interviews (for example, student-centered pedagogies would be very high on the list based on how many times instructors referred to centering their classes around their students; however, only three instructors directly cited student-centered pedagogy as a theory that informs their approach to writing instruction). However, I chose to focus on those theories directly named by instructors because I think the naming of theory is important. When an instructor can name a theory, then they are most likely trying to use it consciously in their classrooms (and therefore moving toward praxis). Furthermore, when an instructor can name the theory, then she can identify with others who name the same theory. A shared language emerges with the naming of theory. For WPAs, naming is important in the creation of a shared vision. A WPA can more effectively bridge the gap between

disciplinary best practices and departmental theories when she knows the theories that currently inform her program.

Process again tops the list with six direct mentions by instructors. Genre, though, moves up in this discussion, tying process's number with six as well. I speculate the prominence of process theory stems from the near ubiquity of the theory. Process theory, for many scholars, serves as the foundation for the field, as process theory aided the establishment of RCWS, and as other theories build off of process theory. For example, Bizzell's critique of Flower and Hayes's article on process theory, in which Bizzell argues that a student's individual writing process is shaped just as much by her discourse communities as it is her cognitive development, provides an even stronger foothold for critical theory within RCWS. Moreover, process theory serves as a good foundation for instructors and students alike. For instructors, a focus on the writing process provides a site for scaffolding both major and minor writing assignments. For students, process theory helps students understand that writing is messy, recursive, and often difficult; no one can write linearly and perfectly in one fell swoop. Because of process theory's foundational nature, it is no wonder that so many instructors rely on it as a core theory.

Process also appears in departmental SLOs, but it has a more subtle presence. In the ENGL 1010 SLOs, some objectives that allude to process are as follows: "complete writing tasks informed by the rhetorical situation"; "practice writing in multiple genres and in response to real-world writing situations"; and "make appropriate decisions about content, form and presentations" ("ENGL 1010 and ENGL 1020 Learning Objectives"). Fascinatingly, in these objectives, process has merged with writing-to-learn and learning-to-write, an evolution of process theory that began in WAC scholarship and moved to

composition as a whole. Thus, instructors have most likely taken the omnipresent process theory and applied it to these objectives, often in the form of writing strategies students can follow to achieve a final product. Process theory, then, may support instructors in focusing on practice, strategies, and skills.

For the interview respondents, process theory serves as the main framework for their courses, with instructors scaffolding their assignments and lessons to provide students with strategies for working through the writing process. Valerie's enthusiastic response summarizes how other instructors feel about process (perhaps, though, without the great enthusiasm): "Process! Process! Process! I'd say process mostly, the majority; that's the one I know the best." She further elaborates that she's "so much about process" that when she creates lessons for her students, she creates them "in a way that [students] can start recognizing their own process [...]." Ultimately, she aims for her students to realize that they have their own processes, but she does that by demonstrating ways of thinking about the writing process. Like Valerie, both Gloria and Daniel take comfort in writing process, because they see it as a practical skill they can easily teach. Because they have taught writing as a process for so long, they feel as if it's a well-oiled machine. Gloria even responds that she's got the process "step-by-step thing" down so well in her ENGL 1020 course that she describes the course as one that she's "polished [...] to a little gem stone because my assignments really do make sense to the students now [...]." While problems do emerge from instructors becoming too entrenched in their instruction (a point I address in the performance section of this chapter), process theory puts instructors more at ease in the classroom.

I interpret these responses as demonstrating process theory's ubiquity in writing studies theory. Process theory established the field, and as such, it practically defines the field for several instructors and RCWS scholars. For these pedagogues, process opposes current-traditional pedagogy, as process celebrates the writer's development of content and revision. Current-traditional, even though it has an early "ending" date in the timeline of writing theories (it "concludes" with the advent of process theory in the 1970s), still has an active presence in both secondary and postsecondary education.¹ I'm speaking only from personal experience here, but many of my past students expressed disdain for writing purely because they had a past instructor (or past instructors) emphasize the mechanical and stylistic nature of writing rather than content creation and development. There's something quite liberating about sharing the writing process with students, and because the writing process has been put into phases and because so many scholars and instructors have created strategies for sharing the writing process with students, it's no wonder that instructors flock to process theory, a theory that's both freeing and practical in nature.

Instructors may also emphasize process theory because it blends theory with practice. Process feels more like a practical skill for instructors, and so they prefer to stress it in their courses. John, for example, chooses to focus on process because he "worked in a lot of factory settings." Because of his factory experiences, John sees that process connects his experiences with a strategy for teaching his students about writing:

¹ Some scholars, most notably Crowley, argue against process' difference from current-traditional pedagogy. For Crowley, current-traditionalists easily appropriated process to create heuristics that would lead to stronger end products. She concludes, "The easy accommodation of process-oriented strategies to current-traditionalism suggests that process and product have more in common than is generally acknowledged in professional literature about composition, where the habit of contrasting them conceals the fact of their epistemological consistency" (212).

“So the idea of process has always been kind of interesting to me, and mechanical processes, and writing, at least at the composition level for most students, can be taught as a process, which demystifies it, and that’s something that students can lock onto.” In fact, he sees process as the way to help students understand writing without all the complexities of theory: “You start getting a little too theoretical with most composition students, and they just sort of tune out. It becomes something that they can’t grasp onto. But if you can give them a process to follow, they’ll do that, and if they want to or not, they’re learning.” Ultimately, process leads to praxis for John. He balances his practical experiences with his theoretical knowledge of writing to make his teaching and his students’ learning more accessible.

Instructors likely take great comfort in process theory because it feels so practical. Instructors can impart practical writing strategies to their students, and many of these strategies can be used in several different writing situations. Moreover, because of process’s ubiquity, process theory utilizes a more well-known language than other theories. Most instructors know the terms *prewriting*, *drafting*, *revising*, and *editing*, and so perhaps because of this universal language of process, writing instructors without backgrounds in RCWS might use process because they can speak that language easily. Because they can speak the language of process, instructors can more readily share it with their students, thus making process theory the most accessible theory for instructors and students in the FYC classroom.

Process theory, though, is more than just practice. Process theory is a way of thinking about writing, too, and so instructors might see that they are truly imparting a way of thinking about writing that just happens to have practices that students can latch

onto and a common language, one that stretches across institutional (high school included) and disciplinary boundaries. Given how instructors emphasize practice and the theories they embrace from departmental objectives, I believe that MTSU's instructors filter many of their new encounters with theory through the lens of process theory, especially the practical aspects of process. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I explore the practices instructors use and the theories they embrace, and I often return to the relationship with process theory. In the recommendations chapter, I discuss the importance of including process/practice elements in SLOs and framing workshops around a particular practice, encouraging a connection between the language of process and the language of threshold concepts in order to increase instructor uptake. WPAs should help instructors see that many theories have practical applications, and so WPAs should emphasize these theories and practices in SLOs and workshops to help instructors broaden their RCWS theoretical horizons.

Performance Anxiety and a Preference for Practice

When I ask Gloria about the theories that inform her approach to the instruction of writing, she immediately responds that she doesn't think she can answer that question. She explains her position: "I know all the practical, but I don't know enough about the theories to sound intelligent." Her hesitancy to name theories and then her explanation of her hesitation indicates that she feels that she does not have the authority to name theories or theorists in front of a perceived "expert." I had worked as a graduate WPA the year before, and throughout the interview, she references my position in the department. Gloria likely has several theories informing how she approaches her courses, theories that she has learned while on the job. However, she cannot name those theories, and so she

disparages and demarcates her knowledge: she doesn't know theory (and she sees it as a problem), but she does know practice (and she's good at it).

In this situation, I believe Gloria articulates an aspect of performance anxiety in the classroom, one particularly felt by NTT instructors. Like many NTT instructors in the department, Gloria has a Masters degree in English, and her RCWS training has been limited to what she learned about it in graduate school (one course) and her experiences on the job fresh out of graduate school. Because she's an NTT instructor, her job relies on successful performance in the classroom as described by her students, her colleagues, and administration in the form of student evaluations of teaching (SETs), observations, and reflection papers. In order to achieve that performance, Gloria likely teaches what she knows best—writing practices—so that she can appear successful to her students, colleagues, and administrators. In this section, I provide an overview of performance anxiety in relation to labor concerns, and I then explore how instructors rely on their past experiences with writing practices (rather than relying on theoretical knowledge) to inform their approaches to the course.

Performance for Rehire: Labor Concerns for NTTs

Instructor performance drives rehiring practices for NTT instructors, most of whom have a contract dependent upon university budget and/or student enrollment, as Gretchen M. Reevy and Grace Deason (2014) note. One way to maintain employment is through positive performance, which is often measured in departments via a combination of student evaluations of teaching (SETs), formal observations, and faculty perceptions of their own performance. Laura Langbein (2008) describes this phenomenon as “pay-for-performance,” a problematic issue in higher education because of the difficulty in

measuring performance (417). Langbein explains that SETs “have become the preferred, low-cost mechanism by which university administrators monitor faculty teaching, prevent ‘shirking,’ and maintain productivity,” and that “faculty are rewarded with promotion, tenure, and higher pay for ‘better’ teaching, as measured entirely or in large part by the SETs” (418). Langbein contends that in the pay-for-performance model, “faculty are rewarded with higher SETs if they reward students with higher grades” (426), and so SETs should not be used to measure performance because “successful” faculty performance rests on grade inflation, which could then lower the value of a university degree and cause for the need for more graduate degrees (426-27). No matter the end results, faculty reliance on SETs to establish a stronger performance record demonstrates just how much faculty desire to be seen as successful instructors to their students and their employers.

Performance anxiety places a unique stressor on NTT instructors. While TT instructors do need to perform well to achieve tenure, once they become tenured instructors, they achieve a status that proffers job security. NTT instructors, though, must rely on performance perceptions to remain in their nebulous state as a potential fixture within the university. Universities do little to hide the import of success as related to rehiring, as several job advertisements stress that NTT instructors have a higher likelihood of being rehired based on how well they execute their duties within the department. While these job ads do not clarify exactly how instructor success will be measured, the stress remains. Reevy and Deason study the psychological “perceptions of workplace stressors and harm,” and how faculty handle these issues, particularly by examining “depression, anxiety, and stress.” They surveyed 200 instructors (performing a

follow-up survey in which 90 of the 200 instructors participated), and they reported that the greatest stressors listed within the first survey were as follows: “The responses mentioned by 10% or more of the sample workload (31.9% of the sample), contingency/precariousness of status (31.4%), lack of support (including physical space; 30.4%), low pay or pay inequity (26.5%), not being allowed to participate in service/governance/department politics (18.6%), lack of recognition/invisibility (15.7%), and no benefits (health, etc.; 11.3%).”

In Reeve and Deason’s study, contingency status and the precariousness that comes with it ranked as the top stressor for NTT instructors. The very knowledge of their contingent position causes great stress for these instructors, and the remaining issues, lack of support, low pay, and lack of participation in governance, are all symptoms of the contingency disease. This disease spurred by an employment crisis has continued for over thirty years, with the Wyoming Resolution in 1986 marking the disciplinary announcement of the crisis. Ann Larson (2016) writes that not much has changed in the university: “By most accounts, writing teachers’ working conditions have stayed the same or deteriorated during the period that composition scholars fought for disciplinary recognition in the academy (and then lamented the internalized dramas that emerged from that pursuit)” (172). The conditions for NTT faculty remain a problem, as their employment status suggests that writing courses are not that important. Even if the conditions for hiring faculty come from university administration rather than writing program coordinators, Larson implores WPAs to begin the work of improving hiring practices.

However, not all scholars agree that the situation is as dire as Larson and others make it. Murphy (2000) writes that NTT faculty with renewable contracts are in a favorable position, for they have the joy of teaching without the stress of researching. However, even Murphy calls for a change to the system, demanding that universities acknowledge how many NTT instructors they hire and account for why they do it. In other words, let the researchers research, and the part-timers teach (25-26). He does explain that he wants the NTT positions formalized and professionalized so that instructors can have security on campus (25-26). No matter how instructors may feel in these situations, many universities have yet to formalize these positions, thus leaving faculty in a potentially precarious position.

In a special issue of *College English*, Sue Doe et al. (2011) see the unresolved hiring issue as a “a strategy in academic hiring” (429): “Despite the resilience of this system, with the exception of work focusing on faculty organizing, most efforts by scholars and professional organizations appear to be stalled on the assumption that traditional approaches will one day be restored” (429). In their qualitative study, Doe et al. analyze the discourses found in faculty participants’ work logs, finding that contingent faculty do much of the same work as tenured faculty (unlike what Murphy, writing a decade earlier, suggests): “...[contingent faculty] effort and output can be seen as inextricably connected to the activities of tenure-line faculty” (444). Contingent faculty do the work without the security and even glory of tenure.

Contingent faculty, no matter their feelings on their position, certainly inhabit a liminal space within the department. Should they be comfortable in their roles, they still must renew their contracts and/or hope that university enrollment maintains or increases

so that they might continue to work in the university. Because of this liminality, they might not feel comfortable taking risks in the classroom or even learning new theories, for the risks could cause for unfavorable evaluations (and NTT faculty rely on a positive image in the department in order to increase the likelihood of rehire) and theories come and go, making instruction perhaps more frustrating than they think it should be.

Within this department, a clear divide between NTT and TT/T remains, unfortunately. I must note at the outset that this is not a divide that is meant to make NTT faculty feel inferior. In fact, there seems to be great collegiality and respect between NTT and TT/T faculty alike. Instead, this divide appears only as brief asides when instructors express their insecurity (NTT) or security (TT/T) as instructors in the department. Furthermore, the department is currently considering a proposal to allow NTTs into shared departmental governance. Gloria's and Anthony's remarks demonstrate the insecurity NTT instructors face.

For both Gloria and Anthony, their insecurities with their employment status appear inadvertently when asked about how they use theory or departmental objectives. When Gloria, a long-time NTT for the department, concludes her theory of writing after stating that she doesn't think she can name theories or theorists, she returns to the fact that, in that moment, she cannot name any theorists. When I tell her it's fine, she laughs, "Don't tell they who hire me. Ha!" Like other NTTs, Gloria's position hinges on a renewable contract. Here, Gloria indicates that a knowledge of theories must make her more suitable for rehire, a point that may be true, and so her lack of knowledge could change how her employers approach her rehire application. Gloria reveals her insecure position again when discussing SLOs, as she alludes that she does not know them well. In

order to save face in the interview, she says this about SLOs, “I would say, if I were going to try to answer intelligently, it would be: I would think of the learning objectives as the end game, and then I would use my step-by-step process that works for me as a teacher to get them to the objective. That’s what I’d do.” I assume that she makes this response because I have worked as a program assistant in the department, and so, as she sees it, I am involved as an administrator with the capacity to influence hiring.

Anthony provides a much more lengthy response to the hiring issue, and like Gloria, this appears when asked about the theories that influence his approach to writing instruction. When he mentions that he follows the “currently in vogue” theories, and, after some prompting on my end to expand on that idea, he mentions that the department encourages certain theories. When I ask him if he likes the department’s encouragement for certain theories, he begins his response by noting the differences in faculty status:

Yeah, uh, well, it’s clear, well, as a full-time temporary person, well, there are two routes. There’s the tenure/tenure-track and full professors who are part of the university and part of self-governance. Then there’s the full-time temporary, adjuncts, GTAs, who are not part of self-governance, which means that we are employees, not coworkers, so employees have to follow the lead of the boss as it were, which is our director and chair, and they have been really good about that.

He goes on to say that he has felt great support from the WPAs, and he feels like they are flexible with instructors as they learn and adapt to the new theories, but the tension clearly still remains for him.

Anthony continues to mention his NTT status when mentioning “failure” in the classroom. When he explains how failure is a good thing for writing, but not for instructing:

In writing, failure can be a good thing. But if you're being observed. You see, there's a...I mean, this is why I call it praxis and pedagogy. I always keep those two things in mind. I let my pedagogy inform my praxis, but I always keep them balanced because all the theory in the world is not going to help a student write better outside of the english class. And all of the practice, and practicality in the world, is not going to do a student a lick of good unless they understand why they're doing what they're doing. And the same way I approach my professional duties. I recognize that failure is good, but I also have to recognize there are times when you've gotta get it done, so...yeah.

This is worth quoting at length because Anthony connects praxis and his liminal position in the university. True praxis is great for everyone, but sometimes, the reality of the situation calls for a perfect execution of practice.

Gloria and Anthony directly acknowledge the precariousness of their employment, but several other colleagues hinted at it, too. When I asked Ian how threshold concepts support him in meeting course objectives, he sarcastically responds, "I know the course objectives so well. Yeah, edit that part out." He doesn't want his seeming unconcern for course objectives to get back to those who hire him, a real concern since the WPAs serve as director to and a reader of this dissertation. His response indicates that he may be worried that his lack of knowledge for departmental objectives will cause him rehiring issues. Tim, a GTA, expresses his concern for acceptable performance when I ask him about what he would like for professional development. He responds that he wants to know more about practical expectations rather than theoretical because he did not know what to do in the classroom. He had to rely on what he did at a previous institution in order to even feel remotely comfortable in the classroom at MTSU.

While I have focused on NTT instructors and their perceptions of employment, their perceptions seem even more valid when compared to the employment comments made by tenured instructors. Like with Ian, when I asked Beth about how she uses objectives to structure her course, she jokingly exclaims, “How do I use them? I put them on my syllabus. Is that not enough?” She then explains, “I guess I read it at the start of each semester, and say, ‘Yeah, yeah, I do that.’” She again laughs as she jokes, “This is the only thing you’re going to quote me on; I can see it.” When I tell her that I might quote it because I’m finding it’s an important conversation in the dissertation, she laughs and says, “When I’ve been fired, we’ll discuss this.” Like with the NTT faculty, she sees a relationship between performance and “perfect” practice, but her opening to the conversation shows she does not have to follow departmental guidelines, likely because she’s tenured. When we talk further about objectives, she defends her position for not knowing them now because she helped create so many of them. Presently, her courses probably follow the objectives because she had a hand in creating them, something that NTT faculty don’t often have the power to do. She does have similar perceptions on performance as NTT instructors, but she does not have to truly worry about being fired for her performance because of her tenured status.

Richard responds similarly to Beth. Richard, a tenured, septuagenarian professor who has been in the department for over thirty years, explains that he uses SLOs to “perform” appropriately, but ultimately, he has a lot of power to resist some of the recommendations in the objectives:

I need a sense that I’m performing in ways that are within the frameworks of what’s going on in the department and in the profession, but I’ve been teaching long enough to know that ain’t nobody here is going to tell me to

do anything any different from the way I'm gonna do it. Just isn't gonna happen. And when it does, I will do something else.

Richard does not have to follow the objectives if they don't mesh with what he wants to do in the classroom, and Richard has the agency to say that he can walk away from it, a luxury many NTT instructors do not have. Because of his position, Richard feels more comfortable asserting his authority as a scholar and instructor. And yet, despite this, Richard is one of the few tenured instructors who insists on teaching a general education writing class every semester so that he can keep up with best practices in the writing class and so he can connect with new students. Richard also is one of the few tenured instructors who routinely attends faculty professional development, attending the major workshops (the semester curriculum meetings and Peck Symposium) whenever they are offered. However, Richard's comments still reveal the differences in performance between tenured and non-tenured instructors.

Problems with Theory and Preferences for Practice

Ultimately, the reliance on process and the stress for perfect performance leads to a preference for practice in the classroom instead of theory. Even though instructors could respond that theories inform their approaches to writing instruction, several instructors said that they would not share those theories with their students, indicating that even though instructors "know" theory, they might not know it well enough to be comfortable sharing it with their students. In this sense, instructors express liminality in their positions as teachers. A couple of instructors voiced that theory should not be used as texts or conversations in the classroom, as students would most likely become overwhelmed and then shut down. To these instructors, students would much prefer

“practical” writing assignments and conversations, since they have more use in the “real” world.

Carol provides the most succinct response in regard to students, theory, and practice, stressing that her approach, preparation, and instruction stress “real” world practice:

I like to think about outcomes and preparing students to function in the world of work, much as I would like for them to be intellectually oriented, I don't think most of them are, just from our student population, and so, I want them to be able to be versatile and to be able to be aware of the different kinds of writing that they will probably encounter, and I'm really very practical about what I teach them how to do.

A fairly dismissive quote towards students filled with praise for practice. For Carol, the students who come through her class do not possess the intellectual capacity to consider theoretical ideas on writing, and so she stresses practical skills, skills that most likely require little thought (or so it seems from her comment about general education students and their intelligence). But, these practical “skills” in writing are grounded in theoretical thought. Perhaps Carol simply means that she does not want to provide a theoretical background. Or, Carol's limited background with RCWS theory prevents her from being comfortable with sharing writing theory with her students. She may disparage her students's ability to understand theory as a move to preserve her identity as a writing instructor.

For Valerie, the situation is more about student interest. She avoids theory in the classroom because she thinks her students will shut down. In one of my favorite quotes, Valerie remarks, “[...] because you know what happens when you throw theory at people, [snores loudly].” She firmly believes that her students's “eyes start to glaze over”

and they “shut down” any time she even barely mentions theory: “and it’s hard to teach them when they’re shut down, you know? It’s like you pretty much can’t. It’s like we might as well sit here and play patty cake because nothing’s going in, nothing’s going to happen.” Because of the theory snooze-fest, she tries to teach processes and strategies for writing, attempting different approaches so that students can see writing from different angles. Practice, as Valerie sees it, resonates more for students, and so she uses practice and process as the focus for her courses.

In Valerie’s case, she’s concerned about student resistance to theory, a concern most likely shared by other instructors. John echoes Valerie’s sentiments when he stresses that he prefers to “keep it practical.” He explains that his students resist theory, and so he tries to make his class as practical as possible: “I deemphasize the technical language. How can we make this practical?” John even goes so far as to diffuse any theoretical or technical language that may appear in his course: “I start to diffuse that language a little bit because people do resist it. Or my students resist it.” Student resistance can be intimidating terrain, but resistance can be managed with some careful planning. As in Carol’s situation, the lack of RCWS theory in Valerie’s and John’s classes might cause this shutdown to occur in students. If instructors are not comfortable sharing theory, if they do not quite know how the theory works in the classroom, then they might not teach it effectively, hoping that students will pick up on it and discuss it. Leading conversations and workshops on theory can be difficult, especially for someone who only has a basic foundation in the theory.

Practice, though, feels easier to teach. I suspect instructors prefer practical approaches because of their relationship to process theory. When an instructor teaches

process theory, she's teaching ways of thinking about and practicing writing; it's a theory with practical implications, one that serves many writers well. However, rather than turning to the disciplinary conversations on process and practice, instructors tend to shift to their own experiences with writing to support their approaches in the classroom. From my interviews, I discovered that instructors recall their past experiences as students and writers to help them remember what their students need to learn in their classes. WPAs, and even RCWS scholars, face a major obstacle with establishing and advancing the discipline when instructors choose to use their past experiences alone to inform their courses instead of coupling them with theory. I expand on this obstacle in a following section on FYC as a service course. By understanding how instructors supplement their theoretical foundations for writing instructors, WPAs can create workshops on threshold concepts that better connect with their instructors, since threshold concepts open up a language between what instructors know about writing instruction and what WPA's know about RCWS theory and best practices.

Experience Is the Best Teacher: Instructors' Past Experiences as an Approach to Writing Instruction

Instructors use their past experiences inside and outside of the academy to shape how they approach writing instruction in their courses. Because of their limited RCWS theoretical knowledge, past experiences serve as reliable sources for instructors to draw from, for their experiences allow them to remember what it was like to be a learner of writing and thus relate with their students more effectively. In this section, I provide examples from my interviews for the main past experiences that instructors draw from to

strengthen their teaching practices: past writing and learning experiences inside and outside of the university.

I begin with Tim's experience, for I believe Tim captures the spirit for how instructors use their past experiences as writers, students, and teachers to create or support their theories and practices of writing in the classroom. Tim readily identifies himself as a writer, and he uses his writing identity to help him approach writing instruction and his course design. He comments that he learned to embrace this identity when he observed other instructors. He noticed that the ways instructors teach are a "reflection of what they believe." Because of his identity as a writer, he uses that identity to influence how he approaches his writing courses: "And I believe in creative writing, and I believe in writing as a tool for students to be able, and people in general, to be able to access their thoughts." He does that by focusing on the writing process, explaining, "So, umm, invention is important, so too is drafting, so too is editing, all of those things are important steps that if you miss or decide not to do them, they have ramifications later in the piece that you may not be aware of as you're beginning the piece. So, I feel comfortable in talking about the writing process." Tim's identity as a writer leads him straight to the writing process, using the steps of the writing process to shape how he teaches his students. However, Tim is a PhD student who is planning to specialize in rhetoric and composition, and so he also acknowledges that critical and rhetorical theories greatly impact his approach to course design, two theories that he returns to throughout the interview. However, he filters much of his instruction through his identity as a writer, using the writing process to help move his students through the course. In Tim's experience, his identity as a writer marries with process theory to establish familiar

terrain that he and his students can walk together as they learn more about writing and the critical and rhetorical theories involved with writing.

Tim's experience describes how I think many instructors use their past experiences to help them approach the instruction of writing. They use what they know as writers, what they are most comfortable with as writers, as a starting point to connect with their students. By connecting with their students based on past writing experiences, instructors emphasize the difficulties with writing. However, they might not articulate the struggle of writing effectively for their students. Rather, instructors tend to diminish their pasts into more manageable skills and strategies for writing instruction, which can be an issue with establishing disciplinarity, a point I discuss in the "FYC as a Service Course" section of this chapter.

Some instructors may rely on their experiences as a liminal learner to inform how they approach their courses. For these instructors, they distinctly recall their own liminal learning process, and they use that to drive how they approach the instruction of writing. Lauren, a fifth-year PhD candidate who is completing a rhetoric and composition dissertation, uses her experiences as a learner to critically reflect on her methods for teaching. For example, when asked about what she feels confident about in her teaching of writing, she responds that she feels comfortable with developing a rapport with her students. She says that she uses her past experiences as a student and a writer to connect with her students:

I guess I just try to connect my teaching to my experience writing helps me feel confident because I know that just having experienced the process in so many ways and in so many different settings, umm, is something I can always bring, and they sometimes find that useful, sometimes they

don't care at the time, but then later they'll reflect back and remember something I showed them about how I do things.

She concludes that because she recalls her experiences as a budding writer, she feels that “helps [her] anticipate what they're going to need.” When asked which threshold concepts mesh with her approach to the instruction of writing, Lauren responds that “All Writers Have More to Learn” is an important threshold concept for her because she believes “that's one of those things that we can say over and over and students don't fully understand that that's true. I know because I was the insecure writer that was always like, that's me still, talking about my dissertation, still feeling like I'm not doing as well as I should.” Lauren's awareness of her current writing struggle, the dissertation (a paradoxical genre that signifies the end of formal education all while causing the writer to realize she actually knows nothing at all), shows the importance of reflecting on the liminal learning process when preparing a course, remembering that students may struggle and even resist the course material. Her experiences indicate that an instructor may be stronger at moving students through the liminal learning process the closer they are to a similar experience. Even if proximity does help with aiding students through liminality, an instructor would probably do well to recall these experiences in order to help students understand ways of thinking about and practicing writing.

Some instructors use their past “real-world” writing experiences to help them approach their courses. Unlike Tim and Lauren, who both study RCWS and so they use their experiences as writers and learners in combination with their theoretical knowledge, other instructors use their past professional writing experiences to help inform their frameworks. For these instructors, though, the practice has little to do with theory (as

they see it). If they do connect their practices with theory, they would most likely associate it with genre theory, particularly because the department has shifted to a genre approach within the past five years, a point that I discuss in the following section on SLOs and instructor theories.

Gloria serves as a good example for how instructors view their past professional writing lives as inspiration for FYC instructional content. Gloria admits that she feels confident in instructing practical elements, such as grammar and punctuation (she is, after all, the self-proclaimed “Grammar Guru and Punctuation Princess”). As noted at the beginning of the section, she exclaims that she knows “all the practical,” which makes it seem as if there is a finite amount of practical writing knowledge in the world, and that if one practices long enough, she will eventually know all of the practical views of writing. She knows how to teach prewriting strategies and she knows how to teach revision because she worked as a professional writer long before she returned to academe. She takes great comfort in her practical instruction, so much so that she feels that she does not have to know theory to be a successful instructor in the classroom. Her continued practice is enough.

For other instructors, the shift from being a GTA to a full-fledged instructor prompted reflection on their professional practices. However, their lack of teaching experience and instruction in RCWS theories causes them to doubt their abilities, which makes them speculate that they aren’t performing the right way. “Valerie” serves as a nice example. Valerie identifies as a writer, and so, like Lauren, she relates to her students because she can use her writing experiences as an example for her students. However, because she has just completed her masters degree, she has little experience in

the classroom, and so she finds that she's stressed about teaching the more mechanical and stylistic aspects of writing. When asked about areas of confidence with instruction, she responds that because of her experiences as a writer, she knows the necessary skills to teach students:

So, um, yeah. I do feel confident because I know that this is a skill, you know, on one layer it's a skill that everybody's going to have to have to succeed in whatever they want to do, and I'm confident that I can teach them that. [...] but, you know, I'm pretty confident in the fact that I can, I have something to teach them. I may not have... I may not know everything, but I have something to teach them: life skills.

Even though she feels great confidence in her ability to teach because of her identity as a creative writer, she finds that she has trouble teaching the more "basic" elements of writing. When asked about refreshers, she wants help with grammar and style:

But stuff like that. Stuff like the little nitty-gritty pieces I could use refreshers on because I know what a thesis is, and I know how to write a thesis statement now, you know. It's like part of my own... but stuff like that... Because a lot of them have gotten bad grades because of the badly written thesis statement and stuff because they haven't been taught very well how to, you know? They know, they have this idea of what a thesis statement is, you know? So that kind of stuff: thesis statement, good introductions, conclusions, you know?

She knows how to *do* these things, but she doesn't know how to *teach* them to students.

I suspect that Valerie's issues stem from three points. First, she's a young teacher, and so she may be overanalyzing the situation. Second, she has only a basic knowledge of RCWS theory (as a GTA, she took the required seminar in teaching composition, and she attended GTA Orientation and other professional development workshops), and because of her basic theoretical knowledge, she cannot see that writing is more than just a perfect thesis, introduction, and conclusion. Finally, she may be concerned about her NTT status and "perfect" performance. She may genuinely be worried that if her students

don't come out of her class writing perfect theses, introductions, and conclusions, then she won't be hired again. She even mentions the precariousness of her status, lamenting that she was only hired for one semester. She hopes that she can be picked up for another semester, and she believes that it's all dependent upon how much administration "like" her: "They have to extend my contract, though. They have to like me enough. Somewhere high up has to extend my contract." I try to explain it's about course demand, but she still holds on that it's about being liked by administration. Her perfect performance means that she'll be able to survive in the world, and so she worries that her writing past and her instructional knowledge aren't enough.

Conclusion

I can see where instructors like Gloria and Valerie come from. They have the past experience to tell students, "This is what the real world is like. I know because I've been there. Here's what I did to make it as a professional writer." But that kind of practice can lead to conflicting ideas about the purpose of FYC between those who study RCWS scholarship and those instructors who only have a basic foundation of RCWS theory. RCWS scholars tend to see the course as a place to teach students about theories and practices in the field of RCWS. Those without a strong background in RCWS, though, may view the course as steps to write in the "real" world. These different perspectives can make for differing and misguided approaches to FYC abound in a department, and when so many different purposes for a course are stated within one program, then a shared vision cannot emerge, and the many stakeholders in FYC and its students might not be well served.

However, past experiences *should* inform approaches to writing (transfer theory supports this idea), and the past experiences instructors bring with them into the classroom creates a vibrancy in the course and the department. WPAs would do well to remember that instructors draw heavily from when their past experiences as students and writers, and that past experiences shape an instructor's autonomy in the classroom. When creating departmental SLOs, WPAs should include recommended practices to inspire a connection between what WPAs see as effective assignments for enacting certain theories of writing and what instructors know from their own personal practices. For professional development workshops, WPAs should begin and end the workshops with instructors considering their prior practical knowledge and sharing that knowledge with their colleagues. By recalling what they know about writing practice, instructors can begin to connect with the theory presented via threshold concepts (especially since instructors saw threshold concepts as truly naming what they know about writing, and so they will be able to identify with threshold concepts even more when connected to their prior knowledge), and they can boost collegiality among each other when they see the experiences of their peers. I address strategies for enacting these ideas for SLO and workshops in the recommendations chapter.

Student Learning Objectives as a Site for Theory Acquisition

I do not want to imply that instructors work in a theory void, nor do I want to suggest that instructors either have the theory or they don't. Instructors do employ theories, especially process theory, but they may not be able to name the theories or fully identify how their work connects with a particular theoretical framework. However, through the interviews, I found that instructors rally around departmentally produced

instructional documents and workshops, namely the department's student learning objectives (SLOs). In this department's case, SLOs for FYC greatly inspire the theoretical frameworks used within the classroom. Moreover, when instructors expressed difficulty with a specific theory or practice in the classroom, the theory and practice in question came from the SLOs. In this section, I present those theories and practices within the SLOs that instructors embrace and those theories and practices with which instructors struggle. I also analyze the 2013 SLOs to demonstrate how instructors were so influenced by the SLOs. For many instructors, SLOs provide the theoretical underpinnings that they did not receive in their GTA training and/or subsequent professional development. In the recommendations chapter, then, I provide a brief literature review to situate my recommendations for integrating threshold concepts into SLOs.

Faculty Perceptions of Student Learning Objectives

I begin with Carol's view of objectives, since her perspective establishes how many instructors use SLOs to influence their course design and pedagogical practices. Carol, a long-time tenured instructor for the department, has been a student in several capacities. Alongside graduate degrees in English, Carol holds a bachelors degree in nursing and she has taken graduate coursework in "education curriculum design." Because of her background as a student and instructor, Carol centers her course development on objectives, since objectives express the goals of the department and potentially attainable goals in the classroom. Furthermore, Carol sees SLOs as sites for learning about and practicing new theories and practices in instruction. She admits that she has not kept up to date with theories of writing instruction, but to combat that, she

relies on the outcomes and objectives to help her know what she needs to teach in her writing courses, even naming outcomes-based education as an influential theory: “[...] as far as writing theory is concerned, I just haven’t kept up to date at all. I’ve just mostly observed and tried to organize assignments using the objectives and thinking about the outcomes again, where they can be successful in a variety of writing situations.” She uses the learning objectives to create assignments and assessments, since SLOs “structure everything about...that’s the starting point for designing a course, developing a course.” Because Carol’s research interests lie outside of RCWS theory (she is a tenured professor whose main focus is Victorian literature), SLOs give her the foundation she needs to meet the department’s best practices. From her experiences as a teacher and scholar, SLOs inspire her theoretical and practical approaches to the course.

Instructors should be inspired by departmental SLOs, since SLOs express a department’s goals for each course in order for a unified education to occur. (For more information on the history of SLOs, see the Recommendations chapter.) I anticipated that practices would be impacted by SLOs, since instructors often stress about what they should do in the course. However, I did not know just how deeply SLOs impact instructors’ views of theory; indeed, SLOs, for some instructors, seems to serve as the initial groundwork in writing studies theory, as Carol describes.

Anthony, for example, begins the planning for every semester with the SLOs as his driving force. Because he prefers a visual representation to help him think through the semester, he draws a map where he lists the SLOs and what he wants for his students to learn in the class. Then, he connects his goals and projects with SLOs. Through this exercise, he can tweak and modify the projects so that students can experience every

SLO. Anthony aims to be as in-step as he can with the department so that there's departmental unity, and so that he can perform appropriately within the department to be rehired (see above).

Like Anthony, Valerie, a new instructor in the department, uses SLOs as her course guides, particularly for courses that she has not taught before. She also considers SLOs and major projects, and she tries to connect them together like Anthony, but without the major map. This year, she taught ENGL 1020 for the first time, and SLOs were one of her saving graces with the construction of the course (sample ENGL 1020 syllabi and assignments served as the other saving grace). When she created the course, she went back and forth between the objectives and her assignment ideas, trying to see how she could revise the assignments to meet the SLOs in the way she saw fit. Ultimately, though, her goal returns to process theory because she wants her students to discover how their own writing processes leads to the end results of the final project and SLO achievement. Practice and process frame much of how Valerie (and other instructors) views her courses, and so in the recommendations chapter, I provide strategies for including assignments in SLOs as they relate with threshold concepts, and I provide examples for creating workshops on threshold concepts that focus on the writing process and practices to establish a firm connection between theory and practice for instructors.

However, not all instructors rely on SLOs to plan their courses. For instructors without a background in RCWS theory, SLOs might not be an important focus, since the instructors might not know the purpose of SLOs. In Gloria's case, she remarks that she didn't originally use SLOs when she first started teaching. Rather, she went by what she

had been told to do by the department chair. She does remark, in an effort to “answer intelligently,” that “I would think of the learning objectives as the end game, and then I would use my step-by-step process that works for me as a teacher to get them to the objective.” Although SLOs were not her top priority when she began teaching, she did rely on departmental supervision to help her design her courses (the department chair at the time). Her response, though, is more telling for how she learned to teach writing.

Unlike most of my interviewees, Gloria had no formal training in the teaching of writing:

I had no training whatsoever. I studied philosophy, and I have a degree, and I studied literature, and I have a degree. And I was a writer for years and years, a professional writer, as a paid writer. [...] I was asked to come to start adjunction here and at Nashville State, and really, I don't want to say thrown under the bus, but I was thrown into the gladiator pit pretty quickly.

Perhaps because she did not have formal training in writing instruction, she did not know that SLOs serve as a unifying framework in a department. Even though she says she does not think as much about SLOs, she does follow them, and often, she's one of the first instructors to jump on board with new initiatives, as she notes at the conclusion of the interview: “But whenever something new is initiated, I try to be the first on board because when I know someone is expecting something of me, I'll do it 150%.” Gloria, then, seems to rely more on departmental word of mouth rather than on the official SLO document, but either way, she's still meeting and discussing course outcomes.

Finally, some instructors don't enjoy the seeming restriction that SLOs place on a course. Kayla takes particular issue with multimodality (an SLO for both ENGL 1010 and 1020), admitting, “[...] I hate it. I don't hate it, but I hate being forced to do it, you know? Like, I do it. I do a presentation and I go on D2L and stuff, so it is there, without

thinking about it, but it is there.” She expands on the restricting nature of SLOs:

“Although you might be inclined to do one thing over another, but sometimes, we have to do what the courses are telling us to do, or what the objectives tell us.” Richard has a similar issue with SLOs, even down to the multimodal requirement: “I was looking at your colored chart over here, some of which is very interesting, and some of which is not. I am not going to do everything on that grid. We’re not writing blogs. I’m not going to do it.” Richard believes that everything on the SLOs handout is required, but, as Captain Barbosa would say in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the ideas for assignments on our SLOs are more like “guidelines than actual rules.” Both Kayla and Richard respond negatively to multimodal recommendations in the departmental SLOs, a point that I discuss later in this section, but I do want to acknowledge how they feel fettered by SLOs. They see the recommendations as hindering how they would initially approach the class, which may indicate that their lack of RCWS knowledge causes them to feel trapped in how they teach. Perhaps if they had a better understanding of multimodality and the notion that design is rhetorical, they might feel as if their classrooms would be opened up with new ways to approach writing.

2013 MTSU Student Learning Objectives Analysis

No matter how instructors might feel about SLOs, the 2013 revision to the FYC departmental objectives certainly does prescribe theories and practices in the classroom, including not only student learning objectives but teaching objectives as well. In the 2013 update (which was approved in 2012), the SLOs for both ENGL 1010 and ENGL 1020 thoroughly convey the theoretical and practical expectations for the courses (well, as thorough as they can while still allowing instructor autonomy in the classroom).

Immediately, one can see how instructors respond so positively to practical elements in the classroom, as the ENGL 1010 objectives read, “[i]n English 1010, Literacy for Life, students complete writing projects that have practical or real-world value” (Appendix E). However, theory begins to appear in the form of genre, rhetorical strategies, and multimodality, as cited in the introduction to the objectives. The introduction to the 2013 ENGL 1020 Objectives (Appendix F) begins almost immediately with a nod to RCWS theory, citing a writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) approach to the course so as to boost content knowledge that applies across disciplines. The introduction then mentions practical applications, primarily via information literacy (source location, evaluation, annotation, and citation). Fascinatingly, these 2013 objectives include both student and teaching objectives, thus expanding on ways for instructors to meet the prescribed goals for the courses. These 2013 objectives, then, nicely demonstrate praxis, as they emphasize RCWS theories and practices to support those theories.

In the table below, I illustrate a few of the SLOs from the 2013 ENGL 1010 and ENGL 1020 update in order to demonstrate the blend of theory and practice in the objective statements. For this table, I chose to select the objectives that reflected the interview responses to illustrate how an instructor’s theories of writing and practices in the classroom can be influenced by SLOs. For full objective statements, see Appendices E and F.

Table 3

MTSU ENGL 1010 and ENGL 1020 Student Learning Objectives (2013 Revision)

Course	Student Learning Objective	Theory (Direct or Implied)	Practice (Recommended or Implied)
1010	2. Students will define and illustrate key concepts in composition studies: rhetorical situation, exigence, purpose, genre, critical analysis, audience, discourse community, reflection, context, composing, and knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhetorical Genre Studies • Discourse Communities • Rhetoric • Process • Metacognitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genre Analysis • Rhetorical Analysis • Reflective Writing
	3. Students will read and analyze various types of texts—print, visual, digital, and audio.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Multimodality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annotations • Rhetorical Analysis
	4. Students will get practice in multiple genres and in response to real world writing situations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genre • Rhetorical Genre Studies • Discourse Communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genre Creation • Genre Analysis • Discourse Community Analysis
1020	2. Students will understand their responsibilities as writers—to cite accurately the work of other writers, to provide their audience with reliable information, and to do their topic justice by conducting thorough research and considering multiple points of view.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informational Literacy • Rhetoric • Critical Pedagogy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annotations • Research Paper • Response papers • Source Evaluation • Source Citation
	4. Students will understand academic writing as governed by the conventions of specific discourse communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing for the Academy • WAC/WID • Discourse Communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genre Analysis • Genre Critique • Rhetorical Analysis
	12. Students will gain confidence in their ability to generate a plan for conducting research and for writing across the curriculum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process • Informational Literacy • WAC/WID 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process Paper • Research Casebook • Proposal

Even though I've presented only a snapshot of the 2013 ENGL 1010 and ENGL 1020 objectives, I can see theoretical trends within the objectives, both singularly and in conversation with the other course. For the 1010 SLOs, rhetorical genre studies, rhetoric, and discourse communities recur throughout the objectives. These theories certainly speak to the goal for students to see how writing works within and beyond the university, the key objectives for 1010 (real world writing) and 1020 (writing in the university). I have distilled these objectives through the lens of my respondents, but the remainder of the objectives stress either the same theories or focus on the writing process and stylistic concerns. A quick example: ENGL 1010 SLO #4: "Students will complete writing tasks that require understanding the rhetorical situation and making appropriate decisions about content, form, and presentation. At least one of these tasks will give students practice distilling a primary purpose into a single, compelling statement." In this example, the objective invokes the writing process, rhetorical awareness, and concerns of style. The ENGL 1020 objectives extend the conversation from the "real world" to the academy, emphasizing informational literacy, WAC/WID, and discourse communities. The connection between ENGL 1010 and ENGL 1020 appears overtly in reading strategies and discourse communities, and subtly in rhetorical genre studies, as 1020 students should study and practice writing within a particular discipline, which has its own genre conventions. Informational literacy serves as another key theory within the 1020 SLOs, and frankly I'm surprised that this theory did not make a stronger appearance in the survey or interviews. Perhaps these instructors have always focused on research literacy in their classrooms, and so theories like genre and reading impacted them more because of their "newness" within the department. Like with the 1010 objectives, the remaining

1020 SLOs reflect the prominent theories of WAC/WID, discourse communities, rhetoric, informational literacy, and style. Unlike the 1010 SLOs, the 1020 objectives become more of the feared checklist of which Estrem warns. For example, the last eight SLOs focus less on the messiness of student learning and instead emphasize skillsets students should have when they depart the course. Some of these skills are composing thesis statements, using certain rhetorical strategies in their arguments, and effectively using the handbook (the thesis statement and handbook objectives also appear in the ENGL 1010 objectives). Also, the term “real world” presents a problematic tension in the objectives, as “real world” could mean beyond the university, thus suggesting that “real” writing happens in professional contexts more so than in the academy. Furthermore, “real world” also emphasizes practice more than theory, as evidenced by Carol’s comments that she aims to prepare her students for the world of work rather than the academy, discounting her students’ ability to understand RCWS theory in the process. While the objectives stress RCWS theoretical frameworks for the course, these objectives also emphasize certain practices that often seem acontextual to the theories presented. Therefore, instructors might have some difficulty seeing how practices connect with theory.

These SLOs certainly can impact instructor theories and practices and their conscious awareness of praxis, but I wonder if, due to their highly perspective nature, the teaching objectives impacted instructors more than the SLOs. In the following table, I have compiled the first three teaching objectives for ENGL 1010 and ENGL 1020 to elucidate their rigidity.

Table 4

MTSU ENGL 1010 and ENGL 1020 Teaching Objectives (2013 Revision)

Course	Teaching Objective	Theory (Direct or Implied)	Practice (Recommended or Implied)
1010	1. Provide a written rationale for the course. Connect the practice of expository writing to writing students will do in other coursework, the workplace, and their everyday lives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rhetorical Genre Studies WAC/WID FYC as a Service Course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a syllabus. Teach genre. Teach about writing throughout the university. Teach professional writing.
	2. Pace your course so that students read and write throughout the 15 week semester. Get the most out of your textbooks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading Writing-to-Learn and Learning-to-Write 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal and informal writing assignments Reading assignments Reading strategies
	3. Introduce composition as a field of study by presenting a sample of research on writing. (Examples: Andrea Lunsford's "Mistakes Are a Fact of Life: A Comparative National Study," Peter Elbow's "Inviting the Mother Tongue," Nancy Sommers's "The Novice as Expert: Writing the Freshman Year," and Deborah Brandt's <i>Literacy in American Lives</i> .)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing about Writing Disciplinarity WAC/WID 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read RCWS articles. Teach the RCWS discipline.
1020	1. Provide a written rationale for the course. See the course justification in <i>Research Matters at MTSU</i> for an example.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informational Literacy FYC as a Service Course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a syllabus Defend the course
	2. Connect the practice of writing to reading. Pace your course so that students read throughout the 15 week semester. Get the most out of your textbooks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading Writing-to-Learn and Learning-to-Write 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal and informal writing assignments Frequent Reading Reading strategies
	3. Give students strategies for previewing, reading, and annotating a text. Students should be annotating texts in most class sessions. (In English 1010, you are using this time for peer workshops.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading Process Informational Literacy Rhetorical Genre Studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rhetorical Analysis Genre Analysis Research Literacy

Surprisingly prescriptive, the above teaching objectives spell out exactly what instructors should be doing in the classroom from the most basic elements (creating a syllabus) to theoretical foundations for the two courses (RCWS as a discipline, WAC/WID, and reading strategies). The first three ENGL 1010 teaching objectives seem less dictatorial than their ENGL 1020 counterparts, but the remaining 1010 teaching objectives dictate further moves instructors should make in the program, such as objective # 4: “[t]each students the rhetorical triangle—exigence/purpose/audience” and objective # 7: “Present students with writing tasks/projects that require consideration of the key concepts. These writing tasks should (1) have real world implications and (2) be expository in nature—writing to inform, instruct, clarify, define, describe, assess, or evaluate.” Please note that the literacy narrative, the praxis touchstone for many instructors, does not appear in that list. The literacy narrative made its appearance through professional development workshops. Likewise, ENGL 1020 teaching objective # 5 states, “Give students writing assignments that require them to join conversations about issues that matter. Control the source material, at least for the first half of the semester.” Departmental objective statements should help instructors and students approach the course, but I wonder at the purpose of these teaching statements. More often than not, SLOs are the only objectives listed, and so I question if the accompanying teaching objectives speak to a perceived need for departmental unity. Prior to the 2013 update, the 1010 objectives encouraged expository writing in the form of “four essays of 1000 words each” (“English 1010, Expository Writing”), and the 1020 objectives asked students to write “four research-based essays of 1250 words each” (“English 1020: Argumentative and Research Writing”). Theoretically, the early 1020 objectives

encouraged a commitment to writing across the curriculum (WAC) and informational literacy, and so instructors were not left on their own entirely in providing a theoretical rationale for the course. The 2013 objectives established theories and even a theoretical language within the department, and so unity through RCWS theory began with these objectives, even if some instructors still grapple with the theory presented.

Theories Encouraged by Student Learning Objectives

Since process theory seems to be the filter through which instructors accumulate new theories of writing instruction, instructors easily incorporated genre into their courses because of genre's process nature. Recent rhetorical genre studies scholarship provides steps and heuristics for genre analysis and genre critique, and the act of discovering genre conventions and then using those conventions as invention for the creation of a genre and the guide for generic style makes genre an accessible theory for non-RCWS scholars. As noted above, six interviewed instructors directly name genre theory as an influential theory in their approaches to the instruction of writing, tying with process's number of direct mentions. While I believe process theory influences instructors because of its ubiquity in the field, genre theory likely entered the department through SLOs.

Rhetorical genre studies, unlike process theory, began experiencing its heyday within the past decade (give or take five years). So, while instructors might be influenced by genre theory because of research in the field, I propose that instructors in this department rely on genre theory because of the department's SLOs, which heavily promote genre theory. When the SLOs were introduced to the department via workshops, the WPAs emphasized the addition of genre, presenting the current argument that genre

theory may encourage transfer in the writing classroom. In many of the workshops, the presenters demonstrated how genre theory emphasizes prior knowledge, genre analysis, and genre critique. Genre analysis and critique rely heavily on analysis of the rhetorical situation and genre conventions, which easily connect with process theory. Since there are steps for determining a genre's conventions and because of the heuristics provided by rhetorical genre studies scholars, instructors may view genre as similar to process in that there are ready-made practices for learning how to understand and employ the theory. However, because of the similarities to process theory, instructors can use genre (and even process) prescriptively, demanding that students master the conventions rather than question the genre's creation and evolution. Because of this connection with process, and because of their own prior knowledge of writing in new and old genres, many instructors quickly took up this new focus in the classroom.

Unlike process, though, genre theory entered into the department via SLOs, and also unlike process, genre theory is emphasized more clearly in the SLOs. For example, ENGL 1010 Objectives state that students will “practice writing in multiple genres and in response to real-world writing situations.” Similarly, ENGL 1020 objectives state that students will “understand academic writing as governed by convention.” Because of its overt presence in the FYC SLOs (and the subsequent professional development workshops and the adoption of the *Bedford Book of Genres* as the FYC textbook), six interviewees named genre as an informing theory for their teaching of writing, the same number as process theory, which indicates how influential the SLOs have been on instructors' theoretical approaches in the classroom. So much so, that when asked about his informing theory, Anthony responds “the theories that are currently in vogue,” and

when asked to expand on that point, he simply responded, “Genre.” In Anthony’s case, the SLOs and process encourage his use of genre in the classroom, as he often models ways of practicing writing for his students. Genre analysis, with its conventions, can easily be modeled and framed within a process, and that’s something that Anthony feels confident doing. Moreover, he sees genres as practical for students, and that boosts his confidence with his instruction.

Anthony’s experience with genre highlights its uptake in the department. Genre blends process theory with another form of instructor prior knowledge: genre conventions. When instructors can blend a new major theory (genre) with process theory, instructors may express more buy-in for the theory and practice presented in SLOs. Process and genre, then, demonstrate the unifying ability of SLOs for instructors. When a theory can be filtered through process, instructors may unify around the theory, a point I discuss further in the recommendations chapter.

However, SLOs do not always help an instructor navigate the murky waters of theory and practice, as the theories that instructors confess to grappling with connect directly with the SLOs, namely multimodality and reading instruction. In the case of multimodality, instructors were largely left on their own with the idea. The SLOs do not expand on ways to teach or present multimodality, and the associated workshops presented multimodality merely as presentations in the classroom. Reading instruction, on the other hand, should be familiar territory to the instructors (because they are also readers), but for some reason, teaching reading in the classroom stymied many of the participants. I estimate that reading pedagogy throws instructors for a loop because it is not often taught (if at all) in the Seminar in Teaching Composition, a point that Linda

Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem make in their article “Reading Practices in the Writing Classroom” (2007). Adler-Kassner and Estrem claim that reading practices have long been overlooked in RCWS scholarship and in departmental conversations. They recommend that reading practices and the roles readers play while reading in the classroom should be articulated definitively so that instructors and programs to “more productively approach reading” (44). Because reading practices have not been translated into a process for instructors, they struggle with not knowing how to approach the instruction of reading in their classes. Instructors have not had to encounter the idea that college students may not know how to read and so they should be taught. I think many instructors (including myself at one point) feel that reading is a given, and that if students do not have that skill, then they can, and maybe should, continue to practice that skill on their own time.

A couple of instructors expressed that they did not understand the concept of multimodality, and so they often see multimodal assignments as “extra work.” When I entered the GTA program in 2013, I heard several instructors bring up their frustrations with multimodality, derisively defining it as “whatever that means.” I had the feeling that these instructors saw multimodality as something that has been added to the course for no real purpose other than to include a digital production that might interest students. The issue seems to be a lack of discussion about the theory. Besides knowing little, if anything, of multimodal theory, many instructors probably have little experience with writing in a medium that is not either pen and paper or a word processor. Beth explains that she needs to “have this whole multimodal thing explained to me” when she identifies multimodality as a theory in which she needs more support. Kayla expresses her struggle

with multimodality. In her case, she expands on how multimodality is not a priority in her classes, but she must “embrace” multimodality because of the SLOs, stressing her interpretation and problems with using it in the classroom: “[...] but I always think of it as a technology, and I hate it. I don’t hate it, but I hate being forced to do it, you know? Like, I do it. I do a presentation and I go on D2L and stuff, so it is there, without thinking about it, but it is there.” For Kayla, and I’m assuming for other instructors, multimodality becomes merely a student presentation in the classroom, where the instructors leave students to their own devices to determine the best way to share their texts in a non-traditional method. Because of their lack of understanding multimodality, instructors can resist using it in the classroom.

Not all instructors reject multimodality in the classroom. Tim, for example, embraces it, as he sees multimodality as a way to reach his students: “[...] I’ve found that students like to engage with technology, and anything they like to do seems to enhance instruction [...]” Tim uses multimodal texts to teach his students about critical analysis and the rhetorical situation. He also encourages his students to use multimodality to complete their writing projects. Tim presents a refreshing uptake of the theory in that he sees the rhetorical and pedagogical implications of sharing writing in its many forms with his students so that they can identify with ways of thinking about and practicing writing in a way that works for them. In Tim’s case, he demonstrates again that objectives can lead instructors to RCWS theory that they otherwise might not have encountered.

Instructors’ difficulty with reading instruction, though, feels out of place when compared with multimodality. I find it fascinating that instructors struggle with reading

instruction, as I assumed it would work like genre instruction. Instructors have used genre strategies for much of their writing careers, and so they found genre analysis easier to share with students. Writing instructors have also been using reading strategies for much of their lives, but for some reason they struggle with teaching reading, likely because they have never been exposed to the theory before. I believe that the problem connects, as most things do, with process theory. Reading instruction has not yet been placed into a process like process and genre instruction. Because reading strategies presented in the department seem to stress ways of thinking about reading rather than practices for reading, I suspect that instructors struggle with seeing tangible ways to teach reading to their students. Yes, pre-reading, reading, and post-reading strategies are certainly reminiscent of process theory and its language, but reading strategies have not been broken down into as many minute steps and strategies as writing instruction, and so I think instructors feel that they cannot quite grasp how to teach reading. Also, reading is a more internal act than writing. When students read, they then discuss what they perceived from the reading, but it's hard to decipher exactly how the student arrived at these thoughts. Finally, instructors have been readers for so long that they might not know how to share their strategies with students. Instructor familiarity and lack of process could be why reading instruction poses a problem for instructors.

Anthony bewilderingly remarks, "So, like, who would have thought that students would have been taught how to read, especially college students?" His candor summarizes what I think many instructors in the department think about reading instruction. Instructors cannot believe that they have to do it, and I think that they see the weighty task ahead of them because this task requires teaching ways of thinking about

writing. When asked about what theory refreshers or support she needed, Gloria responded, “I did think we have put more of a focus on the critical reading in the last semester or two, and I’m doing that, and I’ve been doing it, but I, I think a workshop on something on that would be good. I do. So, maybe that.” Gloria probably represents several instructors in the department, instructors who have attempted to practice reading instruction, but don’t feel quite confident in their strategies. Even after attempting it for a couple of semesters, Gloria still doesn’t feel quite confident in it. Again, the problem seems to be more with teaching students ways of thinking about texts rather than ways of practicing writing, as one does with process theory. Students know how to read (they have made it to college after all), but they do not know how to think about reading. Because reading is personal and internal, it’s hard to feel confident teaching students ways to think about reading, and so I think instructors need to be aided with this via SLOs and professional development workshops.

Instructors did talk positively about reading instruction in literature courses, though, explaining that students enjoyed talking about the reading. However, the reading strategies instructors privilege in literature courses did not transfer/translate into reading strategies in a composition course. Instructors either did not view the strategies in the same way, or they lamented their lack of ability to teach reading instruction in the FYC classroom. For example, Daniel says it’s easier for him to teach reading in a literature class than in a writing class, so much so that he feels confident about his reading instruction: “I often feel that’s a little easier in like a teaching lit class, you can actually question about a text, and let them kind of interpret it, and bring their own ideas to it,

whereas writing is a little bit more difficult. Um, the one thing I want to kind of expand is bring in more model texts, um, and let them examine that and start asking questions.”

I’m not sure why Daniel sees that the questions asked of a literature text differ from the questions asked of a text in a writing classroom. In both classes, students should query the writer’s purpose, the writer’s social context, the potential audiences for the text, and the potential meanings that the audience could construct from the text. My guess is that because Daniel does not have a background in RCWS (unlike many of the participants in this study, Daniel’s teaching course focused more on classroom strategies and very little on RCWS theories), he then does not see how literary theories relate with RCWS theories and practices. Furthermore, the reading in a literature class does not connect with the writing performed in a literature class, and more often than not, instructors do not teach much writing in literature classes. In a literature class, content remains the central focus, while rhetorical perspectives often are untouched. Several instructors responded that they spend about one day per essay reviewing style and formatting with students, which means that all students learn about writing about literature is that style and format are the most important aspects. Students do not share literary studies as a discipline, and so because they have not considered the key concepts of the discipline, they do not know how to translate the strategies for thinking about reading literature to a writing classroom.

Conclusion

WPAs need to remember that SLOs do impart theories to instructors and that these theories are not always self-explanatory. I believe that threshold concepts can help establish an identification between what WPAs and instructors know about writing with

its accessible language. In this case, threshold concepts may help instructors understand ways of thinking about reading, since threshold concepts focus on disciplinarity. For example, threshold concepts 2.1 (Writing Represents the World, Events, Ideas and Feelings), 2.2 (Genres Are Enacted by Writers and Readers), 2.3 (Writing Is a Way of Enacting Disciplinarity), and 3.0 with all of its subconcepts (Writing Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies) can all be used to help instructors explore ways of thinking about reading in both composition and literature classrooms. The same is true for multimodality, as several threshold concepts directly speak to multimodality. Instructors need help with teaching ways of thinking about writing and reading instruction, and threshold concepts speak to that need. In the recommendations chapter, I share how instructors view threshold concepts as a unifying language that speaks to what they know about writing instruction and their past experiences with writing, and I explore strategies for using threshold concepts as a supplemental bridge for WPAs to share theory with instructors.

First-year Composition as a Service Course

What these objectives unwittingly do is help instructors view FYC as a service course rather than a beginning step for WAC/WID theories of writing to emerge, for instructors without extensive knowledge in RCWS theories may interpret the objectives as justifying the ways FYC serves students as they move through the university. Yes, the nods to composition as a field of study within the SLOs might combat the service course myth, but for instructors who have only a basic understanding of RCWS, they might not have the resources available to select, annotate, and introduce appropriate RCWS articles for their students. Moreover, instructors with a fundamental knowledge of RCWS might

not see the more nuanced element of WAC/WID and so instead emphasize FYC's service to students. In the end, the SLOs and teaching objectives do create a unified vision for instructors with theories and practices for the FYC classroom, but they might do so at the sake of perpetuating the unfortunate perspective of FYC as merely a service course. The 2013 objectives, then, do create unity (as evidenced by the great number of faculty who cited genre theory as informing their pedagogies), but perhaps at the price of demoting FYC within the university.

The tension between theory and practice compounds the effect of the objectives, as instructors may aim to impart skills for students to transfer to future writing situations, thus suggesting that FYC teaches the writing skills necessary for almost any writing situation. In the interviews, instructors used the terms *strategies* and *skills* almost interchangeably, but the use of skills could reinforce the notion that writing can be boiled down to a set of skills that require no thought. In other words, by focusing on writing skills, instructors could perpetuate the myth of a single academic discourse. In praxis, ways of thinking about writing (theory) and ways of practicing writing merge in such a way that instructors might not be able to tell when they truly share writing studies theory with their students. In some instances (and here, I'm thinking process), the theory and the practice are so intertwined that an instructor could easily assume she's merely teaching a strategy (and perhaps, for some extremes, a skillset) to students. Instead, she's teaching the theoretical concept of process theory, and even without all the nuances of the theory, the theory as a whole is still within the practice. I can also see this playing out with genre theories, especially when instructors breakdown strategies for identifying genre conventions. Genre conventions have a great amount of theory behind them, but it's easy

to see how an instructor could be teaching something practical and even skills-based to her students.

With the difficulty in identifying praxis, it's no wonder, then, why instructors want to boil down writing to effective practical strategies. When theory can be distilled into steps, instructors may feel that they have transferrable content for their students. However, a key problem that arises is that of myth perpetuation. If writing can be boiled down to a narrow set of skills, then there must be one right way to write. Of course, this is not true, and I'm guessing that most, if not all, of the instructors interviewed would agree, but in the struggle for praxis among instructors with a cursory background in RCWS theory, the myth involuntarily remains. In the remainder of this section, I provide background into the concept of FYC as a service course. I then consider how and why instructors perpetuate this myth because of their RCWS theoretical knowledge (or lack thereof).

First-year Composition as a Service Course: A Critical Overview

I begin with Erica Lindemann's explanation of FYC as a service course, as Lindemann is an early voice in the FYC-as-service-course conversation. Lindemann concisely summarizes the issue at hand: "At issue are the goals of a first-year writing course, the training we give the teachers of that course, and the values people ascribe to the course in the college curriculum" (312). For Lindemann, FYC serves a greater purpose than what many believe, exclaiming that "[f]reshman English does what no high school writing course can do: provide opportunities to master the genres, styles, audiences, and purposes of college writing. Freshman English offers guided practice in reading and writing the discourses of the academy and the professions. That is what our

colleagues across the campus want it to do; that is what it should do if we are going to drag every first-year student through the requirement” (312). With this statement, Lindemann both defines the goal of the course and its importance in the university. Instead of teaching a "universal" academic discourse, FYC should examine and appreciate the variety of academic discourses found in the academy, which would eliminate the myth of a universal academic discourse (311). Lindemann concludes by calling for the field to create a "unified theory to guide our work" (316), a call that summarizes early solutions for the end of the service course notion. If the field is defined, then the course has an inherent purpose which cannot be denied by other disciplines.

Linda Bergmann (1996) responds to Lindemann's argument that FYC should be a site for examining academic discourse by arguing that idea only enhances composition's low-level status. Bergmann writes that when FYC is perceived as a course that teaches students how to write in every academic discipline in the university, then that course will ultimately fail because academic discourse varies greatly between disciplines (58). She remarks that these ideas persist because compositionists don't effectively communicate the importance of the field in order to be seen as useful throughout the academy, which leads to the continuation of FYC as a course not for its own discipline, but for every other discipline on campus (58-59).

Marjorie Roemer, Lucille M. Schultz, and Russell K. Durst (1999) take a different perspective from that of Lindemann and Bergmann in that they argue for the maintenance of FYC in the university, stressing that the issue may not be as dire as Crowley, Bergmann, and others suggest. They believe that the course has value as a "pedagogical site with the potential to influence very large numbers of students, and for its importance

as a site of struggle and change within the institutional hierarchy of academia” (378).

Roemer, Schultz, and Durst advocate that service has evolved to a more positive meaning within the university:

Perhaps the heart of the debate over the first-year course now centers on the meaning of the word service for the profession. Once a term of denigration, indicating the low level, foundational nature of required work, service is making a comeback as a term that garners support for socially responsible action connecting the university with its larger environment. (387)

As a result of this positive force in the university, English departments have grown because of the "support" provided by FYC and general education literature courses (387). They acknowledge the idea that service can promote a logic that makes FYC “demoted, less important, less prestigious, and less highly compensated," which results in a "de facto two-tier system of employment: groups of non-tenured adjuncts or a supply of teaching assistants handle the bulk of the lower level teaching, while the tenured faculty try to restrict their work to upper level specialties" (387). Even with their optimistic view of FYC as a positive service in the university, Roemer, Schultz, and Durst conclude with the same staggering statistics for NTT faculty, calling for action to make part-time jobs full-time (and if that can't happen, then at least to provide the part-timers with better salaries and benefits) and inform graduate students about the reality of the field (390). In the end, there's still a very real employment problem even if the service nature of the course is not what Crowley and others believe.

Unfortunately, this same two-tier system exists within the English department at MTSU, with tenured faculty teaching primarily upper division courses (and many teaching FYC only if they must), and FTT faculty and GTAs teaching the bulk of the

general education courses, including FYC. In fact, FTTs and GTAs rarely have a chance to teach upper division literature and writing courses, with exceptions occurring when tenured faculty can no longer teach the course. FYC, then, seems to be a less-than course, one that “real” scholars would not dare to teach. Furthermore, since most instructors who teach the course have only a cursory understanding of RCWS scholarship and because WPAs have hired these instructors with an understanding of their theoretical knowledge, then they might not think that FYC is as theoretically dependent as upper division writing and literature courses. While I could be exaggerating the situation, I do think that a lack of knowledge of RCWS theories does impact how instructors approach the instruction of writing in their courses. From my interviews, I believe that an over reliance on process theory and a faulty appropriation of transfer theory cause instructors to infer FYC as a service course. However, I do wonder how much of their job security (as discussed above) impacts this issue, too.

Process, Transfer, and the Problems with Skills and Strategies

Although these articles were composed two decades ago, the arguments they present still stand today, demonstrating that the issue of service and employment has not been remotely resolved within the scholarship or on university campuses. My interviews prove that the issue still persists at the local level. A couple of my interviewees responded that they saw their purpose in the classroom as teaching not only the skills/strategies for successful writing, but also university "survival" skills, ways to succeed in the university. Ian, for example, encourages students to consider their college goals in his courses: “So I try to get them to think about literacy in a very broad sense, and that, um, gets them to think about who they are as college students, who they are as writers, what their goals for

college are. We talk a lot about college goals early on, and what they want to get out of college.” Ian’s response demonstrates how I think many instructors view supporting students’ university goals: the theories and practices of FYC extend beyond the writing classroom, and so FYC should be an important course to students. However, associating FYC with other university courses in this way could make FYC seem like it serves the aims of other disciplines rather than possessing its own content.

Hannah, a comp-rhet PHD candidate, heavily relies on theory to construct her courses, particularly post-process and universal design, so that students might have the best chance for success in her courses. To meet that goal, one of Hannah’s chief goals in her classroom is to provide “college survival skills” as often as possible in her courses: “I can combine things as much as possible, give you good study skills and research skills that you can use elsewhere, I am all for that.” Even with her background in RCWS, she still buys into the idea that FYC prepares students for the university. Perhaps these ideas of combining skills come from her disability research, as she wants all of her students to succeed in the university, but even if these ideas do support disability studies, from an outsider looking in, it seems as if she’s arguing for composition as a preparation course and not a discipline in and of itself. Like Ian, she unintentionally supports the myth that FYC serves the university by providing the study skills necessary to survive the university and by focusing on the writing strategies that students can take from the writing classroom into other disciplines in the university.

I suspect that these issues come from a reliance on process theory and a misappropriation of transfer theory. As discussed earlier, instructors rely on process theory for its theoretical language and its practical examples. Because so much of their

writing experiences were rooted in process theory, and because strategies for moving through the writing process abound, instructors filter their knowledge and instruction through process theory. Hence, a skills-based approach quickly emerges. With the department's push for transfer, WPAs began to encourage instructors to have students practice metacognition by having students consider their prior knowledge as they learned new writing strategies, and then to connect their newfound knowledge with future writing situations. I believe that instructors stress these writing and university skills in the way that they do to try to provide cues for students to consider transfer. Furthermore, I have a feeling that these cues of writing's importance in the university genuinely stem from a place of disciplinarity. Instructors want their students to see that writing is important. When instructors have students consider future writing situations, they should have students think about writing inside and outside of the university. However, if students have not been exposed to ways of thinking about writing, this move could be seen as a justification for writing's place in the university rather than a means of promoting the knowledge the field creates and shares with the world rather than the rote skills of style.

John demonstrates how a misguided approach to transfer can occur. When John considers aspects of transfer, he turns to mechanical issues (commas, particularly) to illustrate how students struggle with understanding how transfer works. He explains that he likes transfer, but he quickly turns to style issues:

Again, I like this idea of transfer. Lots of students know they need to learn more, but they refuse. They try to get by on the same flimsy excuses that they have used their whole lives. "I've never understood commas." "Well why they hell not?" Well, I know why not. I have to convince them it's not impossible to learn. But lots of them think that they know it, but then they get here and then they realize they don't know it all. And that's an important one to get through to them, but in such a way that they not only

recognize that they have deficiencies, but they want to start to overcome those deficiencies, and they want to experiment a little bit more. They think about style, and they start to think about diction.

John opens with ways of thinking about writing (he's responding to a threshold concepts question), but he quickly turns the conversation to mechanical and stylistic concerns with writing. His turn can suggest two things. First, he could struggle with articulating ways of thinking about writing because he does not have the theoretical language to do so.

Second, John mainly teaches the 1010K course, a 1010 course for basic writing students, and so his focus might need to be on grammar for his basic writing students. Either way, he still associates ways of thinking about writing with grammar and style, which debases the theoretical work of an FYC course. I suspect that if he had a stronger background in RCWS, he would see that transfer conversations should be about ways to think about writing rather than just stylistic concerns.

Conclusion

With instructors focusing on skills and strategies, they seem to engage in the idea that there is one academic discourse, even though they know that is not true. When it comes to preparing students for the rest of their university experience, I wonder how many disciplines worry about preparing students for university? I doubt biology worries about it. I doubt this is history's concern. If any course falls under STEM, then it has nothing to worry about, for it's seen as providing jobs after university. No, just FYC as a discipline has to further concern itself with preparing students for the rest of their university experience. (I have, of course, not included "Intro to the University" courses in which first-semester students learn about the university in a brief, usually one-credit-hour course.) I may be too harsh in these statements, as I have not discussed this issue with

practitioners in other disciplines, but I do remember from my own college days that my history, biology, and French professors never told me how these disciplines would help me in the university or even in life. It was a given that these subjects were important. Lindemann's call for a unified theory of writing to combat writing's low place of service in 1993 still remains unfulfilled in 2018. Even though texts like *Naming What We Know* demonstrate what the field knows through the lens of threshold concepts, we have not yet effectively established a unified field because of the disconnect between the scholars who learn and create the theories and the myriad of instructors who do not have a strong theoretical background in RCWS.

FYC instructors need more support in developing praxis so as to move the field to unity and out of its perceived service position. While a knowledge of RCWS theory does not necessarily solve the hiring crisis, instructors with a solid theoretical foundation may have greater confidence in teaching, and the more instructors know about the field, the more they can share it with other stakeholders, stakeholders who might be able to create a change for hiring practices in the university. Until then, though, WPAs should support their faculty by creating as many bridges as possible between what WPAs know (RCWS theory) and what instructors know (process theory and practices) together. I believe that threshold concepts of writing studies serve as a point of Burkean identification between WPA and instructor knowledges of writing instruction. Threshold concepts express what the field has established about RCWS in an accessible way that allows for instructors to readily associate their knowledge with the threshold concepts, thus giving a language for writing instruction that most instructors cannot find in RCWS theory alone. In the next and final chapter, I explain how instructors identify with threshold concepts, and I discuss

strategies for incorporating threshold concepts into SLOs. I conclude the chapter with ways for utilizing instructor prior knowledge in professional development workshops as a means to boost instructor buy-in and collegiality.

CHAPTER V: RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The literature on faculty professional development in relation to threshold concepts tends to focus on homogenous departments, filled with faculty who have similar theoretical and practical underpinnings. As such, the literature recommends that if faculty struggle with coming to terms with threshold concepts, it's either in the realm of naming threshold concepts for their discipline or local context or in understanding and mitigating student liminality. These studies, though, often occur in homogenous departments, where faculty have similar backgrounds in their field's theories and best practices. In the case for a heterogeneous department, one with competing pedagogical perspectives, I argue that instructor prior knowledge be taken into consideration when WPAs prepare professional development for their writing instructors. As indicated in the findings, instructors grapple with praxis and concerns for their job security, tensions not unusual within a writing department. Threshold concepts uniquely mediate these tensions, as they unpack writing studies theory and embrace liminality, which could address the risk factors for the stress associated with job security. In this chapter, then, I stress how threshold concepts serve as a form of Burkean identification between what instructors know about writing instruction and what WPAs know. Thus, I examine the unifying potential of threshold concepts, and I also demonstrate how instructors view threshold concepts as "pushing them out of their comfort zones," moving them to conscious praxis as they reflect on what they intentionally or unintentionally overlook in their courses. In order to integrate threshold concepts into the current curriculum to negotiate these

pedagogical tensions, I recommend that WPAs examine their current student learning objectives (SLOs) and incorporate threshold concepts into the language of learning objectives, since instructors overwhelmingly responded that SLOs provide a language for their pedagogical approaches. I then offer strategies for developing a *what/why/how* professional development workshop design on the SLO-present threshold concepts, as instructors largely reported that they wanted to know *what* they were expected to do in the classroom rather than the theory (the *why*) behind the practice. Moreover, I propose that successful professional development workshops entail an element of collegiality, and if instructors get the chance to share and develop their knowledge with others, then there may be a higher rate of uptake.

Threshold Concepts and Burkean Identification

When asked about how she sees threshold concepts fitting in with her approach to the instruction of writing, Hannah responds that threshold concepts relate with what she thinks about the instruction of writing. She expands her experience to other readers of

Naming:

So, I think, in a lot of ways, that's the beauty of threshold concepts, I think, for people who aren't accustomed to composition studies, that they can look at them and see things that they are doing already, and I think in some ways, it makes it a little less daunting, because comp scholarship's daunting to non-comp people [...].

Hannah makes this generalization because she's a current PhD candidate specializing in RCWS, and so her perspective comes from a place of more extensive knowledge of threshold concepts than other faculty members. Her explanation, though, stresses the nature of how my participants overwhelmingly responded to threshold concepts: as ways of thinking about and practicing writing.

Instructors largely see threshold concepts as expressing what they know about writing, and the ideas with and the language of threshold concepts allow instructors to identify their knowledge in RCWS terms. Because instructors respond so well to threshold concepts, WPAs can use threshold concepts as a form of Burkean identification in order to help instructors move to a better understanding of RCWS theory.

Briefly, Kenneth Burke presents his “new” rhetoric of identification in his *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969), arguing that identification has become the foundation of modern rhetoric, supplementing persuasion, the foundation of ancient rhetoric. Burke sees identification as a positive persuasive force in a divided world, and identification rests on the obvious divisions humans perceive. As Burke sees it, we know that we are divided (based on biological, racial, economical, social) factors, but when we see how we relate with others, we are joined with another, united and yet still separate: “Thus he is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another” (21). Instead of focusing on the division, Burke believes that the rhetor should emphasize similarities, the points of identification, in order to persuade his audience. Burke writes, “[i]dentification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division” (22). Identification is a less divisive form of persuasion, and Burke believes that identification “can move from the factional to the universal” (23). When the focus for persuasion is on the shared ideas between parties, they can move to a shared understanding together, rather than placing such great emphasis on the divisive points.

Threshold concepts may be the theoretical identification WPAs need to help their non-RCWS instructors move to a shared vision for the instruction of writing. Even though threshold concepts are rooted in RCWS theory, the ideas presented in and the language of threshold concepts make them a more accessible form of RCWS theory precisely because they lack the jargon that naturally occurs with theory. As Hannah explains, instructors identify with these ideas, and so WPAs should use them as a space for positive identification by uniting threshold concepts with theories and practices so as to move toward a united vision together. Threshold concepts are the bridge between instructors' knowledge of writing and a WPA's knowledge of writing. For instructors, threshold concepts accessibly translate RCWS scholarship, and for WPAs, threshold concepts supplement the theories and practices already functioning within the department. In the remainder of this section, I explain how instructors identify with threshold concepts through the language used to of threshold concepts and the ways that the ideas push instructors out of their comfort zones in a positive way.

Threshold Concepts as a Unifying "Language"

One of the goals for this project was to see if threshold concepts truly do provide a unified language for writing studies. Based on my interviews, faculty respond positively to the universal nature of threshold concepts, with some participants responding directly that threshold concepts did provide all writing instructors with a language for writing instruction, even those without backgrounds in RCWS. For example, Gloria, when asked about how threshold concepts would help her meet course objectives, responds that they "give you some language to put around things," and Valerie responds similarly by viewing them as a "common language around what we're doing." Olivia's response,

though, offers the greatest insight into how instructors view threshold concepts as giving a name for their writing knowledge: “Well, yeah, we’ve been doing that, but it never had a name. Nobody gave a name for it.” Even though Olivia has a fairly strong foundation in RCWS scholarship (she’s an NTT instructor with a literature specialization, and so she’s done quite a bit of RCWS professional development on her own time), she sees threshold concepts as providing the names for the ideas and practices in a writing classroom more so than RCWS theory itself. She’s probably aware of several theories of writing, but for whatever reason, threshold concepts name her knowledge of writing better than theory. I estimate that the universal language of threshold concepts causes instructors to better identify with threshold concepts than theory itself because many threshold concepts combine RCWS theories. Threshold concepts, then, distill over sixty years of RCWS scholarship, and so NTT instructors with limited time can review the broad strokes of RCWS theory in one text.

I begin with Gloria’s response to threshold concepts, as her perspective frames how many instructors respond to threshold concepts. When asked how threshold concepts could influence her approaches to writing, she says, “I think they would influence me a lot. They already have; I just didn’t know it.” Gloria recognizes that threshold concepts speak to what she knows about writing, and so she thinks threshold concepts are already in the work she has done, even though she only had a brief encounter with them (Gloria only looked over the threshold concepts for about ten minutes before the interview began). Richard corroborates Gloria’s response when he states that threshold concepts already tie-in with his approaches to writing: “I think that in some fashion, depending on the course and depending on the assignment, that all of them operate in the classroom for

me. But some of them may be more important at one stage than another in the semester, or at one stage or another in the process of doing this.” Richard even sees how threshold concepts can be scaffolded to enhance student learning. Finally, Kayla explains, “We’re doing it; it’s just nice to put the label on it,” which indicates that threshold concepts put a label on both the theories and practices operating within a writing classroom. For these instructors, threshold concepts offer ways of thinking about and practicing writing. Instructors can relate these concepts with the ways that they approach their writing courses, which includes the theoretical goals they have for the course and the assignments that they create. Because threshold concepts are written in an almost jargon-free way, instructors may see threshold concepts as offering truths about writing rather than nebulous theories of writing.

In the list of thirty-five threshold concepts and subconcepts, eleven of them contain “writing is,” a declarative statement of writing’s identity. The remaining threshold concepts and subconcepts are just as declarative, including verbs like *expresses*, *mediates*, *speaks*, *provides*, and *represents*. Threshold concepts of writing studies express writing as a living entity that creates action in the world. Because the subject matter of RCWS constantly evolves, defining the field remains a challenge for WPAs and those in charge of teacher preparation. However, threshold concepts provide a boundary in that they define the field as it is in the present moment. Furthermore, these declarations in threshold concepts make the knowledge of writing studies seem like truth. These ideas are more than just theories of writing; scholars *aver* these ideas are the current truths we know about writing. Although the scholarship continues to evolve and change, threshold concepts accurately represent the field in its present state. I believe that the declarations

of the field in the form of threshold concepts boost instructors' buy-in to the idea of threshold concepts. When an idea is explained with such assertion, then it's easier for someone to support it.

Furthermore, threshold concepts contain little jargon from RCWS scholarship. The scholars who created threshold concepts sought to condense the entirety of RCWS scholarship into accessible statements that combine theories together. For example, in "Writing Is Informed by Prior Experience," Andrea Lunsford, using the history of RCWS scholarship, effectively blends expressive, process, rhetorical, genre, and transfer theories of writing to show how past experiences influence writing. From my perspective, the only potentially jargon-heavy terms used in threshold concepts are *multimodal*, *metacognition*, and *entrenchment*. However, even if a non-RCWS writing instructor read these threshold concepts, that's potentially only three out of thirty-five with which she might not identify. Overall, instructors can relate with the ideas in threshold concepts because of their accessible, condensed language.

Fascinatingly, when I had instructors identify the threshold concepts that most resonated with their views of writing instruction, many writing instructors would select threshold concepts or subconcepts from Adler-Kassner and Wardle's list, and then expand on the ways of thinking presented in the concepts, rather than focus on practices in the classrooms. For example, one of the most popular threshold concepts from my interviews is "Writing Is a Knowledge-Making Activity." Instructors gravitated toward this idea, likely because it's one that directly involves thought and practice. Daniel states that this threshold concept is one that he knows, but he often forgets to have his students practice it. By seeing this threshold concept, Daniel is reminded about how writing

creates knowledge, and that his students should know that idea and practice it. Instructors also gravitated toward “Writing Is a Social and Rhetorical Activity,” since they saw that threshold concept as dealing with the rhetorical situation, an important aspect of MTSU’s FYC curriculum. Gloria explains that “Writing Is a Social and Rhetorical Activity” has particular meaning for her because she works with students “on the idea that people write and people respond. It’s very much a social activity.” Again, Gloria turns to thought *and* practice; she wants her students to think about and execute writing rhetorically. Threshold concepts, then, help instructors move to considering the theoretical aspects of writing instruction in relation to the practices in their classroom, helping them move closer to praxis.

Instructors responded like Daniel and Gloria to most of the threshold concepts on the list. In fact, so many instructors stated that all five concepts related with how they teach writing, so it’s hard to determine an overwhelming crowd-favorite threshold concept. “Writing Is a Social and Rhetorical Activity,” “Writing Speak to Situations through Recognizable Forms,” and “Writing Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies” may have received more attention than others in terms of direct focus (I’m guessing instructors gravitated toward these both because they verbalize current SLOs and because they were the first three that instructors encountered; location is important, after all), but several instructors stressed the importance of “All Writers Have More to Learn” and “Writing Is (Also Always) a Cognitive Activity.”

When instructors identified these concepts, they began to move toward praxis, as the threshold concepts encouraged them to reflect on the theories and how instructors presented or practiced those theories in the classroom. Beth, for example, uses “All

Writers Have More to Learn” as a way to express how she approaches revision in her classroom. She encourages her students to know that they can grow and improve as writers, and when asked about the threshold concepts that she would want her students to learn, she responds that “All Writers Have More to Learn” is “inspirational and not difficult and factual” for students. She’s able to use threshold concepts to express her approaches and practices to writing to her students. Likewise, Olivia uses “Writing Is (Also Always) a Cognitive Activity” to discover how her practices reflect this theory, one that she says she’s unfamiliar with:

Um, and I’m probably not that familiar with the....umm....[pause]
 “writing is a cognitive...” I mean, I know technically it is, but I don’t know that I’ve really thought that much about it, which is kind of stupid, because I know that I’ve told my students a million times that, uh, a thesis statement is going to change because you write yourself into information. So I know I know it, but I don’t really...I don’t think I teach it. I acknowledge it, but I don’t do that much...and maybe I do...I don’ know. I’m thinking of some of my classroom activities now. I’m thinking, “Yes you do! Shut up!” [laughs].

As she works through the knowledge, she realizes that she does more with cognitive theories than she originally thought. Her response is a strong piece of evidence for threshold concepts as leading to praxis. Because of threshold concepts, she actively considers the theories she knows and those with which she may be unfamiliar, and then she gauges how those theories may play out in her courses. However, there could be some stumbling blocks on the way for her, as her unfamiliarity might not allow for her to fully realize how the theory works in general, RCWS terms. Professional development on the theory, then, would help prevent or ease any of those stumbling blocks.

However, instructors consistently named one threshold concept as problematic: “Writing Is Not Natural.” Instructors struggled with it because of the language, rather

than the idea, as many instructors were operating on just reading the terms instead of reading the accompanying descriptions. Moreover, I believe that the issue with this threshold concept stemmed from instructors' identification as writers. Because they identify as writers, because their worldviews have been transformed by writing knowledge, they cannot identify with this threshold concept. Instructors would most likely embrace the threshold concept if they read Dryer's accompanying description, in which he reminds his readers that writing must be taught. A person only learns to write when someone teaches her how to use pen and paper (or keyboard and monitor) and how to form words from letters. Unlike speaking, which can be imitated, writing involves complex knowledge and tools.

Threshold concepts allow for instructors to identify with theories of writing without being overwhelmed by the jargon and complexities of RCWS theories. With threshold concepts, instructors immediately see ways of thinking about writing and how they relate with the practices that instructors value so greatly. Threshold concepts operate on several levels for faculty through statements of writing's nature, through connections to past writing experiences, and to nods to prominent theories that instructors have some knowledge of (process, genre, expressive, transfer, etc.). Besides reminding instructors of what they know, threshold concepts also remind them of what they have forgotten. When instructors consider what they've left out of their instruction, they become more reflective of their courses, which further helps instructors reach praxis. Through these reflections, threshold concepts further help instructors identify with the field.

Threshold Concepts and Comfort Zones

Instructors continued to view threshold concepts as a unifying practice when they noted that threshold concepts would remind them of areas of instruction they should focus on in the classroom. When he discusses how threshold concepts fit in with his course design, Daniel again emphasizes that he would use them to improve what he's doing and to incorporate points that he doesn't usually address: "If [my course design] did change, it would be to better do the things I'm already doing and to incorporate those things I'm kind of lacking in, and I think that would be the biggest advantage of me delving in that book and reading it." Other instructors saw this as the "challenge" that threshold concepts brought to their worldviews in that threshold concepts served as a reminder for what they were omitting in their classes. Hannah sees threshold concepts as pushing her out of her "comfort zone" as an instructor, but she sees that as a positive thing in her teaching.

Some instructors put a positive spin on the challenge of threshold concepts. Tim, for example, sees threshold concepts as serving as a good space for revising a course. Likewise, Ian sees threshold concepts as causing an instructor "to be very deliberate in your essay sequence and all of your subsequent class things." Olivia notes that they challenge her in that she could use them to go through her syllabus to see what she was omitting. They provide her with a "chance to look objectively instead of kind of subjectively at what I've constructed. So it gives me a framework, a technical, official framework, I guess." Likewise, Carol agrees that threshold concepts serve as "very nice organizing principles for everything you're doing in the classroom." Again, threshold concepts help instructors move toward praxis, but in this instance, it's via new or

“forgotten” theories. Threshold concepts remind instructors about what they had learned about but have forgotten to include in their classrooms. Threshold concepts also instruct teachers in unfamiliar theories, as their language conveys ideas about writing in such a way that they can begin to understand the theories. I also guess that because of their experiences with writing and teaching writing, instructors are familiar with these theories because they have practiced them for so long. Even though they might not have “officially” encountered these theories through professional development of any sort, their experiences speak to the truth of those theories.

Not all instructors, though, view threshold concepts as the “best” framework for writing instruction. “Lauren,” a GTA specializing in rhetoric and composition, expressed some hesitancy with using threshold concepts as a framework. While she sees that threshold concepts do structure what the field collectively knows, she sees them as another framework for instructors to use, one that she doesn’t necessarily buy into it since it “feels like a framework that doesn’t really mesh with the other kind of ways that we structure a semester, the way that we design a semester or course. It’s sort of a different approach, so to me, it’s almost like it would be a whole other phase of designing a course.” Instructors must use SLOs, and some supplement with the WPA-OS and the Habits of Mind, and so Lauren sees threshold concepts as a disparate framework. But, like other instructors, she recognizes that threshold concepts can help her identify her reasoning for what she does in the classroom: “You know, I actually think if I focused on them more, they could help me identify what you’ve been asking about, like things that I’m already doing, things that are already a part of my reasoning, and they could help me look at things that I’m not really thinking about.”

Threshold concepts, then, serve as a space for instructors to revise their courses based on both theory and practice. Instructors could use the ideas in threshold concepts to test what they are doing and what they should be doing in class. Olivia particularly responds to the reflexive nature of threshold concepts when she recognizes that threshold concepts can help her look at her syllabus objectively to find the areas that she's glossing over purely because she finds them boring. She knows that her students might need that information, and so threshold concepts can remind her of that. Threshold concepts both affirm and challenge instructors, pushing them to consider what they know about writing instruction. When instructors view writing instruction from such a position, they begin to move toward praxis. By turning to their practices as teachers and the underlying theoretical principles within those practices as described by threshold concepts, instructors may be able to comment more on theory than they had in the past. Threshold concepts do provide a language for writing instruction, a language that engages instructors in both theory and practice. As such, threshold concepts can be used as an identification bridge between instructors' knowledge of writing instruction and a WPA's knowledge in order to move toward departmental unification.

Threshold Concepts and Student Learning Objectives

When I asked my interviewees about how they saw threshold concepts connecting with SLOS, they saw them working in tandem, with each informing the other. Olivia provides the most succinct response: "I mean, most of the course objectives acknowledge one or more of these threshold concepts, so it automatically, I'm supporting them [...]." Because of this relationship between the two, Olivia sees threshold concepts as giving "a different name to some of the course objectives that I'm already

supporting,” and providing her with “a different way of thinking about [SLOs], I guess.” Carol believes threshold concepts can work in a similar way as SLOs in regards to course design in that she sees that TCs could be articulated into SLOs, and then the subconcepts serve as ideas for writing tasks: “[Threshold concepts] are really comprehensive, and so I think it’d be a matter of just really selecting what’s reasonable for the course that you’re going to be designing, and how long it’s going to be, and all that sort of thing.” Finally, Ian would use TCs to articulate the goals for the class and have students engage with them. So, he sees them as course goals, which ties in with SLOs; it’s natural to tie the two together.

Threshold concepts can also provide a practical guide for the theoretical components within SLOs. Anthony, for example, sees threshold concepts as “ready-made lesson plans for any core concept that your department will have the say in.” For him, SLOs are the departmental guide, the key framework for course design in a department. Because he places such emphasis on SLOs, he views threshold concepts as practical aspects; he has not yet moved to a place where he sees threshold concepts as informing his theories of writing instruction. But that’s not necessarily a problem, since threshold concepts are deeply rooted in theory. While Anthony might not have the full consciousness required for praxis, he does have an awareness that the practical aspects of a writing class need to have deeper meaning than just a writing task. Anthony is not the only instructor that has this opinion. Tim shares it as well. He sees threshold concepts as a way to measure how successful a teacher is in teaching an overall objective: “And then you [...] can match how closely your objective, your goal, is for that session with what you’re supposed to be accomplishing. So it’s a way of measuring, in my opinion, [...]

how effective you are in accomplishing your overall objective.” I find Tim’s idea that threshold concepts serve as a measuring tool for SLOs fascinating. Prior to Tim’s perspective, I viewed the situation in the opposite way, with SLOs serving as the practical measurement for threshold concepts. However, I see Tim’s point, for Tim sees SLOs as the unifying force in a department’s vision for writing instruction, and so he uses threshold concepts supplementally to fulfill departmental standards.

Threshold concepts fill in the theoretical and practical gaps that may be missing in traditional SLOs. Hannah describes this aspect when she considers the connection between threshold concepts and SLOs: “I think a lot of our threshold concepts match up with our course objectives, which is good, but I think that they are more distilled and condensed ways of looking at course objectives, or can be viewed that way.” For Hannah, threshold concepts focus on important theories of writing, while SLOs play a more bureaucratic role in the department: “I think one is that threshold concepts are designed to talk to me about what we talk about, what we know about writing. Whereas course objectives are for the powers that be.” Because of this, threshold concepts seem “more approachable than course objectives. And again, I think that’s a lot of the rhetorical situation of it. A course objective is designed to please the man; it’s not necessarily designed to appease our students, or appeal to our students, or be something that our students can benefit from.” Threshold concepts work with SLOs; they inform SLOs. However, threshold concepts resonate more with the goals of writing theory, while SLOs seem to have taken on a position of appeasing non-writing studies stakeholders. Her position is fascinating because she shows that perhaps SLOs have moved away from their

intended use (letting students learn at their own paces and in their own ways), as Estrem suggests.

Student Learning Objectives: A Brief Overview

Since threshold concepts provide a universal language for ways of thinking about and practicing the teaching of writing, they should be used transparently within the department to boost a universal approach to writing instruction. Unlike other departments and programs in which instructors have similar theoretical backgrounds, writing programs have faculty with diverse backgrounds, many of whom do not have much training in RCWS. However, as this study has shown, instructors do have theoretical underpinnings based on their postliminal states as writers and writing teachers and through their use of SLOs. In both cases, faculty prior knowledge functions as a site for instructors to connect with threshold concepts.

Transfer theories of writing focus heavily on prior knowledge, because tapping into prior knowledge can help a student metacognitively consider how past writing experiences connect with present, and perhaps even future, writing experiences. For example, Angela Rounsaville, Rachel Goldberg, and Anis Bawarshi, in “From Incomes to Outcomes: FYW’s Students’ Prior Genre Knowledge, Meta-Cognition, and the Question of Transfer” (2008), explore the relationship between genre and transfer by studying students’ prior genre knowledge from their high school writing experiences. They conclude that while students did draw on prior knowledge of genres in their FYC course, the students could not communicate transfer, and so Rounsaville et al. encourage instructors to conference with their students to boost transfer language. Rounsaville, Goldberg, and Bawarshi’s study may provide some insight for how instructors learn new

theories of writing instruction. Like novice writers, instructors have the prior theoretical knowledge from past writing and teaching experiences, and yet, they do not always have the language required to express writing studies theory in a way that a broader community (their colleagues) could easily understand. In order to encourage a transfer to threshold concepts as a unifying framework for a department, then, threshold concepts should be linked with another departmental unifying force—student learning outcomes (SLOs)—so that a bridge between prior knowledge (SLOs) can be created to the new knowledge (threshold concepts).

Beyond being a unifying force because of their ubiquity in a department, SLOs are an ideal prior knowledge point for threshold concepts because the original purpose of SLOs connects with the purpose of threshold concepts. William Spady and Kit Marshall (1991) explain that SLOs (which stem from Outcomes-Based Education, or OBE, are “founded on three basic premises”:

- “All students can learn and succeed (but not on the same day in the same way).
- Success breeds success
- Schools control the conditions of success” (67).

In short, OBE, when it proclaims that all students learn and succeed in their own way and time, stresses student learning in a way that’s similar to liminal learning in threshold concepts. OBE, though, has a longer history than threshold concepts, as it began in the 1960s in Johnson City, New York (Desmond 1). Their model was so popular, that school administrators from across the US and Canada flocked to the Johnson City school district in order to learn how to incorporate OBE into their own schools (Desmond 2). By 1985, the Network of Outcome-Based Schools (NO-BS) “became the major vehicle for the

dissemination of outcome-based education, and its members traveled throughout the country promoting the educational model of OBE” (Desmond 7). Block et al. Describe NO-BS’s primary goal and task “was to codify and elaborate the basic philosophical premises undergirding the various schools and districts in which mastery learning ideas were flourishing” (11). Thus, OBE stresses the philosophical underpinnings within a local context while challenging skills-based education.

Floyd Boschee and Mark A. Baron (1993) define OBE as “a student-centered, results-oriented design premised on the belief that all individuals can learn” (1). Outcome-based education focuses on the learner, with the instructor clearly identifying what will be learned, assessing students throughout the learning of the material, accommodating the student’s needs through “multiple instructional strategies and assessment tools,” and by providing the “time and assistance to realize [the student’s] potential” (Boschee and Baron 2). OBE proposes that all students can learn the materials, with time, “amount of instruction,” and opportunities for demonstrating learning as the fluctuating variables in student learning (Boschee and Baron 5-6). Ronald Harden (2007) praises OBE because it forces instructors to think about what and how they want their students to learn (625).

John Biggs and Catherine Tang (2011) describe the difference between OBE and a traditional “teacher-based education”: “A course outcome statement tells us how we would recognize if or how well students have learned what it is intended they should learn and be able to do. This is different from the usual teacher-based curriculum, which simply lists the topics for teachers to ‘cover.’ That is, an outcome statement tells us what students should be able to do after teaching, and how well they should do it, when they

were unable, or only partially able, to do it before teaching” (11). Ultimately, Biggs and Tang see teachers who use OBE as focusing more on “engaging students in active learning, building their knowledge in terms of what they already understand...” (22). Like prior knowledge, OBE builds on what students learn. Biggs and Tang do not see OBE as a list that needs to be checked off. Rather, they argue that OBE tries to make learning as explicit as possible with the understanding that “unintended but desirable outcomes” do occur in OBE. In fact, they use unintended outcomes as a rebuttal against OBE critics: “Teachers and critics often overlook that students may also learn outcomes that hadn’t been foreseen but which are eminently desirable” (11).

Threshold Concepts and the Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement

Much as threshold concepts were designed to identify and disseminate the field’s shared knowledge, learning outcomes originated as a way to unify departmental approaches to writing instruction. In the edited collection *The Outcomes Book: Debate and Consensus after the WPA Outcomes Statement* (2005), Edward White reminisces on his instigation of discipline-wide outcomes with his query on the WPA list serve (WPA-L). In his reflection, White advocates for learning outcomes in that they provide a stronger sense of unification than standards, since outcomes present a general shared goal, while standards differ from university to university (5). Moreover, White sees learning outcomes as the strongest way for writing knowledge to be transferred from one situation to another (6). Kathleen Blake Yancey in “Standards, Outcomes, and All that Jazz” extends White’s conversation when she remarks that outcomes provide a way for departments to define themselves, a key issue in creating a shared vision of writing.

Heidi Estrem, in her chapter in *Naming What We Know*, speculates on the relationship between threshold concepts and student learning outcomes (SLOs) by first acknowledging that threshold concepts and SLOs both contribute to a shared vision of writing instruction within a department. However, Estrem asserts that threshold concepts shift the focus from the end product (the focus of SLOs) to “shared understandings of student learning about writing” (90), which should be the focus of FYC courses. Estrem praises SLOs since they clearly articulate expectations for student learning, curriculum development and cohesion, and assessment; however, she fears that SLOs can quickly become competencies due to oversimplification and decontextualization, thus leading instructors, departments, and institutions to view student learning as linear (threshold concepts, on the other hand, emphasize the “messiness” in learning about writing) (91-93). Estrem articulates the very problems early critics of SLOs warned: SLOs could quickly become a checklist of skills-based competencies that instructors will check off as each student completes each outcome. Learning moves from a messy enterprise filled with discovery and struggle to a process that has very little meaning. For Estrem, revising SLOs to reflect threshold concepts allows instructors to focus on how students learn about writing, which will allow for more meaningful conversations about writing (101).

While Estrem is right in aligning threshold concepts and SLOs in order to remind instructors about the liminal learning process, Estrem’s suggestion seems like a big leap for a department, largely because she recommends for a complete overhaul of SLOs to reflect threshold concepts. Estrem recommends that departmentally crafted threshold concepts should replace current SLOs. Estrem’s process, while an ideal one, requires a committee to craft the new SLOs, and such a drastic overhaul could cause undue stress on

a department/program. Instead, I propose that threshold concepts should first be connected with current SLOs so as to resonate more with faculty prior knowledge, both theoretically and practically, as many instructors within a program have embraced the theories present in the SLOs, and they have built their courses on those SLOs. I recommend that WPAs slowly integrate threshold concepts into their SLOs by explicitly linking theories, related threshold concepts, and recommended practices within their SLOs.

Revising Student Learning Objectives with Threshold Concepts

To demonstrate ways for integrating threshold concepts into SLOs, I'll use two different sets of ENGL 1010 and 1020 SLOs: one from the 2013 "Literacy for Life" update (which many instructors alluded to in the interviews and survey), and the updated 2017 version, which delineates and streamlines the movement from ENGL 1010 to ENGL 1020. These two sets of objectives reveal two ways WPAs can create SLOs for a department, and I think the similarities and differences between the two together reveal strengths and pitfalls of objective statements, particularly when put into conversation with threshold concepts and labor concerns. Both sets of SLOs privilege RCWS theory, and so the negotiation of SLOs with threshold concepts feels a bit easier to make for these objectives.

Unlike the 2013 objectives, the 2017 update approaches departmental SLOs in a more streamlined (and colorful!) manner, with tables articulating the relationship of ENGL 1010 and 1020 SLOS and for individual ENGL 1010 and 1020 SLOs. I begin with the relationship SLOs, as this update departs greatly from the previous one. In the 2017 objectives, the first table represents the "First-Year Writing Program Objectives (Aligned

with TBR Outcomes),” and so the center of the chart hosts the shared program outcomes between ENGL 1010 and ENGL 1020. Also included in this update are the “key concepts” for both ENGL 1010 and ENGL 1020, which have been designed to mirror each other (and which serve as a nice space to insert threshold concepts). Finally, the objectives have been greatly condensed, with five main objectives for the two courses. The individual objectives for each course follow the updates of program objectives and key concepts with added “Invention/W2L” and “Writing Project” columns to provide instructors with practical approaches to the course. Instructors, then, get to see the theoretical underpinnings and the practical assignments (both informal and formal) that can be used to implement the theory.

The 2017 SLOs explicitly describe the theories and practices emphasized in the department via the key concepts and suggested invention/W2L and writing projects (the 2017 SLOs can be found in Appendix G). For the writing projects, the WPAs made a note that they only recommended these projects; instructors can create other projects that meet the objectives and outcomes for the course. The course goals have not changed much between the 2013 and 2017 versions of the SLOs, but the 2017 update has included more theory for instructors to consider when creating and teaching their courses. For example, in the updated ENGL 1010 objectives, habits of mind, metacognition, and backward-reaching transfer have been added to the conversation. Similarly, the ENGL 1020 objectives include more explicit theories in the form of metalanguage and forward-reaching transfer. While these theories may have been implied in the 2013 version, they are now explicit in the 2017 update, thus giving instructors the terminology and language to further explore and discuss the theories with other instructors and students,

Refreshingly, the update does not include teaching objectives, and so instructors may feel more freedom in designing their courses. However, some remnants of the teaching objectives remain in the recommendations for formal and informal writing assignments, but these recommendations seem more like a kind gesture rather than mandates on behalf of the WPAs.

One of the minor downsides to the 2017 objectives, though, deals with instructor familiarity with the program. For instructors who have participated in the program since the 2013 objectives premiered, they are aware of the genre and rhetorical theories emphasized in the department both from the perhaps overly thorough 2013 objectives and the accompanying professional development workshops stemming from that update. For newer instructors, though, the updated SLOs might be intimidating, as they might not be familiar with these theories in a general sense and in the local site's use of these theories. WPAs should then consider to provide extra support for their new instructors. However, the streamlined and simple approach with practical guides might work for new instructors to the program.

The 2017 update reminds instructors and students (and any other stakeholder, for that matter) of the messiness of writing and learning, particularly within the ENGL 1020 SLOs. One nod to the inherent difficulty in writing and learning appears in the "Invention/W2L" section on reading: "Acknowledge difficulties and devise strategies." When instructors and students embrace the acknowledgment of struggle, then more effective learning may be achieved. The objectives also acknowledge practice, another strategy for addressing and handling difficult learning and writing moments. In one open nod to practice, a 1010 objective states, "Develop genre awareness and practice genre

analysis; Complete writing tasks that require understanding of the rhetorical situation.”

Encouraging practice remains an important part of writing instruction. When students feel that they can practice, then they may take risks (and perhaps reap the benefits of failure), as encouraged within Threshold Concept 4: All Writers Have More to Learn. Other objectives encourage students to “examine literacies across contexts,” consider new ideas, and to attempt to make connections between coursework. The 2017 update, then, takes the work of the 2013 SLOs and revises them to better reflect the liminal learning process found within threshold concepts.

Heidi Estrem sees threshold concepts as affording “a mechanism for faculty to articulate the content of their courses, identify student learning throughout the course experience, and create shared values for writing in a way that a focus on end products—on outcomes—cannot” (90). Estrem does not see SLOs as thoroughly lacking, though. She does concede that outcomes and objectives “make expectations for student-learning more visible” and “offer productive possibilities for assessment,” great things for students and educators to see and understand (91). However, they just “can’t account for the messy, hard, uneven work of learning” in the same way that threshold concepts can (93). On the surface level, acknowledging student learning via threshold concepts reminds writing instructors to include moments of practice and revision as students begin to engage with the key tenets of a discipline. On a deeper level, threshold concepts and student learning can reconfigure how instructors, WPAs, and other university disciplines and administrators view writing’s position within the academy, as Estrem so eloquently notes, “[Threshold concepts] now provide a map of student learning that gets closer to acknowledging, more honestly, the uncertain and uneven work of learning about writing

that has the potential to be supported and developed more meaningfully across the curriculum” (103). Writing becomes more than just a list of checkmarkable skills as sometimes seen in SLOs. Threshold concepts enact writing as a discipline, one that can stand alone and be involved within every other discipline within the university.

Estrem and other scholars who study methods for incorporating threshold concepts into the classroom, curriculum, and/or discipline typically recommend that faculty meet together to identify threshold concepts within their unique local context. As noted in the literature review, my chief concern with this method in my particular local context is the lack of RCWS knowledge needed to create threshold concepts for our writing program. Furthermore, I aimed to see if Adler-Kassner and Wardle’s threshold concepts of writing studies truly names the discipline for instructors. Based on my interview responses, instructors readily embraced threshold concepts, with several instructors noting that threshold concepts finally named what they know about writing. In this instance, then, I recommend that WPAs revise their SLOs slowly by incorporating threshold concepts as supplements for the theories and practices presented within the objectives, as instructors use SLOs as a site to ground their own pedagogical practices.

To illustrate this recommendation, I use the 2017 SLOs, as they are more streamlined, more explicit about theory, and less didactic about practice. The 2017 SLOs even appear to include nods to threshold concepts with references to disciplinarity and the unevenness of student learning. Threshold concepts easily enter into the conversation with the SLOs, and, because these objectives are so thorough with theory and practice, I only add in a column for threshold concepts, selecting threshold concepts that connect with the theories/practices in the SLOs and those that resonate with instructors. I

speculate that adding threshold concepts to expand on objectives and key concepts will aid in the establishment of a shared language within a department. Also, threshold concepts extend writing beyond the classroom, expressing ideas that are central to all writing acts. Catherine Latterell advocates to balance theory and practice in GTA preparation by creating key concepts as a foundation for new instructors: “It gives them a vocabulary they can use with their students and with each other...Bringing this kind of context into pedagogy courses helps new teachers gain an understanding of the complexity of writing instruction...” (20). When instructors have a shared language for writing, and when they remember that the foundational ideas of RCWS extend beyond just the writing classroom, then instructors can communicate more with each other and their students. FYC becomes the space where instructors and students engage with the messiness of writing and learning, encountering ideas that will eventually transform how they view writing as they move through the university, their professional careers, and their personal lives.

Truthfully, the creators of the 2017 update anticipated the pedagogical tensions found within my interviews. However, since over half of my interviews were conducted before the 2017 update was officially released to faculty, instructors may not have had the time to see how the update influences praxis. Threshold concepts, though, may help increase praxis purely by their language. If threshold concepts truly do name not only the discipline, but also what instructors know about writing (and my interviewees corroborate this idea), then threshold concepts alongside theory and practice within SLOs could be the supplemental force that helps instructors move to praxis. Threshold concepts speak to the universality of writing. A combination of threshold concepts, theory, and practice,

then, might establish the connections for instructors to gain praxis, and thus move them to combat the idea of FYC as a service course.

Composing Processes	Conduct primary research; Make appropriate decisions about content, form, and presentation	genre analysis, primary research, multimodality	Situations through Recognizable Forms"; "Writing Is Linked to Identity"; "All Writing Is Multimodal"	Create literacy "maps"; Conduct literacy "bingo"; Interview classmates about literacy	Literacy Narrative, Genre Portrait, Interview Project/Profile
Reading	Examine literacies across contexts, Read and analyze various types of text—print, digital, and audio	recursive/reflexive reading, reading strategies, annotation	"Writing Expresses and Shares Meaning to Be Reconstructed by the Reader"; "Genres Are Enacted by Writers and Readers"	Read aloud in-class protocols, Guided activities over textual features and reader reactions; Asking questions of the text	
Rhetorical Knowledge	Develop genre awareness and practice genre analysis; Complete writing tasks that require understanding of the rhetorical situation	rhetorical situation, genre convention & deviation, genre affordances & constraints	"Writing Is a Social and Rhetorical Activity"; "Writing Addresses, Invokes, and/or Creates Audiences"; "Writing Represents the World, Events, Ideas, and Feelings"; "Writing Mediates Activity"	Genre scavenger hunt; Analyzing genre samples	Genre Analysis, Writing to Targeted Audiences
Integrative Thinking	Reflect on literacy in student lives; Develop a writing theory that can transfer to writing situations in other classes and professions	habits of mind, metacognition, backward-reaching transfer	"Writing Is Linked to Identity"; "Writing Is Informed by Prior Experience"; "Reflection Is Critical for Writers' Development"; "Writing Is a Way of Enacting Disciplinarity"	Reflective writing; End-of-class one-minute papers	E-Portfolio, Final Reflection/ Theory on Writing, Celebration of Student Writing Presentation
Information Literacy	Learn about discourse communities; Learn to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources and between fact, opinion, and inference	research ethics, discourse community, campus resources	"Words Get Their Meanings from Other Words"; "Writing Involves Making Ethical Choices"; "Texts Get Their Meaning from Other Texts"; "Writing Provides a Representation of Ideologies and Identities"	Take pictures and reflect on different spaces across campus; Visit and reflect on campus resources; Examine source use and attribution across disciplines/contexts	

Figure 4. *Recommended ENGL 1010 SLOs with Threshold Concepts*

Composing Processes	Conduct secondary research; Demonstrate recursive relationships between reading, writing, research, and reflection	rhetorical analysis, secondary research, writing across genres	Rhetorical Activity"; "Writing Mediates Activity"; "Writing Represents the World, Events, Ideas, and Feelings"; "Reflection is Critical for Writers' Development"	Read sources rhetorically; Identify exigence for individual research; Consider how to achieve one's purpose with a specific audience	Annotated Bibliography, Topic Proposal
Reading	Interpret and respond to complex ideas in sources; Identify and contribute to critical conversations	self-directed reading, critical reading, source analysis	"Writing Expresses and Shares Meaning to Be Reconstructed by the Reader"; "Genres Are Enacted by Writers and Readers"; "Writing Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies"	Acknowledge difficulties and devise strategies; Craft "reading like a writer" accounts; Consider what a text says/means/why it matters	
Rhetorical Knowledge	Identify and address appropriate audiences and contexts; Demonstrate flexibility and awareness of effective delivery within different genres	rhetorical appeals, kairos, delivery	"Writing Addresses, Invokes, and/or Creates Audiences"; "Writing Mediates Activity"; "Text Is an Object Outside of Oneself That Can Be Improved and Developed"; "Learning to Write Effectively Requires Different Kinds of Practice, Time, and Effort"	Revise investigative research article for different audiences/purposes	Investigative Research Article, Cumulative Reflection, E-Portfolio, Celebration of Student Writing Presentation
Integrative Thinking	Identify connections between coursework and other academic and external contexts	experimentation, metalanguage, forward-reaching transfer	"Writing Is a Knowledge-Making Activity"; "Disciplinary and Professional Identities Are Constructed through Writing"; "Writing Provides a Representation of Ideologies and Identities"; "All Writers Have More to Learn"	Write weekly blog posts reflecting on past, present, and future reading	E-Portfolio, Final Reflection/ Theory on Writing, Celebration of Student Writing Presentation
Information Literacy	Locate sources and analyze their relevance and credibility; Demonstrate rhetorical understanding of source attribution	ethical source use, public audiences, research integration	"Words Get Their Meanings from Other Words"; "Writing Involves Making Ethical Choices"; "Texts Get Their Meaning from Other Texts"; "Writing Provides a Representation of Ideologies and Identities"	Analyze sources and target publications; Use self-help guide for integrating source material	

Figure 5. Recommended ENGL 1020 SLOs with Threshold Concepts

Aside from threshold concepts, I made three minor revisions to the SLOs. I added *theories* to the “key concepts” section, so as to be more transparent about RCWS theory. I also added another asterisk to “Invention/W2L” to explain what these terms mean to new instructors to the department who might not know them. Finally, I included the recommendation for a profile assignment into the “Writing Projects” section. I viewed the “Interview Project” needed a genre with it to directly relate with the genre theory referenced in the SLOs.

Before delving into my incorporation of threshold concepts into the SLOs, I want to recognize how *I* viewed the praxis within SLOs differently after including threshold concepts. When I first began the work of going through the threshold concepts list to find the ones that worked best with the theories and practices within the SLOs, I felt that there was some disconnect between the objectives, concepts, and practices. I thought that some of the objectives did not invoke some of the selected theories. I brushed that off, though, as interpretive differences between WPAs. I also thought that the invention/W2L practices did not quite mesh with the theories. However, when I simply added in threshold concepts between the theories and the practices, I saw more explicit links between the two. The language of threshold concepts reframed how I viewed the intertwining of objectives, theories, and practices. I acknowledge, though, that perhaps in the undertaking of finding threshold concepts that spoke to the theories and practices, I saw the relationship between the two better. However, I do suspect that the language of threshold concepts does impact my viewing of SLO praxis, even just a little bit.

During the interviews and coding the interviews, one question I kept returning to was: “How do WPAs choose which threshold concepts to include and which ones to leave out?” Initially, I thought that if threshold concepts truly define the field, then *all* of them should be present in SLOs. If a WPA were to pick and choose, then there would be a privileging of threshold concepts, and that might make it seem as if some are not as important as others. However, a WPA always chooses certain theories over others because there are so many RCWS theories circulating that a WPA must narrow the field down for her department. I was surprised at the reticence I felt in selecting threshold concepts for SLOs, but I think this is a common struggle, especially for new WPAs.

Selecting the threshold concepts, though, did allow me to pause and review the goals of the department, a good exercise for any WPA.

While I will not go through my selection process for every threshold concept on the list, I will address my process in general. I began with the objectives and the key concepts, using the objectives to hem in the theories a bit, and I synthesized the objectives with the key concepts and theories. Then, I went through the list of threshold concepts, listing every threshold concept that I thought would work with the objectives and key concepts/theories. After listing the concepts, I went over them again in an effort to narrow down to the most essential threshold concepts. Too many threshold concepts, and I might overwhelm my audience. Too few, and I might provide more confusion and less of a supplemental resource for instructors. After creating this list, I checked for unnecessary redundancies and places to insert threshold concepts on revision (more on necessary redundancy and revision below). Finally, I inserted the threshold concepts into the SLOs, and I reviewed my threshold concepts selections in light of the theories and practices, making changes if needed.

I selected some threshold concepts based on their simplicity. The subconcepts echo the major concepts, and in some instances, the subconcepts supplemented the praxis better than the major concepts. For example, instead of choosing “Writing Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies,” I selected “Writing Is Linked to Identity.” While the two decidedly do not mean the same thing, I think that the latter option speaks to the situation better because it’s not as complex as the former. When a writing instructor considers how writing is linked to identity, I think that the instructor will consider how writing creates and enacts identities. Furthermore, because “Writing Is Linked to

Identity” seems easier to grasp, I wonder if students will uptake this threshold concept, too. Also, the length of “Writing Is Linked to Identity” makes it easier to insert into the SLOs.

A couple of threshold concepts make an appearance more than once in a given SLO set, and some threshold concepts remain the same between the two SLOs. The ideas within the threshold concepts responded to more than one theory and objective in the SLOs, and so the redundancy seemed necessary. Repeating a threshold concept in different contexts can help with instructor uptake. In the ENGL 1020 SLOs, “Writing Mediates Activity” and “Writing Provides a Representation of Ideologies and Identities” appear twice in the 1020 SLOs. Both of these threshold concepts are important vocalizations of the social nature of argumentation, the purpose of ENGL 1020. Some threshold concepts in the 1010 SLOs mirror their 1020 SLO counterparts. The Reading and Information Literacy threshold concepts are almost identical in both SLOs. I expanded on those threshold concepts a bit in ENGL 1020 by adding one additional threshold concept to each, but for the most part, they are the same. I felt that this redundancy helps remind instructors that the concepts and objectives in 1010 are built upon in 1020. Threshold concepts bridge theories and courses.

The 2017 SLOs do not have many explicit references to revision practices in the writing classroom, and so I have tried to add them into the new version. Several instructors identified with the threshold concept “All Writers Have More to Learn” and all of its subconcepts. While I understand that the WPAs probably did not want to put too much emphasis on style concerns, I do think that returning to the idea of practice as presented in “All Writers Have More to Learn” might help remind writing instructors that

revision and editing help writers express the content that the rest of the threshold concepts and SLOs encourage. This threshold concept may help instructors view revising and editing in a more positive rhetorical way, as some instructors still hold on to the desire to provide extensive feedback on grammar and style rather than content.

The addition of threshold concepts gives instructors another way to view and voice theory. Threshold concepts give general theory in an accessible language to instructors. By placing threshold concepts between theories and the recommended practices, a supplemental praxis bridge appears for instructors. Instructors might be able to see how the theory can be practiced, and so they might embrace and use the theory more explicitly. The supplemental bridge of threshold concepts may provide a language for instructors, and they may help instructors move toward praxis. With a new language for RCWS theory and a stronger praxis, then a more unified vision for writing instruction may emerge in the department.

I also recommend that WPAs speak with their instructors to find out what threshold concepts resonate the most for their instructors in order to increase buy-in. While several interviewed instructors remarked that they appreciated the entire list of threshold concepts (save for Threshold Concept 1.6: Writing Is Not Natural), there were three major threshold concepts that instructors were drawn to: Threshold Concepts 1.0: Writing Is a Social and Rhetorical Activity, 2.0: Writing Speaks to Situations through Recognizable Forms, and 3.0: Writing Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies. By speaking with instructors, WPAs can get a brief sense of the tensions within the department and work to ease them in SLOs and faculty professional development.

Threshold Concepts and Faculty Professional Development

SLOs alone cannot change how a department views writing instruction.

Professional development workshops bridge a WPA's vision for writing instruction with instructor pedagogical perspectives. Through professional development activities, WPAs can expand and clarify any vague, worrisome, or confusing areas within SLOs, and they can elucidate their vision for writing instruction in a venue that allows for instructors to weigh in. Professional development workshops also may grant some security for NTT faculty. Attending workshops boosts departmental visibility for NTT instructors (thus demonstrating their dedication to the job) and gives them the opportunity to learn departmental expectations (allowing them to perform "appropriately" within the department). These workshops also alleviate isolation that many instructors might feel, but especially more so for NTT faculty, as they do not always have full departmental voting rights. (Currently, MTSU's General Education English program is trying to extend voting rights to NTT faculty.) One example of successful professional development within the department is the heavy use of the literacy narrative. The assignment was not mentioned in the SLOs in 2013 (it finally appeared on the SLOs in 2017), but the assignment has been a praxis touchstone for instructors since the new SLOs appeared in 2013, and it's all because of professional development. In beginning-of-semester curriculum meetings and middle-of-the-semester workshops, instructors promoted literacy narratives, illustrating how the assignment uses genre, rhetoric, and reading practices all while encouraging students to consider their literacy, often in light of composition as a field of study. Several objectives are met in this one assignment, and

professional development workshops brought it to instructors. Professional development, then, helps instructors navigate praxis.

Professional Development: A Brief Review

Much of the literature on faculty professional development and teacher training argues that collegial models of development and training are the most successful (Colbert et al. 136). Mark Long, Jennifer Holberg, and Marcy Taylor (1996) provide one of the earliest forms of their self-titled method, the “collegial model,” in RCWS scholarship. They explain that a collegial model operates in direct contrast to the apprenticeship model, where instructors (TAs, mainly) are seen as “recipients of training” (68), rather than as colleagues and active participants within the department. Active participation boosts buy-in to professional development activities. Colbert et al. stress that effective professional development is meaningful for instructors, and the best way to achieve meaningful professional development is to provide teachers “control of their own learning” (139).

Besides creating a collegial environment for professional development, effective professional development must happen more frequently for uptake to occur, which connects with philosophies on student learning. Like students, faculty need to review new theories several times and in different ways in order to understand new theories of writing and/or instruction. Linda Darling-Hammond (2005) stress that “one-shot workshops” aren’t effective for instructors; rather, workshops that focus on “effective problem-based learning that is built into teachers’ ongoing work with their colleagues” has far better success (238). Collegial workshops move away from a top-down hierarchy, where administrators tell instructors what to teach. When instructors collaborate and learn from

each other, they do so within a community, one that encourages growth rather than success.

Much of the scholarship in RCWS, however, focuses on teacher preparation rather than professional development, most likely because writing instructors' training comes more from the teacher preparation they received as graduate students. Any training beyond the graduate level for writing instructors probably takes on a more individual form via reading scholarship and attending conferences. As collegiate instructors, one would assume that instructors are engaging in personal professional development in order to continue their work in a university, as the creation and dissemination of knowledge is an important aspect of university work. Moreover, some scholarship, such as Karen Hammerness et al. (2005), suggests that instructor success depends largely on the training received during teacher education programs rather than in professional development workshops later in their careers (360). However, evidence that professional development is not as effective beyond the novice years does not mean that professional development workshops should not be performed within a department. Rather, the focus of professional development workshops must shift to a more collegial and more practical nature.

While many scholars call for a *what/why* approach, Hammerness et al. provide a strong guide for structuring workshops to meet instructors' collegial and practical needs, arguing that "the design for effective learning opportunities needs to begin with a clear idea of what we want people to know and be able to do" (360). Their structure falls into three tiers: 1) Examine instructors' prior knowledge; 2) To "enact" what they know from prior knowledge, instructor need to understand both theory and practice (366); and 3)

Develop a metacognitive approach so that teachers can “learn to take control of their own learning by providing tools for analysis of events and situations that enable them to understand and handle the complexities of life in classrooms” (366). Like theories on transfer, Hammerness et al. recommend using prior knowledge as a site for instructors to learn new theories and practices of writing instruction. I take Hammerness et al.’s approach and blend it with the what/why strategies to suggest a what/why/how approach to professional development workshops, stressing a blend of prior knowledge, practice, and theory.

Instructor Recommendations for Professional Development

Furthermore, many of my interviewees requested that professional development workshops be more practical in nature. In fact, twelve out of fifteen (80%) of my respondents requested that workshops have a more practical approach instead of a theoretical one. Intriguingly, these numbers reflect job status, as the remaining three instructors who did not request practical professional development were the tenured instructors. Perhaps because of their more secure status, these instructors were not as concerned about *what* to do in the class in order to keep their jobs. I should note, though, that the tenured instructors have taught for many years, and so perhaps they feel that they are beyond needing practical guidelines for writing instruction.

The practical approaches requested by my respondents differ, with some instructors advocating for practical examples and others desiring a space to simply work with other instructors on aspects of course design. Tim wants professional development to focus more on practice instead of theory, especially at the beginning: “I think at the beginning it should probably be focused more on practical than theory [...]” Tim’s

request comes from his experience teaching for the first time as a new TA with no experience at MTSU. He had to rely on past teaching experiences to help him design the course since he wasn't sure what MTSU required in terms of practical assignments. Ian and Olivia believe that effective professional development serves as a space for instructors to meet and discuss course design. For Olivia, she desires a focus on intentionality in practice, where instructors consider reasons for their practice, blending theory and practice, but her focus is more on the practice. Sonya, a new GTA who has not yet taught, echoes Ian and Olivia's requests for community, asking that professional development workshops include time for instructors to ask each other about their courses. In most responses, then, instructors desire collegial environments where they learn about and discuss practice.

When considering professional development workshops on threshold concepts, faculty again turned to the practical, but they offered more concrete examples for how those workshops would look. For example, Gloria describes a collegial model for threshold concepts workshops, one where participants "took the threshold concepts and worked to come up with different classroom activities for them." For the more introverted instructors, Lauren's suggestion of bringing in people from the department who use the threshold concept in a certain way so they can show how the threshold concept appears in an assignment that they do echoes Gloria's recommendation. Like Lauren, John wants to see more professors present, but he wants to make sure that a variety of instructors present, and not just the usual instructors. Finally, Anthony believes that because any SLO will have the ideas presented in threshold concepts, he believes that threshold concepts work as "ready-made lesson plans for any core concept that you're department

will have the say,” and so professional development workshops on threshold concepts as lesson plans would work for him.

However, one interviewee, Richard, a tenured instructor, remarked that he did not like the term *professional development*, arguing, “Professional development activities assume that the faculty’s deficient in some way. I would prefer not to assume that. I would prefer to assume that faculty members are constantly growing and evolving on their own [...]” He sees, then, professional development more as indoctrination rather than growth, and he advocates for faculty to grow on their own, without departmental standards, such as “objectives or theories,” in order to reach students on a personal level. On one hand, Richard’s right. Professional development easily becomes a place for indoctrination, a place where well-meaning WPAs can try to mold their instructors to their theoretical frameworks. On the other hand, professional development can inspire personal and professional growth, and so I think it does have a place within a department, especially if the professional development is more collegial in nature. To be fair, Richard agrees, as he concedes that professional development gives him a “sense of community.”

Like Richard, Carol sees professional development workshops as solving the isolation problem in teaching at the university level, and like other respondents, Carol wants to see practical examples from her colleagues: “I like to see examples of what other people are doing, particularly if it’s been successful, and if they can talk about how it’s worked.” However, she remarks that one of the greatest issues with professional development is finding the time. Hannah specifically reflects on the time issue with professional development, arguing that effective organization and time are the biggest issues with the success of professional development workshops. She suggests that

practical professional development workshops might encourage more instructors to participate:

I think maybe if we could find a way to bridge it with praxis, like, here's a threshold concept, here's how a unit looks with it, here's how a threshold concept can work in an assignment, here's how a threshold concept can work in 2020/2030. [...] We all want something practical we can take away from it, but I think, again, if we could structure it that way, then that would probably create a buzz, which is what you want with anything, and hopefully, cumulatively lead to more butts in the seat.

She's right. When instructors know that they can get something meaningful out of a workshop, then they will most likely attend. Of course, there are perhaps easier solutions, as Kayla suggests. For Kayla, end-of-semester written reflections with threshold concepts as their guides solve the time issue. However, her suggestion lacks one of the most important aspects of professional development: collegiality.

While professional learning communities would most likely be the best option, the time issue is certainly important to remember, as many writing instructors are NTT faculty, and so their time is severely limited due to the high number of courses and number of students in a semester. They are overworked, and so attending a professional development workshop, especially one that offers very little tangible, practical, advice, likely will not happen. Instead, I advocate for workshops that have a what/why/how approach, so that instructors can blend both practical and theoretical approaches together.

What/Why/How and Threshold Concepts

My recommendation for a what/why/how approach to professional development is hardly new. The earliest reference to such a practice that I could find was Richard Gebhardt in his article "Balancing Theory with Practice in the Training of Writing Teachers" (1977). He argues that writing instructors need to know more than the practical

aspects in the classroom; they need to know the theories that inform those practices: “They need to know the ‘what’ of composition teaching; but they also need to know the ‘how’ and the ‘why’” (138). Ultimately, he calls for a Teachers of Writing course, in which graduate students practice the writing their students will encounter and to write about teaching (I expand on his ideas in the literature review chapter). Latterell (1996) continues the idea, recommending that graduate courses in composition for TAs need to remember to include the practical, and to combine it with the theoretical:

It would be a serious mistake to completely discontinue providing first-year GTAs with concrete and practical advice for teaching writing. What we need, then, is to find ways to balance these ‘whats’ with ‘whys’: We need to contextualize that advice by providing GTAs with the theoretical frameworks shaping them. (20)

Finally, Chris Anson, David Jolliffe, and Nancy Shapiro advocate for professional development workshops in which instructors work through pedagogical cases together, considering *how* they would work through these issues within the classroom. They feel that these kinds of workshops increase praxis and faculty attendance: “We see the use of cases as a starting point for programs that want sustained participation in faculty development. Cases offer a kind of model for reflective practice that formalizes experience without taking it out of the world of human action” (35). Connecting the the practical and theoretical through a what/why/how approach allows for instructors to practice praxis; they can consciously reflect with other instructors how theory and practice inform each other.

I see this method as working particularly well for instructors who struggle with the theory/practice tension and whose postliminality as writers and writing teachers pushes them to a space of liminality when preparing their courses for their students. Since

so many instructors requested practical approaches in a professional development workshop, a focus on the *what* within the classroom makes sense. The *why* and *how* elements motivate instructors to think about their courses, the formal and informal assignments, feedback, and student engagement. In a workshop setting, instructors can work with each other through these issues, perhaps mitigating any power struggles they might feel when working with a WPA. By working together, instructors can collegially support each other toward praxis and postliminality.

In the era of SLOs and standards, instructors may feel as if they must teach a certain way, thus causing them to first want to know *what* they need to do in the classroom. The *why* and *how* questions may come later, after the instructor has had time to implement the new, perhaps departmentally-required, lesson and/or assignment. A sense of security may occur when instructors see practical assignments modeled in a workshop, for they could assume that these practices are recommended by the department. They may feel like they are performing appropriately within the department. But there's more to these workshops besides offering practical assignments to ease performance anxiety. In these workshops, instructors have the opportunity to engage with threshold concept theory with other instructors, discussing ways to include the theory and learning that multiple approaches to the same course are good. Unity can occur in different ways, and threshold concepts unite the theories and practices different instructors bring to their classes.

When creating these workshops, WPAs should consider their SLOs and the threshold concepts present within them. When they actively link their SLOs with threshold concepts, WPAs begin the invention for professional development workshops.

WPAs should also reflect on popular assignments within the department so as to strike an harmonious chord with their faculty. The general structure for the workshop would go as follows:

- Frame the workshop around a practical aspect (an assignment, a form of feedback, an assessment tool, etc.).
- Open the workshop by having instructors reflect on the particular practical aspect, so that instructors can tap into their prior knowledge to increase uptake and transfer.
- Provide samples of the practical element for instructors, giving them a couple of options to work with.
- Incorporate corresponding threshold concept(s), providing excerpts from *Naming What We Know* so instructors can read the theory behind the concept(s).
- Have instructors select (or even create) a sample that connects with their purposes for the class and the assignment, connecting their *why* with threshold concepts, and thus establishing *how* they will accomplish the practice (*what*) with the theory (*why*), while also establishing a language for writing instruction.



Figure 6. *Workshop Flowchart*

Centering the workshop on a certain practical aspect gives instructors the practical advice they desire while preventing a potentially overwhelming theoretical workshop. WPAs should also market the workshop around the practical element that frames and opens the workshop boosts instructor buy-in. When I first hosted threshold concepts workshops on

individual threshold concepts, few instructors attended. When I shifted the workshops to a specific aspect, attendance increased at least twofold. Marketing is key.

I provide a more detailed sample below. In this sample, I focus on reading instruction in ENGL 1010 by using “Genres Are Enacted by Writers and Readers.” I respond to an objective (Reading), two key concepts/theories (reading strategies and genre analysis), and a recommended invention/W2L exercise (“Guided activities over textual features and reader reactions”). I also allude to a major writing project (the literacy narrative) to show instructors how an invention exercise scaffolds a major writing assignment. I begin with a freewrite on what instructors do in the classroom as it relates with the workshop topic. I then give them a practical assignment they can do in the classroom with their students. If there is time, instructors participate in the assignment so they can see how it works and begin to consider how they can tweak it for their courses and teaching styles. Next, we address the *why* by discussing the threshold concept. I include quotes from *Naming What We Know* to help instructors understand the theory behind the concept. The workshop concludes with instructors applying the theory to the practice within their own classrooms, brainstorming with each other to boost collegiality.

1. Begin with prior knowledge freewrite and connect it to a major writing assignment to help with scaffolding.
 - a. “How have you taught a model text to your students in the past?” (Or “What do you do when you teach a model text to your students?” to keep with the *what* theme.)
 - b. “What do you wish your students knew about reading and analyzing a genre?”
2. Unveil the practice: a guided reading on Sherman Alexie’s “Superman and Me,” a good model text for the literacy narrative assignment. (Here, I selected the major assignment that it feeds into, the invention exercise, and I’m hinting at threshold concepts and RCWS theory in order to give instructors the practical element they

desire while feeding it into a theory with threshold concepts as the bridging language.)

3. Let instructors experience the practice:
 - a. For this assignment, they'll read for 5-10 minutes.
 - b. Then, put them into groups, divide up the text, and have them do a reverse outline, which I will demonstrate with the first paragraph.
 - c. In their groups, they will determine the following:
 - i. What happens in the paragraph?
 - ii. What is the purpose of the paragraph?
 - d. For the discussion portion of the practical assignment, instructors will put their sections of the reverse outline on the whiteboard. The workshop facilitator then asks the instructors to connect the paragraphs: How does paragraph one work with paragraph two? Why do you think Alexie put these paragraphs together?
 - e. Once we've gone through all of the paragraphs, ask instructors what they liked/disliked. Have them consider the structure: what would they move around? What would they cut? What did they want expanded and why? (In the classroom, it might be wise to let students reflect on these ideas via a freewrite and then discuss, letting them know before the discussion that different opinions are fine; we all write differently, and that's a good thing.)
 - f. For students, have them think about their own literacy narrative, and see if they can plug in some of their ideas to the general organization of Alexie's.
4. Transition to the theory behind the assignment by using "Genres Are Enacted by Writers and Readers." The goal of the conversation is for instructors to see how to teach genre analysis in light of rhetorical genre studies and reading strategies (thus combining two SLOs: Composing Processes and Reading), with threshold concepts as the bridging language between practice and theory.
 - a. Have instructors discuss what they think the threshold concept means and how it plays out in writing situations, taking notes on the board.
 - b. Provide them with some quotes/summaries from Bill Hart-Davidson's explanation of "Genres Are Enacted by Writers and Readers" in *Naming What We Know*:
 - i. "The textual structures are akin to the fossil record left behind, evidence that writers have employed familiar discursive moves in accordance with reader expectations, institutional norms, market forces, and other social influences" (39).
 - ii. He employs Carolyn Miller's genre theory (from her article "Genres as Social Action [1984]), which he summarizes as "genres are habitual responses to recurring socially bounded situation....Genres are constructions of groups, over time, usually with the implicit or explicit sanction of organizational or institutional power" (39-40).

- iii. One implication of this theory is that one text is not *the* genre, but one instance of a genre (40). Another implication is that genres result from social interactions between writers and readers (40).
- 5. Ask instructors to connect the theory with the reading practice presented in the first half of the assignment. How can they elucidate the social aspect of genres for their students? How can they use social theory to help students read more model texts and apply it to their own writing? How can they help students see the “stable for now” conventions of genre and the places where the writer can shift the genre to meet her particular rhetorical situation? How does this work in your classroom?
 - a. Allow instructors time to brainstorm how the practice (or another practice, if they’d like to use it differently) works in their classroom. Encourage group brainstorming so that instructors can begin to form collegial relationships and have the opportunity to bounce ideas off each other, a practice that should be occurring outside of workshops.
- 6. Conclude the workshop.

Depending on time, the workshop facilitator can either describe the guided reading assignment or allow instructors to participate in the assignment. Instructors might find that active participation in the assignment speaks to their need for practical guidance better than just an overview of the assignment. When discussing threshold concepts, WPAs need to supplement the threshold concepts with RCWS theory, as not all of the concept descriptions include direct mentions of theories. In this case, Hart-Davidson’s description did cite theory (prominent and influential theory at that), and so I did not have to draw too heavily on my background to create the theoretical portion (the *why*) of the workshop. Should a WPA need to cite RCWS theory, Hart-Davidson’s blurb serves as a nice example for a simple-yet-effective way to include theory.

Concluding the workshops with instructors considering theory in light of the practice (or a new practice the instructor came up with during the workshop) causes instructors to consciously reflect on the interplay between theory and practice.

Furthermore, when instructors work with each other on praxis, they see that reaching praxis is difficult; it’s not easy, and almost everyone struggles with it. Praxis takes time.

The collegial environment may help instructors learn to talk with each other about theory and practice, and the language of threshold concepts may unify them together more than the generalized, overarching, and complex theories presented in the SLOs. WPAs should offer instructors time to reflect on theory and practice, and they should make themselves available during and after the workshop to answer any praxis-related questions that may appear. When WPAs take into account the practical and theoretical needs of their instructors, they provide workshops that navigate pedagogical tensions. Instructors can unite their prior knowledge with the new knowledge among their colleagues, teasing out pedagogical tensions together.

WPAs should also consider when and where they offer these workshops since GTAs and NTTs have limited time due to packed schedules. GTAs must balance courses, teaching, planning, holding office hours, providing feedback, and, occasionally, writing center hours. NTTs teach a 5/5 course load, hold office hours, plan for their courses, and respond to students (formally, informally, and answering online questions). Due to these constraints, GTAs and NTTs, the populations who would most likely desire to attend the workshops, require multiple opportunities to attend professional development workshops. To schedule workshops appropriately, WPAs should review GTA and NTT schedules, looking for open times in the schedule. WPAs should also host workshops soon at least two different days, and maybe even over the span of a couple of weeks, to hit on days and times that might work better for instructors. WPAs should also vary the workshops dates throughout the semester, as some instructors have longer singular days on campus than other instructors. Finally, WPAs could consider digital offerings via university course management software, a departmental website, or via email. They might also use digital

badge systems to encourage instructors to participate in the workshops. However, online professional development might not have the same amount of collegiality found when working face-to-face. Either way, instructors should consider at least posting the workshop online so that all instructors may have access to the workshops.

Conclusion

Threshold concepts serve as an identification point between WPAs and their writing faculty. The language of threshold concepts resonates with instructors better than the theoretical terms, perhaps because threshold concepts express theory without the jargon, and they are written in a way that reveals current truths about writing rather than speculations about writing's nature. Instructors also saw threshold concepts as a way to reflect on and revise their courses, suggesting that threshold concepts encourage praxis on their own. Only about half of my interviewed instructors attended the workshops on threshold concepts. The other half encountered and reflected on a list of Adler-Kassner and Wardle's threshold concepts; they did not have the accompanying descriptions. Even these instructors expressed the praxis-potential of threshold concepts.

WPAs should use threshold concepts as a bridge between what instructors know about writing instruction (theories and practices) and RCWS theory and best practices. WPAs should also make the bridging explicit by stating theories and recommended practices in departmental SLOs. When conducting workshops, WPAs should encourage praxis by having instructors reflect on *what/why/how*, with threshold concepts serving as the introduction to RCWS theory. By promoting the language of threshold concepts alongside departmental theories and assignments, WPAs may help move their writing program to a more shared vision of writing instruction.

While my recommendations help encourage threshold concept use to mitigate the tension between pedagogical theories and practices, they do not necessarily respond to the other tension that appeared in my analysis: labor concerns. Likely, the chief way more explicit and thorough SLOs and *what/why/how* professional development workshops mitigate labor concerns is by boosting instructor confidence in RCWS theory and best practices. Performance anxiety seems to be a large side effect of labor imbalance in the university. When instructors can engage in RCWS theory with their WPAs, colleagues, and students, then they may feel more secure in their performance as instructors. Their performance might also improve since they are using RCWS theories to inform their courses all while considering praxis. Even though some good things may occur from these recommendations, the labor issue is not solved.

However, easing performance anxiety and increasing instructor knowledge of RCWS may begin to solve labor disparity within the university. Since most of a university's contingent faculty teach FYC courses, a refocus on RCWS as a field might help WPAs to convince upper-level administration that FYC is an important field of study and not merely a service to the university. In fact, some university labor scholars advocate for WPAs to increase professionalization efforts in order to definitively establish rhetoric, composition, and writing studies (RCWS) theory within the department and throughout the university, thus increasing the course's value among instructors and stakeholders. Professionalization and field definition go hand in hand. Joseph Harris calls for WPAs to support their instructors in keeping up with field best practices to help establish the field. He also calls for WPAs to create better working conditions for their

instructors, but that often depends on higher administration, an unfortunate side effect of the collegiate business model.

I do believe that WPAs can begin the work for improving labor concerns by supporting their faculty through better departmental resources, particularly via SLOs and professional development workshops. These resources, though, must take into account the diverse backgrounds writing instructors have, as many FYC instructors have specializations in literature from many different programs across the country. Furthermore, these instructors only have a basic understanding of RCWS theory because they encountered it so infrequently in their graduate careers and even less frequently in their professional careers. To help instructors begin to understand best practices and theories in RCWS, WPAs need to meet them in the middle by providing practical examples, framing theories in light of process, and using threshold concepts as a language bridge between what instructors know about writing pedagogy and what WPAs know.

WORKS CITED

- Abraham, Matthew. "Rhetoric and Composition's Conceptual Indeterminacy as Political-Economic Work." *CCC*, vol. 68, no. 1, 2016, pp. 68-96.
- Adler-Kassner, Linda, and Elizabeth Wardle. "Naming What We Know: The Project of This Book." Adler-Kassner and Wardle, pp. 1-11.
- Adler-Kassner, Linda, and Elizabeth Wardle, editors. *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*. Utah State UP, 2015.
- Adler-Kassner, Linda, and Heidi Estrem. "Reading Practices in the Writing Classroom." *WPA*, vol. 31, no. 1-2, 2007, pp. 35-47.
- Adler-Kassner, Linda, and John Majewski. "Extending the Invitation: Threshold Concepts, Professional Development, and Outreach." Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, pp. 186-202.
- Adler-Kassner, Linda, John Majewski, and Damian Koshnick. "The Value of Troublesome Knowledge: Transfer and Threshold Concepts in Writing and History." *Composition Forum*, vol. 26, 2012, compositionforum.com/issue/26/troublesome-knowledge-threshold.php. Accessed 20 Mar. 2018.
- Anson, Chris M., David A. Jolliffe, and Nancy Shapiro. "Stories to Teach By: Using Narrative Cases in TA and Faculty Development." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 19, no. 1-2, 1995, pp. 24-37.
- Artze-Vega, Isis, et al. "Privileging Pedagogy: Composition, Rhetoric, and Faculty Development." *CCC*, vol. 65, no. 1, 2013, pp. 162-84.
- Atherton, James, Peter Hadfield, and Renee Meyers. "Threshold Concepts in the Wild." *Doceo*, www.doceo.org.uk/tools/Threshold_Concepts_Wild_expanded_70.pdf. Accessed 21 Mar 2018.
- Baillie, Caroline, John Bowden, and Jan Meyer. "Threshold Capabilities: Threshold Concepts and Knowledge Capability Linked through Variation Theory." *Higher Education*, vol. 65, no. 2, 2013, pp. 227-46. *Academic OneFile*, doi:10.1007/s10734-012-9540-5. Accessed 27 June 2017.
- Basgier, Christopher. "Engaging the Skeptics: Threshold Concepts, Metadisciplinary Writing, and the Aspirations of General Education." *The WAC Journal*, vol. 27, 2016, pp. 17-35.
- Berg, Terje, Morden Erichsen, and Leif M. Hokstad. "Stuck at the Threshold: Which Strategies Do Students Choose When Facing Liminality within Certain Disciplines at a Business School?" Land, Meyer, and Flanagan, pp. 107-18.
- Bergmann, Linda. "Academic Discourse and Academic Service: Composition vs. WAC in the University." *CEA Critic*, vol. 58, no. 3, 1996, pp. 50-59.
- Biggs, John B, and Catherine Tang. *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does*. McGraw-Hill, 2011.
- Birman, Beatrice, et al. "Designing Professional Development That Works." *Educational Leadership*, vol. 57, no. 8, 2000, pp. 28-33.
- Blaauw-Hara, Mark. "Transfer Theory, Threshold Concepts, and First-Year Composition: Connecting Writing Courses to the Rest of the College." *Teaching English in the Two Year College*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2014, pp. 354-65.

- Block, James H., et al. *Building Effective Mastery Learning Schools*. Longman, 1989.
- Borko, Hilda. "Professional Development and Teacher Learning: Mapping the Terrain." *Educational Researcher*, vol. 33, no. 8, 2004, pp. 3-15.
- Boschee, Floyd, and Mark A. Baron. *Outcome-Based Education: Developing Programs through Strategic Planning*. Technomic, 1993.
- Boughner, Robert L. Salkind. "Volunteer Bias." *Encyclopedia of Research Design*, edited by Robert L. Salkind. Sage P, 2010. *SAGE Research Methods*, doi: 10.4135/9781412961288. Accessed 13 Dec. 2017.
- Boyle, Bill, David While, and Trudy Boyle. "A Longitudinal Study of Teacher Change: What Makes Professional Development Effective?" *Curriculum Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2004, pp. 45-68.
- "Buy or Upgrade NVivo." *NVivo*, QSR International, www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/products. Accessed 12 Apr. 2018.
- Carter, Michael. "Ways of Knowing, Doing, and Writing in the Disciplines." *CCC* vol. 58, no. 3, 2007, pp. 385-418. Reprinted in *Writing across the Curriculum: A Critical Sourcebook*, edited by Terry Myers Zawacki and Paul M. Rogers. Bedford, 2012, pp. 212-38.
- Christians, Clifford G. "Ethics and Politics in Qualitative Research." *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln, 4th ed., Sage P, 2011, pp. 61-80.
- Clark, Irene L., and Andrea Hernandez. "Genre Awareness, Academic Argument, and Transferability." *The WAC Journal*, vol. 22, 2011, pp. 65-78.
- Colbert, Joel A., et al. "An Investigation of the Impacts of Teacher-Driven Professional Development on Pedagogy and Student Learning." *Teacher Education Quarterly* vol. 35, no. 2, 2008, pp. 135-154.
- Couper, Mick P. *Designing Effective Web Surveys*. Cambridge UP, 2008.
- Cousin, Glynis. "An Introduction to Threshold Concepts." *Planet*, vol. 17, 2006, pp. 4-5.
- - -. "Threshold Concepts, Troublesome Knowledge and Emotional Capital: An Exploration into Learning about Others." Meyer and Land, pp. 134-47.
- Creswell, John W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. 3rd ed., Sage P, 2007.
- Crowley, Sharon. *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays*. U of Pittsburgh P, 1998.
- Davies, Peter. "Threshold Concepts: How Can We Recognise Them?" *Overcoming Barriers to Student Understanding: Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge*. Meyer and Land, pp. 70-84.
- Darling-Hammond, Linda. "Teaching as a Profession: Lessons in Teacher Preparation and Professional Development." *Phi Delta Kappan*, vol. 87, no. 3, 2005, pp. 237-240.
- Denzin, Norman K., and Yvonne S. Lincoln. "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research." *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Denzin and Lincoln, 4th ed., Sage P, 2011, pp. 1-19.

- Desmond, Cheryl Taylor. *Shaping the Culture of Schooling: The Rise of Outcome-Based Education*. State U of New York P, 1996.
- Dhand, Amar. "Using Learning Theory to Understand Access in Ethnographic Research." *Methodological Developments in Ethnography*, edited by Geoffrey Walford, JAI P, 2007, pp. 1-25.
- Doe, Sue, et al. "Discourse of the Firetenders: Considering Contingent Faculty through the Lens of Activity Theory." *College English*, vol. 73, no. 4, 2011, pp. 428-49.
- Ebert-May, Diane, et al. "What We Say Is Not What We Do: Effective Evaluation of Faculty Professional Development Programs." *BioScience*, vol. 61, no. 7, 2011, pp. 550-558.
- "ENGL 1010 and ENGL 1020 Learning Objectives." *General Education English Teaching Resources*, Middle Tennessee State U, 13 Sept. 2017. www.mtsu.edu/english-teaching-resources/ENGL1010_1020_Objectives.php. Accessed 21 Mar. 2018.
- Entwistle, Noel. "Threshold Concepts and Transformative Ways of Thinking within Research into Higher Education." *Threshold Concepts within the Disciplines*, edited by Ray Land, Jan H. F. Meyer, and Jan Smith, Sense P, 2008, pp. 21-35.
- Estrem, Heidi. "Threshold Concepts and Student Learning Outcomes." Adler-Kassner and Wardle, pp. 89-104.
- Fielding, Nigel G., and Raymond M. Lee. "New Patterns in the Adoption and Use of Qualitative Software." *Field Methods*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2002, pp. 197-216.
- Fish, Stanley. *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies*. Duke UP, 1989.
- Fulkerson, Richard. "Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century." *CCC*, vol. 56, no. 4, 2005, pp. 654-87.
- Garet, Michael S., et al. "What Makes Professional Development Effective? Results From a National Sample of Teachers." *American Educational Research Journal*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2001, pp. 915-945.
- Gebhardt, Richard C. "Balancing Theory with Practice in the Training of Writing Teachers." *CCC*, vol. 28, 1977, pp. 134-40.
- Getzel, Elizabeth Evans, Lori Briel, and Shannon McManus. "Strategies for Implementing Professional Development Activities on College Campuses: Findings from the OPE-Funded Project Sites (1992-2002)." *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2003, pp. 59-78.
- Glaser, Barney G., and Anselm L. Strauss. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Aldine, 1967.
- Hammerness, Karen, et al. "How Teachers Learn and Develop." *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World: What Teachers Should Learn and Be Able to Do*, edited by Linda Darling-Hammond and John Bransford, Jossey-Bass, 2005, pp. 358-389.
- Harden, Ronald. "Outcome-Based Education: The Future Is Today." *Medical Teacher*, vol. 29, 2007, pp. 625-29. *Teacher Reference Center*, doi:10.3109/0142159X.2010.500703. Accessed 2 Mar. 2017.
- Harris, Joseph. "Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss: Class Consciousness in Composition." *CCC*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2000, pp. 43-68.

- hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Routledge, 1994.
- Jupp, Victor. *The SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods*. Sage P, 2006. *SAGE Research Methods*, doi: 10.4135/9780857020116. Accessed 13 Dec. 2017.
- Land, Ray, Jan H. F. Meyer, and Michael T. Flanagan. Preface. Land, Meyer, and Flanagan, pp. xi-xxxiv.
- Langbein, Laura. "Management by Results: Student Evaluation of Faculty and the Mismeasurement of Performance." *Economics of Education Review*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2006, pp. 417-28. *Elsevier*, doi:10.1016/j.econedurev.2006.12.033. Accessed 21 Mar. 2018.
- Larson, Ann. "Composition's Dead." Welch and Scott, pp. 163-76.
- Latterell, Catherine G. "Training the Workforce: An Overview of GTA Education Curricula." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1996, pp. 7-23.
- Leech, Nancy, and Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie. "Beyond Constant Comparison Qualitative Data Analysis: Using NVivo." *School Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2011, pp. 70-84. *Education Source*, 10.1037/a0022711. 17 Dec. 2017.
- Leverenz, Carrie Shively, and Amy Goodburn. "Professionalizing TA Training: Commitment to Teaching or Rhetorical Response to Market Crisis?" *WPA*, vol. 22, no. 1-2, 1998, pp. 9-32.
- Lindemann, Erica. "Freshman Composition: No Place for Literature." *College English*, vol. 55, no. 3, 1993, pp. 311-16.
- Long, Mark C., Jennifer H. Holberg, and Marcy M. Taylor. "Beyond Apprenticeship: Graduate Students, Professional Development Programs and the Future(s) of English Studies." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 20, no. 1-2, 1996, pp. 66-78.
- Maykut, Pamela, and Richard Morehouse. *Beginning Qualitative Research: A Philosophical and Practical Guide*. Falmer P, 1994.
- Meyer, Jan. H. F. "Variation in Student Learning as a Threshold Concept." *Journal of Faculty Development*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2012, pp. 8-12.
- Meyer, Jan H. F., and Ray Land, editors. *Overcoming Barriers to Student Understanding: Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge*. Routledge, 2006. Print.
- - -. "Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge." *Overcoming Barriers to Student Understanding: Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge*. Meyer and Land, pp. 19-32.
- - -. *Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising within the Disciplines*. Occasional Report 4. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 2003. *ETL Project*, www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/docs/ETLreport4.pdf. Accessed 25 July 2017.
- Meyer, Jan H. F., Ray Land, and Caroline Baillie. Preface. *Threshold Concepts and Transformational Learning*, Sense P, 2010 pp. 3-19.
- Mohamed, Ahmad Tharmini F. Syed, Ray Land, and Julie Rattray. "Ambivalence, Hybridity and Liminality." Land, Meyer, and Flanagan, pp. 77-91.
- Miles, Matthew B., and A. Michael Huberman. *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Sage P, 1994.

- Moore, Jessie. "Designing for Transfer: A Threshold Concept." *The Journal of Faculty Development*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2012, pp. 19-24.
- . "Mapping the Questions: The State of Writing-Related Transfer Research." *Composition Forum*, vol. 26, <http://compositionforum.com/issue/26/map-questions-transfer-research.php>. Accessed 21 Mar. 2017.
- Murphy, Michael. "New Faculty for a New University: Toward a Full-Time Teaching-Intensive Faculty Track in Composition." *CCC*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2000, pp. 14-42.
- Murthy, Dhiraj. "Digital Ethnography: An Examination of the Use of New Technologies for Social Research." *Sociology*, vol. 42, no. 5, 2008, pp. 837-55. *Academic OneFile*, doi:10.1177/0038038508095465. Accessed 17 Dec. 2017.
- Nolan, Michael. "The Emergence of Global Stability in Local Interaction in a Consulting Practice." *Experiencing Emergence in Organizations*, edited by Ralph Stacey, Routledge, 2005, pp. 78-107.
- Nowacek, Rebecca S. *Agents of Integration: Understanding Transfer as a Rhetorical Act*. Southern Illinois UP, 2011.
- Odell, Lee. Introduction. *Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Writing: Rethinking the Discipline*. Southern Illinois UP, 1993, pp. 1-8.
- Patton, Michael Quinn. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. 4th edition. Sage P, 2015.
- Perry, Kristen H. "'I Want the World to Know': The Ethics of Anonymity in Ethnographic Literacy Research." *Methodological Developments in Ethnography*, edited by Geoffrey Walford, JAI P, 2007, pp. 137-54.
- Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*. Directed by Gore Verbinski, performances by Johnny Depp, Geoffrey Rush, Orlando Bloom, and Keira Knightley, Walt Disney Studios, 2003.
- "Plans and Pricing." *SurveyMonkey*, www.surveymonkey.com/pricing/?ut_source=header. Accessed 12 Apr. 2018.
- Pytlik, Betty P. "How Graduate Students Were Prepared to Teach Writing—1850-1970." *Preparing College Teachers of Writing: Histories, Theories, Programs, Practices*, edited by Betty P. Pytlik and Sarah Liggett, Oxford UP, 2002, pp. 3-16.
- Rademaker, Linnea L., Elizabeth J. Grace, and Stephen K. Curda. "Using Computer-assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) to Re-examine Traditionally Analyzed Data: Expanding Our Understanding of the Data and of Ourselves as Scholars." *The Qualitative Report*, vol. 17, no. 22, 2012, pp. 1-11.
- Rattray, Julie. "Affective Dimensions of Liminality." Land, Ray, and Flanagan, pp. 67-76.
- Reevy, Gretchen M, and Grace Deason. "Predictors of Depression, Stress, and Anxiety among Non-Tenure Track Faculty." *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 5, 2014, doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00701. Accessed 21 Mar. 2018.
- Reiff, Mary Jo, and Anis Bawarshi. "Tracing Discursive Resources: How Students Use Prior Genre Knowledge to Negotiate New Writing Contexts in First-Year Composition." *Written Communication*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2011, pp. 312-337.

- Roemer, Marjorie, Lucille M. Schultz, and Russell K. Durst. "Reframing the Great Debate on First-Year Writing." *CCC*, vol. 50, no. 3, 1999, pp. 377-92.
- Rounsaville, Angela. "Selecting Genres for Transfer: The Role of Uptake in Students' Antecedent Genre Knowledge." *Composition Forum*, vol. 26, 2012, <http://compositionforum.com/issue/26/selecting-genres-uptake.php>. Accessed 28 July 2017.
- Rounsaville, Angela, Rachel Goldberg, and Anis Bawarshi. "From Incomes to Outcomes: FYW's Students' Prior Genre Knowledge, Meta-Cognition, and the Question of Transfer." *WPA*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2008, pp. 97-112.
- Rowbottom, Darrell Patrick. "Demystifying Threshold Concepts." *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2007, pp. 263-270.
- Ryan, Mary E. "Making Visible the Coding Process: Using Qualitative Software in a Post-Structural Study." *Issues in Educational Research*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2009, pp. 142-59.
- Saroyan, Alenoush, and Cheryl Amundsen. Introduction. *Rethinking Teaching in Higher Education: From a Course Design Workshop to a Framework for Faculty Development*, edited by Alenoush and Amundsen, Stylus, 2004.
- Schell, Eileen. "Austerity, Contingency, and Administrative Bloat: Writing Programs and Universities in an Age of Feast and Famine." Welch and Scott, pp. 177-90.
- Scott, Tony, and Nancy Welch. Introduction. Welch and Scott, pp. 3-17.
- Spady, William G., and Kit J. Marshall. "Beyond Traditional Outcome-Based Education." *Educational Leadership*, vol. 49, no. 2, 1991, pp. 67-72.
- Trimbur, John. "Writing Instruction and the Politics of Professionalization." *Composition in the Twenty-First Century: Crisis and Change*, edited by Lynn Z. Bloom, Donald A. Daiker, and Edward M. White, Southern Illinois UP, pp. 133-45.
- Tschannen-Moran, Megan, and Peggy McMaster. "Sources of Self-Efficacy: Four Professional Development Formats and Their Relationship to Self-Efficacy and Implementation of a New Teaching Strategy." *The Elementary School Journal*, vol. 110, no. 2, 2009, pp. 228-45. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/605771. Accessed 30 Nov. 2017.
- Van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage*. Translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee, U of Chicago P, 1960.
- Van Maanen, John. "An End to Innocence: The Ethnography of Ethnography." *Representation in Ethnography*, by Van Maanen, Sage P, 1995, pp. 1-35.
- Waltermaurer, Eve. "Convenience Sample." *Encyclopedia of Epidemiology*, edited by Sarah Boslaugh, 2 vols, SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008. *SAGE Research Methods*, doi: 10.4135/9781412953948. Accessed 13 Dec. 2017.
- Wardle, Elizabeth. "'Mutt Genres' and the Goal of FYC: Can We Help Students Write the Genres of the University?" *CCC*, vol. 60, no. 4, 2009, pp. 765-89.
- Welch, Nancy, and Tony Scott, editors. *Composition in the Age of Austerity*. Utah State UP, 2016.
- "What Is NVivo?" *NVivo*, QSR International, www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/what-is-nvivo. Accessed 17 Dec. 2017.

- White, Edward. "The Origins of the Outcomes Statement." *The Outcomes Book: Debate and Consensus after the WPA Outcomes Statement*, edited by Susanmarie Harrington et al., Utah State UP, 2005, pp. 3-7.
- Wilhoit, Stephen. "Recent Trends in TA Instruction: A Bibliographic Essay." *Preparing College Teachers of Writing: Histories, Theories, Programs, Practices*, edited by Betty P. Pytlik and Sarah Liggett, Oxford UP, 2002, pp. 17-27.
- Wilson, Suzanne M., and Jennifer Berne. "Teacher Learning and the Acquisition of Professional Knowledge: An Examination of Research on Contemporary Professional Development." *Review in Research on Education*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1999, pp. 173-209.
- "WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (3.0), Approved July 17, 2014." *Council of Writing Program Administrators*, wpcouncil.org/positions/outcomes.html. Accessed 21 Mar. 2018.
- Yancey, Kathleen Blake. "Introduction: Coming to Terms: Composition/Rhetoric, Threshold Concepts, and a Disciplinary Core." Adler-Kassner and Wardle, pp. xvii-xxxi.
- - -. "Standards, Outcomes, and All That Jazz." *The Outcomes Book: Debate and Consensus after the WPA Outcomes Statement*, edited by Susanmarie Harrington et al., Utah State UP, 2005, pp. 18-23.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been teaching at the university level?
2. How long have you been teaching at MTSU?
3. Which Lower Division English courses have you taught at MTSU? Circle one or more of the following:
 - a. ENGL 1009
 - b. ENGL 1010
 - c. ENGL 1010K
 - d. ENGL 1010KE
 - e. ENGL 1020
 - f. ENGL 2020
 - g. ENGL 2030
 - h. Other _____
 - i. None of the above
4. Have you taught any English courses (first-year composition and/or literature) at another institution? If so, please list them below.
5. What kind of teacher preparation did you have before teaching your first class? Circle one or more of the following:
 - a. Seminar in Teaching Composition
 - b. Seminar in Teaching Literature
 - c. GTA Orientation
 - d. Lower Division Curriculum Meeting
 - e. New Hire Orientation
 - f. Other _____
 - g. None of the above
6. What theory (or theories) of writing currently inform your teaching of writing?
7. What do you feel confident about in your teaching of writing?
8. What areas of writing instruction do you feel like you need a refresher or more support in?

APPENDIX B
SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

1. What theory (or theories) of writing currently inform your teaching of writing?
2. What do you feel confident about in your teaching of writing?
3. What areas of writing instruction do you feel like you need a refresher or more support in?
4. What did you know about threshold concepts of writing studies before the professional development workshop(s)?
5. How do you approach the teaching of writing in your courses?
6. How do threshold concepts of writing studies fit in with your approach to the instruction of writing?
7. How do threshold concepts of writing studies challenge your approach to the instruction of writing?
8. What threshold concept(s) do you think would be most beneficial for students to understand? Why?
9. How would you present threshold concepts to your students, if at all? Why would you present them that way?
10. How would you use threshold concepts of writing studies in your classroom now that you have been introduced to them?
11. Would you use threshold concepts of writing studies to create major assignments for your students?
12. How does what you know about threshold concepts support you in meeting course objectives?
13. How do threshold concepts impact your scaffolding of learning objectives in your course?
14. How do threshold concepts influence your course design, if at all?
15. How can you envision threshold concepts informing your teaching of writing not just in first-year writing courses but also in literature courses?
16. What professional development opportunities would help instructors learn how to incorporate threshold concepts into their classrooms?
17. What ideas do you think should be added to existing threshold concepts of writing studies?

Sample Interview Response

Morgan: So, what theory or theories of writing currently inform your teaching of writing?
#00:00:28.46#

Anthony: Ummm...the theories that are currently in vogue...sooo...#00:00:33.31#

Morgan: So, right now? What is that to you? #00:00:35.77#

Anthony: Genre, uhhh, literary analysis, umm, I stay away from literary...I stay away from literacy narratives because I don't like narratives, and it's too, ummm, it's too formulaic for me, [indiscernible], different, but current, umm, students currently shift, and we follow the lead of our, of our, chairs and directors, and umm. Theories that I use are generally writing as freewriting, umm, writing is holistic in nature, meaning, um, it's messy, like you talked about, and umm, what is it? It's a variety. So, for example, 10 years ago, we could teach a single style of writing, or a single genre of writing, and it would be okay, because it would be in the same job and all jobs have the same acts of writing, but now students are going to have three to four careers in their life, which means that each of those careers require a different type of writing, so rather than teaching them one style to fit a specific job, as we did ten, fifteen, twenty years ago, they are going to learn how to adapt to other rhetorical situations, and so I teach them different rhetorical styles and radically different at times, so that they can learn to adapt, and to uh, to adapt for a career that they choose or for a philosophy that is [indiscernible]
#00:02:38.84#

Morgan: So, when you, like, I love that you mention both the practical applications of genre theory for you, but I like that you also mention departmental push for it, so I, like, how have you felt about the department's ideas on that? Do you like that they've done it?
#00:02:57.25#

Anthony: Yeah, uh, well, it's clear, well, as a full-time temporary person, well, there are two routes. There's the tenure/tenure-track and full professors who are part of the university and part of self-governance. Then there's the full-time temporary, adjuncts, GTAs, who are not part of self-governance, which means that we are employees, not coworkers, so employees have to follow the lead of the boss as it were, which is our director and chair, and they have been really good about that, so it's not, it's...they've been willing to talk about it; they've been willing to explain, it's not, "Okay, we're doing something new, and just sort of figure it out." You know, "Here's a game you don't know the rules to; Have fun!" type of thing. And so it's not been that, which has been nice, but it is a point of, and we've been lucky that we've had very good directors, because they follow the research rather than taking a stand on a single issue, and if they do, like genre has been pushed, but they are flexible..., which is nice. So... #00:04:19.92#

Morgan: [indiscernible] So fascinating. So...so what do you feel confident about in your teaching of writing, then? So these theories inform...what do you feel confident in as a teacher?#00:04:34.89#

Anthony: [As a teacher, #00:04:36.54#

Morgan: Interrupting above] or as a teacher of writing?#00:04:38.34#

Anthony: Well, as a teacher, I create a rapport with my students easily. Ummmm. I explain things well to them. Ummmm. I'm a good evaluator. I'm an excellent evaluator. Ummmm....as far as what as my strengths I'm confident about in my teaching, I'm a great researcher.#00:05:01.78#

Morgan: What do you research? #00:05:01.78#

Anthony: [indiscernible overlapping] I mean...I have....My focuses are poetry, American Poetry, and science fiction, and so I know where to find things. I can... Before Boolean operators and [indiscernible] I was already doing that, so I use different research styles normally. I...I...For example, if I'm doing something for the first time, I'll throw a wide net, and so for example, if I knew nothing about rhetoric, my response, the first thing would not be to go to a database. If I wanted something professional, I would go to Dr. Barger and Dr. Pantelides, and say, "Can you give me a list of three to four of the best journals that you know of and three or four of the best introduction books?" And then I would start from there. And so, that realization that if you are starting a new discipline, you don't go to a search engine pell mell. You go to people who know, and you can have information, so...that's that. #00:06:16.63#

APPENDIX C

MTSU ENGL 1010 SLOs (2012)

Freshman Writing Courses

English 1010 and English 1020 fulfill part of the Communication requirement of the General Education Program. The long-range goal of the Communication requirement is “to enhance the effective use of the English language essential to students’ success in school and in the world by way of learning to read and listen critically and to write and speak thoughtfully, clearly, coherently, and persuasively.”

English 1010

English 1010, Expository Writing, helps students achieve this goal by providing an introduction to critical thinking and writing. Students are introduced to strategies for writing purposeful, coherent, and adequately developed informative and persuasive essays. Students’ competencies will be measured by the following objectives:

1. Students will improve their ability to generate a writing plan with informed writing objectives.
 2. Students will draw writing content from experience, imagination, and outside resources (e.g., printed materials, interviews, films).
 3. Students will be introduced to strategies for synthesizing and analyzing different types of text and material.
 4. Students will gain a greater sense of the process of writing: prewriting, drafting, rewriting, and editing.
 5. Students will write out-of-class essays that illustrate their knowledge of the writing process and a least one in-class essay that illustrates their on-demand writing ability.
 6. Students will write at least four essays of 1000 words each.
 7. Students will be able to analyze their writing strengths and weaknesses.
 8. Students will improve their ability to develop a thesis clearly with a variety of supporting evidence (e.g., definition, illustration, description, comparison and contrast, casual analysis).
 9. Students will learn to adapt their writing to audience and purpose.
 10. Students will learn to integrate and document primary sources accurately.
 11. Students will develop the ability to vary the structure and length of sentences and paragraphs.
 12. Students will learn to write with grammatical competence and use conventional punctuation and spelling.
-

APPENDIX D

MTSU ENGL 1020 SLOs (2012)

ENGLISH 1020: Argumentative and Research Writing

Argumentative writing is intended to influence the reader's attitudes and actions. Writing is usually called argumentative if it clearly supports a specific position.

In 2011, the English department renewed its commitment to general education by refocusing English 1020 on writing across the curriculum. Whether you have chosen a reader with selections from various disciplines or a single-topic reader, you will ask your students to participate in conversations that they might otherwise expect to have in psychology or chemistry, business or education.

Participating in these conversations will require critical reading and thinking skills as well as "informational literacy." All 1020 students receive instruction in how to locate, evaluate, and use source material. Rather than emphasizing the rules that govern the various documentation styles, instructors should discuss academic integrity—the how and why of citing sources—as well as encourage their students to use their handbook, *Research Matters at MTSU*, as a reference guide.

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will improve their strategies for reading and analyzing different types of text and material.
2. Students will write four research-based essays of 1250 words each. (Some instructors assign an annotated bibliography in lieu of the third essay and in conjunction with the fourth.)
3. Students will receive at least one hour of library instruction from a literacy librarian.
4. Students will integrate and document primary and secondary sources accurately.
5. Students will adapt their writing to audience and purpose.
6. Students will improve their ability to generate a writing plan with informed writing objectives.
7. Students will gain a greater sense of the process of writing: prewriting, drafting, rewriting, and editing.
8. Students will be able to analyze their writing strengths and weaknesses.
9. Students will write with grammatical competence and use conventional punctuation and spelling.

Teaching Objectives:

1. Provide a rationale for the course. Connect the practice of argumentative writing to writing students will do in other coursework, the workplace, and their everyday lives.
 2. Connect the practice of writing to reading. To enter into an academic conversation, students must be able to summarize and deconstruct others' writing.
 3. Pace your course so that students read and write throughout the 15 week semester. Get the most out of your textbook.
 4. Give students strategies for previewing, reading, and annotating a text.
-

5. Give students a variety of in-class writing assignments that facilitate close readings of print, visual, and digital texts. Focus on accurate and complete summaries of single texts and of multiple texts that present opposing or complementary views.
 6. Create writing assignments that require students to join conversations about issues from across the curriculum. Control the source material, at least for the first half of the semester. A typical assignment sequence: summary paper, argumentative paper, annotated bibliography, research paper. Some instructors require a research proposal (see *Research Matters at MTSU*, Chapter 4) prior to the annotated bibliography.
 7. Encourage students to choose research topics related to their majors/interests and ideally, to the readings in your textbook.
 8. Use the annotated bibliography assignment to teach informational literacy. Collaborate with a literacy librarian, bringing your students to the library as they are beginning this assignment. **Provide the librarian with a copy of your assignment before the session.**
 9. Use the argumentative paper or the annotated bibliography to teach academic integrity. Put the emphasis on *why* we cite sources. Use *Research Matters at MTSU* as a reference for how to cite sources. Arrange for the Writing Center to give a tutorial on citation.
 10. Provide workshop opportunities for students to get and give feedback on their writing.
 11. Grade students on process (no more than 30%) and product (at least 70%).
 12. Assign appropriate chapters in *Research Matters at MTSU* in addition to using it as a reference for documentation styles.
 13. Use the final exam period for an in-class, on-demand writing assignment that requires students to demonstrate their ability to summarize and respond to other writers' views.
-

APPENDIX E

MTSU ENGL 1010 SLOs (2013)

Expository Writing, Literacy for Life

In 2012 the English department substantially revised its first semester general education composition course. In English 1010: Literacy for Life, students complete writing projects that have practical or real-world value. These projects may be fairly simple (an email or complaint letter) or quite complex (a field research project culminating in a written report and a multimodal presentation). Successful students exit the class with the ability to analyze and adapt to various rhetorical situations, use appropriate modes of composition (text, image, audio, and/or video) to achieve their purpose, and revise and edit their work. The most important change to the course has been to remove the instructor as the (primary and sole) audience for the students' work.

ENGL 1010 Learning Objectives.

1. Students will understand **composition as a field of study** that involves research about writing and how it works.
2. Students will define and illustrate **key concepts** in composition studies: rhetorical situation, exigence, purpose, genre, critical analysis, audience, discourse community, reflection, context, composing, and knowledge.
3. Students will **read and analyze** various types of text—print, visual, digital, and audio.
4. Students will complete **writing tasks** that require understanding the rhetorical situation and making appropriate decisions about content, form, and presentation. At least one of these tasks will give students practice distilling a primary purpose into **a single, compelling statement**.
5. Students will get practice writing in **multiple genres** and in response to real world writing situations.
6. Students will conduct basic **research** necessary for completing specific writing tasks, learning to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources and between fact, opinion, and inference.
7. Students will develop the skill of **constructive critique**, focusing on higher order concerns, including matters of design, during peer workshops.
8. Students will know how to use their **handbook** as a reference tool.
9. Students will develop their own **writing theory** (based on the key concepts) that they can transfer to writing situations in other classes and in life.

ENGL 1010 Teaching Objectives

1. Provide a **written rationale** for the course. Connect the practice of expository writing to writing students will do in other coursework, the workplace, and their everyday lives.
2. Pace your course so that students **read and write throughout the 15 week semester**. Get the most out of your textbooks.
3. **Introduce composition as an academic field of study** by presenting a sample of research on writing. (Examples: Andrea Lundsford's "Mistakes are a Fact of Life: A Comparative National Study," Peter Elbow's "Inviting the Mother Tongue," Nancy Sommers's "The Novice as Expert: Writing the Freshman Year," and Deborah Brandt's "Literacy in American Lives.")
4. Teach students **the rhetorical triangle**—exigence/purpose/audience.
5. Reinforce understanding of **key concepts** (particularly the rhetorical situation) through reading. Show students how to **annotate model/mentor texts**, focusing on both content and form. Put emphasis on understanding the writer's purpose, main idea/argument, and rhetorical strategies. Teach students that writing is about making choices that reflect an understanding of audience.
6. Give students **writing-to-learn** opportunities.
7. Present students with writing tasks/projects that require consideration of the key concepts. These writing tasks should (1) have real world implications and (2) be expository in nature—writing to inform, instruct, clarify, define, describe, assess, or evaluate. **A typical sequence of writing assignments:** Personal Statement, Profile of a (student) Organization, Op-Ed or Review, Rhetorical/ Analysis or Report.
8. At least one writing task should require that students **distill a primary purpose into a single, compelling statement** and order and develop major points in a reasonable and convincing manner based on that purpose. This task might be an email, a letter, an op-ed, a report, or an essay exam. Acknowledge **that thesis statements** are often informative and sometimes implied.
9. Give students instruction in **basic research**, e.g. finding definitions, explanations, facts. Teach them how to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources of information and between **fact, opinion, and inference**. Introduce the idea of **academic integrity**—when and how to document source material. (You might have them compare the "same" information gleaned from several different sources—Wikipedia, a reference volume, and a website.)

10. Introduce **basic concepts of design**. Do not require strict adherence to MLA formatting unless called for by the rhetorical situation.
11. Use **workshops** to reinforce the key concepts: What is the student writer's purpose? Who is the audience for this work? What is the relationship between form and content? What is the work this writing is doing? How can it do this work more effectively? **Students should analyze and annotate their peers' writing in the same way they analyze and annotate the mode (mentor) texts**. Whenever possible, position students as evaluators, e.g. for op-ed drafts, peers are members of the editorial board of the newspaper.
12. Teach students **to revise** with attention to higher order concerns and **to edit** for clarity.
13. Grade students on **process (no more than 30%) and product (at least 70%)**.
14. Use *Easy Writer* for 5 minute mini-lessons. Do not teach grammar or mechanics out of the context of an actual student's writing.
15. Use the final exam period for **formal presentations** of students' work.

APPENDIX F

MTSU ENGL 1020 SLOs (2013)

ENGLISH 1020: Research and Argumentative Writing

Argumentative writing is intended to influence the reader's attitudes and actions. Writing is usually called argumentative if it clearly supports a specific position.

In 2011, the English department renewed its commitment to general education by refocusing English 1020 on the two main principles of the writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) approach: (1) writing to learn (inquiry), and (2) writing content essays, the content coming from across the disciplines. The most popular 1020 textbook is Norton's *They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*. The rhetoric portion of the textbook teaches students how to situate themselves within existing conversations. The readings spark debate on a range of issues and provide models of argumentative writing published in various venues.

English 1020 students learn how to annotate texts, building a repertoire of rhetorical strategies for their own argumentative writing. They also gain "informational literacy": all 1020 students receive instruction in how to locate, evaluate, and use source material. Rather than emphasizing the rules that govern a specific documentation style, instructors discuss academic integrity—the how and why of citing sources—teaching students how to use their handbook, *Research Matters at MTSU*, to choose the appropriate style for their writing task.

ENGL 1020 Learning Objectives.

1. Students will understand academic writing as a **conversation** about topics of consequence.
2. Students will understand their **responsibilities** as writers—to cite accurately the work of other writers, to provide their audience with reliable information, and to do their topic justice by conducting thorough research and considering multiple points of view.
3. Students will learn to **take their writing seriously**, approaching writing tasks as opportunities to increase their knowledge about a topic and to improve and expand their communication skills.
4. Students will understand academic writing as governed by the **conventions** of specific discourse communities.

5. Students will become more **critical readers**, learning strategies for previewing, annotating, summarizing, analyzing, and critiquing print, digital, and visual texts.
6. Students will acquire **informational literacy**—the ability to locate and evaluate source material.
7. Students will improve their ability to write clear and compelling **thesis statements**.
8. Students will become adept at using appropriate **rhetorical strategies** (description, analogy, planting a naysayer, etc.) to develop and make their arguments.
9. Students will develop the skill of **constructive critique**, focusing on higher order concerns during peer workshops.
10. Students will understand the distinction between **revising and editing**.
11. Students will know how to use their **handbook** as a guide and a reference tool.
12. Students will gain confidence in their ability to generate **a plan** for conducting research and for writing across the curriculum.

ENGL 1020 Teaching Objectives.

1. Provide **a written rationale** for the course. See the course justification in *Research Matters at MTSU* for an example.
2. Connect the practice of writing to **reading**. Pace your course so that students read throughout the 15 week semester. Get the most out of your textbooks.
3. Give students strategies for previewing, reading, and **annotating a text**. *Students should be annotating texts in most class sessions.* (In English 1010, you are using this time for peer workshops.)
4. Give students **in-class writing activities** that facilitate close readings of print, visual, and digital texts. Focus on accurate and complete **summaries** of single texts and of multiple texts that present opposing or complementary views. Identify the various **rhetorical strategies** different writers use to achieve their purpose.
5. Give students writing assignments that require them to **join conversations about issues that matter**. Control the source material, at least for the first half of the semester. **A typical assignment sequence:** summary paper, argumentative paper, annotated bibliography, research paper. **An alternative sequence:** argumentative paper, research

proposal, annotated bibliography (and presentation of source material), research paper (and multimodal presentation).

6. Encourage students to choose **research topics related to their majors/interests** and ideally, to the readings in your textbook.
7. Use the annotated bibliography assignment to teach **informational literacy**. Collaborate with a literacy librarian, bringing your students to the library as they are beginning this assignment. **Provide the librarian with a copy of your assignment before the session.**
8. Use the argumentative paper or the annotated bibliography to teach **academic integrity**. Put the emphasis on *why* we cite sources. Use *Research Matters at MTSU* as a reference for how to cite sources. Arrange for the Writing Center to give a tutorial on citation.
9. Provide opportunities for students to **present their work**. (This replaces time you would spend on peer workshops.)
10. Grade students on process (no more than 30%) and product (**at least 70%**).
11. Assign appropriate chapters in *Research Matters at MTSU* in addition to using it as a reference for documentation styles. **Do not teach MLA style**. Instead, teach students all the ways published writers (in your reader) manage source material.
12. Use **the final exam period** for an in-class, on-demand writing assignment that requires students to demonstrate their ability to summarize and respond to other writers' views. Provide source materials from the database *Opposing Viewpoints in Context*. (See alternative sequence in #6 above.)

APPENDIX G

MTSU ENGL 1010 AND ENGL 1020 SLOs (2017)

First-Year Writing Program Objectives (Aligned with TBR Outcomes)

1010 Objectives	1010 Key Concepts	Program Outcomes	1020 Key Concepts	1020 Objectives
Conduct primary research; Make appropriate decisions about content, form, and presentation	genre analysis, primary research, multimodality	Composing Processes	rhetorical analysis, secondary research, writing across genres	Conduct secondary research; Demonstrate recursive relationships between reading, writing, research, and reflection
Examine literacies across contexts; Read and analyze various types of text—print, digital, and audio	common course texts, reflexive & recursive reading, annotation	Reading	self-directed reading, critical reading, source analysis	Interpret and respond to complex ideas in sources; Identify and contribute to critical conversations
Develop genre awareness and practice genre analysis; Complete writing tasks that require understanding of the rhetorical situation	rhetorical situation, genre convention & deviation, genre affordances & constraints	Rhetorical Knowledge	rhetorical appeals, kairos, delivery	Identify and address appropriate audiences and contexts; Demonstrate flexibility and awareness of effective delivery within different genres
Reflect on literacy in student lives; Develop a writing theory that can transfer to writing situations in other classes and professions	habits of mind, metacognition, backward-reaching transfer	Integrative Thinking	experimentation, metalanguage, forward-reaching transfer	Identify connections between coursework and other academic and external contexts
Learn about discourse communities; Demonstrate understanding of ethical primary research practices	research ethics, discourse community, campus resources	Information Literacy	ethical source use, public audiences, research integration	Locate sources and analyze their relevance and credibility; Demonstrate rhetorical understanding of source attribution

* Objectives have been approved by the General Education English Committee and are aligned with TBR Communication Outcomes; Key Concepts and additional material are intended as teaching tools for instructors. They are also meant to differentiate between the two courses, helping both students and instructors understand how the courses build upon each other. Program Objectives are derived from the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) (the national body that researches first-year writing) Outcomes Statement and MT Engage Student Learning Outcomes.

ENGL1010: Literacy For Life

Program Objectives	1010 Objectives	1010 Key Concepts	1010 Invention/W2L	1010 Writing Projects*
Composing Processes	Conduct primary research; Make appropriate decisions about content, form, and presentation	genre analysis, primary research, multimodality	Create literacy "maps," Conduct literacy "bingo," Interview classmates about literacy	Literacy Narrative, Genre Portrait, Interview Project
Reading	Examine literacies across contexts; Read and analyze various types of text—print, digital, and audio	recursive/reflexive reading, reading strategies, annotation	Read aloud in-class protocols, Guided activities over textual features and reader reactions, Asking questions of the text	
Rhetorical Knowledge	Develop genre awareness and practice genre analysis; Complete writing tasks that require understanding of the rhetorical situation	rhetorical situation, genre convention & deviation, genre affordances & constraints	Genre scavenger hunt, Analyzing genre samples	Genre Analysis, Writing to Targeted Audiences
Integrative Thinking	Reflect on literacy in student lives; Develop a writing theory that can transfer to writing situations in other classes and professions	habits of mind, metacognition, backward-reaching transfer	Reflective writing, End-of-class one-minute papers	E-Portfolio, Final Reflection/ Theory on Writing, Celebration of Student Writing Presentation
Information Literacy	Learn about discourse communities; Learn to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources and between fact, opinion, and inference	research ethics, discourse community, campus resources	Take pictures and reflect on different spaces across campus, Visit and reflect on campus resources, Examine source use and attribution across disciplines/contexts	

* These are recommended as options for writing projects, aligned with course objectives. We generally recommend three primary writing projects and a fourth culminating writing project (portfolio, reflection, or presentation), supported by inventional/W2L assignments throughout the semester.

ENGL1020: Research and Argumentative Writing

Program Objectives	1020 Objectives	1020 Objectives	1020 Invention/W2L	1020 Writing Projects
Composing Processes	Conduct secondary research; Demonstrate recursive relationships between reading, writing, research, and reflection	rhetorical analysis, secondary research, writing across genres	Read sources rhetorically, identify exigence for individual research, consider how to achieve one's purpose with a specific audience	Annotated Bibliography, Topic Proposal
Reading	Interpret and respond to complex ideas in sources; Identify and contribute to critical conversations	self-directed reading, critical reading, source analysis	Acknowledge difficulties and devise strategies, craft "reading like a writer" accounts, consider what a text says/means/why it matters	
Rhetorical Knowledge	Identify and address appropriate audiences and contexts; Demonstrate flexibility and awareness of effective delivery within different genres	rhetorical appeals, kairos, delivery	Revise investigative research article for different audiences/purposes	Investigative Research Article, Cumulative Reflection, E-Portfolio, Celebration of Student Writing Presentation
Integrative Thinking	Identify connections between coursework and other academic and external contexts	experimentation, metalanguage, forward-reaching transfer	Write weekly blog posts reflecting on past, present, and future reading	
Information Literacy	Locate sources and analyze their relevance and credibility; Demonstrate rhetorical understanding of source attribution	ethical source use, public audiences, research integration	Analyze sources and target publications, Use self-help guide for integrating source material	

APPENDIX H IRB DOCUMENTATION

IRB
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
 Office of Research Compliance,
 010A Sam Ingram Building,
 2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
 Murfreesboro, TN 37129



IRBN001 - EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL NOTICE

Wednesday, February 08, 2017

Investigator(s): Morgan Hanson (Student PI), and Julie Barger (FA)
 Investigator(s) Email(s): lmh6p@mtmail.mtsu.edu; julie.barger@mtsu.edu
 Department: English

Study Title: Sharing Our Beliefs about Writing: Using Threshold Concepts as a
 Framework for Professional Development Workshops
 Protocol ID: 17-2129

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXPEDITED** mechanism under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110 within the category (7) *Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior*. A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated as shown below:

IRB Action	APPROVED for one year from the date of this notification	
Date of expiration	2/28/2018	
Participant Size	75 (SEVENTY FIVE)	
Participant Pool	Any Lower Division English Department faculty member and English Graduate Teaching Assistant	
Exceptions	All faculty members must be teaching at least one Lower Division English course in the 2016-2017 academic year, or be a graduate teaching assistant during the 2016-2017 academic year.	
Restrictions	1. Mandatory signed informed consent 2. 18 years of age or older	
Comments	NONE	
Amendments	Date N/A	Post-approval Amendments NONE

This protocol can be continued for up to THREE years (2/29/2020) by obtaining a continuation approval prior to 2/28/2018. Refer to the following schedule to plan your annual project reports and be aware that you may not receive a separate reminder to complete your continuing reviews. Failure in obtaining an approval for continuation will automatically result in cancellation of this protocol. Moreover, the completion of this study MUST be notified to the Office of Compliance by filing a final report in order to close-out the protocol.