MAKING CONNECTIONS: UNDERSTANDING HOW BASIC WRITERS

VIEW THEMSELVES AS ACADEMIC WRITERS

By

TRAVIS L. MANN

Bachelor of Arts, 1991
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
AddRan College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Texas Christian University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts

May 2006

Table of Contents

**Chapter 1**

**Searching for Connections**

Less than two minutes after Lynne, the instructor for the Introduction to Critical Writing class I was researching, handed out the in-class writing assignment, I was stuck. I had no idea what to write in the blanks on the "Where I'm From" sheet. She had asked us to fill in the blanks with the first thing that came to our mind. The prompt began,

I am from _____ (specific ordinary item) from_____.

I am from the _____ (home description)

_____, _____, and_____

(adjective, adjective, sensory detail); I am from the _____

(plant, flower, natural item), the _____ (plant, flower, natural

item).

Few words came to mind to fill in the numerous blanks. This assignment, I reasoned, must be too hard for these students who were enrolled in this "stretched" version of Texas Christian University's first-year composition class that I was researching. These students were advised to take this course because their writing, high school transcripts, or test scores did not meet the criteria for the "average" college student at TCU, or they expressed concern about their writing or abilities to their advisors.[1]

But as I looked up from the paper that was causing me frustration, I noticed that many students seemed to experience little difficulty filling in the blanks of their "Where I'm From" sheet. Although a couple of students were asking for help from the instructor, the majority were quickly writing answers, easily moving through this assignment. Again, I thought about what the instructor had said: "Just write the first thing that comes to mind." Although I am an experienced

---

[1] All of the academic advisors reviewed students' SAT scores, high school transcripts, and/or other writing samples to determine placement.

writer of professional and academic prose, my "first things" were not coming, yet these students who had been identified as underprepared for first-year college composition seemed to work through a difficult exercise with no problem. I looked back at the paper. I had blown off the first two sentences and skipped down to the "I am from_____ (plant, flower, natural item)." Still, nothing came. My mind ran diagnostics of my writing process, trying to understand why I could not come up with words to fill in the blanks. In the background, I heard Lynne ask for volunteers to read their work. I was surprised when Edge[2], a student I noted early in the semester who did not seem particularly interested in class, much less writing, volunteered to read. His previous classroom behavior had led me to my early conclusion: he consistently did not pay attention, nor did he seem to want to participate; many times, he arrived late to class, and, invariably, asked for an extension on his assignments. As I was still working on my own sheet, I half listened to him, expecting to hear exasperation.

"I'm from big trees, pine trees, and woods," Edge read, emphasizing the words as he carefully held his paper. "I'm from family gatherings and Baptist church and love." This student – one of 15 in a class designated for writers who needed extra help with college writing skills – easily read his paper even though I still could not think of a simple tree or bush or shrub or other natural item to describe my origins. "I'm from Lobo Country. Tough, true, and smart. I am from failure and graduation. I am from the love-below and the hate-above." His work demonstrated a sense of rhyme and meter, of calling ideas into creation, creating metaphorical images of himself that before the assignment had not existed. "I am from where I was, not where I'm at." It's poetry, I thought, quickly looking up at him during my sudden realization. He is writing poetry without being bound up tightly by the process of writing. He had done what the instructor had

---

[2] At the beginning of the semester, I asked students to choose pseudonyms for me to use when referring to them to protect their identity. The instructor also chose a name that she wanted me to use.

asked and written the first things that came to his mind. Yet here I was, a writer who had written pages of academic discourse during my graduate program, stuck trying to describe where I was from based on a plant. I was a writer who could not write, listening as someone who had earlier in the semester said that he was not a writer read a text he had just composed.

Edge and the other students seemed to easily fill in their "Where I'm From" sheet, but I had read the drafts that he and his classmates had submitted for their literacy autobiographies earlier in the semester. They were not producing college-level texts. Their work was unfocused, informal, and often rambled off topic. Most of the students could not create and maintain an argument, nor could they analyze an issue for any length of time. For example, Edge, writing about how he defines himself within the context of a group, wrote,

> The groups that we make fun of are the power rangers. It may sound funny, but once you think about it they are screwed up in the head. If you think about it we are just like them. The very first main power ranger was the red one. The pink one used to date the red one, until the green one came along and then they started dating. The red power ranger acted as though everything was cool and they keep fighting bad guys together. Then you come to found out that the green power ranger is the leader now. The red one sat back like a little punk. I don't make fun of any groups now because I don't of any as stupid as that one. Yeah, that was totally off the subject. Just another example of my group getting off track.

But how did Edge see himself as a writer? At the beginning of the semester, these students had completed a questionnaire[3] that assessed their views of writing and how they saw themselves as writers. On the questionnaire, Edge circled "I write a little, but do not consider myself a writer" in answering a question about how he felt about writing. Here was a student reading his own

---

[3] The initial questionnaire and end-of-semester questionnaire are included in Appendix A.

writing aloud, using writing as a tool for communicating his ideas, yet he did not consider himself a writer. He *was* a writer, but he also was not a writer. Edge and most of his classmates were able to complete this in-class project with little problem, but they struggled to write their literacy autobiographies.

The "Where I'm From" classroom assignment continued the relentless chipping away of the assumptions I had about students identified as basic writers[4]. When I began teaching basic writing students at Tarrant County College in 2003, I entered the classroom loaded with assumptions, many of which I am now beginning to question. My initial assumptions, which I will address later in this chapter, served as the impetus for this project: Recognizing that many of my assumptions were not based on fact, I want to better understand the students who populate my classes and how they identify themselves as writers within a college classroom; in addition, I want to identify elements within a classroom – the instructor, the assignments, the group – that may influence a student's formation of a writing identity. The more I teach basic writing courses, the more I wonder if I really know the students I am teaching *as writers*. Do they think themselves writers when they enter my classroom? Does the perception of themselves as writers make a difference? Do their impressions of themselves change during the semester? If so, how much and why? As an instructor, what specific impact do I have on their perceptions of themselves as writers? What effect do the assignments have on them? What about the classroom community and its culture? I read the texts they write throughout the 16 weeks they are in my class, but what do those texts tell me about how they see themselves as writers? And why does a student's perception of himself as a writer matter?

---

[4] TCU does not refer to the students in this class as basic writers. In composition scholarship, "basic writer" appears to the be most widely used term to describe students who are not prepared for the first-year composition classroom, but other terms, like remedial writers, developmental writers, and underprepared writers, are also used. I made the decision to use that designation throughout my research since these students are similar to the students I teach in my basic writing classes.

With these thoughts and questions driving me, I theorized that by looking at a class I was not teaching, I might be better able to understand basic writing students as writers and enter ongoing and newly created conversations within the discipline. Spending a semester with the students and the instructor in TCU's Introduction to Critical Writing class allowed me to compare what the scholarship says about basic writing students to what these students said about themselves. My methodology, which I will detail more fully later in this chapter, involved observing the students in the classroom, reading their writing (both drafts and final products), asking them to complete an initial and end-of-semester questionnaire, interviewing two of them in depth, and interviewing the instructor. I searched for patterns or relationships that explained how students identify or begin to identify themselves as writers within an academic setting.

I approached my project keeping in mind Sondra Perl's advice presented in her introduction to *Landmark Essays on Writing Process:* "When conducting such inquiries, researchers begin, then, not with an hypothesis to test but with a readiness to pay attention to the phenomena at hand" (xix). By allowing the data and observations to determine the scope of my project and entering my research ready "to pay attention to the phenomena at hand," I allowed myself the opportunity to examine new avenues I may not have initially considered, thus ensuring a research project driven by data rather than a project restrained by a driving hypothesis.

My project was partly inspired by Marilyn Sternglass's exploration of students in her 1997 text *Time to Know Them* in that it attempts to understand students within a particular setting, but it does so within a limited period of time. In her longitudinal study, Sternglass followed a group of students over six years to understand their writing and intellectual development at the City College of City University of New York based on in-class and outside factors. Her study begins to answer the call by many in composition to research students and

their writing over multiple years to gain better insight into how students develop and change during their educational experiences (see Emig [1971], Shaughnessy [1975], Bartholomae [1980], Hull and Rose [1989], and Flower [1994]). Although my project is not longitudinal in nature, it represents an attempt to understand how a particular group of basic writing students create their sense of self as writers and how they develop intellectually as student writers.

My project provides space for two kinds of data: first, students can express their sense of self as writers through their own texts. Formal and informal student writing – especially the writing assignments in the class that I will describe in detail in chapter 2 – allowed students to write about themselves while connecting their values and beliefs to the outside world. These textual moments served as an incubator for creating a sense of self as a writer, and students articulated that sense in their own words. Second, my interviewing students and observing them within a classroom without the constraints of teaching the class allowed me to begin to identify factors that influence their sense of selves as writers. By focusing on two students, Angela and Fresh, whom I will describe in chapter 3, I will be better able to understand their construction of identity and thus better understand how the students I teach view themselves.

## Connecting to the Composition's Conversations

> American education is subject to two contrasting underlying motifs: egalitarianism, the argument that everyone should have opportunities for success, and elitism, the restriction of opportunities to the most 'deserving' – which often means to those from a relatively privileged home.
>
>         — Edward M. White, "The Importance of Placement and Basic Studies: Helping Students Succeed Under the New Elitism"

Higher education demands that those within its walls employ academic discourse[5] as the primary form of written communication; it offers little capital or power for those who cannot write within this genre. However, basic writers – those students identified by placement tests, poor writing samples, or low grades in high school – appear at colleges and universities, seeking access to the literacy offered by these institutions. These students solicit help in matching their writing skills to what higher education values in discourse. Basic writers, suggests David Bartholomae, have "to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language" well before academic writing skills are learned ("Inventing" 135). Charlotte Brammer argues that students who cannot adapt their language to meet the language demanded by the academy lack "the linguistic cultural capital to recognize and to utilize the necessary written codes for academic success" (17). This tension between those who can and those who cannot write in the discourse of the academy creates perceptions about both groups: those who have not mastered the writing demanded within higher education's walls are many times deemed not worthy of entering; those who are literate in academic discourse occupy an elite space. This tension is keenly present in Edward White's quote that begins this section, and gives credence to the idea that, although perceived to be egalitarian in nature, higher education possesses a particular elitism since academic success for those who are not literate in academic discourse remains typically out of reach.

Writing, Stanley Fish says, is "contextual rather than abstract, local rather than general, dynamic rather than invariant" (438). The genre that is academic discourse, I believe, can be seen in Fish's quote, except for the last part: academic discourse traditionally has been seen as

---

[5] Defining academic discourse is problematic as the term seems politically charged. Throughout my work, I define the term academic discourse based on Candace Spigelman's use of the term in *Personally Speaking*. She views academic writing as "more intricate and more flexible" than a traditional rhetorical argument, using claim and support as the deductive tool to develop a more "complicated insight" (6). In addition, I see academic discourse as a tool that helps those within the academy deeply engage ideas while positioning themselves within scholarly conversations.

invariant with its users needing to employ this type of discourse in a particular way. Every writer possesses specific skills and traits that allow him or her to communicate in ways that make sense to that individual, but in order to succeed in higher education, those skills must meet narrow academic standards. Experienced writers can occupy lofty spaces both within our society and the academy. Inexperienced writers, or those who struggle to keep their thoughts together and put them in coherent sentences, occupy a far different space. Higher education refers to these writers (though many would not consider themselves writers) by certain designations that can create problems for instructors and students. The ways in which we look at, name, sort, and place those writers within the context of higher education impacts how these students see themselves as college writers inside the classroom.

How we name students also affects their perceptions of themselves, and students' perceptions of themselves may play a significant role in their ability to succeed as writers in the classroom. In "The Content of Basic Writers' Essays," Andrea Lunsford argues "much evidence now points to the connection between poorly developed writing skills and poor self-image, lack of confidence, and lower levels of cognitive development" (284). She suggests that our field needs studies that "will probe the relationships among self-image, cognitive style, perceptual system, and development of writing abilities" (284). Lunsford bases her arguments on a study in which she compared basic writers' perceptions of themselves against more skilled writers' perceptions. Even though this article is more than 25 years old, our profession has made some strides in this direction, but more research and application need to be undertaken. Lunsford also relied on the scholarship of Marie Jean Lederman. In "A Comparison of Student Perceptions: Magic and the Teaching of Writing," Lederman, too, studied skilled writers versus basic writers and found that the basic writing students generally viewed themselves through a negative lens. During her work, she saw that the vast majority of basic writing students experienced low self-

esteem, and she argues the "these students see themselves as alone, frightened, oppressed, [and] limited" (686). Lawrence Kasden echoes these two researchers when, in his introduction to his edited text *Basic Writing: Essays for Teachers, Researchers, and Administrators,* he says that many basic writing students suffer from poor self-image, low aspirations, and feelings of powerlessness (3-4).

But not all scholars agree that basic writers suffer from negative perceptions of themselves. Walter Minot and Kenneth Gamble argue in "Self-Esteem and Writing Apprehension of Basic Writers: Conflicting Evidence" that their empirical study in 1987 found that some basic writing students did not suffer from low self-esteem. When they compared different sections of basic writers to first-year composition sections, they discovered that one basic writing class had *higher* self-esteem and less apprehension toward writing compared to the other 19 first-year writing classes within the study. They argue that the data challenge the assumption that basic writers are a "homogenous group" that can be identified by specific characteristics related to perceptions. They suggest that instructors should "make finer discriminations instead of simply labeling basic writers as apprehensive and lacking in self-esteem" (122).

The bulk of this chapter will explore my initial assumptions about the basic writing students I teach and use the work of other scholars to situate myself in the scholarly conversation about basic writing. I will explore how cultural clashes – those moments when a student's home culture clashes with that of the academy – affect students within the basic writing classroom by using Patricia Bizzell's argument from "What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College" and Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the contact zone. I will end the section with the notion that some scholars have articulated that basic writing students should sever their ties with their home cultures in order to be successful within college.  Then, I will explore how basic writing students

have been labeled and theorize possible assumptions that exist that might explain why we identify and sort these students in particular ways and how this sorting might affect students' perceptions of themselves. How we choose to identify or mark students might significantly affect how these students view themselves, establishing in students, instructors, administrators, and those outside the academy certain homogenous perceptions of basic writing students.

**Dispelling Personally Fixed Myths: Examining My Assumptions**

When I entered my first basic writing classroom, I was not sure what to do, but I thought I knew exactly what to expect from my students. The English department chair at Tarrant County College's South Campus saw something in my educational and professional history that made her think I would be successful teaching basic writing students. She gave me a sample syllabus, a few practical classroom suggestions, a brief pep talk, and told me to "go teach them to write." By the third day of class, I was hooked on teaching. Most of the students I encountered wanted to understand how to write and wanted to be in the classroom. Many were older students returning to school, and I could identify with them since I, too, had been a nontraditional undergraduate student. Some students, however, did not want to be in this classroom. They felt cheated, reasoning that they should be able to register for first-year composition without attending basic writing classes; some described being "marked" by failing a computer-graded, standardized test. Their writing exhibited construction errors, misspellings, and was generally incoherent; I had expected some of these issues, but not as large a scale as I encountered.

I became increasingly uncertain how and what to teach students who seemed to need so much help just to put a few simple thoughts on paper. Many could speak coherently, but most students could not form written sentences without excessive errors in construction. Their sentences had subject-verb agreement problems, and many were fragments or run-ons. Students

seemed not to understand how sentences operated within a text, much less how to form sentences into paragraphs. Many students told me they knew what they wanted to say, but they could not write their thoughts on paper. Their sentence errors seemed to represent larger issues. Were their problems cognitive? Did they not know how to think? Were they not trained in high school to compose a text? Some, I learned, suffered from learning disabilities, but most appeared to have been inadequately trained to express their ideas in writing. The amount of "catching up" these students needed to do to prepare for college writing made me realize that I was in way over my head, but I was too stubborn to quit – in part because I saw how much work had to be done to get these students ready for the challenges they would face in writing for college. I had naively assumed students arrived in college classrooms well-equipped with writing skills from their high school experiences, and proficiently skilled to understand and excel in the variety of writing assignments they would face. Even basic writing students, I thought, would seamlessly enter first-year composition courses after they had "brushed up" their writing skills and solved what I thought of as merely grammatical problems.

My assumptions, however, were wrong. I discovered the problems were much more diverse and complex than mere grammatical issues. Many students did not understand how to construct a complete sentence nor did they know what a sentence was supposed to do. The thoughts they were writing were incomplete thoughts. Students would also struggle simply inventing ideas for composing texts. They invariably looked at the text they initially created as a finished product without any need for revision or editing. They would turn in half-completed texts and say that maybe they were not meant for college.

Before I began teaching, I also had constructed identities for these students: simplistic identities that did not fit the individual students I encountered. These students, I thought, would be "typical" college students, books in hand, yearning to fix their writing problems (mostly

associated, I thought, with grammar, punctuation, and spelling problems), but otherwise prepared for the college classroom. Yet they arrived in my classroom infinitely more complex in their identities, backgrounds, and uses of literacy than I had envisioned. According to Walter Minot and Kenneth Gamble, I had made the mistake that many within composition make: believing that basic writers share common characteristics and can be seen as a homogeneous group of students who merely lack effective writing skills (116-117). These scholars suggest that the idea of basic writers is problematic since the "usefulness of a concept such as this hinges on the existence of well-established shared characteristics" that can be easily identified within this group of students (117). They argue that current literature does not contain identifiable traits that mark basic writers as a distinct group beyond students who cannot write within academic discourse.

**Clashing Cultures, Clashing Values**

My classroom experiences began teaching me that many students struggle to adapt their private language to the public language used within the academy. I discovered that this "translation" problem is magnified when students become marked as basic writers by placement tests or ineffective writing samples as they enter higher education. In her essay titled "What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College," Patricia Bizzell notes "[U]pon entering the academic community, students are asked to learn a new dialect and new discourse conventions, but the outcome of such learning is the acquisition of a whole new world view … [I]t is a short step from seeing basic writers participating in a clash of discourse conventions to seeing them engaged in a clash of ways of thinking" (296-297). For example, in my basic writing classes, many students came from African American communities, and they resisted writing. At first, I thought that these students were merely resisting school since they were placed in a basic writing classroom; on the contrary, I soon learned that their communities did not seem to value writing

as a way to communicate, and that their resistance was based on the values they were bringing to my classroom. They were being asked to learn a new language, one that required them to change the way they communicated. When we privilege the language of the academy and teach our students how to see the world by using academic discourse, we promote a specific worldview that may clash with the worldview of students. Bizzell argues that when we teach students how to write for the academy "we must deconstruct ideologies the students hold as foundational, a very painful process that students often oppose no matter how egalitarian and nonauthoritarian the teacher tries to be" (*Academic Discourse* 269). For example, some students might bring a religious fundamentalist view of the world and ideas explored within the academy might significantly challenge those beliefs.

The initiation of basic writing students into an "academic language" forces a change in how they write in a public setting, yet scholars suggest this process represents a clash of discourses based on cultural conflicts. By requiring students to write within academic standards, we become academic discourse guides, carefully "prepar[ing] students to write someplace else in the academy" (Soliday 17). Mary Soliday explains: "[T]ranslation pedagogy attempts to negotiate between different discourses – those that the students bring with them, and those that they may encounter in academic situations" (17). She challenges James Traub's argument in *City on a Hill* – a text calling for the elimination of basic writing courses – that past City College of City University of New York students succeeded by assimilating smoothly into the mainstream, and that current students are simply unable to accomplish this act "because [remediation] can't hope to erase students' cultural, not just their academic, deficits" (128). Soliday asserts that students unfamiliar with academic discourse and those labeled as unprepared for academic challenges ultimately "live between cultures and must navigate those thorny questions that are never settled in the teaching of writing, and perhaps especially in remedial courses" (148). She

notes, "the processes of intercultural contact and assimilation to new discourses are a far more complex social and intellectual effort" (149). In his work *The Hunger of Memory,* Richard Rodriguez describes the difference between public and private discourse and the choices those who enter higher education are forced to make. His story makes clear that education is a long, unglamorous, even demeaning process, "a nurturing never natural to the person one was before one entered a classroom" (68).

When I began teaching, one of my assumptions dealt with the cultural composition of the classroom. I knew my students would come from a variety of cultures and backgrounds, but I had not anticipated how cultural differences would impact my classroom or myself as a teacher. I soon found myself pressing the values of higher education (those of writing and reading) upon my students; as the instructor in the class, I was working inside Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the contact zone. Pratt describes the contact zone as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (519). As a member of the academy, I was pressing the dominant culture of higher education upon my students, and I was meeting resistance. Employing the notion of the contact zone has helped Composition clearly see where clashes occur between the dominant culture and other cultures within classrooms, and looking through the contact zone lens allows scholars and instructors to see differences that resist homogenous assumptions. In my experience, many basic writing students come from cultures that conflict with the standardized culture created within the academy. I assumed students would readily accept the values of writing and reading once they entered the classroom, but I was wrong. Many times students struggled to learn how to write because their values were different from those in higher education, and their home communities did not value writing.

While trying to assimilate within higher education through acquiring academic discourse skills, these students bring cultural differences to bear on the dominant tradition. In "From Silence to Words: Writing as Struggle," Min-zhan Lu discusses the problems she encountered living within and between two discourse communities, that of her family's language and the language of the academy. "Constantly having to switch back and forth between the discourse of home and that of school made me sensitive and self-conscious about the struggle I experienced every time I tried to read, write, or think in either discourse" (166). During the first year of teaching, I realized that the language I was using in the classroom came entirely from my point of view and offered little space for varied student language. My position encapsulated the "power" within the classroom, and my students' cultural experiences represented a challenge to that power through their diversity, a challenge I thought I had to overcome. Basic writing instructors and, increasingly, those who teach other composition courses, have attempted Bizzell's call to use Pratt's model of contact zones as a tool to help our students and ourselves make better sense of what we teach and how we teach it. She calls for reorganizing the English discipline "in terms of historically defined contact zones, moments when different groups within the society contend for the power to interpret what is going on" in an effort to enhance classroom pedagogies based on diversity ("Contact Zones" 483). Although Bizzell does not use the basic writing classroom as a specific example of this reorganization, the diversity within many basic writing classrooms could serve as a site for creating new pedagogies. Unfortunately, this diversity of discourse may run counter to the narrow band of writing that is academic discourse, creating an issue for Composition. How does our field allow for diversity within academic discourse when faced with culturally diverse students? And will those changes significantly impact our profession of teaching composition? How do we negotiate differences within academic discourse and will a concrete definition of the term be achievable?

To improve the chance for success of basic writers within higher education, some scholars suggest that students should cut ties to their home culture and discourse. Peter Rondinone argues that basic writing students must sever relations to family and communities in order to inculcate the values and ideology of the academy. Through his personal experience moving from a working-class Italian-American family into the world of the academy, Rondinone argues that basic writing classes offer students a chance to recognize the difference between the discourse in which they were raised and academic discourse. He notes,

> There are times when Basic Writers will have to reject or betray their family and community … To succeed in college, I had to distance myself from my uneducated family and community. So I plant the idea in the minds of Basic Writing students that sometimes their will and/or ability to enter an educational discourse community might be impeded by the people closest to them. I have hoped to open the classroom to discussions of this possibility because I've felt that this issue has long been a dirty little secret. (qtd. in Adler-Kassner *Basic Writing* 25).

Rondinone's suggestion echoes Kenneth Bruffee's ideas from 1984. Bruffee argues that students must "loosen ties to the knowledge communities they currently belong to and join another. These two communities would be seen as having quite different sets of values, mores, and goals, and above all quite different languages" (433). Bruffee believes education serves primarily as a site of acculturation where students "gain membership" in another community by learning its "language, mores, and values" (428) Students come, Bruffee argues, from "local communities" that offer "the most narrow and limited" options to economic and political opportunity (428). This shift from the values and culture a student brings to the classroom into a new world based on "foreign" ideology suggests Bizzell's earlier notion that introducing students to academic

language might begin to impact their worldview. By suggesting an abrupt separation from family and community, teachers and scholars within the academy may drastically impact how students begin to see themselves and their worlds.

**Sorting and Labeling Basic Writers: Impacting Identity**

Understanding how the field of composition names, views, and talks about basic writers can help scholars and instructors begin to understand one factor that affects how students form their identities as writers in a classroom. By defining writers as underprepared, unskilled, or remedial, instructors and researchers immediately focus on what students cannot do rather than on their current skills. In essence, by labeling students this way, the academy leads students away from seeing themselves as student writers because the terms the field uses to describe them immediately say to them that they are not writers; our assumptions set up students for failure from the beginning because of our intense focus on perceived deficiencies. Deficiencies focus on identifying students' errors, and a pioneer in the field of basic writing explored that challenge form than 30 years ago. Mina Shaughnessy's landmark text, *Errors and Expectation*s, analyzed the essays of 4,000 urban, open-admission students, seeking a way to classify writing errors and create hypotheses about their significance within the context of the classroom. She struggled to understand these students and their writing processes through examining and quantifying their errors, but she noted how labeling students as basic writers can create difficulties. She writes,

> The term *BW [basic writer] student* is an abstraction that can easily get in the way of teaching. Not all BW students have the same problems; not all students with the same problems have them for the same reasons. There are styles to being wrong. This is, perversely, where the individuality of inexperienced writers tends

to show up, rather than in the genuine semantic, syntactic, and conceptual options that are available to the experienced writer (40 original emphasis).

Though broadly characterized by making errors in constructing texts, these students are labeled by a designation that does not adequately address, as Shaughnessy points out, the individuality of inexperienced writers. Although I use "basic writer" to describe these student writers throughout this text, I recognize the politically charged nature of the term. Many people consider basic writers as very different individuals within an academic setting; by describing these students this way, many perceive them as inferior or inadequate, in some cases "foreigners" coming to the academy. I have yet to create another designation that adequately represents these students.

In 1985, Mike Rose discussed the stigma associated with higher education's cultural tendency to label basic writing students. He argues that how our institution positions these writers serves to keep basic writing students "at the periphery of the curriculum," noting that metaphors about basic writing marginalize students (341). Those metaphors, often situated in medical maladies, he suggests, should be abandoned. He notes:

> [T]he political dimension is powerful — to be remedial is to be substandard,
> inadequate, and, because of the origins of the term, the inadequacy is
> metaphorically connected to disease and mental defect … "Remedial" quickly
> generalized beyond the description of students who might have had neurological
> problems to those with broader, though special, educational problems and then to
> those normal learners who are not up to a particular set of standards. (349).

By tracing the etymological history of the term "remediation" through its use in the writing classroom and in basic writing research, Rose argues that its current use shows "wisps and traces of disease" whereby students "labeled as such are exclude[d] from the academic community" and must "sit in scholastic quarantine until their disease can be diagnosed and remedied" (352).

Even though Rose posited his idea more than 20 years ago, other scholars continue to focus on the cultural consequences of naming basic writing students in terms that appear inappropriate. Martha Casazza argues that the term "remedial" focuses specifically on weaknesses or deficiencies, "implying a 'fixing' or 'correction' of a [specific] deficit" (4). She notes that many scholars and institutions still associate "remedial" within a medical context "where a diagnosis is made, a prescription is given, and a subsequent evaluation is conducted to see if the 'patient' or student has been brought up to speed" (4). Minot and Gamble note that "by its very existence, the term *basic writer* demarcates a subgroup of the writing population, sets this group aside for special treatment, and, more importantly, implies that this group is in some significant ways, very different from other writers" (117). During my short career as a basic writing instructor, I have experienced similar situations and have heard instructors and administrators refer to basic writing students using medical terminology. For example, the chair of the English department at one of Tarrant County College's campuses once told me that students should remain in Basic Writing classes until they can demonstrate that they are "cured" of their writing deficiencies.

In "Theory in the Basic Writing Classroom? A Practice," Victor Villanueva suggests that basic writing teachers should first focus on what students already know and connect that to what the academy wants them to know. He struggles with the idea that these students are many times labeled "developmentally dysfunctional" since this stance fails to account for "issues of class and race or ethnicity" as underlying reasons why many basic writing students are struggling to learn to write within a college community (80). By moving away from sorting and labeling and focusing more on students' abilities, a better understanding of these students' histories, skill levels, and ability to meet the challenges of the higher education classroom may appear. Villanueva focuses his instruction on teaching students the conventions of academic discourse as

a means to succeed within a higher education environment because he recognizes what students bring to the classroom and can connect students and their skills to the expectations of higher education. In other words, he assumes students can learn what they need to learn to succeed in a classroom rather than focusing on deficiencies in their writing skills.

Anmarie Eves-Bowden surveyed and interviewed her students as well as explored published basic writing research to discover how students see themselves in relation to the process of writing. Her work moved her away from naming students and their deficiencies and allowed her to focus more on the skills a basic writer needed to be successful in college. She argues that "[l]earning the reasons behind basic writer's frustrations should be an integral part of becoming a successful instructor" (74). Instructors must "know" their students, their skills, and their histories in order to teach. Although she acknowledges her results may not be universal, she suggests that studies like hers "reveal the way classroom events impact students and shape their experiences" (81). Recognizing the discrepancies between teacher and student expectations promotes a middle ground in which learning can occur. Her research suggests that the lack of a "successful composition, not as a paper, but as a process" contributes to a lack of success (83). A model process, Eves-Bowden argues, can "encourage students to realize what fosters effective writing so they can come to see their own writing as deliberate and strategic" (83). Her research suggests a way to understand basic writing students by focusing on developing their processes of writing for college as a means to promote success.

Sorting students is inevitable under the current system because perceiving and assessing error and writing deficiencies serve as components that are "central to our current pedagogical practices" of identifying a student's writing ability (Brammer 21). But by understanding and recognizing how labels create assumptions, we might be able to move away from this practice and better interrogate what lies within a specific pedagogy. Treating basic writing students *as*

*students* who need to comprehend and understand the requirements of college rather than seeing them as individuals existing within a homogenous group who need "fixing" allows instructors to theorize new pedagogies and create new opportunities for teaching. This strategy also allows us to better understand students as writers by moving away from assumptions that basic writing students are deficient. To be successful, both instructor and student should recognize that matching skills and experience to the demands of higher education creates an opportunity. Coalescing this theory into practice may provide basic writing instructors and students opportunities for success.

**Connecting Students to the Academy: TCU's Stretch Class**

In 2002, TCU began planning to offer a class specifically designed for students who were identified as not ready for the writing challenges of first-year composition classes. English faculty proposed the idea to "stretch" the existing one-semester first-year composition class over a two-semester period that allowed and encouraged increasingly difficult writing challenges and introduced students to the complex literacy tasks they would need to be successful with academic writing. Titled "Introduction to Critical Writing," the two-semester class would offer students three credit hours toward freshman composition and three credit hours of usable electives if both semesters were taken consecutively and a passing grade was achieved; however, if students failed to take the second semester, they would not receive the three-hour credit for first-year composition and would be required to take and pass the standard composition class required of all incoming students. If students failed the first semester, they were required to enroll and take the standard first-year composition course or wait until the following year to begin the stretch class again.

Though not overtly described as a "basic writing" class, the Introduction to Critical Writing course shares some characteristics of basic writing courses at other institutions: students have extra time to hone their reading and writing skills; initial writing assignments appear easier than those in standard first-year composition courses; there is more focus on sentence-level or grammatical issues; the cultural mix of students is more diverse than in other courses; and most students express hesitancy about writing. Admission staff and college advisors identified students who they thought would benefit from a slower paced integration into composition classes based on students' admission information. The majority of students in the first class (2004-2005) and the second year (2005-2006) were student-athletes[6]. Besides student-athletes, students whose admission information suggested they might have difficulty in a standard first-year composition course, included students who were English as a Second Language writers, and students with specific learning disabilities. A student who self-identified as having problems with her writing, Angela, who will be described in detail in chapter 3, was allowed to enroll in the class. Students are admitted to the class by permission only. Although advisors strongly encouraged these students to enroll, there was no mandatory process for placing students in this class, and students could instead choose to take the standard first-year composition class.

TCU is a mid-sized, church-affiliated private institution that has not offered a remedial writing course in its recent past. The institution recognizes the need to diversify the freshman composition experience in order to prepare some students who might not be successful within the standard freshman-writing classroom. The decision to offer this course comes at a particularly interesting time when some in the Composition field and outside academia are calling for either an abolition of basic or remedial writing programs or a strategy for mainstreaming all writers within the freshman composition class. Yet the university's English department recognized that a

---

[6] The demographics of the class appear in chapter 2.

one-size-fits-all class does not meet the needs of all the students enrolling at the school. The standard first-year writing course demands that students engage in critical readings, research, integration of sources, and engaging in substantive revision of standard academic English. All of these activities occur with specific direct instruction, a tactic very different than in the Introduction to Critical Writing class.

**Study Objective and Methodology**

My research focused on individual students who enrolled in the Introduction to Critical Writing class during the Fall of 2005[7]. I was particularly interested in understanding how these students identified themselves as writers when they begin the class, how they may (or may not) have changed their perceptions of themselves as writers during the course of the semester, and, by semester's end, to determine factors that may have played a role in changing their sense of self as academic writers. My research sought to identify relationships, and/or patterns that might be associated with forming an identity as a writer, including an individual's description of himself or herself as a writer at the beginning of the course compared to the end of the semester, frequency and types of writing inside the classroom, and engagement and commitment to academic writing projects during the semester. Because this is only the second time TCU has offered this class, my research may contribute to how the course affects students and provide insight for TCU's composition administrators' decisions as to the requirements and nature of the class. The knowledge created by this research in relationship to how students perceive their development as academic writers may also contribute to composition's better understanding of the theoretical assumptions that inform classroom practices.

My specific research questions are outlined below:

---

[7] Currently, TCU only offers one section of Introduction to Critical Writing class each year.

1. How do these students' identities as academic writers change from the first day of class to the end of the semester?

2. If there is a change, how and why did this occur?

3. What (if any) class-related factors influenced a student's change in identity?

To explore how these students form their identities as academic writers, I employed three steps to gather data to help me better understand both the classroom and individual students:

1. Gathering data directly from students:

   ❑ Asking students to complete questionnaires at the beginning and end of the semester to understand how they perceive themselves as writers (those instruments are included in Appendix A).

   ❑ Completing two one-on-one interviews with the two students who will be the focus of chapter 3. After the semester has ended, I will also ask these students to answer a set of questions about their experiences in the class.

   ❑ Collecting and examining out-of-class and in-class writing assignments looking for descriptions of "self" that might show how their identity as writers changes.

2. Gathering data from the instructor:

   ❑ Interviewing the class instructor and the Director of Composition to ascertain the historical inception of the course and the assumptions behind offering the course.

   ❑ Interviewing the class instructor before the class begins to ascertain her perception of her students and the course, and to understand why the instructor. designed the course in a particular way

   ❑ Reviewing instructor comments on writing assignments to theorize how these comments might influence identity formation.

3. Gathering data based on observations and reflections:

❑ Attending the class once a week for observation and analysis of student interactions with the instructor as well as determining how students interact with each other.

❑ Maintaining a weekly reflection journal of class activities and observations.

By analyzing and interpreting conversations during one-on-one interviews and responses to questionnaires, observing classroom behaviors and activities, and reading what and how study participants complete classroom assignments, I was able to create a subjective depiction or representations of these students. In chapter 2, I endeavor to paint a general description of the entire class, its instructor, the classroom assignments, and the course's pedagogy. I begin the chapter by situating myself as a basic writing instructor, including interrogating how I understand myself as an instructor and the students whom I have taught in basic writing courses over the past two-and-a-half years. I use the notion of a "filter" to describe the way in which I see my world and allow me to better understand myself as an instructor and researcher. Chapter 3 will focus on two students and endeavor to tell the story of how they formed their identities as writers. My methodology for understanding these students include interpreting my classroom observations, conducting interviews with these students, and observing the progression of their writing assignments during the semester so that I can better see the possible evolution of them as writers within a college classroom. Chapter 4 of my thesis brings additional scholarship to bear on my observations and data in order to make meaning and situate these students and the classroom in which they practiced writing.

**Chapter 2**

**"Oh, I'm not a writer.": Disconnecting Individuals from a Community**

He seemed to shudder slightly when I told him that I was now teaching English composition classes at a local community college. As memories of days in composition classes flashed across his face, Frank, a friend I had known for years, told me "I hate writing and I especially hated writing in school because it seemed like the assignments were pointless. They did not serve any real purpose." He went on to tell me a story about a college writing assignment he had spent hours completing, only to receive it back from his instructor crimson with sentence-level corrections and a large "C" written on the back with the instructions to "rewrite the paper." He told me that after his first-year composition experience, he purposely took classes that did not require writing. After graduating college, this successful sales manager for a radio station network in Dallas had navigated his way through jobs to arrive at a high-paying, high-pressure job that he seemed to thoroughly enjoy.

"But you must write in the job you're in now," I commented.

"Sure, I write reports, memos, and employee-related items every week – way too many – but those are just documents I have to do for my job. It's not really writing."

"Then you're a writer," I said.

He looked at me quizzically, wondering if I were playing some kind of English instructor trick on him. "Oh, I'm not a writer," he said dismissively. "Sure, I write for my job, but in no way do I consider myself a writer. Writers are people who make money with their words and like to write. I hate it."

Frank cringes at the thought of writing and does not see himself as a member of a group of people who "make money with their words and like to write." He feels outside of this community, this group of people who share, at least, these two characteristics. He hates to write,

yet he "makes money" from using writing in his work. If Frank ever considered himself a writer, at some point he became disconnected from that feeling, and, ultimately, disconnected from a community. Was it his first-year college writing experience that pushed him away from the idea that he is a writer? Did his experiences in this classroom affect his confidence? Was the value of writing not effectively communicated to him from his instructors? Did he not feel part of a classroom community of writers in his composition class? Was that class ever situated as a community in which individuals came together to talk about and help each other with writing or were they merely individuals coming to class but never coming together? Where was Frank shut out of the writing community? And who shut him out? Others? Or himself?

These questions came to mind as I began to reflect on a seemingly everyday encounter with a friend that ultimately related directly to my research. The ritual I experienced with Frank – that of people telling stories about college writing experiences to those who teach composition – mirrors what physicians experience when someone discovers they have a doctor as an audience: people tend to talk about their negative health issues, hoping for some insight that will confirm or reject a diagnosis or misdiagnosis. Composition instructors hear many more negative stories about college composition experiences than those in which individuals had a positive or even satisfactory experience. These stories inevitably involve the retelling of painful encounters they suffered as they wrote for instructors, who, many times, told them – either through disparaging comments on papers or blatantly – that they were in no way "writers," a group of individuals who share the ability to effectively communicate in writing.

My friend Frank experienced this phenomenon. He says he writes for work, yet he does not see himself as a writer. He never joined with others who were writers and felt part of a group. Basic writing students may feel like Frank. These students write for school, but most of them do not see themselves as writers. They arrive in class with established filters, filters that may

prevent them from seeing themselves as writers or as members of a writing community, a group of individuals who value communicating through a specific discourse. Although many communities of writers exist, those who write within the academic community hold the power to include or exclude members based upon using academic discourse as a means to identify with that community.

In this chapter of my research, I will probe the filters the Introduction to Critical Writing students used to view themselves as writers and the act of writing in general. First, I will briefly examine how I position myself as a scholar, researcher, and an academic writer to better understand what filters I use to view the students I am investigating in this class. I will then turn to examine how Lynne and her students interacted during specific classroom moments. I will look at how her position in the classroom might play a role in her students' ability to see themselves as writers and become a part of a writing community. Throughout this work, I will look at the students and the instructor through the notion of individuals trying to form a community, one in which a group of individuals come together to share similar behaviors and characteristics. By looking at how individuals within a community begin to accept its values and language, I can see if these students begin to accept and employ the discourse offered by the class. But I would soon discover that Lynne and the students struggled to create a community within the classroom; during that struggle, concepts of confidence, history, connections, identity, culture, race, and values highlighted tensions that might explain why this class failed to come together as a community during the semester.

**"They cannot write at all!": Connecting to Academic Writing**

This past semester, I overheard a fellow TCU graduate instructor lament that the students in her first-year composition class "cannot write at all." She wondered aloud how she could get

them to write at the college level. As an instructor teaching the same course, my reaction to my students was quite the opposite. I thought that, perhaps as a new college instructor experiencing the classroom for the very first time, my colleague had failed to see that, in fact, many of these students *could write*, but not in the specific genre of academic discourse expected of them; perhaps my colleague's filter might be restricting her from seeing what her students *could* accomplish in terms of writing. In my first-year composition class, I found that almost all of my students could write, but some could not write using the strategies of academic discourse, skills they would need in order to satisfy the stated course requirements. But my identifying them as writers, particularly as a group of writers – as opposed to my colleague's insistence that her students could not write – may have powerful implications. By focusing on a student's writing strengths and capabilities – at whatever level – instructors presume students can write and, possibly, join the ranks of successful writers for the academy. By assuming students are writers, students themselves might begin to see themselves as writers.

Positioning students as academic writers, however, is sometimes difficult for both the instructor and the students themselves. In "Being a Writer vs. Being an Academic: A Conflict in Goals," Peter Elbow focuses on the "conflict between the role of writer and that of academic" (72). He describes his goal of teaching first-year students as getting them to "feel themselves as writers and feel themselves as academics," but he recognizes this may be an idealistic goal that some students will not reach (73). By using the term "academics," Elbow is not suggesting that all his students will join the academy professionally; rather, he wants his students to engage important issues through critical writing and reading in order to position themselves within others' ongoing conversations. He also wants them to see the value of academic writing. He says, "Insofar as I want them to internalize the role of academic, I should teach my students always to situate themselves and what they have to say in the context of important writers who have

written on the subject: to see the act of writing as an act of finding and acknowledging one's place in an ongoing intellectual conversation" (78). Yet Elbow seems to struggle with the narrowness of the role of the academic and how academic discourse sometimes inhibits the role of a writer, much as my colleague's ideas about her students inhibit her ability to see them as writers.

Elbow's theory that *Everyone Can Write,* the title of one of his more recent texts, reinforces how I see students within a college classroom setting. My liberal, optimistic view of the world strongly influences how I see the writing classroom and those who occupy it. I assume the students who enter my classroom have the ability to write and can join a community of writers through the help of an instructor and the other student-writers in the class. This view of writing and the need for teachers diverges from Elbow's idea noted in his book *Writing Without Teachers,* in which he argues that traditional writing methods – and sometimes teachers – may inhibit student writers. This text focuses on promoting ways for students to develop confidence in their writing ability through freewriting, multiple drafts, and both evaluative and nonevaluative feedback. Elbow argues that developing a student's confidence is critical to successful writing, and his text pays close attention to how a community of writers also has an impact on student writing.

In my view, students must learn the genre of academic discourse, one of my goals as an instructor, and they must read examples of this type of writing and see individuals who employ the discourse. Teachers serve as members of a community that values writing, and many represent the value of academic discourse through their pedagogical practices; as a result, these teachers write in and promote academic discourse as an apparatus for success within the academy. Writing instructors can also offer students the opportunity to create relationships with individuals who can help them understand how academic discourse functions, its role and scope,

and the purpose it serves within higher education. Many times, writing instructors offer students their first invitations to join a writing community.

But promoting the function and rules of academic discourse plays only one role in helping student writers. In order to help students become more successful in writing within this discourse, instructors must work toward getting students to "see" themselves as writers. At the beginning of chapter 1, I focused on a snapshot from my research observations in which an African American student-athlete, Edge, wrote a passage describing where he was from. During my analysis, I noted that he was a writer, yet he was not a writer. He occupied the space of a writer in that he successfully created metaphors and images to complete his "Where I'm From" sheet. Listening to him read his work aloud, I concluded that he was able to write, effectively completing his in-class college writing assignment; however, I had read his other work, part of an autoethnography, and he did not use language or have a style that any instructor would consider college-level writing. In describing himself as part of a group as the assignment required, he wrote:

> My group sometimes wished that we had a signature CD or band. I always wanted to do something for the music business. We tend to think that not trying everything we want to do in life is one our challenges. The worst challenge that we have now is trying to get our footwork better for next year. The main group that we would never belong to, is the receivers. You have to have good footwork to become a legendary receiver.

In simple terms of putting words on paper, he was a writer; however, the lack of coherence expressed in this passage would not classify him as an academic writer. Again, he was a writer, yet the academic community would not consider him a writer.  Even Edge himself does not consider himself a writer: at the beginning of the semester, he answered a question saying that he

did not think he was a writer. He began the semester feeling outside of the writing community perhaps because he previously had never been asked to join.

I have felt similar tensions between being an outsider and working to gain access to a community as an insider. Before I began my graduate studies classes at TCU, I used writing as a technology to help me succeed in my career. My most recent profession before coming to graduate school was ghostwriting journal articles for physicians and medical researchers, conceiving and drafting stories for publication in various medical journals. Though I used writing extensively and considered myself a "writer" within this specific discourse community, I merely recreated the arguments, language, tone, jargon, style, and techniques of specific journals to create a text that would "fit" within that genre. I understood how the writing I employed in this position was very different from other work-related writing I had accomplished; for example, the texts I had written in the past, like writing grant applications and articles for company newsletters and magazines, were focused on a different audience and served vastly different purposes. In spite of my teaching experience, when I came to TCU, I worried that my writing would not be seen as "graduate school-level writing," nor would I be seen as a "writer" ready for graduate school. I seemed similar to Edge in that I could "write," but at the same time, I perceived I could not write like the authors of the articles I was reading in school. I worried that I would not be part of the academic community of writers, and that I would remain an outsider. When I began school, I considered myself outside of this community and did not feel that I was a contributing member of my profession.

But considering myself an "insider" has allowed me to write this project. And what I choose to observe in my research – and what I do not see – is affected by the filters I use to look at the world. These filters control how I view the students whom I teach in my basic writing classes; filters also play both a tacit and overt role in how I look at the students and the instructor

in my research. Those filters create a specific subjectivity from whose gravity no researcher can escape. For example, I did not foreground the idea of a writing community and the role it plays when I conceived and began researching this project. After entering the research process ready to pay attention to what was happening around me, the idea of a community began to appear during my observations. Through the idea of a community, I argue, I will be able to, as Sondra Perl notes, "bring to life the people [I] have come to know and the particularities of their living" (xix). In the next section, I will attempt to "bring to life" some of the events I experienced observing instructor and students' interactions within the Introduction to Critical Writing class as they sought to form a community. I want to explore Lynne's position in the class and her classroom practices to understand the role both she and her assignments may have played in her students' perceptions of themselves as writers and as members of a community. My hope is to construct images of the students so that readers can see the tensions that existed during their struggle to become a community of writers.

**Trying to Connect on Day One and Beyond**

The first day of the Introduction to Critical Writing class began with the rambunctiousness of many first days: students arrived, some peering in the doorway of the long rectangular room, asking if they were in the right place; others entered with contemporaries, talking and laughing as they found seats together. Books and papers were shuffled around as students prepared for their first day. Lynne appeared prepared and confident, smiling and welcoming students as they came into class. She told each individual to sit wherever he or she liked; she walked up and down the slightly narrow room, talking with students. The way she moved among the students left little doubt who was the instructor. She tried to set them at ease from the moment they walked in the door, yet I noticed her straightforward conversation and

tone bespoke one of authority. The students immediately recognized who was in charge in this classroom.

Most of the class arrived on time; however, some students straggled in well after the class began. The overwhelming majority of students in the class were males, twelve men and three women. The cultural and gender diversity of students was profoundly different than any other TCU class I had seen. Two of the women were white, and one was African American. Of the men in the classroom, nine were African American, two were white, and one appeared to be from Southeast Asia. Those nine African American students were all members of either the TCU football team (7) or basketball team (2). All of the students appeared to speak English, but the male student from Southeast Asia spoke haltingly and hesitantly throughout the semester; the accent of one woman appeared to be Scandinavian in origin. She, too, seemed hesitant to speak in the classroom.

During my initial observations and discussion with students, I failed to effectively recognize the role race and culture would play in this classroom and in the concept of literacy acquisition. I initially observed divisions within the classroom based upon race, gender, culture, and identification as an athlete, but I only recorded these variables as classroom statistics. In my first few weeks of observations, I did not heed these ramifications. My simple focus on how students formed their identities as writers seemed to restrict me from seeing how cultural differences affected the class as a whole. It would not be until I had discussions with my colleagues and my thesis committee that I would fully come to understand how these concepts factored into this classroom. Only reading and reflecting upon my data allowed me to see these factors as defining characteristics that may have hindered the formation of a community of writers.

When she called the class to order, Lynne introduced herself and began her description of the course[8]. I immediately noticed that she commanded the class's attention, but she did so in a way that set the tone of the first day and days that would follow. By making her introduction of the class syllabus and policies interactive and fast-paced, the students were kept a little off balance, not quite sure what to expect next or how to take their new instructor. She walked up and down between the two rows of students, making eye contact and asking them specific questions, a technique she would use quite often during the semester. Students answered her questions hesitantly at first, but some soon got into the fast-paced nature of the class. She allowed students time to fully answer her questions, often asking for more information or a clarification. When a student arrived late, she would not stop in stride or in her discussion, but merely handed him a syllabus and pointed to an empty seat. By establishing this interactive environment, she seemed to be creating a classroom in which she expected ongoing conversations between herself and the students, conversations that she believed would be integral to the success of forming a community.

Lynne seemed to be trying to form a web or matrix among her students with her at the center. She constructed this matrix by moving among the students, explaining class policies and procedures and engaging them in conversations through questions. I pictured Lynne spinning invisible lines that connected her to the students and the students to each other. She accomplished this through asking questions: she always asked her students questions as a way to engage them in discussion within the class. Her skill in creating this matrix appeared to come from her past teaching experience, something she had alluded to during our first two meetings. During later conversations, Lynne would tell me that she was trying to create a safe place for these students, and that immediately presenting herself as an instructor who cared for her

---

[8] The Introduction to Critical Writing syllabus appears in Appendix B.

students would hopefully establish specific group behaviors, such as open communication, ability to ask questions, and forming a strong student/teacher relationship.

Lynne would tell me well after the semester was over that she knew that many of these students had not succeeded in past classrooms, and she was hoping to create a less "traditional" classroom; however, she would also note that these students *expected* a strong teacher environment, and there were times during the semester when she did not assume that role. It is possible that the moments in which she did not assume a strong teacher-centered role created problems for these students because they did not understand how to accept responsibility for their own role in their education. As I would later discover, they also did not seem to understand the value of joining with a group to become successful as writers. I would come to realize that one reason they did not seem to value joining this group was that the culture they brought to the classroom clashed with the culture Lynne projected. Many of these students may have never been challenged academically and did not know how to respond to a classroom environment that was significantly different than what they had previously experienced. Perhaps they had been pushed forward in their education even when they could not complete the type of work required for advancement. As athletes, many of these students may have equated their "job" at TCU as performance on the field or on the court rather than in the classroom.

During the first day of class, Lynne allowed me 20 minutes to introduce myself and my project, obtain permission from students, and have them complete a questionnaire. When I introduced myself, I described myself as a graduate student in TCU's English program. I explained that this work was an attempt to better understand how students who were placed in a first-year composition course that was stretched over a two-semester period, formed their identities as writers. I talked about my teaching experience as a basic writing teacher at Tarrant County College, and explained that I had taught a course similar to the one they were in 18

times. Inadvertently, this admission – one subconsciously meant to bolster my ethos as a

researcher within the classroom – seemed to cause Lynne angst. In an e-mail conversation two

weeks after the first day, Lynne said that by focusing on how many times I had taught a similar

course, I may have usurped her authority as an instructor on the very first day. I was unsure what

to do beyond apologizing and remaining silent.

But from that moment on, I became overly cautious of my presence in the classroom.

After I noticed that the class did not seem to be coming together as a group even after weeks

together, I worried that it might be partly a result of my presence. I did not discuss these issues

with Lynne, but would ask periodically how she thought the class was progressing. Each time,

she would say that she was struggling to bring everyone together as a community. At the end of

the semester, she acknowledged to me that the presence of "other voices" within the class –

voices from academic advisors, coaches, peers, and other instructors – strongly inhibited her

ability to form a community with these students. She noted at the end of the semester one of the

things she would have changed would be to "not allow the presence of others in the class until at

least mid-term. This presence would be literal (no visitors) and it would also be figural (no

voices telling me how to run the class)." Even though she was careful not to name me as one of

the "voices," I could not help but think that my presence was somehow complicit in her struggle.

Lynne spent a great deal of time discussing her syllabus content to ensure students

understood the nature of the class. Within the document, she outlined her expectations, the

semester's writing assignments, class policies and procedures, requirements, grading scale, and

resources available for students. Her syllabus's bulleted format allowed students as readers and

listeners to quickly ascertain the course requirements and objectives. The document moved from

course objectives to policies and procedures, focusing on what typical syllabi describe

(attendance, text format, policies for late papers and revisions, class decorum, and plagiarism).

Lynne read aloud to the class every objective and policy, carefully noting each section and asking for questions after each major section. She paid particular attention to attendance, tardiness, and assignment submission rules, something I assumed would be important during the semester since part of the nature of teaching a first-year composition class is teaching students how to "do" college. The basic writing students I had taught many times did not understand the expectations of a writing course, nor did they fully comprehend their responsibility. Though many of my students were older, most appeared in class with a "high school attitude," one where they expected to be told exactly what to do and how to do it. The students in Lynne's class seemed to share similar attitudes.

Writing, Lynne told the class on the first day, would shape the class's activities during the next two semesters, and both her syllabus and demeanor represented that notion. The first bullet within the syllabus noted that the student will "produce writing that goes beyond 'high school' writing (however one might define that)." Students seemed to become uncomfortable (some emitting audible groans) when Lynne said that each student would produce 35-40 pages of graded and ungraded texts that go beyond "high school writing." J.T., a student-athlete who was placed in the class because of poor writing performance in high school, told me that he was not sure he could write all of the assignments that were outlined in the syllabus. I asked Angela and Fresh, the two students I will discuss in detail in chapter 3, what they thought about producing more than 35 pages of text; both were unsure if they would be able to write that many pages. In fact, of the six students I casually asked, all said that writing that many pages would be a difficult task for them. Most said they had never been asked to write that much, and the idea of completing that many pages of writing made them uneasy. As I would later learn from reviewing their initial questionnaires, all of the students with whom I discussed the page expectations did

not see themselves as writers. Lynne, however, would call them writers from the first day and continued to address them as writers throughout the semester.

**Trying to Connect Students Through Writing Assignments**

Lynne broke the semester's assignments into three major units and a final written exam. Each unit contained multiple writing tasks that led students to ultimately write a final essay for each component. These units included "Literacy and Identity," "Framing Identity," and "Autoethnography." Besides these major units, students were also expected to keep an online journal, write three letters to various audiences, complete online quizzes, write responses to readings, write responses to fellow classmates' writing, and complete a final written exam. All three of the major writing activities culminated in essays, primarily essays of about five pages in length. Students were expected to submit essay drafts for peer and instructor review and workshop their texts before the writing of the final draft. They were also expected to meet with Lynne at specific points during their drafting process.

In her syllabus and during classroom discussion throughout the semester, Lynne described the objectives of these writing assignments. She told students that these writing assignments would help them acquire multiple strategies to succeed as writers during their college experiences, including: engaging in and understanding the processes of invention, drafting, revision, and editing their own texts as well as the texts of their classmates; practicing writing, analyzing, and producing complex texts; engaging in the practice of secondary research; understanding and practicing how and when to revise texts for college classes; strengthening their ability to use Standard Written English; and learning key terminology and practices for discussing and analyzing writing and arguments.

The first unit, Literacy and Identity, required students to write an essay in which they

examined and interrogated their exposure to personal literacy events, specifically reading and writing, and then connected those experiences to some larger point about language, literacy, community, and identity. One of the unit's main goals was for students "to enable readers to enter your experience and to understand its importance." The second unit, Framing Identities, focused on students generating meanings about their families, identities, beliefs, and cultural practices through close and careful examination of a family photograph; then, students were required to connect that meaning to broader cultural claims. The final unit, Autoethnography, asked students to describe themselves as a member of a group or subculture. Students would then articulate how that membership contributed to shaping who they are as individuals.

All of these assignments were process-based in that each unit contained heuristical elements that built toward the unit's final essay. For instance, the Literacy and Identity unit contained the following writing assignments: an autobiographical haiku, a text of fewer than 100 words in which students provided readers with insight into their lives; creating and writing three definitions of literacy; writing examples of an autobiographical narrative; written analysis of specific events and their significance; written responses to readings surrounding literacy and identity; writing multiple drafts of their final project for peer and instructor review and workshopping; and producing a final draft of their essay for the unit. On a larger scale, each unit was process theory in practice: every unit built upon the strategies and experiences of the previous unit. By engaging students through this practice, Lynne was helping them engage in the writing process rather than only focusing on their final product.

Throughout the semester, Lynne stressed the idea that writing "practice" was a key component for a student's success in the course, and that only through varied writing exercises would a student be ready to face the rigors of college-level writing. Lynne would often stress the value of reading and writing in order to be successful in college. She focused student attention on

the idea that one of the requirements of the course would be to strengthen their use of and familiarity with Standard Written English[9]. During her initial presentation and the first few weeks of class, she spent time discussing how students would be revising their own texts and incorporating secondary research within their assignments. One student asked how often students could revise their texts. Lynne pointed to her revision policy in which students had the opportunity to revise their "first three essays…within one week from the time I return the original manuscript to you." She discussed revisions extensively, noting that her definition of revision encompassed more than simply correcting surface errors; instead, revision, by her definition, is a "re-seeing of your work and it is a significant change of your original document." Her focus on revision suggests that she values the writing process as well as the product as a way to evaluate a student's writing success. During the semester, Lynne would comment on drafts and final papers both in writing and during scheduled student conferences.

Lynne provided students a list of writing resources they could access for help with writing or other issues that might arise during the course. She focused particularly on the William L. Adams Center for Writing, noting that since her office was located in the center, each student would become familiar with the center's location and services. As she talked about the writing center, she encouraged students to use the facility as a resource, saying that students who used the center during last year's class had higher grades than students who chose not to use the center. Her physical location within the Writing Center also speaks to her responsibilities as an instructor and tutor: Lynne taught three writing courses during the semester I observed her, and she tutored other students for ten hours each week.

---

[9] Lynne would later tell me that she believed many of her students "spoke Ebonics or a form of it," and that she sought to recognize and appreciate that language that each student brought to class. Her work teaching students to understand Standard Written English was a way to help them "communicate in another language."

**Connections to the University**

Since I was a first-year composition instructor at TCU during the same semester as I was observing this class, I compared Lynne's syllabus to my own, looking for similarities and differences. What struck me was Lynne's choice of how to situate this course: She fashioned her course as a first-year writing class strikingly similar to the standard syllabus given to students in the traditional first-year composition courses. The course objectives are noted as:

> ENGL10703 is a writing workshop designed to give you extensive practice in college-level critical reading and writing. Through regular assignments of varying lengths and complexity, you will learn to position yourself within ongoing conversations about issues important to educated readers. In this course, you will engage in the processes of invention, drafting, revision, and editing as you complete a range of writing tasks including exploratory writing, synthesis, analysis, and argument.

What is interesting is that this course description mirrors almost identically the course descriptions for other first-year composition courses at TCU as given by the Director of Composition to all first-year composition instructors. These students are positioned to produce work similar to other first-year writing students. They are, in essence, treated exactly like first-year composition students. These students probably do not recognize this distinction, but identifying them like other first-year composition students speaks to how both the instructor and institution view these students as individuals and as a group.

The official TCU catalog notes that this class "gives students the opportunity to engage in a year-long study of academic writing. …[ICW] is designed for students who do not have extensive experience writing research-based academic essays." By establishing this class, describing it in academic terms, and offering credit for the class, the institution is valuing both

the class and the students who occupy the class; in essence, TCU says that the class offers value

to the college as an institution, and that the students in the class are valuable members of the

academic community. Certainly, the students are marked as "different"[10] from other first-year

composition students by enrolling in a course that is "stretched-out" over two semesters;

however, the institution is also sending a strong message to the students that their contribution to

TCU is just as important as that of other students. This message is unusual compared to other

institutions. Other schools provide basic writing classes, but most offer them only as noncredit

courses that cost the same amount as other college courses and require the same amount of time.

For instance, the students who attend basic writing classes at Tarrant County College are not

given credit they can use toward a degree plan. These TCC classes are positioned, in essence, to

provide "make-up" work that will prepare students for first-year composition classes – quite a

different message than TCU sends to the students in the Introduction to Critical Writing classes.

Offering credit for the course, however, has some stipulations. Lynne's syllabus

described the year-long course and the specific structure of both semesters. Students must take

and pass the first semester of ENGL 10703 offered in the fall to be able to register and take the

second semester class, ENGL 10803. Courses must be taken in this order for students to be

eligible for credit. If students fail either semester, they are required to enroll in and complete the

traditional 10803 course. Lynne's spring class, titled the same as first-year composition courses,

is only available by department permit to students who have taken 10703.

Both TCU and Lynne structured this class as a site for students who needed extra time

with their writing to gain the skills to be successful during their college experience. Offering the

class as a credit course when many other institutions look at courses like this one as a means for

---

[10] Angela, one of the students I will discuss in detail in chapter 3, noted that she "does not go around advertising" that she is a member of this class because she feels different from her contemporaries who are taking the standard first-year writing course.

students to "catch up" on their writing skills clearly suggests the value this institution places on the class and the students who enroll in it. Lynne's behaviors and approach signal a specific dedication to the students; in addition; how she structured the class and how she spoke about the students emphasized that she viewed these students as writers within the classroom community. Many of the students, however, chose not to recognize themselves as writers or even as students who wrote. In the next section, I will explore the students' behaviors to understand what role these behaviors played  in the resistance these students exhibited toward writing within this particular classroom.

**Seeing Connections and Disconnections Through Behaviors**

The students and instructor for the Introduction to Critical Writing class met every Tuesday and Thursday from 11 a.m. to 12:20 p.m. in a computer classroom with individual computer stations arranged along two long walls. The instructor positioned herself by the board and media control area. A ceiling projector and drop-down screen offered quick access for Lynne to use in multimedia presentations, which she did frequently throughout the semester. The elongated, well-lit room offered easy movement for her to walk the length of the room while lecturing, and permitted her to work with students independently, though with little privacy. At the beginning of the semester, students sat wherever they chose, but as the semester progressed, students were instructed to sit closer to the front of the class, filling in empty seats to create a more intimate space. By requiring students to sit close, Lynne seemed to be working toward establishing a community setting in which students would see themselves as individuals who come together as a group. Students invariably sat in the same seats most of the time, but their rolling chairs allowed Lynne to rearrange them at a moment's notice.

During the second week of observing the class, I noticed patterns in student behaviors beginning to emerge that seemed to set the tone for the semester. The instructor's lively discussions and topics were designed to help students focus their thoughts on writing, specifically, their own writing, but more than half of the students seemed not to care about the class or value the work that was occurring. Many would arrive late, unprepared for class, or offer excuses for their lack of ability to complete the work. The decorum within the classroom also spoke to how the students viewed this class. For example, during my second day of observations, two student-athletes in the back of the classroom began talking about an upcoming football game while the instructor was discussing the day's agenda. At first, Lynne asked them to please be quiet and pay attention. When they would return to talking after a couple of minutes, she would become firmer, asking them to please stop talking. But the students struck up their conversation again after a few minutes. By the third time she asked them to be quiet, her frustration was obvious to everyone in the room.

The interruptions by the student-athletes reflected how they valued this class, and they would occur frequently as other students struggled to pay attention and Lynne worked to create a cohesive classroom. By week four, the instructor commented to me that she was still waiting for the class to "come together" in such a way that a classroom community would be formed. It would not be until December 1 – fully 15 weeks into the class – that the instructor would tell me she "felt" like the class was finally becoming a more cohesive team. Her observations were different than mine: by the end of the semester, I would not have described the class as fully coming together as a community. Even though they had spent a semester together, some students still did not participate in classroom activities. On my last day of observations, I noticed that some of the students' body language and their limited engagement with Lynne and the other students clearly indicated that they did not feel part of this classroom.

Most of these students did not see themselves as students participating in a class; I believe they came to class simply because they had to. However, a few students did participate and seemed to be paying attention. Angela, a student I will highlight in chapter 3, came to class prepared and always participated during classroom discussions. In fact, she offered to speak and participate far more than any other student in the class; still, I sensed her reluctance to come to class and an unwillingness to join with the group. Her reluctance, I argue, was probably related to frustration. She saw the students who did not want to participate, and she became frustrated that these students did not want to do the work necessary to become active participants. Another student, Frank West, told me he was tired of coming to class since the instructor had to dedicate so much time to students who were not participating.

But it was the unengaged students who dominated the classroom. Through their body language, lack of participation, and inability to complete the assignments, it was clearly evident that the student-athletes did not want to be in class or be members of a writing community, much less learn how to write for college. I had experienced some of this within my own basic writing classes, but not on the large scale that occurred in the Introduction to Critical Writing class. Many of the students in my classes who did not participate chose this behavior for specific reasons: factors outside of the classroom, such as work and family life, impeded their ability to concentrate or even come to class; some students seemed not ready or unable to undertake the challenges inherent in being in a college classroom; some students thought these classes were merely an extension of high school, and that since they had been pushed ahead many times without doing the work, their experiences in the college classroom would be the same. Yet sometimes I could not quite understand why some students in my class chose not to participate. The vast majority of my unengaged students almost always failed or simply quit coming. The student-athletes who were in the Introduction to Critical Writing class appeared particularly

disinterested in the class and did not choose to participate. Those choices were apparent in their behaviors. For instance, when the final draft of the first unit's assignment was due, I observed five students asking for a deadline extension, claiming that they needed more time to finish their texts; two other students had not even bothered to bring their work to class. Later, I began to think that about those behaviors. Perhaps these students did not see themselves as students. Recruited to TCU as athletes, they had come to the university first to play sports; being a student perhaps was only a consequence of being able to play sports.

The instructor's "struggle" to create a community in which students were motivated to come to class and complete their work shows how this class evolved over the semester. At the beginning of the semester, I noted in my observations that the majority of the students appeared to see little value in the class, even though Lynne constantly projected and modeled the value of writing and working as a class. On numerous occasions when I was observing the class, the instructor would discuss the need for and value of writing as they moved through their educational experience, but some students seemed to place little value on the craft. For example, LJ, a student athlete I observed who seemed to show little interest in the class, rarely completed his online journal entries. Looking back at what he wrote and the infrequency of his journal entries, I noticed how little he seemed to value the writing assignments the class completed. LJ wrote his first two journal entries, both only two sentences long, then did not complete another journal entry for almost eight full weeks. With the exception of one entry related to football, the last four of his six journal entries contained only two sentences; his football entry contained four sentences. I began to realize that perhaps LJ did not complete the work because his values were clashing with the values expressed by Lynne, TCU, and the academic community. As a community, we value writing as a means to create and extend conversations and create new ideas. We value writing as a mechanism and a space in which to think through ideas and

concepts, but LJ did not seem to share those values. By not choosing to accept the values of writing, LJ would choose to exclude himself from joining with the community.

LJ, however, did not seem to be an anomaly. This conflict was apparent in other students as well. For instance, how the students seemed to perceive classroom policies about attendance and lateness reflected how they felt about the class. For the first ten days I observed the class, at least one student was more than 10 minutes late arriving for a 75-minute class. In two instances, two students came in a full 30 minutes after class began. This lack of respect for classroom policies and structure did not mirror what I experienced in teaching first-year composition at TCU or during my classes at TCC. Though some students certainly arrived late to class when I was teaching at TCU, most appeared to respect the classroom rules about attendance and tardiness. Lynne would counsel late arrivers after class, noting that the syllabus clearly stated her expectations of student attendance and late arrivals, but I could not discern if her actions had any effect on the students.

During the fifth week, on a day I was not observing the class, one student's behavior became so disruptive that Lynne chose to keep the student after class to discuss his actions. The discussion with the student-athlete did not resolve the issue, and Lynne scheduled a meeting between herself, the student, an athletic academic advisor, and the Chair of the English Department. During this meeting, the student reluctantly agreed to abide by strict rules within the classroom, and Lynne placed the student at the front of the class for the rest of the semester. Yet the student's behavior remained a concern for Lynne. She told me that this student would schedule conferences with her and not attend; she also noted that he habitually turned his work in late. By semester's end, this particular student seemed to participate more in classroom discussions and activities, but Lynne told me that struggling with this student had "taken a toll" on her.

A noticeable shift in the class occurred at mid-term. During the ninth week, I observed that the students seemed much more interested in the writing they were doing for class and seemed to listen more intently to the discussions proposed by the instructor. At first, I believed that the students had had a collective moment of realization, and, after more than half a semester, they began to see that writing for this class and learning about writing could significantly impact their success in higher education. In my observation notes, I had written "Wow. Seems to be a big shift/change in attitudes. Reason?" during a reflective moment. At the time, I did not consider that mid-term grades had been posted and that this may have had an impact on how students viewed their behavior in the class. The student-athletes who ended the semester with failing grades would be ineligible to play their given sport. For those students, receiving a failing grade would mean that they would become "disconnected" from their athletic community Conversations with the director of composition enlightened me that reporting failing or low grades to students and advisors can serve as a strong motivational tool for students. I now doubt that the motivation I first perceived – that the students "realized" how writing could help them during their college classes – was the factor in their change of behavior. I now think that their ineligibility to play sports and the pending disconnection from the athletic community played a much larger role in shaping their classroom behavior.

The students' lack of interest in the class directly affected this formation of a community, and my observations bear that out. With the few exceptions I noted earlier, it appears that the majority of the students in this class did not value writing as means for success in a classroom setting because they either did not understand how to connect themselves to the classroom, the instructor, or each other through their writing, or simply did not want to. They seemed to see themselves merely as individuals within a class that, given the opportunity, many would choose not to attend. This unwillingness to value writing affected classroom dynamics. During the

classroom episode when Lynne had difficulty with a student-athlete and had to call a meeting to discuss his behavior, she e-mailed me and asked that I not attend class until she felt like she had better control. I readily complied and did not attend her class for two weeks. She appeared frustrated with the students, noting that students from the previous class had seemed much more motivated and responsive. Her concern was that any presence other than her own would continue to disrupt the process of building a cohesive classroom.

The ongoing tensions started to affect me as a researcher as I began to dread watching Lynne struggle with her class. During a class in late October, students seemed to be exceptionally disengaged, and Lynne's frustration peaked: she handed out homework and dismissed the class 15 minutes early, telling me that this was the most aggravated she had been this semester. On that day, Lynne had been trying to talk with them about how their identities may be related to cultural and societal issues. But the majority of students did not pay attention to her presentation. Their body language and their inability to focus on what she was saying left little doubt that they were not engaged in the activities.

On three occasions I vividly remember leaving after class was over and thinking that I was glad I did not have to teach that particular class, a reaction that surprised me since I enjoyed teaching basic writing classes. Although these students were different from the students I taught at TCC, they still represented students who needed help with their writing to succeed in college. That feeling would periodically disturb me during my observations, and I would spend time writing about that feeling in my observation journal. I never reached a resolution by writing about these episodes, yet my ability to reflect on them provided me with an emotional distance from my observations and a chance to reflect upon why these incidents troubled me so much. Looking back, I think my expectations were clashing with the students' expectations since our perceived values of writing were so different. I am a member of the academic community and

am pressing what I think is valuable upon these students. This recognition affects the filters through which I see these students and the students I teach.

Creating a community within the classroom appeared vitally important to Lynne as a means to introduce her students to the values expressed in higher education. In chapter 1, I noted Patricia Bizzell's argument that when students enter an academic community, they can experience a "clash in the ways of thinking" that can affect their view of themselves and their world (297). Though extreme in his call for breaking ties with local communities to join the world of higher education, Peter Rondinone argues that joining the academic community requires students to sever relations to family and communities in order to inculcate the values and ideology of the academy. Through our work in composition classes, we are, in essence, seeking to change how students see themselves and their world. We are also asking students to interrogate their foundational ideologies and beliefs in order to join this community. This shift, as Bizzell notes, can be a "a very painful process that students often oppose no matter how egalitarian and nonauthoritarian the teacher tries to be" (269). The struggle that Lynne and her students experienced may illustrate that process.

**Looking at the Disconnections**

One of the reasons the ICW students may have been reluctant to join a community of writers may be directly connected to their attitudes about themselves as writers, how they define or think about writing, and how they value themselves as participants within the university. In an initial survey, students were asked to respond to the following question:

Which of the following statements best describes you as a writer?

    a.  I am not a writer

    b.  I write a little, but do not consider myself a writer.

      c.   I think I can write and consider myself a writer.

      d.   I write often and would describe myself as a good writer.

Of the 15 students in the class, 11 students did not consider themselves writers, with three of those students choosing "A," and eight choosing "B." Four students thought themselves writers (two chose "C"; two chose "D"). The students who considered themselves writers, Dave, Anna, Frank West and JT, appeared to have little difficulty understanding the classroom activities. For example, each of these students rarely had a problem completing and turning in their assignments on the specific due dates as compared to the other eleven students who would frequently ask for extensions to complete their work. The lack of perception of self as a writer may strongly influence an individual's ability to write and complete an assignment. Conversely, the lack of an ability to complete an assignment may also impact a student's ability to see himself as a writer.

Students' perceptions of the difficulty of writing and their description of what writing means to them may also play a role in their ability to complete assignments. The eleven students who did not describe themselves as writers all responded negatively when asked to complete the sentence: "Writing is_____." For example. N/A[11] described writing as "difficult," the most-used adjective by students when talking about writing. N/A saw writing as a "big mountain" that made him feel sad; in addition, he says he feels "sad" when given a writing assignment. Another student, Good Writer, described writing at the beginning of the semester as "hard." He noted that when he writes, he feels "up tight (nervous) frustrated," and that when given a writing assignment, he feels "pressured, cause I don't have confidence in my writing." Although he describes people who write as "successful," he "does not think writing is good for you." LT, who answered the above question with "A" (I am not a writer), saw writing as "hard

---

[11] This was the name chosen by the student for me to use during my research.

for me to do" and said that writing is "something I will never be good at." In fact, after answering this section of the questionnaire, LT gave up and left the remainder of the questionnaire blank.

These examples seem to aptly situate how almost three-fourths of the class felt about themselves as writers when they began the class. The negative perception of themselves as writers and the act of writing seemed to manifest itself in their unwillingness or inability to complete assignments for the class. By permitting deadline flexibility, the instructor may have inadvertently reinforced many of these feelings in these students, allowing students to keep pushing back the need and exigency for them to write.

**Ending a Difficult Semester**

The Introduction to Critical Writing class did appear to help a few students change their perception of themselves as writers. By the end of the semester, of the eleven students who answered, "I am not a writer" or "I write a little, but do not consider myself a writer," four of them said "This class has helped my writing, and I now consider myself a writer."[12] When queried as to what helped them the most during the class, those four students described different assignments and aspects of the class that seemed to help shape them as writers. Angela, N/A, and LT wrote that the Framing Identities classwork of writing about family photographs was the most helpful. Angela and Good Writer noted that the Literacy and Identity unit was the most helpful assignment they completed. N/A noted that the "letter" writing assignments in which students were asked to write and mail specifically assigned letters served as one of the most helpful assignments for him because the purpose of the assignment "seemed more real [to me]."

---

[12] Two of the eleven students did not complete the final writing survey, including Fresh, who will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3. However, Fresh and I e-mailed each other at the end of the semester and his responses will be seen in the next chapter.

All of these assignments were designed to allow students to reflect on what they thought, then connect their ideas to something larger than themselves. By connecting their ideas to something outside of themselves, these students seemed to gain a stronger perception of themselves as writers. The sense of purpose of an assignment and understanding how that purpose connects to the actual act of writing seemed to help students change their sense of selves as writers. In other words, achieving a meaningful goal in relationship to a specific assignment helped them feel more like writers.

These few students not only changed their impression of themselves as writers, they also changed how they felt about the act of writing. At the beginning of the semester, LT answered "I am not a writer." By semester's end, he answered the same descriptive question with "This class has helped me, and I now consider myself a writer." LT initially said that writing is "hard for me to do" and "something I will never be good at"; in contrast, by semester's end, he described writing as "fun" and people who write as "smart." He told me that the Framing Identities assignment helped him the most because he was able to write about a simple photograph in "ways that I never thought I could." He also said that Lynne's comments on his papers made him feel better about himself.

N/A seemed to change his perception of himself significantly from beginning of the semester to the end. He began the semester describing himself as "not a writer." He told me he hoped "to be good writer" at the end of the class, and that "[He was] hoping writing will be easy for me." By the end of the semester, N/A had changed his perception of seeing writing as a "big mountain" to seeing writing as an "art." Although he says he still feels "sad" when given a writing assignment, he now thinks writing "is the beautiful way to express my feelings." He, too, says the Framing Identities assignment was the most helpful to him in terms of growing as a

writer. N/A noted that this assignment helped him organize his writing more effectively and allowed him to "think to write."

But how did Lynne's perception her students change by the end of the semester? At the end of the semester, Lynne talked about some of the issues that affected her the most, one of which was requiring students to turn in assignments when they were due. She said that one of the biggest challenges was convincing students to complete their assignments and bring them to class on the due date. During the days I observed the class when an assignment was due, almost half of the class would say they did not have it ready, or they would ask Lynne if they could turn it in at some point after class. Students might also show her a page or two of the assignment and say they were not quite finished. In each instance, Lynne would grant an extension, typically telling students that if they delivered it to her office by 5 p.m. that day, she would not count it as late. After the semester ended, I asked her about things she might do differently in her class. She wrote:

> I would be stricter about deadlines and schedules. In trying to create a different atmosphere—one the students had never had because they had generally not done well in the more patriarchal systems—I wasn't quite as strict as the students expected (and needed) me to be. These particular students didn't respond well to this style as it is one that they could manipulate to their advantage, and they did. They needed much more structure than they had. The 2004 class responded very favorably to a less-structured environment. I made the mistake of assuming that since students enrolled in ENGL 10703/10803 had not been successful in a traditional system, that they would be successful in a different system.

Talking with Lynne at the beginning of the spring semester, which began the second semester continuation of the class, she told me she was already "much stricter with deadlines," noting that

because of this new approach, the students seemed to "have already produced better texts than they wrote late semester." She further noted, "I don't know that there is a correlation between turning the work in on time and producing "better texts." Part of the change is the new semester, and most of the students are finished with football. The students also notice the absence (failure) of one of their friends."

**Seeking to Understand the Disconnections**

Many of the questions I asked at the beginning of this chapter when I wrote about my friend Frank and his aversion to writing appeared during my observations of and communications with the students in the Introduction to Critical Writing class. I wondered how Frank's experiences in his first-year writing class had affected him as a writer. I questioned if he had been exposed to a community that valued writing, and if he had not been exposed to that, what role that might have on the formation of his identity as a writer.

I did and I did not see Frank in the Introduction to Critical Writing classroom.

I saw students who did not see themselves as writers ready to join a community. I saw a group of students who were asked and encouraged to join a community; most chose not to. Lynne modeled the idea and benefits of a community, but most of these students appeared to see little value in joining. They stayed disconnected. I saw an instructor who presented the value of writing to her students, but the students could not or chose not to understand that value. Lynne called these students "writers" from the beginning of the semester and continued to express that sentiment until the end of the term. Although some ended their semester saying that this class helped them to better see themselves as writers, most did not seem to change their sense of self or their approach toward writing. Their behaviors within the classroom best demonstrated that.

But when I started to revise this chapter and reread my observations, my view of this class began to change. I saw tensions that existed in the classroom, and what I had not seen when I wrote my initial draft was that forces other than what initially appeared on the surface were at work within the classroom. I had been so narrowly focused on what affected a student's identity as a writer that I missed some of the larger issues that now seem clearly visible. I stepped back to look at a student's identity formation, but then I began to see the role that race and culture played in this classroom and in the difficulty in forming a community. I had recognized the racial differences within the classroom from day one, but I had failed to think through how those differences would affect the dynamics within the classroom. Race and culture define individuals, but race and culture can create tensions between what the students do in the class and what the institution is asking them to do. That seemed to happen in this classroom. I did not deeply look at the clash of culture and how the role of the contact zone may have a significant impact on forming a community.

**Chapter 3**

**Messages and Screens**

I sat in a middle school classroom, tired after a long day of administering and judging University Interscholastic League writing contests. My eyes wandered around the room, noticing all the brightly colored posters and prompts that attempt to keep a young teen's attention focused on the topic at hand. The room's disarray brought back memories of my time in middle school: books wrapped in covers advertising a local bank, arranged haphazardly on the bookshelf; a coat absently left near the teacher's desk; and the teacher's space brimming with materials and pencils and tall stacks of papers from the first half of the semester. What most drew my attention were posters with positive, reinforcing slogans and sayings plastered across almost every inch of wall space. My eyes finally landed on a poster of a six-foot pencil stapled high on the wall. At the eraser end, "The Writing Process" was written in big, bold letters. Six steps were listed, all moving in a direct line to the point of the pencil: "Prewrite," "Compose," "Evaluate," "Revise" (next to it, someone had handwritten "fix it"), "Edit," and "Publish." Being a process-oriented writing teacher, I smiled, thinking that perhaps here was a class that focused on process theory. Yet below the pencil in BIG BOLD ALL CAPS hung a much larger poster that read EDITOR'S MARKS, with the pronounced message of the text focusing exclusively on error and mistakes. Another poster, titled "10 Great Reasons to Write," waited until number ten to announce: "Write to enjoy yourself."

My smile faded. Here, I thought, might be a one distinct disconnection point for student writers. Two messages vie for attention, but the larger one ultimately seems to win: Writing is about discovering and fixing error. And waiting until the last item on the "10 Great Reasons to Write" poster to announce that writing is one way to enjoy oneself seemed almost an afterthought – a positive spin to finish a list of writing reasons that were not likely to inspire

student-writers. Thinking about the students I was researching in the Introduction to Critical Writing Class, I began to wonder if the messages in the classroom spaces through which the students I was researching journeyed might serve as points where they began to move away from considering themselves writers. Fresh, a student I will highlight later in the chapter, told me during an interview that when he thought about his writing in middle and high school, all he remembered was that instructors would not comment on what he wrote, but they always pointed out construction and grammatical errors, never telling him what he was doing right. Is the focus on error so ingrained in students that they see themselves as unable to write because of that focus?

I glanced at the 8th grade students working diligently to finish their UIL Editorial Writing entries, and I knew that the other judges and I would grade these texts based on the final product, rarely discussing the process a particular student used to create his or her final text. We did not have time to get to know the students or how they created their works. When students would turn in their final papers, some would invariably ask if they needed to turn in their prewriting; I would always answer "no," saying that all we based our decisions on was the final product. Again, time worked against me. I was sometimes curious to see these drafts to understand how these writers arrived at the final product; however, I could not spend all day examining their process. I had to judge quickly. I knew we would focus on writing as a product, a noun; not as a process, a verb. To produce contest results rapidly, we would ignore the advice on the six-foot pencil. Where, I wondered, were the points in school that led students to begin to see themselves as writers? Where were the disconnection points, those markers that students experienced that moved them away from thinking about themselves as writers or having the ability to write? Was I sitting in a classroom, somehow complicit in negatively affecting students' sense of themselves as writers?

The chapter that follows attempts to delve deeper into what basic writing students say affects their sense of self as writers. More specifically this chapter explores how two students form their identities as writers by examining the writing, ideas, thoughts, and reflections of Angela and Fresh, students in TCU's Introduction to Critical Writing Class. These two students represent two distinct groups within this classroom setting. Angela was one of the non-athletes, a group of students who were taking this class on the recommendation of advisors who suggested it would help with problems or deficiencies someone somewhere found in their writing. Fresh represented the student-athletes in the room. This group – also advised into the class – comprised football and basketball players whose matriculation to the university was often based on their skills on the field or court, not in the classroom.

Although I focused on all the students within the class during my initial observations, I became increasingly interested in the experiences of this pair. I chose these two individuals for specific reasons: I selected Angela because she appeared to be outgoing in her personality, always ready to speak up in class and address issues that were being discussed. Her verbal skills and willingness to participate in a class that struggled to form a community indicated that she might value the course content. Early on, she told me that she really hoped this class would improve her writing. I also learned that Angela had self-identified as having "learning disabilities," a label placed on her earlier in academic life by "people who thought I learned differently." Angela told me that she was advised to take this class by her counselor *only after* she told her counselor that she had been diagnosed with learning disabilities. She wrote to me, "I was in the [advising] offices talking to my advisor and I was telling her how I had trouble with english and it would be my most difficult subject. They advised me to get into this class and I had no idea what I was getting into I just did what I was told." By semester's end, she said she

thought she could have taken and been successful in a regular first-year composition class, but now she was committed to staying for the two-semester class.

Fresh, a basketball player at TCU, was selected because he seemed different from his fellow student-athletes. Quiet, soft-spoken, and apparently introverted, Fresh would rarely volunteer information or participate in class discussions unless prompted by Lynne or other students. Yet when he did participate, his thoughtful perspectives usually brought refreshing insight to the class discussion. I was struck by Fresh since many times before class, I would observe him rapidly punching the keys of his mobile phone to send text messages, an activity that intrigued me since he had said, "I am not a writer." His first e-mail to me also had a strong impact on me. When I e-mailed a selected group of students to gauge their interest in further participating in my research, his well-worded response caught my attention. He said he would be "pleased to help me" and that he was "excited that you were interested in my writing." Unfortunately, by semester's end, Fresh was the only student not to pass the course. His failure in this course and two others led to benching on TCU's basketball team, an action that I know had a profound effect on him.

In order to allow each student's voice to clearly resonate within this text, I have attempted – as accurately as possible – to employ the language used by Angela and Fresh during interviews and in specific written responses. When incorporating their writing into this text, I decided to use both draft and final versions of their writing assignments to see if I could find specific instances in which these students wrote about how they saw themselves as writers within the classroom. Any misspellings or grammatical errors within their texts are verbatim. The thoughts, observations, or ideas expressed by Angela and Fresh during oral interviews are as close to accurate as I can reproduce. I depended upon transcripts I completed after interviews for

this data and periodically reviewed the specific tapes from the interviews to ensure the accuracy of their quotes.

**Listening to Angela**

> My life has always been split between two cultures. I am an Irish citizen making life work as an American citizen. School was difficult to fit in and then having peculiar expressions from another country added complications. I embraced my difference and molded it into my personality. If I had advice for anyone I would suggest not to erase what makes us different but to welcome it into our lives. Once I realized this was the key I stood out from the crowd no longer am I an Irish citizen trying to live as an American citizen. I am a proud dual Irish American citizen.

The above text was the final version of Angela's autobiographical haiku in which she writes about coming to terms with her identity as a dual citizen. This assignment, written early in the semester, prompted students to think about themselves in connection to their culture and identity, and asked students to write a 100-word text that would offer readers deeper insight into their lives. Angela focuses on her identity, one defined by two cultures and two geographies, making a connection with how differences or diversity enhances her experience both as an Irish and American citizen. She pointedly asks the reader not to erase but rather embrace the differences that make individuals unique. This text represents one of the first writing samples from Angela that I read, and its theme of identity intrigued me since that was the underlying focus of my research. Her ability to express how she felt about her identity continued to solidify my reasons for choosing Angela as one of the two students to examine for this project.

Angela came to TCU from Bishop Lynch High School, a private college preparatory institution in Dallas. As her haiku reveals, she holds dual citizenships, both a citizen of Ireland and the United States. Her parents were both born in Ireland, but the family spent the majority of Angela's childhood in Hollywood, Florida, later moving to Dallas. She has a significantly older brother who has left home and is working, and a younger sister who still lives at home in Dallas. She writes that she is the first one in her family to go to college in America and the first woman in her family to ever go to college. Both her father and mother, she notes, instilled in her the importance of a good education, hard work, and determination; on two different occasions, she noted that she often thinks back to a quote she remembers her father saying: "put your mind to it and you can do it."

When I first met Angela, she seemed an uncertain student in an uncertain classroom. Angela began the semester apparently hesitant to define herself as a writer; her responses to an initial questionnaire I asked all students in the class to complete suggested that writing was a difficult task for her. She was one of the 11 students mentioned in chapter 2 who described themselves as individuals who do not consider themselves writers. When asked to rate her apprehension toward writing on a scale with 1 describing little or no apprehension and 10 displaying significant apprehension towards writing, Angela selected 9, the highest number selected by any student in the ICW class. When asked what she thinks makes her apprehensive about writing, she simply said, "I find it difficult," a descriptor she used quite often throughout the questionnaire and in interviews we held later in the semester.  At the beginning of the semester, she noted she used writing in three ways: to write e-mails to friends and family; to text-message people from her cell phone; and to write texts for various college classes. Past experiences seemed to have played a significant role in forming her sense of self as a writer. Responding to a question about her positive or negative experiences with writing, she said, "I've

always been told I don't have writting skills," a quote I will unpack momentarily when I describe a specific event from her literacy autobiography.

In my questionnaire, I asked students to complete sentences from initial prompts followed by blank lines. "Difficult" was the term most repeated when I reviewed Angela's approach to and feelings about writing. She said: Writing is "a difficult task" and she views writing as "a difficult chore" that is not her "strong point." She specifically defined the act of writing as "[a] difficult way of expression on paper in words." When she thinks about writing, she feels particularly afraid of failure and she feels "frightened" and "stressed" when given a writing assignment. These responses suggest a strong negative inclination toward writing and how she views herself as a writer. Yet within her initial responses, data suggest she may see writing as a valuable tool. She views people who write as "amazing" and believes that people with writing skills "should teach me." She also thinks writing is valuable since it is "necessary to suceede."

By semester's end, Angela answered a similar questionnaire, and her responses seemed to indicate a slight change in her sense of self as a writer and her approach to the act of writing. She noted the Introduction to Critical Writing class had helped her writing, and she "now considers herself a writer" who is "competent" and finds it "moderately easy to express myself when I write." When asked to complete the same sentences from the beginning of the semester, her answers seemed to suggest a change in how she viewed herself. After the sixteen-week class, she now views writing as "easy, but feels like a chore." She notes that people who write are "intelligent" and that when she writes, she feels "intellectual." And she thinks writing is valuable because "it stimulates the mind," a more introspective response that her original response ("is necessary to succeede").

But some of her answers suggest she is still somewhat hesitant about writing and her relationship to the act. She still thinks that writing is hard, but it does not appear "as hard" as it did when she began the semester. She does not think writing is "exciting," and "failure" remains the key word she uses when she thinks of her fears of writing. Interestingly, she responded to "Writing does not_____ by writing "pass away the time," possibly suggesting her initial theme of writing being a time-engaging "chore." During an e-mail interview at the end of the semester, Angela discussed how she has changed as a writer because of the semester:

> I don't know if my level of writing has changed a whole lot, I have noticed a little bit of a higher level in my writing. But the way I form my papers and the use of framing is something I have never used. So how I approach a paper before I sit down to write it has changed alot since I first came to class. I have more confidence in myself as a writer. I suppose that is because we have so much practice with in the class before we turn in the final paper.

Even though she circled "This class has helped my writing and I now consider myself a writer" on her final semester questionnaire, her written responses to me indicate she is still unsure of herself as a writer. She writes: "I still don't know if I would call myself a writer though because I have not been exposed to any other english class. With in this class I feel like a writer but next year when I am in a regular english writing class I will see if I view myself as a writer more." In the next section, I will examine Angela's writing throughout the semester, incorporating my observations of her and items from our interviews to weave a better narrative of her experiences. By examining what she experienced between the two questionnaires, a better sense of how she changed (or did not change) her perception of herself as a writer will appear.

**"Reading is hard. Writing I can work my way through better."**

Angela's self-described experiences with literacy influenced how she looks at both reading and writing. She noted that her dad was instrumental in her educational pursuits, teaching her to read early in life since she wanted to "imitate" her father reading books on the weekends. In her literacy autobiography and during our discussions about reading and writing outside of class, she focused on reading with her father as the first positive literacy experience she remembers. As a small child, Angela said she and her dad would go to a bookstore together every week to pick out a new book, then return home and sit together to read the book aloud. When she enrolled in kindergarten, her teacher discovered she could read and she was asked to read books aloud to her classmates. She writes:

> I got to read aloud in kindergarten class as well as a first grade class above me. I remember my teacher would record my voice reading books, and many of my classmates were envious of me because I was taken out of class to read. … I think that at the time I did not realize that it was a positive experience that I was reading to my class; looking back on it, I realize it was an amazing feeling. This was such a big deal for me I felt so intelligent.

Her teacher's recording of her reading had a significant impact on her since no other student in her class was asked to read anything that was recorded. Periodically, she would be taken out of her kindergarten class so that she could read to first-graders, an act that she described vividly during our later interviews. She describes the reading she accomplished at this point in her life as "fun to do" and a "great way to bond with my father." As a child, her father read aloud to her, and she "learned to be just like my father" by reading aloud to her kindergarten class. These values expressed about reading by her father and inculcated in Angela indicate she views a

usefulness to reading within the classroom and as a tool to bond with her father as well as other individuals.

Yet her writing and our discussions about reading suggest that her orientation toward reading changed significantly after her kindergarten experiences. She writes that "Sadly that is about the last time I felt intelligent when I read." She now says she does not like to read and finds reading assignments "dull and uninteresting." During her sophomore year in high school, her class was assigned the *Odyssey,* a work she said she had trouble understanding. "It was a difficult to read. And we had to write papers about it. Since I had no idea what was going on in the book, I couldn't write papers about it. I don't know how I made it through my sophomore year." She also experienced difficulty understanding *Lord of the Flies*. "I could never make it through all the novels. That was the hardest part for me." Her journey through educational settings seemed to influence her view toward reading: she said she now reads "rarely," and that reading typically involves religion or English textbooks.

At some point in her school career, Angela was diagnosed with a "learning disability" and that label has followed her through school and into this particular classroom. She says she has always been unsure exactly what that meant except that "people have told me I learn differently" than other students. She identifies reading or completely understanding a text as her most difficult challenge, often presenting stumbling blocks to completing a writing assignment. As I noted earlier, she found high school readings challenging in that she was usually unable to complete the reading assignments and, therefore, had trouble writing papers that covered longer texts. Angela seemed hesitant to talk at length about her "disability," expressing a reluctance to go into detail. She did, however, mention to Lynne that she had a learning disability, who, in turn, mentioned that fact to me at three different points during the semester when we were discussion various students' progression. That label probably affected Angela's impression of

herself as a student, but her reluctance to discuss the issue made me hesitant to press her for more information.

Even though some of her high school teachers discouraged her by telling her that she did not have the ability to write (an idea I will examine in detail in the next section) Angela appeared to use writing as a means to succeed within the high school classroom. When given a choice of test types, Angela said she always chose a nonobjective, essay-answer test. She explained that in her high school history courses, students had the option to take either multiple-choice objective tests or more subjective, long-answer or essay exams. She told me,

> I never took the multiple-choice tests when I had an option. I always took the essay tests because I could always get my thoughts out better that way. I remember I was the only one in my class who *always* took the essay tests. When I have choices in objective tests, I begin to second-guess myself. I know concepts more than I know facts, so I can express myself better.

Angela's choice to take what some may perceive to be the "harder test" of the essay exam may signal that she feels more comfortable with relating to concepts by analyzing ideas through writing rather than reciting facts from memory. During one of our interviews, she talked about how understanding the concepts was more important to her than remembering mere facts. "It's important to know what is going on so that you can apply those concepts and ideas to other situations." Her mature viewpoints on applying concepts to different situations did not resonate with me until I began to compile this section of the chapter. Ultimately, I found Angela's focus on relating concepts to "other situations" appeared to signal evolving critical thinking skills she seemed to be developing through employing writing as a tool to communicate.

**"My teacher told me I didn't have the skills to write."**

Angela positions herself within her literacy autobiography as a student who is profoundly influenced by her teachers, and it shows how she views the impact of teachers on a student's perceptions of self. Her first paper for the Introduction to Critical Writing class, titled "Literacy Shaping Our Minds and Personalities," begins with "Teachers can be the most influential people in ones academic life. Teachers can build your confidence and work towards being a good academic writer, but in a heart beat they can tear down all confidence in academics." Her literacy assignment asked students to reflect upon and analyze their literacy experiences and write about specific positive and negative experiences that connect to a larger point they want to make about language, literacy, culture, and identity. Like many of the students in the ICW class, Angela used this paper as a vehicle to explore her personal experiences with writing within an academic setting.

Angela began her paper by focusing on how a specific negative literacy experience had an effect on her as a writer. She noted that her English teacher during her junior year in high school had the most profound negative impact on her as a writer, writing that it is "amazing how just one person can influence your life negatively." During this teacher's class, she had been assigned a research paper on John Wayne, a subject that interested her. "For the first time ever I was excited to write a paper for school," she wrote. "Procrastination was not an option for me I was going to write this paper and write it well." She describes bringing drafts to class for peer review and for her instructor, who told her that she "was heading for an 'A' on this paper." As part of this project, students were asked to make an oral presentation and create a visual representation depicting the subject of their research. Angela writes that she created a Hollywood stage depicting "the Duke's" movies and the different eras that defined his life. After her presentation, she turned in her writing assignment, writing in her literacy paper that her "heart raced with excitement and anticipation" at the thought of how much she had worked on the text

and how proud she felt. Yet when her text was returned, she received a "72%" on her paper, a disappointing blow to her self-esteem as a writer. "The even more disheartening part [was] that right next to my 72% there was a 98% written and marked out in red ink, and I could not figure out why my grade could change to a 72% from an 'A.'"

As if this initial experience were not negative enough for her, she writes that when she scheduled an appointment with her teacher to discuss her low grade her teacher told her she had misplaced four commas within her text that caused her grade to drop from an "A" to a "C." When she and her teacher began reviewing her paper, Angela said that her teacher began to find additional errors and suggested they stop looking at the paper; otherwise, she might lower the grade even further. A final blow during this meeting, Angela noted, was that her teacher ended their conversation telling Angela that she "did not possess the ability to write." Angela told me that the teacher did not offer anything positive about her John Wayne paper, a text she was enormously proud to have written.  "No one should be told that they do not have the ability to write especially by a teacher," Angela wrote in her literacy experiences paper. "Unfortunately, I have had too many run-ins with teachers who used their ability to tear down my confidence. Most of my high school career I had been told that I was a weak writer. Sadly, I allowed that to be a barrier and define how I saw myself as a writer."

But an experience during her senior year helped her begin to overcome that "barrier" to visualizing herself as a writer. The positive literacy experience, she explained in her text, changed her sense of herself as a writer. While preparing applications for colleges, she wrote an essay to use during the application process. She writes,

It was that time of year when I was applying to colleges, TCU in particular. I began to stress because I was under the impression that I could not properly write a paper. I worked hard to get my [entrance essay] perfect. I had so many friends

and family members working with me to make sure I did not make any horrible

mistakes. I really learned the importance of revising and getting other people to

look at my work.

Within "a few months," Angela received her acceptance letter from TCU. "I was ecstatic. At this point, no one could stop me; I was invincible." She wrote that she began to think if TCU liked her essay, "maybe other organizations would appreciate what I had to say." She revised her essay and entered it in multiple essay competitions. In one competition, the East Field College Literary Arts contest, her essay, titled *Two Countries, Two Cultures, One Angela[13]*, won. She writes,

As I was sitting in the room among many other brilliant writers I realized that I

finally made it. My Mom and [a] family friend attended the ceremony with me;

my dad was out of town and could not attend. Never did I imagine that I would be

sitting awaiting recognition for an essay I wrote. The founder decided to read a

few entries that impressed him. He read about four selections and then on his fifth

it sounded rather familiar. I realized that it was my essay and I was so ecstatic. I

was actually getting my work read by a scholar who was impressed by what I did.

At that moment, my barrier was broken, and I over came my fear of writing.

She notes that when she went to the front of the room to accept her award, her junior-year English teacher – the one who had told her in no uncertain terms that she was not a writer – was present and congratulated her on winning the contest. "It felt so good because I conquered what I was told all my life that I was not a good writer."

---

[13] I changed her name to use her pseudonym in the title of her original essay.

**Messages in the College Classroom**

Angela's entrance into a college English classroom appears to have had a positive effect on her as a writer. "This class is the first time ever that an English class is going well for me," she told me during our mid-semester interview. She says she cannot identify why she has that feeling, but thinks the class is easier because of its slow-paced nature. Angela describes the character of the class and says that even though she thinks it is going too slowly, it is helping her writing. "It's totally driving me crazy, but it works out in the end. Taking all that time is really mundane, but I can see that during that time, my papers are getting much better than if I wrote it the first week and submitted it then." Angela's frustration with the time it takes to complete one unit is evident in our discussions, but she continues to point to how it seems to improve her writing. She said that when the class gets to the end of a unit, what she has produced is "so much better than when I started." When I asked if she felt she was a better writer at mid-semester, she initially said she could not tell a difference in her writing; however, her comments would change as we discussed the process-driven nature of the first unit, saying that "yes, my writing is improving."

Instructor's comments on her writing are still having an impact on Angela. The final draft of her literacy autobiography received a "B-" from Lynne and included positive and negative comments as well as marks to indicate grammatical corrections. Lynne's responses on the final paper's rubric were predominately positive in nature. She noted four "Excellent" designations for Angela's work, and three "Good" remarks. But it was the low "B" and the "Poor" designation for "Material is organized logically" that most concerned Angela. She said during an interview, "I thought my paper was better than a B-," and told me she read other students' papers, many of which, she noted, "were not near as good as hers." The "Poor" designation for her material's organization confused her since she only found one comment written on her paper where Lynne

suggested an organizational change of the essay. Lynne's end comment suggested that "In your revision, work on organization and mechanical issues." This paper was Angela's first major college-level writing experience and she said she was not sure how it would be graded; however, she told me she revised and resubmitted her text under Lynne's revision policy to see if she could have her grade raised. Her revised paper received an "A-" with the comment "much better organization" highlighted on the first page.

By the time she finished her second major project for the ICW class, Angela's grades as well as her writing appeared to be improving according to Lynne's comments. This assignment, in which students analyzed a family photograph to generate meaning about families, identities, cultural practices, and beliefs, was interesting to Angela. "I liked working on this one because I was able to talk about my family and their importance to me." Angela appeared to take advantage of the extended time within each unit by creating multiple drafts of her paper, with changes between her first and second drafts being significant not only in grammatical corrections but in the synthesis and inclusion of information as well. Her text focused on a photograph with her siblings perched upon rocks in front of the ocean during Christmas 2001. Angela relates this Christmas experience through the aftermath of the events of September 11th and how this was the first Christmas her family had spent in the United States as opposed to being with extended family in Ireland. What struck me most about this work was Angela's growing presence within her text. I had noticed in her earlier writings that her sense of self within her texts seemed to be emerging, yet within this text her presence was quite strong, a bolder, more powerful sense of herself coming through her text. Her text exuded more confidence. She wrote quite passionately about her family and their relationships to each other. Her descriptions of events and settings were keenly written. Although she still suffered some grammatical errors within her text and Lynne pointed out that she could "work a bit on transitions," Angela seemed to be growing in her

confidence to write papers for this class. She had little trouble describing her siblings and how they relate to each other as a family unit. But more importantly, she seemed to understand how to connect their experiences as a family to a larger cultural issue – how September 11th affected lives. By making this link, Angela began to create connections in her writing to events beyond those that she viewed as so personal.

**Speaking Aloud and Writing in Silence**

Angela's ease with speaking and participating in a classroom setting captured my attention, and Lynne commented in a late-semester letter to her that she "really like[s] your willingness to speak out in class. Your perspective is very different from many of your peers, so we could learn a lot from you." Throughout the semester, I observed Angela many times taking the initiative to speak first during open discussions. As I discussed in chapter 2, the class appeared to struggle to bond as a "community," and Angela said that the lack of participation by other students bothered her. "I get tired of the silence some time in that class," she said. "If I say something that's wrong, it doesn't matter. Sometimes I don't want to say anything or want someone else to talk." As one of three female students in the class, Angela spoke (and was asked to speak) much more often than her female peers, and she readily participated when asked. I did not keep a running tally of which students participated the most, but Angela was by far one of the most verbal students in the class. During the two days I observed the class when Angela was not present, Lynne seemed to have more trouble engaging the students in conversation; however, my intent focus on Angela's participation during discussions may have influenced my observations and memory of those days.

Angela told me that she sees a distinct difference between speaking in public and writing in private. She says she does not fear speaking in front of a group, even when she is reading her

own writing aloud; however, the act of writing causes her anxiety. During our interview discussions about speaking in front of a group, she told me: "I never had a problem getting up and talking in front of a group of people. But when I have to sit down and write a paper, it's bad." She acknowledged that many people have a fear of public speaking, but that has never been an issue for her, noting that her ability to speak in public yet having trouble writing sometimes makes her feel "backwards." She noted she thinks writing is much harder for her because "Writing is more personal than speaking," a comment that suggests she recognizes a marked difference between the two acts. She presents a dichotomy when discussing reading her work aloud: "I don't mind reading [my work] out loud. But when someone else reads my writing out loud I get real nervous." As described earlier, Angela was excited when a "scholar" read her work in the presence of a group, suggesting that the person reading her work and the situation in which the reading occurs makes a significant difference to how she defines herself as a writer.

**Angela's Final Writing Assignment and Final Grade**

> Throughout this course I have learned many things about writing, and about myself as a writer. As I sit down to write I have a history that I bring to the table. My experiences in life shine through in my work. The hardest challenge for me is to make my experiences significant to my audience. Keeping this tactic in mind, I attempt to work hard and make my writing mean something to my audience.

So begins Angela's final exam writing for the ICW class. Within this five-page, handwritten text, Angela explores how her writing has changed over the past semester and how her impression of herself as a writer has changed. This assignment asked students to reflect upon and analyze their writing experiences during the previous semester – both the actual products they produced and the processes they went through to create their drafts and finals products.

They were then asked to build a common theme or idea through which the reader could see how the creation of these texts and their accompanying experiences shaped or changed their personal views about writing.

Angela mentions all three major writing assignments and breaks down the most important items she learned through each of the experiences. She writes that through her first essay, the writing assignment that asked her to explore her positive and negative literacy experiences and how they shaped her ideas about writing, she "learned that I can't just tell a story, but I have to think about who I am telling my story to. Keeping the audience in mind helps to make my literacy experience valid to my audience." She made the distinct connection between writer and audience, which allowed her to think from multiple perspectives as she wrote. At the end of the semester, Angela told me that recognizing the audience's role in writing changed her as a writer because "I have to think more about them" when creating and writing her text. She notes that her unit 1 essay did not change her as a writer until she began writing her next unit; then, she "began to see growth." Angela did not specifically elaborate on how she would describe growth or what she meant by that statement, but during her final exam analysis of the role of audience, she writes that she began to think about how keeping the audience in mind helps her better connect her experiences with her readers. She says she "grew very much as a writer" not during the act of writing, but when she began to think about those connection points that occur between writer and reader.

Earlier, I discussed how Angela connected her family's Christmas experiences to the larger issue surrounding the events of September 11th. During her final exam, she described having no idea how to begin writing her essay in which she analyzed her family photo. But the time she took to think about what to say ("how much can one really write about a picture?") allowed her to see her family photo, then look "through the photo" to images "behind the ink" so

that she could "describe what you could not see." She begins to make the rhetorical move of positioning her family's photo as significant to her audience by connecting her family photo to something beyond her family. Within her original essay, she explored how her thoughts about her family were connected to the events of September 11th and how the events of that day changed Christmas family traditions for her family. By employing this rhetorical device, she believes she developed this into a "well-written essay" that vividly connected her to her reader through her understanding of how the reader would react to her text.

In her final exam essay, Angela wrote about meeting with Lynne before every major writing assignment was due, and the impact of revising her text during the drafting process. "I learned the importance of revision and took full advantage of the opportunity to improve my writing" beyond learning where and how to fix her "problems with commas." As I noted earlier during our conversations, the idea that the class took too much time to create texts for each unit surfaced frequently, but she touches on the idea that time plays a role in creating a written text. Angela admitted to me that whenever a text was due in class, she invariably wrote the assignment the night before; however, since each text passed through multiple drafts, she said that her papers were "so much better" than if she had only worked on them once, then turned them in. She writes that even though she "struggles to make her experiences significant to others," the first thing she thinks about now when she begins the writing process is the role the audience plays.

Finally, Angela admitted that her fears about writing have lessened because of her experiences within the classroom. "In the beginning, I would never consider myself a writer but now the thought of writing does not frighten me," she concludes in her final essay. Answering e-mail questions at the end of the semester, Angela says she still would not consider herself a writer "because I have not been exposed to any other English class." Within the context of the

ICW class, she views herself as a writer perhaps because she now feels herself part of a community; however, she notes that it will not be until next year when she is in a "regular English writing class" that her impressions of herself a writer may change.

**Listening to Fresh**

Fresh, a first-year, African American student, came to TCU on a basketball scholarship from Cedar Hill High School in West Dallas, noting in his initial writing to Lynne that he "was an unfortunate child that understood the true meaning of poor!" He grew up in the Oak Cliff neighborhood, the son of a single mother with two other brothers. Oak Cliff is an older, urban neighborhood with a diverse population. A suburb of Dallas, Oak Cliff is indicative of many struggling cities in that its economy does not seem to be able to generate adequate opportunity for its residents; as a result, many residents must take lower-paying jobs or commute greater distances for other work opportunities. Fresh describes his motivation to succeed in school as directly related to wanting a better life for his three-month-old daughter and a nephew. Fresh hesitated to provide me additional information about himself or his background, and he continued to steer me away from questions I asked about his history and the circumstances he experienced before coming to TCU. I did not press as I assumed I would receive more information from the texts he produced from this class. Fresh's quiet nature contrasted with Angela's verbal acuity, and his quiet personality may be one factor that influences his sense of self as a writer.

Like Angela, Fresh began the semester uncertain of himself as a writer. He said he found it difficult to express himself in writing and feels that "elaboration" is one of the key items that he identifies as needing the most work in his writing. He noted that he hoped to learn "proper writting skills and techniques" as a part of this course. Similar to Angela, Fresh completed the

initial questionnaire's sentences about writing with a primarily negative tone. Fresh wrote that writing is "boring" and that it does not interest him. He feels "pressured" when he writes and "disturbed" when he is given a writing assignment. He is also afraid of not staying on topic when he writes his compositions. In completing the sentence "Writing does not _____," he wrote, "interest me." Interestingly, like Angela, Fresh used the exact same word, "amazing," to describe people who write and says a writer has "well arranged, has well-organized thoughts, and can be very descriptive about minute things." When he wrote about his literacy experiences, he says he does not possess these characteristics, and that learning how to organize his thoughts would help him become a better writer. He views writing as "an expression of feeling and thoughts" and says that it serves as "a tool to communicate thoughts." This focus on writing as an emotional expression became a theme within his work.

One of Fresh's first formal writing assignments in this class focused on his literacy experiences. The unit, titled "Literacy and Identity," asked students to ultimately "Write an essay in which you explore your history as a reader and writer. … Select important events based on some larger point you want to make about language, literacy, community, and identity. Your goal as a writer is to enable the reader to enter your experience and to understand its significance." This unit broke down writing assignments into heuristical chunks to help the student view the unit as a writing process, not merely a finished writing product. It included various steps each writer had to accomplish to render a finished paper. Steps included writing an autobiographical haiku, creating definitions of literacy, learning how to incorporate examples into narratives, answering questions about literacy in relation to self, analyzing why a particular literacy event is significant, peer review of final paper drafts, and synthesizing data into a final written draft. Students had approximately one month to finish the process and complete their final paper.

In reviewing the items Fresh wrote for this unit, I was struck by his choice not to complete some of the assigned components of the unit. I could not find his autobiographical haiku, described as a text of fewer than 100 words that provides readers insight into the writer's life. Nor were his definitions of literacy apparently submitted. Fresh did, however, complete the positive and negative literacy examples that included his exploration of literacy in relation to himself, and a text that analyzed why particular literacy examples appeared significant to him. I observed him participating in the peer review process for this paper. He seemed to take time to read two of his fellow students' papers, but I did not see him writing many comments on these papers. His final paper for the unit, turned in after the deadline, received a "C." Lynne included a rubric and wrote comments directly on his text, noting some errors, but many times posing questions for Fresh to consider.

In writing about his literacy experiences, Fresh noted that he has had more negative experiences than positive, saying that "ignorance" of the correct way to write has played a significant role in his literacy experience. He writes,

> Improper teaching of the correct way to do something is a common reason for failing. If you don't know how to kick a field goal you're going to miss and if you don't know how to shoot free throws you will miss them. The same counts for writing. If a person doesn't know the proper way to write a sentence or paragraph he or she is going to fail at writing a sentence, paragraphs, and inevitably papers.

Fresh said that he thinks his teachers played a role in his lack of ability to write: "Not being properly taught could essentially hold me back from a lot of acceleration in my writing." In a text produced later in the semester, he would write that "At a younger age it was harder to write because I felt as if [writing] was a punishment or duty," indicating that he views writing and possibly his previous writing teachers through a negative lens. When I asked him about his most

recent high school teachers, he described them as not seeming to focus on how to teach students to write. He noted they seemed to be more interested in "our taking and passing tests" instead of writing. He remembers writing short responses to readings in high school, but most of those responses were only a page or two, and he said the readings were "not very interesting to me." When asked about his most recent grades in high school on writing assignments, he noted that he usually averaged a "B-" but added, "I'm not sure they really read my writing that much." When teachers did comment on his work, he noted that most of the comments dealt with grammatical errors and misspellings, and that little comment was ever made about the actual content of his writing.

In his literacy text, Fresh points to an example in his 5$^{th}$ grade classroom that had a negative effect on him as a writer. He was told to write a paper on zoo animals, with the students writing the best papers from the class rewarded with a trip to the zoo. His paper was not selected. He did not say what he thought of the composition he produced or how his teacher viewed his writing. He wrote that "experiencing this at such a young age crushed me," but later noted that the experience "alter[ed] my perception of schoolwork" and "encouraged me to work harder in the future." This negative experience followed by a positive future stance is a theme that seems to appear throughout his writing and during interviews we conducted throughout the semester. Fresh would note a negative encounter, then follow that description by a message that indicated that he hoped that experience would help him in some fashion. In terms of his writing, this theme may suggest that he sees some value in writing if he feels he can acquire the tools needed to write "more correctly." By positioning himself as merely a receiver of "not properly being taught" as he does at the beginning of this assignment, Fresh may be suggesting that if he had experiences with teachers who more effectively taught writing, he might view himself as a better writer at this point in his educational career.

When he turns to his positive literacy experience within his assignment, it is one that combines writing and speaking. Running for 8th grade class president, Fresh created posters with slogans and had to prepare a "meaningful speech" to give in front of the entire student body. He noted he stayed up "the entire night before [the speech]" writing, but was unable to create a speech "that I was pleased with." He described himself as being "terribly uncomfortable" and his actual speech as a "shaky presentation," yet he was pleased with the outcome: at the conclusion of his speech, students "clapped and cheered for me … I felt as if I had already won the election." Fresh does not tell the reader if he won the election, but by describing a positive event in which he combined writing and speaking to a "successful" conclusion, Fresh may be signaling that at that moment in his literacy history he saw value in the act of reading his writing.

Lynne's reaction to his first major writing assignment appeared more positive than negative. Of the 12 items included in her rubric, five were marked as "Good"; three were marked "Fair." Four items were marked as "Poor." Her handwritten comments were distinctly positive, though she did mark some obvious grammatical errors and organizational deficiencies. The most prominent comment on the first part of his paper asked him if it were possible to "blame *teachers* for all the negative literacy experiences" that had occurred during his educational experiences (original emphasis). By asking Fresh to think beyond what he had written, Lynne appeared to ask him to further analyze his literacy experiences, to stretch past how he felt about the experience to connect it to a larger issue within society or culture. The comments she places at the end of his text, "Good start, Fresh!" display a rhetorical move to suggest that his text was a work-in-progress. She praises him for his literacy examples, yet she notes a sense of surprise that he did not "incorporate more of the grammar/mechanical suggestions from our conference." She gently admonishes him to pay more attention to these errors when correcting his future texts. But by

focusing more on positive suggestions than an intent focus on error, Lynne may be working to build Fresh's confidence in himself as a writer.

**"Where I'm From": Revealing More About His Past**

During our mid-semester interview, Fresh talked at length about how the "Where I'm From" in-class writing assignment impacted his ability to write. This assignment, described in detail in chapter 1, asked students to fill in nouns and adjectives about their past to create a sense of their individual history. He said that when he was first handed the assignment, he did not know what to do or how to complete it. "I asked Lynne if I was doing it right because I was afraid that I wasn't. I wanted to make sure I was filling it in right. She told me to just write the first things that came to mind." When I described my problems with filling out the sheet, he said he experienced the same thing until all of a sudden something "clicked." "After I got into it, it was kind of neat." How it sounded when he began to read back through it made a distinct impression on him. "When the other students read theirs, it sounded really cool. When I looked back at mine, I found a way to fill in some of the blanks that I had left blank after listening to other people read their sheet." His final typed "Where I'm From" sheet revealed more about his community and self-image:

> I am from gold chains, slabs, and big bodies, (Large cars) I am from the jungle, krunk, wild, and dangerous. I am from the Oak trees and steep cliffs. I'm from gambling and hustling. From Butah Man and Low Key. I'm from loyal and fake. From being strong and never scared. I'm from Baptist. I'm from Oak Cliff and West Dallas. I'm not a statistic, I'm my own man. I am from the home of the brave.

But a personal "Where I'm From" was only one final submission. He also included a text written to describe his educational history. Titled simply "Education," he wrote:

> I am from study guides, tutors, and academic advisors. I am from long nights, tests, quizzes, and term papers. I am from the tall trees and colorful flowers. I'm from the student center and the recreations center. I am from Neil Doughtery and David Cason. I'm from the weird and the curious. I'm from studying and passing. I'm from Baptist. I'm from Ronald E. McNair Elementary School and Cedar Hill High School. I'm from running if you don't get your study hall hours. I'm from Texas Christian University.

These texts suggest that Fresh perceives a certain structure in his neighborhood and community, and within that structure, he clearly sees himself situated. Writing about his environment may also point to how he views and filters the world. His neighborhood and life outside of formal education suggest an urban setting, one much like images portrayed in contemporary movies and songs about life in inner-city neighborhoods.

His "Education" text begins by describing structures that support students. His focus on the first three items, "study guides, tutors, and academic advisors," may describe how he sees himself in relation to schooling in general. By noting things or individuals who have helped him with school, he may be layering his earlier idea that "improper teaching" led him to acquire other support mechanisms (study guides and tutors) to help him be successful in school. "Long nights, tests, quizzes, and term papers" created an image of Fresh "cramming" facts and ideas into his head in order to pass his classes. The act of remembering and then grouping "long nights" with "tests, quizzes, and term papers" may signal specific behaviors Fresh employs as a strategy during his schooling. If one "crams," then takes and passes a test or succeeds in writing a paper that receives a passing grade, one has become successful within an educational setting.

What I find interesting about Fresh's "Where I'm From" assignment is how he described its value in connection to the writing assignment he was completing concurrently. He said that by being able to think about how to complete his "Where I'm From" sheet, it "freed him" to write better on the main paper for this unit, the "Framing Identities" assignment. That writing assignment, one in which students analyze a family photograph to generate meaning about families, identities, cultural practices, and beliefs, had been assigned before the "Where I'm From" exercise. Fresh noted that he had been struggling to write anything about his chosen photo because "very little came to my mind when I looked at my photo. That green sheet really made me think about what I was writing because I suddenly wanted to write about where I'm from and where my family is from." The in-class "Where I'm From" assignment appeared to serve as a "primer" for Fresh to think and write about himself and his family. It helped him generate ideas and images of himself so that he could begin thinking more about his family and how to write about their identity. Using primers like the "Where I'm From" allowed the students in the class to make meaning about themselves that they could transfer to their longer texts.

For his framing identity paper, titled "Mi Familia," Fresh did not choose a photograph that included his mother, brothers, or any blood relative; instead, he selected a photo showing him with three friends with whom he played basketball during high school. He describes them as his family "because of our similar upbringing and everyday life experiences." That shared experience "brings something different to the family which makes our family strong." He describes their years growing up together and how they would help each other, looking out for and getting each other out of trouble. He wrote using an extremely personal tone, but failed in one major aspect of the paper: In the original instructions for writing this paper, students were asked to include one outside reference in order to "contextualize your claims in some way,

offer[ing] your reader insight into larger cultural forces and phenomena." His inability or reluctance to include outside materials or sources may reveal how he views himself as a writer. When he would later write about the idea of incorporating other's writing or ideas into his text, he says that introducing another voice or presence in his writing disturbs him. "I try not to use quotes or other peoples views for my papers because I feel its my paper. I also feel that my paper is art work that I have painted for another to come along and either love it or hate it." He does not seem to recognize that one goal of writing within the college classroom is incorporating the ideas of others within a text as a means to enter an ongoing conversation or create new thoughts or ideas.

**Understanding Fresh Through Journaling, Text Messaging, and Confidence**

Reading Fresh's journal offers a glimpse into how he views himself as a writer and how he seems to use writing. At the beginning of the semester, Lynne asked that all students keep an online journal so that they could reflect upon issues and topics that she would give them throughout the semester. She told them that they would sometimes be given specific topics to write about and sometimes they would be free to write about any topic they chose. Her only requirements: students could not hit the delete or backspace buttons or attempt to correct their work in any way. Fresh's first three journal entries appeared to be personal reflections, two based on specific prompts given by Lynne, one considered a "free" journal entry to write about anything the student chooses. The three topics included responding to Anne Lamott's "Shitty First Draft" essay, writing about individual activities that students participated in over a given weekend, and a topic that was "free" in that students could write about whatever they wished. Each of Fresh's entries was similar in length, averaging 140 words each, with a predominance of the use of "I" as a subject. Fresh's opinion of "Shitty First Drafts" was that it was not a hard text

to read and understand. He briefly described her text, then immediately turned these ideas inward to discuss how he writes. He noted that "when trying to do something as difficult as writting and expressing yourself," some exercises help him create texts more than others. As an example, he said that being in an environment surrounded by "stuff that I like such as food, pictures, people, and object" makes it easy for him to write. This focus on "stuff that I like" as tools to give him ideas from which to write may suggest that his confidence in himself as a writer stems from things in his life that he understands and is certain about. Within his "free" journal entry, he immediately wrote about things that appear to be close to him: playing basketball ("the basketball season starts in exactly 64 days!"), his mom coming to his basketball games ("my number one fan"), and his daughter ("she will enjoy her Daddy shooting, dribbling, and passing"). When he writes about the things that are closest to him or about things that he identifies with, Fresh constructs active, easily flowing simple sentences. When read aloud, his work seems to be constructed as if he were writing his voice on paper. His third journal entry focused on watching the TCU football team win against Oklahoma, a pivotal game during the season. He wrote a narrative about his activities during and after the game in active declarative sentences, vividly recalling details about "jumping in the fountain to celebrate" and running through the main cafeteria screaming and shouting. I did not ask him about these three entries specifically, but through reading them, I deduced that his interest in the topics likely allowed him to write easily and freely, since he was actually writing about his own experiences.

His September 20 entry, however, seems to display a shift in his ability to communicate. Titled "Focus," students were asked to define what "focus" meant to them and to create examples of the term. This entry was half the length of the first three journal entries, and he seemed to have more difficulty writing his thoughts clearly. He begins by writing: "Focus is conentration. Concentration is used mainly thought things that need focusing." But his next

sentence suggests that he recognizes he is having difficulty communicating his ideas: "Let me explain myself." He then employs an example of tasks that do not require focus ("breathing is involuntary"), then notes that drawing a stick figure requires less focus than a "detailed picture of Mickey Mouse." He ends the entry comparing the higher need for concentration on an essay test than that required for a multiple-choice test. Writing about an abstract idea like "focus" appears to be less engaging or harder for Fresh because it requires him to produce ideas rather than recall experiences. Comparing this entry to his first three entries may indicate that his ease with writing stems from his familiarity with the subject. He easily writes about playing basketball, his mother, and other specific topics, but when given a more abstract idea, Fresh seems to struggle to find the words he needs to use to adequately communicate his ideas. He may also be having trouble conceptualizing and formulating abstract ideas.

During our conversations, Fresh noted he likes to write about things that interest him but did not like to write about things in which he had no investment. His journal entries seem to reflect this attitude. When asked to write about a situation in which an Air Force Academy football coach made an apparent racial statement about TCU football players, Fresh wrote his longest journal entry of the semester (197 words). This entry moves from the specific statement made by the coach to Fresh's interpretation of its meaning. He wrote that team members are "all the same color" when they are wearing the same uniforms. He then said that the coach may have made a mistake, but this mistake is "just like everyone else does." This journal entry, completed around the halfway point in the semester, seems to display a small turn in how Fresh writes about things beyond himself. He appears to be a little more able to discuss an external concept, writing about how he internalizes the issue, then connect his thoughts on the idea back to a larger issue.

Beyond writing for school, Fresh employs writing almost daily through his use of text messaging. When I first met him, he had just finished sending multiple text messages before

class began. At the end of class, he immediately opened his phone to check his text messages. When I casually asked him how often he sends text messages, he replied "All the time." Responding to initial questions about how often he uses writing, Fresh noted that sending text messages was one of the ways he used writing every day. "I think that text messaging has made me a better writer," he told me during an interview at mid-semester. "You have to describe what you're talking about quickly." However, he later said that using text messaging is not really writing, noting that he sees it as a form of talking to friends in a different way than on the phone. "I text message people all the time. What you have to watch for in talking with them through text messaging is the tone of the message. The person receiving the message doesn't know your tone and they can't see you to know," suggesting that Fresh is contemplating his audience as he writes his text-messages. An interesting comment he made about text messaging involved using punctuation. He noted that the only punctuation he used in text messaging was the question mark to let someone know that what he was writing was a question, not a statement. Fresh apparently recognizes the rhetorical situation within text messaging since he understands that by using a question mark, his "readers" will better understand what he is trying to communicate.

While in the Introduction to Critical Writing class, Fresh said that he began to notice a difference between high school and college writing. In high school, most of his writing involved writing a paper about a book or another assigned text he had read. He said he usually received a "B-" on most of his writing assignments but noted "I rarely found what I was read was interesting." In high school, most of the writing that Fresh completed appeared to be about texts or events abstracted from himself or texts in which he felt he was not present. During our conversations about high school writing, I sensed that he rarely felt connected to what he was reading or the writing he was producing. But the writing he was completing in college thus far was very different. "The first few things we've done in Lynne's class deals with writing

something about myself. My writing is getting better because of that." By writing about himself and reading what others are writing about themselves, Fresh notes that he can quickly see that some people seem to enjoy writing and other people do not. "I've read other people's papers. Some of them don't seem to be liking [the class] but other people are," Fresh said. "Writing about the stuff you know about makes you able to fall into it better. I feel like I can know this stuff. It's all good."

During the first month of class, Fresh said he had a paragraph assignment (he could not remember the specific assignment at the time) and that Lynne's comments on his text made him feel better as a writer. When he began this class, he was unsure how people would react to his writing. "I was worried how people would take my writing. Would they get what I was trying to say? What if they didn't understand what I was trying to say? But Lynne commented on how much she liked my paper. That made me feel good. She told me this paragraph was better than what I had written [before] because there were fewer errors." Fresh also said this paragraph was one he had to read aloud to the class, and doing that made him nervous. At the beginning of the semester, he described the act of reading his work aloud as making him feel "weird," a statement I asked him about later in the semester. "I still don't like reading my writing out loud. I don't really care if someone reads my writing, but when I read it out loud it makes me feel weird or different."

In two interviews, Fresh expressed how confidence in his writing has a big impact on him. During our first interview, he told me his confidence in his ability to write was not very strong when he came to TCU. "I wrote in high school and it was all good, but when I came to TCU, I was not confident in writing at all. I didn't think I could write like they wanted me to write." At the beginning of the semester, he did not identify that building his confidence was one of the main things he wanted to achieve in the class (he had noted that "hand writting" and

"elaboration" were the two main things he wanted to learn from the class), but his focus on building his confidence in his writing appeared to be a growing goal for him. At mid-semester, he noted, "Confidence changes my whole point of view. When I feel confident, I write better. This class is helping build my confidence, but I still don't see myself as a writer."

**Final Exams, Final Grades, and Failure**

As I discussed earlier in regards to Angela, the class' final exam required students to write about their beliefs on the significance of writing now that the first semester was over, and how they think their writing changed during the previous fifteen weeks. This writing task asked students to provide "synthesis and reflection" between their texts in order to identify a common theme to discuss within their final essay. By semester's end, Fresh's definition of writing appeared to change little. At the beginning of the semester, he defined writing as "an expression of feelings and thoughts." In his final exam, Fresh said he defined writing as "an expression of your opinion, thoughts, feelings, emotions, and most of all you. … everytime you move your pen or press a key your expressing." He seems to consistently describe writing more as an emotional experience than an intellectual endeavor, noting "Writing is a way of allowing your heart to speak whatever it may feel. … I try to fall in love with my topic and express my love for my topic whatever way possible."

This emotionality of writing is reflected in the assignment he chose as one of the most helpful for him during the semester. The assignment he said best represented him as a writer was the "Framing Identities" assignment, in which he analyzed a family photograph to generate meanings about families, identities, and cultural practice and beliefs. "Mi Familia," represented one of the classroom tasks he enjoyed since he was able to write about himself and his family. "'Mi Familia' was an expression of me to give a solid background of what it is that I believe in."

Like most of his writing throughout the semester, Fresh's final exam rarely left the personal

realm to reflect on how his writing connected to subjects beyond himself.

In his final exam, Fresh alludes to becoming a stronger writer but never claims that he

now considers himself a "writer." However, a common theme did appear within his final exam.

It appears Fresh came to see writing and the steps associated with it as process-driven. He writes,

> To be honest, the thing that I enjoy the most about writing is making mistakes! To
>
> me making mistakes are great! Not making a lot of them, but enough to learn
>
> from in which makes my next paper better than the one before. Improving and
>
> developing is a big part of writing. The process begins when you write your shitty
>
> first draft and realize your faults or weaknesses and turn your weaknesses against
>
> yourself to become a better writer. Also, realizing that nothing is perfect and
>
> everything can be fixed and nothing is done to perfection.

Fresh does indicate that his classroom experiences have helped him grow as a writer. He

continues, "The learning process is a strengthening process. I feel it I am learning is helping me

to become a better writer, which in this case better is stronger."

But when final grades were posted at semester's end, Fresh appeared much less confident

in himself as a writer and the writing he produced because he failed the class. He was not present

on the day I conducted the final questionnaire, so I e-mailed interview questions to him at the

end of the semester, hoping to get some understanding of how his final grade affected him. He

did not answer my questions, but sent back a paragraph articulating how he now sees himself,

writing briefly about his reactions to failing the class. He seemed to position the blame more on

Lynne than he did himself, even though at one point he notes his "irresponsibility." He wrote:

> Unfortunately for me, Lynne didnt enjoy my work. She failed me with a 59. I feel
>
> confused about my abilities to write. What I have realized from the experience is

that its not about your abilities like teachers say it is about the work. I must admit I was a bit irresponsible about turning in work on time, but I think the overall quality of my work was good. I poured my heart out on every assignment and I still failed … Do I feel that she is a bad teacher? No, but I think she is trying to teach me a lesson that may have hurt me worst than she thought it would. But I made the bed so I have to sleep in it. Sorry I wasnt more of a help to you, but I do appreciate your intrest in me as a writer.

He uses a strong adjective to describe his feelings about himself as a writer. He continues: "To answer your question about how I feel about me as a writer is horrible. I havent lost my faith in my writing but I am a shock and stuck about the outcome." I could not discern if his focus on "outcome" meant how the class itself affected him or if he was "shock[ed] and stuck" about the grade he received in the class.

In the end, Fresh did not pass because he simply did not do the work. One aspect of the class was writing three letters (a letter of thanks, one of praise, and a letter of complaint) to people identified by each individual student. Fresh did not complete any of these letters, telling me at the end of the semester that he did not think these letters would count that much toward his final grade. However, Lynne's syllabus clearly discussed the role these letters would play in calculating the student's final grade. Her syllabus also clearly stated what type of work constituted a specific final grade for the course. For his final unit essay, in which he was asked to synthesize material from sources, an activity discussed earlier that he did not like to do, Fresh received a "D." He failed to incorporate outside sources in his work, did not include a Works Cited page, and did not submit any drafts. He also failed to attend teacher conferences about the assignment. "Fresh simply did not do the work," Lynne told me at the end of the semester when discussing his final grade. When I reviewed his final unit essay, Lynne had written a "B" on the

text, then changed it to a "D" because of the reasons listed above. "I worked hard to get Fresh to pass, but he missed too many classes and did not turn in his work." After grades were posted, Fresh came to see Lynne to discuss why he did not pass. During their conversation, Lynne received a call from Fresh's academic advisors in which she learned that Fresh was visiting with professors of the three classes he had failed to try to get them to change his grade. She refused to change his grade, telling him that if had he done the work, he might have passed.

**Understanding Angela and Fresh As Writers and Beyond**

The narratives of these two students provide distinct voices from a classroom that struggled and ultimately seemed to fail to come together as a community during the semester. Talking to them as individuals, I was able to better understand how they felt about themselves and how they constructed their identities. Their stories helped me place them within the classroom as two very different students with specific histories, personalities, and behaviors; all of these factors play a role in how they view themselves. When they agreed to be the subjects of my investigation, they willingly offered stories that revealed how they became who they are. They talked about their literacy experiences, their families, their struggles, and their successes in compelling ways.

But something else happened as a result of our interviews and my closely reading their work: I became interested in them as more than mere student writers within a classroom. As I wrote the first section about Angela's frustration with her high school junior English teacher, I found myself experiencing her anguish as she struggled to understand how and why a teacher would ever tell an individual that she could not write. I celebrated with her as she described the sense of victory she felt when her essay was accepted as a winning entry in a contest. When I was constructing Fresh's story, I found myself cheering him on when, in his autobiographical

haiku, he said: "I'm not a statistic, I'm my own man. I am from the home of the brave." "You go, Fresh," I thought as I wrote that section. I was heartbroken when he made choices not to complete his work and, thus, fail the class.

That move – to see them as more than students – reminds me to see my own basic writing students differently. In that moment, Angela and Fresh became the teacher: I was no longer a researcher in their class; I was the student.

Listening to Angela and Fresh talk and write about their identities as writers required me to really hear what they were saying. Through our conversations – both written and oral – and what they wrote in the classroom, they were able to describe events, situations, or ideas that shaped their self-awareness as writers and how they saw themselves in the classroom. For Angela, past experiences with teachers profoundly influenced her identity as a writer and, quite possibly, created in her a fear of writing. Fresh also points to teachers as his reason for not succeeding as a writer. These early negative experiences led these two students to construct views of themselves and influenced how they saw the act of writing. As a result, their histories and experiences accompany them each time they enter a writing classroom or begin composing a text.

In looking back at their individual narratives, we can begin to see how some of their experiences helped shape them as student writers. For Angela, coming from a home culture where literacy was valued played a key in her sense of self as a student. Her positive experiences with her father when they read together informed how she constructed herself both as a beginning student and a consumer of texts. She wanted to be "just like" her father and engage in the act of reading. That behavior was rewarded in her kindergarten class when she read to her classmates and her teacher recorded her. She was even given the opportunity to read to first-graders, a proud moment she points to as a positive experience with literacy. Those moments

quite possibly shaped her sense of self as an individual who, as she describes it, does not fear standing in front of a group and speaking. These early moments also built her self-confidence in her ability to use literacy as a way to engage and understand her world.

But her confidence in herself as a consumer and user of literacy would be shaken. As the complexities of reading increased during her schooling, she began to struggle to understand texts in ways that her contemporaries did not. At some point, she was diagnosed as "learning disabled," a label that, although she did not articulate the notion, must have negatively affected her sense of herself as a student. Her negative experiences in high school with writing shaped how she views herself as a writer. Those in a position of authority have an ability to affect her self-image. She began to filter the world through comments made by teachers, and those filters affected her sense of self. She still appears to be frustrated when teachers give her a low grade and constructive criticism. When Lynne commented on her paper about the positive points within her text, she did not notice them; writing is more about identifying and correcting mistakes.

Even as she probably still sees writing in a negative light, Angela recognizes the benefits of writing as a literacy tool. As she noted in my original questionnaire, writing is "necessary to suceede," and people who write are "amazing." She sees a value in literacy and does not seem to resist learning. She entered the class hoping to learn how to write more effectively for school and find tools that would reduce her fear of writing. To a degree, she was successful: She finished her first semester less frightened by the thought of writing. Although the data suggests she is still unsure of describing herself as a writer, she now thinks that she can write – at least within this classroom.

Angela also began to see the process nature of writing. She began to recognize the role time played in her revisions and how time allowed her to "re-see" some of her texts, which

ultimately resulted in what she described as better texts. Even though she admits to still writing her papers the night before they are due, the multiple revisions in which she engaged did have an impact. She sees that after writing and revising the paper multiple times, the final product is significantly improved from the first draft. I would suggest that her recognition of process also increased her sense of the role of an audience. Through her multiple conferences with Lynne and the class discussion of audience, she now seems to consider her audience.

Perhaps the biggest change for Angela is understanding the rhetorical move of connecting text to something beyond just one's self. It appears she is beginning to recognize how connecting herself through her writing to larger societal and cultural issues can enhance her sense of self as a writer and, quite possibly, as an individual. I would argue that she still has trouble recognizing how she is connecting her class writing assignments to cultural and social issues; however, she is beginning to understand that engaging others' ideas in her writing enables her to create new ideas and understanding. Writing, then, may be shaping her epistemology of the world.

Fresh, however, represents a very different user of literacy than Angela. When he writes, he does not want to connect himself to ideas beyond his own. To him, writing is purely a personal endeavor, one he engages in only to discuss things that are close to him. He seems either unable or unwilling to use writing as tool to engage his thinking. Fresh does not understand how academic discourse (a term that I cannot remember Lynne using in class) can be used as an intellectual experience; or, that by using other's ideas and concepts he could expand and connect his ideas to things beyond what he initially sees. Nor does he see the value of that exercise. After fifteen weeks with him, I argue that he does not see value in writing within the classroom, nor does he feel the need to write about any concept in which he does not have a vested interest. Until a member of the academic community helps him recognize the value of writing as an engaging exercise, he will probably not be successful in college.

But that, Fresh might say, is the whole problem. He believes that his instructors have never taught him how to write correctly; consequently, he refuses to see himself as a writer because his experiences in the classroom have shown him that he is not a writer. And those experiences continue since he failed the first semester of the Introduction to Critical Writing course. Returning to his past behaviors, he blames Lynne for his failure. On some level, he recognizes that he is culpable to a degree, but only to a small degree. In his Literacy and Identity unit, he did not complete portions of the unit, nor did he attend conferences with Lynne; however, he does not see or he does not want to see that his failure to complete the work lies not in his inability to write, but in his inability to merely complete the projects. Lynne told me that had he just done the work he would have passed the class.

Fresh does not recognize that the literacy of writing has a certain currency or value within the college classroom. But that does not surprise me. When we talked about his experiences with literacy, not once did he mention how his family or culture thought that reading or writing would help him. According to Fresh, his environment did not include messages supporting the value of reading and writing because these acts did not seem necessary in his home culture. As a result, he feels little confidence in himself as a writer, but why should he? The messages he seems to have received during his literacy history do not promote the value of writing, so he has ingrained that notion. The only writing he says he does is sending text messages. Reading holds seems to hold similar irrelevance; he does not read outside of the classroom. Basketball has meaning; writing does not.

The stories of these two students represent distinct and compelling narratives about the role writing plays as a literacy tool. Understanding who they are and what they think has been both a pleasurable and frustrating experience. I am not sure that understanding their individual stories has helped me understand all of the students within the Introduction to Critical Writing

class better, but I seem to have a better sense of these two students; because of knowing them better, I seem to have a better sense of the class. Their stories are only two stories of a class of fifteen students that are clamoring to be heard. My final chapter seeks to make sense of these stories as individuals and a group. By placing my observations and experiences within scholarly conversations – some ongoing, some new, and some yet to begin – I will make connections for myself and my field.

**Chapter 4**

**Connecting Angela, Fresh, and Their Classmates to Composition Conversations**

> The way we teach writing behavior, whether we will it or not, causes
> reverberations in all features of a student's private and social behavior.
> …Regardless of one's approach to writing instruction, it is impossible to deny
> that in teaching students about the way they ought to use language we are
> teaching them something about how to conduct their lives (92).
>
> — James Berlin, *Writing Instruction in 19th Century American Colleges*

My wife, Ma'lisa, asked me a simple but profoundly important question toward the end of this academic exercise of researching, writing, and rewriting my thesis: "So what have you learned from this experience?" Surprisingly, it was a hard question to answer. Like answers to many questions, it gets messy trying to identify ideas and offer insights and solutions in a concrete, easy-to-articulate fashion. I began this research with a "simple" question: How do basic writing students construct their identities as writers in a classroom? Again, answering a simple question seems, well, simple, but it is not. Answering this question requires entering into established conversations or beginning new ones.

What I discovered by exploring this question within the Introduction to Critical Writing classroom is that multiple factors seem to play a role in how a student constructs his or her identity as a writer: past experiences with teachers, writing, and reading; the amount of self-confidence a student brings to class; the type of community(ies) that exists (or does not exist) within a specific classroom; a student's perception of the difficulty of writing and ability to connect his or her writing to something beyond the personal; the intricacies behind race and culture in a classroom; and how students' perceptions of their "job" within the university affects

their sense of self. But within these factors, myriad other issues exist, and explicating all of these in detail in this space would prove exceedingly difficult. So, to break my observations and experiences down into manageable chunks from which I can extract meaning, I will fashion this chapter based on the controlling metaphor throughout my work: that of connections. The work I completed can be divided into three categories: How my experiences and observations connect with ongoing conversations within basic writing and composition, which have held currency for some time; how my data connects to conversations that are new or may be just beginning; and how my experiences and observations that connect to conversations that may have begun, but have yet to take hold. Managing this "meaning-making" through these three divisions will offer me a chance to connect large and small areas of my research to what other scholars may be saying, and create an opportunity to propose new ideas or possibly new questions.

Like Fresh, I have held off placing much of other people's ideas within my work, but I constructed my text this way for a reason: I wanted readers to be aware of the "little narratives," the term Beth Daniell coined in *A Communion of Friendship* to describe "literacy in particular local settings, the best of them presenting the contradictions and complexities of specific literate practice" (4). I wanted readers to see the "little narratives" within this class and these students in the most descriptive way possible without other voices potentially diluting the ongoing narrative. Now is the time for those other voices.

**Connecting to Ongoing Conversations**

**Connecting Individual Identity to Community in the Classroom**

By way of understanding what factors inform a student's identity in the classroom, I positioned chapter 2 to look at the idea of a community within a classroom. That was not my original plan. I thought that by simply observing individual students within a classroom,

interviewing them one-on-one, and reading their texts, I would be able to easily identify how students form their identity as writers. I soon noticed, however, that many of these students seemed to position themselves as outsiders in this class. Chapter 2 explored why many of the students seemed unable or unwilling to join the classroom community. A classroom, by its nature of bringing individuals into a shared space, begins to set the stage for a community[14] to develop; however, participants must identify with a community and those within it. Then, they must make a choice to join that community. What I observed in the classroom connects to ongoing conversations in the field. David Bartholomae notes in his work "Inventing the University" that how a writers thinks of his position inside a given community is important. He writes, "I think that all writers, in order to write, must imagine for themselves the privilege of being 'insiders' – that is, the privilege both of being inside an established and powerful discourse and of being granted a special right to speak" (644). From the beginning of this class, Lynne both extended an invitation and granted students permission to begin thinking of themselves as "insiders," able to write within a college classroom. She called them "writers" from the very beginning of the semester. They wrote to her and she wrote back. She established collaborative working relationships among them as students and with her as the instructor. Her assignments granted these students "a special right to speak" by focusing first on them as writers. They then built upon their individual experiences in order to connect them to other individuals and ideas through writing. As I described in chapter 2, TCU also positioned these students and this class as being "inside" and having a right to speak by offering this class as a credit course and positioning it as

---

[14] Talking about the idea of community can be problematic since conversations in our field vary as to the definition of the term. Scholars also debate the benefits and pitfalls of community and the discourse that particular communities use. For example, in "The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing," Joseph Harris, compares a community to a city, and argues that our academic community should allow "for both consensus and conflict, that holds room for ourselves, our disciplinary colleagues, our university coworkers, *and* our students" (20 original emphasis). I recognize Harris and other scholars' work (Bruce Horner, Min-zhan Lu, Ira Shor) as areas for future exploration regarding the effects of community on basic writing students are concerned.

valuable to the institution. But many of these students did not become part of the classroom community and stayed, as Bartholomae describes, "outside the peculiar boundaries of the academic community" (644). In chapter 2, for instance, I described LJ, a student-athlete whose behavior caused Lynne problems during the beginning of the semester. His behavior marked a resistance to the work that was occurring within the classroom, and signaled his decision to remain outside the boundaries of the community. But why were these students choosing not to join?

In *The Hunger of Memory,* Richard Rodriguez highlights how those who enter higher education must make choices to become a part of that community. He writes, "A primary reason for my success in the classroom was that I couldn't forget that schooling was changing me and separating me from the life I enjoyed before becoming a student" (564). Rodriguez *wanted* to be identified with the educational community, but he realized he had to make a choice to leave his home community to join the academic community; within that moment of choice, he was losing connections to his family and culture. It is possible to see the students in the Introduction to Critical Writing class as being asked to make that choice, and many of them are resisting. I would argue that they probably do not see the choice to become a member of the academic community as a watershed decision that will separate them from their individual home cultures and values; however, I believe that on a certain level, they recognize a tension: that by joining with this community, they will be changed in ways that clash with some of their beliefs and values. Fresh, LJ, Edge and some of the other students came to the university from cultural and family backgrounds where the benefits of education may not have been strongly promoted. When I described Fresh in chapter 3, I noted that he did not mention messages about the value of education he received from his family or community. His environment did not send him messages supporting the value of reading and writing because these acts did not seem important

in his home culture. The academic community values reading and writing, but many of these students did not. Fresh did not seem to value writing – at least not within this academic setting. Many of the students resisted both reading and writing. These students may, as Rodriguez suggests, discover at some point that the decision to join an academic community will clearly show them how far they must move from their past in order to envision themselves as insiders within this new community. To join the community, one must accept its ideology and speak its language. At this point in their academic experiences, many of these students were not ready to do either.

Angela's messages, however, were different. She entered TCU after attending a private, religious, college-preparatory high school and came from a family tradition of valuing education. By paying to send her to a private school, her family sent her the message that education was an important resource. Her father encouraged her literacy early in her life. She recalled stories of him taking her to bookstores to buy new books; then, they would sit together and read. In kindergarten, she received positive messages from her teacher through encouragement to read aloud to her classmates and first-graders. But when she began having trouble in high school, her attitude toward school and her confidence in herself changed. She lived in the midst of messages that told her that education and literacy were resources and were "good," but teachers began telling her that she was not a writer. Those negative messages had a profound affect on her ability to see herself as part of an academic community, and, perhaps, traces of those messages still reverberated when she entered the Introduction to Critical Writing classroom even though she clearly values the academic community. Comparing her and Fresh, she seemed the most willing to join the academic community. She saw the value of education. But she still showed moments of resistance to what the educational community values and its ideology. For instance, she thought the class took too much time revising papers, even though she noted that her papers

were often better after those activities. But why would she exhibit moments of resistance to joining this community when she recognizes the value of education? One possible explanation is that she is afraid of reliving the negative experiences she encountered in high school when her teacher told her she could not write. She resists the community because the community excluded her earlier in her life. But she also may have resisted because she was required to revise her texts often, an act she may not have had to perform in high school. Fresh, too, may have resisted because of revision. He thought his work was "his own" and because he was expected to change his text for the requirements of the class, he resisted.

Patricia Bizzell addresses the struggles basic writing students encounter in the classroom in "What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College." In this text, she characterizes students' struggles as confrontations beyond merely adapting to a new language or genres; instead, she remarks that students' views of the world are sometimes significantly challenged by the choice to join the academic community. When she later reflects on this article in her introduction to *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness*, she writes about her experiences teaching basic writers. She says she tried to teach basic writing students without inhibiting their initial "home perspectives." She writes,

> At the same time, I attempted to preserve the project of teaching academic
> discourse to basic writers by arguing that there are grounds for hoping they can
> learn to work comfortably within the academic world view without abandoning
> their home perspective or becoming deracinated" (22-23).

But by asking students to accept academic discourse as a way to communicate and make meaning of the world, we quickly force them to abandon many of the beliefs and values that they bring with them. We are "deculturing" and, to use Bizzell's term a bit differently, we are "deracinating" them so that they can join our community.

I contend that we cannot teach students to join our community and begin to write in our language without significantly affecting how a student views himself or his world. Fresh's behavior appears to support that argument. He does not want to include other people's work within his own text since he thinks it will change the meaning of his original text. His text is a manifestation of himself. By making the move to include another person's text within his text, he will be changing how he views himself and, therefore, his world. When we ask him to do that, we also are challenging his cultural beliefs of how he makes meaning of his world. Since race plays a role in how he sees himself, we are also challenging his conception of what it means to be an African American or, within the context of the classroom, an African American male student in a predominately White school. Bizzell argues that no matter how egalitarian or democratic a classroom, changing the foundational ideology of students' worlds and themselves is "a very painful process that students often oppose" (269). I argue that many of the students in the Introduction to Critical Writing Class resisted joining the community because they had much to lose by making that choice: their sense of identity and how that identity connected them to what they know and where they are from. I believe even Angela – who came from a culture that encouraged education – sensed that joining the community would change her. She noted that she was the first woman in her family to go to college; by choosing the path of higher education, she was entering new territory that would possibly change her and separate her from her core values and beliefs.

Where do these opposition moments between the university and home culture often happen that so affect a student's sense of identity occur? Many times, it is within the composition classroom. In "Modeling a Writer's Identity: Reading and Imitation in the Writing Classroom," Robert Brooke addresses a student's sense of identity, saying,

Composition teaching works, in the modern sense, when it effectively models an

identity for students which the students *can in some way accept*. It works when

part of their identity becomes a writer's identity, when they come to see that being

a writer in their own way is a valid and exciting way of acting in the world (40,

my emphasis).

Through employing writing assignments like the ones Lynne used in her class, students begin to

explore what it means to have an identity as a writer. In many cases, this may be a student's first

exploration of herself through the lens of literacy. That exploration may present significant

challenges by forcing her to look beyond her world into other worlds so that she can then make

meaning. For instance, when I teach basic writers at Tarrant County College, I use an assignment

that asks students to write their own obituaries as a way to employ writing to reflect upon their

life experiences. As they move through this assignment, one in which they must write from the

third-person perspective, they begin to make meaning by connecting their experiences together

through a linear writing exercise. For most of my students, this is the first time they have

"written" their life on paper. Using an obituary as a tool to encourage self-reflection can

challenge one's sense of identity by requiring students to closely examine their lives. Using a

literacy history assignment is similar. Students can begin to understand themselves within the

context of the classroom and reflect upon themselves and how they created their identity through

literacy acts. Using assignments like the ones Lynne used allows classrooms to become a space

for exploring personal identity. But it also asks students to go further. By using an assignment

based on individual literacy histories, students are asked to begin connecting their ideas and

thoughts to broader, less individualistic concepts. For example, in the first classroom assignment,

Literacy and Identity, Lynne asked students to reflect upon positive and negative literacy

experiences and write about how these events connect to some larger point about language,

literacy, community, and identity. She communicated that learning these rhetorical strategies will help the students better position themselves within a classroom as academic writers.

But, as we have seen, this strategy does not always work. Fresh proves that the move to connect the personal to larger cultural issues is not always successful. He continued to have difficulty connecting his experiences to larger issues within his culture and to forces beyond his culture; he did not like using what "other people say" in his own writing. He said, "I try not to use quotes or other peoples views for my papers because I feel its my paper." He remained in the "writing-is-merely-personal" world and appeared not to understand the value of writing as an intellectual endeavor. His attitude toward writing may present a struggle for him to overcome as he moves through college. This behavior may extend beyond the basic writing classroom into other areas of composition. The ability to communicate effectively may be enhanced by creating an environment where students engage their sense of self as writers beyond the personal so that they begin to understand how their culture affects their beliefs and values.

In entering into an academic community, two choices must be made: first, a "literacy sponsor," a term coined by Deborah Brandt meaning any agent that regulates literacy in some manner, extends an invitation to an individual to become an "insider;" then, the individual must make a choice to accept the invitation. This transaction causes changes for both parties. For the community, initially the change is miniscule; a new member has come into the fold, accepting the institutionalized values and language of the given community. Even though there is opportunity for individuals to change the community, those changes many times come slowly. For the individual, the change can be quite substantial. In order to accept the community's values and language, the individual may have to change the way he or she views the world. That transaction of offering acceptance and choosing to join can present difficulties, as evidenced by

the resistance that unfolded within the Introduction to Critical Writing classroom. The consequence of that resistance is remaining an "outsider" in relation to a specific community.

**The Role of Confidence in Identity and Community**

The students I met during this research project said that confidence played a role in how they constructed their identities and in their ability to construct texts. These responses appeared in myriad places. In the initial questionnaire, many students pointed to a lack of confidence in themselves that kept them from seeing themselves as writers. For example, in chapter 2, the student whose pseudonym was Good Writer described writing at the beginning of the semester as "hard." He noted that when he writes he feels "up tight (nervous) frustrated," and that when given a writing assignment, he feels "pressured, cause I don't have confidence in my writing." During a face-to-face interview with Fresh, he talked about how his confidence was raised when, on one of his initial writing assignments, Lynne encouraged him by writing positive remarks on his texts. In Angela's experiences, she pointed to how teachers negatively affected her confidence by saying she could not write. With the idea of confidence ever-present, I began to think about how confidence is formed within individuals and how growing confidence affects individuals. Those ponderings led me back to the controlling idea of community, specifically, how a community affects an individual's confidence and in what ways. Confidence is a self-constructed individual attribute, but it is the product of a relationship between an individual and other individuals within a community. Good Writer, Angela, and my examples from above relate to the theme of community in that they are all a reflection of being a part of a community or being rejected by a community. In chapter 1, I used Charlotte Brammer's argument that basic writing students lacked "the cultural capital to recognize and utilize the necessary written codes for academic success" (17). Part of that "cultural capital" that leads to academic success, I would

argue, is the growth of confidence or increased support from a community. A visible part of that cultural capital is constructed by our community through the written and oral interactions we have with our students concerning their texts and their ability to communicate in writing. Communities enhance and diminish confidence in their members by making judgments about those members. For instance, in the composition community, each time we mark a student's text or talk with a student about her composition, we are depositing confidence or making a withdrawal, similar in many respects to James Berlin's quote that began this chapter. I return to Angela's experience with her English instructor during high school since it clearly represents a moment where her confidence in herself and her abilities were shaken. The instructor – a member of a specific community – told Angela that she was not a writer, and excluded her from being a member of the community of writers. What may be worse is that the instructor sent the discouraging message that Angela would not ever be able to join this community.

But does focusing on building a student's confidence mean a student will become a better writer? My data does not suggest a concrete answer to that question, but it offers a qualified "maybe." In "Theory in the Basic Writing Classroom? A Practice," Victor Villanueva suggests that basic writing teachers should focus on what a student brings to the classroom and connect that to what the academy wants them to know. That recognition of students' capabilities is a nod toward building confidence. Lynne's classroom assignments seemed to ground their starting point in Villanueva's idea. By asking students to begin their writing in a college composition classroom by writing about themselves, Lynne is connecting what they know overtly about themselves to the act of writing. Her assignments increase in levels of difficulty in that changing rhetorical situations challenge students to incrementally move away from what they know to explore new areas. For example, the third major assignment in the class, the Autoethnography assignment, required students to move from strictly personal narratives to a new rhetorical

landscape by including outside sources in their texts. By using the assignments to continue challenging students to grow as writers, Lynne represents the community by reaching out to these students, encouraging them to join the community. But as we have seen, many of them declined to take the invitation. Fresh overtly refused to include "other voices" in his work; through this move, he refused to accept the ideology of the community.

Through revision, our community may encourage the growth of confidence in students' perceptions of themselves as writers. By employing the idea of revision within her class, Lynne communicated to her students the idea that their texts can be changed and, perhaps, improved. In her work "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," Nancy Sommers describes revision as "[a] sequence of changes in a composition – changes which are initiated by cues and occur continually throughout the writing of a work" (77). Sommers explores the differences between the revision strategies of students and experienced adult writers and argues that these groups see a difference in the activity of revising. Students' perceptions of revision, she argues, focus more on changing text to meet abstract rules. She writes, "In general, students will subordinate the demands of the specific problem of their text to the demands of the rules," (80). Experienced writers, by contrast, see revising their work as a way to discover meaning. Lynne's focus on revision is meant to build a student's confidence by encouraging students to delve deeper into the meaning of their text. Her syllabus described revision as "a re-seeing of your work and it is a significant change to your original document." For example, in the Autoethnography assignment written by Edge, the student I highlighted through his "Where I'm From" assignment in chapter 1, Lynne does not tell him to revise his final text; however, she encourages him to revise the text by posing more questions to consider at various points throughout his work rather than simply marking errors. Angela noted how revision helped her. She said that, even though she did not like spending so much time on revision, her texts were

significantly better than after they were revised compared to her first drafts. Feeling her texts are "better" may connect to raising her level of confidence. Angela does not occupy the space of an experienced writer – at this point she does not see revision as discovering meaning, only as a means to satisfy Lynne's requirements – but she is moving in that direction. By describing revision as a tool to change texts for the better, Lynne is representing a specific value of our community. Creating better texts builds confidence in a writer's ability to write.

When I began exploring identity, I thought the road to understanding how students construct it in the classroom would be easy to recognize; the reality was quite different. I realized there was more involved than simply reading an individual's texts, talking with them about how they felt, and seeing them interact within a classroom; now, I better understand how intricately connected a student's identity is to his or her relationship to a community. But this initial exploration into identity and community represents a start for me to understand these relationships. I see further research possibilities that involve exploring the elements of a community within a basic writing classroom, what assignments work best (or inhibit) the formation of a community, how cultural diversity affects the growth (again, or inhibits) a community, and how the role an instructor plays influences the formation of community. By exploring some of these questions, I will be better able to understand how these elements influence a student's identity and how that identity influences a students ability to see themselves as a writer and write within a basic writing classroom. Ultimately, these explorations will generate new knowledge that will contribute to my field and make me a more effective instructor.

**Connecting to New Conversations**

**Who owns literacy?**

While understanding the role that community plays within a classroom is not a new conversation in our field, neither is the role that a student's race (or an instructor's race) plays in the construction of community and the idea of identity. For example, in 1977, Geneva Smitherman called for a better understanding of the role that race plays in African American students' experiences with education in her text *Talkin' and Testifyin': The Language of Black America.* Within this text, Smitherman argues that programs designed to "help" African Americans acquire a new discourse actually serve as a means for "inculcating the values of the dominant society and eliminating the cultural distinctiveness of Black America" (203). These programs, she asserts, have been designed to help African American children become more "culturally enriched" since, in the view of many within the dominant culture, these individuals have been "culturally deprived" (206). Many of the arguments she poses in her text about the role of culture and the approach to teaching African American students could easily be lifted from her almost 30-year-old text and used as valid arguments (positioned in specific ways) in a text constructed for today's conversations.

But a more nuanced conversation is occurring within our field, one where scholars are beginning to discuss how race affects access to and creates specific consequences of literacy. Catherine Prendergast presents an argument in *Literacy and Racial Justice* that literacy, as constructed in the United States, is considered "White property" (7). She uses the metaphor to explore how literacy has been given to and withheld from various non-White groups, and how disseminating literacy affects those within the dominant culture. She writes,

> In identifying where literacy has been recognized as White property, I use the
> concept of property in its broader definition, as a quality, trait, or attribute.
> Recognizing that literacy has often been regarded as a White trait, something that
> Whites possess naturally, rather than as a White privilege, I maintain, more

accurately reveals why many Whites – including those recently contesting affirmative action in educational settings – have acted as if something has been taken away from them when the goods of literacy are redistributed (7-8).

If we use Prendergast's lens of "White property" to look at the literacy the students in the Introduction to Critical Writing are being asked to learn, we can begin to see the non-White students' behaviors in a different way. Most of these students – almost two-thirds of them – are African American. When we consider the activities and assignments within the classroom as literacy acts coming from a dominant culture of the university, that of Whites, we are, in effect, offering the African American students tools to use to join the dominant discourse. The assignments, I would argue, are constructed with these particular basic writing students in mind, but perhaps they do not fully consider the role that race plays within the classroom. For example, the third major assignment in the class, an Autoethnography, asked students to incorporate at least one outside source within their text. Fresh, however, chose not to perform this move within his writing. During my interviews with him, he noted that including someone else's words within his text would change his text and make it not his own work. By asking students to employ this rhetorical act – one based on the assumption that literacy is White property – we may be asking students like Fresh to move toward a "White" way of seeing or interpreting the world. Perhaps on some level, Fresh did not include outside sources because by changing his text by using a White rhetorical act, he would begin to accept White property. Prendergast argues, "People acquire and develop literacy through relationships with institutions and with other people. … How people experience literacy development becomes bound up with how they perceive their own identity and the identity of others" (10). Once Fresh or any other student who is non-White accepts and uses the literacy acts of a predominately White institution, they move toward the dominant culture.

But how then does Angela serve as a "countervoice" to Fresh and the other African American students when we use Prendergast's ideas of literacy as White property? When we look back at Angela's history, we see her as an Irish American student from a family that placed a high value on literacy and increasing individual access to literacy. For example, her father expressed the value of reading to her when she was a little girl. They would often go to bookstores together where they would buy texts to bring home and read. She connected to her father through the literacy act of reading. In her first experiences in kindergarten, she was a reader who was asked to read aloud to her class and the first-grade class. Later, her high school experiences all occurred within a private, religious, college-preparatory institution that only accepted students through an application process. When she encountered difficulty with writing while in her English classes, her parents provided her the resources she needed to access a tutor. At some point during her schooling, she was diagnosed as learning disabled, and she was provided strategies for how to succeed within a school setting. As a White student growing up in an environment that strongly focuses on literacy, Angela vividly represented Prendergast's argument that literacy is a White trait or attribute. The focus on acquiring literacy with Angela was to increase her individual literacy skills as a member of a community. When she struggled with her literacy, it was an individual struggle. For Fresh, however, it goes beyond an individual struggle. He sees his struggle not from an individualistic point of view; for him, it may be a tension between cultures. He places the blame for not succeeding in the literacy of writing on the poor teaching he received in the past, attributing his current problems to not having been properly taught; as a result, he may see his problem with literacy as a force outside of himself that will not adapt to help him.

Being asked to use the tools of the dominant culture may change Fresh's sense of self. His identity (or his construction of himself as an individual), which is based in a specific culture,

will change once he makes that move. Victoria Purcell-Gates, writing in *Other People's Words*, argues, "all learners are seen as members of a defined culture, and their identity with this culture determines what they will encode about the world and the ways in which they will interpret information" (4). Staying with Fresh as an example, we can see Purcell-Gates' argument through his actions. Although I did not collect data about the different ways in which race figures into how individuals communicate, Fresh's identification with a culture, like he expressed in his "Where I'm From" sheet in chapter 3, plays a significant role in how he will perceive his world and the lens through which he may interpret data. Beyond text messaging, an act he says he does "all the time," Fresh rarely employs writing to communicate with individuals from his home culture. For example, one of the assignments students were asked to write was a letter home to a family member. Angela wrote a long, detailed letter to her parents, thanking them for allowing her to attend TCU; Fresh, however, did not write any letter to his family. If we use Purcell-Gates' idea, we see that Fresh seems to come from a community that does not "encode" or "interpret" information through writing. I contend that his choice not to send a letter home for this assignment indicates that he saw little value in this rhetorical act. Fresh's behaviors become clearer if we couple Prendergast's idea of literacy as White property and Purcell-Gates' notion that cultural identity determines how an individual will translate information. He may have chosen not to write letters (or incorporate information into his work) because his cultural values place no significance on communicating through writing. Asking him to perform that act may hold little meaning to him.

Earlier, I noted that many students have much to lose when they choose to join an academic community. Their sense of identity or their sense of community may be affected by this decision. But, I argue, students also have the most to gain by choosing to join an academic community, and this is a message that we need to more effectively communicate to our students.

When students join an academic community, they immediately open new avenues to literacy tools that the culture of the academy says are important to success within the academy and in the world beyond. Broadly speaking, the tools we teach fall under the idea of accessing and refining critical thinking skills: reading as a way to create new meaning of our world; and writing as a means to connect ourselves to others and also create new meaning.

I recognize that having access to a larger set of literacy skills does not necessarily ensure success within any community. In making a case for the myth of literacy, Harvey Graff effectively argued that little evidence exists to suggest that literacy actually relates to success. Learning new literacies through joining with a community, however, may increase a student's probability for success inside and outside a given community. My personal experiences bear out both Graff's idea of the literacy myth and my idea that joining with a community will increase access to literacy and possibly provide additional opportunities. Since I joined the academic community, I have become more "literate" within my given community, but my increased literacy does not ensure that I will be successful in using this literacy. What it does provide me is additional options to use my new literacy skills. If I choose, I could use the literacies I had before my graduate school experiences to access job-related resources, but it is only through the literacies I have learned during my experiences that I would now be able to access additional resources. Angela's experiences also show how increased access to literacy opens opportunity. When she decided to seek help to write her entrance essay to TCU, she discovered that increasing her writing skills would enhance her ability to succeed. She joined with others to craft an essay that ultimately went beyond a mere college entrance essay; her essay received distinction outside of its initial rhetorical situation when she won the literary competition.

When we ask students to begin to use academic discourse as a tool to understand and interpret the world, we must recognize how this will affect them as individuals coming from a

different culture. In an ideal world, we would teach our students a new "language" without destroying the language (or languages) they bring with them to the classroom; however, as multiple scholars suggest, this might not be possible. Yet within this moment in which students are exposed to a new language and a new community, perhaps an opportunity exists for further exploring the relationship of the language one brings to the classroom to the language the academy is asking students to inculcate. Is it possible to teach students the language of the academy without significantly impacting the value and belief systems they bring to the classroom?

**Connecting to Budding Conversations**

**Understanding Student-Athletes**

Research sometimes reveals new observations that seem to be connected to conversations that may be occurring in a given field but have yet to take hold. My research, I believe, uncovered two such connections. In an attempt to use Sondra Perl's advice and enter my project "ready to pay attention to the phenomena at hand" (xix), I discovered themes that deserve more research. First, our field needs to better understand the perceived "job" student-athletes think they are performing during their college experience. The students in this class who were athletes received mixed messages about the importance of the field or court versus the importance of the classroom space. Both the institution and coaches encouraged them to focus on their "work" as athletes and rewarded them for that behavior. For example, early in the semester, all of students who were members of the TCU football team missed a Thursday class for an upcoming home game. These athletes were sequestered with their teammates at a local hotel so that they could focus only on the upcoming game. This action sent the athletes three messages: first, it told them that their participation in sporting activities was more important than their participation in

classroom activities; then, it suggested that that their identity as an athlete was more important than their identity as a student; finally, it overtly said that while football season was in full swing, academic classes came second to sporting events.

The community with which these student-athletes identify is critical. TCU's sporting community accepts them as athletes and identifies them as such. Many were recruited to the institution based on their demonstrated performance and their athletic ability. These students would not be members of the team if they did not have outstanding athletic skills. I would argue, mostly from anecdotes I heard from Lynne, that these students would not have the academic background or grades to be admitted to TCU if they were not recruited as athletes. They view themselves as athletes, and most define themselves first as an "athlete" before they define themselves as a "student." Fresh offers us a great example. Here is a student who, in his journal for this class, wrote about basketball, counting down the days until the season began. He sees himself as a basketball player who cannot wait until his mother and infant daughter see him performing on the court on opening day. He says nothing about how his family might view him if he were to "perform" in the classroom. In terms of identifying with TCU, his first community is probably the community of sports.

As I described in chapters 2 and 3 and argued at the beginning of this chapter, the academic community made an effort to accept these students into the community. But there is a difference: these students were not "recruited" to the institution because of their academic skills. Fresh struggled with writing before he came to TCU, and his academic advisors suggested he should take this course. Once in this class, he recognized that it was different from other first-year composition classes through the description of the "stretched-out" nature of the class. He saw eight other "student-athletes" in the class; they, too, were "advised" to take this class. He was among others of the athletic community, many of whom identified themselves first as

athletes. Lynne calls them writers, but he did not identify himself that way. He is an athlete because that is the message he received when he was recruited to TCU.

It would be interesting for our field to explore in depth to what degree students who are athletes see themselves as "academic" students. What effect does being a college athlete have on their perceptions of themselves in the classroom? In what ways do they see themselves as students? What is the relationship between being an athlete and being a student? If they had the choice, would they choose the term "student-athlete" or "athlete-student"? And playing off the underlying nature of my research project, do they identify themselves as writers in a classroom and what affects those perceptions? Here is where Beth Daniell's concept of "little narratives" can inform the field and help a conversation take hold. A qualitative research project on these types of students may help us better understand and better situate them within the composition classroom and in classrooms beyond our discipline.

**Learning More About Student Identity**

Besides learning more about the perceptions and positions of student-athletes within a classroom, another area ripe for investigation is the continued exploration of what *all* students think of themselves as writers within a classroom setting. In "What Basic Writers Think about Writing," Anmarie Eves-Bowden studied basic writing students she was teaching to see how they viewed the writing process. She argues that basic writing students seem to possess a writing process, but her students did not have strategies to generate ideas or know what to say about an assigned topic. Her observations echo what I have experienced teaching basic writing students. I sense that my students also seem to have writing processes that they attempt to employ when they are given writing assignments, but many times they fail to generate ideas to write a text that completely addresses the assignment they have been given. Many simply quit because they

believe they are not smart enough to generate the ideas they need to complete the writing assignment. The student's ability to develop ideas may relate to how they see themselves in the classroom. If students do not see themselves as writers – even if we encourage them overtly as Lynne did throughout the semester – they still may not be able to effectively create the strategies that lead to successful writing. Seeing one's self inside a community of writers may offer students the confidence they need to create new ideas.

Marilyn Sternglass's *Time to Know Them* provides our field with one of the best longitudinal studies of the "life" of writers while in college. Sternglass's work at City College of City University of New York offered some of the most detailed descriptions of students – both their struggles in the classrooms as well in their lives outside of classes. She argues that only through understanding the complexities of how these students develop as writers will we be able to understand them as students within a classroom. She writes,

> We need to look in greater detail at the experiences students bring to their colleges years, as Hull and Rose (1989) pointed out, as well as the changes that occur during the college years. We need to consider how academic preparation, personal life factors such as working hours and family responsibilities, instruction settings and approaches, and the natures of instructional tasks interact as students respond to the writing demands placed upon them. Only then will it be possible to present the true complexity of writing development, nothing that will likely fit into a new flow chart (26-27).

Sternglass calls for a more holistic approach to understanding the students who appear in our writing classrooms. Each student is distinctly different to be sure, but studies that represent students as individuals interacting with outside factors that influence their work in the classroom

may provide us that better understanding of not only how they view themselves as writers, but also why they view (or do not view) themselves in this way.

**Final Connections**

During the past nine months, I attempted a research endeavor the likes of which I have never undertaken before. I conceived what I thought was a simple, straightforward project that would allow me to better understand the students I teach in my basic writing classes and help me become a better composition instructor. I thought that by looking closely at how students construct their identity in a writing classroom, I would make connections with what I was experiencing in the classroom and with what I was reading and discussing in my composition and rhetoric classes. These connections would serve as clear intersections of theory and practice, praxes that would reinforce what I was learning as an instructor and a student. But while I set out to find answers and a particular clarity, I soon discovered "messiness," a concept that one of my favorite professors uses to describe research results and our discipline's history. He suggests that when scholars provide clear-cut answers to problems, they are ignoring the "messiness" factor that exists within most of what we do as instructors, scholars, and students within our discipline.

My research attempted to uncover some of the factors that contribute to a student's formation of a writing identity. Through observing students within a classroom setting, reading their writings, and listening to them talk about themselves and their writing, I was able to discern patterns of behavior that existed within this classroom of fifteen diverse students and one determined instructor. I believe, to a large degree, I was successful in this discovery. But on some levels I was unsuccessful. For example, in various ways, Angela's story serves as a countervoice to many of the student-athletes I have described throughout this chapter and in chapter 2. She resisted slightly – she did not like the idea of constantly revising her texts – but

ultimately found her revised texts better. She is both resisting the discourse of the academic community and is accepting it as a language she must employ while she is a student at TCU. Yet, instead of her seemingly contradictory position troubling me, it, in fact, satisfies me as a scholar and an instructor. Simply put, the inability to discover specific answers or observe uniform patterns means there is so much more for me to learn and explore to better understand the students our field labels as basic writers. I am learning how to embrace the "messiness" that comes with understanding our field and those who are members of it.

Some of the answers to my wife's simple question "So what did you learn?" that started this chapter exist in the previous pages; some do not. But these answers also exist well beyond this document: they are entwined within the conversations we enter every day when we talk about what we do as instructors and when we enter the classroom to teach and learn from our students. The answers that we seek invariably spark more tantalizing questions and traces of other opportunities from which to set off in new research directions. Creating conversations about the students who appear in our classroom will continue the process of generating knowledge and helping all of us become better instructors.

**Appendix A**

**Initial Writing Survey**

Because you are enrolled in Introduction to Critical Writing, you have been selected to participate in a research project to explore how students use writing to form their identity. This survey is one part of a research project titled "TCU's "Other" Writing Students: Does Academic Writing Affect Formation of Identity?" This research project will investigate how students use academic writing to form a sense of their identity. The results of this research project will help me and other teachers of basic writing understand the relationship between students and academic literacy and how this relationship affects a student's formation of identity.

Participation in this survey is voluntary; there is no penalty for choosing not to complete the survey**. By completing this survey and turning it in to Lynne, you are consenting to participate in this research project.** The survey should take you less than 10 minutes to complete. Thanks!

Your Name_____

1. Which of the following statements bests describes you as a writer?

   a. I am not a writer.
   b. I write a little, but do not consider myself a writer.
   c. I think I can write and consider myself a writer.
   d. I write often and would describe myself as a good writer.

2. Writing Apprehension. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning little or no apprehension and 10 meaning high apprehension, how would you describe your apprehension toward writing?

   1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10
   Less Apprehensive                    More Apprehensive

3. If you answered between 4 and 10, what do you think makes you apprehensive toward

   writing?_____

4. How would you describe your writing ability?

   a. I find it extremely hard to express myself in writing.
   b. I find it difficult to express myself in writing.
   c. I find it moderately easy to express myself when I write.
   d. I find it easy to express myself when I write.

5. How many hours do you read during an average week?_____

6. What are two things you have read during the past two weeks?

   a. _____

   b. _____

7. How have your past experiences with writing (either negative or positive) affected how you

   write now?_____

8. How would you define the term "literacy"?_____

_____

9. Please complete the following sentence: In high school, my writing usually received a grade

   of _____.

10. Please circle all that apply to you:

    a. I write e-mails to friends and family.
    b. I record my thoughts in a journal.
    c. I write letters to friends and family.
    d. I write when I am upset or angry.
    e. I write when I am happy.
    f. I write text messages on my cell phone.
    g. I write only for school.
    h. I write outside of classes.
    i. I write poetry or short stories.

11. Please answer the following: If I could change two things about my writing, it would be:

    a. _____

    b. _____

12. What do you hope to learn in this class? _____

_____

17. Please complete the following sentences:

    a. Writing is_____

    b. People who write are_____

    c. Writing does not_____

    d. Reading my writing aloud to other people makes me feel_____

    e. I see writing as_____

    f. When I write, I feel_____

    g. When I think about writing, I am afraid of_____

    h. I don't think writing is_____

    i. I think writing is valuable because_____

    j. When I am given a writing assignment, I feel_____

13. How would you define "writing"?_____

During the course of this research project, I want you to identify me as _____ (please choose a pseudonym that you can remember during the semester).

Thank you for participating in this research project!

Travis Mann

**Final Writing Survey**

Thanks for allowing me to sit in your class during the last semester. Here is a final survey I would like you to complete.

Your Name_____

14. At the end of the semester, which of the following statements best describes you as a writer?

   a. Even though I've been in this class, I still don't consider myself a writer.
   b. I write a little better now, but do not consider myself a writer.
   c. This class has helped my writing, and I now consider myself a writer.

15. Please circle the word that best describes you as a writer.

   a. Poor
   b. Adequate
   c. Competent
   d. Good
   e. Excellent

16. At the end of the semester, how would you describe your writing ability?

   a. I still find it extremely hard to express myself in writing.
   b. I find it a little difficult to express myself in writing.
   c. Now, I find it moderately easy to express myself when I write.
   d. Because of this class, I now find it easy to express myself when I write.

17. What two writing assignments were the most useful during the past semester?

   a. _____

   b. _____

18. What two writing assignments were the least helpful?

   a. _____

   b. _____

19. I asked you this at the beginning of the semester. Have things changed? Please circle all that apply to you:

   a. I write e-mails to friends and family.
   b. I record my thoughts in a journal.
   c. I write letters to friends and family.
   d. I write when I am upset or angry.
   e. I write when I am happy.
   f. I write text messages on my cell phone.

g.   I write only for school.
h.   I write outside of classes.
i.   I write poetry or short stories.


20.  Please answer the following: If I could change two things about my writing, it would be:

a.   _____

b.   _____


21.  What is one way you use writing outside of this class?

a.   _____


22.  What two things did you learn about writing during the past semester?

a.   _____

b.   _____


23.  Please complete the following sentences:

a.   Writing is_____

b.   People who write are_____

c.   Writing does not_____

d.   Reading my writing aloud to other people makes me feel_____

e.   I see writing as_____

f.   When I write, I feel_____

g.   When I think about writing, I am afraid of_____

h.   I don't think writing is_____

i.   I think writing is valuable because_____

Thanks! Happy Holidays!

Travis Mann

**Appendix B**

# Introduction to Critical Writing: Literacy and Identity

## COURSE OBJECTIVES:

ENGL 10703 is a writing workshop designed to give you extensive practice in college-level critical reading and writing.  But more than that, this course is one in which you will develop as a writer and will grow in your relationships with words.  Through regular assignments of varying lengths and complexity, you will learn to position yourself within ongoing conversations about issues important to educated readers.  In this course, you will engage in processes of invention, drafting, revision, and editing as you complete a range of writing tasks including exploratory writing, synthesis, analysis, and argument.

To produce writing that goes beyond "high school" writing (however one might define that).  In this course you will produce 35-40 graded and ungraded pages of writing.
To learn key terminology for discussing writing and argument
To practice analyzing and producing complex texts
To practice doing secondary research
To engage in the practice of textual revision
To strengthen your ability to use Standard written English
To participate in an oral presentation
To work collaboratively on projects

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

Instructor:          Lynne H.
Office:              Rickel Building #244-E (Center for Writing)
Office Hours:        M/W 10:00 to 11:30 and **by appt**.
Telephone:          817.XXX>XXXX
Email:
WebPage:            http:

## REQUIRED TEXTS:

Bartholomae and Petrosky, *Ways of Reading*, Bedford St. Martin's, 2005.
Raimes, Ann.  *Keys for Writers*.  4th ed.  Houghton Mifflin, 2004.
Britenham and Hoeller, *Key Words for Academic Writers*, 2004.
$$$ for Copying
Access to a computer with Internet access and access to "U" drive

# Course Policies and Procedures

**Attendance:**
Your attendance is essential in this course.  Therefore, I do take attendance at every class meeting.  I also adhere to the English Department policy that three weeks of absences (6 in a T/TH course) constitutes failure of that course.  If you are absent more than 3 times in the course of the semester, expect a 5-point reduction for each absence to be levied against your final grade.  But since everything you do in this course "counts," more than a week's worth of absences will begin to affect your grade.  Only official university absences—absences REQUIRED by an official body of TCU—will be excused (will not count against you).  These absences must be documented BEFORE they occur, and work due during the intended absence must be submitted in advance.  Extra-curricular (non-academic) activities, studying for another course, breaking up with a boyfriend/girlfriend, and very many similar issues are not sufficient cause to miss this class or to be late with an assignment.  Disruptive and disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated, and I reserve the right to ask the offender(s) to leave the class.  I prefer not to hear excuses for missed assignments or classes.   I live by the old standby rule, "90% of success is just showing up."

**Tardies:**
Please be on time for class.  Tardies, if occasional and non-disruptive, are generally accepted in this course.  HOWEVER, if they are frequent (once a week or more), or pronounced (10 minutes or more), then they will be counted toward absences.  Keep in mind that students who are late are a distraction to me and to other students.  Keep in mind, too, that in-class work is often assigned at the beginning of class and this work cannot be made up.  Two tardies (10 or more minutes late) will count as one unexcused absence.

**Books / Materials:**
If you choose (habitually) to attend class without your books and appropriate materials, I will count you absent.

**Paper Format:**
All out-of-class writing, including rough drafts, must be word-processed and in the format discussed in class.  (This is generally double-spaced, normal font [Times New Roman or Ariel] in a 12-point font, 1" margins.)  When you submit essays to me for evaluation, you will do so in a simple pocketed folder.  This folder will contain your drafts, peer reviews, drafts that I have seen, and often, will contain your research.  You will submit TWO hard copies to me.  One I will evaluate and return to you; the other I will keep.  Almost nothing you hand in for evaluation will be handwritten.

**Late Papers:**
Papers are due by 5:00 p.m., in my office, on the appropriate due date.  Of course, you can submit these in class, too.  Because of my extensive revision policy, late papers are not accepted.  In the very unlikely event that I do accept a late assignment (verified issue through student life or verified university sanctioned absence are the only exceptions), your essay will be penalized one letter grade for every class day that I don't have your work.

**Revisions:**
You may revise any of your first two essays repeatedly throughout the semester.  A revision is not simply a correction of surface errors (spelling, grammar, etc.).  A revision is a re-seeing of your work and it is a significant change of your original document.  Revisions will not allow you to gain points lost due to late work.  In order to assure that you have revised substantially, I strongly suggest that you visit the Center for Writing before you submit your revision to be for a second evaluation.  When you submit a revision to me, you must also include your original, graded, essay plus all the supporting material you submitted the first time.

# Course Policies and Procedures

**Class Decorum:**
Disruptions and personal business will not be tolerated.  If you are not interested in the topic at hand, simply leave rather than disturb the rest of the class with chatter, sleeping, etc.  I prefer a casual atmosphere in class; however, that does not mean the course will be easy.  I have very high standards and expectations, and I believe that you can do the work that I will assign to you.  With that in mind, I am well aware that each of you has commitments beyond this English class.  Part of being a successful student includes learning to balance all of those commitments.  If you run into some difficulty here, let me know; we'll work out a solution.

**Other (food, electronic devices):**
Please recognize that there will be no food of any kind allowed in class (food, candy, chips, etc.).  If you would like to have a drink (as I'll usually have one), please make sure that it has a secure lid.  If it doesn't, I'll ask you to leave it in the back of the room until the end of class.  Please make sure that all electronic devices are OFF when in class (pagers, cell phones, iPods, and the like).  If a cell phone or pager goes off in class, I reserve the right to give the entire class a pop quiz.

**Academic Dishonesty:**
Refer to page 51 of the *TCU Undergraduate Studies Bulletin*.  The following examples apply specifically to academic misconduct in composition courses:

Plagiarism: The appropriation, theft, purchase, or obtaining by any means another's work, and the unacknowledged submission or incorporation of that work as one's own offered for credit. Appropriation includes the quoting or paraphrasing of another's work without giving credit.
Collusion: The unauthorized collaboration with another in preparing work offered for credit.
Fabrication and falsification: Unauthorized alteration or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise. Falsification involves altering information for use in any academic exercise. Fabrication involves inventing or counterfeiting information for use in any academic exercise.
Multiple Submission: The submission by the same individual of substantial portions of the same academic work (including oral reports) for credit more than once in the same or another class without authorization.
Complicity in academic misconduct: Helping another to commit an act of academic misconduct.

Ways to avoid academic dishonesty include allowing enough time to complete assignments, submit drafts when required, seek advice from me, the writing center, or other competent sources.

**All cases of suspected academic misconduct will be referred to the Director of Composition.  Sanctions imposed for cases of academic misconduct range from zero credit for the assignment to expulsion from the University.**

# Course Requirements

### In-Class Writing / On-Line Quizzes  (10%)

Almost daily, you will be asked to do some in-class writing.  These will generally be short responses to readings or to discussions.  It is important that you come to class prepared and complete all assigned readings.  You will also be required to participate in group activities throughout the semester including writing peer responses during workshops and as occasional homework.  All these activities are important to your success in this course, and therefore, your work during these activities will be evaluated in order to determine 10% of your final course grade.  In-class work cannot be "made up" for any reason, including any kind of absence or tardiness.  You will also take on-line quizzes throughout the semester.  I will drop the lowest quiz grade.  Quizzes and in-class writing will generally happen at the beginning of class.  If you are tardy, you cannot make up the work.

### Letter Writing Portfolio (10%)

Over the course of this semester, you will write several different types of letters in which you make a claim and attempt to persuade your audience to do something about that claim, such as a letter of praise, a formal letter of complaint, and a letter to the editor of a community publication.  You will even write letters to me and to a close family member.  These must be done on time and in the format specified to receive full credit.

### Media Journal (15%)

Throughout the semester, you will keep a "Media Journal" in which you will comment on a wide variety of issues that we'll discuss in class, but you'll do so through the lens of a television show or a newspaper/magazine column.  Each journal entry should provide some sort of commentary on the phenomena we are studying in class (race, technology, physical space, web communities, argument), moving beyond general plot concerns or summaries.  You will need to choose a television or textual event that will remain constant throughout the semester.   You will post two times a week:  one posting you will make about your media event and you will respond to your peers weekly.  Each entry that you make about your events would be 250 words (one page of double-spaced writing), and you will have 13 individual entries.  These entries are due on Wednesday night at midnight.  You will also be responding to the writing of your peers.  While you will also have 26 of these responses, they don't have to be quite as long as your initial posts, _ page each.  Responses to your peers are due on the following Sunday by midnight.  The media journal boards will be locked after the due date and these cannot be made up.  The grading scale for these entries is on a separate handout.

### Formal Papers (60%)

You will write three formal essays this semester (but you'll have lots of smaller assignments with each of these major ones).  Each completed, formal essay will be approximately 5 to 6 pages long.  You will be asked to submit rough drafts and to participate in peer review workshops before you submit your final papers.  Your participation in the "draft stage" will determine a portion of your paper grade.  Each essay will have a detailed assignment sheet that I'll give you later.  All the assignments in this course must be completed (in the order they are given) to receive credit for the course.  You will not pass the course without completing all assignments.

| First | "Literacy and Identity" | 20% |
| Second | "Summary and Analysis" | 20% |
| Third | "Synthesis of Source Material" | 20% |

### Final Exam (10%). Please don't make travel plans that conflict with this exam.  I will not change it for you.

# Grading

It is very important that you know that it is your responsibility to earn the grade you need for whatever you might need it for.  It is not my responsibility to keep you eligible to play a sport, receive a scholarship, to enter the business school, to join a sorority or fraternity or to please your parents.  This is your job.

**Grading Criteria:**

**A**    An "A" paper is an exceptional example of college writing.  It shows a clear main idea that can be traced throughout the development of the paper to the end, with carefully thought-through transitions between paragraphs and sentences.  The writer understands the mechanics of English grammar, punctuation, and spelling because there are few (if any) of these concerns in your essay.  Generally, there are not many of these for any given assignment.

**B**    A "B" paper is a good example of college writing.  This paper also contains a definite and original thesis.  The organization of the paper is good, although the supporting connections may not always be smooth.  The writer's supporting points relate closely to the main idea of the essay.  The langauge is generally clear, and the paper may contain more than a few mechanical errors.

**C**    A "C" paper fulfills the basic requirements of the assignment but needs improvement in some areas.  The essay shows a definite thesis that basically controls the essay's development.  The paper has organization, but may not be adequate in some respects.  The writer has organization, but may not be adequate in some respects.  The writer has provided vague or inadequately explained supporting ideas.  Sentence structure may be awkward, and the essay contains numerous grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors.

**D**    A "D" paper is marginally acceptable college writing.  The main idea of the essay is present, but it is difficult to follow through the paper's development.  The paragraphs deviate from the main thesis, and the missing connections between paragraphs and sentences keep the paper from moving forward with any sense of direction.  The paper contains major grammatical errors that seriously interfere with the paper's meaning.

**F**    An "F" paper seriously falls short of work appropriate for college-level writing.

**Grade Disputes:**
In evaluating your work, I do my best to be both rigorous and fair.  During my conferences with students, I try to approach the situation as simply another opportunity for each of us to become more effective at articulating the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing.  Accordingly, I use the following procedure for grade appeals.  If you strongly disagree with a grade you have received in this course, and desire an appeal:

**Grading Scale:**
It is your responsibility to keep track of your grades.  I will use the grade book on eCollege, but reserve the right to stop using it if the system proves to be too cumbersome.  However, I will inform you of your grade during my office hours but not during class.  If you have concerns about how to fulfill an assignment, or if you have concerns about your grade, please make an appointment to see me.

| Avg. | 98 | 95 | 92 | 88 | 85 | 82 | 78 | 75 | 72 | 68 | 65 | 62 | 0 |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
|      | A+  | A   | A-  | B+  | B   | B-  | C+  | C   | C-  | D+  | D   | D-  | F   |

# Resources

**Center for Writing**
The William L. Adams Center for Writing is an academic support service available to all TCU students, faculty, and staff.  Writing Specialists and peer tutors are available for one-on-one tutorials from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.  The Writing Center is located on the 2nd floor of the new Rickel Building (in the new sports complex, #244).  Tutoring hours are also available seven days a week in the library computer lab area.  Please see the Center for Writing website for specific hours (http://www.wrt.tcu.edu).  Drop-ins to the Rickel Center or the Library Annex are always welcome, but you may also make an appointment by calling (817.257.7221).

**Americans with Disabilities Act**
TCU complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 regarding students with disabilities.  The University shall provide reasonable accommodation for each eligible students who (a) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity, (b) has a record or history of such an impairment, or (c) is regarded as having such an impairment.  Eligible students should contact the Coordinator of Students with Disabilities as soon as possible in the academic term for which they are seeking accommodations.  Each eligible student is responsible for presenting relevant, verifiable, professional documentation and/or assessment reports to the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities (*TCU Undergraduate Studies Bulletin* 28).

**Diversity Awareness**
In this class, I will establish and support an environment that values and nurtures individual and group differences and encourages engagement and interaction.  Understanding and respecting multiple experiences and perspectives will serve to challenge and stimulate all of us to learn about others, about the larger world, and about ourselves.  By promoting diversity and intellectual exchange, we will not only mirror society as it is, but also model society as it should and can be.

**Course Calendar**
In the unit calendars, what we'll be doing each day, what you're expected to read for homework, and what you're expected to write is listed.  The course calendar is very important, and you are responsible for completing all the assignments listed.  I will often remind you of the reading and writing you'll need to complete for homework, but because we'll often become so engaged with our work in class, I might forget to discuss homework assignments.  Therefore, I'm letting you know ahead of time that you are responsible for completing all the assignments listed in accordance with the due dates provided.

**You can earn a guaranteed "B" in this course, if you do ALL of the following:**

You cannot miss more than one week's worth of absences (two) for ANY reason

You cannot be late with any major assignment

You must make substantive revisions on your major assignments

You will conduct good copy editing on your final revisions

You will make good effort on workshops with your peers

You will keep up with the Media Journal

You will make substantial effort with each draft

# How to be Successful in this Course

**The short answer:**

## Just do the work!

**The long answer**:

**Readings:** You should plan to read each assigned reading twice before we discuss it in class. The first time through, you should read quickly, to get a general sense of what the writer is doing, what the piece is about. Then, you should read through a second time, this time working more closely and deliberately with the text, focusing on those sections that seem difficult or puzzling or mysterious. You should read with a pen or pencil, marking the text in a way that will help you when you go back to it (particularly when you go back to it as a writer). If you can't bring yourself to write in your book, you should begin to develop a system using note cards or Post-it notes.

**Writings:** Each week, you will write one short essay (generally, one page or even one paragraph) and/or revise one essay, both as stages in three larger projects. Each week, you should make <u>two additional copies</u> of everything you have written, one for me and one for a peer reader. These smaller essays will begin to form the foundation of your larger projects. They will not be graded individually, but will factor into the project grade.

I will carefully comment on these one-page essays (as well as your larger projects). I spend a lot of time on these comments and I will expect you to take time to read what I have written. If you find that I have written much on your paper, you should take this as a sign of respect, not disrespect. It means that I was interested in your work, engaged. And this is a good thing. The best way to read my comments is to start at the beginning of your essay, reread what you have written, and stop to read my comments along the way. This is how I write the marginal comments, while I am reading. They show my reactions and suggestions at that moment. The final comment is where I will make a summary statement about your essay. Be warned: I tend to be blunt and to the point. If I sound angry, I probably am not. I want to get your attention, I want to be honest, and I see no reason to beat around the bush.

Since I allow ample revisions on your work, I will put grades on individual essays. I will expect you to consistently and successfully proofread all papers, <u>including first drafts</u>. I know that my handwriting can be a problem. I will not be embarrassed if you ask me to decipher what I have written. I will, however, be heartbroken if you simply skip over what is hard to read.

**Works Cited**

Adler-Kassner, Linda, and Susanmarie Harrington. *Basic Writing as a Political Act*. Cresskill,

    NJ: Hampton Press: 2002.

Bartholomae, David. "Inventing the University." *When a Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writer's*

    *Block and Other Composing-Process Problems*. Ed. Mike Rose. New York: Guilford,

    1985, 134-165.

_____. "The Study of Error." *College Composition and Communication* 31 (1980): 253-

    269.

_____ . "The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum." *Journal of Basic*

    *Writing* 12.1 (1993): 4-21.

Berlin, James A. *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges*. Carbondale:

    Southern Illinois U P, 1984.

Bizzell, Patricia. *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness.* Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P,

    1992.

_____. "'Contact Zones' and English Studies." *Cross Talk in Comp Theory*. Ed. Victor

    Villanueva. Urbana: NCTE, 479-486.

_____ . "What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College?" *College Composition and*

    *Communication* 37.3 (1986): 294-301.

Brammer, Charlotte. "Linguistic Capital and Basic Writers." *Journal of Basic Writing* 21.1

    (2002): 16-36.

Brandt, Deborah. *Literacy in American Lives*. New York: Cambridge U P, 2001.

Brooke, Robert. "Modeling a Writer's Identity: Reading and Imitation in the Writing

    Classroom." *College Composition and Communication* 39.1 (1988): 23-41.

Bruffee, Kenneth A. "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of the Mind.'" *Cross Talk in Comp Theory*. Ed. Victor Villanueva. Urbana: NCTE, 415-436.

Casazza, Martha. "Who Are We and Where Did We Come From?" *Journal of Developmental Education* 23.1 (1999): 2-7

Daniell, Beth. *A Communion of Friendship (Literacy, Spiritual Practice, and Recovery)*. Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois U P, 2003.

Elbow, Peter. "Being a Writer vs. Being an Academic: A Conflict in Goals." *College Composition and Communication* 46.1 (1995): 72-83.

_____. *Everyone Can Write*. New York: Oxford U P, 2000.

_____. *Writing Without Teachers*. New York: Oxford U P, 1998.

Emig, Janet. *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1971.

Eves-Bowden, Anmarie. "What Basic Writers Think About Writing." *Journal of Basic Writing* 20.2 (2001): 71-87.

Fish, Stanley. "Consequences." *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1985): 433-58.

Flower, Linda. *The Construction of Negotiated Meaning: A Social Cognitive Theory of Writing*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois U P, 1994.

Graff, Harvey. "Literacy and History." *The Literacy Myth: Cultural Integration and Social Structure in the Nineteenth Century*. New Brunswick: Transaction, 1991. 1-19.

Harris, Joseph. "The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 40.1 (1989): 11-22.

Hull, Glynda and Mike Rose. "Rethinking Remediation: Toward a Social-Cognitive Understanding of Problematic Reading and Writing." *Written Communication*. 8.2 (1989): 139-154.

Kasden, Lawrence N. "An Introduction to Basis Writing." *Basic Writing: Essays for Teachers, Researchers, and Administrators*. Eds. L. N. Kasden and D. R. Hoeber. Urbana: NCTE, 1980.

Lederman, Marie Jean. "A Comparison of Student Projections: Magic and the Teaching of Writing." *College English* 34.5 (1973): 674-689.

Lu, Min-Zhan. "From Silence to Words: Writing as Struggle." *Landmark Essays on Writing Process.* Ed. Sondra Perl. Davis, Calif: Hermagoras P, 1994. 165-176.

Lunsford, Andrea A. "Content of Basic Writers' Essays." *CCC* 31.3 (1980): 278-290.

Minot, Walter S., and Kenneth R. Gamble. "Self-Esteem and Writing Apprehension of Basic Writers: Conflicting Evidence." *Journal of Basic Writing* 10.2 (1991): 116-124.

Perl, Sondra. "Writing Process: A Shining Moment." *Landmark Essays on Writing Process*. Ed. Sondra Perl. Davis, Calif: Hermagoras Press, 1994.

Pratt, Mary Louise. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Ways of Reading*. Eds. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky. Seventh Edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005. 517-530.

Purcell-Gates, Victoria. *Other People's Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy.* Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1995.

Rodriguez, Richard. *Hunger of Memory*. Boston: Bantam, 1988.

Rose, Mike. "The Language of Exclusion: Writing Instruction at the University." *College English* 47.4 (1985): 341-359.

Shaughnessy, Mina P. *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing.* New York: Oxford U P, 1977.

Smitherman, Geneva. *Talkin' and Testifyin': The Language of Black America*. Detroit: Wayne State U P, 1977.

Soliday, Mary. *The Politics of Remediation*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2002.

Sommers, Nancy. "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers." In:

  *Landmark Essays on Writing Process*. Sondra Perl, Ed. Davis: Hermagoras P, 1994.

Spigelman, Candace. *Personally Speaking*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois U P, 2004.

Sternglass, Marilyn S. *Time to Know Them: a Longitudinal Study of Writing and Learning at the

  College Level*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997.

Villanueva, Victor. "Theory in the Basis Writing Classroom? A Practice." *Journal of Basic

  Writing* 16.1 (1997): 79-90.

White, Edward M. "The Importance of Placement and Basic Studies: Helping Students Succeed

  Under the New Elitism." *Journal of Basic Writing* 14.2 (1995): 75-84.

# VITA

| | |
|---|---|
| Personal Background | Travis L. Mann<br>Born April 9, 1964, Abilene, Texas<br>Son of Hal and Glynda Mann<br>Married Ma'lisa Y. Laidlaw, October 14, 1995 |
| Education | Diploma, Weatherford High School, 1982<br>Bachelor of Arts, English, Texas Christian University,<br>    Fort Worth, 1991<br>Master of Arts, English, Texas Christian University,<br>    Fort Worth, 2006 |
| Experience | Instructor, Tarrant County College<br>    2003-present<br>Graduate Instructor, Texas Christian University<br>    2005 |
| Professional Memberships | National Council of Teacher of English,<br>    2003-present<br>Texas Community College Teachers Association,<br>    2003-present |

ABSTRACT


MAKING CONNECTIONS: UNDERSTANDING HOW BASIC WRITERS
VIEW THEMSELVES AS ACADEMIC WRITERS

By Travis L. Mann, M.A., 2006
Department of English
Texas Christian University

Thesis Advisors:

Carrie Leverenz, Ph.D., Committee Chair; Associate Professor and Director of Composition

Charlotte Hogg, Ph.D., Assistant Professor

Ron Pitcock, Ph.D., Assistant Professor

This research explores how basic writing students in Texas Christian University's

Introduction to Critical Writing class viewed themselves as academic writers and how that view

changed from the beginning of a semester until the end. Conducted in the fall of 2005 and

compiled during the spring of 2006, this work attempts to understand factors that influence a

student's formation of identity as a writer by using the idea of a community that forms within a

classroom as a lens to frame the data. By looking at the students through the lens of a

community, issues of educational history, confidence, race, culture, and values became quickly

apparent as factors that strongly impacted how students view themselves as writers within a

classroom. The study's methodology included pre- and post-questionnaires, semester-long class

observations, the analysis of students' drafts and final products, and one-on-one interviews with

students and the instructor.