

COMPOSING COMMENTS FOR ONLINE STUDENTS: A STUDY OF FACULTY
FEEDBACK ON WRITING IN MULTIDISCIPLINARY CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I present findings from a qualitative research project designed to articulate practitioner-teachers' beliefs about writing and their role in providing feedback on student writing in online courses. To analyze the qualities of these beliefs, I interviewed eight full-time and part-time teachers from multiple disciplines teaching at the same private career-based college. Participants primarily defined writing as grammar and described their feedback intervention as dependent on tools, such as rubrics and web-based grammar software, to ensure students write professionally. Professionalism was a significant concern for participants, many of whom considered preserving the integrity of their discipline and preparing students for its effective deployment as their most important role as teachers. With this goal at the forefront of their efforts, participants generally apply writing as a tool for and sign of professionalism. My findings suggest that participants see professionalism relative to writing as work ethic, formality, practicality, and arrival. These categories characterize what participants prioritize in terms of providing feedback. A limitation of this study is that the participant pool was relatively small and participants all taught at the same institution, with specific standardization requirements influencing how participants perceive the writing task. That said, because the study is so intensely focused, its results may be relevant and generalizable to the perceptions of practitioner-teachers at many institutions.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to my mother, Mary Lou Neuteboom, a K-12 special needs teacher who succumbed to cancer in 2001. She has been and remains to be the educator I strive to become.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

I have been a student of online education for more than a dozen years. My exploration of this modality of instruction began when I was assigned my first online writing course, a section of Creative Writing. Having been trained to teach writing in a residential setting, my first question was how do I teach students about writing if I'm not physically present to explain it to them? The experience felt a lot like walking the dark corridor of an unfamiliar house. I did not feel equipped to provide the directions needed to help my students find the proverbial light switch. As students engaged me through email and discussion, however, and as I learned to leverage the course home page for announcements and offer detailed feedback on student writing as my primary method of instructional intervention, I came to understand online writing instruction as an opportunity not only to hone my writing skills but to take advantage of writing to teach writing, an important benefit of online learning that Beth Hewett articulates in her fifteen year canon on OWI (2015). I found that when I communicate primarily in writing, I must be as thorough and clear as possible because writing is not interactive like speech. The composition contains no elaboration, only the words presented on the page. Depending on writing, then, as a tool for instruction required me to develop an increased respect for the relationship between author, audience, and message.

Some years later, after teaching a variety of online writing courses, including English Composition, Introduction to Literature, American Literature, Creative Writing, Humanities, and Introduction to Critical Thinking, I transitioned to the role of administrator for a private career college in the upper Midwest. My new role included the responsibility to train, guide, mentor, assess, and evaluate faculty teaching in at least two dozen disciplines working within seven distinct college schools. My faculty team consisted of teachers with a broad range of teaching

experience in residential, blended, and fully online instructional settings. Most of my early training efforts related to online teaching focused on the logistics of how to take full advantage of the tools and resources available in the college's learning management system. For many, this how-to approach mitigated much of the fear they experienced when confronted with new technologies, a crucial part of preparing faculty for success in the online modality. I gleaned by reading Palloff and Pratt's *Lessons from the Virtual Classroom: The Realities of Online Education* (2013) that one of the largest barriers faculty encounter when they transition from residential to online teaching is technology. "The main issue," Palloff and Pratt claim, "continues to be adequate faculty training to construct and deliver high quality courses" (7). Teaching teachers about the mechanics of online instruction addressed at least the first part of that admonition. But classroom management online is only one dimension of teaching online, and it is not exclusively the most important part.

As much as tips and tricks helped faculty better understand the tools through which they conducted their teaching, these resources did not necessarily help them improve their teaching online. In fact, too much attention to the technology could have an adverse effect on learners, particularly if these learners were struggling with content, had a difficult time reading or understanding feedback, or became bogged down by a multiplicity of technologies that impeded instruction (Banks 2006). I realized that the "quality" piece of which Palloff and Pratt wrote must also be a target of consistent faculty training. The challenge, of course, is that quality is a fairly ambiguous concept and can mean many different things in different instructional contexts. The key to providing helpful support in terms of training, I soon learned, had to be conducted through instructional reflection, a characteristic Flower (2011), Harasim (2012), Yancey (2015), and others promote as an essential component of teacher professional development.

In 2014, I began to integrate reflective activities designed to help faculty better understand why they make the decisions they do in their classrooms as part of regular professional development trainings. I created a professional development practitioner-teacher actualization plan, which asked faculty to take the *Strength's Finder 2.0* exam, write a teaching philosophy, and produce a professional vision board that incorporated teaching strengths, a purpose statement, and their educational, professional, and personal goals, all part of a process to help faculty better understand and reflect upon their identity as teachers. The vision board took the form of images representative of teachers' strengths and the role in which they perceive themselves playing in student education (a sample of my own vision board from this training is available in Appendix A). Having developed a clearer sense of their individual purpose relative to teaching in this way, faculty who participated in this training began to strategize instructional approaches and to develop not only the "how" and "what" of online teaching but understand "why" they were employing certain practices. For instance, one instructor reviewed the communication types she used in her online courses (course announcements, discussions, video recordings, etc.) and realized she was not connecting content across the course or the curriculum as effectively as she could. Often, these communications were delivered to and received by students as disparate asynchronous information bites in the form of course announcements, rather than as an interconnected narrative designed to guide students toward meeting objectives. For instance, she would post her weekly objectives without explaining the relevance of those objectives to the tasks assigned that week. At times, she might post a link to a resource but neglect to explain how that resources might help students with their learning efforts. By adjusting the purpose of her communication in the course, she was able to revise her approach from one of information posting to instructional narrative, which elaborated on how the

communications of the class – announcements, content, and assignments – interrelated to enhance student learning. The insight derived from such awareness, I came to understand, is the power of reflection. By extension, I also came to realize that good teaching, from philosophical and practical perspectives, is the result of continued self-reflection that leads to meaningful change in teaching, which in turn invites more effective learning.

Why Online Writing Feedback as an Object of Inquiry

My continued work with faculty next prompted me to contemplate the role online writing feedback plays in online instruction. As I conducted quarterly observations of online faculty for the college, I began to see the feedback task as central to student growth within a discipline. I witnessed both the specific, detailed, and constructive direction some faculty provided, as well as the terse, general, and vague direction other faculty offered. As an administrator, I have also listened to students over the years express frustration that some of their teachers deduct a significant percentage of assignment points for grammar, spelling, and incorrect documenting and formatting practices. A common point of contention for such students is that they claim to have presented an adequate response to the assignment prompt, addressed the issue ideationally, but are assessed primarily for the correctness of their delivery of that information, an interesting disconnect identified by Zhan (2016), Lee (2009), and Ward, Peters, and Shelley (2010). For instance, a student in a Justice Studies course contacted me some months ago, paper in hand, to show me that he had accurately defined and illustrated general search and seizure policies in accordance with assignment instructions. The accuracy of his handling of this policy was substantiated by comments the instructor had provided in feedback. The student's paper, however, received a very low score because he had made several grammatical and formatting errors. Despite a scoring rubric that allocated ten percent of the total score to these technical

writing requirements, the student received only half credit on the basis that the language was unclear. In essence, the final score reflected a penalty much greater than that defined by the writing requirements listed on the scoring rubric. Interestingly enough, this student also happened to speak English as a second language.

I pondered what prompted so many teachers from multiple disciplines with whom I work to reduce feedback on writing to surface level or editorial matters. Obviously, a place to start such a contemplation is to consider the value some communities of practice place on the appearance of professionalism in dress, speech, and writing. Part of the initiation process, after all, involves shaping outsiders into the mold most conducive to what the insiders view as a model of the discipline. The student, essentially, must learn to reflect back to the community its perceptions of itself, including its values relative to language, class, and race. In other words, within this paradigmatic view, the successful student seems to mimic and mirror what the community claims itself to be. An easy way for some teachers to point out that this complex mimicry isn't happening is to flag the markers of unprofessionalism in writing, which some interpret as the misspelled word, the errant or missing comma, the absent in-text citation. This notion of professionalism and unprofessionalism is problematic, of course, because it simplifies the complex interactions that shape disciplinary practice and reduces it to a definition of professionalism that is neither entirely accurate nor universally accepted. From this point of contemplation, then, the error-centered approach to writing feedback presented in the results of this study consider the teachers' position one similar to Shaughnessy's "Guard[ian of] the Tower" (1976) or Gee's protectorate of the Discourse community (2010).

Another potential reason some teachers may prioritize their feedback comments to surface level concerns is because the assessment of and language used to describe writing is

complex and some faculty may feel inadequate providing sufficient direction, an observation Hewett forwarded in her work on online writing instruction. Yancey also considers this point in her book on teaching writing for transfer, in which she explains that teachers define, explain, and name writing practices differently. They do so because no common or universal nomenclature exists for writing techniques or moves outside of English Studies. Even in English Studies, language becomes a slippery proposition and teachers argue over meaning. Such incongruity among even those considered experts in teaching writing can make teachers in disciplines outside of English Studies feel inadequately prepared or at least on uncomfortable footing when it comes to addressing student writing.

Finally, a third possible reason some teachers limit feedback to what is readily visible in student writing, the objective components of the product in front of them, is because responding to global, middle, and surface level concerns, not to mention stylistic decisions, rhetorical moves, and the ideational elements of argument, is extremely time-consuming (Raffo and Brinthaupt 2015). The grading task and its complimentary activity of feedback are much more manageable when focused on error, an insight gleaned from studies conducted by Hartwell (1985), Treglia (2008), Lunsford (2008), Lee (2009), Knapp and Watkins (2013), and Mutnik and Lamos (2014). From a position of professionalization, it is easier to point out a deficiency in the professionalization process in language errors than it is to dig deeply into the subtle, nuanced, and implicit rules that govern writing generally and in the disciplines specifically. In short, grammar and formatting may be shorthand for more extensive problems that teachers find themselves too busy or inadequately prepared to address.

Regardless of the reasons that prompt faculty to respond to the surface errors in writing primarily, and sometimes exclusively, the instructional activity of providing feedback on writing

in the disciplines is important for students to improve their writing and to understand the expectations of their discipline in practice. Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) describe these expectations as standards set by “dominant conventions” critiqued by “skeptical, critical audiences” (37). The challenge, however, is that faculty responding to student writing in the disciplines experience a paradox between a “community of values” and how those values are communicated to students in response to their treatment of a disciplines’ conventions (88). The linguistic diversity that defines different discourses is often reduced to comments regarding error.

To study the idea of error in writing feedback online from this disciplinary perspective, I conducted a pilot study in 2016. I was interested in studying error in this way because grammar and formatting frustration was a pervasive theme in conversations I regularly had with faculty within my stewardship. My study asked participants to complete a survey and to submit an assignment in which they had provided feedback on student writing. The goal of this study was to determine the extent to which faculty from multiple disciplines focused on error in their feedback practices on student writing. Each of the four faculty who participated, not surprisingly, commented most frequently on grammar, formatting, and documenting errors, confirming studies by Lee (2015), Treglia (2008), and Zahn (2016). However, the survey questions I prepared, which asked participants which aspects of writing they commented on, did not provide enough information about why they responded the way they did (Appendix B). The study, consequently, failed to provide helpful information to generate insight into the decisions faculty make when they comment on student writing or how they define the feedback activity or their role relative to its deployment. The pilot was a helpful launching point for this study, however, because it confirmed for me a need to understand why faculty respond as they do, how

they define feedback in relation to learning writing, and how, when, and why they decide to intervene. My interest in feedback for this study, then, initiates from the contemplations above but has become more intensified by my previous experiences and solidified by extensive review of existing literature.

Why is online writing feedback the object of this study? For one, feedback on student writing is an intervention designed to help students with their individual writing needs. Nancy Sommers (2006), referencing a study conducted at Harvard, stated in her article “Across the Drafts” that “feedback plays a leading role in undergraduate writing development” (250). The goal of feedback, she further states, should be to “move students forward as writers” (250) and that it often shapes students’ “writing experiences” (251). The importance of this intervention is magnified within the online setting, where written comments must stand alone, devoid of phatic explanation or elaboration. For this reason, Hewett (2015) advocates for clear, precise, and direct communication to ensure students can apply feedback in meaningful ways to their writing (92-100). The goal of feedback, after all, is to prompt students to rethink, reengage, and revise their work not only to better address the writing task but also to develop the ability to reflect and self-assess so they might more effectively respond to the varied exigencies that demand writing in other situations as well (Yancey 2015). And so I find myself at a curious juncture wanting to know if and how faculty of disciplines outside of English Studies engage in the feedback task in their online courses. The work detailed in the subsequent chapters present my processes, findings, and contemplations relative to the multidisciplinary perspective on writing feedback in the online classroom.

Important Definitions

Before I can successfully outline my dissertation project, I must first turn to the terms I will use to define this study. In order to make sense of these objects of inquiry, I will deconstruct and explain each of the major components detailed in this book's title: *Composing Comments for Online Students: A Study of Faculty Feedback on Writing in Multidisciplinary Contexts*. Each term provides some condition or another that serves to calibrate this study to a certain set of criteria. These conditions manifest as the following concepts: modality, online writing feedback, feedback epistemology, and multidiscipline. Practitioner-teacher is another important term that requires further explanation, because it describes the specific population of educators who participated in the study.

The first condition of this study deals with modality. My inquiry focuses exclusively on teaching in the fully online instructional modality. Online instruction can be understood, for purposes of this study, as curriculum designed within a learning management system that distributes course activities and collects course artifacts virtually. Participants join the course on the internet from anywhere in the world. Interaction within this instructional space may include video and audio elements but is primarily conducted via writing. Writing and reading are primary learning activities in this educational format.

The second condition, online writing feedback, also called "digital response to writing," can best be expressed by criteria detailed in Beth Hewett's *Instructor's Guide for the Online Writing Conference* as "Any text-based, computer-distributed feedback to student writing" (iv). Due to the extensive platforms for writing available in learning management systems, writing response can be performed formally or informally in discussion or chat forums, on written papers submitted through course assignment drop boxes, or as part of a course project. Digital

responses can be distributed in written, verbal, or video form. For this study, written feedback will be the object of inquiry because it acts as the most common interactive medium in online courses.

A third consideration, how teachers form an epistemology of writing feedback, can be narrowly defined for this study as a philosophical position an instructor assumes relative to her or his role in assessing and commenting on student writing. It presumes certain tendencies toward and practices associated with how a teacher should or should not intervene in the student's journey to improve her or his writing. It is based on values, beliefs, and attitudes shaped by personal, social, and institutional influences. An epistemology in this sense often dictates how a teacher orients herself or himself toward student work and the type of intervention she or he performs. Ultimately, I strive to capture how faculty in a variety of disciplines believe students learn how to improve their writing and how they perceive their role in facilitating that development.

A fourth condition of this study deals with multidisciplinary contexts. Multidiscipline in this study is a term used to describe not only the diverse content areas that define and differentiate college programs, but the way in which such variations impact the development of epistemologies related to writing feedback. Such guiding philosophies constitute both a culminating concept and the primary purpose of this study. Because writing is the principal form of communication and often the central method of evaluation and feedback in the online classroom, teachers of all disciplines confront the writing task from personal, professional, institutional, and societal positions. Multidisciplinary context is the location from which a teacher orients her or his philosophy about writing and its purpose in disciplinary practice.

That philosophy localizes in the individual based on their life-world experience (Kvale 2007). It is important to recognize that many of the faculty at career-based, online colleges, like the one where I serve as administrator and teacher, are transplants from the industry for which they teach. They provide a meaningful mentorship to students by knowing the discipline in practice well. For this study, I refer to teachers who straddle the line between education and their disciplinary field as practitioner-teachers. The emphasis is placed purposefully in this term, as it acknowledges that the teacher's practice is her or his most relevant exposure to the discipline and defines her or his primary loyalty. The "teacher" portion follows the "practice" portion of the term because many practitioner-teachers do not have teaching experience, nor did they study pedagogy within their discipline. Their knowledge of classroom management and instructional delivery originate on the job, both in disciplinary positions that require them to train co-workers or subordinates or by trial and error as they adapt to and apply the rules and regulations of a college to the classroom. This term is crucial to understanding the mindset and experiential orientation of participants within this study.

Related Genres in English Studies

Of course, this study intersects a number of similarly related movements in English Studies. The elements of multidisciplinary study, for instance, parallels the interdisciplinary activities associated with writing for transfer, writing in the disciplines, and writing across the curriculum. Any study that seeks to understand how feedback is defined, composed, and delivered, particularly from the position of epistemology, must consider the complexities of learning standardized English, which includes the perspectives of ELL, ESL, E2L, and Basic Writing pedagogy. The online component addresses issues related to online writing instruction and distance learning. Suffice to say, the study of online feedback practices of multidisciplinary

teachers emerges from a breadth of conversations with similar and ongoing concerns, conceptualized by Kenneth Burke's parlor metaphor (1967) and described by Kristin Luker (2008) as locating the "case" of something (106). How these similar strands of conversation factor into and influence the study of this dissertation will be detailed in the following paragraphs.

In terms of writing feedback, the object of inquiry for this study, scholars have long argued its efficacy in terms of depth, breadth, and purpose. Jamalinesari et al. (2015) describe feedback as a powerfully impactful practice (116). Sommers (2006) and Hewett (2015) contend that clarity, specificity, and relevance are important ingredients to effective feedback. Several studies, however, suggest that many teachers, due perhaps to workload, insufficient time, or uncertainty, produce vague, confusing, or abstract feedback that leave students baffled and frustrated (Treglia 2008) or focus primarily on surface errors in their comments reducing writing to a set of linguistic rules (Zhan 2016, Lee 2009, and Ferris 2014). While research about this topic is extensive in English Studies, similar studies in other academic disciplines are less commonplace. In one study, Laurie Sharp (2016) recounts how preservice teachers in the Education field "receive limited training with theory and pedagogy for writing and are often anxious and lack confidence in their ability to teach writing due to limited knowledge and experiences" (78). In fact, research about feedback on writing that does exist in multidisciplinary contexts typically concentrates on how English courses prepare students for transferring writing knowledge to different writing situations within the disciplines (Yancey et al. 2015, Thaiss and Zawacki 2006, Wardle and Downs 2011).

Writing for transfer, writing in the disciplines, and writing across the curriculum, then, constitute important elements of this study. These topics, too, have been studied extensively in

English Studies, as scholars have tried to determine the role of English composition courses relative to other college disciplines. Wardle and Downs (2011), for instance, contest notions that English composition can teach a “unified academic discourse,” since such a “discourse does not exist” (552). Yancey et al. (2015) agree that decontextualized writing instruction meant to provide a standardized academic approach for students is incomplete. Rather, they posit, writing for transfer involves an immersive approach that leverages the subject knowledge and genres of writing across the curriculum with the language of the disciplines and the connections of disciplinary subject matter common among writing in the disciplines (27-29). The success of this form of instruction relies on the following five “interacting domains”: “discourse community knowledge; rhetorical knowledge; genre knowledge; composing process knowledge; and subject matter knowledge” (30). While composition can provide some direction to help students write more effectively in their disciplines relative to these domains, the composition course alone does not offer extensive enough insider knowledge to produce writing sufficient for all disciplinary expectations (Thaiss and Zawacki 2006). In these ways, writing for transfer, writing in the disciplines, and writing across the curriculum find relevance in this study because, according to scholars, writing instruction and feedback in English Studies alone does not produce the depth of disciplinary knowledge students need to appropriately negotiate the situational and contextual writing needs of disciplines nor of their communities of practice. Teachers in the disciplines must be active participants in the writing education of students in their disciplines.

How can they accomplish this task? Another correlating topic in English Studies, genre theory, may provide a possible answer. Genre theory has long studied the impact of teaching writing as “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” (Miller 159). Carolyn Miller (1984), Ann Johns (1997), Charles Bazerman (2009), and Amy Devitt (2014) argue that genre is

a point of access into disciplinary writing and can bridge composition courses with writing courses in the disciplines. According to Devitt, genre pedagogy focuses on three approaches: “teaching particular genres, teaching genre awareness, and teaching genre critique” (147). The benefits of teaching genre for transfer, Bazerman suggests, is that it helps students develop a diversity of applications for “different kinds of writing activities” (280). The cognitive activities in which students engage while producing various artifacts serves to help them learn as they write, the main theme of the writing to learn movement in English Studies. Genre is important to this study as well, since genre, the patterns of writing produced in the disciplines, consists of expectations and rules defined differently in disparate disciplinary contexts (Thaiss and Zawacki). The onus for nuanced instruction of these genres often falls to the experts who frequently employ and negotiate communication in these generic forms. Consequently, teaching writing cannot fall exclusively to the English composition instructor, whose limited knowledge of the disciplines does not provide full access to specific writing situations, which are, according to Melzer (2009), varied, “extensive,” and difficult to “deduce” (251). Even within academics, these genres require expert guidance. As such, this study acknowledges the essential role faculty of the disciplines play in writing instruction during the student lifecycle and beyond.

Other important areas in English Studies that intersect this study are ELL, EFL, E2L, and Basic writing. Because the task of teaching writing to English language learners magnifies the challenges of writing instruction exponentially, teachers often find themselves working with language in unfamiliar and uncomfortable ways. Under such stress, writing teachers may resort to responding exclusively to error, marking papers in direct and negative ways. According to Treglia (2008), responding to student writing in this way can “cause negative affective repercussions,” such as lack of confidence, disengagement, or frustration (106). Jamalinesari et

al. (2015) studied direct versus indirect feedback on student writing. They determined that “there may be a mismatch between the feedback students want or expect and the feedback that is actually given” (117). That feedback, according to Treglia (2008), Lee (2009), Ferris (2014), Zhan (2016), and Chiu and Savignon (2016), is most related to grammar, is form-focused, and is typically delivered negatively. In fact, explicit and direct feedback on error, in light of these studies, seems to suggest that direct and negative comments have short-term noticeable results but a long-term negative impact on students’ confidence. Thus, how teachers compose their comments and the way in which they deliver their feedback are concerns of significant importance to not only the scholars who study ELL, EFL, E2L, and Basic writing, but also to anyone who provides commentary on student writing. A teacher’s orientation toward error will be described in Chapter 2 as an important defining quality for forming an epistemology of writing instruction. Furthermore, online education has presented the potential for global learning, which brings with it a variety of diverse learners and writers.

Finally, online writing instruction (OWI) has become an expanding area of focus in English Studies the past fifteen years (Allen and Seaman 2017). Consequently, as the number of online programs and course offerings increases, the need for more detailed and nuanced research becomes essential. Because online instruction is generally mediated through writing, teachers working in the virtual classroom find themselves teaching and interacting with students primarily in writing. In fact, Scott Warnock (2009) talks extensively about the amount of reading and writing students and teachers are asked to perform in online courses, finding it a space conducive to improving writing due to its propensity for intensive practice with language. Beth Hewett (2015) recognizes that the phatic elements of feedback, which often accompany teacher’s written comments on student writing in residential instruction, is not always an easy option in the online

modality. Relying on writing for all aspects of communication in a course, she theorizes, elevates the importance of the written word and has the potential for immersive writing instruction. OWI scholars and the organizations that support them, such as the CCCC (2013), have acknowledged the virtual classroom as a distinct instructional space in which faculty must be trained, must develop sensitivity to student needs, and must be strategic in how they use writing with students to effectuate learning. While OWI has become a common fixture of the English Studies repertoire, focus on writing instruction in this modality is typically limited to English courses and programs.

These areas of English Studies intersect with, provide rationale for, and inform the study of my dissertation project in several ways. For instance, writing for transfer, writing in the disciplines, and writing across the curriculum promote the need for teaching writing at all points in the student's academic lifecycle, particularly in courses outside of and beyond English composition. Each of these approaches requires that teachers of all disciplines take an active role in their students' writing education as they prepare them for the discursive expectations within their communities of practice (Johns 1997). Relatedly, one of the goals of this study is to better understand how teachers from multiple disciplines define their role relative to writing instruction. Another point of consideration is the impact feedback has on student writing. Feedback decisions, as detailed above, are important in demonstrating when, how, and why faculty intervene. Thus, feedback is a way to measure faculty practice against philosophy. Moreover, what faculty emphasize in their feedback belie their primary concerns with student writing and provide insight into their writing feedback epistemologies. The lessons of ELL, ESL, E2L, and Basic Writing research, by extension, provide essential insight into the value students do or do not see in certain feedback practices. This study is designed to capture what

faculty generate in terms of feedback and seeks to understand why they make the decisions they do, adding, hopefully, to the extensive body of research on writing in the disciplines and writing across the curriculum in meaningful ways. Finally, the online platform adds further complexity to the task of writing instruction. While online educators have come a long way – training is improved, the technology more advanced, and the modality more universally acceptable – few studies exist that seek to understand how faculty feel about teaching writing online in courses not typically viewed as writing-specific courses. Locating some of the ways in which teaching writing with writing in the disciplines impacts faculty feedback practices and shapes epistemology is a residual potential outcome and benefit of this study. In these ways, my dissertation topic is located within the complex interstices of the discursive instructional practices of multidisciplinary faculty responding to student writing in online courses. An overview of how these perspectives factor into the feedback task in this study are described in the following section.

Chapter Overviews

In Chapter 2: Locating Teacher Assessment Philosophies in Online Instruction: Theoretical Frameworks, I summarize the major theories of feedback in English Studies. Following a brief overview of these theories, I next present general theories of online writing feedback, which includes online feedback practices in relation to methods of intervention, technology, and rubrics. Then, I recount some of the debates that complicate feedback practices, including teachers' perceptions of error and the movement toward and limitations associated with automated feedback. I conclude the chapter by addressing the specific gap my dissertation project addresses in relation to the literature: the study looks at how online teachers provide feedback on writing in multidisciplinary contexts.

In Chapter 3: Designing a Framework for Online Faculty Feedback Epistemologies, I detail the methods I used in this study to gather information about how faculty develop their epistemological approaches to feedback on student writing. I then provide an overview of the institutional, curricular, and instructional characteristics of practitioner-teachers participating in this study. Following this account of the study's demographics, I explain the qualitative approach I employed to gather data, which includes an interview and a think aloud observation conducted through web conferencing software. Then, I share how I plan to analyze the data from coding through analysis. Finally, I discuss some of the limitations associated with this study, primarily my role as an administrator and the implications of narrative construction.

In Chapter 4: Analyzing the Data: Mining for Epistemological Meaning, I present findings relative to interviews conducted for this study. I provide participant characteristics, samples of responses to interview questions, and analysis of potential epistemological relevance of those participant responses. I next correlate findings with the research questions driving this study. I also offer a summary of the main themes that developed during the think-aloud observation, the second part of my research plan. I elaborate on these themes as they relate to the formulation of a theory that initiates from participants' disciplinary conception of professionalism. I then review key terms that surfaced from the first stage grounded theory coding method open coding and the second stage coding activity axial coding. From this activity, I detail language faculty use to define, describe, and explain writing and explicate how these terms contributed to forming a theory I call writing as tool for and sign of professionalism.

In Chapter 5: Writing as Tool for and Sign of Professionalism: A Theory, I propose a theory that describes the values and attitudes exhibited by participants in this study I call writing as tool for and sign of professionalism. This theory argues that practitioner-teachers perceive the

writing task primarily from a practical and formal perspective. Mapping terms analyzed in Chapter 4, I describe four categories that come to define this epistemological perspective: work ethic, formality, practicality, and arrival. Each of these categories represent ways in which professionalism is interpreted and enacted in the feedback activity relative to the meaning and expectation of the writing task. I postulate how these attitudes manifest in the ways faculty define good and poor writing, what they hope students do with the feedback they receive on their writing, and what their writing practices say about what writing is and what it should do in their disciplines.

In Chapter 6: Conclusion, I explain how the theory of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism influences practitioner-teachers' perceptions of writing and their role relative to its instruction. Based on their interpretation of professionalism and writing as a product rather than a process, practitioner-teachers tend to approach writing as something students always already know and use it to determine if particular students fit disciplinary expectations of professionalism. I suggest that such a view of writing within this particular context of professionalism results in a narrow interpretation of its disciplinary value. Consequently, my theory deconstructs participants' attitudes toward writing in relation to their view of its value in disciplinary education by providing the framework of work ethic, formality, practicality, and arrival as tenets of the writing as tool for and sign of professionalism paradigm. I conclude the chapter by acknowledging the limitations of this study, namely the study demographic, the goals and values of the institution for which participants teach, and the fact that student perspectives are not consulted in response to the feedback they receive on their writing. I present this last point as an opportunity for further study. I conclude the chapter by contemplating opportunities for improving the participant engagement activities employed to gather data and present a

possible training plan that targets the underlying implications each of the four tenets of the writing as tool for and sign of professionalism concept.

A Note on Practitioner-Teachers

I want to make a brief but important point about the practitioner-teachers who participated in this study or who work in a variety of educational capacities at colleges and universities across the country. Teachers from the industry bring a unique and important perspective to education. Because they have worked in the field and know expectations first-hand, they are valuable and valued in the classroom. Students look up to teachers they know have done the work they are preparing to do. The study I conducted, not to mention the results that I will explain, analyze, and criticize in the following chapters, is designed to elucidate how practitioner-teachers define, understand, and teach writing, a skill many do not consciously consider an area of their expertise. I want to make clear that any criticism of how practitioner-teachers view and handle writing instruction in their courses is by no way a criticism of their knowledge, their passion for teaching, or their insights into their industry. I respect and appreciate the effort it takes to transfer insider knowledge of such nuanced complexity to disciplinary initiates. It is from a desire to learn and to support that I begin and conclude this study.

The Implicit Influence of Race

While I will describe later in this dissertation the framework I employed to generate a theory to define and describe how practitioner-teachers in this study form an epistemology of practice relative to feedback on student writing, I feel compelled to discuss the much larger and invasive framework of racial inequity that always already influences perceptions in educational practices broadly writ, in accordance with the tenets of critical race theory. To do so, I echo the

sentiments Robin Lakoff (2000) shares in her book *The Language War*: “When bias is made explicit... it can be identified and criticized. But when it’s implicit, hiding behind a frame that renders it invisible, it is impervious to critique or change” (52). Much of what educators do from an institutional, social, and political perspective is based on implicitly biased practices. Inoue and Poe (2012) capture this idea well: students are “‘already socialized into discourses of race and power relations’ when they come to school,” (13). Race, they claim, is “made invisible” and, when something is invisible, a problem can’t exist. It is “exnominated,” a term Lakoff uses in her work to describe that which is ignored, devalued, forgotten (53).

Because implicit bias is “unconscious” and often operates covertly as standard, conventional, normal, and a matter of common sense, teachers aren’t necessarily aware of the discriminatory views that shape racist attitudes in our culture and impact their perceptions of students, particularly through students’ use of language. Lakoff explains that one of the tactics hegemony employs to retain power is to erase matters of racism through what she terms as the “unmarked we” (72). This “we” comes to represent a voice that speaks for all. In education, the “we” might be channeled to develop standardized rubrics or compose assignments teachers feel apply to all students equally. Unfortunately, the “we” is actually the voice of the dominant authority that creates the impression of what is and is not acceptable. By doing so, the “we” marginalizes anyone or anything that does not fall within the “familiar, the unmarked, the within-the-frame” (74).

When issues of race are silenced and practices of racial inequality are normalized, considered part of the “status quo” within the educational system, teachers operate from the culturally indoctrinated notion of “common sense” (Lakoff 13). That is, they believe language is a “stable and fixed” reality (Lakoff 75) and preserving its integrity is a teacher’s primary

responsibility as “gatekeepers” of their disciplinary stewardship (Shaughnessy). Perhaps the most apparent activity in preserving language integrity is protecting the system against error, more particularly the kinds of errors that mark individuals as outside the familiar “frame” because they are “other,” marked by their use of speech and writing that is aberrant from the “standard dialect,” which protects power and authority (Lakoff 77).

Generally speaking, teachers are susceptible to the tactics that preserve racism and discrimination in our country’s social institutions. As the primary place of learning, the school indoctrinates. To use Foucault’s language, it “orders and disciplines” according to the social and political expectations of the mainstream, what Lakoff refers to as “the status quo” (142). One of the tacit purposes of the education system is to control those it instructs. With its standardized outcomes, disciplinary expectations, and history of manufacturing productive workers, educators “train” their “ranks” of students toward an acceptable uniformity (Foucault 170). When students don’t demonstrate acceptable uniformity, if they are different, the system demands “remediation” (Banks 2006), some way to fix the person to better fit the social and economic machine.

These differences mark a student as an outsider. Among those activities that mark students as outside the status quo, language is an explicit sign. Ingrid Piller (2011) posits in her work *Intercultural Communication* that “discourses of cultural differences and language proficiency serve as a cloak for racism and discrimination” (128). She goes on to argue that “‘Culture’ is naturalised in the way ‘educationability’ and lack of intelligence are ascribed to... discursively constructed group[s]” (129). In other words, one of the methods for ensuring control and entrenching the status quo – that which is constructed and preserved by the dominant culture – is to punish those who are not already part of the accepted culture by alienating, remediating,

and excluding them from full participation in all aspects of society, including both education and employment.

I posit that the same insidiously discriminatory attitudes that plague institutions in our culture find implicit purchase in the instructional practices of our teachers. The participants in this study are not impervious to these racist influences. The notion that language must be precisely white in its design and delivery, that grammar is a prescribed and fixed reality, and that white language and professionalism are inextricably linked to social, economic, and educational success constitute not only an unconscious but a predisposed bias toward those marked by these cultural and racial differences. The findings I report in this study rely heavily on rendering apparent these too often inherent discriminatory perceptions.

Conclusion

Essentially, my study constitutes a contemplation of writing instruction from a perspective formed through teaching writing online and supervising teachers in a variety of disciplines engaged in similar efforts in their online courses. It is an exercise not only in gathering information about faculty practices and perceptions, but also a reflective activity about online teaching and the role of writing in online education in general. I strive to learn about how teachers think and feel about writing and about guiding writers so that I might introspect upon my practices and share those practices as a faculty leader.

I set out on this journey, then, so that I might better understand how teachers at my institution not only provide feedback but how they define themselves and their responsibility in relation to the feedback task relative to writing. If Yancey is correct, online teachers of all disciplinary types might benefit from more refined insight into how they talk about, teach, and assess writing. If Ferris is correct, online teachers can become better aware of why they write

feedback and how it helps students form and enact more specifically defined goals with their writing. If this study does one thing, it provides some perspective on how teachers in various disciplinary contexts view writing within the complex contexts of their disciplinary practices and in the community that shapes and enacts their discourse (Gee, Johns).

The following chapter looks extensively at research heretofore conducted on and theories related to feedback, writing, online education, and assessment in the disciplines. In doing so, I propose a location for this study at the crossroads of composition theory, online writing instruction, writing across the curriculum, writing in the disciplines, and multidisciplinary studies that connects the instructional epistemologies of online instructors with the writing exigencies of students beyond the composition classroom. The goal of this dissertation, then, is to define what writing feedback looks like for teachers performing within these specific instructional spaces from their own philosophical yet community influenced epistemological perspectives. I pursue this understanding by asking the following research questions. First, I ask this main question:

- How do practitioner-teachers in the disciplines generally define their role and goals related to providing feedback on student writing online?

I follow-up this main question with the following four associated questions, the first two related to defining writing and instructional roles and the last two focusing on setting and meeting feedback goals:

- How do practitioner-teachers define feedback on student writing in online courses?
- How do practitioner-teachers see their role relative to teaching student writing online?
- What are their goals with providing feedback on student writing in this modality?

- When do they know they have met their feedback goals?

CHAPTER 2. LOCATING TEACHER FEEDBACK PHILOSOPHIES IN ONLINE INSTRUCTION: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Introduction

During a conversation following an online observation I conducted as an Academic Dean, a teacher told me that she was fed up with students not following APA formatting and documenting standards, a general requirement at the college where she teaches. This teacher explained that the request was so simple. Curious about the level of frustration clear in her voice, I asked her – with Shaughnessy (1976), Sommers (1980), Joseph Williams (1981), Bartholomae (1986), and Elbow (1991) in mind – why this was such a concern for her. She further explained that students have to learn to write well. APA for her, I ascertained, was a manifestation of good student writing. I was interested both by this teacher’s insistence on documenting and formatting standards as a key indicator of good writing and by the value placed on this task as a major point of grading criteria. Whether her concern about APA was genuine, the result of appeasing what she perceived as an institutional value to an administrative representative, or both, is unclear. However, many interactions like this over the years have prompted within me a desire to understand how teachers form their philosophies about responding to student writing, especially in disciplines outside of English studies.

Coming to such an understanding is no simple task. A brief summary of the studies conducted relative to general assessment practices the past two decades shows a breadth of topics: “mismatches between teachers’ beliefs and written feedback practice” (Lee 2009); the gains and losses between “direct versus indirect feedback” (Jamalinesari et al. 2015); how students respond to “teachers’ written commentary” (Treglia 2008); formative versus summative feedback (Fife and O’Neill 2001); the ways in which feedback can prompt student reflection

(Yancey 2015); the gaps between teachers' philosophies and practices (Ferris 2014). The list goes on and on. Studies into online commenting practices, specifically, are also becoming commonplace, as the modality continues to gain momentum in the curricular repertoire of institutional class offerings (Allan and Seaman 2017). Yancey, for instance, conducted a study on grading and assessing low-stakes ePortfolios. Townsend et al. (2016) reviewed a partnership formed between high school students and college graduate students in which graduate students provided feedback to their high school counterparts through a learning management system. In addition to Hewett and Warnock's theoretical work, the College Composition and Communication Council (CCCC) have also provided extensive direction on the role of faculty intervention in student writing in an online context in their 2017 position statement on writing assessment online.

While pursuing an understanding of teachers' beliefs about commenting practices relative to student writing can be challenging to say the least, it is also an important first step in determining why teachers respond as they do. Inconsistency in belief and practice, for instance, may be less about one's desire to provide detailed, meaningful feedback and more about navigating heavy course loads and increasing student numbers. Let's use the example of Zhan's (2016) recent study on student and faculty perceptions and performance. Students, he extrapolates from his research, "received more feedback on grammar than content" (77). Like many studies of its kind, Zhan's findings present the deficiencies associated with these practices by suggesting that the teachers being studied believe this is the best method of providing feedback. Because the article decontextualizes the commenting act from the overall learning experience, the teacher is positioned both in philosophy and practice as an editor, teaching only for purposes of standardizing English (Strauss 1997). What is missing from this study is

information about these teachers' backgrounds, their education and training, how they position themselves in relation to the expectations of their field of study, their epistemological reflections about writing and student learning, and the current state of their instructional responsibilities. All of these factors construct layers of contingency that complicate the commenting act because the situation is not fully explored. How much time, for instance, did the teacher have to assess, grade, and return each student assignment? Did institutional barriers impact how the teacher constructed feedback? Does the teacher emphasize correctness because a certain discipline values procedural correctness more than sophisticated compositions? What was the instructor's goal for a particular assignment or set of assignments? Did classroom instruction elaborate on written feedback? Does an online environment limit the depth and impact of feedback on student writing? None of these questions is answered by the perception versus practice debate. Furthermore, decontextualizing the moment of practice from the definitions, beliefs, and circumstances that also exist in the rhetorical exigencies of the feedback genre gives us only a partial picture of what teachers ultimately do, not their thought-process about why they decide to comment in certain ways. Those motivations are what compel this study.

The following sections of this chapter provide many of the themes, theories, and challenges associated with providing feedback on student writing. First, I present the major theories of general assessment, defined here as how teachers determine the effectiveness of student writing, and writing feedback, the comments teachers compose to help students improve their writing. I present these instructional activities in this chapter to acknowledge the complex interplay between these two similar yet distinct interventions. One of the challenges practitioner-teachers encounter, which I will discuss later in the analysis of this study, is seeing assessment and feedback as interchangeable rather than complimentary. Next, I review existing theories of

writing assessment in an online educational environment. I then share a few challenges that influence feedback practices. I conclude this chapter by explaining how my study relates to and digresses from existing research. The goal of this chapter is to offer a comprehensive view of the theoretical conversations that shape and inform how and why teachers provide feedback on student writing in online, multidisciplinary contexts.

Major Theories of Writing Feedback

General Theories of Feedback

In order to understand the conversation around feedback as it applies to student writing, we must first review the general theories related to assessment in writing education. According to Treglia (2008), faculty align their approaches to feedback in primarily eight major ways: “the common reader, the copy editor, the proofreader, the reviewer, the gatekeeper, the critic, the linguist, and the diagnostician” (107). Chris Anson (2012) claims that faculty employ these roles in one of three ways, as “Dualistic responders,” “Relativistic responders,” or “Reflective responders” (107). Dualistic responders focus on local writing concerns and align with the copy editor or proofreader role. Relativistic responders pay more attention to global concerns and the ideas expressed in student writing, like a reviewer or common reader. Reflective responders fuse the two approaches, attending to both ideas and localized grammar and mechanics, spanning the spectrum of the eight feedback roles described above. The way in which faculty apply these approaches will determine how they attend to matters of feedback. These orientations can, essentially, provide general explanations as to why teachers focus on certain aspects of student writing in their feedback practices.

By extension, Straub (1996) contemplates similar orientations toward feedback as they relate to levels of control. He argues that the authoritarian, the editor, the collaborator, and the

reader responder commenting styles determine how a teacher perceives her or his role in writing education. These roles function on a continuum from controlling and directive to more interactive and reflective respectively (234). While his argument seems to reduce feedback practices to a duality, he believes that each role has value depending on the need of the student and can be assumed by the teacher as necessary. His theoretical continuum demonstrates the complexity of the commenting task, since it is situation-dependent and contextually driven.

The fluidity of situation and context prompt some theorists to engage in feedback practices that encourage collaboration and dialogue. Fife and O'Neill (2001) argue for "construct[ing] the student as an active, knowledgeable participant in the process of writing and revision" (310). This student-centered approach focuses on student self-reflection, peer evaluation, and faculty mentorship, qualities Yancey (2015) details in her work on assessment as well. The idea is that situation and context will dictate the type of feedback the teacher provides her students. Yancey (2015) simplifies this notion by stating, "I choose to respond" (305). Her assertion here signals an important attitudinal element to feedback. Embracing the intervention as a reader talking about her experience with the writer makes the communication relevant and productive. Response from this theoretical standpoint, in other words, is conversational, relevant, and future-focused. It becomes a collaborative effort between teacher and student.

In this way, current theories about teaching writing through collaborative and dialogic feedback often attempt to straddle a theoretical line drawn philosophically between teacher as expert and teacher as guide. In the first instance, the teacher operates from a position of authority and defines correctness from a fixed place. This is a positivistic perspective that Derrida describes and contradicts in his work. He explains that institutions, imbued with the authority to dictate reality, teach that language is stable and certain. They establish and enforce

rules that protect their version of reality. As the accepted reality, these authorities “assume the right to silence those whom they position on the other and inferior side of the binary” (Smith 149). The expert perceives her or his role as enforcer of the reality for which her or his discipline constructs its expectations. Adam Banks equates this type of corrective approach as one that remediates, constituting a power move meant to exclude certain groups of students from learning. On the other side of that perceived binary, the guide aligns her or his beliefs with the expressivists, concerned that direct intervention in the writing task may result in appropriating student work. Control for expressivists, like Elbow and Murray, is detrimental to writing development, since writing initiates from within the writer (Berlin 1982). Sommers (2006), Yancey et al. (2015), Hewett (2015), and others see potential in merging these grand theories by providing both intervention as appropriate but allowing space for individual writers to reflect upon their own writing strategies. In this way, the teacher as responder arranges the learning experience for the student and acts as a guide

E2L, ELL, EFL and Basic Writing theorists often debate practices along the lines of error-centered feedback. Studies relative to the feedback task in these specialized English disciplines typically focus on how the point of written interaction between student and teacher is managed or mismanaged. Icy Lee (2009) and Li Zhan (2016), for instance, argue that teachers often say they provide detailed feedback at all levels of writing, when in fact they generally limit their feedback to editing or proofreading. Jamalinesari et al. (2015) find that teachers in English language learning situations focus to a high degree on what is wrong with a student’s writing and rarely, as a result, provide much positive feedback. The general belief as to why faculty respond in this way to student writing in these situations has to do with the often glaring and obvious mistakes that English language learners make, such as using the wrong preposition, applying the

incorrect verb tense, or selecting words with the wrong denotative or connotative meaning. In other words, teachers assessing student writing that does not visibly conform to the rules of Standard English get caught up in responding to what Patrick Hartwell describes as the “first meaning” of grammar: “The set of formal patterns in which the words of language are arranged in order to convey larger meanings” (209). So pervasive is the role of error in writing in these disciplines that the topic has come to dominate much of the theoretical discussion in E2L, ELL, EFL, and Basic Writing literature.

Perhaps this is the reason many of the studies related to the role correctness plays in writing education initiate from L2, EFL, and ELL research. The primary concern surrounding error-centered writing in English language learning situations, not to mention a major emphasis for researchers in this field, has to do with the seemingly myopic view some teachers have of English. Instead of focusing on meaning, some teachers attend to semantics and syntax, assuming that a correctly written paper somehow resolves the issue of a student appearing to be an outsider. Messy language constructs further suggest to readers inadequacy, clumsiness, or incompetency. Some communities of practice even use language as a marker to identify who does and does not belong, as I explained in Chapter 1 (Lakoff 2000). The challenge for educators responding to student errors in these writing situations is doing so in a way that elicits improvement. Scholars such as Connors and Lunsford (1993) and Beth Hewett (2015) recommend finding a balance between positive commentary and constructive feedback. Students are more receptive to feedback if they do not feel personally criticized.

In fact, Freire (1970), Shaughnessy (1976), Hartwell (1985), Bartholomae (1986), Elbow (1991), Banks (2006), and Inoue and Poe (2012), among others, recognize the racial, institutional, social, and individual power hierarchies inherent in grading, assessing, and

commenting practices. Of the theoretical positions described above, those that target error, assign remediation, and limit access to academic or professional communities serve to keep certain vulnerable groups from full participation in education and, as a result, realizing their intellectual, social, and economic potential. Inoue and Poe introduce into the assessment conversation broadly and the commenting practice specifically the observation that “unequal or unfair outcomes may be structured into our assessment technologies and the interpretations that we make from their outcomes” (6). These technologies are often invisible to the teacher who applies them according to best practices or as part of an initiation that defined their own instructional training, rendering the activity of feedback from a philosophical standpoint even more complicated.

Of course, theories related to feedback on student writing are varied and complex. The individual nature of student learning demands responses to the task that are dynamic and fluid. Often, what it means to provide feedback in one student writing situation may be ineffectual or even counterintuitive in another. For instance, a teacher who comments extensively on comma splices when a student clearly doesn't understand the basic parts of speech offers advice the student may not be ready to apply. A residual outcome might even be that the student takes fewer risks in her writing for fear the sentences might be too long. Debates about directive versus facilitative approaches to feedback (Straub 1996), positive versus negative commenting strategies (Nicol 2009, Treglia 2014), emphases on local versus global writing concerns and their impact on student writing development (Williams 1981, Elbow 1991, Sommers 2006, CCCC 2013, Jamalinesari 2015, Hewett 2015), the role of peer evaluation (Nicol 2009, Yang and Meng 2013, Townsend et al. 2016), and reflection as a tool for recognizing one's writing strengths and weaknesses (Hewett 2015, Yancey 2015) illustrate the expansive and nuanced topics that form

the philosophical dichotomies that come to define this instructional practice. As we have seen, when applied to L2, EFL, ELL, and basic writers, these debates intensify and multiply (Bartholmae 1986, Elbow 1991, Treglia 2008, Lee 2009, Yang and Meng 2013, Jamalinesari et al. 2015, and Zhan 2016,). For instance, the result of error-centered approaches that focus on mistakes, many scholars argue, may disengage English language learners, emphasizing their sense of otherness and demoralizing their self-efficacy.

If such complexity exists for teachers within the writing disciplines, it should come as no surprise that faculty working outside of English studies exercise some trepidation when it comes to providing feedback on their students' writing. Writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines scholarship supports a movement toward standardized approaches to quantify the assessment of student writing as much as possible, in an effort to remove some of the ambiguity that makes writing assessment abstract. Their main caveat is that such standardized assessment tools must be applied without compromising student learning. I have seen this standardization movement manifest most recently in rubrics with universal criteria for effective writing, a tool regularly applied by teachers in all disciplines in an attempt to wrangle what they perceive as the relevant particulars of writing. In response to this movement, Barbara Walvoord (2014) proposes that rubrics designed for general application in classes, departments, and institutions can work, if the criteria reflects the task of the writing assignment and faculty can employ the tool effectively (14). The development and use of such a rubric is also a point of debate in assessment theory. Anson et al. (2012) claim that such unification efforts fall apart against the situational and contextual elements of writing unique in each discipline and to each writing task. As Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) contend, the complexity of writing assessment at the individual and programmatic levels is exacerbated by "differences in expectations," "disciplinary

preferences,” and “subdisciplinary and idiosyncratic preferences” (61). It would seem that as soon as the tool comes together under common categories, it begins to fall apart amidst nuanced criteria. The solution for Anson et al. is to create “discipline-specific rubrics” (12). But what does this mean for teachers responding to student writing? Is a standardized rubric an effective enough tool to communicate expectations and guide student writing on assignments?

One of the primary disconnects I have observed both in the formal study conducted for this dissertation and in my informal observations of practitioner-teachers working in multiple disciplines is a tendency many disciplinary faculty have of conflating and confusing assessment tools with feedback practices. That is, they often pigeonhole their feedback practices by relying extensively on assessment tools designed to be primarily summative in nature. Consequently, feedback on writing assumes a similarly summative purpose, which emphasizes product and disregards the crucial role of process in writing development. For this reason, assessment and feedback become entangled as faculty attempt to assess writing from a list of standardized criteria that reduce the writing task to a checkbox and the feedback that accompanies it to an assessment of a student’s knowledge of grammar, formatting, and correctness.

And let’s not forget about Inoue and Poe’s warning about the power disequilibrium that often drives decisions relative to the creation of such tools. According to Inoue and Poe (2012), because “race is often elided” or rendered invisible in the development of rubrics, these tools are often designed by and for an assumed normalcy that often manifests in the form of writing criteria from specific standard language conventions (9). Furthermore, if a rubric is employed to determine placement in remedial classes or restricts access to some potential students, as Adam Banks (2006) also contends, the rubric acts more as a safeguard for the “status quo,” to employ Robin Lakoff’s (2000) term, than a way to measure student writing or understand writing in

nuanced and diverse ways. In relation to race, then, I add an additional question to the ones above: In what ways can rubrics purposefully and supportively provide latitude for language and thought diversity in its categorical applications? Furthermore, how can feedback in conjunction with rubrics be leveraged to help students develop their individual writing voices?

Before we answer these questions, we turn to the opinions of English studies scholars, many of whom agree that teacher comments “play a leading role in undergraduate writing development” (Sommers 2006, 250). Nicol (2009) proclaims, “There is no such thing as good teaching without good feedback” (1). Fife and O’Neill (2001) argue that “written commentary is where most direct teaching happens” (300). When this intervention is handled effectively by teachers, as Jamalinesari et al. (2015) claim, “feedback procedures” have a “positive and powerful impact” on “the achievement of their students” (116). Despite its importance, scholars also recognize that “responding to student writing is a critical endeavor that is often fraught with frustration and uncertainty” (6). Lee (2009) describes the task for some as “frustrating,” “grueling and anxiety-ridden,” and “tedious and unrewarding” (13). Several studies capture the tension of commenting on student writing by identifying the incongruities between the proclaimed values some teachers place on written feedback and the often general, vague, and summative practices in which many teachers engage (Treglia 2008, Lee 2009, Ferris 2014, Hewett 2015, and Zhan 2016). A rubric, we might conclude, then, may not alone suffice for facilitating growth in an activity that is so idiosyncratic. Yancey (2015) provides useful perspective here. For her, “a scoring guide does not, in fact, promote conversation” (304). Conversation, she contends, is the essential ingredient to effective feedback. A rubric, while a useful tool, only enhances the intervention when it specifies how to improve writing. Coupling a rubric with conversation can steer the tool in productive ways. Still, many practitioner-teachers

with little formal training in providing feedback or teaching writing, I have observed, may pursue standardized tools in an effort to save time and simplify the feedback activity by removing the contingency upon which such tools rely.

The core purpose for many practitioner-teachers in pursuing assessment tools, such as comprehensive rubrics, is to bridge the gap between general writing courses, like English Composition, and student writing in the disciplines through standardization. For this reason, much of the work in English Studies scholarship prioritizes the teacher's role in writing feedback. In their work on writing across the curriculum, for instance, Yancey et al. (2015) advocate for a shared vocabulary for talking about writing, so students and teachers can extend the conversation about their writing that begins in freshman writing classes to their programmatic courses. Transfer, Yancey's research team claims, is possible only if students have a framework to take with them to their varied writing situations. She calls this theory teaching for transfer (TFT), and it involves teaching students common key terms, providing readings about theory and writing, assigning reflective writing opportunities, and requiring students to develop their own theory of writing (73). These areas are designed to help students consciously transfer knowledge about writing and writing practices. Its success is contingent upon the teacher's instruction and intervention, however. These interventions often influence how students perceive themselves as writers and impact how they approach the writing task.

Student perceptions about writing, incidentally, are often influenced by a teacher's philosophy of writing education. The beliefs that form a teacher's philosophy will manifest in the types of interventions the teacher chooses to make. Those interventions appear in the comments they make on student writing: how they respond, if they respond, when they respond, why they respond, and the medium they use to respond. These considerations form complex

notions of what writing should mean and how the activity is conveyed to learners. Online instruction adds yet another layer of complexity to the considerations a teacher must make in communicating feedback.

General Theories of Online Writing Feedback

Early theories of writing feedback in online courses typically concern themselves with technology usage, often conflating commenting practices with “instructor activity and interaction” broadly (Swan 2002, 26). These theories of interaction often assume the form of instructional “presence,” of which feedback is one dimension (Garrison 2007; Palloff and Pratt 2013). Perhaps because the transition to teaching online with unfamiliar technology can be a significant challenge for teachers, the majority of initial research into this instructional modality took the form of various how-to manuals that intentionally and unintentionally positioned online instruction as a barrier to learning. An article by Mehlenbacher et al. (2000) illustrates this primary concern. First, the authors present writing instruction in its traditional form, advocating for process-based, regular, and timely intervention on student writing. “The challenge,” the authors posit, is to “emulate and perhaps extend these instructional approaches online” (7). Next, they present a list of interactions that form what they call “student environment interaction,” a concept similar to D. Randy Garrison’s (2007) online presence model and founded on the principles of Chickering and Gamson’s Seven Principles of “Good Practice in Undergraduate Education” (1987). The study that frames their work attempts to identify how students learn differently in an online versus a residential setting. Their findings generalize to how active learners perform better in online writing classes than passive learners. Many such studies often dichotomize instructional modalities, concluding that technology inhibits rather than promotes both instruction and learning, a point Scott Warnock contests in a bibliography of

studies that defend the efficacy of online writing courses evidenced by positive outcomes (2013). Feedback from this dichotomized perspective often comes to represent a general student communication strategy rather than a method of individualized intervention to guide improved writing.

Perhaps this nascent focus was essential before more robust theories of online writing feedback could develop. Beth Hewett, one of the current leaders in online writing instruction, published a 2004 training guide focusing on five principles that describe how faculty can select, engage, and reflect upon technology. Like many resources at the time, the emphasis of this training focused on preparing faculty to teach online. The specific features of that preparation assumed, as those studies describe above, a general admonition for teachers to be present, a primary concern for a modality that requires purposeful activity for students to feel sufficiently supported. Feedback practices were often positioned, as a result of this messaging, as methods of interaction or strategies of engagement, instead of opportunities for instruction, modeling, and dialogue.

Online Feedback

The many general feedback practices and theories I detailed above have a direct impact on feedback practices online. The extended challenge for online writing instructors is the technology, which often separates and isolates students. Online writing instruction (OWI) theorists, then, often contend with how written feedback functions in this primarily asynchronous, computer-mediated environment. In fact, in many online classroom designs, feedback generally means written feedback. This does not, however, diminish the activity. Rather, it might even render the activity more important for faculty working in this modality. Fife and O'Neill (2001) offer an appropriate sentiment with their assertion that “the important

response, the response that counts, is the written comment to the student draft” (302). Many OWI scholars embrace both the challenges and opportunities afforded the online teacher relative to providing the meaningful written comment. Some even contend that teaching writing with writing, as is often the primary intervention with online writing instruction mediated through technology, provides modeling opportunities that enhance student learning.

For instance, Beth Hewett (2015) values a direct approach to written feedback, claiming that students perform better revision when they are given specific instruction. As the result of this epistemological view, Hewett developed an instructional theory she calls “semantic integrity.” Her theory of semantic integrity avoids indirect, what she considers vague commentary, in favor of feedback that explains and shows students how to improve aspects of their writing. She provides a formula unique to online feedback that consists of personalizing feedback, providing support or praise as appropriate, summarizing the main points of the student’s writing, offering constructive comments relative to global concerns, and, depending on the writer’s situation and work, providing some local level direction (192). Like the efforts of Anson’s (2012) “reflective responder,” Hewett’s goal is to use feedback as an instructional intervention that focuses students’ revision efforts on working through the rhetorical problem. In her perspective, feedback should be clear and actionable.

Scott Warnock (2009) speaks to the collaborative potential of the online classroom for expanding feedback practices to informal writing situations. He argues that virtual discussion forums can serve as spaces for students to provide low-stakes feedback on peer work. Warnock suggests that such evaluative opportunities offer students an authentic purpose for writing: “to help their colleagues produce a better written project” (109). As for teachers, Warnock’s feedback theory aligns with Straub’s “reader responder” role. He claims that a teacher’s primary

role as reviewer should be “fleshing [himself or herself] out as an audience for [his or her] students” (123). His perspective also aligns with Yancey’s, when he claims that a written “conversation” is the key aspect of effective feedback (125). In his text, Warnock also mentions using personalized online rubrics that can be edited to capture specific comments to individual learners. Some of the online software programs Warnock recommends for creating “electronic rubrics” include “RubiStar, RubricOne, Rubrics.com, and Waypoint” (126). The advantage of these programs is that they allow for personalized comments in addition to general criteria, a necessary component of effective rubric use according to Anson et al. (2012).

In addition to sharing general best practices about grading student work online, Warnock also provides some specific guidance, claiming that “online writing teachers” should think even more about feedback than teachers in residential settings (168). Like Yancey’s suggestion in “Grading ePortfolios: Tracing Two Approaches, Their Advantages, and Their Disadvantages,” Warnock posits that the asynchronous nature of online learning provides a “wealth of student data to investigate” (169). He recommends that teachers grade everything and use students’ own reflections as part of their feedback process, also a technique Yancey et al. advocate in their teaching for transfer philosophy. Warnock’s comments on all aspects of instruction and feedback are valuable to any would-be online instructor.

Of course, the online platform provides ample opportunity for technologized feedback practices. Jennifer Grouling (2018) suggests that electronic feedback, mediated through smart devices like iPads, enhances commenting production for teachers and improves the feedback experience for students. Using technology, incidentally, is a point of difficulty for many teachers, who prefer to use handwritten comments instead of typed comments through software like Microsoft Word. In fact, Ferris (2014) discovered in a survey that the majority of teachers

prefer to handwrite feedback, despite typed feedback being more legible, “less cryptic,” and easier to archive for later discussion (21). An additional finding in Ferris’s study is that teacher participants reported finding “it hard to adjust to reading student papers on a computer.” In this vein, participants explained, “word-processed commentary was less convenient and/or more time-consuming” (17). Clearly, teachers perceive the electronic-mediated feedback task as different and, according to these comments, more complicated than traditional hand-written commenting practices. One might ask how pervasive these opinions are for teachers, especially for those working in the online modality, which requires computer-mediation in every dimension of the course. In fact, such written communication is one part of an extensive array of communication types that define the instructional experience for online faculty. They must also write emails, clarifications, and often announcements, to name a few (Hewett 9). From this perspective, not only does providing feedback take more time on a computer – or at least seem to take more time, according to Ferris’s participants – but it is only one of several writing responsibilities for teachers in online contexts. Grouling acknowledges that learning the technologies needed to provide electronic comments often feels like too great an investment to teachers and training is not always readily available. Consequently, many resort to trusted and tried methods or streamline their feedback to codes, rubrics, or brief end comments. New technologies like the iPad, however, Grouling argues, provides a good alternative, a halfway point as it were, between handwritten comments and electronic comments. She found that teachers could transition to the iPad, particularly with use of a stylus to replicate the motion of handwriting. She also recommended the use of audio and/or video capturing software to provide feedback, offering this intriguing quantitative statistic: written comments average about 250 words, while audio comments average 830 words (73). In English Studies, the discipline of her

study, these devices and their application to feedback situations are gaining acceptance. She warns teachers, however, to be clear about the intent and meaning of their feedback to avoid confusing students (91).

As the examples above illustrate, theories of commenting on student writing online are often contained to writing situations within English Studies, especially composition. For instance, even though Warnock's book can serve as a general guide for teaching online, its primary audience consists of online writing teachers. Hewett's comments are also designed for an OWI audience. In fact, the majority of research about commenting on student writing generally and online specifically is currently directed toward teachers in English Studies. This means that teachers of other disciplines benefit from these conversations either through colleagues in WAC programs, by virtue of trainings from writing center faculty or tutors, or through research conducted on their own, if at all. This significant gap is problematic if teachers perceive that helping students improve their writing is important to their professionalization in the disciplines. It is also a timely topic since many teachers now teach students online. For these reasons, I take up this study: to identify the philosophies and practices of faculty who are important contributors to improving student writing through their online teaching and feedback. By doing so, I hope to identify opportunities for expanding the conversation detailed above to broader academic circles. However, before this study can be fully detailed, we must turn to several challenges that complicate the feedback genre. It is within these complications we come to understand how difficult the feedback activity can be.

Points of Debate that Complicate Feedback Practices

Error as an Orienting Philosophy

Similar to the experience I related at the beginning of this chapter, I have had many conversations over the years with faculty about the role error plays in assessing and responding to student work. Many contend that the instructor's primary responsibility is to locate and correct error in student writing. One teacher told me that addressing writing mistakes guides student improvement. Perhaps. The intentions that drive such a philosophy seem sound, particularly if error identification becomes a launching point for meaningful intervention. What I have observed, however, is that many faculty stop at the juncture of error identification, penalizing the error as inconsistent with rubric expectations or English language standards. Few online teachers pass the threshold through which identification of error becomes meaningful instruction.

Central to the conversation about writing feedback practices in general, then, is how teachers orient themselves toward and handle error. In fact, each of the writing theories presented earlier in this chapter by Straub (1996), Treglia (2008), and Anson (2012) are defined by how teachers perceive their instructional responsibilities in relation to the mistakes students make in their writing. What this focus has done to writing research over the years is provide a rich dialogue about the extent to which error should be addressed in the feedback effort. The point of debate often finds purchase in the following binary: While some faculty adopt, as Deborah Mutnick and Steve Lamos (2014) identify in an essay about basic writing pedagogy, "error-centered approaches," Mutnick and Lamos warn against "overemphasizing" grammatical correctness as an instructional strategy (28); the dangers of overemphasizing correctness in writing instruction include instilling in students a lack of confidence in their writing, confusing a

grammatically correct artefact as well-written and thoughtful writing, and discounting student ideas because they are riddled with surface error.

Critics of error-centered feedback approaches believe that applying a purely error-centered philosophy to writing instruction not only limits student learning, but it belies several social inequities that always already serve to exclude certain learners from full participation in academia, in communities of practice, and in learners' own self-realization. In one sense, errors in writing aren't always or primarily about language mistakes, they contend. Instead, language serves as the marker that differentiates the "us" from the "them." When inscribed from a place of social politics, error labels some as "ignorant" and "silences" others (Freire 32), relegating them to oppression, an oppression that is carefully enacted and culturally embedded and perpetuated by the "status quo" (Lakoff). Thus, education that promotes self-awareness and renders transparent these inequities often functions in contrast to the goals of institutions and communities that rely on unequally distributed power. This perspective suggests a subtext to error-centered feedback practices that extends well beyond the few pages in which such comments are made.

There are, in fact, many reasons feedback that overemphasizes error can be problematic to student learning. For one, it can act as a tool of exclusion. Foucault described this in his work *Discipline and Punish*. He explained that power labels and "ranks" learners as "basic," "remedial," or "outsider." As I will illustrate throughout this dissertation, many of the practitioner-teachers in this study tend to use error as a primary measurement for determining appropriate writing. In these cases, not only is student writing reduced to one dimension of the writing task, but students are also judged in a similarly reductive way. If students do not produce error-free work according to a particular brand of Standard English, they are often considered

unfit for disciplinary service. Such an approach reinforces hierarchal power structures that safeguard the dominant culture.

Lakoff further argues that power coalesces in language that determines “what words mean, who can use what forms of language to what effects in what settings” (Lakoff 42). Therefore, those who err in demonstrating their fluency with cultural expectations within a community, be it within academia or industry, are marked as outsiders (Gee 200). Outsiders tend to remain outside the dominant cultural paradigm and aren’t allowed to take advantage of the benefits provided insiders. In the case of this study, Standard English acts as a code for belonging and a gate for those who do not yet possess the code. Practitioner-teachers who maintain this perspective, as I will present in subsequent chapters, protect the status quo and conflate learning with the insider ways of knowing and doing presented in Gee’s work on Discourse communities. Error, incidentally, can act as a covert sign that someone belongs to the wrong class, race, or culture. Error, then, is no trivial matter when it comes to the complexities of discursive negotiation. If learning is primarily about acquiring “secondary Discourse,” as Gee suggests, and involves “talking, acting and valuing” in certain community defined ways, error is the excluding marker, the sign that inhibits full participation (171-178).

Adam Banks (2009) contends, in his work on race and rhetoric, that language is complicated by racial linguistic and academic inconsistencies. These inconsistencies inform movements in education to “raise standards” that further remediate and typically exclude minority and vulnerable student populations (19). As a technology (Ong 1982), then, language rules and conventions have the power to identify, label, and dismiss outsiders (Gee 2010). In this study, we will discuss how grammar and formatting expectations serve to signal arrival for some writers and punish others.

Additionally, feedback oriented primarily toward error often has the opposite effect of its intent. Rather than inspire students to improve, it can harm their sense of self-efficacy and turn them away from writing. Mina Shaughnessy (1976) metaphorizes the type of assessment that targets correctness in writing as a diagnosis designed to determine the intellectual health of a student. If students don't meet the grade, they run the risk of being labeled outsiders from those "Guarding the Tower" and are academically exiled to remediation (312). Students writing in a situation like this learn to equate writing with failure and see themselves as poor writers. Similarly, in "Inventing the University" David Bartholomae (1986) reminds us that basic writers, a label attached to those students who are not fluent in the academic discourse practices of the institution, must remediate until they can approximate the conventions appropriate to university standards (524). So complex are these nuances that focusing exclusively on surface errors as signals for improvement negates the more complex language moves students are capable of performing and that lead to deeper knowledge of writing. Ultimately, overemphasizing grammatical errors in writing feedback can be detrimental to a student's development as a writer.

If overemphasizing error in feedback has such potentially detrimental outcomes, why do many teachers continue to make language errors a primary concern of their feedback? In his study of "Grammar, Grammars, and the Teaching of Grammar," Patrick Hartwell provides one explanation. He contends that teachers who gravitate toward error-centered instruction are "rigidly skills-centered and rigidly sequential" in their approaches because they see formal language constructs as "the cornerstone or linchpin" of writing education (208). Such an epistemology of writing instruction contends that correctness is a foundational step toward more advanced writing abilities. There is logic in this position. If language is like a building and grammar is the foundation, focusing on strengthening the foundation would, in theory, render the

structure it supports sturdier. Language, however, is not like a building and grammar does not act alone in supporting good writing. In fact, grammar is too unstable to act as a solid foundation for writing. Hartwell further posits that grammar is highly “abstract” and “implicit” (212). It is abstract because it relies heavily on the contingency of the situation. It is implicit because it is rife with tradition, insider knowledge, and social indoctrination. Ong elucidates that “grammar rules or structures normally originate, live, and function far below the level at which articulation functions” (31). Many of these rules are transmitted and practiced at the point of communication and function primarily for effecting a successful speech or writing act. From this point of view, grammar serves the communication act and not the other way around. Knapp and Watkins, in their work on genre and grammar, capture this function well. They write, “Grammar needs to be taught as a potential and generative function within language” (40). They suggest that grammar is not a foundational concept but rather a complex undertaking that requires years to develop.

Beth Hewett (2015) also speculates reasons why teachers focus so intently on error-centered approaches to writing assessment. She suggests that teaching “formatively” toward meaningful student revision rather than “summatively” to point out what is wrong is difficult and takes more time (4-5). Consequently, some teachers default to an assessment of surface errors to avoid the instruction, modeling, and demonstrating that formative writing feedback demands (5). In a study Hewett (2012) conducted, students reported the following general writing areas as most important because these are the primary topics for which they receive feedback: “grammar, organization, sentence structure, word ordering, citing references, addressing awkward wording, and correcting grammar and spelling” (113). These areas are primarily related to formal editing issues. The study also determined that students tend to apply surface-level changes to their work when feedback focuses on these lower-level concerns (113). Students, thus, begin to conflate

good writing with correct writing, thereby emphasizing “lexical changes” in their revisions and become blind to “revision as a process” (Sommers 382). Revision, for them, becomes “a “rewording” activity (382). The result of this type of feedback is that the product takes priority over the process.

We must not be remiss to acknowledge, however, that emphasis on grammatical concerns in writing feedback may be the result of time limitations more than anything else. With increasing enrollment numbers in online courses, faculty are pressured to work quickly to meet the time demands associated with a high work volume. A quick search on Google shows thousands of results related to time management and the feedback task. In fact, Raffo, Brinthaup, Gardner, and Fisher (2015) discovered in a survey about faculty time with online assessment an all too familiar reality of teaching online: “grading papers and assignments and facilitating discussion threads comprised the majority of teachers’ time” (5). They, like so many others, advise faculty to develop a “good time and effort management strategy” to cope with these demands (5). Perhaps part of that strategy involves abbreviated time with each grading task. Because error is a more objective target for writing assessment, faculty may resort to comments on correctness to assuage the relentless demands on their time, forming, as it were, a feedback epistemology of compromise rather than of effective practice.

Automated Feedback

This issue of time has prompted some theorists to tout automated feedback as one way technology can be leveraged to mitigate the feedback task. Lavolette, Polio, and Kahng (2015), for instance, suggest that automated feedback is immediate and relevant to particular language concerns (52). Automated feedback can be understood as feedback produced by software programmed to recognize and correct error. These software programs range from the spellcheck

and grammar features in programs like Microsoft Word to more advanced programs that detect stylistic concerns and plagiarism. It is true that significantly delayed feedback may not carry the same impact on student learning as immediate feedback, but the quality of such feedback may be inconsistent with the goals of writing instruction. Because programmable virtual assessment tools are typically limited to sentence, word, and grammar errors, the nuances of tone, voice, audience, connotation, register, diction, idea, and so forth go undetected. Furthermore, priority on correctness, as argued above, may convince students that an edited piece of writing is strong writing. Mutnik and Lamos (2014) articulate the damage error-centered pedagogy can have on basic writers. When their work “seems ‘correct’ at the sentence level” it can still “fail to demonstrate academic ways of knowing effectively” (24). Lavolette, Polio, and Kahng (2015) recognize this limitation and, for this reason, argue that automated feedback should be used as an additional resource to teacher-generated feedback rather than the only form of feedback.

As a particular point of connection to this study, Grammarly, an online grammar and stylistics language program, is cited and applied regularly by the practitioner-teachers I interviewed. The program’s primary function is to identify word and sentence level errors, as well as recognize unoriginal text in its massive online database. In many cases, faculty in the disciplines apply this tool as their only measure of identifying writing needs, which, unsurprisingly, exclusively focus on punctuation, spelling, and grammar. Participants in this study explained that they submit student work to Grammarly, review the language errors and weak stylistics the system annotates on the student paper, and then use those areas to guide their feedback on student work. These editorial concerns are then communicated to students as the things they need to improve to make their writing better. The system is not able to detect, however, voice, tone, reasoning, cohesion, coherency, or purpose.

In an article that addresses the gap described above, Doug Hesse (2013) posits why automated feedback can stymie student writing growth. He explains that automated feedback cannot recognize, anticipate, or respond to the complexities of writing at the ideational level, the level at which students translate their ideas into language. Computer programs are also unable to pick up on the nuances of critical thought. As such, it cannot detect a writer's purpose, nor understand how to assess an audience or follow the logic of an argument. In terms of grammar, Hesse agrees that formal writing has important merit but that such conventional elements should be considered later in the writing process. A computer is a limited tool and can only respond to a few levels of conventional observation and error-correction. For this reason, Hesse reminds us that "writing is a fundamental human act" (para. 15). He also suggests that teachers need to approach each individual student feedback situation as a "trusted reader" and "coach" (para. 15). He proposes that intervention in the form of specific comments that guide writing improvement is better managed by the rhetorical sensitivities of a teacher.

Like comprehensive rubrics, automated feedback captures a limited sense of the specific writing act. While it minimizes work for teachers, it also reduces the scope of what feedback can, perhaps should, do for students, as Hesse points out. Like spellcheck, automated feedback only identifies what it has been programmed to recognize. It cannot assess the thought that drives the writing, nor assess the audience who will receive it. It doesn't feel the words or understand how to relate them in denotative and connotative ways. Such feedback, provided without the contextual nuances of the writing exigency, leaves a wide void in the communication act.

Each of these points of debate illustrate one of a multiplicity of considerations a teacher must make as she prepares written intervention on student writing. Orientation toward error and

the ways in which technology can be employed to supplement or enhance feedback reveal some of the beliefs about the role faculty feel they play in writing education. These activities also represent intervention behaviors that originate from personal, professional, and social influences. The following section looks specifically at how this study relates to the existing conversation about faculty feedback epistemologies. It also explains how it differs from existing studies by addressing the conditions of online writing feedback and multidisciplinary instructional contexts.

The Gap This Study Addresses

Like research conducted by Dana Ferris (2014), which investigates teachers' philosophies and practices in responding to student writing, I take up a similar effort in my study. That is, I am curious to discover what “teachers themselves do with regard to feedback and why they do it that way” (7). Such a study in online settings is particularly rare and complex. Ferris’s study, for instance, looks only at a specific group of hand-picked instructors who represent just a small portion of academia, in a narrowly defined instructional space. In other words, my study targets two additional areas important to understanding how faculty define and form feedback philosophies: the research detailed and analyzed later in this book investigates how teachers in *multidisciplinary contexts* define their roles in relation to feedback practices in the *online instructional modality*.

To further explain how my study differs from the work that has come before it, I will unpack and analyze Ferris’s work. The studies that Ferris summarizes in her research regarding the history of instructional philosophy and practice as it applies to feedback on student writing is limited to primarily residential courses within English Studies programs. Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990), for instance, interviewed teachers and students in an effort to correlate practice with teacher intent. Newkirk (1995) discovered that teachers and students differ in terms of their

goals. Montgomery and Baker (2007) surveyed teachers in English programs about their feedback practices to learn that most feedback focused on low level writing concerns, such as grammar and mechanics. Lee (2009) found inconsistencies between what faculty say they do and what they actual do when it comes to feedback on writing. What Ferris illustrates here is a limited focus over the years on why teachers respond to student writing the way they do based primarily on residential writing instruction practices but not philosophies, nor from a multidisciplinary perspective.

The few studies that have looked at writing feedback practices from a multidisciplinary perspective are often entangled with the collaborative English Studies movements of writing for transfer, writing across the curriculum, and writing center theories. They also tend to apply general theories about feedback in overly broad ways. Consider a brief article by Schmalz, Feyl, and Schmalz IV (2004). The authors apply Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven principles for good practice to a Health Counseling course with a writing emphasis. They claim that teachers in their program assess student knowledge and prompt writers to reflect on their writing strategies with their feedback. To accomplish these goals, they conduct peer evaluations, hold conferences, and then decide which students "should be sent to the school's writing center to receive further instruction and assistance" (7). While this is a good way to offer students additional support, it does not describe how a teacher in this program personally intervenes in the writing task to assist a student with the nuanced, technical, and discipline-specific writing expectations of a unique community of practice. The assumption, upon close scrutiny, is that writing is a skill applied the same in every situation.

The implication that writing is a task with universal application to all writing situations has been extensively contradicted. Downs and Wardle (2007) argue that genre and situation are

not all the same and assuming a universal “academic writing” generalizes the activity to an unrealistic, not to mention context-irrelevant, standard (556). They warn that writing is inextricably “content- and context-contingent” (558). Moreover, universalizing writing exchanges a genuine relevance for one that is important only in academia. Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) explain that generic “writing is motivated by practical needs of the workplace” and is “evaluated by its effects, not on its conformity to pre-established criteria” (17). The contextual element, according to this statement, is contingent on the outcome, rather than the criteria that labels it good writing. When we remove the context, extricate the purpose from the situation, and immobilize genre to a template for writing, we communicate to students that writing is only an academic exercise and decrease its value as a major contributor to communities of practice.

As we can see, a brief foray into the expectations of different disciplinary conceptions of writing quickly illustrates a “variety of meanings and significances... in how faculty” understand “common terms,” the ways in which specific communities define even the basic writing concepts of “‘evidence,’ ‘audience,’ ‘purpose,’ ‘style,’” etc. in uniquely functional ways (Thaiss and Zawacki 89). These varying interpretations demonstrate how “social institutions” make sense of language and the discourse that drives its purpose (Gee 129). James Gee’s work on Discourse communities reminds us that language in its many forms is generally the product of complex interrelations between “saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing” (171). This reminder is important because it locates the writing task in extremely nuanced and contextualized places. Consequently, the notion that writing of one type for one situation will meet the social demands of the rhetorical exigency of every community communication act is misguided. It is, therefore, incumbent on the instructor of any discipline, the individual whose insider knowledge prepares outsiders for practice within the community, to provide the appropriate level of socially relevant

feedback to students. Implicit in the ways in which students write for a discipline is how they appear to other members of a particular community. Such communication includes self-awareness, cultural competency, and appropriate rhetorical identity. These complex introspective moves and culturally enacted activities require not only apprenticeship but also corrective action at the ideational, ideological, and social levels. Writing in this way requires students to “invoke” the appropriate audience, to employ Ede and Lunsford’s (1984) term, to anticipate the reader’s needs, to formulate an argument appropriate for the situation and in line with the expectations of the community, to apply jargon and insider rhetoric at the right times and in the right ways, and so on. Providing feedback on writing, in this sense, becomes much more than ensuring grammar is correct or sentences are coherent. Effective writing is not merely an act in replicating a certain form or formality, but an ability to reflect, enact, respond, anticipate, and persuade.

An example that illustrates how assumptions about writing as a universally applied skill impacts disciplines outside of English Studies can be found in an article by Stevens et al. (2014), in which the authors describe the development of an online writing intensive course for Nursing graduate students. This research team’s study only obliquely references helping students develop improved “scholarly writing skills” as one goal of the curriculum (17). How that happens and in what ways written comments aid in that improvement are unclear. The researchers state that “instructors grade and provide feedback on discussion board postings and assignments” with the aid of a rubric (20). The details of this feedback are reduced to the claim that students “use the feedback to improve on upcoming assignments” (20). Furthermore, when describing formal writing, the researchers limit their list of criteria of scholarly writing to APA formatting and documenting requirements and language correctness, similar to the way the

instructor I wrote about at the beginning of this chapter expressed her primary concerns with students' apparent disregard for APA documenting standards. While these two writing functions are important editorial concerns, little is said about how students are guided to improve writing at the ideational or rhetorical levels, beyond a superficial reference to critical thinking. Certainly, the intent of this writing intensive course is designed to prepare students to write more effectively in their professional situations. The authors' work is, without question, an important exploration of writing education at the point where academia meets profession. The implementation of the interventions intended to promote such transition may not entirely match the goal, however, despite being extremely well-intentioned.

It is clear that the details associated with how teachers provide meaningful intervention in instances like the one described above is less certain at the juncture where theory meets practice. Teachers who enact these interventions have the insider knowledge to convey to students what matters to the professionals in their discipline. They have a wide range of explicit and implicit understanding of the writing that students need to produce to be successful academics and practitioners. What is sometimes less clear, however, is what they think is helpful feedback, why they compose comments the way they do, and how they interpret their instructional role in relation to the writing task.

Conclusion

While the studies presented in this chapter provide valuable insight into the general practices of writing feedback, few explore the epistemological motivations, the roles and goals that form teachers' philosophies relative to responding to writing, that prompt teachers to deploy practices the way they do. What research does exist relative to the study of beliefs about commenting practices on student writing, in summary, typically focuses on the incongruities

between what teachers say they do and what they actually do (Fife and O’Neill, 2001; Treglia, 2008; Lee, 2009; Ferris, 2014). The problem with such discoveries is that they tend to “study teacher comments in a vacuum... separated from the rest of what we do as writing teachers” (Fife and O’Neill 301). Cindy Moore, Peggy O’Neill, and Brian Huot (2009) articulate, in a study about creating a culture of assessment across college disciplines, an important starting point for understanding why faculty handle writing instruction generally and feedback practices specifically the way they do. They explain that we must first “understand who the faculty are, what their values and beliefs about writing are, and how these may affect assessment” (122). How teachers perceive themselves as educators, how they define themselves as writing instructors, and how they believe comments function to assist students in developing their writing are epistemological concerns that precede composition and distribution of written feedback. These “implications about knowledge and truth” serve to form philosophies that drive practices (Smith 2010). I propose that what we sometimes observe as an incongruity between practice and belief may better be seen as consistency relative to a teacher’s constructed identity.

The teacher who confessed to me that she was displeased with her students’ inconsistent application of APA documenting standards prioritizes this aspect of writing for a reason. Belief always precedes behavior. Any attempt to theorize, without understanding the epistemological motivations that inform a teacher’s practices, is an exercise in speculation. I realized that any explanation I formed in my mind about this teacher’s practices through my filters and my experiences would be incomplete, would act only as a mirror reflecting my own epistemologies. To truly understand the practitioner-teacher, the disciplinary perspective, the value teachers place on writing within community and its relationship to academia rested not on my speculation but

on the ways in which teachers define themselves and their responsibilities in relation to the writing task.

To this end, I prepared a qualitative study that consists of an interview and observation. In the next chapter, I explain my process for engaging participants in conversations about their views of writing, how they respond to student writing, and what they perceive as effective feedback practices relative to writing. I then explain how I collected, coded, and analyzed participant data. I also explain institutional and cultural influences that may guide some of the decisions faculty make in response to student writing specifically and about education generally. Lastly, I discuss the online modality as an additional layer of complexity in the study.

The reason I took up the inquiry of why teachers provide feedback on student writing in online courses the way they do is because I am curious to know how the unique responsibilities of the online environment impact how teachers define themselves as writing teachers in this highly textualized and digitized space. I believe the information gathered from this study will also provide valuable insights for the leading online writing instruction theorists Hewett, Warnock, and others as they form pragmatic theories of praxis designed to help students succeed in online writing courses and in an increasingly technologized world. As I introduced above, the following chapter will detail the design of my study and describe the methodology I employed to better understand teacher commenting epistemologies relative to student writing.

CHAPTER 3. DESIGNING A FRAMEWORK FOR ONLINE FACULTY FEEDBACK

EPISTEMOLOGIES

Introduction

As introduced in the previous chapter, my study is designed to capture faculty epistemologies related to online writing instruction from multidisciplinary perspectives. To achieve a meaningful study of faculty attitudes toward writing, I interviewed eight online teachers of various disciplines and observed them respond to student writing. The research framework I detail in this chapter describes the qualitative and ethnographic approach I used to collect data. The study was structured to both invite faculty participants to be introspective, mindful, of course, of the limitations of memory and of the social constructs that influence storytelling described by research theorists Gubrium and Holstein (2009), and to observe them in practice, also mindful that observers alter the authenticity of the observed activity, as well as influence its meaning through their own world filters (Luker 156). Still, much can be learned from what faculty think they believe and how they demonstrate that belief in practice. How teachers construct an explanation of belief, the sources from which they draw their philosophies, and the ways in which their ideals form an epistemology of writing education will serve researchers of multidisciplinary online writing instruction well, as this study will provide data specific to a demographic that makes up the majority of online teachers. However, little research has been done to date that renders transparent the teaching practices of this majority group, particularly in terms of how they teach and respond to student writing. For this reason, this study offers researchers a deeper look at how this demographic perceives, employs, and assesses writing in their disciplinary practice. With Dana Ferris's (2014) research about teachers' philosophies and practices as a starting point, I orient my study toward understanding the beliefs

and philosophies that prompt teachers to comment on student writing the way they do. I extend her study to the online classroom to further elucidate how these philosophies are influenced by technology.

I am aware that this study pursues a narrow understanding of writing instruction and feedback practices in relation to the broad theories described in the previous chapter. By adding the condition of online education to the writing act, I am accessing challenges, practices, and perhaps fears that may evoke, within participants, different thoughts about what feedback means and how it should be enacted in a virtual environment. I further recognize that adding the condition of diverse disciplinary perspectives may incite a variety of disparate viewpoints relative to expectations about teaching writing. However, these are differences that need to be gathered and analyzed to demystify how teachers in general working in virtual spaces guide students to improve their written communication practices in academia and in their professions. Incidentally, my findings will also illustrate significant similarity in the approaches and attitudes of study participants.

Because my research focuses on individualized faculty epistemologies, I do not specifically espouse any one theoretical position on feedback practices in this study. In my personal practice, I tend toward feedback activities that promote dialogue (Yancey 2015), inspire students to discover meaning through reflection and practice (Elbow 1991), and attempt to model writing at all stages of the writing process (Hewett 2015, Sommers 2006). One might label such an approach “expressivist” (Berlin 1982) on one hand and “reflective” (Anson 1999) on the other. General feedback orientations are important to this study because they come to define certain practices and, more importantly, manifest epistemological perspectives about writing and its role in education. I do not, however, take up the effort to elevate one theory over another.

Such an activity is subjective and beyond the scope of this study. However, I acknowledge that my own commenting tendencies and philosophical preferences have and will surface in my investigation and interpretation of this subject as I strive to better understand what epistemological underpinnings prompt teachers to employ specific commenting practices.

What follows is an explanation of the methods I developed for gathering relevant information, a description of my population for this inquiry, and the approaches I selected to collect and report findings. I deliver this information in the following fashion. First, I present an overview of the research methods I employed to gather qualitative data for this study. Next, I discuss the unique structure of the institution and the culture where the faculty I studied work. Then, I detail with further specificity the theories, tools, and approaches I applied to collect, code, and analyze data. I conclude this chapter by describing the challenges and limitations that impact the study and its generalizable outcomes.

Research Methods

The purpose and goal of this research study is to understand how teachers practicing in various online instructional contexts and disciplines define feedback and perceive their role in responding to student writing. This information will also provide further insight into the complexities, challenges, and strategies inherent in instructional spaces where writing is typically the primary method teachers use to comment on student writing. Furthermore, this information will be used to determine how faculty from multiple disciplines perceive themselves as responders to student writing in online courses. To collect relevant data for this study, I conducted interviews of faculty currently teaching at an associates, bachelors, and master's degree-granting institution based in the Upper Midwest. The interviews provided crucial

information about how and why teachers of various disciplines at this institution respond the way they do to student writing.

As part of the interview process, I also observed faculty narrating how they would generally respond to an ungraded writing assignment from one of their classes. Because this college employs a standardized curriculum in its online courses that integrates transferable skills assignments, which typically result in some written product, each teacher who self-selected to participate had a writing assignment they could provide for the observation portion of the interview. For lack of a better description of this ethnographic activity during the interview, I called it a think-aloud protocol in the spirit of user experience testing and qualitative research methods and adapted to capture the vocalized narration of faculty working through the feedback task in response to student writing. To further illustrate, I will describe in some broad detail my interview with Cordelia, a pseudonym I introduce later in the dissertation for the first participant I interviewed. After our interview concluded, I asked Cordelia to share with me an anonymous student paper. At this point, I explained to Cordelia that I would like her to show me how she typically provided feedback on student work. I then asked her to talk me through her process. She first explained that she needed to open a document, which contained her rubric. She, then, reviewed the assignment instructions. Next, she began reading the student paper. At points during this part of the observation, she paused her reading to type comments. She then toggled between her rubric and the student paper and described how she uses rubrics in conjunction with and as a guide for her feedback. The entire think-aloud session lasted about thirty minutes. Each of these observations offered valuable insight into how practitioner-teachers at the same institution arrive at their feedback decisions. Because the interview and observation took

extensive time to complete, I scheduled a minimum one-hour block per interview at each participant's preferred time.

As I have previously explained, the purpose of this study was to answer the following research questions:

- How do practitioner-teachers in the disciplines generally define their role and goals related to providing feedback on student writing online?
 - How do practitioner-teachers define feedback on student writing in online courses?
 - How do teachers see their role relative to teaching student writing online?
 - What are their goals with providing feedback on student writing in this modality?
 - When do they know they have met their feedback goals?

Institutional Structure

This study was conducted at an associates, bachelors, and master's degree-granting institution based in the Upper Midwest, a private career college with campus locations in six states. Most faculty who teach for this college, generally speaking, practiced in the industry prior to assuming the role of full-time instructor or continue to work in the industry while teaching part-time. This insider knowledge proves helpful to students who assume the role of apprentice to teacher-mentors (Gee; Johns). This model of teacher-student relationship is particularly apparent in the healthcare professions. In fact, most of the practitioner-teachers from healthcare backgrounds in this institutional setting value an instructional approach that mimics on-the-job training, as one participant called it, "tell one, show one, and do one." Such instruction effectively lends itself to kinesthetic learning, as students train to use their minds while performing tasks. As a result, many practitioner-teachers tend to have an innate

understanding of professionalism and appropriate writing practices in their field rather than formal pedagogical training. Such models of instruction, guided by a philosophy of training as teaching, can render writing in the minds of some practitioner-teachers as another hands-on task to be performed in conjunction with other class procedures. It is not unreasonable to assume, based on the responses submitted during interviews, that teachers in the disciplines at this college often see writing as a product that either demonstrates technical skill or needs to be remediated until it is clean and precise, like other procedures for which they require competent delivery. Such a perception can be challenging when applied in an online setting.

In fact, the majority of the school curriculum at the college where I conducted this study is delivered online, with the exception of nursing and health sciences programs, which require residential labs and/or clinical externships. Occasionally, when demand is high enough, some high-enrollment, required general education courses will run residentially. That said, the majority of courses at the college are delivered online. While new faculty are enrolled in an extensive modular training to prepare them for teaching online, they do not receive training specific to writing instruction or assessment. They are assigned an academic leader, who conducts quarterly observations and provides support through regular trainings and quarterly professional development sessions. The college uses Blackboard Learn as its primary learning management system, though some courses are delivered in Moodle. Faculty also receive training and support relative to navigating and editing their courses within these virtual spaces.

English courses primarily serve as preparatory courses for writing in the disciplines at this institution. Students are required to take English Composition and, typically, a couple of elective writing courses, such as Introduction to Literature, Humanities, Creative Writing, English Composition II, Literature of American Minorities, etc. These courses are designed to

disseminate general writing principles that constitute transferable skills, which include communication, critical thinking, digital fluency, diversity and teamwork, ethics and professional responsibility, and information literacy. Courses within the college's disciplines include these transferable skills in their assessment of student writing. Because the college values effective application of transferable skills and assesses students' ability to demonstrate competency with these skills, most courses emphasize writing as a preferred method of evaluation. Consequently, assignments for online and blended didactic courses typically consist of weekly writing assignments, discussion forum writing, and project assignments that incorporate multiple writing genres and allow students to demonstrate their understanding and management of those skills.

Course projects at the college serve a similar purpose as courses designed for writing in the disciplines or writing across the curriculum. The idea behind these projects is twofold. First, they provide materials for assessment at all levels of a student's programmatic lifecycle. Second, they require students to work with writing to both demonstrate proficiency in their field and in writing. The college uses this information to evaluate institutional outcomes and to improve curriculum. To aid faculty with assessment, all courses at the college delivered in online and blended formats include standardized course-specific rubrics, which are designed by subject matter experts to account for the disciplinary, as well general education, skills intended for assessment on a particular assignment. Depending on the assignment, these rubrics include varying levels of specificity, which is, consequently a point of debate picked up by Chris Anson et al. (2012) in relation to institutional use of universalized rubrics. Elements of writing are generally subsumed under a broad category that also includes documenting and formatting, grammar and mechanics, and concepts such as clarity and organization. Nuances of writing can get lost amidst the minutia of the specific content-related tasks students are asked to perform and

upon which they are assessed by the guidelines of these rubrics. Teachers are thus left to interpret and apply their understanding of writing to their contextualized experiences.

Given the college's unique structure in terms of its demographic of practitioner-teachers, standardized curriculum, and online processes, I recognize that this study is being conducted under specific conditions and may not serve as a point of direct comparative analysis for institutions of a different structural makeup. That said, research into online writing feedback practices in multidisciplinary contexts within any course that requires students to produce writing can be a useful study for any institution that 1) deploys online courses, 2) values writing as a tool of assessment and learning, and 3) works with faculty to provide meaningful feedback to students about their writing.

Institutional Culture

The college is part of a multi-campus system with twenty-three locations in six states. To ensure a consistent educational experience, the college designs courses around a standardized curriculum. That is, curriculum is developed by a team of faculty subject matter experts and course designers and then uploaded to a master online shell, which is replicated into sections. The curriculum shares standardized outcomes, includes common content and assignments, and aligns with accreditation standards as appropriate for each of the seven schools at the college. Faculty are assigned course sections with curriculum already prepopulated into course shells. This model allows consistent course objectives to be delivered across the college's campuses and to its nationwide online network.

At some point, every student at this particular college will take online courses. In fact, many of the general education courses, of which English Composition and the array of elective literature and writing courses are included, are taught primarily in this modality. To support

students, the college provides an online tutoring service, an online writing center called BrainFuse, and guides with links to additional support materials, including an instant messaging application which connects students to librarians for support in researching project assignment topics, templates for formatting and documenting papers according to APA standards, and a citation building program called NoodleTools. Students also have access to Grammarly, a program designed to review writing for sentence and word errors, stylistic inconsistencies, and unoriginal text. As I mentioned in the Institutional Structure portion of this section, a tool such as Grammarly aligns well with the most urgent writing concerns practitioner-teachers have at the college: it provides students with guidance toward producing clean, correct, and rule-oriented writing as a standard for professional communication. Grammarly generates a report for students that scores their paper relative to these primary criteria. The advantages and disadvantages of using automated programs for writing assessment are detailed by Doug Hesse (2013) and described in some detail in the previous and subsequent chapters.

As a career-focused institution, the college primarily serves students who are returning to school after spending time in the workforce. The average age of students at the college is around 27. Having spent time away from college, these students are committed to an education with specific career goals in mind. To that end, students value flexibility, accelerated programs, and authentic learning assignments with clear, relevant objectives. While students returning to college tend to be focused and goal-driven, they also have gaps in their writing education (Hewett 2012). Some disrupted their writing education at crucial stages of development (Hewett 19). Furthermore, for some, their work experience often did not require them to produce academic or substantive writing. In addition to these challenges, many first-time students at this college also experience an acclimation period, in which they must discover how to learn in an

online setting. Some students quickly adapt to the extensive reading (Hewett 2015, Warnock 2009), extensive writing (Warnock 2009), and often isolated activities (Palloff and Pratt 2013) associated with online education. Others, however, find the transition from previous learning experiences more challenging. For these students, the college provides tutors, academic advisors, and general campus support.

My experience is that students returning to school at this institution also value very clear assignments with concrete right and wrong answers. Some struggle most with complex writing tasks that require them to rethink, revise, and even re-envision what they initially wrote. Hewett explains that nontraditional students often believe that what they have written is “carved in stone” and resist, to some degree, the recursive and generative nature of writing (19). In some respects, students at this institution can put a lot of pressure on their teachers to simplify feedback to actionable items like the tasks they are accustomed to performing in the workplace. In a sense, students may be complicit in encouraging feedback that prioritizes the objectivity of language correctness. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the difficult position in which many practitioner-teachers find themselves relative to student expectations within the college’s institutional culture. Throughout the study, readers will likely be surprised by the similarities of participant perceptions about and attitudes toward writing across several distinct disciplines. These similarities are not fabricated nor are they designed to reduce individual epistemologies to a collective epistemology; rather, the similarities of opinions and approaches are highly influenced by a culture of common practice that drive the career-based objectives of the institution regardless of modality but intensified within the online instructional space.

The college serves students in residential and blended, but primarily fully online capacities. The college provides resources, student and faculty training and support, and a

standardized curriculum for purposes of promoting consistent learning outcomes. As is the challenge and opportunity with any career-focused college, practitioner-teachers at this college strive to prepare students for workplace success. To aid in that transition, they instruct students to write professionally, which often translates in practice to writing error-free and according to the formatting and documenting standards detailed by the American Psychological Association. The questions posed to teachers at this institution in relation to this study ask them to consider: How they define their roles and goals relative to providing feedback on student writing. In the next section, I describe how I went about collecting data to determine their responses.

Participants and Data Collection

To answer the questions this study poses, I conducted eight interviews, the number of teachers who self-selected to participate by responding to a recruitment email approved by the Institutional Review Boards of two institutions, with practitioner-teachers from several of the major programs at the institution: Nursing, Health Sciences, Technology, Business, and Education. Interviewing an eclectic mix of participants helped me capture a variety of disciplinary perspectives and practices. Of course, due to the self-selection process of this study, the pool of participants formed organically and was not entirely inclusive of all schools at the college. I interviewed six women and two men. Seventy-five percent of the participants were white and 25% were black. The interviews were designed with the goal of collecting insights into the “life worlds” of faculty participants (Kvale 2007). “Life worlds,” as qualitative researchers define it, are the everyday practices of real people. In order for the study to generate meaningful and relevant data, I wanted to capture practices that are authentic to teachers’ actual commenting activities as far as that was possible. Also, in accordance with the tenets of effective interviewing detailed by Jacob and Furgerson (2012) in their article on writing

interview protocols, I used a script and question route (Appendix I) as part of a more inclusive “procedural guide,” one that articulated what I said at the beginning, during, and at the conclusion of the interview session (2). My initial set of questions were designed with the recommendation of Kvale (2007), Luker (2008), Krueger and Casey (2009), and Jacob and Furgerson (2012) in mind: they are “brief and simple” (Kvale 60), open-ended and follow a sequence that moves from “general to specific” (Krueger and Casey 43), clump question categories, invite interviewees to tell stories (Jacob and Furgerson 4), and include warm-up, build-up, and cool-down periods (Luker 170-171). The intent of this approach was to make participants comfortable, ask questions that encouraged explanation and elaboration, and provide sufficient data for analysis.

In the spirit of iterative development (Kvale 2007, Luker 2008, Creswell 2014), I revised questions at the prospectus stage of this project, after a dry run of the protocol with peer volunteers, and again following a couple of interviews. The purpose for making revisions was to ensure that questions prompted the most meaningful responses relative to feedback epistemologies, “since the knowledge produced in the interview depends to a considerable extent on the wording of the questions” (Kvale 62). As Luker suggests for all stages of the research project, the researcher must “do them... over and over again until it comes out right” (61). This is true of the research questions that frame the entire project, as well as the interview questions that provide the specific data that inform the perspectives that address the broader purpose of the study. A full account of the changes made to the question route is illustrated in Appendix (II).

Some of the most notable changes are summarized here. Shortly after my prospectus defense, I removed some questions that were general to teaching, such as “What is your favorite class to teach.” I discovered that this question particularly, while serving to warm-up

participants, was unnecessary once I added a few short-answer questions about program affiliation, teaching background, and experience with writing instruction. These changes served the pace of the route well and more naturally kept the conversation going in a direction most conducive to the goals of the interview. I also reconsidered my initial plan to conduct a survey as an entry point to interviews. Since the data I collected was qualitative and required participant elaboration, a survey seemed either an extraneous step or repetitive. Consequently, I merged the survey questions with the interview question route and found significant overlap. I was able to alter questions to capture the information both the survey and interview were designed to collect. After the first couple of interviews, participants, when asked to critique the question route, shared that the question “Should students be encouraged to respond to instructor feedback? Why/why not?” surprised them. Both participants commented that they had not considered student responses to their feedback could be a positive exchange. Per recommendations, I added a follow-up question at this point in the questioning route, to further gather insight into how faculty perceive such exchanges. The additional question asked participants, “Do you see student response to your feedback as a positive or negative exchange? Explain.” This question prompted interesting responses, often about student attitude and faculty responsibility detailed in the following chapter, but certainly proved a worthwhile addition to the interview. After the fourth interview, I added another question to bring further clarity to how the role and influence of a practitioner-teacher’s discipline impacts writing instruction. I added, “What role does writing play in your discipline?” I followed that question up by asking, “How do you teach students to write for your discipline?” Both questions provided insight into how participants perceived writing in their role as practitioners and asked them to confront the question of value relative to the writing act. After completing the first draft of my dissertation, I made another

important change, but this time to one of my research questions. I realized that one of my questions focused on assessment. However, my study, apart from some research and interpretation about assessment, really did not address this issue. I discovered that my questions more appropriately addressed how practitioner-teachers teach through feedback rather than assess. I, thus, changed the question from “How do teachers see their role relative to assessing student writing online” to “How do practitioner-teachers see their role relative to teaching writing online”? This change seemed to align better with the overall purpose of the study. I also decided that my big research question was “How do practitioner-teachers in the disciplines generally define their role and goals related to providing feedback on student writing.” The other four questions elaborate on the first by further exploring teachers’ roles and goals with writing and, therefore, fit better as supplemental questions to the initial big question. All in all, these changes produced important epistemological data I analyze in great detail in the next chapter.

During interviews, I also asked participants to engage in a modified version of think-aloud protocol, a technique often employed in usability testing. Rubin and Chisnell (2008) describe implementation of this technique as “participants provid[ing] a running commentary of their thought process by thinking aloud while performing the tasks of the test” (204). The task participants were asked to perform was to describe how they would or might respond to written comments on a student paper of their choosing and from one of their classes. I selected this approach for two reasons. First, observing teachers talk through the decisions they make when it comes to commenting on student writing renders transparent their personal feedback processes. Second, the decisions people make and the rationale that drives those decisions often belie beliefs about why people perform certain actions. Additionally, through a lens of Derridean deconstruction, listening for the unsaid, the elided, and the silent also provides meaningful

insight into the decisions faculty make and those they avoid. Understanding decisions from these angles is central to greater insight into the commenting practices of teachers at the college of study, as well as those of practitioner-teachers in general. Teachers were asked, prior to the interview, to bring a copy of a student paper without comments from a writing assignment from one of their online courses. This assignment could be a draft of a multistage writing project, a weekly written assignment, a discussion post, or some other piece of writing for which teachers typically provide feedback. Papers had student names redacted for reasons of confidentiality. Since the study focused on written feedback designed to help students improve their writing, a multi-draft or multi-stage assignment with incrementally graded sections seemed to work best for gathering relevant data. Each participant was asked to bring a minimum of two pages of student writing for the think-aloud observation. This request was not always possible. Faculty who had already completed grading for the week or who felt assignments from courses they were not currently teaching would better represent their assessment of student writing decided to use previously graded assignments. In these instances, their engagement with student writing assumed a more reflective than reactive experience.

Modality of Interviews

Because participants were often too far away to conduct face-to-face interviews, I conducted interviews using technology. I chose the synchronous teleconferencing software WebEx, which offers both an advantage and disadvantage, through which to conduct interviews. The system's advantages are clear. Because WebEx includes a recording function, each interview was archived for transcribing. WebEx also includes both a video camera, which allowed me to see participants to assess nonverbal communication, and an instant messaging application. The software also has a screen-share option, which allowed me to observe faculty

engage in “think aloud” protocol, as they described their thought process relative to providing feedback. The disadvantage is related to the technology itself. It can be temperamental at times and prone to video lapses or audio inconsistencies. For this reason, I also recorded interviews via audio capturing software on my smart device. Another potential disadvantage is that computer-mediated interaction can act as a psychological barrier for participants who may not feel as intimately involved in the project as they might in a physical room with the interviewer. To enhance the experience for participants in a virtual space, I turned to the counsel of Rasche and Platt (2014), particularly in terms of developing rapport with participants, listening carefully for and working through miscommunication, and conducting trial runs prior to a live interview. Trial runs involved two practice interviews with colleagues at the college where I worked to test the questions and the technology prior to the live sessions. While my interviews were conducted orally and did not have the same types of challenges Rasche and Platt experienced with their text-based computer-mediated interviews, I recognized that any internet based interaction is susceptible to limitations different than those in face-to-face meetings, such as technology-induced lag-time, a reduced sense of personal connection, and a greater chance for participant disengagement in the process or the interview questions.

All interviews were recorded in WebEx and also on the Android smart phone app Smart Recorder. I transcribed all recorded materials into text for purposes of coding. To ensure confidentiality, and in compliance with IRB requirements, all recorded materials were password protected and deleted once the project was complete. The following section details the methods I employed to code information into categories for analysis in accordance with grounded theory.

Data Collection, Coding, and Analysis

Once data was gathered, I employed the first cycle coding method open coding, which is similar to in vivo coding, which Saldana (2016) describes as “that which is alive” (105) because it captures the actual language participants use in their interviews. This approach takes words or phrases that participants use to create the language of codes and to develop categories and can be used for information gathered from interviews. It adheres to the grounded theory approach of pursuing meaning in the data (Urquhart 2013). Furthermore, this qualitative approach fits well with the goal of this study in that it identifies the language teachers use to describe their feedback practices. As Anson et al. (2012) point out in “Big Rubrics and Weird Genres: The Futility of Using Generic Assessment Tools across Diverse Instructional Contexts,” teachers from different disciplines don’t talk about writing in the same way. In fact, the study this research team conducted determined a mismatch between “what faculty members in a discipline say they expect of student writers, what they ask students to do in their writing assignments, and the criteria they use in assessing the resulting writing” (3). Observing faculty engage in writing assessment practices illustrates not only how well their beliefs about writing, feedback, and instructional support align, but also how they talk about and explain their processes. An important first step in determining how teachers define their roles in and determine their responsibilities relative to providing written comments to help students improve their writing, incidentally, is locating the language they use to describe their practices, an effort Yancey et al. (2015) have taken up in their work on transfer.

As a transitional coding method, called “axial coding” in grounded theory, I next coded the codes I gathered during the open coding stage of analysis, formed categories, and began to locate themes. This is, in essence, what Glaser and Strauss (1967) call moving from substantive

to formal theory (80) and what Luker refers to as bumping up analysis to “another level of generality” (131). The goal of this activity, as Saldana (2016) describes it, is to “split” and “lump” codes according to their relationships (229), as well as “elaborate” on the codes’ “meanings” (231). It is through this process that themes become more apparent and relationships begin to emerge from the data. From these relationships, I began to theorize meaning, or combine codes into selective codes, as grounded theorists Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe it. During this stage, I also created a visual representation of how I understood the relationships between categories. It helped to first generate a list of important terms in hierarchical order and then to shift categories into primary or secondary categories. Doing so, helped me move from data organizing to data analysis. For instance, I determined that the code “professionalism” was a key indicator of practitioner-teacher epistemology and should occupy a primary position in the hierarchy of codes. I then identified four major categories that aligned effectively below “professionalism” – “work ethic,” “formality,” “practicality,” and “arrival.” These terms captured well the intent of codes I gathered from the data representing clarity, content, conformity, and uniformity. These data collection activities are described in more detail in Chapter 4: Analyzing the Data: Mining for Epistemological Meaning and the theory I developed from this data is presented in Chapter 5: Writing as Tool for and Sign of Professionalism: A Theory.

Challenges and Limitations of these Methods

Since I serve as a college administrator, I am aware of the risk my research may pose participants. Power disequilibrium of any kind can be stressful to participants and can impact how open participants are willing to be. Creswell (2014) reminds researchers to be cognizant of “what the consequences of the interview for the interviewees and the groups to which they

belong might be” (98). To avoid making participants feel threatened in terms of their reputation or position at the college where this study is being conducted, I did not include as potential participants any teachers who currently or have at any time reported to me. Since the college I work for consists of multiple campus locations, I prepared a plan with IRB to ensure as safe and mitigated an experience as possible for participants by protecting the information I collect and keeping that information confidential (Creswell 99). Members of the IRB at the college where the study took place prepared lists of potential participants who qualified for the study. They also provided specific language to include in a recruiting email and a consent form, indicating that my study was being conducted as a student and not as an administrator. Language in this recruitment email and consent form are included in appendix C and E respectively.

In addition to the power discrepancy described above, I also recognize that the methods employed to gather information for this study will be interpreted through many lenses. First, faculty will construct a narrative that attempts to describe their practices in ways that are professionally, institutionally, and socially acceptable. That is, according to Luker (2008), answers to interview questions are more about what people believe should happen than they are about what has or does happen (167). Gubrium and Holstein (2009) explain that narratives are mediated and assembled based on factors including “who tells them, when, for what purpose, and in what setting” (21), always mindful of “the consequences of what is said” (33). As a result, I must concede that teachers in this study are more likely to demonstrate their epistemological practices than they are to explain why they make the decisions they do. Even so, there is value in capturing how people narrate their experiences and observing which details they decide to share and those they omit. In fact, by pursuing understanding, participants in a research study often experience small revelations about themselves and their behaviors. While

such moments may not reveal truth, per se, they can elicit deeper reflection and better insight into the decisions people make.

Not only do such lenses impact participants in a study of this nature, but the researcher also experiences similar influences while gathering, organizing, and analyzing data. The impulses and interests that prompted the research in the first place continue to impact how the researcher interprets the information she or he gathers. This certainly serves as a limitation in any qualitative study. I take up an explanation of my personal writing philosophy in Chapter 5 and acknowledge more specifically how my own writing epistemology directly influences how I prioritize and value the elements of ideation, how ideas are formed and articulated, creativity, and knowledge creation in writing education. That said, I take to heart what Luker reminds qualitative researchers: I do not attempt to distribute “a population across categories” but “to analyze the categories involved” (48). That is to say, I sample from a population that is doing the work that directly relates to the questions I strive to learn more about. I attempt to identify the “relevant categories at work” according to the circumstances of a specific faculty activity and “tease out some generalities about” my “particular research” (102-103). In this way, I analyze what participants say, look for patterns that generate categories, and try to determine what those categories mean. I openly admit that my interpretations of open codes that derive from interviews carry epistemological preferences relative to learning and teaching writing.

Conclusion

In sum, the research of this study consists of a qualitative interview and ethnographic think-aloud observation of eight participants at a career college with multiple campus locations and sets out to answer five primary questions

- How do practitioner-teachers in the disciplines generally define their role and goals related to feedback on student writing?
 - How do practitioner-teachers define feedback on student writing in online courses?
 - How do practitioner-teachers see their role relative to teaching student writing online?
 - What are their goals with providing feedback on student writing in this modality?
 - When do they know they have met their feedback goals?

Interview were held online through the video conferencing platform WebEx. Data was recorded, transcribed, coded, and categorized according to the first stage coding method open coding and the transitional coding method axial coding. Those codes were lumped and split into categories according to selective coding, analyzed in relation to emerging themes, and then reconstructed into a theory. The analysis that follows this chapter targets the epistemological tendencies of practitioner-teachers who work in multidisciplinary online environments and describes how the theory detailed in Chapter 5 emerged during the analysis process.

CHAPTER 4. ANALYZING THE DATA: MINING FOR EPISTEMOLOGICAL MEANING

Introduction

Having spent the last eleven years informally studying online faculty engagement with student writing as an academic administrator, I have internalized many theories to explain why faculty from a variety of disciplines make the decisions they do. However, many of my theories rely on anecdotal evidence, like the example of the frustrated teacher I described at the beginning of this research study. These theories tend to form as a result of observing a series of rhetorical actions faculty members take in their classes. While actions often belie beliefs, they don't always tell the whole story. In fact, some actions, like complaining about APA formatting because students just aren't including title pages, though a seemingly trivial writing matter from my perspective, can represent undermining serious disciplinary expectations and may be perceived by a practitioner-teacher as a serious breach of writing protocol. I knew that if I were to gather meaningful data to help me better understand how teachers from the disciplines in online contexts perceive student writing and their role in relation to the writing task, I would need to suspend theories that presume certain beliefs in favor of understanding why faculty respond with frustration to certain student writing proclivities, as in the example of the teacher's angst over APA.

As I explained in the previous chapter, the goal of this research study is to determine general qualities of writing feedback epistemologies of online faculty from multiple disciplines. While the previous chapter detailed the methodology of this study, this chapter presents findings based on delivery of that methodological plan. As illustrated below, these findings provide further insight into the complexities, challenges, and strategies inherent in instructional spaces where

writing is typically the primary method teachers use to communicate with students about their writing. Furthermore, this information relates how a specific group of practitioner-teachers from multiple disciplines at a career-based college perceive themselves as responders to student writing in online courses. The study sets out to answer the following set of research questions:

- How do practitioner-teachers in the disciplines generally define their role and goals related to providing feedback on student writing online?
 - How do practitioner-teachers define feedback on student writing in online courses?
 - How do practitioner-teachers see their role relative to teaching student writing online?
 - What are their goals with providing feedback on student writing in this modality?
 - When do they know they have met their feedback goals?

Since this study focuses primarily on teachers' perceptions of their role as responders to student writing in online courses, the first question is the most important, with questions two and three providing essential, albeit ancillary, elaboration on the topic introduced in question one.

Questions four and five provide extended insight into the role of faculty feedback on student writing as it relates to faculty goals in relation to their perceived role in the feedback task.

Ultimately, the first question establishes the purpose of the study and the subsequent questions both limit the scope of the study to the specific criteria of the role and goals of online teachers at the same career-based college and also allow expansive potential for how those roles and goals manifest in a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

To this end, I developed questions for an interview that focused on how, why, when, and where faculty participants locate and enact the writing feedback task in their disciplinary courses.

I conducted the interview in the following way. I asked participants a series of twenty questions, not including follow-up questions that developed naturally from the flow of conversation. These twenty questions consisted of two main categories: the first five asked participants to report on their discipline, experience, and training; the final fifteen focused on writing. Participant answers to the first category of questions form the first portion of this analysis and provide insight into the characteristics and experiences of practitioner-teachers in the study. The subsequent category of questions constitute the second part of this study, which analyzes participants' perspectives on writing and writing feedback. Before I analyze participants' responses to questions, I review the results of the methods I used to promote gathering, organizing, and theorizing the data I collected from these interviews. The final section of this chapter presents the challenges faculty participants shared that may have direct or indirect influence on their philosophical perspectives or limitations that create dissonance between the practice and theory of their feedback approaches.

Although I discovered many expected similarities in participants' responses to interview questions, I also found some surprising differences. In terms of similarities, I verified that practitioner-teachers in this study tend to conflate writing with grammar, use rubrics with limited writing emphasis, and consider writing important only insofar as they interpret its value within the perceived notion of professionalism in their field. This last point is quite nuanced and tends to find purchase in a peculiarly general yet discipline-specific notion of professionalism. This term, professionalism, truly complex in its implied and covert meanings, is often employed broadly and students are generally expected to understand it implicitly. What I did not expect to discover is that faculty from the disciplines even, perhaps especially, those least comfortable with writing themselves, use complex writing processes in composing their feedback. However,

they rarely share their own effective writing processes with students in their courses. This disconnect between what teachers in the disciplines practice themselves in composing comments and their inability to communicate that knowledge to students, who typically receive vague feedback about becoming professionals instead, seems to create a rhetorical stalemate that perplexes and stymies some students into continued poor performance while frustrating faculty, who often interpret student confusion as stubbornness or a lazy unwillingness to make changes, or even to read faculty feedback. As I explained earlier in this dissertation, I also discovered that implicit and unconscious bias can negatively impact student learning when students are expected to always already know how to produce writing without error. The following analysis details how I arrived at these conclusions.

Methods Summary and Analysis

Before I provide an extensive discussion of the research questions I used to collect data, I will review the methods I employed to conduct this study. Using the online coding tool Dedoose, I organized, categorized, and analyzed research data using a grounded theory methodology similar to that presented by Strauss and Corbin (1998). I coded the data according to open codes captured from participant language, created categories from open codes as a measure of axial coding, and then honed those categories through selective coding. I describe in more detail the qualitative approaches I employed below to separate, combine, and then theorize the meaning of participants' data.

As I explained in Chapter 3, I used a multistage data collection and analysis process. The first step I employed was the first cycle coding method open coding, which derives codes from participants' own language. The reason I chose to employ the open coding approach was to find commonalities in the language participants used to describe writing. To manage the volume of

data I gathered from the interviews, I used the online data correlation tool Dedoose for cataloging and organizing codes, as I worked through axial and then selective coding activities (Figure 1). This effort proved fruitful. I recognized several correlations in nearly every interview relative to writing, including “clarity,” “flow,” “APA,” “plagiarism,” “rubric,” “error,” “grammar,” “instructions,” “content,” “research,” “Grammarly,” “if they read,” “good job,” and “professional.” Some other codes of note that also appeared in multiple interviews include: “Intelligible,” “making sense,” “communication,” “logic,” “documentation,” “sources,” “answer the question,” “text talk,” “objectives,” “getting it,” and “improvement.” These terms surfaced in Dedoose as I coded participant responses to the interview questions. I present them here in this isolated format to illustrate how codes emerged from the data and served to inform my understanding of the attitudes and beliefs practitioner-teachers expressed relative to writing feedback. In the following chapter I explain in detail how these terms interrelate and how they function to produce a working theory relative to how faculty in the disciplines perceive themselves and their roles relative to the writing task.

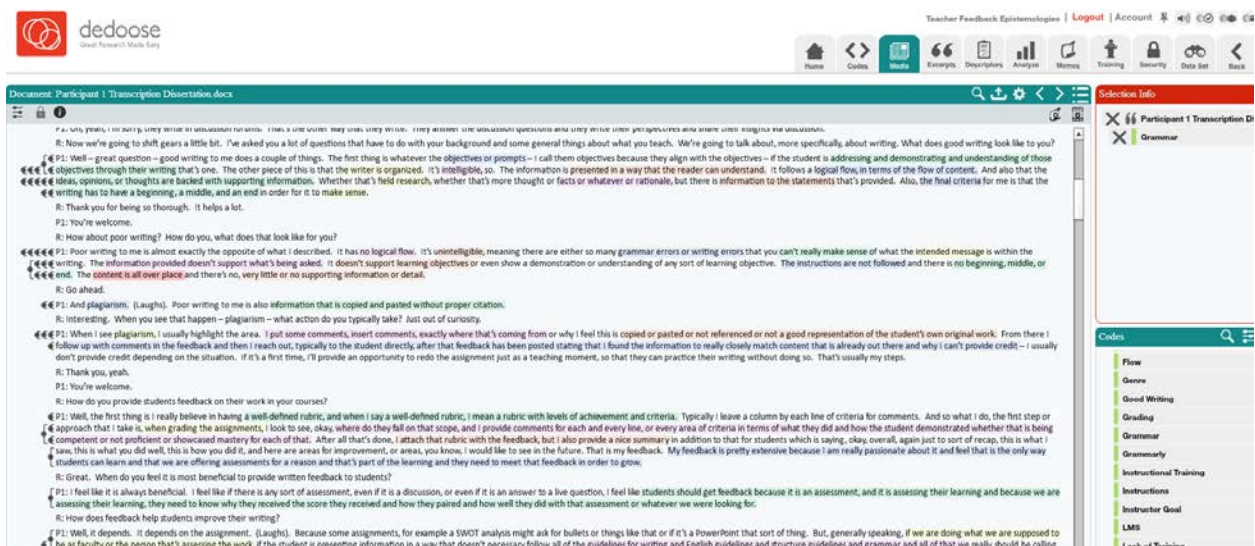


Figure 1: Dedoose Coding Process

In the next stage of the data analysis process, I performed axial coding, or, in other words, coded the codes, which is to say I lumped and split codes according to common relationships to determine categories that would move my analysis toward generating theory. During this stage, I identified participant comments about student attitudes toward writing as a category related to work ethic. If students “followed instructions” or worked hard to produce clean, error-free work participants considered them “good” writers and ethical stewards of their disciplinary responsibilities. As I teased out the nuances of what constitutes a disciplinary view of work ethics in writing, I began to see that the primary relationship between the elements of good writing, described in more detail in the subsequent section, found commonality under the heading of formality, since participants highlighted most often writing as a clear communication act that adheres to the rules of grammar, formatting, and meeting assignment objectives. I found a similar cluster form around the concept of practicality. The assignment, as participants explained, must “answer the question,” “make sense,” and “meet the objectives.” Furthermore, when students accomplish these practical tasks and achieve formality of presentation appropriate enough to be considered “professional,” and captured in specific criteria on a rubric, they are rewarded with positive comments that illustrate their arrival – “good job”; they “get it.” In this way, the codes began to align into four relatively clunky main categories: uniformity, conformity, clarity, and content (See Table 1). These categories, however, as illustrated in the table below, served as good transitional terms to help me understand the relationships between the codes identified in the open coding process but themselves are rife with contradiction, overlap, and inconsistency. Nevertheless, they were crucial in bridging codes to the more appropriate categories of work ethic, formality, practicality, and arrival, which I formed during

the selective coding process and which come to form the foundational concepts of the theory I explain in Chapter 5.

Table 1: Coding Process (Open Coding, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding)

Open Codes	Axial Codes	Selective Codes
Good Grammar, Grammatically Correct, No Text Message Format, Spacing, Indenting, Capitalization, APA,	Uniformity	The rules and standards of professionalism (Work Ethic)
Logical flow, flows nicely, Organized, Has a Beginning, Middle, and End	Conformity	The conventions of professionalism (Formality)
Intelligible, Understandable, Makes Sense, Not Cryptic, Gets to the Point, Direct	Clarity	The delivery of professionalism (Practicality)
Answers the Question, Detail, Evidence, Conciseness, Good job, professional	Content	The competencies of disciplinary knowledge (Arrival)

As I considered these four main categories – work ethic, formality, practicality, and arrival – they, too, seemed related under the broader topic of “professionalism,” a term employed extensively by participants. Not only was professionalism repeated multiple times by participants, it appeared often as the primary criteria for determining effective writing. As I focused my analysis on professionalism, I discovered that the term functioned not only explicitly but implicitly as the keystone to an epistemological perspective that defined participants’ views of writing as a tool for and sign of demonstrating and enacting the professional within a disciplinary community (See Figure 2).

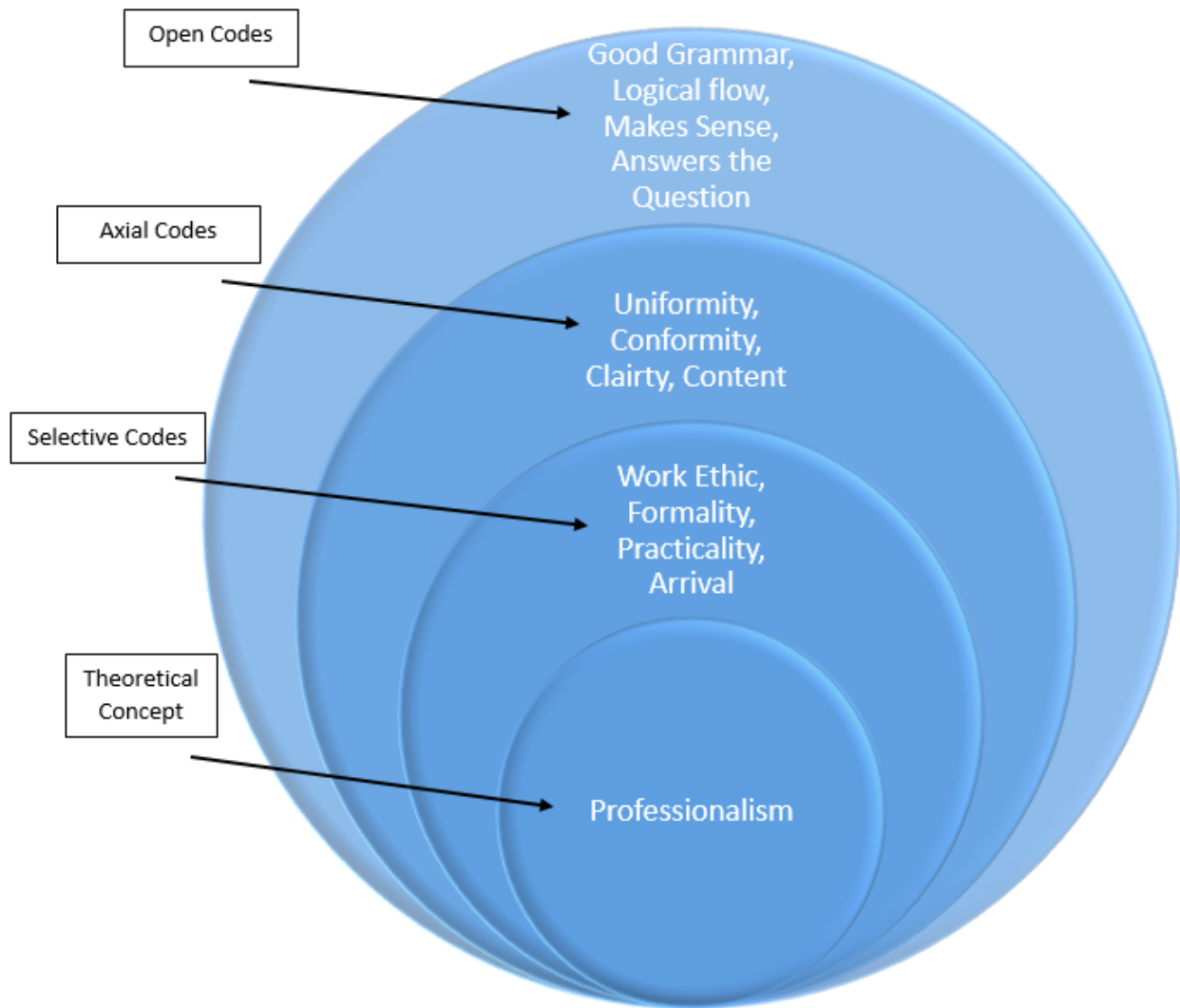


Figure 2: Relationship Model for Coding Process

In Figure 2, I illustrate how I formed my writing as tool for and sign of professionalism theory that I present in the subsequent chapter. The outermost layer of the relational model depicts the original language participants used to describe certain qualities of writing (abbreviated for purposes of this model). As the model narrows into the next layer, I present the axial codes I applied to understand the purpose behind the various qualities participants assigned to their definitions and perceptions of writing. The next layer clarifies the purpose of these transitional categories into the disciplinary concerns that seem to drive the types of comments

faculty provide on student writing. Professionalism, the final layer of this model and its core principle, not only explains why participants approach the writing feedback task primarily through a lens of technical correctness, but it also generates a circular type of logic, I posit, in which students are expected always already to be and enact the professional in their disciplinary writing. I will present further conversation relative to the role of professionalism in this model in Chapter 5.

Questions Analysis

Participant Characteristics

I will now present findings relative to this process by sharing participant information. Over the course of ten weeks, I interviewed eight full- and part-time teachers. The average time per interview was one hour and seven minutes and fifteen seconds. Of the eight participants I interviewed, two teach in the College's School of Business, two in the School of Health Sciences, one in the School of Education, one in the School of Technology, one in the School of General Education and one in the School of Nursing. Five of the eight participants serve as full-time employees. The remaining three are adjunct faculty. Six of the participants, all but the participant from the Schools of Education and Nursing, served as administrators at some point in their educational careers. Five participants were women and two were men. Six of the participants were white and two were black. All but one participant have backgrounds working in the field and can be termed practitioner-teachers, named such because they either did at one time or continue to work in the discipline they teach. The outlier, The General Education participant, worked as a K-12 teacher and administrator prior to transitioning to higher education.

Consequently, only the General Education participant had any formal teacher training prior to his first teaching experience. He did not, however, receive any training related to writing instruction. One of the School of Business participants served as a corporate trainer prior to teaching. No one else cited any preparation, with the exception of their own graduate college experience, that might be considered formal teacher training. That said, one of the School of Health Sciences participants made the point that her discipline requires her to “teach all the time” and challenged the notion of teaching as an activity isolated to classrooms at schools.

Years of experience vary by participant from only three years in the case of the School of Education instructor to seventeen and eighteen years for one of the School of Health Sciences participants and the School of Technology participant respectively. The average years of experience for participants in this study was about twelve. That experience typically consisted of multiple institutional contexts and often involved a transition from face-to-face to online teaching. The School of Technology instructor described his teaching experience in two waves: face-to-face instruction from 2000 to 2007 and online teaching from 2007 to present. One of the School of Business participants described various encounters with learning management systems, one of which she “didn’t get any training at all.” She then described having “to teach herself” so she could then “teach others.” One interesting observation she made about online training years ago is that “a lot of the training that’s out there – and we did the same thing as we first started rolling out – is just training faculty how to use the platform. It wasn’t training faculty how to be a good online instructor.” As a faculty trainer, she emphasizes the key ingredients of what makes a teacher effective in the online modality: modeling, mentorship, and immersion. Training, as illustrated by this example, is a complex term that encompasses not only technology training but modality-specific instructional training as well. Furthermore, the

online platform also requires significant writing and, by extension, an implicit requirement for teachers to compose, assess, and teach writing to their students, as Warnock describes in his work on teaching writing online. This form of training in writing, however, is rarely identified as an explicit skill necessary for teaching online courses outside of English Studies. In fact, none of the participants claimed they had any training in teaching writing at all. We could posit that those participants with doctoral degrees received some training in writing themselves, of course. That said, no participant indicated taking a formal course in writing instruction during their graduate studies.

In terms of education, the School of Technology and the School of Nursing participants hold doctoral degrees. The two School of Business participants are currently in doctoral programs. The School of Education participant began a doctoral program in fall semester 2018. The remaining participants, both School of Health Sciences participants and the General Education participant, hold Master's degrees. An important, though perhaps obvious, observation about this aspect of the study, is that those with or currently working on doctorates tend to provide much more detailed feedback on student writing, likely because they have worked or are working closely with language themselves, as they compose written work for their programs. This was most evident when the School of Technology participant referenced the writing he produced for his own dissertation process and, then, later in the observation portion of the interview, provided feedback about high, middle, and low level writing concerns. While the School of Business participants not surprisingly did not know the language of writing well enough to label language concerns, they attempted to model improved sentence structure by rewriting or recasting student writing. One interesting but relevant side note about participants' education is that more than half of the participants completed or are working on graduate degrees

from online institutions. It might be fair to speculate that many practitioner-teachers mimic in their instructional practices what they personally experienced as students. These considerations in mind, all participants identified themselves as instructional faculty. None of the participants indicated that they pursue scholarly writing in their current academic positions.

The table below details disciplinary and experiential information about practitioner-teacher participants in this study. I list participants chronologically in the order I interviewed them.

Table 2: Participant Data in Order of Interview

Participant	Pseudonym	Discipline	Courses	Years of Experience	Formal Training in Teaching Writing
Participant 1	Cordelia	Business	Introduction to Business	8	None
Participant 2	Ansley	Business	Career Development	13	None
Participant 3	Kourtney	Health Sciences	Structure and Function of the Human Body; Microbiology	17	None
Participant 4	Beatrice	Education	Supporting Professional Practices in Early Childhood Education; Observation and Assessment in Early Childhood Education	3	None
Participant 5	Lowery	Technology	HTML; C++; PHP; Tableau Data Visualization	18	None
Participant 6	Maud	Health Sciences	Professional Practice Experience; Capstone in Health Information Technology; Medical Terminology; Health Information Management; Health Information Services	12-14	None
Participant 7	Wallace	General Education	Career Development; Computer Applications and Business Systems	12	None
Participant 8	Eliza	Nursing	Role, Scope, Quality, and Leadership in Professional Nursing; Professional Nursing Capstone	8	None

As detailed in Chapter 3, all interviews were conducted and recorded in the teleconferencing platform WebEx. I decided to use WebEx because the platform allowed for audio, video, and screen sharing capabilities. The platform did, in fact, perform well in terms of audio and screen sharing. As a result, I was able to observe faculty present their processes relative to responding to specific student assignments. Some of the participants were reluctant, however, to use the video feature. Three of the eight participants ultimately elected not to engage their cameras.

Another interesting result was the response to the faculty observation portion of the study. Only one faculty participant, one of the School of Business teachers, brought ungraded student writing samples to the interview session, despite clear directions to do so. All other participants brought previously graded work and either used their existing comments as a platform for explanation, or, in the cases of one of the School of Business participants and one of the Health Sciences participants, deleted comments on previously graded assignments and proceeded as if they had not graded them. This unintended result altered the observation portion of the interview from the spontaneity of generating feedback to a reflection on practice. Based on the hesitation some faculty expressed about a study on writing, this response seems to suggest that faculty felt more comfortable thinking about what they did – perhaps even providing justification retrospectively – and using examples that highlighted what they perceived as their best samples. They worried, one might postulate, that they would be judged as imposters if they did not establish control of the feedback activity in this way. This concern was evident, particularly when participants selected samples that were most comfortable for them to talk about than they were, perhaps, the best assignments for a study on writing. For instance, even though Ansley mentioned an assignment in her course that required students to write a reflection

paper relative to career goals and job search, she presented a couple of résumés for the observation portion of the interview. Kourtney demoed a worksheet that required students to write paragraph-long responses rather than a paper, which was available as part of a project in her course. These decisions certainly speak to a degree of uncertainty some participants perhaps felt going into the observation.

The writing samples themselves ranged significantly from participant to participant. The School of Technology participant presented three samples, a discussion post, a reflection piece that accompanied a software coding exercise, and a research essay that integrated maps meant to layer information about district and county congressional data. The School of Education participant presented a short argumentative piece designed to propose rationale for a policy change at the students' current or future daycare center. One of the School of Business participants presented a couple of résumés and a reflection essay about an experience at a mock interview. The other School of Business participant presented a SWOT analysis with exposition meant to analyze the quadrants of the report. One of the Health Sciences participants reviewed three assignments that asked students to provide detailed explanations about medical terms. The other School of Health Sciences participant shared a reflective assignment about a training plan for a healthcare facility. The General Education participant demonstrated two assignments that asked students to compose a short research based paper. The School of Nursing participant shared a group writing assignment designed to present a short-term SMART goal for some type of nursing-related patient intervention.

Some of the common approaches participants described about their feedback processes include using a detailed rubric with specific criteria outlined in categories, addressing students by name – a measure described by Palloff and Pratt (2013) as personalizing the learning experience

for virtual students – and using either the Blackboard LMS annotating tool or the Word commenting function to provide feedback on student documents. Every participant also mentioned using Grammarly, an automated tool designed to check language for errors and to determine how much of a student’s work is original. In four instances, faculty participants mentioned using Grammarly to check all student work during the grading process. In this way, faculty claimed they could both locate areas of student writing that deviate from Standard English, provided the software doesn’t misread the subtlety of a particular turn of phrase or complex sentence structure, and ensure students had not plagiarized their papers.

In terms of discussing writing specifically in the interview and subsequent observation, few participants made explicit effort to differentiate writing from the content expectations of their assessment of student assignments. One of the Health Sciences participants, for instance, described writing as “information.” The notion of writing consisting of “information” entangles it inextricably from the content students are writing about. The School of Nursing participant equated writing with “APA formatting,” claiming that students who don’t know APA haven’t been taught to write. From this perspective, writing seems to be implicit and reduced to a simple mode of delivery that must adhere to a very specific set of rules. Both School of Business participants and the School of Education participant further conflated writing with information by referring to writing as “answering the question.” When addressing writing directly, every participant but one, the School of Technology participant, described it exclusively as “grammar,” “punctuation,” or “APA formatting,” by its technical aspects rather than by its rhetorical features, appeals, ideational qualities, or language moves. Consequently, writing performs a particular practical function for participants in this study, which elucidates how some practitioner-teachers orient themselves philosophically to the subordinate role it plays within disciplinary study and

knowledge creation. The following summaries and analyses of interview questions illustrate some of the nuanced attitudes and beliefs that shape these general perspectives of writing.

Table 3: Interview Questions

Interview Questions
What role does writing play in your discipline? How do you teach students to write in your discipline?
Describe your comfort level providing feedback on student writing.
What does good writing look like? How about poor writing?
How do you provide students with feedback on their work in your course?
How does feedback help students improve their writing?
What are your goals when you provide feedback on student writing? Which ones are most important to you?
How do you know when you've met your feedback goals?
What is most challenging about providing feedback on student writing?
How do you communicate to students that certain parts of their writing is good? How do you communicate that certain parts need work?
Should students be encouraged to respond to instructor feedback? Why/why not?

Participant Perspectives on Writing and Feedback

The second part of the questioning route began with questions asking participants how comfortable they felt about providing feedback on student writing. Understanding participants' level of confidence with writing determines, to a large extent, how they respond, when they respond, and why they respond to student work. As the following participant summaries will show, most interviewees either verbalized or demonstrated some discomfort with providing comments on student writing, even those who claimed to feel "very comfortable" with responding to student writing.

For the remainder of this study, participants will be referred to by the following pseudonyms: "Cordelia" (Participant 1); "Ansley" (Participant 2); "Kourtney" (Participant 3);

“Beatrice” (Participant 4); “Lowery” (Participant 5); “Maud” (Participant 6); “Wallace” (Participant 7); and “Eliza” (Participant 8). I will use these pseudonyms for two primary reasons: One, to assist readers with keeping participants straight as they review the subsequent responder data, and two, to enhance the readability of the data. I correlate these pseudonyms with relevant participant information in Table 2 (101-102).

Describe your comfort level providing feedback on student writing.

Most participants claimed to be extremely comfortable with providing feedback on student writing. Cordelia, for instance, described her comfort level as “very comfortable.” Lowery provided a couple of examples of students who responded positively to his feedback, concluding that he, too, feels “very comfortable” with providing feedback on student writing. Ansley also said she was “very comfortable now,” adding the condition that she is more comfortable after learning how to use and teach APA. Similarly, Eliza, having studied English as an undergraduate, also described herself as “very comfortable” offering feedback on student work. She explained that she provides editing services for School of Nursing curriculum at the college and jokingly referred to herself as the “grammar Nazi.” Kourtney also claimed to be “very comfortable” with writing; however, she added the caveat that while she’ll “correct grammar and stuff,” she “couldn’t tell... someone this is why this is right,” referring specifically to grammar. Each of these participants also mentioned that they rely heavily on “Grammarly” to provide guidance for responding to “writing errors.” The outliers to this interview question were Beatrice, Maud, and Wallace. Beatrice expressed a general lack of confidence in this way: “On a scale from one to ten, I’d say about a five. I’m just... I’m very critical of my own writing.” Wallace mentioned a couple of times that he is “no English teacher.” Maud explained, “I have no problem talking about content... I feel I am less secure in talking about structure and function

or [the] mechanics of the writing.” Unlike Beatrice, who shared methods she uses to improve her own writing and, by extension, her ability to help students with their writing, Maud did not consider writing instruction her responsibility. Instead, she focuses on content, believing that the end of her disciplinary program, when she sees students, is “not the time to be teaching them how to write.” Yet, her actions contradicted this position, since she, alone among the participants, implemented a revision process for all writing assignments, allowing students to resubmit until their work was acceptable in terms of content and grammar correctness. In some cases, the participants who admitted to being uncomfortable responding to student writing offered some of the best strategies for students to improve their writing, while some of those who claimed a high level of comfort relied on external sources or avoided interventions that exposed them to working directly with language.

To effectively unpack these complex perspectives that are rife with contradiction and uncertainty, as illustrated above, I will present a summary of participants’ responses to each of the interview questions. In the following segment of this chapter, organized by question in the sequence designed according to my interview protocol, I present the purpose of each question in relation to this study’s major research questions, present sample responses that illustrate characteristics that frame epistemological perspectives, and interpret what those responses mean in relation to theoretical, attitudinal, and behavioral beliefs about writing from a multidisciplinary lens.

What does good writing look like? How about poor writing?

As a point of departure, it was important to establish a baseline for how faculty define quality writing to determine what faculty look for when they evaluate student work. Doing so also provided insight into which writing elements participants of this study value most.

Furthermore, defining good and poor writing elucidates some important participant attitudes about the purpose of student writing in their courses. As illustrated by the following examples, responses to this question often showed significant emphasis on and prioritization of grammar, formatting, and writing as sign of professionalism. I gathered the following terms from an open coding activity within the grounded theory approach.

Cordelia defined good writing as writing that “aligns with the objectives [of the assignment],” is “organized,” “intelligible,” understandable, “follows a logical flow,” is “backed with supporting evidence,” and “has to have a beginning, a middle, and an end in order for it to make sense.” Ansley presented these characteristics: Good writing “answer[s] the question,” uses “good grammar,” and “flows nicely.” Like Ansley, Wallace also listed “answering the question,” adding the qualities of “detail” and concision to his definition of good writing. Kourtney described good writing as “simple and logical and it gets to the point.” Beatrice described good writing as detailed, decipherable by the reader, grammatically correct, and preserves a sense of “professionalism” for the field. Lowery defined good writing as “No text message format, no incomplete thoughts or sentences, perfect punctuation,” includes “standard APA formatting,” and uses appropriate “spacing,” “indenting,” and “capitalization.” Maud described good writing as “direct,” concise, and “not cryptic.” Eliza also listed conciseness, clarity, “correct grammar,” and appropriately sourced research according to APA standards when asked to describe good writing. In terms of APA, she explained that students “are not taught” APA and this shows in their inability to produce papers adequate to those formatting conventions.

Most participants positioned their descriptions of poor writing as the opposite of good writing. Cordelia, for instance, said, poor writing “has no logical flow. It’s unintelligible,

meaning there are either so many grammar errors or writing errors that you can't really make sense of what the intended message is within the writing." Furthermore, Cordelia explained, it does not "meet objectives," does not "follow instructions," and "The content is all over place and there's... very little or no supporting information or detail." Ansley found "spelling errors and grammatical errors, and not answering the question, not finding the right words to convey their thoughts" as the primary characteristics of "poor writing." Kourtney, pithy in her definition of good writing, described poor writing as "writing in text talk or writing in a way they would speak to their friends" when the writing calls for more formality. Beatrice described poor writing as something "thrown together last minute," in which students do "not referenc[e] the instructions as well as the grading rubric," culminating in this statement: "Poor grammar, not a lot of details, and again, like I said, they incorporate a lot of texting like techniques into their writing."

Lowery focused on the nuances of the informalities students typically incorporate in their writing: inappropriately short paragraphs, spacing errors, "text message format," incomplete thoughts, and generally not adhering to formatting or grammar expectations. As a foil to her definition of good writing, Maud called poor writing, "making assumptions that someone is going to understand what they're asking for and they are just putting in pretty cryptic notes."

Wallace included the qualities of "not fully explaining themselves," grammatical inaccuracies, "capitalization errors," and "unprofessionalism" in his description of poor writing. Eliza simply said, "Spelling errors. I can't stand spelling errors." She added that "people throw commas in everywhere, even where they don't belong." She also identified irrelevant information as a sign of poor writing.

Critical Commentary

An interesting correlation that surfaced in this portion of the interview is that participants often talked about plagiarism as a sign of poor writing. Cordelia described her process when responding to student plagiarism: “When I see plagiarism, I usually highlight the area. I put some comments, insert comments, exactly where that’s coming from or why I feel this is copied or pasted or not referenced or not a good representation of the student’s own original work.” Kourtney listed “plagiarism” as the final item in a list of qualities that describe poor writing. Wallace mentioned using Grammarly “for the plagiarism factor.” Eliza also ended her list of poor writing qualities with “oh, and plagiarism.” Given that plagiarism is an affront to professionalism, it is not surprising that faculty include such a breach in protocol and disregard for policy as a characteristic of poor writing, even though copied and pasted content from another source is no indication at all of a student’s writing. It is, rather, a null writing, an absence of student composition and voice altogether. By labeling plagiarism poor writing, another interesting observation can be made: practitioner-teachers in this study aren’t assessing student writing in cases of plagiarism but the student’s effort. The task was not performed according to the rules of the assignment. By attempting to skirt the rules, the perpetrator is insulting the profession and making a mockery of the training process. If only portions of the paper are “plagiarized” and the student has clumsily integrated source materials, then in what ways does the person assessing the work guide the student toward a clearer understanding of synthesis in writing? While plagiarism is not the focus of this study, the way in which participants positioned plagiarism relative to their definitions of poor writing, the opposite of good writing defined by the characteristics of good grammar and appropriate APA formatting, is reason for pause. If plagiarized portions of student writing are merely labeled and punished, do

students receive enough guidance to improve their work? Or, does the student continue to make the same errors and hope she or he doesn't get caught the next time?

These questions in respect to the plagiarism conversation relative to student feedback prompted me to contemplate the extent to which faculty provide guidance on poor writing. In three instances, Cordelia, Ansley, and Lowery provided comments on student papers that moved beyond just pointing out grammar and formatting errors. Cordelia illustrated how she uses student writing to provide examples of how to arrange language differently with brief demonstrations. While she doesn't articulate any specific language concerns, she shows the student how to rethink sentence structure. Ansley rewrites entire sections of student work in an effort to model the genre required for a particular assignment. Lowery, the most experienced teacher, offers advice about organization, voice, and style, in addition to providing feedback on grammar. These exceptions aside, the majority of participants used vague terms and broad rubrics to comment on language errors. The implication here is that the value participants place on correctness doesn't always match the guidance they provide students to help them achieve their writing expectations. That is, while they define good writing as correct writing, their feedback rarely provides students with the specificity and direction to produce work that satisfies their perception of good writing. Poor writing, as many in this study admitted, is often perceived as an insurmountable barrier for which the practitioner-teacher can only penalize and hope the student corrects.

Apparent in participant responses to what constitutes good writing is an immediate and narrow focus on the technical aspects of language production – grammar, sentence structure, formatting, and language precision. Participants seemed quite concerned with writing that contained “errors.” Good writing for most participants, then, boiled down to clear, clean, and

obedient to the conventions of formal language and formatting principles. The reputation of the discipline seemed to be of primary concern in many cases and belied the intense focus many placed on grammar correctness in their interview. Beatrice and Maud made direct correlations between correctness and “professionalism.” Maud, for instance, reportedly tells students they will be “judged” for their skill in writing, or lack thereof, and insists that putting someone’s “name” on a written product seals a writer’s fate one way or another. Because of this emphasis on professional presentation, good writing is not described as creative, insightful, unique, or compelling. Instead, the prevailing definition places it in relation to its practicality and its ability to conform to the expectations of its audience, real or perceived. The method by which participants present their feedback may provide some insights into why and how this disconnect occurs.

How do you provide students with feedback on their work in your course?

While relatively ambiguous, most participants interpreted this question in a similar way. They talked about the course tools and assessment tools they employed to produce feedback. Cordelia, for instance, described using a detailed rubric with “levels of achievement and criteria.” She then explained that she includes a column for writing comments on the rubric. Ansley described using the “comment box” to write feedback. She also mentioned annotating student papers, using Grammarly, and recording short videos using the online video capturing software Screencast-O-Matic. Beatrice described how she sets the tone for feedback. She begins with something positive and then goes “right back to the grading rubric.” She reviews each criteria closely and assesses student work in relation to each of these criteria. While proprietary limitations disallow me from showing a complete sample rubric, an example of the writing criteria from Beatrice’s standard rubric is available in Table 4 (134). She also spoke at some

length about relying on Grammarly to provide direction in terms of spelling and grammar, areas, she disclosed, in which she felt very uncomfortable. She concludes with something positive about the student submission. In addition to Grammarly, Lowery and Wallace mentioned using a rubric and the in-line grading tool “Box” in Blackboard Learn to present feedback. Maud stated that she writes comments in the comment box for online assignments. She prefers, however, meeting “by phone” or in “WebEx,” locations she believes are better suited to explaining and showing students how to do things.

Critical Commentary

One of the most compelling results of the responses in this study is that participants elided the writing aspect of this question almost entirely and spoke very broadly, instead, about general assessment practices. As if in token response, most referred to sentence structure and punctuation error examples as constitutive of writing, implying that grammar was writing’s only dimension. The online grammar site Grammarly was presented, in this respect, as a metonym for Standard English, which constituted for participants part of an enthymeme that implied good writing equals grammatically correct writing. Grammarly, consequently, was perceived by participants as the tool teachers use to teach, or at least check, for good writing. As such, while participants in this study seem to take ownership of writing education as a point of epistemological responsibility to their students, they rely to a great extent on technology to provide guidance on how to perform their duties relative to writing education.

How does feedback help students improve their writing?

The type and extent of feedback faculty provide students is often indicative of the extent to which they believe feedback will help students improve. Designed to see how participants reconcile their perceptions of good and poor writing with the direction they provide students in

feedback, this question is important because it reveals attitudes toward process, revision, and practice, key elements in writing pedagogy.

Participant responses to this question often took the form of an extension of their good or poor writing responses. Cordelia, for instance, argued, “if the student is presenting information in a way that doesn’t necessarily follow all of the guidelines for writing and English guidelines and structure guidelines and grammar and all of that we really should be calling that out and providing more instruction in terms of why that’s an error or what they can do to improve.” Kourtney focused her response on not “rewriting the sentence” or response for students but encouraging them to simplify their writing, removing all “flowery language.” Lowery prefaced his response by saying, “students just aren’t aware of what the expectations are for being a professional or a student in higher ed.” He elaborated that “practice” and “tips and pointers” result in improved performance more in line with those professional or academic standards. Ansley simply stated that students “want to see what they are doing well and what they can improve on.” Maud focused her response on how modeling what she perceived as effective writing can help students improve: “if your writing is well done and its structured well and it’s easy to read and the communication flows well, then I think the student will learn from you.” Reflecting on an English teacher who served as a mentor for him, Wallace claimed that reminding students “several times” can help reinforce for students the areas they need to improve in their writing. Often, participants made these statements contingent on whether students “read the feedback” or not. Eliza offered a skeptical view of feedback and writing improvement, stating she “has no proof” that writing feedback actually helps students improve. For this reason, she applies “formative feedback” that students can implement and resubmit, provided they turn assignments in before the deadline. She concludes her remarks by saying she is “hopeful

[feedback on writing] does” help students improve their writing. As a point of critical clarification, what constituted formative feedback for this participant was little more than editing recommendations.

In sum, participants identified the following feedback approaches that offer potential positive impact on student writing: Pointing out errors, modeling what participants perceive as appropriate writing for their discipline, repeating feedback until the behavior changes, and providing opportunities for practice or revision.

Critical Commentary

I will pause at the conclusion of these first few questions to provide some additional contextual discussion. To this point in the interview, participants revealed a couple of common attitudinal perspectives on writing. First, they consider good writing as correct application of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Likewise, they consider poor writing as incorrect and misapplied grammar, punctuation, and spelling. In both cases, they seem to insinuate writing as a school-based activity designed to mark student preparedness for transitioning to and belonging in their representative profession. Second, participants often correlate plagiarism with poor writing, even though plagiarism is better described as a void of student writing. Third, participants explained that they employ detailed rubrics to structure their feedback on student writing. They also claimed that if students read and applied feedback, received regular reminders when their writing was incorrect, were provided with formative feedback, and watched how their teachers communicated professionally, these same students would improve their writing. At face value, some of these comments certainly could help students improve their writing.

As I analyzed these responses, however, I began to wonder how vague rubrics that generally referred to “writing errors,” implicit modeling activities that did not seem sufficiently articulated for students to revise their work, and misinterpretation of assessment practices, such as formative versus summative feedback, translated to improved student writing. Moreover, I began to ask myself why the practitioner-teachers in this study were unable to see a disconnect between what they intended to do with their feedback and why students generally did not apply feedback in ways they anticipated. It was at this juncture I theorized that faculty perceive the role of writing as a tool for and sign of professionalism. This practical perspective on writing explains why participants focus their feedback almost exclusively on the technical aspects of writing – Mistakes are the visual cues of a writing philosophy that is based on professional appearance. Not only are grammar errors easier to spot than errors of thought and judgement, but they also don’t reflect well on the writer or the profession the writer is attempting to represent. This concern of appearances seems to compel participants toward a subtle, unspoken agenda within their individual brand of disciplinary writing education: to ensure the professional integrity of community participants. We could say that writing is one method of testing participants’ belongingness and a way for practitioner-teachers to protect their industry from those ill-prepared to represent it. What this agenda does not do, unfortunately, is help students improve their writing. I learned more about how this agenda functions as I analyzed data from the subsequent set of questions.

What are your goals when you provide feedback on student writing? Which ones are most important to you?

While this question was meant to capture the specific reasons participants make decisions about commenting on student writing in an effort to guide them toward individualized writing

development, participants responded to this question with very general and ambiguous goals, such as “to help them improve” or encouraging students to “make changes.” The changes that participants hope to see in their students tend to focus on improving skills, doing assignments better, being successful in the course or the workplace, or realizing “full potential.” In terms of writing, these goals seem to dissipate into vague pronouncements.

For instance, Cordelia said, “My goals are mainly to help them to grow, to help them to, you know, understand, and learn from it, so they can become, hopefully, better at writing, even if it is a little at a time, just to grow and become better and practice so that they can become stronger writers.” Kourtney explained, “my main goal in providing feedback to students is to help them improve their skills and to help them better prepare for their next step, so that they are constantly improving in each assignment so that when they get to the next classes they’re going to be in even better shape.” Beatrice described her goals as making sure students “understood the assignment” and can “take that information and incorporate it into the class.” Lowery referenced the use of “rubrics,” student motivation, and responding quickly to student emails to suggest that goals to improve student writing should originate with the learner, who, he hopes “pays a little bit more attention in terms of detail.” Ultimately, he claims that he can “help students realize their full potential.” Maud sets out to show students “how important being a skillful communicator is” and to help them present themselves appropriately and professionally in the workplace. Wallace strives to position students for “success in [his] course” and “to learn.” Eliza’s primary goal is to let students “know why they scored what they scored” in hopes that “they do learn from it.” As part of her response, she also mentioned that students “rarely challenge” their grades, even when she includes an invitation for questions in her

comments. Her point is that “if the feedback is thorough enough,” the students “should understand it.”

Critical Commentary

Apart from a couple of references to incremental writing improvement and hints at developing a skillset in writing that can transfer to more advanced courses or the workplace, the prevailing theme for participants relative to this question is that goals for student writing improvement are less about a set of strategic interventions with targeted outcomes and more about institutional jargon. Broad goals, such as “to grow,” “to improve,” “to understand,” and “to learn,” have no specified learning objective, nor do they define a clear path for reaching that objective. If we pause and take a cumulative look at the developing attitudinal qualities of participants in this study, we can see a significant gap forming between what faculty desire students to do with writing and what they are able to provide for them in order to reach those goals. Participants present good and poor writing as dichotomies tethered by grammatical correctness. The methods participants employ to assist students with their writing depend largely on technologies designed to root out grammatical error and aberrant stylistics. Faculty are uncertain such interventions are useful because they question student commitment, readiness, and willingness to read or apply feedback, so feedback seems to serve a tentative and unreliable function in student learning. If these perceptions form the basis of an epistemology of writing instruction, it is no surprise that the goals faculty formulate for students are likewise uncertain, vague, and rhetorical. Furthermore, reducing writing to its grammatical components and assuming that by mastering the rules of language construction students somehow improve all aspects of writing is similar to asserting that anyone can don a lab coat and be a doctor. Sure, the lab coat is a necessary piece of attire for the doctor in her professional setting, but it is only the

outer layer, a *techne* of her discipline. If the knowledge isn't there – the ideational elements that qualify her for her practice – she simply looks like a doctor. Just because students might spell better or write more grammatically correct sentences does not mean they have improved the ideational, rhetorical, or creative components of writing. Their writing may just end up being a lab coat. If participants seek for these metaphorical lab coats, how can they formulate meaningful goals and what, if anything, are they hoping to accomplish? We explore these considerations further in the next section.

How do you know when you've met your feedback goals?

A follow-up to the question that precedes this, participants were asked to think about the impact of their interventions in accomplishing their feedback goals. Because the goals most participants shared were quite general, their assessment of student “improvement,” “change,” or, conversely, “non-responsiveness” presented a circular rationale that repeated the goal as either having been met or not. This question is particularly important to this study because it invites participants to reveal their attitudes toward writing and the feedback they produce about writing. Cordelia indicated that she meets her feedback goals “when [she] see[s] them (students) implement it, when [there is] a change in the next assignment based on the feedback that [she] provided.” Kourtney described measuring the effectiveness of feedback on student writing in this way: “I can see over the course of the term, from their first paper to their last paper, how much they have improved just in their ability to... just in the assignments they're doing.” Beatrice explained that student improvement shows in how well their work aligns with rubric criteria. Because she allows for revision, her goals are met when students better align their work to that criteria. Lowery admitted that it is “difficult for [him to] judge or gauge whether or not this is being helpful,” because “some students are just non-responsive.” That said, he gauges

whether he has met his goals or not on “the general improvement and the willingness for that matter” of students “to correct an error because not all students are willing to do that.” Maud stated definitively that she “sees an improvement” from the beginning “to the end of the course.” Her goal, she elaborated, was to instill in her students a drive to keep trying until students are “proud of [their] last submission if it’s something [they] don’t mind putting [their] name on.” Wallace acknowledged the limitation of the short timeframe he has with students, which often disallows him from seeing “those students that [he] had move forward.” He explained, however, that he sees the most growth in students within a two to three week window, as they “make changes,” primarily in terms of grammar and sentence structure. He qualifies this by saying the most noticeable improvement happens for “the students who did really, really poorly” with their writing. Eliza expressed some uncertainty when it comes to meeting feedback goals. She claims she “doesn’t know that” she does in fact meet those goals. She is, however, “hopeful” that she does. She then added that if students send a revised “copy” of their work in response to her “formative feedback, then [she] knows” because the students fix the errors.

Critical Commentary

To make sense out of what participants mean by “improvement” sufficient enough to satisfy faculty goals relative to student writing, we must understand first that the marker for such improvement, according to participant responses, is fewer language errors. In other words, participants generally equate improvement with language correctness. The correlation Lowery made between “improvement” and “student willingness to “correct an error” can help us understand a common assumption among participants. Faculty seem to believe that grammar can be improved through effort. This is an important epistemological point for practitioner-teachers in this study: Like any other task in the workplace, grammar as writing is perceived as poor when

students don't try and as good when they try harder, the proof of which is a piece of writing devoid of error. Put another way, grammar is viewed as a reflection of attitude. Grammatical correctness equates to professionalism, a sign of conformity, obedience, and hard work, and the appropriate application of grammar means that students take their discipline and its community seriously. Because participants feel this way, they don't perceive themselves ultimately responsible for student writing improvement. Improvement comes only when the student decides to be more serious and try harder. Unfortunately, this attitude does not account for regional dialects, racialized and international Englishes, or the impact of socioeconomic status on speakers of English. It preserves only one dominant idea of what the English language should be, privileges those who are already insiders to its rules, and labels those unable to conform lazy and unfit for education. Eliza made this very clear when she said that an ESL student's work "doesn't score well." It is difficult for teachers to achieve goals when they feel their only impact is telling students to try harder, especially when those students don't improve, or can't. The challenges faculty face find development in the following response summary and analysis.

What is most challenging about providing feedback on student writing?

More than other questions, participants' responses to the challenges of providing feedback on student writing revealed some intriguing information and attitudes about how they see themselves relative to the writing task. This question, for instance, often triggered responses about insufficient student commitment, frustrations when students submit work with extensive grammatical and formatting problems, and a general belief that writing success means following assignment instructions. In the excerpts below, participants further reveal a common belief that poor writing is the result of lack of effort and laziness rather than student understanding or level of writing ability, underscoring the point that practitioner-teachers expect that students who exert

more effort will, by their will, enact marked improvement in their grammar and formatting practices.

This particular question invited some fairly extensive participant responses. It also revealed some surprising frustrations teachers in this study have about student effort, motivation, and attitude, as well as further solidifying that grammar and formatting are key frustrations for participants. Cordelia finds student work that is “really bad, when the writing is really, really bad... the most challenging.” This level of poor writing is difficult because it needs “almost like a complete overhaul and it takes a lot of time at trying to call out all of these individual areas.” She also contemplated the value in responding to all errors, as such a tactic may “overwhelm” students. Ansley identified the “time factor” as a challenge for providing “the feedback that [she] want[s] to give.” Kourtney was skeptical that students actually read her feedback, claiming that only “25%... apply the feedback.” She described her biggest challenge in these terms: Students “don’t take the feedback and they don’t apply it or use” it. In similar fashion, Wallace also identified students not reading or applying feedback as most challenging. As a point of clarification, he said, “the most frustrating part is when they don’t improve after your recommendations.” He then claimed that “a lot of it is with APA formatting and things like that.” Beatrice, after explaining her own challenges with grading and relying on Grammarly to ensure her own writing integrity in terms of correctness and grammar, indicated that she “include[s] a link [to Grammarly] or something that would give [students] a better understanding of how to accomplish” writing as a professional. The implication in this instance is that the primary concern for this participant, like many others, is correctness. For Lowery “there are so many variables” involved in feedback and student writing improvement. He enumerated a few “punctuation, grammar,” “APA,” “structure and formatting,” paragraphing, transitions, ideas,

etc. He concludes this list by adding that some students “just write a paper that doesn’t even address what they’re being asked to address, so that’s a challenge for sure.” Maud claims that “student attitude” is most challenging for her. “If someone has,” she explained, “an I-don’t-care attitude, there’s not a lot I can do to help them.”

Critical Commentary

We might pause again at this point to provide some additional exposition on the philosophical perspectives elucidated by the question above. The two qualities students seem to exhibit that create the greatest challenges for participants in this study are not reading directions and not applying feedback. The general assumption driving this perception among participants is that students, as Lowery explained it, are more interested in other activities, like “XBOX,” than in reading directions from faculty. Yet, faculty continue, by their own admission, to produce extensive feedback on student work. It is curious that faculty perceive the feedback task as valuable if students rarely read it or do anything with it. Given this general belief, it is surprising that every participant claimed that providing written feedback on student writing for all assignments was beneficial. Moreover, most admitted to spending extensive time providing formative feedback. Why go to the trouble if students don’t even look at it? The reality, according to a study conducted by Zahn (2016), is that most students do look at and value faculty feedback. So, if students read feedback but still don’t apply it, we might logically ask if the feedback is presented in a useful manner. Is pointing out grammar mistakes the most effective way to help students improve their writing, particularly when feedback about grammar relies on vague terms like “clarity” or “unprofessional” or directs students to submit their writing assignments through a program that checks for grammar? Do students who receive markups on papers that say “you can do better,” as in the case of Maud’s process, really have the requisite

guidance to develop writing skills or are they expected to make that progression on their own? Does a general rubric that includes a short list of vague criteria for writing truly offer a level of specificity sufficient to promote student improvement? These questions emerge from the gap between what participants want – grammar precision that represents disciplinary professionalism – and what students who don't meet the standard need – a more intricate and specific set of directions that help them strengthen not only their delivery skills in terms of correctness but their thinking skills. Expecting students to already always have understood grammar and writing is an error in judgement and a misunderstanding of writing. Writing is not a series of rules to measure out in language but a bringing into being thoughts through language. It is the translation of thought that must be manipulated into symbols and combined to form meaning. The true challenge here is that an epistemology of writing that relies on grammar as metonym for writing misrepresents and misapplies what writing is and how it functions. The issue isn't necessarily that students don't read or don't apply feedback – though it certainly happens from time to time – it is that students are asked to produce a perfect paint job before they have even built the car.

As I analyzed participants' goals and challenges, the influence of professionalism on writing education began to come more fully into focus. Participants appear to make a number of assumptions about learners, their abilities, and what writing means to their disciplinary education. The primary assumption is that all students in a given course can produce error-free writing if they want to. In other words, poor student writing, from this perspective, isn't about writing but about effort. The idea that writing is grammar and grammar is fixable through effort constitutes a significant misunderstanding of writing's role in education and about how adults learn grammar, according to Hartwell (1985). This attitude about writing also provides insight into why practitioner-teachers insist on focusing on error in their writing feedback – their

feedback is in part an attempt to adjust student attitudes and turn them into compliant workers. However, it also explains why an error-oriented writing philosophy is too myopic for effectively teaching students how to write in the disciplines. That is, fixing the errors in writing doesn't necessarily produce employees who can make strong arguments or present thoughtful ideas. It just makes the writing look better on paper. In fact, data from the next question reveals how study participants use positive comments to reinforce error-free writing as a dimension of the writing as tool for and sign of professionalism concept I explain in Chapter 5.

How do you communicate to students that certain parts of their writing is good? How do you communicate that certain parts need work?

These two questions were designed to elicit information about faculty feedback approaches on two fronts. First, these questions invites participants to elaborate on the methods they use to generate feedback. Second, they attempt to ascertain the type and balance of feedback participants provide student writers in terms of both positive and critical feedback. In relation to the questions guiding this study, understanding how faculty engage with student writing in this fashion reveals how they view their roles as responders to student writing. In light of the developing gap discussed in relation to participant responses and student writing, we find that communication, again, tends toward vague pronouncements that either praise students for doing a "good job" or elicit a desire for students to do a "better job." Again, how that happens from paper to paper or in what ways feedback provides clear progression relative to that improvement is unclear. Most responses to these questions deal with rhetorical techniques designed to encourage students or point out errors rather than offer specific steps toward assisting students with developing their writing.

Participant responses to these questions, for instance, suggest that faculty generally attempt to mitigate the distance aspect of online learning with feedback approaches that address students by name, according to Cordelia, Ansley, Kourtney, Lowery, and Wallace, and offer some positive commentary. Cordelia said she “praises those areas” by “calling them out.” Kourtney makes a point to “highlight” certain areas, especially if the students “have written very poorly.” One comment that recurred in every interviewees’ response to this question was some variation of the phrase “good job” to indicate effectively written work. While a fairly commonplace phrase used for praise in a number of contexts, “good job” finds significant meaning when used to describe writing from a disciplinary perspective. Not only does the “job” aspect of the phrase connect the writing directly to the workplace, but it also reduces writing not only to an assignment but to yet another workplace task.

In response to the second half of this question, which deals with communicating constructive feedback, Lowery focused his response on the mechanics of how he delivers feedback, indicating that he uses the Blackboard LMS function called Box to provide feedback, emphasizing the technical layers of the feedback activity. His feedback tends toward critical rather than positive comments. Likewise, Maud explained that she offers positive comments but operates philosophically from a position of critical feedback. She described it in this way: “I do explain to students ahead of time that ‘Your time is very valuable. I don’t know how much you want me to say about what a wonderful job you did on this and how beautiful it is and how well and how pretty it is. What’s more important to you – that I pat you on the back or I tell you how to make it better?’” Wallace also admitted, “I don’t do a lot of positive comments on the paper, which I probably should do.” He tries to balance this approach, he elaborated, by offering general positive feedback in the online assignment comment box for each student. Cordelia,

Ansley, Kourtney, and Beatrice explained that they couch their constructive comments in positive comments, but, as Cordelia clarified, she “calls out” errors and provides extensive direction to students by making suggestions, rewriting portions of their work, and pointing out errors. Ansley described and demonstrated that she not only “calls out” error but provides extensive rewriting that she feels better demonstrates what the discipline expects of its generic products.

Critical Commentary

As the examples above illustrate, participants often interpreted constructive feedback as criticism. They also assumed the primary function of constructive feedback was to correct student writing error and often conflated the notion of constructive feedback with criticism of student error. In fact, as we continue to interpret participants’ response data, we find that writing is systematically reduced to the task of grammar. “Calling out” for Cordelia, who offered more detailed feedback than other participants, involves identifying something a student either did well, often in respect to following instructions, or something the student did wrong and then showing students how to write the sentence differently, or instructing students to include a comma, with little or no explanation why rewriting or making a punctuation change might improve student writing at the point of intervention. Consequently, “calling” something “out” only bears relevance when the object of interest is important to preserving strong correct writing approaches or dissuading less effective ones. To build upon previous observations, then, we might add that both the phrases “calling out” and “good job” are vague. While both may be used as positive reinforcement and can act to instill confidence in learners, they carry no actual value unless they are attached to some specific explanation. If that explanation is ambiguous or limited to correctness, students may perceive the praise as arbitrary. As such, no noticeable

development may occur and students risk continually lapsing into negative practices because they aren't sure of the rule being "called out" or which approaches warrant praise. This may confuse and frustrate students, a concern faculty expressed in response to the following section, which deals with student responses to instructor feedback.

Should students be encouraged to respond to instructor feedback? Why/why not?

The purpose of this question was primarily meant to determine the extent to which faculty leverage the feedback activity as a means to promote interaction and collaboration to support their writing instruction. An interesting, not to mention unanticipated, attitudinal perspective was revealed as participants responded. Five of seven participants immediately thought the question had to do with student complaints about their grades and answered as if a student response was a negative exchange. Three of the participants commented after the interview that they had not considered that student responses to feedback might be a positive exchange or a useful component of the feedback process. For this reason, I added the follow-up question "Do you see student response to your feedback as a positive or negative exchange? Explain."

The first two participants interviewed for this study, Cordelia and Ansley, were quite taken aback by this question. Both responded with a significant amount of trepidation and qualification. Cordelia, for instance, responded, "There are some instances when students should be encouraged to respond to the feedback and in those instances if they have questions regarding the feedback or if there is something they're not clear on or if they disagree with, I feel by all means they should feel very comfortable reaching out to their instructor for more. Otherwise, I don't see a need for them to respond to every piece of feedback. That might drive the instructor a little bit crazy and the student if they feel it is a requirement." In similar fashion, Ansley began

her explanation by saying, “That’s a tough question.” What is tough about the question, she went on to explain, is that students typically respond only to challenge a grade. After this particular interview, Ansley stated, “The one question you asked about, you know, do I expect my students to respond to the feedback. I thought that was really good because I never thought of that before. You know, I mean we have students who do, the ones who are upset, the ones that just don’t agree with their grade. But, the ones that do agree with their grade, you know, that’s kind of interesting.” Because these two participants perceived this interaction as a primarily negative experience, they had not considered the potential positive and knowledge-producing conversations that may develop from discussing writing. Instead, participants saw feedback as primarily summative, a unidirectional communication they used to inform students of what they did wrong.

Critical Commentary

As I pause to consider the implications of the participant comments above, I posit that practitioner-teachers find student responses to their feedback uncomfortable because it requires them to use writing feedback formatively, to partner with their students in unfamiliar ways, and to focus on process and revision rather than final results. Consequently, participants become wary of applying feedback in a way that exposes them to the messy complexities of writing. The skepticism with which many approached this question belies the discomfort of an uncertain interaction and explains why many conflate student response to feedback with student complaints about grades. Wallace illustrates this skepticism about students responding to feedback, claiming, they are more “negative than positive.” Even so, he was open to “the idea” with this qualifier, “if we could do it,” a qualification that belies residual skepticism. Kourtney, Beatrice, Lowery, and Maud were more amenable to the idea of students responding to feedback,

but each added a proviso, as in the case of Kourtney's response, "as long as [students] do it in a constructive way." Eliza was fairly ambivalent toward this question. She said she "never" gets student feedback in response to her feedback, explaining that "if your feedback is thorough enough," students don't need to ask questions.

Following my second interview, I began asking participants if they felt the exchange was primarily positive or negative. Doing so altered the complexion of participant responses. Kourtney indicated that she tries to make student interaction to feedback "a positive thing," advising that teachers and students should not allow their "feelings to get hurt." The exchange, she qualified, is dependent on the "student's openness to things." Beatrice approached this question from her experiences as a student. She called it "positive" and a "learning experience." She also acknowledged that student response to feedback shows that students are "concerned about their grades."

This last statement establishes an intriguing pedagogical commonality between all participants: Everyone I interviewed correlates student response to feedback as a conversation about grades. This is typical of the practitioner-teacher perspective on education: the grade is the object of discussion, not necessarily the learning. Grading is a point of contention, of course, for all teachers because it is the currency education provides its consumers, the students. As currency, it holds power for and over those who need it. For this reason, grades create contention and many practitioner-teachers are not confident enough in their roles as educators to diffuse pushback on grades and redirect it in positive ways. Consequently, the conversation often becomes a justification rather than a dialogue about how to improve writing. To this point, Lowery interpreted "positive exchange" as a student reading feedback and doing something with it. This participant viewed an exchange most productive for students who receive a "poor

grade.” Incidentally, students who respond negatively to poor grades and constructive feedback are often viewed as unprofessional and, if their frustration becomes overly contentious, are directed to college codes of ethics and behavioral policies that remind them to be professional. While this control is not uncommon in educational settings, it is circular in reasoning and rarely leads to a resolution that both deescalates student concerns and helps them improve their writing. Rather, some students typically learn to conform and accept low grades and not ask questions or respond to feedback for fear of appearing too aggressive, opting instead for political safe ground than for learning.

Think-Aloud Observation

The type and extent of engagement in the think-aloud activity varied significantly from participant to participant. For instance, Cordelia, Kourtney, and Lowery provided extensive examples and thorough demonstrations of their processes. Ansley, Beatrice, Maud, Wallace, and Eliza summarized their processes rather than demonstrate them, electing to use documents that had already been populated with feedback and graded as a reference point to talk about the decisions they made rather than make those decisions on the spot. Cordelia, Beatrice, Lowery, and Eliza prepared documents in advance, while the remaining participants searched for documents during the observation session, often scrolling through course assignments in Blackboard Learn until they reached a submission they felt best represented what they thought I was looking for.

A number of themes developed from these observations. First of all, every participant in this study but two (Maud and Eliza) spoke at great length about using grading rubrics to drive their feedback. Maud and Eliza also mentioned rubrics as part of their assessment activities, just not to the same extent as other participants. In fact, the term rubric was used over 130 times

across the eight interviews. Cordelia, Ansley, Kourtney, Beatrice, Lowery, and Wallace mentioned using rubrics to guide student performance by posting them prior to assignment deadlines and then referencing them in their feedback. The impact of this practice relative to participants' feedback on student writing is subtle but important. Only one vague category was present in any rubric to detail writing criteria. Moreover, these criteria, according to participants, were limited to "grammar," "grammatical errors," using "resources," "contains five or fewer writing errors," and "grammar and punctuation and mechanics and all that." While Lowery "might provide a little bit more of a paragraph about writing" to connect "technical concepts" with "writing," the fact is that writing is categorically reduced in these assessment tools to a practice in formality rather than a system of complex language moves upon which content depends for its logical distribution. Of course, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that such approaches to writing feedback are also influenced significantly by the important goal within each discipline of ensuring students learn the content of their discipline. Writing may serve, in these instances, as a tool of conveyance and, for this reason, take a secondary position to the subject matter practitioner-teachers assess to determine student learning.

It also became clear that many participants were less confident talking about and demonstrating their interactions with student writing than they were about general assessment practices, despite their earlier claims to feeling "very comfortable" responding to student writing. Beatrice, for example, presented grading and feedback as a procedure designed to meet assignment guidelines, only mentioning writing when talking about the grammar component of her rubric. While I cannot include a copy of a rubric due to proprietary restrictions I mentioned earlier in the chapter, I will share the narrative description Beatrice provided during her think-aloud observation. She explained that the assignment students were asked to complete consisted

of four steps, each captured by and aligned with rubric criteria. She described her rubric in this way: “A two is considered competence, which means that’s like a C. You provided the information that was asked. A three is proficiency, which is like you kind of went... a little bit above what was asked, gave a little bit more detail. A score of a four, which is the equivalent to an A, which is also considered mastery, which means you kind of went above and beyond what was asked. I mean, you met all of those bullet points with some good details.” While a rubric is a good tool for consistency of assessment, the problem with such unwavering focus on assessment tools as Beatrice described is that the nuances of writing may be ignored in favor of the procedure of checking off competencies. In fact, rubrics run the risk of reducing complex tasks to simple steps and can prioritize certain writing activities, such as organization, grammar, or formatting, over the thinking moves that make writing meaningful to situational communication. Furthermore, numeric scores or levels of competency often limit assessment to strict and predefined categories that emphasize a finished product over process. If those competencies don’t include writing criteria beyond grammar and formatting, students miss out on an essential component of their writing development within the disciplines: they begin to believe a list of minimum expectations detailed in a rubric that primarily deals with completing grammar tasks sufficiently prepares them for complex rhetorical situations. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

Table 4: Sample Rubric of the Writing Criteria from Beatrice’s Universal Rubric

1 (F)	2 (C)	3 (B)	4 (A)
(No mention of writing errors)	The proposal contains 10 or more writing errors.	The proposal contains 5 or fewer writing errors.	The proposal is free from writing errors.

Relying so heavily on rubrics that prioritize the technical elements of writing may also confuse practitioner-teachers, who themselves begin to conflate writing with grammar. We can look at an example of this in the observation portion of Wallace's interview. While demonstrating how he transitions from reviewing students "content" to their "writing," he contemplated the level of severity relative to grammar mistakes, concluding that capitalizing an "I" or certain spelling errors were "major" concerns, while certain punctuation errors or some words of an unspecified nature were "minor" errors. Like most interviewed for this study, Wallace stated that he prioritized "content" over "writing," since the students in his courses were primarily "beginning writers." He did not want to penalize them for errors. In his feedback, his comments represented this attitude. His "general feedback," the term he used to describe the end comment on student papers, typically began, "Thanks for your submission and for answering the questions asked." He mentioned, in one instance, the student needing to "elaborate a bit further" and called out "a few errors." From these short statements, we can trace a hierarchy of importance from content to detail/length to writing as grammar. Prioritizing content over grammar makes a lot of sense for courses that require students to demonstrate their knowledge of certain concepts. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that "answering the question" bears significant disciplinary weight in the professionalization process.

In fact, "answering the question" serves an important function in writing-to-learn theory. Students must demonstrate they understand concepts as they progress through their disciplinary study and using writing to make sense out of concepts is an important function for achieving learning objectives. In this respect, "answering the question" posed by assignment prompts seemed to be a significant concern for Ansley, Kourtney, Maud, and Wallace. In Ansley's case, "answering the question" sufficiently seemed synonymous with effective writing. As she

explained the assignment she presented for observation, she said, “I focus more on making sure they are answering the question as clear and concise as they can.” Kourtney’s demonstration shifted away from writing altogether, as she focused on the process she uses to determine “whether or not [students] answered [the question] correctly.” By the end of the session, Kourtney spoke primarily about content. Kourtney’s position reveals that writing can and should support student learning of disciplinary concepts. Unlike Kourtney’s focus on how writing helps answer questions, Maud emphasized that writing in her discipline served the function of receiving answers to questions to clarify points of confusion common among coders in a healthcare setting. Her interview was unique in that she spoke very broadly about assessment rather than share specific examples of student writing and her response to it. Writing, for Maud, was important insofar as it didn’t get in the way of the message. Ironically, such a view negated the crucial role writing plays in formulating and delivering that message.

One of the unexpected results of this study that surfaced during the observation portion of participant interviews was how many participants engaged in process-based writing while composing their feedback to students. While participants focused primarily on grammar, structure, and clarity to define both the qualities of good and bad writing and confessed not to know how to describe “English guidelines” and “grammar,” according to Cordelia, as effectively as they would have liked because they feel “less secure in talking about structure and function or mechanics of the writing,” as Maud put it, each demonstrated strong compositional practices in their own writing. For instance, Cordelia admitted to reading her comments out loud and making revisions prior to considering them complete, sometimes to the extent of entirely rewriting her sentences to better articulate her ideas. Ansley showed students how to work with language by recasting some of their writing to illustrate the résumé genre. Beatrice described her writing

process in great detail. She said, “I initially... after reading papers, I would just type. I don’t pay attention to grammar, I just type. And then after I get my thoughts on paper, then I go back and I kind of revise and maybe I need to add something or maybe take things out.” Next, “when [she’s] done with that, then [she] takes that feedback and cop[ies] and paste[s] it into Grammarly and [she] reviews it in Grammarly just to make sure [her] grammar is okay. That [she’s] making sense.” In this way, she engages in the full array of process pedagogy, saving the editing phase for last. Lowery composed lengthy feedback in sections arranged by subheadings. In this way, he embraced the arrangement component of canonical rhetoric and, by extension, modeled effective design for his students. Maud, who expressed the least amount of confidence and interest in teaching writing, claimed, “if I had to teach them the mechanics of writing, it’s kind of putting the horse behind the cart for what I’ve been teaching for,” a position counterintuitive to writing development. She shared that she returned student work often so students could “rework it and resubmit” and she would “regrade it.” In doing so, Maud valued in practice the important process element of revision. She summarized her philosophical position in this way: “I don’t think it’s realistic to achieve... for anybody to do it the first time right on anything that they are doing.” She added that practice with true intent of improvement hones students’ skills so they are prepared for the workplace. In a similar vein, Eliza applied what she termed “formative assessment” on papers that were submitted prior to assignment deadlines so students could use the feedback to revise and resubmit their work. In these ways, participants demonstrated that they value writing as a tool of instruction and learning, even if they are uncertain how to talk about writing or teach students to develop their own skills.

Another unexpected result was expressed by two participants following the interview, who claimed that they had never considered student response to their feedback could be a

positive exchange. Ansley described it this way: “The one question you asked about, you know, do I expect my students to respond to the feedback? I thought that was really good because I never thought of that before. You know, I just, I mean, we have students who do, the ones who are upset, the ones that just don’t agree with their grade. But, the ones that do agree with their grade, you know, that’s kind of interesting.” Beatrice stated, “I really enjoyed how the question asked about how to handle negative feedback.” She then went on to explain in more detail the intellectual and emotional turmoil faculty experience when students challenge grades, yet how important that follow-up intervention can be. Wallace shared a similar experience. He said, “You did get me thinking about some things, though, like when you were talking about the looping on feedback, where students have to respond to the feedback. I can think of so many benefits to that. You know, I think that it really got me thinking about a lot of things. It got me sidetracked a little bit because I continued to think about it while I was talking.” Embedded in these additional points of discussion is an implied value to the subject matter of this interview. These faculty experienced a type of reflection similar to that offered in teaching development sessions. In this way, participants were able to assess their practices and challenge their biased preconceptions of student responses to feedback as always negative. This was yet another unexpected result of the study. I did not expect that participants would consider the interview as a type of development. I am not surprised, however, based on participants’ expressed concerns about responding to student writing, that some of them found value in talking through their feedback practices and appreciated challenging assumptions about the role feedback can play in the complex interactions between teacher and student.

Challenges

Each interview revealed several challenges participants expressed relative to their interactions with students and student writing. These challenges also implicitly described the boundaries that define the feedback experience and practices of practitioner-teachers. One of the most apparent and initial challenges of conducting interviews about how faculty in disciplines outside of English Studies respond to student writing is the trepidation many expressed about talking about a subject with which they have little confidence. One of my first tasks in each interview, in order to make participants comfortable enough to share their insights, was to ensure them that the study was designed to understand rather than pass judgement or to find fault in their practices. Nearly every participant confessed after the interview and think-aloud activity that they were nervous about the interview, afraid, Cordelia articulated, that she “wasn’t doing a good job.” In one instance a would-be participant rescheduled multiple times, ultimately not showing up one morning. In email exchanges, this potential participant expressed some insecurities about bringing writing to assess during the session. Ultimately, when the interview was conducted, she talked very broadly about writing assignments and her perspective of writing in her courses and discipline, referencing a few examples rather than demonstrating how she responds.

Throughout the study several challenges arose as participants both talked about and demonstrated their feedback practices. These challenges are significant enough findings that they require some additional development here. Each challenge below relates to some aspect of one of the study’s research focus areas, such as online education, faculty roles, and faculty attitudes. What follows, then, are three categories that address the topics of time, feedback and grading, and perceptions of student attitudes. While these categories were also mentioned in the

interview portion of this chapter, they also appeared quite extensively in the think-aloud observation and, for this reason, may provide additional points of analytical interest to further characterize participant epistemologies relative to the writing task.

Time

One of the topics that surfaced in every interview in some form or another was time. This is not surprising, since time has a relatively complex function in online instruction. When referring to time, faculty mentioned it as a limitation, “time is a challenge,” as a deadline students must meet or that faculty must meet relative to institutional expectations and standards, according to Ansley and Eliza, or as a way to describe the promptness of the feedback intervention, as in the form of “timeliness,” as applied by Lowery and Wallace. In both cases, time has direct and indirect impact on the feedback task as either a constraint or limitation. As a constraint, Ansley commented that her biggest challenge working with student writing was time, because she has “thirty something students, always” in her courses. The number of students and weekly assignments to grade for each student is time-consuming and limits what she can do in terms of feedback. In fact, participants in general reported that grading time could be extensive, particularly if a student’s submission was riddled with errors and if they felt compelled by a sense of duty to the students, themselves, and/or the discipline to “call it out.” Cordelia, Ansley, Beatrice, Lowery, Maud, and Wallace admitted to spending what they considered “a lot of time” on grading, as the verbiage from Lowery’s interview suggests. For most, this meant “an average of ten minutes” per assignment, a timeframe identified by Cordelia and similar to the time reported by Wallace, spending as long as “half an hour grading one paper” if the paper contained significant writing errors, a term interchangeable, as we’ve established in this chapter, with significant grammatical errors.

The general agreement among participants is that student error produces a heavier workload than a paper with few errors. Consider Wallace's comment, "A lot of times, if you are seeing and reading thirty plus papers and things, you're not going to catch every single mistake the students made, and Grammarly is also not going to catch all those, but it does help give me guidance to places I should specifically be looking where errors were made." The idea here, and captured in various forms throughout interviews, is that the instructor must address all of the writing errors, or student writing won't improve, exemplified in Cordelia's contemplations about "overwhelming the student" with too much feedback. These errors, as described by every participant, tend to deal primarily with "grammar," "spelling," "punctuation," and "formatting." On the other hand, student papers without these errors tend to take less time to grade. I suspect that the focus on grammar anesthetizes the teacher to the other writing needs that are less visible. Compounded by the time it takes to comment on papers with extensive grammar mistakes, teachers who view writing as grammar may inadvertently perpetuate certain ineffective student writing approaches by not addressing them. For instance, I did not observe, during any of the observations I conducted for this study, a single comment about a student's purpose or focus in sample papers. I admit that it is possible that none of the fourteen papers I observed participants read and respond to in the think-aloud portion of the observation may have needed this type of direction. However, that said, I also did not hear anyone talk about a thesis statement, a unifying idea, or cohesion.

I find this a compelling and insightful finding because I have spent extensive time commenting on papers with few grammatical errors that demonstrated significant underdevelopment at the ideational level and much less time with papers riddled with grammatical errors because the ideas were sound and the argument solid. If grammar and

mechanics are not only the primary concern practitioner-teachers have with grading student writing, but also the key indicator of quality work on assignments, I am left to wonder if content and its logical presentation are, as participants in this study claim, the most pressing concerns for them, as indicated by Kourtney, Beatrice, Maud, and Wallace, or if grammatical correctness supersedes all else. The baffling result of fixating on grammatical correctness may be that it potentially masks more serious student thinking, writing, and even content concerns, elided as practitioner-teachers battle the commas, misspellings, capitalizations, and awkward syntaxes. In fact, I posit, practitioner-teachers may put so much effort into addressing the minutia of correctness that they exhaust themselves on rhetorical red herrings, chasing invisible rabbits down holes that take them farther and farther away from addressing more significant student writing and learning needs. This is a particular concern for writing theorists working with ESL, ELL, E2L, and basic writing students. It is hard, theorists like Treglia (2008), Lee (2009), and Mutnik and Lamos (2014) acknowledge, for faculty to see past extensive language error to locate the logic and ideas undergirding compositions written by students outside the dominant culture's understanding of Standard English. It is easier to write students off as in need of remediation than to engage language in its various unconventional forms, Adam Banks (2006) would argue.

In conjunction with the time participants spend commenting on student papers, Lowery and Wallace also commented on the importance of timeliness. Lowery stated that “good feedback, I think, should be provided in a timely manner.” Time, then, functions as a deadline for participants and as a limited window for intervening on student writing. This window compels participants to submit work by institutional deadlines in an effort to help students before they submit their next assignment. However, as we've discussed in this chapter, if the primary focus of feedback is grammar and formatting, the only changes students will make, if they

understand the feedback that is, are editorial in nature. The timeliness element, in this instance, may simply be a matter of policy if the feedback students receive does not help them with truly substantive development.

Reconciling Feedback with Grading

The observation portion of this interview also revealed that participants had a difficult time focusing their responses on writing when they described their feedback practices. In the cases of Cordelia, Ansley, Kourtney, Beatrice, Maud, and Wallace, discussion about writing feedback dissolved into general comments about grading once they began speaking about rubrics. At this point, “answering the question,” a phrase employed by Cordelia, Ansley, Kourtney, Beatrice, Lowery, and Wallace, replaced any concern about how effectively students used language in their responses to questions. Nearly every participant attempted to account for “writing concerns” by submitting student work, as well as their own in Beatrice’s case, to the online grammar and stylistics tool Grammarly. Although every participant, except Maud, claimed writing was essential for their program and for a student’s successful career in their discipline, writing feedback in most interviews, except perhaps for Cordelia and Lowery, relied nearly exclusively on the direction of this automated program.

Ansley, Kourtney, Beatrice, Maud, and Wallace described very similar processes for integrating Grammarly into their feedback practices. After downloading student submissions from the course management system, participants would upload those submissions to Grammarly. Grammarly would then conduct an automated evaluation of the student paper and provide an annotated list of errors in the areas of grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, and originality. According to Beatrice and Wallace, this report would be used as a guide to help them provide feedback on their students’ writing.

I will now illustrate an example of this use. During Wallace's think-aloud activity, I observed him recommend a comma before a coordinating conjunction, even though the conjunction was linking a dependent with an independent clause that shared the same subject. For those who rely on this program, it seems as if good and poor writing are determined solely by the number of identified grammar and stylistic errors identified during the Grammarly check. Even so, Wallace specifically mentioned ignoring the "passive voice" flags Grammarly generated as less egregious than punctuation, spelling, and sentence integrity errors. Such errors, however, found little weight in most rubrics, since they accounted for less than 10% of the student's overall score on the assignment and used only minimal criteria to capture writing requirements. An example of a rubric for writing criteria is provided in Table 4 (134).

Additionally, more than half of the participants expressed being surprised that student response to feedback could be a positive exchange. They assumed, from experience, that students often and only respond to the scores they receive on assignments when they are angry. Participants used terms such as "disagree," "poor grade," "attack," and "negative" to describe their typical exchanges with students who respond to feedback. What's interesting about the perspective undergirding attitudes about student responses to feedback is that participants seem to see feedback as and prefer when it is a unidirectional communication. As such, participants appear to operate from the position that students should receive the feedback, make adjustments, and improve their work for the next assignment and only contact them if they don't understand what they are asked to do. The grade, incidentally, seems to be the relevant object for both students and teachers instead of learning in this type of exchange.

Since grades appear to be the most important objects in this perspective of the teacher-student exchange, feedback acts as a sort of justification, similar to the rationale provided for a

performance evaluation in a business setting. Faculty identify an accumulation of errors, for instance, to render transparent the reasons for a low grade. Although grammar accounts for only a small percentage of a student's grade on an assignment, according to the general standardized rubric participants employ, participants at times deduct points in other rubric categories when extensive language errors interfere with "clarity" or readability. If the goal is to avoid uncomfortable student responses to grades in which students might "attack back," as Kourtney described it, practitioner-teachers may use feedback and rubrics to shore up the evidence for the grades they assign, emphasizing surface errors, since they are more visible than the nuanced elements of tone, voice, audience, genre, and so forth. The unfortunate outcome of this negatively oriented feedback design is that the effort to assist students with developing their writing is elided with summative comments about what students did wrong in order to maintain the status quo of the traditional teacher-student power dynamic. Students, we may conjecture, respond to closed communication of this type by either not reading/valuing the feedback or not knowing how to fix their mistakes. If students do approach their teacher, the teacher may respond defensively, particularly if the student demonstrates any measure of frustration. It may be this fear of the uncomfortable interaction that prompted Cordelia and Ansley to tentatively respond both "yes and no" to whether students should be encouraged to respond to instructor feedback. It may also account for Wallace's comment that he experiences "very little" response to his comments and labels it "more of a negative" experience and explains that "just because I think the ones that do usually reach out maybe have an issue with the way that I graded it or assessed it. So, you know, unfortunately, I would probably say more, yeah, negative than positive."

As we consider the relationship between a rubric that focuses criteria on vague points of error and feedback used as a justification to anticipate potential student frustration, we might conclude the result to be a one-way communication designed to protect practitioner-teachers from discomfort and to preserve the power dynamic that separates teacher from student. The potential impacts of applying feedback in this way include student disengagement, student frustration, and student uncertainty about the purpose of writing and the student's ability to produce it. When participants make the grade the object of importance relative to the writing task, they undermine their own efforts to teach writing. They may even unintentionally render the writing activity as a negative experience for students who prefer to avoid the pain that comes with failure to produce perfect work and who simply do the work at the last minute because they have to and hope for the best.

Attitude

Perhaps related to the grading concerns mentioned above, participants spoke quite frankly about their frustrations with students not reading comments or doing anything to fix their errors from assignment to assignment, similar to the challenges most participants articulated during the interview portion of this study. As an example, Lowery mimicked what he perceived as a typical student's response to feedback, especially lengthy feedback, by saying, "Eh, I'm not reading all of that." When asked if students should be encouraged to respond to feedback, he proposed adding an analytical function to Blackboard Learn to track "whether they've actually read the feedback and whether they're doing anything about it." In fact, this particular participant spoke almost exclusively about students not reading or applying feedback instead of addressing the question of student response to feedback directly, finally concluding that "it would be helpful" for students to reach out if they did poorly on an assignment. Cordelia, Ansley, Kourtney, and

Wallace shared concerns about students either not reading comments or not caring enough to apply them. Maud verbalized the attribute that causes this frustration. She called it “an I-don’t-care attitude.” While Maud accurately assessed that her “hands are pretty well tied” when students don’t want to learn, I might posit an alternative possibility. If teachers fear student outreach because they expect it to be negative, then the tools they use to assess and the tone they employ to communicate student error may produce a communication barrier. As a result, the attitude that students may demonstrate either vocally or silently toward a course, their grade, or learning may be partially composed by the rhetorical safeguards teachers put in place to protect themselves from a negative experience. Even an invitation to “ask questions” or “reach out” tagged on the end of a comment with a tone that contradicts the invitation might appear gratuitous and insincere to students. I’m not suggesting that every student has the same level of commitment to their education, but I am proposing that students know when they are up against a mountain of evidence that reinforces their own inadequacies and labels them as a certain letter grade with no hopes of improving the score. This is to say that attitude is complicated, often co-created, and reinforced by perceived and real rhetorical interactions.

Conclusion

To recap, then, participant responses to the questions posed by this study revealed complex inconsistencies and contradictions between what participants say they believe about their role responding to student writing and what they actually provide students in terms of feedback, which is often conflated with grading. While they claim to be comfortable responding to writing, many were quite reticent about showing how they respond to student writing, about writing in general, or about working with language directly, many qualifying their level of comfort to the guidance offered by grammar software. Incidentally, most participants substituted

the terms grammar or formatting for writing and suggested that correctness is the highest priority in the writing activity. When student papers do not demonstrate improved correctness, participants generally believe the student isn't reading or applying feedback. They tend not to recognize that their feedback on student writing is often limited to vague points in an underserved category within the rubrics they rely upon so heavily. Many do not see that their comments on student papers, even those that specifically "call out" error, may not be sufficient guidance for students to accomplish what they are asked to do. The frustration that develops in response to inadequate student application of feedback implies that practitioner-teachers believe lack of error is associated directly to effort and that students who do not provide correctly written and formatted papers do so because they are unwilling to try or that they do not care. Most participants view student responses to feedback as a complaint about grades. They shore up against these complaints justifications that often take the form of correcting language error because error is apparent and can be used to provide proof a paper does not meet expectations. With such evidence presented to students to prove their incompetence, students may disengage and fulfill the role faculty unintentionally place them into. As grammar remains the primary focus of faculty writing feedback, the ideational, rhetorical, and nuanced aspects of writing go unaddressed, thus stymying student writing growth to a practice in formality.

While good intentioned, faculty in this study focus a significant amount of their time on the editing aspect of the writing process. As a result, they miss opportunities to assist students with rethinking the ideas that drive their writing decisions. As this study also revealed, practitioner-teachers themselves demonstrate strong writing processes. The gap between participants' own writing practices and their inability to communicate these processes to their students is surprising. Somehow the approaches faculty use to guide their own writing get lost

amidst the grammatical errors they prioritize in their feedback and never quite reach their students. Many expect, however, that students should have already learned how to write and believe that pointing out error will convince them to do better. Consequently, participants' prioritization of language proficiency simultaneously reifies white privilege while penalizing students who do not conform, those marked as "other" due to race, culture, or socioeconomic status.

Generally speaking, we might say, then, that the answers to our guiding research questions for this study are as follows: Teachers at this institution define feedback on student writing in online courses as pointing out grammar and formatting errors; Their role relative to teaching student writing online is to ensure students are compliant with institutional, social, and linguistic expectations in terms of Standard English, APA formatting, and disciplinary genres. Their goals with providing feedback on student writing in this modality are ambiguous and tend to focus more broadly on assessment practices in general; however, these goals also attempt to help students grow, improve, and learn. Faculty know they have met their feedback goals when students show improvement from assignment to assignment. According to participant responses, improvement can be interpreted to mean correctness in writing. Some faculty are not certain students do improve for a variety of reasons, some of which have to do with student effort and student unwillingness to read or apply feedback. From these fairly common responses, we can further postulate that the practitioner-teachers in this study provide and will continue to provide feedback on student writing because they feel it is important, even if they do not know if it helps. They will point out errors when they see them and refer students to rubrics that remind them that their work should contain very few to no language errors and insist upon professionalism. They will send work back that does not meet expectations, rewrite student work extensively, use

grammar software when available, and try to meet feedback deadlines required by the institution. They will also penalize students for presenting inadequate language skills and grade their writing from the summative position of writing as product. They will also continue to feel inadequate about the training they received relative to writing, spend most of their time chasing errors, and seek direction from automated grammar systems to help guide their feedback. These are the qualities that participants communicated in their responses and may inform the perspectives of practitioner-teachers in this study and may even suggest an epistemological structure to how practitioner-teachers work with student writing more broadly.

In the next chapter, I explore the implications of these epistemological characteristics more specifically in an effort to define how the online practitioner-teachers interviewed for this study understand writing from a multidisciplinary perspective. By extrapolating responses and analyzing key terms and phrases common among participants, I propose a theory in which professionalism acts as a disciplinary and rhetorical device that frames both the practitioner-teacher experience as well as their orientation toward offering feedback on student writing. I call this theory writing as tool for and sign of professionalism and deconstruct how it frames the epistemological lens through which practitioner-teachers engage the feedback task by targeting four main philosophical categories: writing as work ethic, writing as formality, writing as practicality, and writing as arrival.

CHAPTER 5. WRITING AS TOOL FOR AND SIGN OF PROFESSIONALISM: A THEORY

Introduction

To set the stage for this chapter, I now return to the teacher who told me about her frustration relative to APA formatting errors I described in Chapter 2. Why, I asked myself, are formatting errors so important for this instructor? What creates the frustration that elicits such an emotional response from teachers in general? In fact, many of the interview questions I detailed in Chapter 4 demonstrate my effort to understand the compelling nature of such a position and how it serves to form an epistemological perspective on the practitioner-teacher's role in responding to and teaching student writing. This chapter presents findings relative to those questions and provides theoretical explanations to the motives that drive faculty practice in respect to writing feedback.

Before we undertake an exploration of meaning relative to the analysis I conducted in the previous chapter, I must confess that my personal interest in and motivation for writing is not practical but philosophical in nature. This perspective influences how I write, how I teach writing, and how I respond to student writing. It forms, as it were, a different epistemology than that of the practitioner-teacher in this study. I will try to explain. As a student of the discipline of English Studies, I view writing as a complex mediation between thought and meaning expressed through symbols that form language. I contemplate language's compelling simultaneity and incompatibility with structure and arbitrariness, a la Saussure, and think about its performance steeped with motives (Burke 1967) and a politically negotiated performativity (Butler 1997). I study its philosophical underpinnings and attempt to disentangle it from the messy uncertainties that render it imperfect and unconquerable (Derrida 1967). When I engage

students, I think about the societal and political echoes that hide in the recesses of its connotative meanings (Freire 1970). For me, writing is a potent force that delivers those meanings in layers of complexity through which each writer must discover how to translate their flickers of thought into decipherable communication. Through this process, the writer must learn to organize those thoughts, discern what is important, present a case, and be cognizant of an audience. In doing so, the writer must wade through the turbulent waters of discursive practice (Gee 1999, Johns 1997), locate and persuade others of their argument's relevance (Aristotle), and make sense out of the exigency that prompted composition (Bitzer 1968). For me, writing has always been this complex matrix of intellectual tasks, in which the abstraction of thought intersects the practicality of delivery.

Few disciplines, however, contemplate so extensively the theoretical nature of language, particularly when the object of the discipline is a trade or skill. The gymnastics routines of the mind, as images are attached to words, is only important to many disciplines as a final performance presented on paper. In other words, the way in which many practitioner-teachers tend to view writing is as a product, an object designed to perform a communication act for purposes designed by and for the task at hand. It is perceived as a skill through which students must demonstrate their competency. This philosophical motivation in the disciplines is derived primarily from completing the task as accurately as possible according to specific instructions with detailed criteria and serves as an important starting point for analyzing how practitioner-teachers perceive their role relative to responding to student writing. An orienting point for the theory I propose in this chapter stems from the general observation that faculty in the disciplines perceive the preliminary activities of writing as something students do separate from and outside of the written work they produce for class. That is to say, many practitioner-teachers do not

view writing education as a progression but as a destination, where students demonstrate in the production of genres their level of professional acquisition.

In this study, then, based on the collective responses to questions from the interview, as well as the observation of faculty talking through their feedback practices, I discerned that faculty participants generally appeared to apply an epistemology of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism. This model adequately applies to each participant, regardless of discipline; however, the manner in which professionalism manifests in writing or the ways in which feedback on student writing is leveraged to enact professionalism varies significantly among participants in this study. I set out in the subsequent sections of this chapter to articulate the specific attitudes and beliefs that culminate in a disjuncture between writing as process and writing as product through the practitioner-teacher lens of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism as derived from participant data.

Important Caveats

I want to make clear, however, a couple of caveats relative to my theory before I present a detailed explanation. First, I acknowledge that my analysis and theory of this study are based on a particular view that practitioner-teachers concern themselves with grammar and often perceive writing as an accumulation of its technical aspects. While I hold to this opinion based on my interview data and observations, I understand that participants also comment on other aspects of writing. Often, their comments appear to be ambiguous, implied within the vague terms “clarity” or “flow.” These comments likely function to make students aware of content, organization, and audience inconsistencies. However, these terms, according to Yancey (2014) and Hewett (2015) in their work on writing transfer and semantic integrity, carry implicit rather than explicit value for students. In other words, practitioner-teachers may believe that “calling

out,” as Cordelia phrases it, when student writing is “unclear” communicates clearly that the student needs to work on transitions, topic sentences, or any variety of global writing issues. It is probable, however, that students may read such implied comments about their work being “unclear” to mean their sentences and words need to be edited. To clarify, then, I observed in this study that grammar typically dominates the feedback concerns of practitioner-teachers. For this reason, I generalize that grammar seems to be a priority for study participants because their explicit responses to interview questions and the things they commented on in think-aloud observations support that view of writing, the apex of which is captured by the term “professional.”

I have contemplated why grammar is such a priority relative to student writing feedback for participants in this study. It has occurred to me that participants may have assumed that I wanted them to talk about grammar because they believe English, as a disciplinary community, focuses on the technical aspects of writing. In other words, they may have targeted grammar as an object of concern in this study because they thought I was looking for how well they understood and applied the rules of language. Just the other day, incidentally, I mentioned to a friend that I was working on a dissertation for a program in English Studies, and his immediate retort to me was, “I’d better watch my grammar around you.” If this is the general perception, participants may have presented a lopsided view of what they actually focus on in their feedback. A second caveat to consider, then, is that practitioner-teachers may have a skewed understanding of English as a discipline and that view could have influenced the type of data I collected.

That said, this is a study of faculty perceptions and attitudes about writing. If participants believe that a study on writing feedback required them to demonstrate their understanding of grammar, we might conclude that participants do consider writing primarily an exercise in

composing correct grammatical writing. This view, then, validates the notion that practitioner-teachers in this study see writing first and foremost as grammar. For this reason, my theory that practitioner-teachers view writing as tool for and sign of professionalism is contingent on the warrant that participants conflate writing with correctness.

Defining Writing

An important point of departure for exploring the epistemology of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism is to look at how faculty define good and poor writing. By extrapolating these characteristics as described in Chapter 4, we can theorize a definition of writing for practitioner-teachers in the disciplines. I begin this exercise by identifying the common terms participants in this study used in their personal descriptions of student writing. According to open coding practices and in line with grounded theory, I used the terms participants provided as a launching point for organizing codes. Every participant, for instance, assigned the qualities of clarity, which they presented as “intelligible” or “making sense,” “flow,” and “good grammar” to good writing. All participants also described at some length that integrating research appropriately according to APA standards was an essential quality of good writing. Finally, every participant commented that they use a rubric in their assessment of student writing and overtly or implicitly associate good writing with meeting rubric criteria. Four of the seven participants explained that following instructions was an important aspect of good writing. In two of seven instances, Cordelia and Lowery articulated organization that includes a “beginning,” a “middle,” and an “end” as essential qualities of good writing. Lowery emphasized the importance of writing a complete sentence. Ansley added that good writing meets the objectives of the assignment. Essentially, the elements most valued by participants in this study appear to be practical and task-oriented. I come to this conclusion because the

concerns participants expressed about student writing derive almost exclusively from the practical elements of language delivery.

Likewise, participants also assessed poor writing in relation to students' ability or lack thereof to meet practical writing goals. Participants, then, defined poor writing as containing an accumulation of "grammatical error," having "no flow," an inappropriate tone for academic writing that three participants associated with "text language" or "text message format," and not adhering to "APA" standard formatting nor incorporating "research" that, in one instance, Cordelia described as "very little or no supporting information or detail." Every participant also made the point that "not following instructions" is a sign of poor writing. Five of the seven participants also spoke about plagiarism at some length, considering it an egregious affront to their discipline punishable by assigning no credit and reporting the student to administration for the offending submission. Ansley and Lowery both highlighted incorrect capitalization of the letter "I" as improper "netiquette" or a "pet peeve," respectively.

As we consider the collective elements of what makes writing good from these disciplinary perspectives, we can identify several common themes that may assist in generalizing a practitioner-teacher definition of writing. From the data I collected in interviews and the feedback moves I observed in think-aloud activities, I propose, as a beginning point of my theory, the following definitions of good and poor writing. Practitioner-teachers seem to define "good writing" as an organized set of ideas presented clearly with little to no error that fulfills the requirements of a specific set of assignment criteria according to the standards of formatting and documentation accepted by the profession represented by the writer. Poor writing, conversely, might be defined as ideas expressed in a partial or unconvincing way that do not address the assignment prompt and are devoid of appropriate supporting evidence. Poor writing,

by this definition, primarily contains significant grammatical and syntactical error and/or is presented in a voice and tone unbecoming of a professional in the discipline for which the writing is being produced.

From these definitions, we can isolate a few important points of practicality that clarify how some practitioner-teachers not only ascribe value to writing in their disciplines but also how they perceive their role relative to writing instruction. Based on the terms participants expressed in their interviews and the codes I assigned to categorize those terms, I assert that the primary areas of concern for teachers in this study can be contained to the following five main writing elements, which I generated from the data as initial categories: clarity, content, conformity, uniformity, and professionalism. Clarity captures the idea that students must write according to the conventions of Standard English and provide appropriate signals for readers throughout their compositions to achieve the desired outcome of “logic.” Content encompasses the broad array of writing errors that practitioner-teachers often refer to collectively as “poor grammar” that impacts the clarity or accuracy of a piece of writing. Conformity speaks to the value practitioner-teachers place on ensuring the consistency of their genres and refers to the minutia of language conventions that either align students with “professionalism” or signal “unprofessionalism.” Uniformity requires that students format their compositions according to the rules of appropriate generic standards. The last term, “professionalism,” which, I propose, can effectively describe the primary goal of practitioner-teachers, who strive to help students “improve their writing” for purposes of demonstrating their disciplinary value, appeared multiple times in interviews with the participants of this study. It can be interpreted as a key indicator of how writing functions within the disciplinary perceptions in this study.

In fact, I propose that participants' perception of professionalism drives the epistemology of the practitioner-teacher, who views her or his role as one-part mentor and one-part manager in the teacher-student relationship. Professionalism is the goal and standard by which students and their writing are judged. To understand more about how this perception is formed and in what ways it is applied, I propose we look at professionalism in the following ways: As work ethic, as formality, as practicality, and as arrival. These categories developed as I organized the five categories above and engaged in the grounded theory activity of moving from substantive to formal theory, as Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest. It became clear to me that these categories provide a lens for conducting nuanced analysis of how professionalism is framed and formed by these conceptual arrangements. The complex ways in which professionalism is enacted in writing instruction is detailed in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

Professionalism

First, we must begin with an analysis of professionalism as scholars have presented it in the Writing across the Disciplines and Writing for Transfer movements in English studies. About writing instruction in the disciplines, Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) explore the tensions that exist within disciplines between community expectations and student understanding. The tensions they describe often impact the way in which teachers from various disciplines attempt to instruct students relative to the criteria of their unique communities' communication patterns and conventions. Interwoven in this complex discursive education, however, are many preconceived beliefs that writing means the same thing in all situations and to all disciplinary communities. The challenge in such a view is that it leads teachers to employ general and vague language to describe writing concerns in their feedback, which does not always coincide with disciplinary expectations, nor provide enough guidance for students to improve in the ways the teacher hopes

(58). A major disconnect between the nuanced expectations of a particular community and the general advice that faculty typically provide often results in little to no change in student writing and significant frustration for teachers.

One such general belief about writing participants clearly expressed in this study is that of writing as sign of professionalism. Each participant at some point in this study referenced student writing as either professional or unprofessional. This notion of professionalism, like Thaiss and Zawacki's "imprecise terms," presents students, who are apparently undergoing a professionalization process, with implicit guidelines, which they either meet or miss based on the precision or imprecision of their writing. However, those specific guidelines are entirely implied and the feedback practitioner-teachers compose relative to professionalism is designed to be self-evident, as detailed by my analysis in the previous chapter. For instance, Cordelia wrote in a comment to one student, "This is not completed in a professional manner." Beatrice described one of her goals with writing feedback in this way: "I want them to see the importance of being professional and using proper grammar." Lowery said in response to a question about how feedback helps students improve their writing that "students just aren't aware of what the expectations are for being a professional or a student in higher ed." The implication here is that practitioner-teachers perceive the purpose of their disciplinary and instructional goals as a means of assisting students to transition from a place of inexperience and unprofessionalism to one of demonstrable professionalism, often signaled by how they present themselves relative to knowledge retention, appropriate interaction, and adequate communication.

While the notion of professionalism seems cut and dry for practitioner-teachers, already practiced insiders within their discipline, it is anything but simple, as the last quote in the paragraph above indicates. Yancey et al. (2015), in their work on writing as transfer, provide a

helpful lens for understanding how professionalization is a complex and challenging process for students. They identified two important moments in students' "rhetorical novice-ship": First, students "move into college" and then "they move into their majors" (19). These two transitional stages present students with rules that become increasingly disorienting and differentiated. Inherent, and certainly unspoken, in these transitional moments are additional writing considerations that involve sociolinguistic and sociocultural expectations (8). When practitioner-teachers describe the nuanced expectations specific to a particular community broadly as professionalism, the specific flavor of professionalism, its rules and practices, remain a secret. Even associating good grammar or logical flow to the term professionalism, a major theme of the participants in this study, limits the scope of what the disciplinary community truly views as appropriate writing.

Furthermore, what constitutes appropriate professionalism in disciplinary writing ranges notably from discipline to discipline. For example, Maud, who teaches in the School of Health Sciences, described professionalism for her discipline in this way: Students "are not students" they are "developing employees" in her field. Writing, Maud confessed, was not her strong point but experience has taught her that certain communication practices work better than others. To that end, she equates writing with a tool of professionalism that must first and foremost share all relevant information. Effective communication, then, what she termed "professional writing," is direct, accurate, and informative within her community. But, because she is not comfortable with writing and dismisses her role relative to its instruction in her discipline, her guidance is limited to broad statements about brevity, clarity, and adequacy. These abstract concepts come to form an ambiguity of qualities that many of the practitioner-teachers in this study use to describe writing in their disciplines, all implied under the blanket expectation of professionalism.

Regardless of its rhetorical limitations when it comes to providing feedback, professionalism is an important term used by all participants in this study and constitutes a key characteristic of epistemological practice in the disciplines relative to responding to student writing. Because participants use relatively vague language to describe good and poor writing, such as the writing “doesn’t flow” or “doesn’t answer the question,” particularly in terms of semantic and syntactic error, they tend to categorize all error as unprofessional and clean, error-free writing as professional. Even though the term professionalism is quite general, what it means to be professional has significantly nuanced meaning in different disciplines. For instance, professionalism for business faculty appears to function as a symbol for a good worker, someone capable of following directions and completing tasks. Professional writing – that is, good writing – for Cordelia and Ansley, then, translates to effective work ethic, the ability for convincing interaction with customers, and a clear flow of ideas. For Beatrice, professionalism is a mark of relevance for a discipline often seen as little more than “babysitters.” Beatrice’s concern is that error in writing will damage the reputation not only of the student but of the entire discipline. In this respect, Beatrice’s approach to providing feedback often takes the form of a warning. In fact, Beatrice was so concerned about the perception of illegitimacy for her discipline among peer disciplines that she confessed spending extensive time drafting her own comments in an effort to model professionalism for her students, even submitting her writing to Grammarly, an application that reviews grammar and stylistics for what it identifies as high and low order concerns, before sending feedback.

The examples above expose an important point of epistemological perspective I propose about how professionalism functions in the practitioner-teacher’s definition of writing: Writing is viewed as a culminating activity, the end product of the professionalization effort, rather than a

process by which writers test their understanding of self and community. I will illustrate.

Beatrice spoke very broadly about student writing in her interview, referring to grammar and formatting as the only relevant pieces of writing in the Early Childhood Education discipline. She believed that “professionalism” for her discipline translated to writing without error, and thus prioritizes the final product over process. However, when prompted to elaborate on her goals for feedback, she shared a detailed account of her own writing process when responding to student writing. She described her composition process as consisting of a series of revisions, first beginning with major points and then progressing toward grammatical concerns, which, she explained, came right before she finalized her comments. She diagnosed herself as not having “confidence” in writing and indicated she relied on support from the automated grammar system “Grammarly.” In a sense, her description of her process and the production of the types of artifacts she requires of her students are very different. Her process, which demands writing, rewriting, revision, and review is rooted in the recurring steps of English composition’s writing process theory and supports the idea that writing requires transitional drafts to reach a desired rhetorical outcome. On the other hand, her expectations demand that students produce error-free writing without much guidance in terms of how to reach their required rhetorical destination. In other words, Beatrice draws from past experience, understands the challenges associated with writing, and employs a process-based approach that enables her to achieve a “professional” product of her own. Her students, conversely, are required to achieve professional writing without the benefit of guidance through the process and are penalized when the product is not neat and clean. For this reason, feedback often becomes a list of things the student failed to do correctly with little direction in terms of how to fix their errors. Somewhere between assignment

and submission, Beatrice seems to expect her online students to apply a series of writing moves that perform the rituals of professionalism in the murky uncertainty of disciplinary discourse.

In a similar vein, Wallace also explained that he employs “Grammarly” quite regularly as part of his assessment and feedback process. Because this automated system is used to identify sentence and word level errors in writing, Wallace further explained that he uses the program to review all student submissions for grammar errors and then uses the report the software generates to compose his own feedback. During the observation portion of this participant’s interview, he demonstrated how the software locates errors and then recommends changes. The program, however, isn’t always entirely accurate in its assessments. In this instance, Grammarly underlined a coordinating conjunction and recommended a comma. Unfortunately, the recommendation was ill-advised. The sentence did not require a comma since the conjunction was serving to connect two verbs to the same subject. However, per the system’s recommendation, Wallace added a note to the student’s paper about punctuation. As this example illustrates, the details of what and how to fix error may be uncomfortable territory for some practitioner-teachers. Some avoid grammar instruction altogether, while others attempt to supplement their uncertainties with automated systems. Many employ the general term “unprofessional” as a comment into which grammar errors are broadly insinuated. In this way, the general term “professionalism” provides practitioner-teachers with a multiplicity of purposes relative to feedback on writing without lending their intervention much relevant specificity.

As these two examples illustrate, one possible explanation as to why participants did not mention ideational categories of writing during their interviews may be because they do not know exactly how to express these characteristics. In fact, each participant shared levels of trepidation relative to responding to student writing. While the majority of the participants

expressed that they were “comfortable” responding to student writing, every participant also communicated uncertainty about how to explain to students why their writing was unprofessional. Like participants in Yancey’s study on transfer, participants in this study explained that they did not know the language of writing, often resorting to general terms, such as “clear,” “flow,” “grammar,” “APA,” and so forth, in their feedback. Cordelia and Ansley demonstrated how they address syntactic and semantic errors by extensively rewriting student work, modeling, they explained, how a sentence could “make more sense” and better conform to the language patterns of their disciplinary expectations. When asked how they explain what parts of a student’s writing needs work, however, each participant expressed some level of ambiguous concern about not knowing the right words and rules to guide students relative to improving the grammatical and syntactical elements of their writing.

Professionalism, thus, becomes a convenient category into which practitioner-teachers can assign the ambiguities of writing error. Maud stated that “professionalism equals effective communication.” She described writing as “a communication tool.” She explained that certificate and associate degree seeking students in her program use writing primarily to clear up miscommunication within the generic documents distributed among healthcare staff. For this reason, she explained that writing feedback for her is limited to the concept of clarity. She said, “You can’t teach this [writing].” Students must “experience and learn it in the field.” If students, she further elucidated her position, are “direct” and “clear” in pursuing the information they need, then they have successfully communicated. On the other hand, recognizing the political implications of writing clearly and minimizing error in her field, Maud also said that “students will be judged by what they write.” Part of her process, then, is to provide an insider’s response to the writing students produce. While she does not offer feedback on specific points of

grammar or sentence structure, she will return work ungraded that doesn't qualify as effective or clear communication. Unfortunately, students are left to guess how to make their writing appropriate for professional distribution in accordance with the vague markers of clarity, conciseness, and sense-making.

In fact, in terms of qualities that describe the philosophy of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism, all participants used common language, such as “clear,” “flow,” “logic,” and supporting “documentation” or “sources,” in some form or fashion to explain when writing is good. Cordelia and Ansley were particularly adamant that good professional writing should “answer the question.” Similarly, Beatrice expressed that missing information relative to the assignment prompt was detrimental to student writing success and often resulted in an incomplete product and a need for revision. Successful writing, from this vantage, stays true to the task at hand, is thorough in its delivery of content, and relies heavily on logic – often, participants commented on logic's relationship to flow, source management, and content application. All eight participants made mention of some variation of this sentiment: the writing needs to make sense. Implied within this notion of making sense is the expectation that students must submit professional compositions that are free of error and that students already know how and will automatically be able to achieve this important goal of professional communication if they try and desire hard enough. The regrettable reality is that students often don't know and, without appropriate direction, cannot present the writing that meets the professional standards practitioner-teachers demand, a notion addressed by Hewett (2015) in her argument for direct feedback associated with semantic integrity and in Thaiss and Zawacki's (2006) findings relative to professional nuance in multidisciplinary writing.

The disjuncture that frames the notion that students can write professionally if they try hard enough, write clearly enough, and produce error-free compositions constitutes the four subcategories of my theory of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism: work ethic, formality, practicality, and arrival. Before I venture into the specifics of each of these categories, I want to make an important distinction between the way in which professionalism is positioned in my theory of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism and the discipline of professional writing in the field of rhetoric and composition.

Differentiating Professionalism in This Study from Professional Writing Theory

At this juncture, I must clarify an important point about professional writing as it applies to my findings and subsequent theory. I do not want to confuse or unintentionally conflate the rhetoric of professionalism that compels practitioner-teachers to prioritize correctness and formatting above other, less visible writing concerns with the established field of professional writing. For this reason, I will spend some time now defining and describing how the concept of professionalism manifests in professional writing theory and contrast it with the way participants in this study understand and employ the term.

To illustrate the difference, I will begin by defining professional writing theory as it is recognized by experts in the field. Kellogg (2006) tethers his definition of professional writing to one's "expertise in writing" relative to "texts generated by professionals" (413). This broad definition, however, inadequately describes the complexities and variations associated with writing in situations defined by "multiple goals" in "domains of writing" that "are extensive and non-overlapping" (413). For this reason, a definition of professional writing must consider not only the communication genres produced in professional settings, but also how writers in professional fields locate themselves within the specific sense of professionalism in which they

find themselves. Theorists understand that professional writing is not a fixed concept and will require learners to adapt both to the exigencies of the situation and to the changes that will certainly transpire over the course of a professional's career.

To help prepare students from an educational perspective, professional writing theorists focus on connecting writing in the classroom to writing in the workplace through efforts such as writing across the curriculum, writing about writing, and transfer. Read and Michaud (2015) articulate how these activities function to teach “college students to be literate beyond the boundaries of the university” (430). By literate, of course, they mean capable of discerning the many dimensions of discourse inherent in professional communication. Professional writing pedagogy from this vantage serves to prepare students for what they “encounter both during and after their academic experience” (430). Some of the approaches professional writing teachers employ in their instruction include “genre-based,” “industry-based,” and research-based instruction. Each of these efforts involve teaching students how to understand writing from the multiple angles of its professional distribution. For instance, genre-based instruction helps students develop “rhetorical awareness” (432); industry-based instruction partners students with professional organizations in an internship capacity to employ “‘authentic’ workplace genres” to help learners more smoothly transition from the classroom to the workplace (434); and research-based writing encourages students to develop an appreciation and an aptitude for learning throughout their careers (438).

To summarize, we might say that the field of professional writing and its associated pedagogical practices are designed to provide students with specific guidance and mentorship in order to prepare them to communicate effectively in a variety of professions and professional contexts, including but not limited to academia. The field of English studies supplements this

educational effort by collaborating with professional educators in activities such as writing across the curriculum and writing about writing to help students develop rhetorical adaptability they can use in their various and contingent workplace writing situations and practices. In this way, professional writing theory might best be described as a point at which composition, rhetoric, and nonacademic communication intersect in the classroom, in the workplace, and in the community at large.

The role professionalism plays in the theory I present in this study, conversely, is based on how practitioner-teachers interpret and, at times, misinterpret what it means to write professionally in their disciplines. It is a perception of professionalism situated exclusively in individual experience often influenced by institutional guidelines but not necessarily supported by research in the field. More specifically, participants in this study seem to apply professionalism as a destination where students arrive when they present writing that is without error, often disregarding the processes upon which writing relies and privileging instead the final product as a sign for whether a student is acting like a professional or not. Practitioner-teachers who enact professionalism in this way often apply the term as a generic criterion of assessment that labels writing either suited or unsuited for professional consumption. Faculty feedback on student writing from this version of professionalism is typically general, conclusive, and often circular in its logic. That is, students are told their work is unprofessional so they should make it professional. Students, however, receive very little direction in terms of how to move from a place of unprofessionalism to one of professionalism.

Unlike professional writing theory as defined above, then, the version of professionalism I analyze in this chapter focuses on how the practitioner-teachers I interviewed for this study assume students can and will enact professionalism in writing simply by being told they need to

be more professional. Grammar seems to be one of the key indicators of this philosophy because language errors seemingly offer an objective measurement of a student's level of professionalism. There are, of course, a number of fallacies associated with this line of thinking. For one, it identifies and prioritizes grammar as the most important part of a composition. Two, it assumes that students can fix their own errors with only implied guidance. Three, it reduces writing and professionalism to fixed and static objects. And four, it privileges students who come to the classroom with educational, social, familial, and political advantages. In the following sections, I detail how professionalism from these philosophical points create a problematic view of writing and negatively impact student learning in the disciplines.

Work Ethic as Tool for and Sign of Professionalism Theory

The first component of my writing as tool for and sign of professionalism theory is work ethic. We can understand the theoretical underpinnings of this perception best if we consider its relationship to writing error. In fact, research from this study clearly identified that participants' perceptions of student error is closely intertwined with practitioner-teachers' views on work ethic. In some disciplines, we might say, error serves as a marker for determining whether a student has achieved professionalism or not. It is also representative of the characteristics the disciplinary community values. Several participants, for instance, referred to spelling, grammar, and formatting mistakes as the result of laziness, a careless attitude toward detail, disrespect for their real and perceived audiences, and an overall disengagement from the work in which practitioners in a discipline engage. Error, we might say, signals to practitioner-teachers that a student isn't ready for or doesn't belong in a discipline. Conversely, the commonly employed comment for several of the practitioner-teachers I interviewed, "Good job," also has significant rhetorical weight. The "job" aspect is particularly important because it indicates the student's

management of a task for the teacher, whose role is often implicitly compared to that of the supervisor. Good writing for some disciplines, therefore, is defined by how well the student performs the assigned task, which includes how well she or he demonstrates professionalism – a term laden with the desired characteristics of quality work –, shows attention to the teacher’s/supervisor’s direction, and takes the community values seriously. Poor writing, on the other hand, is riddled with error, because the student doesn’t take the time to fix their errors, thus communicating implicitly through their mistakes that they do not care about the discipline, or about their future job. As Ansley noted, students need to show that “they took this [the writing task] seriously.”

In this way, error functions to gauge a student’s level of commitment to her or his disciplinary community. How that commitment transpires through writing and is assessed in relation to community expectations, however, differs significantly. This became particularly apparent in my interview with Lowery. During this participant’s think-aloud activity, he showed a screenshot of code that had the word “typt” misspelled. While a minor error in a writing assignment in the Schools of Education, Business, Health Sciences, and General Education, which would have needed addressed but would have been considered a minor indiscretion in the grand scheme of writing, for a technology instructor in a course on coding, the misspelling corrupted the code to the extent that it would not work. For Lowery, then, detail is essential for success in the field and transfers quite deliberately to his assessment of and feedback on student writing. Not surprisingly, Lowery commented on capitalization errors, spacing and formatting concerns, and the organization of student content in his interview. To model the importance of logical sequence, attention to detail, and structural accuracy, Lowery wrote an extensive end note in his comments, labeling different areas of feedback with subheadings, using icons to

differentiate positive (“plus signs”) from constructive points (“negative signs”) – a term some participants often used synonymously with criticism – and including specific examples, often with the student’s own writing, to demonstrate that even the smallest units of writing are essential for effective communication, as well as for a successful career in the technology field. One of Lowery’s biggest points of frustration, he explained, is when students ignore parts of assignments or deliberately try to deceive him. During the observation portion of his interview, he said, “I found that some of the folks in this course just don’t bother ever testing it. They put it out there or they just give me a bogus URL and think, ‘Hey, he’s never going to use it.’” The incredulous tone in which Lowery conveyed this point certainly speaks to the extent to which he views this action as a significant breach of disciplinary ethics and provides an example of how practitioner-teachers conflate error with attitude. Of course, Lowery’s conclusion is speculative. He can’t be sure as to the reasons students submit “bogus” materials. They could do so for a variety of reasons. If, for instance, a student can’t get the URL to work and doesn’t feel comfortable reaching out for help, the issue may be more about a gap in understanding exacerbated by timidity than an intentional attempt to deceive.

Attitude is a significant term for the participants I interviewed for this study, nonetheless, and is a major tenet of the practitioner-teacher’s philosophy of professionalism. Maud, for instance, claimed that attitude is the biggest challenge for her when it comes to working with students and their writing. She explained that she concerns herself less with a student’s current ability to write and more with their desire to improve. She believes, she explained, that students will pick up on disciplinary writing conventions once they gain experience in the field. Her tactic for encouraging writing development is to return work to students and to tell them “they can do better.” Students in her courses are then given an opportunity to revise and resubmit their work.

While Maud does not provide specific guidance in terms of the mechanics of writing, she focuses on an iterative process in which students engage language until it meets her standards. “I do not see students as students,” this participant explained, “but as employees.” As such, Maud demands a quality product from those she is training to work in her field. If students do not produce work appropriate to the rhetorical expectations of that discipline, nor to the standards of her presumed work ethic, Maud requires them to do it again and again until they get it right. Maud described the student who does not pursue improvement in this fashion as “giving up.” The challenge for students tasked with revising work until it meets this teacher’s standards, however, is that the method of improvement and directions about how to enact meaningful changes are obscure at best, and dependent, almost entirely, on the student’s ability to self-correct. “Doing better,” from this perspective, seems to imply that disciplinary writing performance is based exclusively in the student’s desire and willingness to do it right. Attitude, in this sense, relieves the practitioner-teacher from the responsibility of meaningful writing intervention.

This notion of attitude was also a point Lowery highlighted and lends further insight into the role practitioner-teachers assign it relative to student performance. When describing some of the challenges of responding to student writing, Lowery commented on students’ “willingness... to correct an error because not all students are willing to do that.” Somewhat facetiously, he hypothesized about Play Station or Nintendo competing for students’ time, and then more seriously acknowledged the life responsibilities that often frame the realities of working professionals returning to school and the decisions such students must make relative to time allocation. Despite the caveat, “willingness” seemed an important theme for this instructor, as well as an implied characteristic valued by practitioners in the field. If we dig a little more

deeply into his comment, we might also posit that Lowery views the nontraditional students in his courses as disciplinary insiders who should already be familiar with the communication conventions of their community. The assumption that students already know what they should do means that students only fail to do it because they don't want to. Attitude, in line with this assumption, implicitly places the blame and responsibility for poor writing solely on the student and conveniently excuses the instructor from needing to engage in more meaningful discussions about writing.

Interestingly enough, aptitude for writing was rarely mentioned among participants. Students were typically described, instead, by their level of willingness and effort, as illustrated above, rather than by their level of writing ability. While Ansley acknowledged that students new to college require a bit more leniency on assignment scores than veteran students, her only mention of scaffolding learning for the new student was to explain in more detail how to access resources and how to more accurately apply APA formatting and documenting procedures. I inferred an unspoken belief that participants assume writing improves as a result of trying harder, rather than from process intervention and practice. This gap both functions intuitively for participants in this study and contradicts counterintuitively their own writing processes. It is surprising that participants in this study did not consider their own writing practices as a method for instructing students how to develop strong writing processes. This disjuncture between what practitioner-teachers do in their writing and how they respond to student writing often resulted in significant frustration for faculty, who complained about receiving student papers with the same errors even after providing feedback on student work. They couldn't quite understand why students didn't just write better, or more correctly, or clearer.

In fact, every participant in this study shared the same primary challenge with assessing student writing: when the writing doesn't make sense, or is riddled with excessive error that impacts audience understanding, they aren't sure how to handle feedback. Cordelia said, "When the writing is really, really bad, that's the most challenging because it's harder to pinpoint at that point." She then contemplated the balance of feedback on "bad writing," suggesting that too much feedback could disengage the student and impact the student's writing "growth" process negatively. In a similar vein, Lowery exclaimed, following an explanation about poor writing, "What do I do with that?" Kourtney expressed the same sentiment when she described students turning in work that "hasn't met the minimum requirement." In terms of potential solutions to this primary concern, Ansley explained that she rewrites chunks of student writing, especially for the résumé genre, to show students how to cast language in a more appropriate way according to the expectations of that genre. Maud invites students to call her, so they can discuss the submission. She also referenced directing students to "templates" and "instructions." Beatrice picks and chooses a few errors to call out but relies heavily and primarily on the assignment rubric. She indicated that additional professional development about responding to writing and ongoing education in a doctoral program she begins shortly would help her better address these concerns in the future. Despite these interventions, participants in this study didn't seem to understand that their interventions focused on what students do or don't do and never quite explained to students how to improve their writing. Even the modeling efforts Cordelia and Ansley provided only showed students what sentences could look like when rearranged but not how or why making sentence level revisions could improve their writing.

The reality is that training on how to respond to student writing in the disciplines is not common. When asked if he had heard of any scholarship conducted around responding to

student writing in the technology field, for example, Lowery, a teaching veteran of nearly twenty years, said he had not. Training for him over the years had consisted primarily of “navigating learning management systems” and applying minimum teaching standards. He also shared that he had coached many faculty at several institutions and was amazed at how little feedback many offered students, particularly about their writing. None of the participants, in fact, received formal training of any kind to assist with assessing student writing.

While none of the participants received formal training working with student writing, all of them employ a rich and complex writing process themselves, which they demonstrated during the think-aloud portion of their interview. Cordelia and Ansley, for instance, typed comments in Word to annotate student papers during the think-aloud activity that required drafting, reviewing their writing, rewriting, and finally editing, in a recursive fashion. Beatrice spent extensive time drafting, recasting language, and then seeking feedback from the automated system Grammarly. Lowery described writing as “iterative,” which also appeared to be how he approached writing his comments, spending, he explained, “a long time” on feedback. In fact, when asked how much time participants spent providing feedback on individual drafts, the common response was “a lot.” For some, “a lot” meant 10-15 minutes per paper and for a couple of participants as many as 30 minutes for individual student submissions with extensive writing (that is, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and syntax) errors.

Based on these demonstrated writerly qualities, it is unfair and inaccurate to assume that practitioner-teachers, despite having little to no formal training on teaching writing, do not themselves understand, perhaps intuitively, best practices for writing. I observed drafting, reading aloud, pondering, recasting, and revising a number of times throughout interview sessions. Having spent time “practicing,” an aspect of writing both Lowery and Beatrice

mentioned specifically, these professionals-turned-teachers demonstrate that they know that which is acceptable writing in academia and in the workplace because they have learned by experience. This knowledge drives their efforts to “call out,” Cordelia explained, when student writing is insufficient for either or both of these communication spaces. They know, in other words, what works and what doesn’t work. What they don’t always know or feel comfortable with is explaining to students why their writing doesn’t meet expectations and how they can improve it. For this reason, participants’ comments typically reverted to general statements about grammar, spelling, or flow – the elements participants perceived as indicative of professionalism – that require students to apply writing knowledge they may not possess. In their study on transfer, Yancey et al. (2014) identified vague language, like that participants illustrated in their think-aloud observations, as problematic when responding to student writing. She advocates for removing such ambiguity and agreeing upon a common language for writing. Once such a lexicon is developed, she argues, it should be distributed to all teachers who teach writing in English Studies and beyond (101).

The disconnect for practitioner-teachers between their practices and their ability to communicate writing feedback, however, is more complicated than needing a common language for describing writing, as Yancey et al. (2014) explain in their extensive study on transfer. Practitioner-teachers in this study operate under a set of discipline-specific assumptions about student writing development within their discipline that is defined by hard work, will, and determination. So intricately intertwined is work ethic with educational performance in the disciplines, particularly writing, that practitioner-teachers often cannot extricate one from the other – the writing is the work; when the writing is insufficient, incomplete, or below standards, the student, as worker performing a task, is not working hard enough, is not invested in the

discipline, or is unfit for service within the ranks of its practice. So pervasive are the implicit nuances of each discipline that learners are often assessed by their previous knowledge – of content as well as content delivery – rather than developed from the ground-up. Writing in the disciplines can become, in this respect, a weeding out process well in advance of applications and interviews. We might conclude this section on work ethic as tool for and sign of professionalism by suggesting that writing reduced to a sign of student commitment devalues its educational merit and assigns an artificial, not to mention inflated, value to a product that can never quite achieve a state of completeness. Furthermore, to use writing as a way of gauging professionalism applies writing summatively rather than formatively to disciplinary education, which teaches students to care more about avoiding mistakes than about writing as a way to enhance their learning or improve their message.

Formality as Tool for and Sign of Professionalism Theory

Just as students are expected to demonstrate hard work by writing correctly as a sign of ethical professionalism, they are also expected to present themselves as formal rather than informal communicators according to the unspoken rules associated with the theory of writing as tool of and sign for professionalism. The challenge for students, this study revealed, is that practitioner-teachers' expectations of formality tend to be implicit. Kourtney, for instance, alluded to the quality of formality in her description of good writing. She explained that writing should not consist of "text talk" or be too "casual." She was particularly adamant that the first-person pronoun "I" should be capitalized. Each participant, in fact, expressed similar concerns related to formality in their assessment of good versus poor writing as it relates to professional compositions. These concerns often found shape in comments about grammar, word errors, and a general sense of student inattentiveness to detail. Some of these concerns were relatively

minute, such as the lowercase use of the “I” pronoun. Again, attention to detail is a serious concern of the professionalization process. As Beatrice explained in her interview, being perceived as professional is “very important to us,” speaking of the Early Childhood Education field. She understands that academic discourse includes a high degree of demonstrable formality. In order to prove lateral competency with other disciplines, who she claims consider her field as little more than glorified babysitters, she insists that students work toward producing writing that is perceptibly formal in structure and delivery.

In fact, all participants expressed adamant concern about students not sounding professional enough when they fail to apply the linguistic registers of academic discourse, which, surprisingly, do not always mimic the writing expectations of every workplace in actual practice. Even so, many participants were staunch in their convictions that college discourse matched professional discourse. Like Beatrice, the practitioner-teachers of this study mentioned that student writing served to “prepare” students, helped them “practice” professionalism, and protected them from looking foolish in the workplace. Of course, even as some detailed these goals, a couple of participants simultaneously contradicted the role writing plays in formalized discourse by explaining that students didn’t really need to write much in their field, as Maud explained it, or relegated the writing task to email writing, which is a genre not altogether comparable with the genres of academic discourse. The bottom line is that the role of formality in the theory of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism is to preserve a veneer experts in a given field expect of their employees. Formal writing in this respect accomplishes little more than paying rhetorical homage to disciplinary convention. Writing viewed from this vantage of formality is an empty effort devoid of substance, a façade designed to look like professionalism but limited in terms of depth, breadth, and innovative thought.

Interestingly, none of the participants in this study talked about creativity, inventiveness, or skillful application of critical thinking as desired qualities of good writing. These qualities are important components of writing and learning, as Freire (1970) points out in his “problem-posing” theory, which invites participants to “critically act” and “reflect” on their thinking (109), and Hewett (2015) promotes in her theory of writing as “problem-centered” activity, which encourages students to analyze, synthesize, and construct meaning. In terms of creativity, Donald Murray (1981) reminds us, also, that all writing is “autobiographical” and requires narrative that engages writer and reader and instills purpose in compositions (73). It is not clear if these qualities were inherently included in the “flow” category participants featured in their definitions of good writing, if they were less of a priority to faculty participants in this study, or if participants considered these higher order thinking skills too advanced for their students, given that many in this study teach first- and second-year students. Maud, for example, explained that her students, many of whom are enrolled in certificate or associate’s programs, would be working very little with writing in their field, except for the occasional email to request clarification or additional information. In some instances, as with Wallace, who described his class as “application” based, courses may require less writing and more procedural types of activities, such as populating data into spreadsheets, entering codes into healthcare records, or generating a list in the quadrants of a SWOT analysis. These factors no doubt contributed to participants excluding these ideational categories of writing from their feedback and assessment tools. The formality aspect of the epistemology of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism, after all, emphasizes doing the task the right way, “following assignment directions,” and fulfilling appropriate “outcomes.”

The irony inherent in the view of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism is that the expectations that demand students to compose highly formal work, according to formatting, documenting, and grammatical standards, remain obscured by the language that is used to describe the writing project's desired outcomes. In other words, I propose that requiring professionalism, for which formality is a criteria, and then providing feedback that merely indicates whether the outcome was met or not – is professional or unprofessional – forms a circular logic that benefits only those who already meet the formal requirements of professionalism and leave those who are producing what is considered unprofessional work to the uncertain chance that they might improve over time. In this way, a philosophy based on formality, I conclude, can be viewed as significantly problematic for students and the practitioner-teachers who oversee their education because it implicitly excludes some students from achieving access into their disciplinary field of study. This circular pattern became acutely apparent as participants shared rubrics they used to assess students' work.

The general design of rubrics offers insight into how formality operates relative to writing as tool for and sign of professionalism. It is important to note that, in order to contextualize the use of rubrics in contemporary conversation, two main dichotomous perspectives exist relative to these assessment tools: One perspective believes that rubrics are strong universal tools that can standardize important elements of student writing in all disciplines (Walvoord 2014); the other perspective holds that individualized rubrics should be designed according to disciplinary specific standards (Anson 2012). Walvoord argues that a common rubric can be developed as an aggregate tool through a collaboration between disciplinary and general education faculty. Anson contends that the nuances that differentiate disciplinary writing render a common tool ineffective. Both agree, however, that a strong rubric for assessing student

writing involves detailed and specific criteria for the elements of writing. The advantage to using rubrics is that they “express standards and criteria” and provide students with a guide for what they “were asked to do in the assignment” (Walvoord 15).

Every participant interviewed for this study mentioned using rubrics for their assignments. Some of these rubrics were highly specialized in terms of the tasks students were asked to perform, to the extent that most of the sample rubrics I observed listed a specific number of sources required as support for the submission, included specific directions in terms of the information students were required to provide, and even followed a four-tier quality assessment based on the level of student work, according to Beatrice’s, Cordelia’s, and Ansley’s approaches. Most participants explained that they posted their rubrics on their online learning management system course homepage to provide students with assignment expectations prior to due dates. So detailed are these rubrics that students who read them carefully and apply criteria accordingly should be able to produce acceptable papers, or, as Beatrice and Cordelia termed it, meet “objectives.” In a sense, the rubric becomes a checklist for the work task students are asked to complete. As long as students follow the formal steps captured in the formal assessment document, then they should achieve a high score, or rating, if we consider this from the standpoint of an employer training an employee. But that is not always the outcome for students. That is, if the rubric spells out so clearly all the steps a student must do to earn high marks on assignments, why do they fall short at times? Where does the completion of the task in relation to the quality of work breakdown? In response to these questions, most participants attribute poor student performance to the ineffective writing qualities heretofore discussed: “Grammar,” “APA” errors, “not following instructions,” little to “no logical flow.” These

reasons, however, don't seem to adequately explain why or how rubrics fall short. Why, we must ask, is writing positioned as the primary reason for poor student performance?

I will attempt to explore a possible answer to this question. While the rubrics I observed were detailed in terms of the activities of the assigned task, only one vague category in participants' rubrics were designated specifically for "writing issues" (See Table 4). The criteria for this one category included grammar, mechanics, and APA documentation and formatting. This category appears to act as a catchall for writing errors that are both explicit and implicit. The "clarity," "flow," and "logic" participants used to define good writing in interviews are not listed on participants' rubrics but rather seem to be inherently subsumed under other categories implicitly, among the various specific tasks students are asked to perform in the assignment prompt. I deduce, based on this incongruity of the varying levels of specificity in these rubrics, that writing becomes an assumed expectation that impacts a student's grade without clear guidance or explanation. As an administrator, I work closely with students and often listen to their frustrations about not understanding their grades. Some say that the feedback they receive is unclear, particularly when their writing is the main contributor to their low scores. The rubric that faculty employ, then, either does not provide enough specific guidance, as I have heretofore argued, or students have a difficult time connecting the dots between the criteria faculty present in their rubrics and the actual work they produce. Faculty across the disciplines for this study, however, explain that telling students that their writing or points are unclear or that it does not adhere to APA formatting rules is sufficient guidance to promote change in writing. The demands of formality, consequently, don't provide the means for improvement under the auspices of an epistemology of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism because the practitioner-teacher generalizes when the intervention requires specificity.

Consequently, similar to studies by Treglia (2008), Lee (2009), and Zahn (2016), this study revealed an apparent disparity between the comments faculty provide students and their perceptions of what they believe their feedback does for student writers. However, unlike these studies, the assumptive undertones of the rationale teachers employ in their feedback practices tells a much different story about their efforts to help students improve their writing. First, the problems that prompt intervention and the decisions faculty make about responding to student writing are not arbitrary. Participants made clear in their interviews and demonstrated through observation careful attention to language at both the micro and macro levels. In fact, each of them employed their own thoughtful writing process as they composed comments designed to help students “make sense” and “write professionally.” The problem is that practitioner-teachers in the disciplines interviewed for this study are not experts in teaching writing. As a result, their efforts to guide students to develop communication approaches appropriate to their discipline is expressed in too general and too broad of terms. This disconnect, however, is not the result of philosophical dissonance, as some studies like Lee (2009) and Ferris (2014) suggest, but of practical delivery. I will explain this disconnect in the following section, which details the third component of the writing as tool and sign of professionalism theory.

Practicality as Tool for and Sign of Professionalism Theory

Practicality from the theoretical perspective of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism requires significant analytical attention. Because the practitioner-teacher participants in this study do not see writing as a knowledge building tool, nor see its theoretical applications in learning, they define its value as strictly a medium of delivery. Consequently, they reduce the complex language moves that many writing theorists recognize as knowledge creation or creative thinking to a generalized, and practical, set of descriptors: clarity, flow,

documentation, grammar, and so on. As a result, it does not necessarily matter to disciplinary instructors that they cannot define or explain the language move, as long as they can mentor students to approximate the appropriate move. For this reason, any writing activity that consists of genre templates, patterns, sequences, or an equation that can be repeated by the student – such as the SWOT analysis Cordelia reviewed in the think-aloud portion of her interview – becomes much more valuable than the unique, the profound, or the dissenting piece of writing. The idea of practicality, I posit, is that the writer must learn to match the pattern, not grow beyond it. It is no surprise, then, that the surface markers of grammar, formatting, and documentation assume the primary points of concern for faculty teaching from this practical standpoint. After all, the writing must be clean for quick and accurate audience consumption, consistent with the documents and genres of the discipline and thus recognizable for insider access, and professional in its appearance and delivery.

That said, four of the participants in this study either apologized for their responses to or ignored questions directly related to writing. In fact, some of the think-aloud observations I conducted dealt more with how faculty designed and implemented rubrics and general decisions about feedback and assessment than about writing. In most cases, these rubrics contained, as described above, only one writing category aimed specifically at grammar, mechanics, and formatting. Because these criteria deal exclusively with surface-level concerns, students come to identify writing with correctness, a concern expressed by Perl (1979), Bartholomae (1980), Sommers (1982), Hartwell (1985), and Elbow (1991), and explained in detail in Chapter 2. This may be reinforced when practitioner-teachers reward students most for submitting papers with accurate title pages, few errors, and a list of references. When the rubric becomes a checklist for the faculty member and limits feedback to general, surface-level writing concerns, faculty miss

opportunities to challenge students to develop more complex rhetorical, argumentative, or analytically sound writing.

However, according to some participants, Maud in particular, there is typically little room or need for deep study of writing in the disciplines. Time, after all, is money. In career-focused education, efficiency trumps any thought activity that requires contemplation and time. In fact, efficiency is a primary element of practicality in a student's education relative to managing assigned tasks. Maud described well how writing activities in her field serve as a necessary yet inefficient responsibility. When physician's notes or email directions are unclear, support staff in healthcare fields must seek clarification. The efficient – the practical – approach in these cases is to use as few words as possible, to be direct in terms of the information needed, and to avoid signs of incompetence, such as misspellings, incorrect grammar, or odd syntactical constructions, which could, potentially, lead to additional emails. Time spent with exhaustive email exchange is time lost in completing time-sensitive tasks. Maud's goal, then, is to instill within her students respect for accuracy, conciseness, and efficient communication.

This issue of time is particularly important to practitioner-teachers. For this reason, they grow frustrated with students who don't follow instructions, submit work late, or ignore feedback. In fact, practitioner-teachers perceive students who do not read or apply feedback as exhibiting signs of inefficiency. Each participant commented specifically that students who don't read feedback are among their greatest instructional challenges. If students aren't reading, particularly when the majority of course content is presented in writing online, then learning can't happen. Maud defined her experience of asynchronous exchanges of writing through email as “no real communication,” qualifying her statement by adding, “not like in a classroom.” Such “back and forth” relies on both writing and reading to successfully negotiate the discursive act.

The idea of a “real communication” consisting of physical proximity coupled with facial expressions and “looks” of understanding or confusion further suggests that practitioner-teachers may devalue writing as a meaningful communication tool. Participants in this study seem to consider writing as a less than ideal method of interaction, even though many of the participants generally commented that writing is important for students to learn. I propose that most of the practitioner-teachers in this study perceive writing as a clumsy and time-consuming activity to which they and their students are tethered by the requirements of academia. For those that see no practical value in writing in their profession convey the attitude that they would just as well do without it. For this reason, every participant mentioned talking to students by phone or through teleconferencing software as a preferred communication or next step escalation in their intervention practices when writing fails. I got the impression many felt writing failed quite often. In one rare instance, Lowery claimed writing held “a very important role” in his discipline, “because not only do people need to know the technology, they need to know how to speak about and write about it, and that is one of the most challenging aspects of working in the IT field.” Yet, even in this example, Lowery listed “speaking” about IT before “writing” about it. Participants’ overt and implicit attitudes toward writing suggest that they consider it slower and less precise than verbal exchange. Maud’s insistence that writing is best when it is succinct and clear and doesn’t get in the way of getting an answer is a good example of this attitude.

From a general perspective, it is not uncommon for practitioner-teachers, I have come to understand through my experience, especially those from disciplines that are customer – or patient – facing to prioritize “face-to-face” communication. Writing, Kourtney alluded, offers an incomplete dialogue, one that doesn’t, perhaps can’t, answer all of a student’s questions. From this brief commentary about the role of writing in online educational settings, we can infer that

these practitioners of disciplinary education emphasize the verbal encounter and deemphasize, or rather, re-emphasize the writing act as an imperfect and inefficient alternative in the professionalism paradigm that doesn't quite function as a tool of effective communication. We might posit that practitioner-teachers themselves distrust writing and may inadvertently transfer their own misgivings about it to their students. The irony of such an attitude is that both teacher and student work almost exclusively with writing in their online courses. In a sense, both are subjected to it as a primary means of teaching and learning. Neither, however, may find it very practical. Consequently, practitioner-teachers may unintentionally sabotage the role writing could play in their disciplinary instruction because they see it only as a minor part of the professionalization process and question its effectiveness and efficiency in disciplinary education.

Reading, on the other hand, is important to practitioner-teachers because instruction is often presented in writing; therefore, reading is a practical activity in the online educational modality. Furthermore, following directions is a key component of disciplinary professionalization. Management, for instance, expect subordinates to complete the mandated tasks they distribute through email or in memos. For this reason, every participating practitioner-teacher in this study mentioned students not reading or applying feedback as a major point of frustration in their teaching and a forecasted sign of inappropriate workplace behavior. Often coupled with laughs of derision or scoffs, faculty obviously encounter the challenge of encouraging students to read their feedback quite regularly. Ansley, exasperated, said, "If they read it [feedback], I think it helps greatly." So, the value of feedback was generally not disputed by any participant; however, each participant also expressed some skepticism about whether students actually read feedback. To illustrate this frustration, Ansley shared a story in which she

made extensive sentence-level changes to a student paper, but the student submitted the original draft without any corrections. She said, “I know he wasn’t reading my feedback. So, that is the frustration of the faculty, right, when you take the time to go through all of these and then they don’t read your feedback.” Like writing, reading is a task students must do in order to fulfill the requirements of the assignment. When students don’t read or apply feedback, they are acting akin to the delinquent employee who doesn’t pay attention and is unwilling to change an undesirable behavior. From the perspective of practicality within the paradigm of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism, failure to read the practitioner-teacher-manager’s feedback and submitting the unrevised information is a waste of time and a blatant act of disrespect.

To illustrate the frustration faculty convey relative to students not reading or applying feedback, we can review a comment Ansley included on a student paper during the observation portion of the interview. She wrote on a student paper: “You’re not reading my feedback. You cannot use ‘I’ in your resume. In your employment, please look over templates on uploading your resume and how to do this. You should have the name of your company, your position, the date. You worked a couple of bullets in your tasks and duties of each. This is not completed in a professional manner.” Here, we see Ansley chastising a student for not reading feedback that involves making fixes to very specific minutia within the résumé genre. We also see the ambiguous “professionalism” concept surface as a catchall for what the document should accomplish once complete.

In fact, ambiguity is an all too common result of much of the feedback gathered during this study. As an example of that ambiguity, we can consider one of Beatrice’s comments on a student submission. She states, “Consider redoing this grade and incorporating credible, supportive resources into your paper to earn a higher grade.” What “credible, supportive

resources” entail is not made clear in this or any supporting comments. Likewise, Wallace writes a summative comment to a student that states, ““For full credit, I was looking for you to elaborate a bit further in your comparison. Please see my rubric and comments where a few errors were made.” In this example, Wallace asks students to “elaborate... further” on a “comparison” and to refer to grammar errors he mentions in annotations through the online learning management system Blackboard. Which aspects of the “comparison” the student should “elaborate” were not detailed and the “errors” he references are brief comments in the margin of the student’s document that mention a missing comma or misspelled word here and there.

One final example will illustrate further participants’ primary concern with error as it applies to the technical aspects of writing. In response to a student paper about mapping congressional districts, Lowery wrote, “I don’t find any citations or references, but you should site the eia.gov website. This is a concerning oversight. The remainder of your formatting is good overall. You should keep the font consistent, however, across all the pages, etc.” While Lowery provided additional feedback regarding audience awareness and improving the design of the map visual that accompanied the paper, his end comment reprioritizes the technical errors as most important relative to the student writing task.

As an important point of contemplation, we might ask if there is a correlation between how students perceive and apply feedback and how practitioner-teachers feel about writing. If writing is considered an imperfect medium that practitioner-teachers distrust and the feedback is composed using primarily vague language about the technical aspects of writing, how valuable might students consider the intervention of their teachers’ written feedback? From a certain perspective, practitioner-teachers may be working at odds with their goals. To assume a fully practical position on writing reduces the activity to one dimension, its *techne*, and dismisses the

potential of writing to serve as learning tool. From the position of practicality within writing as professional tool, we might postulate that students will not see the practical point of reading if the feedback they receive has little discernable value. Bluntly put, if the feedback on student writing doesn't communicate how and why they should improve certain areas of their writing, students will likely opt out of reading it or doing anything with it, thus creating the impression that they did not read it. Because both reading and writing are crucial to learning, greater emphasis should be placed on both activities, particularly in online educational spaces.

The Online Variable: Student Reading as Complication

Beth Hewett (2015) and Scott Warnock (2009), in books about online writing instruction, write extensively about the complementary sides of the same OWI coin: writing and reading in virtual spaces. Reading, these theorists argue, is one of the differentiating factors that makes online teaching difficult. Of reading, Warnock (2009) proclaimed, "Your online students will read a lot" (63). They will read their classmates' writing in discussion forums, textbooks, articles, announcements, emails, and, of course, feedback. There are, of course, advantages to pervasive reading in online courses. Students engage with a variety of genres, are presented with different writing voices and audience situations, and practice decoding meaning in a variety of discursive contexts. They can also self-assess when their asynchronous writing is misunderstood or unclear. There is also immediate purpose driving students to elevate their writing since they are often asked to compose in class-community spaces, where classmates and the teacher can read and respond to their writing in public. In theory, the online classroom provides a robust opportunity for collaborative and dialogic learning, not to mention a space for extensive and relevant reading, which Warnock speculates, could improve student writing.

Many participants in this study, however, reported that a major pain point in providing feedback is students not reading instructor feedback. In many cases, faculty added “if they read the comment” as a caveat to whether they felt students did anything with their feedback. Many speculated that students had ulterior motives for not reading feedback – competing activities, lack of motivation, insecurities. Ansley expressed frustration that students didn’t read or do anything about her feedback. She said, “I know the ones that don’t read my feedback because they continue to not do it.” Estimating how many students read her feedback, Kourtney said, “Maybe 25% of them will apply the feedback.” Contemplating the impact of his extensive feedback practices, Lowery ruminated, “Makes you wonder is there any benefit to this.” In this respect, feedback must feel, at times, like a thankless task, I conjecture, something the teacher does because it is required by administration, instead of an intervention that guides students toward improvement.

Several of the participants articulated ways in which they work through what they perceive as low student engagement relative to their feedback. Ansley offers line-by-line editing for student submissions, to the extent of “literally rewrite[ing] their entire résumé.” The assumption here is that spelling everything out will encourage students to read and apply feedback, since the work is mostly done for them. She explained, however, that such an approach meets with mixed levels of success. Maud will return work with a zero and tell students, “You can do better than that.” The implication here is that students will be compelled to apply feedback because their grade depends on it. Lowery suggested that a notification from Blackboard Learn might signal the need for an intervention, a la George Siemens learning analytics theory (2012). He explained it this way, “I would think there could be a way that could be signified in Blackboard to say, ‘Hey, this has been visited. The student read it.’ So, at least

we know.” The idea here is that students who haven’t triggered the notification can be contacted as a follow-up via email, text, or phone call.

This last point, the method of intervention, requires further extrapolation because it reveals a seemingly general attitude some practitioner-teachers have about writing and its effectiveness as a communication tool. Kourtney, Maud, Lowery, and Cordelia said they “reach out to students,” usually by phone, to talk through their concerns and help students get back on track. Kourtney explained it this way: “So, I’ll reach out to them. I’ll give them feedback on the assignment, but I’ll typically also send them an email, saying, ‘Hey, get in contact with me. Let’s talk about, you know, let’s talk about this assignment. Make sure you are using these templates and instructions that I provide and, you know. So, I try to point them in a different direction and try to reach out to them, so that they will take my help.’” Beth Hewett (2015) explains that a major challenge with online instruction is that communication is primarily delivered in writing. For developing writers, this can be both a benefit, since they must work with written language to improve their writing, and a barrier, particularly when the student is not a strong writer, or reader. While Hewett advocates for the type of modeling and language interaction that occurs in written feedback, she also advocates for employing other “audio/video technology, the telephone, and digital files” as additional forms of feedback (2). Ansley, in fact, explained that she sends brief “Screencast-O-Matic videos” (an online video capturing software and recording archive) to students when her written feedback seems ineffective. While Hewett supports the use of eclectic instructional approaches, which incorporate these technologies, she also emphasizes the importance of “creating writing commentary and interactions that accurately address what students need to know in order to develop and improve their writing – on a case-by-case, problem-centered basis” (4). This type of written interaction requires teachers to use

“instructional language that provides sufficient information to students, offers clear guidance about potential next steps, and works to prompt new or different thinking – all through textual commentary” (4).

Of course, Beth Hewett’s advice is primarily directed at English teachers from an online writing instructor perspective. That said, given the text-heavy nature of the online environment, her advice is just as viable and just as impactful for teachers of the disciplines, who are also tasked with teaching writing as it applies to the genres and communication methods of their field. To this end, and in line with the responses this study generated from participants who generally stated how important it was to guide students toward improving their writing, written intervention serves to model, emphasize the value of written communication, and strengthen students’ conceptual knowledge.

Some of the ways in which faculty in this study, both stated in their interview and demonstrated in their think-aloud observation, attempted to use writing to teach writing, in line with Hewett’s theory of semantic integrity, include: Showing students how to improve their sentence structure by rewriting some of a students’ actual writing; explicitly “calling out” error; and explaining when assignments did not convey meaning appropriately. These feedback efforts typically worked in concert with their rubrics and manifested as comments in the margins of student papers. On the flipside, faculty also used vague terms, made implicit statements using insider knowledge without translating it for outsider consumption, and conflated errors in language with breeches of disciplinary professionalism. Consequently, participants in this study do not appear to take full advantage of the opportunity online education offers for teaching writing with writing. Rather, most positioned reading and writing as major hurdles to student learning and quickly deferred to verbal exchanges when their own writing feedback was not clear

or when students did not apply it correctly. Online education, we might say, exposes practitioner-teachers' own uncertainties about writing and can exacerbate an already uncomfortable communication situation for them and their students.

Arrival as Tool for and Sign of Professionalism Theory

Arrival, the fourth tenet of the theory of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism, is a tenuous yet crucial concept in understanding how professional presentation in writing can both solidify inclusion for students who appear to belong in a discipline while simultaneously excluding some participants from full disciplinary access to learning, particularly in the online environment. Arrival embodies the notion that students exhibit, through writing, the language nuances that form the lexicon of practice of a discipline in line with the appropriate measure of accuracy relative to the genres and communication platforms of that discipline. Students who follow directions, meet all of the categories of the rubric, present an accurate document with few errors, and apply appropriate formatting principles are rewarded with positive comments and are considered as “getting it,” a phrase indicative of arrival and presented in several instances by participants in this study.

In fact, participants emphasized assignment instructions as an important part of arrival from the theoretical standpoint of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism. In several instances, participant-faculty made specific mention of following instructions as a key criteria of their writing assessment. Beatrice, for instance, identified both “the instructions” and “grading rubric” as documents students must follow precisely in order to receive a high score. Of poor writing, Cordelia said, “The instructions are not followed.” Conversely, Ansley lauded a student submission because the student “followed instructions to the ‘T.’” Furthermore, the student did a “good job” by answering “all the questions.” The reason following instructions and answering

questions are so important for many in this study is because the student who does so exhibits the qualities of a desirable employee, namely attentiveness, precision, and following directions. Practitioner-teachers often approach education from a workforce perspective, with an eye closely fixed on practicality. If a student is able to present an assignment that conforms to the expectations detailed in assignment prompts and course rubrics, while also composing a clean finished product, the student has arrived because s/he demonstrates the relevant assessment standards of the discipline.

Furthermore, arrival may also be indicated by students who demonstrate that they have read and applied feedback. Since most participants claimed “improvement” as their primary goal for students in their courses, faculty recognize and reward students for applying their specific feedback. Wallace described that a formula for student arrival is when they “read it,” “apply it,” and avoid making the “same mistakes over and over again.” Kourtney described it this way: “I would say my main goal in providing feedback to students is to help them improve their skills and to help them better prepare for their next step, so that they are constantly improving in each assignment so that when they get to the next classes they’re going to be in even better shape.” Cordelia provides what she terms “a lot of feedback in hopes that they... improve.” Ansley associates feedback with student effort to illustrate the connection between applying feedback and arrival. She explains, “You can tell if the student reads your feedback if at the next assignment that they are incorporating some of the feedback that you gave them.” So, generating a perfect, error-free document is not always the key indicator of arrival. Being diligent, following instructions, aligning submissions with rubric criteria, and applying specific feedback in a way that demonstrates progression through effort to meet the standards of a discipline is also part of the arrival paradigm.

The danger in following the prescriptive qualities that define how well someone fits the standards of a discipline by means of professionalism, as theorists Adam Banks (2006) and Asao Inoue and Poe (2012) point out in their work on implicit racism, is that standards tend to start from a place of exclusion. Reducing student work to “bad writing” on the basis of clarity and professional delivery privileges those who come from educationally, culturally, and financially stable situations, have other explicit and implicit advantages, or who have been exposed to commonplace notions of what it means to belong to certain disciplinary communities. Essentially, the very idea of professionalism as an orienting lens places students from low socioeconomic positions, or who are racial outliers, or who come from internationally diversified communities at a disadvantage from those more closely aligned with the dominant culture. Participants in this study did not speak directly about bias that may contribute to such implicit racism, but they were also very clear about the importance of students following the rules of Standard English, which inherently draws a philosophical line in the sand between those students who already have the skills to meet those standards and those students who do not yet have them, including increasing numbers of international students who bring to the online classroom a variety of world Englishes that are often perceived as erroneous or at least aberrant.

While those who participated in this study did not consciously recognize signs of overt or explicit racism – in fact, many commented that they work with first-year and diverse college students by applying leniency to writing error by either allowing students to redo work or by minimizing penalties for error and demonstrated that they primarily provide supportive and positive comments to students, as if these methods mitigated racist practices – the very structure in which they function to prepare workers for disciplinary practice places them in a precarious and often contradictory position. For instance, we must question whether leniency for some is in

and of itself an exercise in racism, particularly when the reason is that less is expected of certain writers. We might consider carefully, as well, the implications of what it means to train writers to conform to strict institutional ideologies of writing. Is demanding correctness to the conventions of Standard English an effort in indoctrination? In response to this question, we could say that overemphasizing Standard English silences and replaces the voices and thought patterns of diverse thinkers by a thought agenda promoted to reinforce and protect the dominant culture. The notion of arrival is a culmination of those inconsistencies and imperceptible political agendas, since the writers and students who meet standardized expectations best will always already be integrated into the dominant culture. Those outside the dominant culture will continue to perform below common standards, a serious problem facing educators, educational institutions, and the societies they serve.

In these ways, the aspect of arrival in the philosophy of writing as tool for and key indicator of professionalism unintentionally and implicitly sets some students at an immediate disadvantage. Particularly, as we've explored earlier in this chapter, when grammar, syntax, and formatting play such an important role in the activity of demonstrating professionalism through writing. In the very attempt to mold students into professionals in their discipline, practitioner-teachers run the risk of inadvertently perpetuating the gap that Adam Banks claims excludes the "Ebonics speaker," for instance, from "full access to education" and thereby "full access to employment" (12). These exclusions and risks are magnified in an online setting, where the "digital divide" intensifies the disparity (12). The bottom line about arrival is that reading and following instructions, producing error-free writing, and accurately following rules is easier for some students than for others. An epistemology that demands professionalism but provides only

general guidance relative to achieving professionalism will typically produce professionals primarily from the professional class.

Conclusion

As a result of the findings in this study, I have theorized that an epistemology of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism consists of four main parts: Work ethic, formality, practicality, and arrival. The values of clarity, content, conformity, uniformity, and professionalism further form the foundation of this framework. Within this framework, writing appears to function as proof of a student's preparedness and belongingness in the field for which she or he produces work. Ironically, practitioner-teachers in this study expressed some trepidation toward writing, often referring to it as a limited communication tool and a clumsy method of instructional intervention. Yet, practitioner-teachers also assign significant weight to the correct application of the rules of Standard English in the final products students submit for assessment. However, reducing writing to a set of standardized rules that are separate from its communicative potential, practitioner-teachers, we might generalize, create a conflicting perspective of what writing is, how it could and should be engaged, and what purpose it serves. It may seem to students that it only serves as a rite of passage into disciplinary practice instead of as a rhetorical method of intellectual development.

In sum, we might say that the theoretical perspective of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism stems from the practitioner-teacher's belief that the classroom is a training ground for disciplinary practice. Discursively speaking, the purpose of that training ground is to prepare future employees to follow directions, work hard, take pride in their deliverables, replicate the genres and standards of the discipline, and fit into a particular work environment. Writing serves as a sign of arrival, an implicit code that, when enacted appropriately, conveys

education, status, and insider knowledge. The rules of writing are paramount from this philosophical vantage. For this reason, practitioner-teachers strive to guide students to follow assignment instructions and to produce error-free work. Unfortunately, one of the limitations of this philosophy is that error is often addressed in general terms. The notion of achieving or not achieving professionalism in writing, for instance, is often presented to students as both the reason for low scores and the method for improvement, creating a circular dilemma for learners and a cycle of frustration for practitioner-teachers. Arrival is an aspect of the role of writing in the philosophy of professionalism that is socially, politically, and academically imbued with inequities that privilege those most closely aligned with the dominant culture, while perpetuating barriers for those who are not.

This study also revealed that the practitioner-teacher participants make assumptions that potentially influence student writing negatively. These assumptions often assign attitudes and behavioral intent to student writers from an anecdotal standpoint. Students, they posit, produce poorly written work because they don't try hard enough, have little motivation or interest, or simply don't follow instructions. They don't read feedback, many participants postulated, because they don't want to or allow other priorities to encroach on their writing time. I cannot verify whether this is the case or not for the students of these particular teachers, but I can deduce, based on the often general comments faculty provide student writers, that one possible cause of students producing poorly written work might be that the feedback they receive doesn't clarify how to fix their writing problems. Moreover, the feedback based in writing as tool for and sign of professionalism is highly demotivating to those who are labeled unprofessional. Add to this stigma the point of view some participants shared that writing is something students should have learned long before enrolling in their class, and it should come as no surprise that

student work doesn't seem to show much progress, either grammatically or ideationally, in these situations.

I continue the conversation about professionalism and writing in the subsequent chapter. In doing so, I review the research questions that guided this study. I draw further connections between the findings in this study and writing theory. Then, I contemplate the gaps this study reveals as a result of how participants view writing through the lens of professionalism and position that view against the accepted practices forwarded in English Studies. I then present opportunities and limitations, which include the limited study demographic, the specific institutional context, the need for including the student voice, and considerations relative to the study's design. I conclude the chapter by reviewing the implications of this study and propose a professional development plan that reapplies the writing as tool for and sign of professionalism theory in a way to support practitioner-teachers in their work with student writers.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

Introduction

At the inception of this study, I set out to discover how teachers in disciplines other than English Studies provide feedback on student writing in online instructional contexts. To collect relevant findings, I posed five questions to eight participants:

- How do practitioner-teachers in the disciplines generally define their role and goals related to writing instruction?
 - How do practitioner-teachers define feedback on student writing in online courses?
 - How do practitioner-teachers see their role relative to teaching student writing online?
 - What are their goals with providing feedback on student writing in this modality?
 - When do they know they have met their feedback goals?

As I analyzed participant comments and reviewed their feedback practices through a think-aloud observation, I hypothesized a theory based on how participants employ the term professionalism relative to writing production in their fields. I called this theory writing as tool for and sign of professionalism. The main tenets of this theory include work ethic, formality, practicality, and arrival. These tenets form a particular worldview of professionalism and appear to influence the decisions study participants made relative to feedback on student writing. I attempted to make sense out of these tenets by assigning participant responses to one of four general axial categories I created to organize codes: uniformity, conformity, clarity, and content. These categories helped me decipher the meaning behind participant answers to the questions I posed for this study because they define and describe how these particular participants interpret their

role relative to student writing education, elucidate how practitioner-teachers at a particular institution understand the role writing plays in disciplinary practice, especially when mediated through technology, and explain what participants hope to instill in writers by insisting on their interpretation of professional composition.

I will provide an overview of a few specific ways in which participants answered the research questions that frame this study and that I analyzed in previous chapters. In terms of defining their role and goals related to writing instruction, I discovered that participants tend to correlate grammatically correct writing with effective writing. Participants talked about clarity, avoiding writing errors, accurately applying the principles of APA formatting, and following instructions as primary indicators of good student writing. Valuing these technical and practical components of writing belies a certain philosophical orientation toward writing: Participants seem to believe that the best feedback practices involve pointing out error, verifying originality, and ensuring students fulfill each part of the writing assignment. Consequently, participants appear to prioritize assessing writing as a product over teaching writing as a process. To perform this type of assessment, participants explained they use detailed rubrics to determine if their students' work is polished enough for professional consumption. However, participants typically only include one vague criterion in their rubrics to guide feedback on writing. That criterion typically captures only the technical and editorial portions of the writing task. As a result of a perspective that emphasizes correctness as writing, participants see feedback as a way to encourage students to fix errors of *techné* rather than errors of substance. Participants reported the general attitude that their primary goal with writing instruction, based on those points of writing they emphasized, is to prepare students for professional practice in their disciplines. Participants often described professionalism in broad terms and interpreted its practice in writing

as correct grammar and devoid of error. Unfortunately, this particular goal is difficult to achieve because participants are not sure how to assist students with developing the compositional moves necessary for producing writing that meets the nuanced expectations of professionalism within their discipline. This gap is significant and often produces frustration for teachers and confusion for students.

How Writing as Tool for and Sign of Professionalism Connects to Participant Practices

To contextualize the relevance of the points above within my study, I will now explain how my theory of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism fits into participants' philosophies relative to writing instruction in the disciplines. I will also illustrate how this philosophy is complicated by a confluence of race, language, and hegemonic expectation. Because participants expressed the general attitude that professionalism is a key indicator of effective writing, many seem to espouse the implicit belief that professionalism in writing can be taught by simply labeling writing professional or unprofessional in feedback. This implicit belief seems to rely on a few tenets which became apparent as I analyzed participant interviews. Participant comments revealed that the tacit criteria upon which practitioner-teachers determine professionalism consist of work ethic, formality, practicality, and arrival. Participants explained that students who produce error-free writing do "a good job." This idea suggests that correct writing is tied inextricably to effort. In other words, this criterion proposes that students can write better – grammatically correct, that is – if they want to. Embedded within this idea is the assumption that students in America should speak English. Not just English, in fact, but a particular brand of Standardized English privileged by the dominant white culture. In this way, work ethic becomes an unstated tenet of the professionalism as writing concept and a marker for belongingness. When students manage to produce correct work, they sound professional and

they appear professional, or white, according to the expectations of speaking English correctly within cultural, social, and political contexts accepted by the dominate group. Ingrid Piller (2011) claims that dominant notions of language and work function in tandem to produce “covert” forms of “discrimination” that manifest in “refused promotion,” “types of work,” “abusive behavior,” and “manipulation” (133). Some participants indicated that appearing professional is essential for personal and disciplinary reputation. In relation to “covert discrimination,” the notion of reputation becomes uncomfortably entangled with the idea of race, assimilation, and power disequilibrium. That said, formal writing that adheres to generic conventions and correctness becomes a sign of professionalism for participants of this study. While writing formality serves to represent the professional, the tenet of practicality ensures that writing produces some work-related purpose. Embedded in this concept of professionalism is the notion that writing is best when it doesn’t get in the way of gathering “information” or clearly “communicating” a need. The final tenet, arrival, means that those students who follow directions, write clearly, and avoid error demonstrate “mastery” of the rhetorical expectations of a discipline. This idea of arrival is often contingent on the student’s ability to make the intuitive rhetorical transition from the error-producing student to the error-free practitioner. It bears reemphasizing that this theoretical interpretation of the motives that compel participants in this study to conflate professionalism on the basis of work ethic, formality, practicality, and arrival is racially problematic.

At this point, I will take a moment to clarify an argument I have been developing over the course of this study relative to the data I collected and analyzed regarding how practitioner-teacher participants perceive the writing task in the complex deployment of disciplinary education. The points below discuss how practitioner-teacher participants prioritize correctness,

use general terms in their written feedback to students, and equate writing effectiveness with effort. The last point in this section is particularly problematic as it tends to reinforce social, racial, and educational inequities. Every point reveals significant misunderstanding of the role, purpose, and value of writing.

First, I want to emphasize the point that a theory of writing pedagogy that primarily focuses on grammar and correctness to assess student work reduces writing to a set of technical rules while ignoring crucial ideational development. I set my feet firmly on a theoretical foundation set forth by composition theorists Perl (1979), Williams (1981), Flower and Hayes (1981), Berthoff (1984), Hartwell (1985) Sommers (2006), and Lunsford and Lunsford (2008) when I say that such an orientation toward writing instruction is limited and limiting to novice writers. So why do practitioner-teachers in this study prioritize grammar in their assessment of student writing? Hartwell provides one explanation. He posits, “Those who defend the teaching of grammar tend to have a model of composition instruction that is rigidly skills-centered and rigidly sequential” (208). As the practitioner-teachers of this study illustrated in their responses to questions and demonstrated in think-aloud observations, many entangle writing with the skills-based activities of their disciplines, leaning on grammar as a primary indicator of writing competency. Consider Cordelia, Ansley, Beatrice, Lowery, Wallace, and Eliza’s comments. Each identified bad grammar as a major component of poor writing. This happens for a few reasons as I have discussed in this dissertation. For one, as Beatrice, Maud, and Wallace point out, they are not confident with the contingent and malleable elements of writing, claiming they “are not English teachers,” according to Wallace, and that they “feel less secure,” in Maud’s words, talking about writing. In many cases, participants may find it easier to quantify grammar and capture it in rubrics as error than to comment on the less tangible qualities of voice,

audience, purpose, style, and so on. To a great extent, they seem to adhere to the belief that writing error somehow simplifies both the feedback and the assessment tasks and provides them with stable ground for teaching and responding to writing. In a national study on writing mistakes, Lunsford and Lunsford (2008) found that faculty tend to avoid marking error extensively on student papers because “of the difficulty of explaining the error” or a narrow focus on types of errors (784). However, even grammar isn’t as simple or stable as participants would like to believe. Like participants in Lunsford and Lunsford’s study, the practitioner-teachers in my study made similar decisions, often deferring to grammar software or rewriting exercises to align writing with the tactile skills they require students to master in their discipline. From a theoretical perspective, participants seemed to use grammar as a tool for transforming writing from a generative, exploratory, and cognitive activity to a criterion of professionalism.

Second, feedback on student writing that uses generic terms like “clarity,” “information,” “flow,” and “supporting evidence,” to name a few examples from participant interview responses, does not provide sufficient specificity for students to make meaningful revision on their writing. Instead, students guess what these terms mean but typically only change a few things, such as adding the comma and fixing the misspelled words that their teacher has “called out” and nothing more. Participants fume about students not reading their feedback, which they claim is evidenced by students submitting work that is not revised. This cycle of inadequate communication serves only to baffle students and infuriate faculty. Recognizing these possible outcomes relative to writing instruction, particularly in online contexts where phatic communication is at a premium, Hewett (2015) proposed using direct language in feedback on writing, explaining that students won’t be able to pick up on what their teachers mean if teachers don’t write exactly what they intend the student to do. In addition to saying what one intends,

Yancey et al. (2015) posit that using a lexicon everyone understands to discuss writing could help minimize frustration borne from vague feedback. To expect students to inherently know how to fix errors and write effective prose disregards the complexity of writing and the role the teacher plays in equipping students to manage situational writing. Instead, it promotes the idea that writing can be mastered through effort.

Third, then, expecting students to improve their writing skills based on effort typically privileges some students and disadvantages others. If we consider Gee's conception of Discourse communities, insiders are more welcoming of those who already know some of the unstated rules associated with the community (2010). Those who sound like outsiders, remain outsiders. Certainly race, social status, educational systems, and socioeconomics factor into how well one can perform the expectations of a disciplinary community and assume its discursive practices. Freire (1970), Bartholamae (1986), Elbow (1991), Banks (2006), and Inoue and Poe (2012) offer strong counterarguments to what participants see as equitable access to learning and disciplinary practice, since many in this study appear to consider correctness as the paramount sign of belonging to the group or at least having the potential to become a member of the group. In a sense, grammar can either signal inclusiveness or guard against those unable to adequately produce its codes (Shaughnessy 1976).

In sum, my theory of writing serving as tool for and sign of professionalism reveals several practitioner-teachers' attitudinal characteristics about the role, purpose, and relationship of writing in disciplinary learning. I also use this theory to reveal how participants in this study, perhaps even how a broader segment of practitioner-teachers in disciplinary education generally speaking, exhibit beliefs and practices that conflict significantly with current and established

writing philosophies. I provide some concluding remarks about these inconsistencies in the subsequent section.

Connecting the Theory of Writing as Tool for and Sign of Professionalism to Literature

It is important at this juncture that I explain how participant responses and my related theory align and conflict with existing literature in the areas of writing pedagogy, assessment, and professional writing. To set the stage for this discussion, I must first clarify that the theory I propose relative to the study I conducted and the responses participants provided connects practitioner-teachers' attitudes about writing to a particular definition of professionalism and describes how practitioner-teachers leverage writing to determine the success of professionalization in online courses. This definition depends largely on participants' perceptions of writing as an object or task, similar to other physical tasks students are required to perform in their disciplinary study. Such a view reduces writing and its related assessment to a single product that practitioner-teachers assume can and should adequately demarcate how far along the continuum of professionalism a student's ability resides. Participants seem to believe that focusing on the technical components of writing is the most logical way to determine student professionalism along this continuum. To provide consistent assessment of student writing within the context of professionalism, participants rely heavily on rubrics, which they believe identify the most pressing disciplinary criteria for writing designed to professionalize students. The criteria upon which their theory rests reduces writing to grammar and formatting, the seemingly concrete elements of writing participants believe accurately determine if a student's product meets the objective standards of the profession. At this point, we find ourselves back at the beginning of the writing as tool for and sign of professionalism cycle, but not in a generative or recursive way. Instead, as I have theorized, the process is illogically circular, constrictive, and

maddeningly unproductive. In the following paragraphs, I detail how each of the components of this theory present limitations, contradictions, and misunderstandings in relation to writing instruction and assessment.

We begin with a discussion about how study participants appear to interpret writing and compare their perspectives to writing pedagogy theory. One of the most compelling differences between the practitioner-teacher paradigm and that of composition theorists is the practitioner-teacher's seeming belief that writing is an object comparable to the widgets of business production that are manufactured, packaged, and sold. Or, that writing is similar to performing a medical procedure that requires a nurse or healthcare professional to systematically work through a series of actions designed to eliminate possibilities until a probable cause remains. In both cases, the steps are linear, systemized, and formulaic. Seeing writing as a linear and formulaic system reduces the writing activity to a *techne*. That is, a linear and formulaic perspective of the activity neglects to see writing as an intellectual and situational task. A linear and formulaic view positions writing as a thing that can be produced the same in every instance and that replication in this way is appropriate in all cases. Understanding the writing task as a highly complex and malleable activity, Breuch (2002) challenged the notion that writing could be "reduced... to a series of codified phases that can be taught" (97). Viewing writing as something that holds "true all or most of the time" is inadequate because "writing" is "an activity rather than a body of knowledge" (98). As such, writing is "recursive," as Sommers (2006) describes it (43), is "connective" and therefore "generative," "synthetic," and "analytic," according to Emig (14), and "interpretive," to employ Breuch's term (113). Perl (1979) effectively explains where a perception of writing as object (body of knowledge) conflicts with its composition: "Teaching composing, then, means paying attention not only to the forms or products but also to

the explicative process through which they arise” (39). For some reason, a major disconnect for the practitioner-teachers I interviewed relative to feedback on student writing is seeing writing as a product and not as a process.

In fact, participants emphasizing product over process is one of the most surprising findings in this study, since the formative aspects of process better align with the goals of writing development. Scholars in English studies have agreed for decades that process is paramount in writing education. We can trace the roots of this debate back to the 1970s, during which time Donald Murray (1972), Janet Emig (1977), Sondra Perl (1979), and Nancy Sommers (1980) provided significant commentary and conducted meaningful studies relative to process-based writing as effective pedagogical strategies for writers. In fact, in 2002, Lee-Ann Breuch even proposed the concept of “Post-Process Pedagogy,” the notion that writing is not a “thing” but an “activity” (110). Part of her theory even rejects the idea that writing can be “mastered” (105), which, ironically, is one of the terms Cordelia, Ansley, and Beatrice use as one of their performance categories in their rubrics. While we may not know for certain why these participants reduce writing to a product when process-based writing is the commonly accepted pedagogical practice writing theorists employ today, we can conjecture that uncertainty, a focus on correctness in writing, and a specific application of professionalism as heretofore discussed in this study may contribute to participants perceiving their students’ compositions as objects of evaluation rather than the results of a complex and evolving process.

Of course, we must also consider that practitioner-teachers may not have had the opportunity to learn about the advantages of teaching process-based writing. Some studied years ago in disciplines outside of English Studies. All of the participants have been removed from academia for some time as they pursued careers in various industries. During their time in

college, many explained, they did not receive training in teaching writing. So, the natural response to suddenly finding oneself in a classroom as a teacher is to teach the way they were taught. Perhaps, an important action item to surface from this study is the need for practitioner-teacher specific training in writing instruction and feedback, particularly in the online environment. I should also point out that it is unfair to place blame on individuals who have not been exposed to certain practices for not knowing practices they have not learned. Wallace's explanation about not "being an English teacher" is not a failure on his part but a fair assessment of a system that could provide more adequate training. In fact, we would be correct to suggest that institutions form and promote their values by what they prioritize and what they neglect. Practitioner-teachers, particularly, rely on the institution to help them locate curricular expectations for both classroom policy and instructional practices. Training, therefore, is generally provided for the things most meaningful to the institution.

Another surprising dimension of the product vs. process debate that emerged from this study is that while participants see student writing as a product they themselves demonstrated process-based writing techniques. There is a clear disjuncture between what they do as writers and what they teach their students about writing. That is to say, that even though they employed freewriting (Beatrice), rewriting (Cordelia and Ansley), revision (Maud), and editing (Beatrice and Lowery) in an iterative and recursive way, they did not look for or appear to teach these techniques to their students. Rather, they provided either very specific feedback on sentence and word level errors, concentrating comments on editing concerns, or offered general feedback designed to spur students to produce more professional artifacts. I have asked myself numerous times as I have analyzed these findings why the practitioner-teachers in this study do not recognize this disconnect. Perhaps more to the point, why do the participants I interviewed and

observed continue to use product-based writing instruction when process-based composition is so firmly established in composition pedagogy? While I don't have the answer, I am certain that reducing writing to a product influences how participants interpret the role writing plays in their discipline and further solidifies my theory that practitioner-teachers in this study use writing as a method to signal professionalism. As such, participants apply assessment as a summative activity to determine whether their students have arrived. Assessing writing in this way, of course, disallows for growth in terms of writing process because the end result is always treated as the most important part of writing.

As we explore assessment further, we can extrapolate that study participants demonstrated a preference for employing rubrics with detailed requirements for what students should include in terms of content in their writing assignments but only an emaciated category for criteria regarding student writing. That is, effective writing in participants' rubrics seemed to reduce the writing activity to an exercise in avoiding language errors, particularly in examples presented by Cordelia, Ansley, Beatrice, and Wallace (Table 4 illustrates the writing category of Beatrice's rubric). If we turn to literature related to the role rubrics play in writing assessment, we can see a significant disconnect between the generic category participants in this study used to determine the effectiveness of student writing and the recommendations theorists like Chris Anson et al. (2012) present about the need for situational and comprehensive criteria requisite for meaningful assessment of writing. One of the problems Anson and team identified in a study on standardized rubrics is that the result can be "A three-way mismatch between what faculty members in a discipline say they expect of student writers, what they ask students to do in their writing, and the criteria they use in assessing the resulting writing" (3). Part of the reason this mismatch exists, Anson and team posit, is that "not all faculty members who incorporate writing

assignments into their teaching have had adequate opportunity to scrutinize their own assumptions about what student writing could or should look like” (3). Furthermore, Anson et al. identify that disciplinary faculty often resort to using vague language to capture what they think are descriptors of writing effectiveness, similar to the words practitioner-teachers in this study applied to their definitions of good writing, such as “clarity,” “flow,” “logic,” and so forth. I observed that most of the rubrics participants in this study used to assess student writing exemplified an even broader mismatch than what Anson and team extrapolated from their study. That is, institutional rubrics, in some instances, further reduced writing to the single concern of correctness by listing a certain number of errors to determine adequacy of the writing task and nothing else (See Table 4 in Chapter 4). The bottom line is that participants use rubrics that are not designed to effectively assess student writing, even though they rely exclusively on those rubrics to assess writing.

In addition to the mismatch that exists between the types of rubrics participants employ for writing assessment and the rubric designs for which composition theorists argue, a related disparity exists between the practitioner-teacher participants’ insistence on using electronic grammar and usage programs to aid in assessing and providing feedback on student writing and the limitations such programs afford. We can return to the example Wallace shared in his think-aloud observation in Chapter 4 and the analysis I provided in Chapter 5. He explained that he uses Grammarly quite extensively to provide guidance relative to grammar on student writing. He confessed, after all, that “He is not an English teacher.” In this example, Grammarly offered Wallace inaccurate advice. Nevertheless, Wallace included in his feedback that the student should add a comma where a comma was clearly not needed. The point of this example isn’t to excoriate Wallace for not knowing every grammar rule in the English language but to

demonstrate that electronic assessment is not reliable, even in matters as technical, as seemingly clear-cut, as grammar. Of course, as we discussed above, grammar is the criteria upon which study participants assess student writing, so it should come as no surprise that practitioner-teachers, uncomfortable with the nuances of language but compelled to ensure its accurate distribution, would rely on systems to help them determine the extent of student “error,” in accordance with the vague criteria of the “writing” portion of their rubrics, and shape their feedback practices. We need only turn to Doug Hesse’s (2013) admonitions and observations to question the validity of such methods. He concludes that computer grading is limited and cannot offer meaningful intervention along the lines of “audience,” “purpose,” “ambition,” “fact and reasoning,” nor determine whether a piece of writing adheres to “formal conventions” within a specific rhetorical matrix (2). In other words, electronic systems cannot discern. For this reason, systems like Grammarly exceed the capabilities of their programming if they are alone responsible for assessing student work.

Here we transition into yet another dimension of the feedback conversation and reveal yet another disconnect between the practices participants employ and the recommendations of composition theorists by exploring what feedback on student writing should and could look like. What participants in this study understand of what it means to provide feedback on student writing and what they actually provide are two very distinct things. We need only consider the works of Treglia (2008), Lee (2009), Ferris (2014), Jamalinesari (2015), and Zahn (2016) to know this type of disjuncture is common among teachers of all disciplinary fields. However, to truly understand the philosophical and attitudinal factors that influence perception in this way, I will deconstruct findings further in the context of relevant literature. To return to the topic of computers’ inability to adequately grade student work, Hesse assigns two activities in which

teachers must engage to determine whether a piece of student writing is effective. The teacher must “judge” what and how information is presented and determine if the writing achieves its “assigned purpose” (3). We can add to these activities, Straub (1996) and Lunsford and Lunsford’s (2008) advice “that the best response is well developed, text specific, global, and attentive to rhetorical situation” (72). Furthermore, referencing Ferris, Grouling (2018) reminds us “that response has shifted to focus on specific suggestions rather than correctness” (72). So, when participants in my study claim to provide extensive feedback by identifying error in student submissions or by rewriting student sentences, they focus their priorities on a part of writing that is least likely to prompt effective writing improvement and conflicts with current pedagogical practices in composition studies.

We find yet another interesting disconnect in the realm of professional writing. Most participants clearly articulated that one of their goals, perhaps their most important goal, was to prepare students to become professionals in their disciplines. Successful disciplinary training in this way requires intense initiation, as Gee (2010) and Johns (1997) describe in their work on Discourse communities and communities of practice, respectively. Gee defines the qualities of such discursive apprenticeship as a complex process, involving social, cultural, and contextual interactions (105). He explains that “none of us speaks a single, uniform language,” rather all language consists of a “heteroglossia,” to employ Bakhtin’s term (104). The field of professional writing acknowledges the nuances and contingencies that plague the student writer attempting to negotiate the registers, situations, and rules of academic and professional discourse. To teach students how to develop an awareness and appreciation for the distinctions that dictate written communication in various contexts, Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) advise teachers to “use diverse methods, formats, and cognitive structures” in their instruction of disciplinary writing (105). All

too often, however, teachers believe that writing in their discipline is a “transparent” activity and that students share an understanding of a teacher’s “values” and can intuitively discern what their teachers perceive as “common terminology” (59). In this study, participants often assumed that simply telling students to write professionally would result in compositions with fewer errors, the most important value they inherently assigned to their definition of professional writing. Most students, faculty reported, continued to produce writing with significant error. Participants alluded to students who continued to submit writing with errors as applying insufficient effort. Herein lies a significant disconnect. Clearly, expecting students to transition intuitively from novice to professional writer without timely and meaningful intervention of the type described by Thaiss and Zawacki within the complex discursive contexts elucidated by Gee is an unrealistic goal. I propose that a significant gap exists in this study between what participants expected of their students and the methods they employed to help them achieve those goals.

Gaps within the Paradigm of Writing as Tool for and Sign of Professionalism

For purposes of contextualizing the inconsistencies I described above relative to writing instruction, writing assessment, and professional writing, I will explain how the theory of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism exposes significant gaps between the participants of this study and the vetted practices and philosophies of writing education theorists. These gaps consist of how participants position writing within their definition of professionalism, how practitioner-teachers in this study employ vague language in their feedback and expect student improvement, and how broad writing categories in rubrics do not sufficiently guide student writing development. I conclude this section by explaining how a philosophical orientation toward error is the cornerstone of the writing as tool for and sign of professionalism paradigm.

First, the notion that good writing can be captured solely by how correct the language is presented dismisses the complexity of writing as a process of learning and knowledge generation. In this sense, participants interpret professionalism to mean something akin to an appearance, a veneer people don in order to fit into their disciplinary group. When students generate writing from this philosophical vantage, they are taught that the appearance of professionalism, how good or appropriate it looks, means more than the substance of professionalism, despite all of the disciplinary and discursive complexity associated with being professional. This explains the tenet of formality within the writing as tool for and sign of professionalism theory. To appear professional in one's writing, as participants described it, is to write without "mistake," to use Beatrice's criteria for good writing, to avoid "error," a term Cordelia and Ansley used to differentiate good from poor writing, and to write with correct grammar, a concern for every participant in this study. While a grammatically correct and appropriately formatted piece of writing helps readers understand the writer's ideas more clearly, as well as meets the demands of standardized convention, such writing cannot account or stand in for all aspects of writing. Furthermore, as Hartwell (1985) reminds us, grammar is not as stable of a linguistic target as participants would like to believe. Those who demand error-free writing but themselves are not entirely sure what constitutes correct grammar usage find themselves operating quite uncomfortably, we might even say naively, in uncertain linguistic spaces. The result of such a position is inadequate, perhaps even incorrect, guidance, if we consider Wallace's blind trust of the grammar and stylistics tool Grammarly. No wonder participants find it difficult to provide meaningful feedback on student writing.

This brings us to my second point: utilizing vague terms in feedback does not guide student writing improvement nor does it help students or faculty meet their goals. Vague

feedback only assesses a student's ability or inability to meet ambiguous writing expectations that somehow correlate with grammar, formatting, and language inconsistencies. Yancey et al. (2015) claim that faculty need to employ terms in their feedback that students can recognize and use. To this point, Hewett (2015) argues that students need very direct and specific guidance, what she terms "semantic integrity," to be able to assimilate and accommodate unfamiliar writing schemes. The general epistemological perspective of writing theorists is that students won't know how to produce sophisticated language moves with which they are unfamiliar without meaningful intervention (Perl 1979, Sommers 1980, Elbow 1991, Lunsford and Lunsford 2008, and Hewett 2015). In a study about feedback from the student perspective, David Nicol (2009) relayed that participants of his study expressed "concern when... comments are illegible, ambiguous, too abstract, too general or vague, and too cryptic" (2). Participants in my study seem to assume that students inherently know how to fix errors and write better. Therefore, many engage in the feedback behaviors Nicol summarized in his findings. Furthermore, study participants often provide feedback of encouragement rather than feedback with specific direction. Those participants, such as Cordelia and Ansley, who demonstrated significant rewriting of student compositions do so without appropriate context. Nicol refers to contextualizing comments as identifying "the gap between what the student did and what was expected" (4). However, when Cordelia and Ansley rewrite students writing, they do not appear to explain to students why they are rewriting their work or why such revision is necessary. Consequently, students don't see the value in revising what they originally composed and, as participants complained, submitted work without the changes they recommended. In relation to the theory of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism, vague language conceals significant

intuitive information that students are required to discern on their own. Until they can present themselves according to these inherent expectations of formality, they simply have not arrived.

Third, employing rubrics with emaciated writing criteria does not sufficiently guide students to improve their writing. Every participant in my study explained that they use rubrics to assess all student work. Upon close analysis, I realized that most of the participants' rubrics included only one category for writing and the criteria of that category was limited to grammar, formatting, and error. In one instance, Beatrice demonstrated that the writing category in her rubric was distilled down to a specific number of writing errors allowed in the paper to achieve a certain level of student performance. This form of generic and vague rubric produces what Sommers (1980) calls a "rubber-stamp" scenario, in which the teacher simply marks whether student error is contained or excessive (152). "The problem of overgeneralized criteria," Anson et al. (2012) explain in an article that argues in behalf of creating situational and context-specific rubrics, is that they "carry a uniform set of performative standards" that "are, in fact, imbricated with highly context-specific expectations" (3). Teachers who employ general rubrics assume these standards are apparent in the broad language that defines rubric criteria. However, the reality is that any assessment tool with very broad criteria runs the risk of misinterpretation both by the student and the teacher. In fact, rubrics with general writing criteria, such as the ones employed by participants in my study, may belie that "not all faculty members who incorporate writing assignments into their teaching have had adequate opportunity to scrutinize their own assumptions about what student writing should or could look like in their course" (Anson et al. 3). Certainly the trepidation with which participants in my study approached the interview and subsequent observation supports this idea. Used in the way participants in my study explained, rubrics with general writing criteria serve to assess whether students present themselves

professionally or if they are unfit to represent their discipline. From a Foucauldian perspective, the rubric acts as a checklist designed to determine aberrance and the score is punishment for producing errors. Shaughnessy (1976) might suggest that an error-centric rubric is designed to “guard the tower” from those who the teacher deems inadequate for entry.

In sum, I am suggesting that an error-centered approach to writing instruction, vague feedback, and rubrics with general writing criteria coalesce to define a certain philosophical perspective of writing as it relates to a specific way in which participants of this study interpret professionalism. Because participants see writing as something that must in some way relate to their discipline but are not sure of its role within disciplinary education, they perceive the writing act as a direct extension of the professionalization process, entangling it with concepts like work ethic, practicality, formality, and arrival. However, writing is complex and its compositional distribution within disciplinary study is diverse, situational, and context-dependent (Thaiss and Zawacki 2006). It involves contingencies, uncertainties, and adaptabilities that are difficult to measure. I began to theorize, as I analyzed participant data, that professionalism was the anchor to which participants tethered writing to contain, control, and manage it. Grammar seems like a good point of access into writing as a professional activity because error can be enumerated and assessed within the areas of work ethic, practicality, formality, and arrival. As such, writing marks the extent to which students are capable of demonstrating their professionalism. This seems like a logical application of writing. However, as I have presented above, this philosophical orientation toward writing is not only reductive because it ignores the educational benefits of writing as a generative and creative act, but it also undermines practitioner-teachers’ effort to produce substantive and thoughtful employees in their fields who understand that

writing is thought and thought becomes knowledge. How one learns to articulate knowledge is the foundational principle of meaningful professionalization.

Seeing writing as a tool for and sign of professionalism is further complicated by the online educational modality. Beth Hewett identified that the online modality has few phatic elements and Scott Warnock highlighted the intense reading and writing that accompany the virtual modality. Participants who see writing as a secondary or tertiary communication method – Maud considered writing an imperfect and a less desirable form of communication – try to avoid it when possible, encouraging students to call or to meet with them in synchronous interactive technologies like WebEx. Avoiding writing in an instructional modality dependent on asynchronous interaction is highly problematic, as such an attitude devalues writing as an effective communication method and minimizes its importance, teaching students to tolerate writing in the professions at best. Additionally, practitioner-teachers who purposefully or unintentionally present writing as something you do only when other communication methods are unavailable and instruct students to focus their writing efforts exclusively on grammar miss opportunities to help students leverage writing to learn and to improve how they think and shape their ideas. All things considered, instruction that reduces writing to its technical aspects, communicates distrust of its effectiveness, and penalizes students when it doesn't look professional will not fully prepare students for participation in their disciplinary community's generic and discursive practices.

The Institution as Authoritative Lens: A Critical Observation

At this juncture, I would be both remiss and unfair to the participants of this study if I did not recognize the impact and influence of the academic institution, the system that defines their instructional experience, which indoctrinates a certain philosophical lens for how education

broadly and writing specifically functions in its curricular distribution of disciplinary knowledge. Not unlike many who report to institutions in this country, participants in this study must adhere to policy and cultural rules that dictate how teaching should be enacted. That is, institutions shape instructional philosophy by creating policies and standards that dictate what is and is not acceptable. These stated and unstated policies and standards constitute what critical race theorists refer to as social constructs.

In the case of this study, for example, many faculty employed rubrics that were designed by subject matter experts. Some of them modified these rubrics, but none made any significant change to the writing category of their rubrics, as I have explained earlier in this dissertation. It is highly likely that the teachers using these tools and receiving guidance in terms of how the institution defines professionalism and writing that is acceptable extend the institutional paradigm, those socially constructed and institutionally embedded constructs, to their classroom instruction, prioritizing correctness and formatting accuracy because these are the areas identified by subject matter experts as the elements of writing that matter.

We can look to Foucault, Freire, and Lakoff to elucidate the power institutions hold over those within their dominant grasp. Foucault posits, for instance, that discipline, a mechanism of power, is a multifaceted concept that comprises “a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a ‘physics’ or an ‘anatomy’ of power” (215). As such, it is invasive and often invisible, entangled within and reinforced every day by the activities of the institutions that are created by and exist to protect it. Freire writes about how this invasive influence impacts those within these power systems: “Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual’s choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber’s consciousness” (47). In other

words, people have a tendency to act in accordance with “the guidelines” prescribed by the hegemonic authority, who Freire refers to as “the oppressor” (47). Since the institution is the magnified embodiment of Lakoff’s exnominated power group, “typically middle- and upper-class white males,” it becomes the accepted “reality” of the world, unchallenged and therefore unchanged (19).

In the case of this study, then, a certain reality of what writing is and how students should conduct it is codified in the institutional philosophies that shape the values teachers are expected to support in their instruction. It is difficult to discern the extent to which participants consciously or unconsciously reify dominant power in the feedback activities within their classes, but we cannot overlook the fact that complicity with dominant views of the world is often not a simple matter of agreement. Such views are part of a complex network of indoctrination that is deeply embedded within the social conception of “status quo” and distributed frequently at all levels of institutions. We might say that bias, prejudice, and racism of the type identified in this study constitute manifestations of these bigger social and political concerns. What we encounter in this study is an example of the social injustices manifested in social institutions and debated in critical race theory. Writing as tool for and sign of professionalism models how teachers are enculturated into the racist underpinnings of institutions built upon power disequilibrium and racial inequality. The individual, when we consider this type of institutional lens, is herself indoctrinated into and becomes a reflection of the hegemonic control localized in white institutions.

Opportunities and Limitations

While I am confident that the theory I presented in this study and summarized in this chapter presents an accurate portrayal of practitioner-teacher attitudes toward the purpose,

instruction, and assessment of writing in online disciplinary courses, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the opportunities and limitations of this study. This portion of the chapter provides contemplations on additional institutional factors that may influence participant practices, the demographic of the study, and the scope of participant data. I also consider improvements to the questions I posed participants and the topics that prompted their composition.

First, this study provides only a glimpse into disciplinary practices relative to writing within a particular educational context. That is to say that the participants of this study operate under a specific set of institutional values and philosophical premises. At the institution where participants teach, for instance, education is perceived as training for students entering the workforce. By design, teachers at this institution are encouraged to teach writing as communication from the vantage of it serving as a transferable skill. A transferable skill requires measurable results, often interpreted by practitioner-teachers as some sort of objective metric. Measureable results through this lens tend to include clearly identifiable and specific criteria, things noticeable like grammar and formatting, while eschewing writing elements such as a convincing claim, effectively integrated evidence, logical reasons, and so forth. Such an institutional perspective can impact how teachers perceive their roles relative to the writing task, writing's purpose in education, and the goals teachers establish for themselves and their students. Teachers, for instance, may feel compelled to focus on editing because correctness is of paramount importance within the institutional epistemology. Furthermore, without an English department to guide writing education at this institution, disciplinary teachers turn to institutional goals to determine their instructional practices and to calibrate their epistemological viewpoints about writing. The limitation here is that not all faculty or institutions may work under these

specific educational conditions. It is likely, for instance, that disciplinary faculty serving in positions at universities with WID or WAC programs may provide much different epistemological perspectives on student writing and their role in responding to writing.

Second, this study is limited to the perspectives and attitudes of practitioner-teachers. As such, faculty trained to teach writing in their disciplines are excluded from this study. Consequently, because participants come from such a narrow pool, they cannot be representative of all teachers within their discipline. However, while acknowledging this limitation, I must also clarify that this study is replicable and can be applied more broadly to determine faculty epistemological practices of writing education at any institution. Furthermore, the literature suggests that writing education is a challenge for teachers in the disciplines, generally speaking, particularly when it comes to consistency (Zahn 2016), mediating between what they say they do and actually do (Ferris 2014), and teaching writing the way they practice it (Neuteboom 2019), one of the main findings in this study.

While the sample size of this study is small and the participant demographic exclusive to one educational context, there are a few findings that we can generalize and, perhaps, assign to the broader notion of a practitioner-teacher epistemology of disciplinary writing instruction. For instance, disciplinary faculty tend to share an interest in how best to help students transfer their knowledge, including their ability to write, to the workforce. Such a goal renders one susceptible to perceiving writing as a product measurable by its technical components. Many teachers of the disciplines may also struggle to articulate student writing needs in sufficiently specific detail. Furthermore, a common challenge may also manifest in the assessment tools disciplinary faculty apply to writing assignments. Clearly, many of the tenets I discuss in this dissertation may be generalizable and hint at characteristics that define a broader practitioner-teacher epistemology.

Third, this study does not address how students at this institution perceive and work with the feedback they receive in response to their writing from their practitioner-teachers. While participants assume student attitudes based on things such as students not reading feedback, their apparent disengagement from the course and its expectations, and perceived student unwillingness to make changes from assignment to assignment because the same errors appear over and over again, their concerns are primarily anecdotal. Students themselves could provide insight into the way in which they receive and use feedback. It is important to recognize that this study is illustrative of only one half a complex interactive coin.

In other words, this study looks only at how faculty alone perceive and enact the feedback activity. For a more comprehensive study of how feedback on writing in the disciplines in online contexts impacts student writing, a next step might be to conduct a similar interview with students. Faculty, as this study uncovered, make a number of assumptions about student commitment based on how feedback is or is not applied. These assumptions typically presume that faculty produce feedback that is always clear, that students can comprehend and put to effective practice improved writing approaches, often on their own with little specific guidance, if they want to, and that effort will equip students with everything they need to be good writers, or, as described in this study, error-free writers. It would be helpful to know which, if any, of these assumptions is true. It might also be useful to know what kinds of interventions online students in career-focused programs value most relative to improving their writing.

In addition to these opportunities and limitations, I have also identified areas for improving my study. As I consider the interview itself, for instance, now having had time to process its efficacy, I believe there are a few modifications I would make and areas I would

revise. For one, I would seek clarification relative to how practitioner-teachers view feedback and assessment and what role they believe rubrics play in relation to both of these instructional tasks. I would also have requested through IRB an opportunity to collect and analyze proprietary rubrics from the institution where participants teach. It would be helpful to explore if and/or how standardized tools restrict, facilitate, or influence the types of feedback faculty provide their students. I also see an opportunity to explore more specifics about individual disciplines and how the disciplinary community shapes certain epistemological and ontological positions on writing at the intersection of industry and academia.

Critical Implications

In the wake of this extensive analysis and explanation of a model for understanding the reasons for the decisions practitioner-teachers make relative to responding to student writing, I pose these questions – how do we make sense of it and what do we do with it? As far as understanding those decisions is concerned, we can consider the individual, institutional, and societal implications of writing as tool for and sign of professionalism from the perspective of critical race theory, which, Ian Lopez explains, studies the dual complexities of “the power of race” against the powerlessness some have because of their “ancestry and appearance” (192). Critical race theory considers how race as a social construction often determines one’s status in society and the amount of power one is allowed to have within the racial boundaries established by said society. Such orientations toward race become part of the accepted worldview of people within that society. Hence, changing those perceptions requires extensive introspection at all levels of society, from the individual to the institutions that reify inequitable distributions of power. For this reason, Lakoff suggests that “change always entails struggle” and one of the greatest struggles involves seeing outside the “frame accepted by a majority of influential

people” (49). Regardless of its difficulty, change is a crucial part of personal and intellectual growth and essential for abolishing the deep-seeded racist practices embedded in our culture and promoted quietly but persistently by our institutions. I propose that a logical next step is to provide training for practitioner-teachers that address the racist implications related to the theory I propose in this dissertation that participants see writing as a tool for and sign of professionalism, a professionalism that is designed by and for white privilege. I approach this training plan from the helpful lens of critical race theory.

Certainly training teachers to be aware of the apparent and underlying inequities inherent in a writing as tool for and sign of professionalism paradigm is a good start for resisting “racial constructions” (Lopez 200), but it is not enough. As I have discussed in preceding chapters, racism is a pervasive and invasive societal, political, and cultural institution that reifies through language. The bottom line is knowing that it happens doesn’t necessarily change it. Rather, awareness must lead teachers to actively resist the practices that support its perpetuation. Freire refers to this type of resistance as a “transformation of culture” (159). It involves “nam[ing] the world in order to transform it” and requires “dialogue,” “cooperation,” and “praxis” (168-171). For the practitioner-teachers in this study and those teaching at institutions around the country, awareness followed by active resistance with a goal to transform how we interact with and prepare students for the world is a challenge because it requires disentangling not one but several institutionally-embedded white hegemonic ideas and values staunchly planted within dominant perceptions of reality and supported by the notion of “common sense” (Lakoff 48). For this reason, training that enables transformative action must be a palpable experience for teachers.

To make training a palpable, and therefore useful, experience for practitioner-teachers is to situate it in praxis rather than philosophy – philosophy will develop over time as participants’

critically engage in practical activities. I envision a training plan that consists of five separate one-hour workshop sessions over the course of a semester. The five sessions will address one of each of the four tenets of the writing as tool for and sign of professionalism paradigm, work ethic, formality, practicality, and arrival, with the fifth training focusing on how notions of white professionalism can negatively impact students who are labeled racial, cultural, or socioeconomic outsiders. Essentially, I propose to use the theoretical model I identified as a framework for identifying topics for a focused practitioner-teacher professional development plan. Each session will promote incremental steps that render transparent the personal and institutional biases that effect racist practices in education.

The first training session, which addresses issues related to work ethic, will challenge the perception that students don't improve their writing because they don't try hard enough. It will shift the onus of improvement from the student alone to both teacher and student by illustrating the importance of clear communication in feedback and in tools such as rubrics. In fact, an effective point of entry into a training focused on praxis may well be through rubric design, analysis, and revision. Since rubrics are a significant tool for practitioner-teachers and, frankly, perpetuate many of the problems I discussed in this dissertation, these tools may be the best way to train disciplinary teachers to develop their writing feedback practices, as well as help them see how the criteria they include or exclude can exacerbate racial inequalities. In the first session, participants will review several sample rubrics that include a broad range of high, middle, and low end writing elements. The leader of this session, preferably someone with a strong background in writing instruction, then facilitates a conversation about the value focus, purpose, audience, cohesion, organization, etc. serve in guiding student writing improvement. Participants will, then, create a rubric that expands writing criteria beyond grammar and

formatting and share it with a group of peers to receive feedback. These activities will be supplemented by writing and rubric theories forwarded by Scott Warnock (2009), Chris Anson (2012), and Beth Hewett (2015). The goal of this session is to instruct practitioner-teachers how to be specific and purposeful in their feedback and to employ rubrics that detail writing as a complex activity rather than solely an exercise in identifying error and acknowledging correctness. This session will also illustrate how providing specific criteria in rubrics can save teachers time, since students will have a better sense of what their writing should accomplish on assignments and will send work that better aligns with what practitioner-teachers expect them to write.

As an extension of the first training session, the second training session, addressing issues related to formality, will encourage participants to critically assess the areas of writing they have identified as important in their rubrics. This will require participants to consider if the criteria they have built into their rubrics align with the writing practitioners encounter and are required to produce in the field. In this session, participants will first encounter the idea of professionalism and try to find ways to describe in concrete terms what that abstract idea means when it comes to writing. At this stage of the training, then, participants will revise their rubrics to replace vague language with specific language for the writing moves they desire students to make. Work on transfer and writing in the disciplines by Yancey et al. (2014) and Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) will help elucidate how writing and speaking about writing can and should function in disciplinary education. This activity will have the additional benefit of clarifying for teachers what they want from student writing and how to talk about it in their feedback.

The third training session, addressing issues related to practicality, will highlight writing as a generative task that enhances content knowledge as students review, reconsider, and revise

their ideas. In this session, participants will expand their understanding of writing. They will review sample student papers that have undergone extensive revision over the course of several weeks. They will, then, be given a student paper, approved by the student and removed of all personal identifiers, to review with the rubric they created in session one. Next, they will be asked to review a revised version of that paper and discuss changes made to the paper in terms of focus, strength of claim, idea development, use of supporting evidence, and other ideational writing components typically ignored by reductive grammar-as-writing practices.. Introducing participants to the wide range of composition theorists who have written about process (Emig 1977, Sommers 1980, Breuch 2002, and Flowers and Hayes 2011, to name a few) will help clarify for participants the value of formative feedback and drafting relative to writing improvement. By doing this, participants will come to understand that writing isn't just about submitting a single product for grading but a process and that writing to generate ideas and to improve the delivery of those ideas can also be a practical application of the writing task in their disciplinary courses.

The fourth training session, addressing issues related to arrival, will tap into practitioner-teachers' demonstrated desire to mentor their students into their disciplinary practices. However, instead of using writing as a sign for those who either do or do not belong in the field, enacting what Shaughnessy (1976) calls the gatekeeper mentality, practitioner-teachers will be encouraged to use their own insider knowledge to model for students how to write effectively. Furthermore, arrival, recast in this way, will help practitioner-teachers define a method to share her or his writing processes with students, instead of using writing as verification that students either get it or they don't, an approach embedded within the exclusionary practices of the "common sense" paradigm (Lakoff 48). For this session, then, participants will spend time

defining their writing process, illustrating how their process functions, and considering ways they could use that process to support students struggling to develop their ideas in writing. This approach strives to debunk the notion that writing is an intuitive activity that students should already know and empowers the practitioner-teacher to have greater direct impact on student writing improvement at all stages of the writing process.

The final training session, addressing issues related to professionalism, will focus primarily on recognizing and challenging systemic racism in institutional spaces, deliberately transitioning to a more philosophical focus but still grounded in praxis. The session will provide an opportunity for participants to deconstruct their rubrics to consider what the implications of including and excluding certain criteria mean for all learners and their perceptions of themselves and their potential. Using Inoue and Poe's (2012) work on race and writing assessment, the last installment of this targeted training will require participants to challenge institutional definitions of "writing ability and student 'need,'" reconsider the labels they intentionally and intuitively apply to students based on their writing and writerly voice, and revise their notion of professionalism from one of a location where students who belong arrive to one of a process of personal, intellectual, and profession growth that happens gradually and with the support of caring teachers to guide them along the way (Inoue and Poe 141). The goal and hope of this final session is that participants come to see writing as an intellectual task that promotes an idea of professionalism that is inclusive, individual-centered, and equitably distributed.

As Freire argues, change comes at the point of action, a place of praxis. While this plan sounds ambitious, perhaps even beyond the scope of what writing instruction is capable of doing, this training can contribute in important dialogical ways to improving equity awareness and distribution in education. Shifting participants' views from the stable and narrow perception of

writing as an exercise in conforming to Standard English to a belief that writing is a process by and through which students can learn and think and change confronts deeply embedded racist tendencies to remediate, ignore, or remove “others” from a system designed to reward white privilege. How we engage students in writing and what we think about them based on their writing matters. Rather than promote writing as a way to mark students as white or other, a common but subtle practice in racially dichotomized cultures, we can use written feedback and other methods of instructional interaction to equalize learning and strengthen the collective self.

Conclusion

As I conclude this dissertation and consider the impact of my findings relative to the ways in which practitioner-teachers view writing in their online instruction and feedback activities, my thoughts turn to a metaphor for writing I encountered some years ago. In his famous “Unending Conversation,” Kenneth Burke (1967) does not describe the arguments in the discursive parlor as a tentative encounter between people attempting to make the most grammatically correct statements they can to appear professional when they “put in [their] oar” and join a conversation, careful to produce the one right answer; rather, he describes an intense encounter between opposing views constantly developing, changing course, and inviting new perspectives (Burke 109). His metaphorical parlor is a dynamic space, in which ideas are valued, contested, and reconsidered. It is through the grappling of these ideas that the mind develops toward a deeper understanding of how language can structure thought and mediate meaning. The role of writing in this process is complex, mutable, and imperfect. If we can teach students to embrace the contingent, pursue more effective methods of encoding their thoughts, and encourage them to use writing as a way to understand what they think and why they think the way they do, we can help them achieve an understanding of writing that improves interaction and

functions better in their disciplinary work. We will also better prepare them for communicating effectively and meaningfully in their various professional discursive spaces.

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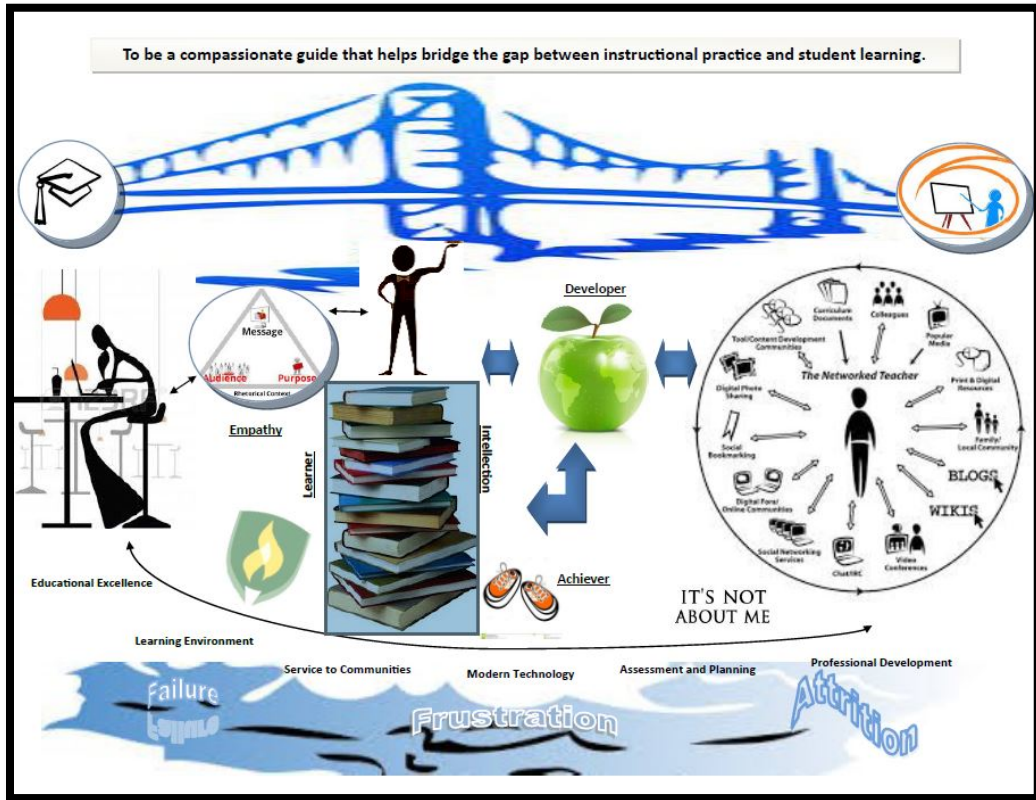
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APPENDIX A: VISION BOARD SAMPLE



APPENDIX B: PILOT STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

Survey Questions for Faculty Participants

- 1- What is your name?
- 2- What course/s do you teach?
- 3- How much formal training have you had teaching writing?
 - None
 - I've had some informal training
 - I've taken one or more formal courses
 - I consider myself a professional writing instructor
- 4- How do you define good writing?
- 5- How do you define feedback?
- 6- What role do you believe feedback plays in helping students improve their writing?
- 7- What are your top three goals for providing feedback on student writing?
- 8- What characteristics do you feel make writing effective in your field? Ineffective?
- 9- Please rank the following writing feedback categories in order of importance on a scale of 1-6, 6 being the most important and 1 being the least important:
 - Genre (the type of writing the student is asked to do)
 - Formatting and documenting standards (such as APA, MLA, Chicago Style, etc.)
 - Misspellings, syntax, grammar, and mechanics
 - Paper organization, paragraphing, and transitions
 - Cogency and logic
 - Thesis statement, a consistent focus, and topic sentences
 - Introduction and conclusion
 - Supporting evidence, integrated research, and synthesis of information
 - Student voice and tone
 - Audience awareness
 - Content of the paper (the actual information the paper presents)
- 10- Please list other categories you find important to student writing not listed in the selection above.
- 11- What is most challenging about providing feedback on student writing?
- 12- What is the most beneficial about providing feedback on student writing?
- 13- What do you emphasize most in your feedback on student writing? Why?
- 14- How closely do you find student writing in your course/s relates to the professional standards of your discipline?
- 15- What improvements, if any, do you see from student writing based on your feedback?

Link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/onlinewritingfeedback>

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT EMAIL FOR DISSERTATION STUDY

Hello Faculty,

My name is Rob Neuteboom. I am a doctoral candidate in the English program at North Dakota State University, where I am studying online writing instruction. While I am an administrator at Rasmussen College, this work is completely separate from that role and any information discovered during the course of this research will remain separate from the College. My dissertation project is titled “Composing Comments for Online Students: A Study of Faculty Feedback Epistemologies in Multidisciplinary Contexts.” The purpose and goal of this research study is to understand how teachers practicing in various online instructional contexts and disciplines define feedback and perceive their role in responding to student writing. This information will also provide further insight into the complexities, challenges, and strategies inherent in instructional spaces in which writing is typically the primary method teachers use to comment on student writing. Furthermore, this information will be used to determine how faculty from multiple disciplines perceive themselves as responders to student writing in online courses. I am interested in how online teachers of various disciplines define writing feedback, how they see their roles relative to assessing student writing online, and how they determine their goals for providing feedback on student writing.

I am looking for at least 10 volunteers from several of the college’s disciplines to participate in a research study about feedback practices relative to student writing. I am seeking at least one volunteer from each school. This email is an invitation to participate in an interview and think-aloud activity. The interview consists of 15 questions related to how you compose feedback, how you describe your approaches, and how you think about your feedback practices. For the think-aloud activity, I will observe as you narrate aloud how you respond to an ungraded piece of writing from one of your classes. If you are interested in participating, you will need to prepare 2-3 pages of unmarked student writing by removing all student identifiers for the observation portion of this interview.

The interview and activity will take between 1 and 2 hours. I understand this is a significant time investment, so interview sessions can be broken up into two sessions if necessary. The interview and think-aloud activity will be conducted in WebEx, so that distance does not limit participation. WebEx will also allow the session to be video and audio recorded for purposes of data coding and analysis. I will retain transcripts from recordings that will remain anonymous.

Your information will remain confidential during the interview and think-aloud activity. All information presented in findings will likewise remain anonymous. All information presented in findings will likewise be presented without identifiers. By self-selecting for an interview, you are voluntarily consenting to participate in this research study. The study asks questions about how you perceive and approach student feedback in online courses. As an online teacher, your insights will help the researcher better understand the purpose and meaning of feedback in virtual instruction.

Risks for participating in this survey include the potential for loss of confidentiality and emotional, psychological distress and/or social implications. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known risks to participants. Participation in this research is voluntary and you may quit at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

Your participation will serve to benefit online educational practices and online student learning. The data collected from you will provide necessary insight into how writing is taught in a virtual multidisciplinary context and may help identify opportunities for improving instructional practices.

You are welcome to contact the researcher with questions at robert.neuteboom@ndsu.edu or by phone at 218-304-6217. Additionally, you may also contact the principle investigator of the research project, Dr. Kelly Sassi, at kelly.sassi@ndsu.edu or by phone at 701-231-7156.

If you have questions about the study (IRB #HS16303), please reach out. I am happy to provide additional information or explain the project in more detail.

For information about your rights as a participant in research, you may also contact the NDSU Human Research Protection Program by:

- Telephone: 701.231.8995 or toll-free 1.855.800.6717
- Email: ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu
- Mail: NDSU HRPP Office, NDSU Dept. 4000, PO Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050.

The role of the Human Research Protection Program is to see that your rights are protected in this research; more information about your rights can be found at: www.ndsu.edu/irb .

Additionally, the plans for this study have been reviewed and approved by the Rasmussen College Institutional Review Board.

I appreciate your consideration and your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Rob Neuteboom

APPENDIX D: SCRIPT FOR INTERVIEW AND THINK ALOUD ACTIVITY

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this interview and activity. As I mentioned when I first asked to interview you, I am a graduate student at NDSU. The purpose of this interview is to gather information about how online faculty from multiple disciplines define and compose feedback on student writing. The activity is designed to have participants show and explain how they make decisions about their feedback choices on student work. The interview and activity should take no longer than two hours. If you would like to proceed, please read and verbally agree to the Informed Consent form I am displaying on this WebEx page. Please know that you may terminate participation at any time. Simply let me know if you would like to stop.

I will ask you a series of questions. I am not looking for a single right or wrong answer. In fact, your thoughts and ideas are exactly what I am looking for. I invite you to share examples, insights, and opinions openly. Doing so, will help my research. If a question is unclear, don't hesitate to ask for clarification. Let's get started.

Part I: Interview

Interview Question Route

- 1- For which College school do you teach?
 - Nursing
 - Health Sciences
 - Business
 - Justice Studies
 - Technology
 - Design
 - Education
- 2- What course/s do you teach?
- 3- How long have you been teaching?
- 4- Describe the training you received before you started teaching.
 - How much training have you had teaching online?
- 5- What role does writing play in your discipline?
 - How do you teach students to write for your discipline?
- 6- What types of writing do students do in your course/s?
- 7- Describe your comfort level providing feedback on student writing.
- 8- What does good writing look like? How about poor writing?
- 9- How do you provide students with feedback on their work in your courses?
 - When do you feel it is most beneficial to provide written feedback to students?
- 10- How does feedback help students improve their writing?
- 11- What are your goals when you provide feedback on student writing? Which ones are most important to you?
- 12- How do you know when you have met your feedback goals?
- 13- What is most challenging about providing feedback on student writing?

- 14- How do you communicate to students that certain parts of their writing are good? How do you communicate that certain parts need work?
- 15- Should students be encouraged to respond to instructor feedback? Why/why not?
- Do you see student response to your feedback as a positive or negative exchange? Explain.
- 16- Is there anything you would like to share about your commenting process or practice you didn't have a chance to explain before? Please share.

Part II: Observation

Think Aloud Protocol

At this point, I would like to observe you talk through your thought process as you describe for me the decisions you would make about commenting on a student paper. I asked you to bring a copy of a written assignment you have not graded and for which you have not yet provided comments. For this activity, please read over the student paper and then describe how you would approach giving feedback. As you read, I encourage you to verbalize when you encounter something on the student paper that would normally prompt you to respond in some way. Although this process is a little unnatural, please try to narrate the decisions you would make out loud. Will you please share your paper in WebEx?

Okay, let's get started. Please talk about this paper as you review it. I encourage you to review this paper just like you would any other paper during the observation. I am interested not only in observing how you respond to this paper, but also in why you make the decisions you do. To that end, I will ask you to reflect upon your comments after you have completed the talk aloud activity.

(Observe teacher and take notes)

Thank you for sharing your approaches and contemplations with me as you worked through this student paper. We are now going to shift gears a bit. I have a few questions that will ask you to describe for me why you responded the way you did to this student paper.

- 1- Please explain the assignment.
- 2- Describe your goal with this assignment.
- 3- How much time do you usually spend reviewing and commenting on individual writing assignments?
- 4- What is the first thing you typically do when you assess student papers?
- 5- What prompted you to intervene at these points in the paper?
- 6- Why do you think you responded the way you did?
- 7- How did you decide which elements of the student's writing needed work?
- 8- What did you emphasize most in your feedback? Why?
- 9- What do you want students to do with your feedback?

Thank you for participating. Your participation will serve to benefit online educational practices and online student learning. The data collected from you today will provide necessary insight into how writing is taught in a virtual multidisciplinary context and may help identify

opportunities for improving instructional practices. May I contact you again if I have additional questions? I appreciate your time.

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Project: Composing Comments for Online Students: A Study of Faculty Feedback Epistemologies in Multidisciplinary Contexts

This study is being conducted by Rob Neuteboom, a doctoral candidate at North Dakota State University. The purpose of the study is to gather information about how online faculty from multiple disciplines define and compose feedback on student writing. The study is part of a dissertation project that may inform further research into assessment practices in this modality as it applies to multidisciplinary writing instruction.

Volunteers interested in this study will be asked to participate in an interview. During the interview, participants will talk through how they would respond to a student paper. In order to accomplish this task, participants will be asked to provide a student paper that has not yet been graded from an online course they teach. All student identifiers must be removed from the writing. The interview will be conducted in WebEx and will last about two hours. Participants may elect to meet for either one two-hour session or two one-hour sessions.

By self-selecting to complete the interview, you are voluntarily participating in this research study. The study asks questions about how you perceive and approach student feedback in online courses. As an online teacher, your insights will help the researcher better understand the purpose and meaning of feedback in virtual instruction.

This study is being conducted through the researcher's role as student at NDSU. For data coding and analysis purposes, interviews will be recorded in WebEx. Information about those who self-select to participate will be kept confidential by the researcher. Interview responses and student work samples submitted as part of this study will only be used for purposes of this study and will be permanently deleted after its conclusion.

Risks for participating in this survey include the potential for loss of confidentiality and emotional, psychological distress and/or social implications. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known risks to the participant. While you will be asked to provide your discipline and the courses you teach for purposes of correlation, every precaution will be taken to ensure all information remains private and confidential. These precautions include password protecting all personal information. Furthermore, all findings reported from this research study will be anonymous. You may, of course, opt out at any point during the survey.

Your participation will serve to benefit online educational practices and online student learning. The data collected from you will provide necessary insight into how writing is taught in a virtual multidisciplinary context and may help identify opportunities for improving instructional practices.

Participants are welcome to contact the researcher with questions at robert.neuteboom@ndsu.edu or by phone at 218-304-6217. Additionally, participants may also contact the principle

investigator of the research project, Dr. Kelly Sassi, at kelly.sassi@ndsu.edu or by phone at 701-231-7156.

You have rights as a participant in research. If you have questions about your rights, or complaints about this research, you may talk to the researcher or contact the NDSU Human Research Protection Program by:

- Telephone: 701.231.8995 or toll-free 1.855.800.6717
- Email: ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu
- Mail: NDSU HRPP Office, NDSU Dept. 4000, PO Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050.

The role of the Human Research Protection Program is to see that your rights are protected in this research; more information about your rights can be found at: www.ndsu.edu/irb.

Signing this form signifies consent to participate in this study of your own free will and that your questions about the interview have been answered.

Participant Name

Participant Signature

Date