First-year college student beliefs about writing embedded in online discourse: An analysis and its implications for literacy learning

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FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE STUDENT BELIEFS ABOUT WRITING EMBEDDED IN ONLINE DISCOURSE: AN ANALYSIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERACY LEARNING

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

Approved:

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December, 2010
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents for giving me a love of literacy, my husband for his support, and my children for their patience.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my committee members for their guidance and support with this project. I also thank my friends and family for listening to me as I worked through the many stages of this project. I thank my students who have motivated me, inspired me, and continue to teach me about literacy.
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An Abstract of a Dissertation

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

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Approved:

Dr. Rick Traw, Committee Chair

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University of Northern Iowa
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ABSTRACT

Online discourse has become a common mode of communication for the Twenty-first Century. Many businesses now use electronic networking sites such as Facebook to communicate with customers through online posts and electronic updates through Twitter. With these recent trends in electronic communication, some educators have begun implementing electronic discourse into the classroom through online discussion boards. Discussion boards available through course technology such as WebCT and eLearning offer educators opportunities to channel this heightened interest in online communication. By building electronic course sites, educators can further classroom discussions on online discussion boards, which allow students to discuss course material with each other through electronic conversations over the Internet.

As language is multifaceted, ambiguous, and rich with our metaphors and symbols, this dissertation suggests that discourse analysis of an online discussion board offers a useful mode for uncovering and understanding the beliefs that first-year college students have about writing. This study used qualitative inquiry to analyze the online discourse that occurred over the period of one semester in a first-year writing course. The study sought to uncover the beliefs about writing that first-year college students bring with them to a first-year college writing course. Additionally, the study looked at how the beliefs shifted during the course of one semester. It concluded that curriculum including an online discussion board may provide college and high school educators another lens for understanding the disconnect that exists between high school and college curriculum. Additionally, the study found that the resulting discussion of the discourse analysis on a
course discussion board may facilitate an understanding of the transition for first-year students from high school to college.

Major findings of the study were:

- When students engage in online discourse within a learning community, they begin to understand how others think and feel. This leads to an appreciation for diversity and for a greater understanding of self.

- An online discussion board facilitates the formation of self, as students look at their identity within a learning community and rethink their own individual beliefs and values.

- Online discussion boards may facilitate positive social interactions in a first-year writing course and lead to smoother and more positive transitions from high school learning to college learning.

- Online discussion boards in a first-year writing course may facilitate the formation of a recursive literacy process that finds value in feedback.

- Online discussion boards might be a valuable resource to help instructors understand how students are processing literacy curriculum and how it is contributing to the formation of self and knowledge.

- Online discussion boards offer an authentic assessment resource for informing educational decision making in the classroom.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

What Should College Students Know about Writing?

How does an instructor of first-year college students meet the challenge of teaching to a wide range of writing experiences and abilities? As Erickson, Peters, and Strommer (2006) suggest, “those who teach first-year students” must “try to devise some means to meet them where they are, academically, intellectually, and emotionally, without abandoning reasonable rigor and appropriately high standards” (p. 7). The first step to creating this type of curriculum begins by realizing that “students differ” (Erickson et al., 2006, p. 21). However, in order to understand and teach to these differences, we need to understand their belief systems.

Recent research on first-year students helps us to understand the types of belief students come to college with and how they process information. For example, Perry (1999) identified nine stages of development that first-year students pass through. These stages are typically categorized into 4 groups: dualism, multiplicity, relativism, and commitment to relativism. Other researchers also found a similar progression from believing knowledge is factual and conveyed from teacher to student to an accepting that knowledge is relative and that we all construct meaning (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Erickson et al., 2006; Hofer & Pintrich, 1997; King & Kitchner, 1994; Baxter Magolda, 2002).
So it seems, the answer to this question about what students should know about writing may not be as simple as it sounds. It involves careful analysis and study of the belief systems of those who devise and implement curriculum and those who are educated within it. At a recent meeting sponsored by the Connecticut Coalition of English Teachers where educators spent several days reflecting on what students should know about writing, Sullivan (2006) described the task as “daunting,” as he and those in attendance attempted to define and answer this question (p. 1). Yet despite this challenging task, Sullivan (2006) still believed that the English profession “could benefit enormously from reopening a dialogue about this question” (p. 3). Thus, this dissertation will attempt to reopen and stimulate reflection, discussion, and perhaps writing about this seemingly timeless question. And in doing so, it seems prudent to first revisit the past one hundred years of reform in writing curriculum. This will provide a better understanding of how writing curriculum was shaped into what it is today and to begin envisioning the direction writing curriculum should take in the future. Additionally, it will be important to look at the belief systems that have guided and are guiding our current writing curriculum. As language is multifaceted, ambiguous, and rich with our metaphors and symbols (Barthes, 1977; Derrida, 1981; Foucault, 1977), this dissertation will suggest that discourse analysis offers a useful mode for uncovering and understanding beliefs about writing within the context of writing.
Writing Curriculum in Review

A quick review of the past one hundred years of the teaching of writing reflects uneasiness about student writing and an inability to decide how and what students should be able to write when they reach college. College students have been required to take entry-level composition courses since the late 1800s, after a majority of Harvard's incoming freshman failed the writing entrance exam—stirring up the timeless question: What should students be taught about writing? Looking at a copy of the 1874 writing exam shows a desire for students to be able to engage in writing about British Literature as content emphasis was placed on Shakespeare. The exam asked students to write “30 lines” organized into “two paragraphs” on the “Story of the Caskets” in the “‘Merchant of Venice.’” Attention in composing the paragraphs was to be on correct grammar, punctuation and spelling (Harvard University, 1887, p. 161). This type of focus can also be seen in the 1882-1883 exam when students were asked to write a composition about Othello. A list of several character topics was given offered from which to choose. Again, students were assessed on the ability to paragraph and use correct grammar, punctuation and spelling. One difference in this later exam was the direction to write “clear” and “forcible” sentences. Students were not restricted to 30 lines or two paragraphs in the 1882-1883 exam but were told to focus on “quality rather than quantity” (Harvard University Catalogue, 1882, p. 261). Both exams also included 12 sentences that students were to edit for correct grammar, punctuation and spelling (Harvard University, 1887; Harvard University, 1882). In discussing his grading of these entrance exams, Hill (1880) reported that half of the students taking the exam failed and that overwhelmingly the
exams showed first-year students to be deficient in the ability to distinguish between the use of a period and comma and spelling. He also reported that about one tenth of the students who failed displayed an ignorance of topic content. Another of Hill’s (1880) complaints was students’ inability to organize thoughts and ideas when writing about a topic.

A review of writing instruction in the years following the 1874 exam showed multiple curriculum approaches that attempted to shape the American student into a proficient writer. The approaches varied from penmanship, an emphasis on reading, to personal writing about life and connections to literature (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006). Berlin (1984) argued that among these approaches “three distinct rhetorical systems” surfaced and “only two remain[ed] in force at the end of the [19th] century” (p. 3) when “composition courses became firmly established in the new American college (p. 85). He named these rhetorics “classical,” “psychological-epistemological,” and “romantic” (pp. 3-4; p. 85) and noted that while different in focus, all three centered around an awareness of “reality, interlocutor, audience and language” (p. 4). He also acknowledged that their theoretical beliefs placed an emphasis on the relationship between “what is going on in the classroom and what is happening in the larger society” (p. 4). His research found that at the end of the nineteenth century only “psychological-epistemological” and “romantic” remained in the college curriculum and that by the twentieth century “a form of the second—current-traditional rhetoric—became dominant” (p. 85).
Later in the century, during the 1960s, the "romantic" returned when the "current-traditional rhetoric began to be challenged" (p. 85; p. 9). And not long after this shift, the question of what our students should know about writing officially and publically flared again in 1975. Only this time, the question was presented as a crisis when Newsweek published the article "Why Johnny Can't Write," which accused the public schools of failing to provide students with the basics of writing. While the controversy was not new, it reignited a fiery debate that instituted the requirement of college writing courses for incoming freshman and led to the formation of the National Writing Project (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006).

In 1983, our country's educational practices continued to be seen as a dire crisis, and writing was placed front and center when Ronald Reagan's appointed panel the National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE] published its report *A Nation at Risk.* Among other suggestions, the panel recommended that high school students be required "to take 4 years of English" (Hillocks, 2002, p. 2). The report placed English first on their list of recommendations and even directed the teaching of these high school English courses by emphasizing that students should leave high school with the ability to communicate what they comprehend, interpret, and evaluate with an "ethical understanding" of how they as individuals "relate to the customs, ideas, and values of today's life and culture" (Hillocks, 2002, pp. 2-3). This was significant because it suggested that teaching practices in a country that still viewed a teacher as a transmitter of knowledge delivered from a podium should facilitate active and authentic learning (Goodlad, 1984; Hillocks, 2002, p. 3; Nystrand, 1997).
Writing in a State of Flux

Twenty years later, a report from the National Commission on Writing for America’s Families, Schools, and Colleges (2003) still argued for a needed revolution in the teaching of writing in the classroom, and a recent report from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), revealed that “literacy practices are in the midst of a profound change” (Yancey, 2009, p. 1). The report also showed practices in the teaching of writing may be evolving as a recent poll conducted by NCTE of language arts teachers, parents, and teens, revealed that “nearly two-thirds of the [educator] poll respondents indicated that their teaching methods had undergone marked changes reflecting new concepts of literacy” (p. 1). Among these changes, educators acknowledged that today’s writers are involved in many “out-of-school literacy practices” that are just as “critical to students’ development as what occurs in the classroom” (p. 1). A report titled “Teens and the Social Media” from the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2007) concurred with these findings, as it stated “39% of online teens share their own artistic creations,” “33% create or work on web pages or blogs,” and “26% remix content they find online into their own creations” (Lenhart, Macgill, Madden, & Smith, 2007, p. i).

Yet, another study titled “Writing, Technology and Teens” conducted by the National Commission on Writing and the Pew Internet (2008) showed that teens didn’t make any connections between their outside-of-class writing and their classroom writing. Additionally, teens valued their school writing above outside-of-class writing (Lenhart,
Arafeh, Smith, & Macgill, 2008). These mixed messages revealing that students engage in many literacy activities via technology and their lack of value for them in comparison to their school literacy activities provide cause for reflection on the literacy values being promoted in education. If practices in the teaching of writing are indeed changing to place more value on the literacy practices students engage in with technology outside of the classroom, they may be slow and ineffective in leading students to see connections between their out-of-class literacy practices and in-class literacy practices. Students aren’t making meaningful connections between their writing inside the classroom and outside the classroom.

Teachers may be hesitant or slow to incorporate technology into the writing classroom for many reasons—some of which might include the bureaucracy or budget of the schools where they teach, lack of support and training, or because change is frightening (Herrington & Moran, 2009). Another obstacle has been the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation that was implemented in 2002 under the Bush administration as a solution to an education system that Bush (1999) described in his talk The Future of Educational Reform as “the soft bigotry of low expectations” (n.p.). Once implemented, NCLB evaluated states yearly based on their students’ standardized test scores. The legislation assumed “tests keyed to rigorous state academic standards provide a measure of student knowledge and skills” (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Since then, teachers have been concerned with test results—which may be another reason for hesitancy to implement technology into writing. Teachers are measured on their students’ test scores, not their students’ ability to write with technology. Hillocks’s research on
state mandated assessments (2002) might also lend some credence here, as he concluded that curriculum is often defined and limited by the content of statewide assessments.

So it seems after the past one hundred years, we aren’t any closer to agreeing on what students should know about writing, and it also seems that the answer depends on who is asking the question, who is responding, and what that group or organization believes about writing. K-12 students are still arriving at college with limited writing abilities (Hillocks, 2002; Herrington & Moran, 2009). In response, NCTE and the Council of Writing Program Administrators have published statements in an attempt to shape the reform of writing education in K-12 and higher education (Herrington & Moran, 2009).

Beliefs about Writing

The Writing Study Group of the NCTE Executive Committee (2004) listed the following beliefs about writing to guide teachers of K-12 as they teach writing in the classroom. Thus, it gives us a glimpse into what NCTE believes about writing and what they believe teachers should convey to their students about writing:

1. Everyone has the capacity to write.

2. People learn to write by writing.

3. Writing is a process.

4. Writing is a tool for thinking.
5. Writing grows out of many different purposes.

6. Conventions of finished and edited texts are important to readers and therefore to writers.

7. Writing and reading are related.

8. Writing has a complex relationship to talk.

9. Literate practices are embedded in complicated social practices.

10. Composing occurs in different modalities and technologies.

These belief statements show writing to be process-oriented, flexible, accessible and connected with reading, thinking, social relationships, social functions, and technology.

Not drastically different but focused on “outcomes” rather than beliefs, the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) wrote and adopted WPA Outcome Statements that are organized by the following categories of desired outcomes: Rhetorical Knowledge, Critical Thinking, Reading and Writing, Processes and Conventions. Within each category, the WPA listed what it hopes students will leave a first-year writing program with and then continue to build upon. Within the categories, the WPA included similar beliefs to NCTE by emphasizing such skills as “writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating,” responding “to the needs of different audiences,” and that there are “social aspects of writing processes.” However, in focusing more on outcomes than beliefs, the WPA’s statement includes skills that students should
also possess by the end of a first-year writing program. And among these skills, the list included documentation, grammar, formats of texts and genres, and a knowledge of writing conventions. In formulating the outcome statements, the council stated “we seek to regularize what can be expected to be taught in first-year composition” (Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2000). Thus, while similar in nature, the statements are also very different. The WPA (in focusing on skills not too different from the skills focused on by the early Harvard writing exam) “seeks to regularize,” while NCTE seeks to convey important beliefs the council would like writing teachers to nurture in K-12 students.

Perhaps, this variance in approach provides some insight into the confusion and disagreements among students, professors, administrators, and high school teachers about what students should know about writing when they arrive at college. The openness of the NCTE’s beliefs about writing, while holistic and embracing, leave K-12 teachers with the ability to focus only on creative writing if they choose in the midst of a NCLB administration that measures writing with standardized tests that do not include student writing. And, the WPA emphasizes mastery of documentation, writing conventions, grammar, punctuation and a knowledge of rhetorical analysis.

This creates a challenge for the instructor of first-year college students who may have only one semester to prepare students for the types of academic expectations delineated by WPA, especially when they come to college with little preparation and experience with these types of expectations. I personally have found students in an
introductory writing course to come from a variety of different academic backgrounds in regard to writing curriculum, as a result of the conflicting beliefs and statements discussed above. From my own experience in the past 9 years of teaching writing to first-year college students, I have found students enrolled in the same course to range from having no writing experience to having advanced experience, and multiple levels in between. Some students have shared in conferences that they only wrote fiction in their high school English courses, some regurgitated grammar rules and did not write papers, and others have shared that they wrote thirty page research papers. Several students have also shared that their English course was a study hall because the English teacher quit and was not replaced.

Yet these types of stories are seldom found in research or heard at curriculum planning meetings because students do not have presence there. Thus, student voices are seldom heard. In looking at the diverse beliefs from the various voices within the Education profession and political arena discussed above about what should matter in student writing, it seems one collective voice is missing—the students. While the research above on how students process information is helpful, it does not tell us what students believe is important about writing. What beliefs about writing do college students bring with them to their first-year required writing course? What do they see as the absolutes about writing that their teachers have taught them? And, do their beliefs evolve during their first writing course at college? If so, how? As a researcher, academic learning center coordinator, and college writing instructor of first-year college students who is driven to help students transition from high school to college-level writing, these
are the questions that drove the research of this study. Thus, this study analyzed students' online discourse that occurred on an elearning discussion board during a liberal arts core writing course to identify and understand literacy beliefs that students bring to an introductory, college-level writing course. Additionally, the discourse analysis sought to identify and understand shifts in the students' beliefs about literacy that occurred during the semester, as they engaged in the writing curriculum.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

First-Year College Students

Before leaving for class, I quickly peruse my email and respond to several student emails. Debbie (a single, teenage mother) will be home with her infant who is ill and would like me to review her essay. Mark has just been diagnosed with H1N1 and must not attend class. Amy just had a close friend die in a car accident and will be attending a funeral. Tom would like to meet to discuss his paper, and Hillary who has missed several classes would like to discuss whether or not she will pass the course. Matt (already struggling with readjusting to regular life since returning from Afghanistan) has been told that he will be deployed again at the end of the semester and would like to set up a time to talk.

In the classroom as I prepare for teaching, Malory arrives early and approaches me with questions about APA style documentation. Bill inquires about how to write a business proposal for a business he would like to get off the ground. Eric asks for strategies for reading his Calculus text. Linda would like advice for organizing her Humanities paper. And, Anne excitedly asks me about the book she is reading and cannot put down. This is an actual morning from a first-year writing course that is not out of the ordinary.
Over the past nine years of teaching college English courses to freshmen and my new experiences of working with them on their reading processes in the Reading and Learning Center, I have come to know first-year college students well. Their first year in college is a transitional year in which they learn to navigate a foreign and alien world. Many are away from home for the first time and learning to live with other students very different from themselves. Some have shared that they had never learned in an environment with people of different race, color or ethnicity before. Others are learning from professors of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds for the first time. They are making decisions on their own as they set their own curfews, homework schedules, and decide when to do laundry. While the freedom excites them at first, within a short time they feel confused, overwhelmed and alone. They find college-level course work much more demanding than high school, and most struggle to adjust. And for the first time in many years, they find a need for guidance and advice from adults. Thus, they often turn to me (an instructor of one of their liberal arts courses of smaller enrollment) in their writing, workshops and conferences for guidance and advice. Often, I write their first reference letter because I am the only instructor who has gotten to know them. This is one of the advantages of taking a first-year writing course. Writing builds relationships, and these relationships offer them the feedback and guidance they seek—and relationships with professors are key to surviving the first year of college (Erickson et al., 2006).

Building and maintaining these relationships is not easy though. Often it requires a patience, dedication, passion and knowledge. However, the knowledge extends beyond
the subject matter of the course. The instructor or professor must also know and understand his or her students. This includes knowing why students embark on such a difficult transition. The American Freshman Project, a long-term study of first-year students, and The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) offer much of this information (Erickson et al., 2006). There one can find that students consistently give the following reasons for coming to college:

- Interest in learning (77 %)
- Preparation for career (75 %)
- Gain foundation of knowledge about various topics and ideas (65 %)
- Meet graduate school requirements (57 %; Erickson et al., 2006)

Additionally, a recent report on survey results from the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) shows that once in college, first-year students will need to value and develop certain “Habits of Mind” (DeAngelio & Hurtado, 2009, slide 5). The HERI report relies on Conley (2005) to define “Habits of Mind” as “learning behaviors that college faculty have identified as essential for success in college coursework.” These “Habits of Mind” are listed as:

- “Ask questions in class”
- “Support your opinions with a logical argument”
- “Seek solutions to problems and explain them to others”
- “Revise your papers to improve your writing”
• “Evaluate the quality and reliability of information you received”

• “Take a risk because you felt you had more to gain”

• “Seek alternate solutions to a problem”

• “Look up scientific research articles and resources”

• “Explore topics on your own even though it was not required for a class”

• “Accept failure as part of the learning process”

• “Seek feedback on your academic work” (DeAngelo & Hurtado, 2009, slide 5).

In looking at this list, one can see how all of these skills might be found within the curriculum of a first-year writing course. But, the data does not include how, if, or when students develop beliefs within the first-year of college that might lead to the development of these skills.

Conditions of Learning

Since these “habits or mind” are so crucial to success in college, research that looks at how these habits are formed or beliefs leading to these habits might lead college educators to focus on “conditions that appear to facilitate” learning that might bring about the development of the skills faculty agreed were essential to college students (Surry & Ely, 2007, p. 108). And according to Surry and Ely (2007), this type of learning should not focus on “barriers” (p.108). Surry and Ely (2007), as well as various other studies of
positive learning environments (Bauder, 1993; Ravitz, 1999; Surry & Ensminger, 2003; Varden, 2002), have identified eight conditions in a learning environment that facilitate positive learning experiences for students: “dissatisfaction with the status quo”; “Knowledge and skills exist”; “Availability of resources”; “Availability of time”; “Rewards and incentives exist”; “Participation”; “Commitment,” and “Leadership” (Surry & Ely, 2007, p. 108). Surry and Ely (2007) find it essential for educators to be aware of each of these conditions before, during and after an educational experience so that they might adjust their instruction to the needs of their students.

Thus as a college writing instructor considering the educational setting of my first-year writing students, I needed to understand what they value, why they value, and how much they value it. In essence, I needed to understand and be able to identify their beliefs. In particular, I needed to understand their belief systems about writing. I needed to identify the belief systems that Chapter I of this dissertation showed to have been founded by high school English courses, as Perry (1999) concluded that first-year students come to college with the belief that knowledge is absolute and passed on to students from teachers. And while Chapter I discussed how and why first-year students’ beliefs about writing may vary greatly from college instructors and professors, according to Ely’s (1999) conditions listed above, in order to facilitate a disposition toward learning that implements the skills desired by college faculty, I needed to create an environment that provided the eight conditions listed above, but perhaps of most difficulty might be challenging the belief systems of my student. This would require that I instigate within my students “a dissatisfaction of the status quo” (p. 108). In other words, I needed to
facilitate a cognitive dissonance that demonstrated why their learning beliefs of high school should change.

**Belief Systems**

In facilitating such a cognitive dissonance, I would not only need to conduct an implementation analysis as described above, I would also need to inventory their belief systems. For our behavior is not only consciously but unconsciously governed by our beliefs. As Schoenfeld (1983) discovered in his studies of math students’ problem solving behaviors “tangible cognitive actions . . . are often the result of consciously or unconsciously held beliefs about (a) the task at hand, (b) the social environment within which the task takes place, and (c) the individual problem-solver’s perception of self and his or her relation to the task and the environment” (p. 330). The second of these, the social component becomes of particular interest here, as it indicates that the environment of the class in which learning takes place affects the belief systems that students develop. Thus, as an instructor of writing, I must also monitor and understand the developing collective belief systems of the class—indicating that my class also becomes an entity or a collective student to analyze, understand and evaluate. The social environment of the class facilitates learning about writing and shapes how students define themselves and how they feel about themselves as writers within an academic environment.

What might I find in examining the collective belief system of first-year year college students entering my classroom? Observations may find them exhausted, overwhelmed, and stressed about the workload of college classes. For as Erickson, Peters
and Strommer (2006) noted and I observe on a daily basis in interacting with these students, “there is no real transition from high school to college, only a stopping and a starting,” and so it really shouldn’t be so “surprising that many first year students’ initial concerns revolve around the course load and the work it entails” (p. 8). Comparing faculty expectations with in-coming student experience might also help us to understand the culture shock first-year students experience in attempting to transition from high school to college. The Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, 2004) reported that full-time college faculty expected their students to spend 6 hours per week studying per course. Most students enroll in four to five courses per semester. This would mean that faculty expected them to spend between 24-30 hours a week outside of class studying. In other words, attending class and studying would roughly be the same as a 40 hour work week. In contrast, more than 80 % of first-year college students reported studying 10 hours or fewer outside of class while they were in high school (Sax et al., 2004).

No wonder first year students experience so much stress their first year of college. In addition to having complete freedom over their time and schedules, they are now expected to use the majority of that time studying and working on academics. Both of these experiences are foreign and somewhat at odds with each other. Entering college, students expect college to be about freedom and fun, as heard in the lyrics of the recent hit by American rap artist Asher Roth (2009). Below is an excerpt from the song that many high school students and first year college students listen to and use as their cell phone ring tone. The lyrics give us an idea of the type of experience they believe they will find in college:
Drink my beer and smoke my weed but my good friends is all I need

Pass out at 3, wake up at 10, go out to eat then do it again

Man, I love college

I wanna go to college for the rest of my life

Sip Banker's Club and drink Miller Lite

On Thirsty Thursday and Tuesday Night Ice

And I can get pizza a dollar a slice [. . .]

Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug!

Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug!

Freshmen! Freshmen!

Freshmen! Freshmen!

Do something' crazy! Do somethin' crazy!

Do something' crazy! Do somethin' crazy!

Keg stand! Keg stand!

Keg stand! Keg stand! (Roth, 2009)

While automatic cringing and shock might be the immediate reactions of professors and parents as they read (or listen to) these lyrics, close reading of them reveals some of the beliefs and perceptions that high school students and first year freshman may have about colleges. Some believe it is a chance to “Do somethin’ crazy!,” drink beer, eat pizza, party and make “good friends.” Thus, first-year college students might arrive on campus with the expectations of freedom, parties, and fun that will make them want to “go to
college for the rest of [their lives].” They also arrive with study habits from high school that consisted of 10 hours of studying a week. Additionally, the National Survey of Student Engagement discussed above showed that 75% of these same students come to college to learn and prepare for a career. Clearly these values and beliefs are contradictory in nature. One cannot engage in the types of behaviors described in the song, employ the 6-10 hours a week of study strategies from high school and hope to successfully learn in college and prepare for a career. These contradictory values could only result in a sudden realization that partying, poor class attendance, and little studying doesn’t equate with effective learning and career preparation. When encountering this dilemma, it is not hard to understand the stress and feelings of overwhelm in first-year students that have been reported by Erickson, Peters, and Strommer (2006) and that have coincided with my own observations. Over the past 9 years of working with first-year students, I have also observed students struggling with this transition and shifting of values and beliefs and have found them to become even more exaggerated when met with the rising costs of college. Students soon realize that they cannot afford the party. Some seek guidance and adapt to the transition, and others find the transition impossible and leave college.

In addition to cultural and media influences, the Bridge Project of the Stanford Institute for Higher Education also noted a disconnect between college students and college faculty. The study found states at fault for creating “unnecessary and detrimental barriers between high school and college, barriers that are undermining these student aspirations.” For example, project research found that “high school assessments often
stress different knowledge and skills” than college entrance and placement exams.
Additionally, “the coursework between high school and college is not connected; students
graduate from high school under one set of standards and, 3 months later, are required to
meet a whole new set of standards in college.” And most tragically, “no one is held
accountable for issues related to student transitions from high school to college”
(Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003, p. 11).

Thus, once college students arrive on campus and begin to experience an
academic disconnect, a cognitive dissonance of their perceptions of college life may
bring changes in their belief systems. And I have found the first-year college classroom
too often become their sounding board for this cognitive dissonance, as they find class
readings and writing assignments to give voice to their struggles and questions.
Additionally, this makes the first-year college writing classroom fertile ground for
learning. For, as discussed above, one of the conditions of learning is cognitive
dissonance. By channeling the students’ cognitive dissonance through critical reading,
writing, research, and social discussions, I have observed that students begin to see the
skills of the first year writing course as the essential skills they need to succeed in college
and life.
Engaging the Self-System: Marzano's Revised Taxonomy

Marzano’s (2001) Revised Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (what he calls the revised taxonomy) offered a constraint for my observations and research. In revising Bloom’s Taxonomy Marzano (2001) found the “self-system” to be pivotal to understanding student learning because the “self-system” decided whether or not engagement in learning would occur. Marzano (2001) found in his studies that if the “self-system” engaged in the learning then the student would progress to the metacognitive and cognitive stages of learning. He concluded that “processing always starts with the self-system, proceeds to the metacognitive system, then to the cognitive system, and finally to the knowledge domains.” Additionally, if the “self-system contains no beliefs that would render a given task important, the individual will either not engage in the task or will engage with low motivation.” When the “self-system” does decide to engage in learning it then begins to enter the metacognitive stage and set goals.

Therefore, the “self-system” becomes imperative for the instructor to understand and engage with. As a writing instructor, I need to understand my students’ “self-systems” and the collective beliefs of my students,’ as the collective beliefs influence the individual beliefs. In understanding my students’ beliefs, I can begin to understand if and how the students’ “self-systems” are functioning, as I attempt to channel and create a cognitive dissonance through curriculum that will facilitate the students’ engagement with writing and the setting of their own personal writing goals that can be used and applied to writing assignments in the course, other courses, and their career.
Understanding the Self-System

The self-system discussed above relies on a system of beliefs, attitudes and emotions that work together in order to engage in tasks (Harter, 1980; Markus & Ruvolo, 1990; Marzano, 2001). This system also directly affects motivation as one engages in a task (Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977, 1980; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Marzano, 2001). In analyzing the self-system, Marzano (2001) “found four types of self-system thinking that are relevant to the New Taxonomy: (1) examining importance, (2) examining efficacy, (3) examining emotional response, and (4) examining overall motivation” (p. 50). Thus, in order to engage in learning a student’s self-system must see the learning as (1) important (2) within his or her abilities and (3) a positive experience. If these conditions are met, then the overall motivation level to learn will be high and success is more likely to result. However, it is important to note that these types of thinking within the self-system do not operate exclusively of each other. In fact, they are so mutually influential that one mode of thought could override the other and result in a student choosing not to engage in learning. Another result could be that one mode of thought might result in low motivation even if a student does choose to engage.

This might apply in the first-year writing course in the following manner. For example, some students may agree that they need to learn how to write effectively to do well in college, but they may have had such negative experiences in previous writing courses in high school that they think they are incapable of ever being able to write effectively. Thus, while seeing the importance of learning, the students’ negative
emotional responses to writing result in thoughts and beliefs that learning to write effectively is not possible. Thus, the students will have low motivation to engage in writing activities in the class and will likely do poorly in the class. In order to overcome this outcome, the students would need to change their thoughts and beliefs about their abilities. One means of accomplishing this would be for the instructor to be aware of the students’ thoughts, beliefs, and negative emotional responses to writing and work to facilitate students’ changing of them.

Understanding learning processes as Marzano describes suggests that one potentially effective method of teaching writing involves much more than planning and delivering writing curriculum. It requires an involvement with students on the personal level. According to Marzano (2001), instructors must examine what students (1) believe to be important, (2) believe they can accomplish, (3) feel toward the learning and topic, and (4) want to learn. In essence, effective teaching requires identifying, understanding, and caring about what students believe, why they believe, and how those beliefs can be channeled in ways that motivate students to form and reach positive learning goals.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs: Examining Importance

Since students must first think and believe that a task is important to learn before engaging in the task, it might be helpful to review Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs to understand how Maslow (1954) suggested humans form beliefs about needs and establish importance of needs. Maslow (1954) developed a hierarchical pyramid depicting human needs. In the pyramid, he represented that in order for human beings to reach the highest
level of self actualization, they must first have their lower-level needs met. The pyramid places physiological needs on the bottom level followed by safety, social, and self-esteem needs. Self-Actualization needs are at the highest level of the pyramid. Maslow (1954) believed that one must meet the needs of a level of the pyramid to pass to another level. Thus, one would not move from the level of physiological needs to safety needs until one believed his or her physiological needs were met. Maslow’s (1954) model demonstrated how belief and motivation are governed by human needs, beginning with the most basic and primitive needs of survival. As survival needs are met, one moves on to care more about social and self-fulfillment needs.

**Physiological needs.** At the most basic physiological level, humans make decisions based on acquiring the basics of survival, such as shelter, food, water, and air. According to Maslow (1954), humans at this level are motivated to survive. They do not worry about needs such as social status or self-esteem until these basic needs are met. While most first-year college students have these needs met by their parents or in the residence halls, some may be living on their own and working at a low-paying job trying to meet these basic needs. To engage at this level, students would need to find a connection between literacy and physiological needs. Examples such as Frederick Douglas might facilitate these students’ self-system into engagement, as Douglas traded his physiological needs for literacy and escaped slavery. This risk allowed him to move to higher levels of needs in the pyramid, as he eventually became an influential and respected speaker on reform in the United States.
Safety needs. After the basic physiological needs are met, Maslow (1954) observed that humans then become concerned with safety and security. They need to feel safe and secure from physical and emotional harm. They concern themselves with issues such as job security, financial stability, their living environment and community. Many first-year students come to us at this level. Desiring to make a life of their own, they are motivated to learn because they want to acquire a career that will financially support them. They realize that their parents will not support them forever. Many are living away from home for the first time, and they need to be aware of their environment to protect themselves from rape, assault and theft. Those of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds will need to feel accepted and safe in their learning community. In order to engage students as this level of Maslow’s (1954) pyramid, writing instructors would need to help students realize that writing will help them succeed in their college courses so that they will be able to succeed in a career that will allow them to support themselves. Writing will need to be seen as part of keeping them safe and secure in their community—perhaps as a tool of transitioning from high school to college. Viktor Frankl’s (1959) memoir of surviving the concentration camps might engage students whose self-systems are trying to discern a connection between safety needs and writing. Frankl (1959) explained that he endured the emotional and mental turmoil of being physically and mentally by finding a purpose in his existence. He mentally recorded and reflected on all of his experiences so that he could later write about them for others. His motivation for surviving each day was driven by a desire to write about his experience so that others might learn from them.
Thus, if the students' self-systems also find writing as serving a useful purpose in their existence, they may also engage in the curriculum. Like Frankl (1959), they would need to value writing as a tool that they might use to transcend to a higher level of existence.

**Social needs.** Once humans feel safe and secure, Maslow (1954) found that they desire to connect and relate with other humans in social activities. They desire to interact in friendships, relationships and groups where they are able to give and receive love. In the writing class, instructors can meet this need by assigning group work and projects. I have observed in my own teaching that once the students' self-system engages in the writing process, students easily interact and collaborate with each other as they share their writings, offer feedback, and help each other to grow in their abilities and achieve their goals.

**Self-esteem needs.** Maslow (1954) also found that a sense of belonging led humans to desire recognition, a sense of accomplishment, and self-respect. They wanted to be recognized as important within the groups they belonged. First-year students may also feel this need once they feel they belong and can succeed in the writing classroom. To help them fulfill this need, writing instructors need to provide opportunities for students to present and share their accomplishments. Instructors can help students feel fulfilled by planning curriculum that facilitates the sharing of their expertise, advice, experiences and writing with their classmates. Through presentations and group
discussions, the writing class can become a working and writing community where all students feel respected and valued for their contributions.

Self-Actualization needs. Maslow (1954) described self-actualization as the highest level of the pyramid of needs and said that few humans ever reach this level. People at this level often feel harmony and extreme happiness, yet they are continually motivated to strive for greater self-fulfillment by working toward goals such as truth, wisdom, justice, and meaning. These people seek to understand and make their world a better place. While few first-year students come to the writing classroom at this level, those who do may be motivated to learn by seeing how writing will help them find greater understanding of self, others, and their world. They can benefit from seeing how they could use writing to share their knowledge with others.

Applying the Pyramid to First-year Writing Students

Applying Maslow’s conceptual model to the first-year college writing course might work in the following manner. In order for a student’s self-system to find writing as important to their self-actualization, they would have to feel that their basic survival needs were met, that they were accepted socially and worthy and capable of learning and sharing their abilities in a college writing course. Students on a lower-level of the pyramid, would need to see how writing would help them meet the needs of that level. For example, students on the lower level working to acquire safety needs would need to see how writing might help them to succeed in other college courses and allow them to remain in college. And while Maslow (1954) suggested that humans progress from one
level to the next, more realistically, instructors may find that students may move back and forth between one level and the next. In other words, reaching one level may not assure that one will not move back to a lower level at another point. Additionally, as examples such as Viktor Frankl (1959) have shown, some people have reached self-actualization in the absence of physiological and safety needs. Thus, while the pyramid shows us that many forces affect motivation, individuals may differ in how they interpret and react to set circumstances. Instructors may use Maslow (1954) to understand their students’ motivation, but they must also realize that no theory offers absolute answers.

**Bandura’s Theories: Examining Efficacy**

Bandura’s (1994) theories about self-efficacy may provide some insight into how first-year college writing students might examine self-efficacy in the writing classroom. He defined perceived self-efficacy as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives.” And, he concluded that “Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. Such beliefs produce these diverse effects through four major processes. They include cognitive, motivational, affective and selection processes” (¶1). Bandura (1994) found that people with high levels of self-efficacy faced challenges and adversity with the intrinsic belief that the obstacles could be mastered with their skills and abilities. They were not easily discouraged by minor failures and setbacks. Instead, when faced with perceived threatening situations they found confidence in knowing that they could control the situation with their skills and abilities. Those with
high levels of self-efficacy also had lower levels of stress and were less likely to become depressed.

Conversely, Bandura (1994) reported that those with low levels of self-efficacy often perceived challenging situations as threatening and as personal attacks. They were less likely to commit to goals and obsessed over potential, negative outcomes that may result from challenge and adversity. If they were to engage, they did not put forth much effort, and when they encountered failure they were likely to give up and slow to recover from the set back. They often became easily stressed and depressed.

In his studies of self-efficacy, Bandura (1994) found four main influences on self-efficacy. He listed these as (1) Success, (2) Social Models, (3) Social Persuasion, and (4) Stress and Emotion Reactions.

**Success.** According to Bandura (1994), self-efficacy depends on success. If one is successful, he or she is likely to believe he or she will succeed in the future. However, simple and quick successes can be misleading and lead to failure. Rather, success is more effective if it is the result of sustained and persistent effort. Thus, a first-year writing student would benefit from writing assignments that focused on growth, improvement and process. Finding success with this type of continued effort would empower a student and allow him or her to channel writing strengths and see process as important in future assignments. Success in short, simple and easy writing assignments (such as daily quizzes) that were disconnected from each other would be less likely to build self-efficacy.
Social models. Bandura (1994) observed that seeing others with similar abilities succeed may build self-efficacy because people seek models representing their own levels of skill and ability. In observing others of similar and competent ability, people feel camaraderie. They begin to believe they too can succeed. They see others’ failures and successes as indicative of their own. In this sense, the social models communicate how others might use their skills to overcome adversity. In applying this to the first-year writing course, instructors might find that group work and sharing might build self-efficacy in first-year writing students. This might occur in planning presentations, discussing class readings, or in writing workshops where peers share writing and feedback with one another.

Social persuasion. In addition to finding benefit in social models, Bandura (1994) also found that social persuasion impacted self-efficacy. When people had been verbally told by others that they had the skills necessary to succeed and they tended to believe it they were more likely to approach tasks with attitudes and beliefs that led to greater likelihood of success. Likewise, when they were told they were not proficient they assumed they would fail and tended to not overcome this presumption. The social context in which the activity took place also impacted self-efficacy. Success was more likely to occur if the activities were structured so that everyone was able to succeed. When activities are structured so that people are less likely to feel they can succeed, success is less likely.
Stress and emotional reactions. Like Marzano (2001), Bandura (1994) found stress and emotional reactions tied to self thinking and efficacy. Bandura (1994) found that if the person perceived stress and emotional responses positively and as part of the experience necessary for success, he or she was likely to have increases in self-efficacy. Likewise, if the person felt anxious and fearful as a result of the stress and physiological reactions, he or she was less likely to experience increases in self-efficacy. To better understand this, one might think of a performer about to go on stage. If a performer finds the stress of performing before others as necessary to motivation and a achieving a successful performance, the performer will do well. Knowing someone is watching causes the performer to focus and strive for a high-skilled performance. Successful performers learn to channel stress in productive and motivating ways. However, a first-time performer might not perceive the stress of performing in front of an audience positively. An inexperienced performer might feel completely overwhelmed by the stress of an audience and find him or herself unable to even remember his or her lines when on stage. If this performer does not learn positive ways to perceive and channel the stress of performance, the self-system will determine that he or she is unable to perform in front of an audience.

Bandura (1994) also found mood to correlate with reactions to stress and emotions. Those in a positive state of mind usually perceived stress and physiological reactions as necessary components of success. Those in a negative mood reacted adversely to stress and emotions. They became fearful, apprehensive and withdrawn.
It should also be noted that positive and negative mindsets were connected to the person’s physiological factors. Those who were less healthy and lacked physical necessities were less likely to think positively. Like Maslow’s (1954) research, Bandura’s research seems to imply one must first have their physical needs met before efficacy can be achieved. But as stated earlier, exceptions to this may exist. While these theories aid us in understanding students’ motivation and efficacy, there are no absolutes to be applied.

Within the writing classroom, the writing instructor would want to identify any negative mindsets and work to create a positive learning environment where all students felt empowered and respected. Again, this would require that the instructor know his or her students personally, develop rapport with them, and encourage them in their growth process. Strengths would need to be recognized and channeled. Students who were not physically and mentally well would need to be referred to medical and mental health resources on campus so that they could have their physical needs met. Accommodations might also need to be made for those students struggling with basic needs.

Marzano, Maslow and Bandura Applied

Marzano (2001) established that in order for learning to begin and motivation to be high, students’ self-systems must find content important, mastery of the curriculum achievable with existing skills and abilities, positive, and affirming. Maslow (1954) and Bandura (1994) help us to understand how and why students find learning important and achievable. In looking at Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs, writing instructors begin to
realize that understanding students’ individual situations might be useful in facilitating the self-system to engage in learning. Students struggling to meet the most basic necessities of life may need to see how writing will help them achieve these basic needs. Bandura (1994) also found these physiological needs important, as students who struggled to meet these needs were less likely to have a positive mindset and were more likely to find stress and negative emotional reactions when faced with challenges. While most students will have their basic needs met, some may not. To connect with students struggling on these levels, curriculum might provide motivating examples of prominent individuals who used literacy to transcend dire circumstances.

Both Maslow (1954) and Bandura (1994) also found beliefs to be connected with social perceptions. Once basic needs were met, Maslow (1954) found humans to be motivated by a desire to connect with others and find affirmation and respect from others within their groups and communities. This is similar to Bandura’s (1994) finding that self-efficacy is affected by social models and social persuasion. People were more likely to believe in themselves and their abilities when they observed others of similar ability succeeding and heard from others that they could succeed. In applying this to first-year writing students, writing instructors will likely find their students are affected by the beliefs of other students in the classroom. Thus, as concluded earlier in this chapter, the instructor must not only be aware of the individual beliefs of students but also the collective beliefs of the class. Additionally, the instructor would find it beneficial to have students interact with each other in their learning in small and large groups so that they might see and observe others’ similar successes and failures.
Maslow (1954) and Bandura (1994) also agreed with Marzano (2001) that environments needed to be both positive and affirming. Maslow (1954) found that once people's basic and social needs were met they sought to be affirmed and recognized. Bandura (1994) found that this affirmation was essential to self-efficacy. He also concluded that it was most effective if it resulted from persevered and sustained effort that occurred steadily over a period of time. In the absence of affirmation, failure and lack of motivation ensued—often followed by stress and depression. Therefore, the first-year writing student would be more likely to engage in successful writing if the projects allowed for recognition and affirmation of strengths over a period of time. The project should be challenging and allow for perseverance in attaining achievable goals. Likewise, the project should allow for social affirmation and recognition where camaraderie and community ensues as a result of the writing project. If these conditions are met, students will likely feel empowered, respected, affirmed and view the experience positively. Stress will be seen as necessary for success and emotional reactions will be perceived as necessary and positive contributors of the experience.

The Social Act of Writing

Building on the same premise of the earlier sections that students are motivated by intrinsic needs and a belief that they can satisfy those needs, Vygotsky (1978) argued that students should see the relevance of reading and writing. He encouraged writing teachers to present reading and writing as tools for communicating and understanding within their own culture, rather than presenting reading and writing as tasks to master.
His research also suggested that relationships between instructors and learners may increase learning, as the instructor assesses the learner’s progress and modeled writing and reading so that the learner may follow the examples. He also argued that students learn best by being immersed in their culture, making use of the tools and traditions of the culture to communicate and learn, such as books, computers, and technology. Thus, Vygotsky’s (1978) theories show us that writing is more than a skill. Rather, it is a cultural need that originates from our desire to communicate in our culture. Writing is social.

Sociopsycholinguistics

Sapir (1929) and his student Whorf (1940) began to see this social nature of writing when they argued against the common notion that thought and language is one in the same. Instead, Sapir noted that “Human beings do not live in the world alone. . . .” (p. 69). Rather, our language is a translation of our thoughts. And these thoughts and our language are influenced by our culture and social interactions with others. He claimed that “We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation” (p. 69). Building on Sapir’s (1929) theories of language and culture being inextricably bound, Whorf (1940) stated that as communities we ascribe meanings to our environment as we organize it and codify it into patterns of language. As members of the community, we agree to these meanings. And, “The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one,
but its terms are absolutely obligatory; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees” (pp. 213-214).

Sapir and Whorf’s theories have become known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. This hypothesis in its simplest terms might be condensed to the following two main principles: (1) thought is shaped by language; (2) language affects our perceptions of the world; thus, people of different languages may have different perceptions of the same environment. These two principles echo the Wittgenstein and Popper debate over language translation. While Popper argued that the definition of an object resided in the word, Wittgenstein found language ambiguous (Edmonds & Eidinow, 2001). The Sapir-Whorf premise also finds language ambiguous, making translation difficult if not impossible, because words don’t always fully convey the meaning of thoughts. Additionally, it points out that exact word translations do not always exist between two different languages (Chandler, 1995).

These ideas have been further explored by Steiner (1975) who saw translation as necessary for all communication and Fish (1980) who argued that communication could not be repeated to convey the same meaning because in restating we do not reform language and meaning but rather transform—and thus the meaning is altered and made different from the original. By connecting these theories with the learning, motivation and self-efficacy theories of Marzano (2001), Maslow (1954), and Bandura (1994), the social reflexivity of writing studies surfaces. If language and culture are linked and this connection shapes our perceptions, it makes sense that learning and beliefs about writing
are socially constructed and embedded within a writing classroom. Thus, instructors need
to understand the collective beliefs of the students in order to understand the individual
beliefs and learning needs of students.

Writing theorists and instructors who study and implement this holistic language-
centered approach are often described as sociopsycholinguists because their approach
"emphasizes the construction of meaning, drawing upon the individual’s unique
constellation of prior knowledge, experience, background and social contexts" (Weaver,
1994, p. 57). Viewing writing from this perspective changes the way we view students
and writing. Rather than being empty vessels into which we pour our knowledge of
writing, students became active participants engaged in the construction of meaning. In
writing, students draw on their own knowledge of self, their interactions with others in
the communities, and their prior experiences with language as they construct and
compose. In this learning context, the instructor becomes a facilitator and guide offering
support and guidance (Calkins, 1983; Goodman, 1986; Graves & Stuart, 1985; Smith,
1986; Weaver, 1994). As Dewey (1902) noted in the early twentieth century social
experiences of an individual student should be our starting point in considering how we
plan and implement curriculum and our first priority should be to provide a meaningful
environment for authentic learning to occur.

The writing classroom lends itself to this type of meaningful and authentic
environment because the acts of reading and writing are both transactional and relational
(Cambourne, 1995; Moffet, 1983; Rosenblatt, 1938; Weaver, 1994). When we create and
interact with a text, we draw on our prior experiences and understanding of language, self, and others. And in these interactions, a schema of discourse occurs. In simple terms, schemas are organized constructs made of prior knowledge, experiences, and feelings (Adams & Collins, 1979; Anderson, Spiro, & Anderson, 1977; Iran-nejad, 1980; Iran-Nejad & Ortony, 1984; Rumelhart, 1980; Weaver, 1994). Thus, in communicating with others or in interacting with a text, we activate our schemas to make meaning and sense of the interactions. In turn, new meaning results from the interactions, and our schema is transformed by our social interactions.

In a first-year college writing classroom, this might occur in the following manner. Students arrive in the writing classroom with various schemas about writing. When I ask them about their previous writing experiences, a common schema that students often present during the first week of classes is that writing is a linear process initiated by a writing assignment. Typically, the looming writing assignment they visualize is the research paper. They fear the length, the grammar, the punctuation, and the grade. They bring scars of previous high school writing assignments, and remember pages of their writing covered in red. Most students describe these experiences as leaving them with the impression that they cannot write.

Since I believe that writing is much more than what this schema represents, as a constructivist writing instructor, I facilitate transactions and interactions within the classroom between the students, their writing, other texts, and myself to transform their schemas so that they might grow to see writing as recursive rather than linear. I
encourage them to see writing as a tool of inquiry and communication rather than as a final product or a grade. Additionally, I facilitate learning that pushes them to find relevance and purpose in their writing.

But to create the types of interactions and transactions that might transform their schemas about writing, I rely on much of the theoretical base presented earlier in this chapter because schemas are formed by and governed by self. Thus, as noted earlier, instructors need to understand how students are processing self and engaging the self in interactions with others in the course and with the course learning. This requires an acknowledgment that “meaning arises during transaction . . . in a given situational context, an event during which meaning evolves.” And, “the activation of schemas is influenced by our interpretation of the social context” (Weaver, 1994, p. 27).

**A schema of discourse.** In studying the schemas that students reveal in their writing, Moffet (1981) discovered that the “speaker-audience relationship” grows through a progression in which one begins an “inner verbalization” by “thinking to oneself” (p. 13). So in writing, students actually activate their self-systems. And in activating their self-systems, they not only begin to reflect on their beliefs, but they also record them in a written transcript that might facilitate social interactions allowing for the types of transformations in learning discussed in this chapter previously. Additionally, this written record of students’ self-thinking might be analyzed by instructors so that instructors might understand and observe the collective self that is forming in the writing classroom.
Moffet (1983) noted that once the inner self awakens from the prompts of reading and writing, the self begins “soliloquizing” and “unfolding.” He described this as the “drama of which is happening inside someone.” And he found that in assigning writing and reading, we are essentially initiating students to “soliloquize” their interior dialogues. Interestingly, he also found that a student’s writing has “already been greatly determined by verbal experience,” as well as “reading,” which students “store” for use in future “soliloquy” (pp. 71-72). He found that self then desires to engage in “socialized speech” that leads to a final level of discourse of “publication” in the various genres (p. 13).

In a first-year writing course, I have facilitated and observed Moffet’s (1983) schema of discourse by beginning with informal free-writing prompts (Elbow, 1973), moving to small and large group discussions of the free writes, and then allowing the discussions to be continued on an online discussion board. Additionally, the free writes and discussions are led to unfold in a formal writing assignment in the various genres—such as personal essay, memoir, research reports, poetry, or analytical papers.

Ballenger (2006) described this process as dialectical because it leads students in a back and forth movement between creative and critical thought in their writing. He used the mountain and the sea metaphor to depict how this process evolved. When writing creatively and engaging the self in an interior monologue, as described by Moffet (1983), we are swimming in the sea—completely immersed in the experience. But at some point we must get out. And when we do, it is like climbing up on a mountain and looking back into the sea where we had been swimming. On the mountain, we critically reflect on our creative play and find meaning. Then, we jump back into the water and immerse
ourselves once again. This back and forth movement of writing engages us in dialectical thinking. In this schema of thinking and writing, students awaken and reflect on their self systems. And if they are truly engaged, they might even temporarily lose themselves in an experience that Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981/1989) called flow.

In studies of flow, participants have described feeling a loss of time and consciousness. In moving back and forth in dialectical thinking, people reported having found peace, happiness and contentment. They also experienced intensified motivation and engagement that resulted in increased learning (Anderson, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi, 1991; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981/1989; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005; Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider & Shernoff, 2003; Whalen, 1998). In considering these findings, it appears that engaging students in writing experiences that enable them to reflect on self also offers them an experience of dialectical thinking that may not only bring them a deepened understanding of self but also increase their learning and motivation. And according to Moffet (1981), this inner reflection would in turn lead them outward in transactions with other students in the writing community that would finally lead them to seek opportunities to publish.

One publishing opportunity that I have found especially useful to facilitate this process is an online discussion board. Not only does an online discussion board allow for students to outwardly share their interior monologues that began during in-class free writes, it also allows them to socially transact with other students in the class as they
publish their thoughts in a public writing space. This board can then later be accessed as they reflect on the thoughts they published and how those thoughts shaped the thoughts of others in the class as others subsequently transacted on the discussion board. These published transcripts can also be followed and analyzed by instructors so that the collective belief systems of students might be understood and monitored throughout the semester.

Writing with technology. Using the online discussion board also engages first-year college students of the twenty-first century because online communities such as MySpace and Facebook have grown in popularity among middle school, high school and college students. This same age group also spends a good portion of time communicating with each other in electronic writing through text messaging. As a recent Stanford Study suggests, these students are spending a lot of time writing outside of the classroom. And they are engaged in their outside of class writing (Keller, 2009). Yancey (2009) in studying this phenomenon suggested that educators might better reach the needs of 21st Century learners by introducing online writing and discussion boards into the classroom. Thus, it seems that the online discussion board not only allows instructors to follow and analyze the social constructions of meaning and belief occurring in the classroom, but it also serves to engage and meet the learning needs of the first-year college students in allowing them to write and communicate in the classroom in a familiar manner to how they communicate with each other outside of the classroom.
Recent studies on online education corroborate the benefits of an online
discussion board, as a recent study conducted by SRI International for the Department of
Education (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009) found that those engaged in
online learning experiences had higher levels of engagement and learning than those who
learned in the traditional educational setting. The study noted that an increase in learning
was even more evident in blended environments where online activities were combined
with traditional learning experiences. It noted that the blended environments contributed
additional learning time and instructional elements that the traditional educational
experiences lacked. This study also stated online learning to be one of the “fastest
growing trends in educational uses of technology” and estimated that more than a million
K-12 students had participated in online instruction during 2007-08 (Means et al., 2009,
p. 13). And while the study did find increased learning in blended educational
environments that incorporated online learning into traditional educational settings, the
study also noted the “small number of published studies.” Thus, the study established a
need for more research on online learning environments (Means et al., 2009, p. 13).

Within the blended environments, the study also found that “online learning can
be enhanced by giving learners control of their interactions with media and prompting
learner reflection” (Means et al., 2009, p. 14). As mentioned previously, the online
discussion board offers learners to socially interact with their classmates, control their
interactions, and reflect on their own learning within the learning environment. This
builds upon the notion that learning occurs best within a community of learners
(Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999; Riel & Polin, 2004; Schwen & Hara, 2004;
Vrasidas & Glass, 2004). Additionally, it stems from findings that online discourse allows for more self-reflection (Harlen & Doubler, 2004; Hiltz & Goldman, 2005; Jaffee, Moir, Swanson, & Wheeler, 2006). Nine other studies also found that online environments facilitated students' reflection on their learning and contributed to improved learning. The general consensus of the studies was that learning is enhanced by self-reflection, self-regulation, and self-monitoring (Bixler, 2008; Chang, 2007; Chung, Chung, & Severance, 1999; Cook, Dupras, Thompson, & Pankratz, 2005; Crippen & Earl, 2007; Nelson, 2007; Saito & Miwa, 2007; Shen, Lee, & Tsai, 2007; Wang, Wang, Wang & Huang, 2006).

The Rhetoric of Writing

Understanding Mind, Self, and Society

Fostering an online writing community on a class discussion board becomes particularly interesting when combined with the writing of rhetorical theorist George Mead (1934) who established the theory of symbolic interaction to explain how interactions with language create both individual and collective identities. Mead (1934) claimed that in communicating with each other we create symbols that help us to better understand ourselves and others. He used three elements to explain his theory: mind, self, and society.

Mind. Mead (1934) defined the mind as our capacity to link knowledge and symbols together to create meaning. He argued that humans are not born with this innate ability; it needs to be acquired. He used the mind to depict the process we use to develop
and communicate with significant symbols. And these symbols allow humans to find meaning as they engage their self processes and interact with others.

Borchers (2006) related this to first-year students, as he reminded us that when they come to campus they are often unfamiliar with the symbolic language unique to the campus. “Through their interactions with other students, they quickly come to understand the meanings of these significant symbols and they are able to freely communicate with the universe of discourse” (p. 126). This might also relate to the writing community in a first-year writing course. When students arrive in my classroom, they are often unfamiliar with such terms as active reading, APA and MLA style documentation, and writer’s workshop. Over the course of the semester these words take on symbolic meaning; students then use them to communicate with each other.

However, this doesn’t only apply to the symbols instructors introduce students to in the classroom. Students also bring their own symbols to the classroom that they use to access the symbols introduced in instruction. An example of this might be high school and college students’ use of the word “talking” to indicate a relationship that is not committed but more than a friendship. While most instructors might translate the word “talking” as communicating, the students’ would be using it to convey a relationship status of a couple. Thus, the online discussion board may become a particularly useful tool for accessing the symbols being used in the classroom. Since the discussion board transcribes the written social interactions of students, instructors can analyze it to
understand the symbols used. In interacting with each other, instructors and students share symbols and in turn create new symbols.

**Self.** Mead (1934) found the identification of symbols being used especially important in understanding self. Like Moffet (1991), Mead (1934) also found that we communicate with ourselves in a manner similar to how we communicate with others. Although, Mead (1934) contended that our inner dialogues result from our dialogues from others. Thus, he theorized that our social interactions with others form and shape self. He believed we are not born with self. We must develop it through social interactions, and the use of mind and symbol facilitates this shaping of self.

Within this shaping of self, Mead (1934) found that we respond to the generalized other and significant other. The generalized other refers to the image we have of how others see us. It is the person we identify as society. When we think of how others might see us, we are reflecting on the generalized other. The generalized other also dictates how we communicate as it sets common, unspoken rules. For example, when we pass someone in a hallway and say “Hi, how are you?”, we are following a common, accepted rule of the generalized other. The significant other refers to the people or person in our lives who gives us regular input and feedback on our actions. The messages we receive from the significant other have a direct effect on our self-esteem.

According to Mead (1934) these two forms of other (generalized and specific) make up our self. Thus, he concluded that self is comprised of I and Me. The I is the spontaneous and impulsive response to others; Me reflects on the actions of I. So in
synthesizing Mead (1934) with Ballenger’s (2006) metaphor for dialectical thinking, when the self engages in dialectical thinking, the I engages in the creative sea behavior, and the Me climbs up onto the mountain top to reflect and find meaning in the experiences of the I.

**Society.** In putting together the mind and the self, Mead (1934) argued that this communication of mind and self created a “universe of discourse.” He defined this “universe of discourse,” as “a system of common or social meanings,” which “is constituted by a group of individuals carrying on and participating in a common social process experience and behavior, within which these gestures and symbols have the same common meanings” (pp. 89-90).

In applying this to first-year students enrolled in a writing course, Mead’s (1934) theories cause us to reflect on ways we might uncover and understand the symbols our students bring to the classroom, create while engaged in the writing course, and leave the writing class with and take out into the community. Viewing the first-year writing course in this manner calls instructors to reflect on how the discourse occurring in the course not only affects learning within the course, but also how the discourse of the course affects and shapes the community outside of the classroom. Additionally, identifying the use of symbol in the first-year writing course allows students and instructors to uncover the belief systems embedded within the discourse, as Marzano (2001), Maslow (1954), and Bandura (1994) indicated that learning was both individual and social. The internal and external communications were inextricably linked.
In this regard, the online discussion board might be one of the few written transcripts created by written, social interactions. Thus, analyzing the online transcripts allows instructors and students to study the shaping of self—allowing for an understanding of how beliefs are formed during the semester of a first-year writing course. But, how might one access these symbols and formation of self?

Analyzing Discourse

Weaver (1953) takes us back to dialectical thought in an attempt to analyze the discourse of self. In analyzing discourse, he identified three different orders of knowledge through which the self communicates. In the first order, the self reports data and facts. The self in growing and progressing in thought then makes statements about the facts and then finally progresses to form and express opinions and values about facts. Thus, according to Weaver’s (1953) theory, students wouldn’t begin revealing symbols until they reach the level of knowledge where they attribute values and opinions to fact. This agrees with Perry’s (1999) findings that first-year students move from believing that truth is absolute to recognizing that truth is subjective. In other words, students come to college mostly reciting facts and seeking facts from instructors, and then begin to form ideas, values and beliefs about facts. In this moving toward the subjective, symbols form and shape the self. According to Weaver (1953), engaging in dialectical inquiry helps the self determine goodness and truth—individually and collectively. And symbols help us to convey these values of truth to others. Scott (1967) claimed that we only come to form these truths by engaging in communication with others.
So in looking at an online discussion board, instructors might look for a progression of statements that (1) state facts, (2) make statements about facts, (3) form opinions and values about facts. And in the third level of statements, instructors would expect to find collective and common symbols that convey meaning and belief.

Weaver (1953) suggested that symbolic meaning is communicated through ultimate terms and terms of repulsion. In this regard, ultimate terms convey what has been agreed upon as universal good—truths that have been agreed upon as worth accepting and promoting. For example, justice and freedom might be seen as ultimate terms. When found in discourse, Gee (1999) called the repetition of these terms themes. He also found it useful to identify how these themes were used symbolically in discourse to form metaphors for meaning and understanding. And in tracing how thematic symbols and metaphors progressed from individual to collective symbols, Gee (1999) looked for I statements in discourse and categorized them as: “cognitive,” “affective,” “state and action,” “ability and constraint,” and “achievement” (p. 124). Looking at “I-Statements” in this manner might prove especially helpful, since Marzano’s (2001) revised model of Bloom’s Taxonomy also proposed that students begin processing information with a “self-system,” then move to a “metacognitive” system, and “cognitive” system before internalizing information as knowledge (p. 11). As the “self-system” is the first step in this processing system, it seems imperative for instructors to understand how students define and reflect on self as they engage in the learning processes. Looking at the I-Statements in the online texts, might identify when and how students engage “self” in the learning process to build and form collective beliefs about writing.
An English classroom is especially conducive to this type of reflection as self-reflection is inherent in the reading and writing process (Ballenger, 2006; Cambourne, 1995; Moffet, 1983; Rosenblatt, 1938; Weaver, 1994). Crossley (2000) in her explorations of narrative analysis echoed the other theorists presented in the chapter when she found reflection on self is also social. She stated that how we see ourselves also “relies on the feedback and evaluations we receive from others” (p. 12). Furthermore, Crossley (2000) used Mead’s (1934) metaphor of the “the looking glass self” (p. 12) to illustrate our tendency to see ourselves through the eyes of others. To further this metaphor, we might see the online discussion board as “a looking glass self” that provides instructors with a useful tool for not only examining how students’ perceive their selves and their learning, but also for how they interact with others and influence each other as they engage in the reflexive behavior of learning.

Studies to Build On

In planning a study to analyze the germane writing beliefs embedded in the online discourse of a first-year writing course, several writing research studies from the past three decades guided my methodology. In recognizing the shifted emphasis toward qualitative research since the 1970s and the wealth of information it has have provided about writing and education (Hull & Schultz, 2001), a qualitative study seemed most appropriate to my research questions because qualitative research allows researchers to understand how culture affects the way individuals and groups socially interact with one another (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Green, Dixon, & Zahrlick, 2003; Ortner, 1984).
Additionally, qualitative research studies such as those of Emig (1971) and Perl (1979) have proven helpful in understanding student writing processes, and more recently Dyson (1987, 1988, 1989), Lensmire (1994), and Schultz (1997) have shown the usefulness of qualitative studies in understanding how peers interact with each other socially in writing. As online discussion engages students in the writing process and peer social interactions, qualitative research and analysis offered the most suitable means of data analysis. Also as noted by Schulz (2006), qualitative methodologies provide for authentic inquiry into the ways writing brings together school and community. Qualitative methods allow for a “substantive focus and intent, rather than a procedure of data collection” (Erickson, 1986, pp. 119-120). As online discussion boards are rich with social interactions this type of focus will provide a lens for understanding the beliefs about writing that might emerge and shift during the discourse.

Similar to what Sheridan, Street, and Bloome (2000) described in their book Writing Ourselves, the interest of this study is also “in the social conditions within which people write, the social purposes they use writing for, and how writing fits in with their life histories, all of which define writing itself” (p. 1) Thus, in this study writing is defined as a communicative social act that draws upon life experiences. While writing may occur in many contexts, this study looked exclusively at writing that occurred on the online discussion board. While Schultz (2006) documented in her literature review of qualitative studies on writing that researchers have begun to replace the term “writing” with “literacy” in order to “emphasize the embedded nature of writing as social practices, as well as the interconnections between writing, reading, and talk (and more recently,
visual and aural modalities such as pictures and music)” (p. 366), the committee of this project feared that using the term literacy would be more associated with the term “reading” in the recent trends of NCLB mandates to improve various literacies, such as science literacy, math literacy, visual literacy, technology literacy, etc. However, as explained earlier, when the term writing is used in this study it also implies the “social practices” and “interconnections between writing, reading, and talk,” as it appears embedded in the online discussion board.

In concurring with Schultz (2006) that qualitative research “relies on rich, descriptive language” (p. 361) and Bloome’s (2003) findings that terms associated with writing and literacy can carry different definitions and meanings, an analysis of the students’ discourse seemed to offer the most productive means of qualitatively considering the germane beliefs associated with writing over the course of the semester in the first-year writing course. This study draws from Emig’s (1971) use of student think aloud to understand writing process, as an online discussion board allows students to informally think aloud in a social context. Paralleling Emig’s (1971) research leading to cognitive studies in composition, this study used Marzano’s (2001) taxonomy (as described earlier) to investigate the link between writing, belief, and cognition. This study also draws from Flower and Hayes (1981) research that built upon Emig’s (1971) work and found that “the process of writing is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing” (p. 366). Building on this premise that students engaged in a cognitive process during “the act of composing,” this study proposes that the online discussion board can be viewed as
a record of students’ processes that could be analyzed and understood. Of most interest in that analysis was finding the germane beliefs that guided the processes.

Reviewing the studies that considered the connection between writing, cognition and belief I found that Emig’s (1971) and Flower and Hayes (1981) research led to studies developed by the Center of Writing that shaped and formed research highlighting the sociocognitive theories of writing. The researchers of this center viewed writing as a social function of one’s communities. They sought to understand how relationships formed within communities and how these relationships affected cognition and learning (Freedman et al., 1987). In turn this research led to further think aloud qualitative studies that closely analyzed the context of students’ thought (Flower, 1994; Hull, Rose, Losey, & Costellano, 1991). Of most particular interest was Brandt’s (1992) think aloud research that revealed students tend to base their beliefs on the beliefs of others in their writing community. This, alongside Szwed’s (1981) research that stemmed from what was perceived as “literacy crisis” of his time and call for research on how writing ability relates to community, formed my basis for researching how writing, belief, and cognition might be socially connected and revealed on an online discussion board. Dyson’s (1987) revelations on how students’ used talk while composing to establish and negotiate meaning in their educational setting also provided a purpose and basis for this research.

Recognizing that Gee (2000) focused on the social discourse and interactions of literacy, this study relied on some of his discourse analysis techniques, such as his use and categorization of I-Statements and revelation of metaphors inherent in the discourse
to better understand the cognitive process of self. Maslow (1954) and Bandura’s (1994) theories (as described earlier in this chapter) provided insight into understanding how self was being formed and progressed through Marzano’s taxonomy. Luke (2003), in reflecting on the recent trends in educational technology and the new trends to soon develop, pondered how “literacy practices might be redefined” in terms of social identity and community. This study attempted to offer a window into how an online course discussion board might offer educators a window into how students are forming beliefs about writing within an educational setting.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The Theoretical Framework

As this study was analyzing germane writing beliefs embedded in online social discourse of college students enrolled in a first-year writing course over a semester, it was important that my research methods allowed for the type of rich qualitative inquiry that my questions demanded. Additionally, it was important that my collection and analysis paired with theoretical foundations of my literature review. Thus, I relied on Perry’s (1999) findings of first-year students’ beliefs about knowledge to analyze the discourse for a shift in thinking about learning. For example, I expected the students to enter the course believing that there was one specific writing process that would work for all students and that hard work combined with the information I conveyed to them about writing would result in a mastery of writing skills. Likewise, I hypothesized that over the course of a semester students would begin to realize that writing was subjective and dependent on their own unique processes. I hoped that they would realize learning was an active process and a lifelong journey, and that there was no set factual truth about writing.

Additionally, this study employed Maslow (1954), Bandura (1994), and Marzano’s (2001) theories (as presented in the literature review of this study) about self, efficacy, and learning to understand the various stages students were progressing through as they reflected on, employed, and discussed the writing process. To apply these theories
and ascertain what stages students might be in and their belief formation about writing, this study relied on Gee's (1999) discussion and presentation of I statements and metaphors to analyze the discourse that was transcribed over the semester on the course blackboard discussion board (eLearning). Additionally, the structures of the responses were analyzed to understand the social practices and formation of beliefs on an online discussion board. Following is a more specific description of the qualitative inquiry that was used, the context of the study, and the methods employed to collect and analyze data in an attempt to understand the following questions: What germane beliefs do first-year students bring to the first-year writing course? How do their beliefs shift during the course? How might an online discussion board be analyzed to reveal the shift of beliefs that occurs?

Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research seemed best suited for this research study because it focuses on symbolic interactions that occur in natural, cultural settings for a deeper understanding of the varying perspectives of participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Inspired by Mead's (1934) theories, looking for symbolic interactions to reveal recurrent themes and metaphors helps researchers understand and ponder how people “negotiate meaning” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 6). Building on the qualitative think-aloud studies (Brandt, 1992; Flower, 1994; Hull, Rose, Losey, & Costellano, 1991), this study looked at posted conversations between first-year students about writing as think alouds and used qualitative research techniques to analyze the discourse for symbolic interactions between
the students. As discourse is rich with recurrent themes and metaphors (Gee, 1999), analyzing it allowed me to reflect and draw understandings about how meaning was negotiated and what beliefs were being formed and shifting over the course of the semester. Specifically, I followed the direction of Mead (1934) and looked at how the "I" and "me" were interacting to form self in my students’ transcribed conversations on the course discussion board. As noted in Chapter II, Mead (1934) used "I" to define how a person viewed him or herself and "me" to define how a person perceived others to view himself or herself. Combining this understanding of how self might be formed with Borchers’ (2006) research of how college students formed their own symbolic language and discourse on a college campus allowed me to recognize how discourse was being used and taking on meanings unique to our classroom setting.

Echoing Maxwell’s (1992) contentions that qualitative methods of inquiry allow for many different interpretations of data and results, this study did not seek objective validity. Rather, it sought to understand students’ beliefs about writing and how these beliefs shifted during the course of one semester in a writing course. Thus, my research was guided by a different type of validity than quantitative research. In seeking understanding, I spent considerable amounts of time with the data as I repeatedly observed it for detail and depth (Glesne, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, this qualitative research might best be described as what is commonly referred to as interpretivist research, which seeks to discover the “multiple perspectives of all ‘players’ within a social setting” (Ferguson, Ferguson, & Taylor, 1992, p. 7). In seeking these perspectives, discourse analysis (Gee, 1999) became my tool of inquiry.
The Context for Collecting Data

The online discourse that was analyzed was collected during a first-year College Writing and Research course that took place during spring 2009. The writing course is part of the Liberal Arts Core course at a medium-sized, comprehensive public university in the Midwest. The student course catalog lists the course as part of Category One core competencies intended to help students become better readers, researchers, writers, listeners, and communicators as they learn to critically analyze audience and purpose while communicating and discussing information with others. These core competencies are listed on the syllabus, along with the following course expectations where I explain that students will “discover, develop, and learn how to write, read, and research successfully in various academic college contexts.” Additionally, the syllabus explains that students will “consider audience, purpose, and context” as they “make decisions about voice, usage, grammar, research, and documentation style.” While these skill are intended to help them succeed in their other courses, students are encouraged to look beyond college and apply them to achieve their career goals as well. (A copy of the syllabus is provided in Appendix B.)

To facilitate the learning described above, students were expected to write, workshop and revise a personal essay, field report of a career/major, and a research report on a chosen book. (See handouts for each assignment in the Appendix C). Workshop allowed them to seek feedback on their writing from classmates in both an informal and formal setting. In informal workshop, they exchanged their writing in pairs in class and used prepared guides that focused on different areas of revision (content, structure,
grammar/punctuation). Formal workshop consisted of a planned meeting where they posted their paper online and sought feedback from a small group and myself. After reading the posted papers, we met and verbally discussed strengths and weaknesses of the writing and made suggestions for revision. We also provided the workshop participants with our written reactions and suggestions.

The field report and research report were also presented and discussed in Power Point presentations. To emphasize growth rather than subjective scores and grades, students were asked to attend writing workshops where a small group of students and the instructor provided feedback on the student’s writing and offered suggestions for revision. Additionally, students worked in paired groups and used prepared feedback sheets focusing on different aspects of revision to rethink and reshape their writing over the course of the semester. (See workshop handouts in appendix.) Conferences were also scheduled as needed throughout the semester so students could receive one-on-one feedback about their writing from the course instructor.

Throughout the course of the semester growth was emphasized by having students, with the help of classmates and the instructor, identify strengths and weaknesses in the areas of writing, reading, research, time management, and presentation skills. Students then established individual goals in each of these identified areas with the expectation that they would track their own growth, collect artifacts from the class activities and assignments, and present them to the instructor at the end of the semester in a final conference. The portfolio also required a cover sheet reflection that explained the growth that occurred in each established goal over the course of the semester with
supporting examples referenced as evidence of growth. (See portfolio rubric in Appendix C).

An electronic discussion board on eLearning was utilized so that students could discuss the course with each other in a writing style they were familiar with. Additionally, the discussion board allowed the instructor to monitor the growth and adapt discussion and course instruction as needed. To facilitate the discussion, each student was required to sign up for a day to be the class recorder. As class recorder, the student was asked to summarize what happened in class, react to what was discussed and shared in class, and post a discussion question to further class discussion. Students who were not serving as class recorders were asked to choose one discussion question to respond to each week and to respond to one classmate’s response to a discussion question each week. Thus, the content of the discussions were controlled by the students, as they were responsible for participating in two discussion postings each week and could freely choose which of the discussions they wanted to participate in online. The discussion leaders were not required to respond to their own questions, but were asked to respond to a classmate. Students were not required to meet length or content requirements in their responses.

The course met for 50 minutes 3 days a week. When students were absent or on days that students did not volunteer to be online discussion leader, I served as online discussion leader. Students were also aware that I was reading postings and intermittently participating in online discussions. To avoid dominating or intruding in discussion, I kept my own postings to a minimum but would reference the discussions during classroom
sharing. I also used their interactions to inform my course curriculum decisions. Sometimes I made alterations and adjustments in our schedule and in my lesson plans based on their discussions. The existing eLearning data of the course offers a recorded text of our online transactions in discourse. Thus, through the course of the semester, we authored our own text as we transacted with the course readings and each other. As Rosenblatt (1938) might say, our transactions resulted in its own text.

**Analysis of the Discourse**

To explore and find meaning in the students transactions with each other, course readings, and online discourse, I referenced Rosenblatt’s (1938) Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing in her book *Literature as Transaction*. I applied her definition of the word “text”:

> a set of signs capable of being interpreted as verbal symbols. Far from already possessing a meaning that can be imposed on all readers, the text actually remains simply marks on paper, an object in the environment, until some reader transacts with it. (p. 136)

Additionally, I applied her term “reader” to assign meaning to the transaction that resulted when the student interacted with the text in a written response. In other words, meaning resulted when a student transacted with a posted response by reading the text, reflecting on the text, and then posting a response to the text.

To investigate how social transactions influenced learning and perceptions of learning in the online discourse, I applied the discourse analysis theories and principles of James Gee (1999). In finding themes in discourse he called attention to “I-Statements” and categorized them as “cognitive,” “affective,” “state and action,” “ability and constraint,” and “achievement” (p. 124). Looking at “I-Statements” proved especially
helpful as I used Marzano's (2001) revised model of Bloom's Taxonomy to observe and categorize the systems students were using to process course content. Marzano's model proposed that students begin processing information with a "self-system," then move to a "metacognitive" system, and "cognitive" system before internalizing information as knowledge (p. 11).

As the "self-system" is the first step in this processing system, it seemed imperative to understand how students defined and reflected on self as they engaged in the learning processes. Looking at the I-Statements in the online texts, allowed me to identify when and how students were engaging "self" (Mead, 1934) in the learning process. Following Moffet's (1983) observations of the self, I looked for ways that the self unfolded and engaged in the discourse on the online discussion board.

To see how the self-system began and shifted over the course of a semester, I chose discussions from Week 1, Week 6, and Week 12 to qualitatively analyze. In looking at the discussions over the course of each of these weeks, I chose the questions that received the largest amount of responses from the students. I then highlighted I statements and recurrent words or phrases. The "I statements were then categorized as either: "cognitive," "affective," "state and action," "ability and constraint," and "achievement" (Gee, 1999, p. 124). Categorizing the "I" statements in this way allowed me to analyze whether the students had engaged the metacognitive system and cognitive systems, as described by Marzano (2001), and how the I statements might be dependent upon one another. For example, the statement "I agree" indicated that the statement was
dependent on another student’s statement. It also revealed a social decorum for responding.

While writing theorists recognize these types of writing transactions as ripe and rich with meaning about individual student learning and belief (Ballenger, 2006; Cambourne, 1995; Moffet, 1983; Rosenblatt, 1938; Weaver, 1994), Crossley (2000) reminded us in her explorations of narrative analysis that reflection of self is also social. How we see ourselves also “relies on the feedback and evaluations we receive from others” (p. 12). Crossley (2000), like Bogdan and Biklen (2003), also used George Herbert Mead’s (1934) research on self. She referred to Mead’s (1934) metaphor of “‘the looking glass self’” (p. 12) to illustrate our tendency to see ourselves through the eyes of others. To further this metaphor, we might imagine the online discussion board as “a looking glass self” that provides instructors with a useful tool for not only examining how students’ perceive their selves and their learning, but also for how they interact with others and influence each other as they engage in the reflexive behavior of learning.

Like Gee (1999), Crossley (2000) also used themes, metaphors, and I-statements to analyze how individuals define themselves in relation to others. Operating from the premise that individuals tell narratives to understand themselves and their place in the world, narrative psychology also offered me an avenue for finding themes and metaphors as I sought to understand how my students defined self and “used language as a tool for the construction of reality” (P. 49). Adapting the theories of Crossley (2000), I read my students’ postings as narratives “where the experience of self takes on meaning only through linguistic, historical, and social structures” (p. 49). Thus, in analyzing the
discourse for themes and metaphors, I also looked for linguistic patterns, historical significance, and social structures. These I found in online classroom behaviors by looking at the lengths and sentence structures of the postings and qualitatively exploring meanings of the behaviors and postings, as I applied the theories of Maslow (1954), Bandura (1994), Perry (1999), and Marzano (2001) to draw conclusions about the writing beliefs of the students and how the beliefs shifted over the course of the semester.

In summary, this study analyzed students' online discourse that occurred on an eLearning discussion board during a liberal arts core writing course. The analysis attempted to identify and understand germane beliefs that students bring to an introductory, college-level writing course. Additionally, the discourse analysis sought to identify and understand shifts in the students' beliefs that occurred during the semester, as they engaged in the writing curriculum.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Discourse Analysis

As explained in the previous chapter, discourse posted by students on the course online discussion board from Weeks 1, 6, 12, and 14 was analyzed to get a sense of the beliefs held by students entering the first-year writing course and how these beliefs shifted over the course of the semester. To identify and understand student beliefs in the students’ transactions with each other, course readings, and online discourse, Rosenblatt’s (1938) Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing was applied (as more fully explained in Chapter III). Thus, this study adopted her definition of the word text: “a set of signs capable of being interpreted as verbal symbols. Far from already possessing a meaning that can be imposed on all readers, the text actually remains simply marks on paper, an object in the environment, until some reader transacts with it” (p. 136). Additionally, this study applied her term “reader,” to assign meaning to the transaction that resulted when the student interacted with the text in a written response. In other words, meaning resulted when a student transacted with a posted response by reading the text, reflecting on the text, and then posting a response to the text.

To interpret the “verbal symbols” of “the written responses” of Rosenblatt’s (1938) definitions of “text” and “reader” (p. 136) in the transactions, the discussion board became what Mead (1934) might have described as his notion of “the looking glass self” (p. 12). Thus, the discussion board became a type of mirror to see how “self” was revealed
in the transactions of students. To understand and identify revelations of self, qualitative research methods led to the identification of themes and metaphors (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Borchers, 2006; Crossley, 2000; Gee, 1999; Mead, 1934). Relying on the qualitative premises of Becker’s (1958/1970, 1998) quasi-statistics and Weber’s (1990) content analysis, themes were identified by highlighting and enumerating topics. Adapting Van Manen’s (1999) hermeneutic research, the students’ own words were used to identify topics. Additionally, as discussed in the previous chapter and in adhering to the hermeneutic principals, objective meaning was not sought in identifying themes. Rather, an understanding of students’ beliefs about writing and how they shifted within the course was sought.

In seeking such an understanding, topics were highlighted and listed by occurrence; tallies were placed after each topic as it reoccurred. Categories were then formed by grouping like topics together and counting the number of times the topics were mentioned (Becker, 1958/1970, 1998). These categories were used to understand what students believed about writing and how writing was linked to successful learning in college. These categories became a theme called “Perceptions of Success.”

In looking at how beliefs may have shifted during the semester, this study loosely applied Van Manen’s (1990) qualitative methods of hermeneutics were used to make meaning of the online discourse and identify the I-Statements (Gee, 1999) in the online texts. As with the identified topics, tallies were placed after each I-Statement as it occurred. The “I-statements” were then categorized as: “cognitive,” “affective,” “state
and action,” “ability and constraint,” or “achievement” (Gee, 1999, p. 124). Categorizing
the “I” statements in this way allowed for an analysis of whether and how the students
had engaged the self, metacognitive, cognitive, and knowledge systems, as described by
Marzano (2001), and how the I statements might be dependent upon one another.
Adapting the theories of Crossley (2000), students’ postings were read as narratives
“where the experience of self takes on meaning only through linguistic, historical, and
social structures” (p. 49).

Thus, in analyzing the discourse for themes and metaphors, this study looked for
linguistic patterns, historical significance, and social structures. These were found in
online classroom behaviors by looking at the lengths and sentence structures of the
postings and qualitatively exploring meanings of the behaviors and postings in
consideration with the theories of Maslow (1954), Bandura (1994), Perry (1999), and
Marzano (2001) to draw conclusions about the writing beliefs of the students and how the
beliefs shifted over the course of the semester.

In an attempt to deepen my understanding and go beyond my own transactions
with the data, two undergraduate students who tutor students in literacy were asked to
review the discussion postings to identify and tally topics, themes and I-Statements. They
reviewed the data without an awareness of my findings or each other’s findings. One
student was a senior and one student had just finished her freshman year. The fact that
they were also students allowed me to consider my interpretations in conjunction with
other students’ interpretations of the data. This provided a triangulation of data
interpretation and allowed me to clarify my own perceptions. Discussions about the
topics revealed that we had identified the same topics and perceptions of success. The following results are a reflection of a merged analysis of those transactions.

Week 1

In reporting the data that was collected for each of the weeks, the findings will be presented in the following manner: self-systems, I-statements, length of postings, and structure of postings. The self-systems section offers the topics and perceptions of success identified in the discourse. The I-statements section identifies the I-statements used, frequency of I-statements, and categorizes the statement to offer a sense of cognitive activity. The length and structure of postings' sections report and reveal any shifts in length and structure of the postings and offer another lens for looking at shifts in behavior and cognitive activity.

Perceptions of Success

**Self-Systems.** In the first week of the semester, the following question was posted by a student after the first day of class: **What part of your reading/writing skills do you want to improve on the most through this class?** In analyzing the responses to the question, reading and writing skills became the topics of the discussion. The question also revealed that the student believed that students should want to improve in these skills during the semester and that the course would help students in this improvement.

In response to this question, 38 comments were posted by students enrolled in the course. In applying the qualitative analysis procedures described above, the following topics/themes were identified in the postings. The wording of the original posts was
retained here by using the phrase that most commonly appeared for the topic. When postings mentioned multiple topics, each topic was listed and tallied. As shown in a few of the examples below, “formal writing” and “time management” were listed as topics and tallied because the postings used this phrasing:

“I would really like to grow as a formal writer. . . .” [topic: formal writing]

“I would like to improve my time management skills and learn to write formal papers better.” [topics: time management and formal writing]

- Formal writing
- Research papers
- Grammar/punctuation
- Spelling
- Avoid doing assignments at the last minute
- Vocabulary
- Reading Comprehension
- Understanding of text
- Writing techniques/papers
- Better/faster reader
- Get use to reading more and different types of literature
- Time management skills
- Better writer
- Write longer papers that make sense
- Revision tools
- Understanding audience interest
- Transitions
- Speaking
- Writing process
- Cohesion
- Citing sources
- Adapt writing to situation
- Organization
- Word choice

After discussing the topics that emerged and were tallied with the other readers, the topics were grouped together where overlaps were found. For example, the topics grammar, word choice, spelling, punctuation proofreading, reading speed, comprehension, speaking, citing, vocabulary, and transitions were grouped together and categorized as skills. Topics related to time management, organization and procrastination were grouped into the time management/organization category. Topics such as formal papers, research papers, longer papers, and papers that make sense were grouped and categorized as products. Topics relating to audience, purpose, and context were grouped and categorized as rhetorical strategies, and topics referring to writing as a process were grouped and categorized as process. It was agreed that the all of these categories together made up a common theme of what students perceived as necessary for success in college-level writing and reading situations.
Thus, the following categories emerged as Perceived Factors of Success for improving in reading and writing over the semester as a result of the class:

- Skills
- Time management
- Products
- Rhetorical strategies
- Process

Figure 1 shows the percentages of topics in each category. Figure 2 reveals the desired skills and frequency with which they were mentioned in the postings. As shown in the figures, 61% of the postings focused on the skills that students desired to improve on in the course. The next highest percentages (14%) were time management/organization and developing finished products (11%). Students were less concerned with utilizing rhetorical strategies (10%) and developing reading and writing processes (4%).

Within the skills mentioned, the frequency of mentioned skills showed students were most concerned about their reading comprehension (12), grammar (7), and word choice/vocabulary (7).
Figure 1. Perceived factors of success: Week 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Versatility</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Speed</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Writing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proofreading</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Choice/Vocab</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Break down of Skills topic: Week 1.
I-Statements.

Within the Week 1 postings, the following I-Statements were identified and categorized using Gee’s categories. For example, in the posting “I would like to grow as a formal writer. I want to be good with writing things like research papers. As well as improve on overall grammar, spelling, most of those basics in writings.” The statements “I would” and “I want” were identified as I-Statements, categorized and tallied as follows. The italics show the most frequently made statements. Figure 3 shows the frequencies of each statement and offers a comparison of the frequencies of I-Statements in each category. As shown in the table, the highest frequency of I-Statements occurred in the Affective and State and Action categories. Thus, according to Marzano’s revised taxonomy, students (following the first class period in Week 1 of the semester) could be seen in this discussion as engaging the self (State and Action) and employing metacognitive learning processes (Affective) to a significantly greater degree than the Cognitive, Ability and Constraint, and Achievement categories.

Statement and Action (Having to do with the state or actions of a person):

I have

I am

I tend

I can

I feel
I agree

I don’t

I try

**Affective** (Having to do with valuing and wanting):

*I would like* (as in meaning I want)

I want

I hope

**Cognitive** (Having to do with thought and belief):

I think

I feel

**Ability and Constraint** (Having to do with ability or lack of ability):

I could

I would

**Achievement** (Having to do with what will or might be achieved):

No I-Statements posted for this category.
Figure 3. 1 statements: Week 1.

Behaviors

Length of postings. The lengths of student postings were most likely to be 2 lines in length as shown in Figure 4. The second highest frequency for lengths of postings was one line postings. Thus, in Week 1, students most frequently posted short and simple responses—usually 2 lines in length. Generally, groupings of length did occur. During Week 1, longer postings tended to follow longer postings and one line postings tended to follow one line postings. For example, the first 4 postings were 2 lines in length. When the fifth posting deviated as a 1 line posting, the sixth posting also deviated and was 1 line in length. Another example, is posting number 33, which deviated from 2 line postings to a 3 line posting. Posting 34 was also 3 lines in length. Posting 35 returned to a
2 line posting and the remaining postings were also 2 lines in length. While this was not always the case, it was the case more often than it was not. Students tended to post in the same length as the post preceding their post.

![Length of Postings](image)

Figure 4. Length of postings: Week 1.

Sentence structure of responses. In analyzing the sentence structures of the weeks, independent clauses were defined as clauses with a subject and verb that could make sense alone. Dependent was used to describe phrases and clauses tacked on to the beginnings and endings of sentences. In Week 1 postings, 66 of the 73 sentence constructions were found to be active, independent subject/verb sentence constructions. All of these sentences began with “I,” which explained the high frequency of I-
statements. The most frequently used verbs (as shown by the italicized I-Statements) were “agree” and “would like.” Following are a few examples of this type of post:

“\(I\) would like to become better at doing my assignments before the last minute. \(I\) would also like to work on using a broader vocabulary in my papers.”

“I would like to grow as a writer and grab the attention of my audience better.”

Less frequently, students used passive sentence structures that began with a dependent clause followed by an independent clause (total of 6 sentences). When the dependent/independent sentence constructions were used, they were less likely to be the first sentence of the post (total of 2 sentences) and more likely to be the second or third sentence of the post (total of 4 sentences). This suggested that students were more concerned in the first week of the semester with discussing their own beliefs and less likely to discuss ideas. It also revealed a tendency to follow the protocol of responding to questions in simple, complete sentences similar to the questions posed. For example, the question asked: What part of your reading/writing skills do you want to improve on the most through this class? And most responses posted were structured: I would like to improve on ____. Second and third sentences of these types of responses continued with the same format listing others’ skills they desired to improve on. The next most frequent construction (“I agree”) didn’t begin until post number 29 of 38 and then became the pattern of response for the remaining responses.

This showed that students often imitated each other in responses. Students followed the “I would like” pattern of responding until post number 29 when a student
began a new pattern of “I agree.” Also of interest, the “I agree” response broke away from the litany of skills desired and began to discuss ideas. This is when the cognitive I-statements, such as “I think” became more frequent and I-Statements began to shift away from the affective category.

Below I have included posts 28-30, to illustrate the shift that occurred:

Post 28: “I would like to improve on my informal writing in this class so that I can make my writing more interesting. I feel like if I do this then it won’t be such a daunting task either.”

Post 29: “I agree [name omitted]. I would also like to improve on my grammar and punctuation skills. I don’t think I’ll ever not need improvement on that.”

Post 30: “In response to [name omitted/post 11 referred to]: I agree with your bit about the reading comprehension. I try to read fast and then find myself having to go back and skim over the reading again.”

The string of postings here showed what was described earlier. Note that post 28 has the “I would like” structure that the previous responses followed. However, post 29 begins a new trend by beginning with “I agree.” It then follows the previous format of “I would like” and then begins the third sentence with a cognitive statement of “I don’t think.” Posts after post 29 then followed in the “I agree” pattern and completely dropped “I would like” in the responses. Rather, “I agree” statements were followed by either cognitive statements about a topic and/or by introspective statements of self, which
showed a tendency to look outward at others’ habits and then define self. For example, in post 30 the student followed the statement of agreement with a statement describing his own reading habits. And, post 30 did not include an “I would like” statement. The originally posted question seemed to have been forgotten and was no longer eliciting the response. The response was elicited from a previous post, showing that on a discussion board the original question may only control the structure of a first response. Content and structure of subsequent responses may be more likely to depend on content and structure of posted responses.

In looking at post 28 to see what may have caused the shift of behavior in posting, the second sentence beginning with “I feel” may be revealing. In taking the risk to state how she felt, the student may have initiated the tendency to be more revealing and introspective in postings. This may have been caused the following statement to begin with an “I agree” statement—even if it wasn’t in agreement with post 28 but an earlier post. The “I feel” statement may have directed the subsequent student to look through the previous postings and then make a statement of self before responding to the direct question. This in turn began a new pattern of response that caused the initial question answer format to disappear entirely from the discussion board.

The trend for students to respond in a question-answer manner in the first 28 posts would also explain why the skills category in Perceptions of Success had the highest percentage. The word “skills” appeared in the question, thus it seemed that in listing skills they wanted to improve on they were adhering to a learned behavior for question and response. But, once a student broke away from this learned behavior with an “I
agree" statement, students followed in the same pattern. Thus, not only did their post
state that they agreed but their behavior also agreed as their actions followed the pattern.

Week 6

Themes and Metaphors: Perceptions of Success

Self-systems. Following the same protocol used for Week 1, the question with the
most responses for Week 6 was chosen for analysis. The student posted the question:
“What could you do for the remainder of the semester to improve upon your mission
statement and complete your goals you set early in the semester?.” This question was
posted after the students had finished reading Steven Covey’s (1994) book First Things
First (as described previously in the Methods section of this dissertation). Covey
encouraged his audience to write personal mission statements and goals based on the
mission statements. Daily activities were then prioritized around the mission statement
and goals.

In responding to the question, the following themes/topics repeated throughout
the postings (listed in greatest frequency to least frequency):

- Work
- Try harder
- Forget
- Remember
- Procrastination
• Literacy skills/resources
• Review goals
• Motivation
• Focus
• Bring materials to class
• Ask questions
• Organization/to do list
• Feedback
• Stress
• Attendance

As with Week 1, for each topic, a category was created and a tally placed within the category each time a posting applied to the topic. Some responses fit within multiple topics, and some postings mentioned a topic multiple times. For example, in the following posting “work” is mentioned 3 times. Thus, 3 tallies were placed in the work category for this theme. This posting also mentioned the literacy resources of formal and informal workshops. So, 2 tallies were placed in literacy skills/resources category as well.

I believe that if I concentrate extremely hard and put a lot of work into it I can achieve every aspect of my mission statement. I [think] that if I work with my classmates, participate in formal and informal workshops as well as work on it in my free time I will accomplish all of my goals.

The categories were then examined to see where they overlapped with each other. For example, since hard work often involves avoiding procrastination I merged the 2 into one category. With this type of thinking, the five following categories formed: Work
hard/procrastination, Feedback/Questions, Motivation, Organization/to do list, and Skills/Resources. The following pie chart shows the categories and frequency of the themes. As shown below, students believed that hard work (29%) and organized work (42%) were the largest factors in achieving their mission statements and achieving their literacy goals for the semester. While Week 1 showed students most concerned with skills, Week 6 showed students concerned with working hard in organized ways in order to acquire the skills they perceived as important in Week 1.
Figure 5. Perceived factors of success: Comparison of weeks 1 and 6.
I-Statements. Within the postings, I-Statements occurred and were categorized as shown below and in Figure 6. As reflected in the data, I-statements most frequently talked about students’ states or actions. Students less frequently stated how they felt and seldom made statements about their achievement or accomplishments. As shown by the italics, the most frequented I-Statements were “I think” (12) and “I agree” (10) and showed frequented engagement in the Cognitive and State and Action categories. In comparison with Week 1 I-Statements, one can see a shifting through the categories as the affective category decreased and the state and action, cognitive, and achievement categories increased in frequency. This increased frequency in the state and action, cognitive, and achievement categories and movement away from the affective category revealed that students were moving away from setting goals and moving on to achieving the goals.

Cognitive

I think

I believe

Affective

I need

I wanted

State and Action
I agree

I tend

I haven’t

I don’t

Ability and Constraint

I can

I could

I should

I would

Achievement

I will accomplish

I apply myself
Behaviors

Length of Responses. Continuing to look at lengths of postings to note shifts and patterns of behavior, the data showed that students posted responses ranging in length from 1-4 lines of text. In reviewing the posts, the following frequency in length of postings was observed. Consistent with Week 1, students in Week 6 were most likely to respond with posts 2 to 3 lines in length. However, the data does reveal an absolute decrease in one line posts and an absolute increase in 4 line posts. Additionally, it was observed in Week 6 that the one line posts occurred early in the discussion (posts 3 and 4) and were grouped together. Also, consistent with Week 1, 2 line posts seemed to group together, as did 3 line posts. Thus, while no consistent pattern occurred with the postings, students generally posted responses similar in length to the post prior to their post.
Sentence structure of responses. Sentence structures of the postings in Week 6 continued to show a tendency for students to respond in simple subject/verb responses. In examining the sentences, I found 25 independent subject/verb sentence constructions. Of
these, all but 6 were active and began with "I." Only one student used sentences that began with introductory, dependent clauses. And within that clause, I found the active subject/verb construction that began with an I statement.

In analyzing these findings, it appeared that students continued to most frequently respond with active, subject/verb sentence constructions and then followed those sentences with passive, subject/verb sentence constructions. Thus, they framed any statements about ideas or content with their own actions and beliefs first. This can be seen in the following postings, which might serve as the typical pattern of postings.

I usually don’t go back and read my goals, but just think about things that I would still like to improve on, so it really isn’t something that is set in stone, its more a improve as you go type of thing. [Grammar not corrected]

I think that Brandon is right, it’s important to review your goals frequently and also look to see if you should modify them.[grammar not corrected]

In both examples, you see the students beginning with active subject/verb independent clauses that are I-statements—"I usually don’t" and "I think." These statements frame the passive subject/verb independent clauses—"It really isn’t something" and "it’s important." In Weeks 1 and 6, students begin their postings by stating how they see themselves in relation to each other and then state what they believe about the content.
Week 12

Themes and Metaphors: Perceptions of Success

Self-systems. The question receiving the most postings (30) in Week 12 focused on the students' research projects. The posted question asked: How is everyone's research going? Any struggles yet? In looking at the question, there seems to be an assumption that students are researching and that struggles are part of the research process.

In using the same process used for Weeks 1 and 6 to analyze the discourse in the posted responses, the following topics were identified and are listed in descending order:

- Finding sources
- Library consultation
- Switching topic
- Research process
- Content
- Flow of paper
- Finishing paper
- Types of sources
- Help guidance from instructor

From these topics, the following categories were formed to understand students' beliefs and perceptions of success while they were engaged in the process of writing a
research paper: Rhetorical Situation, Process, Skills, Resources, and Time Management.

Figure 8 shows the frequency within the categories. It should be noted that while working through their research process, the course curriculum introduced and valued recursive writing processes that emphasized feedback and academic scholarship. This may have had some affect on their discussion posts, as this process is different than the linear process they were accustomed to using in high school, where value was placed on a finished product rather than the process.
Perceptions of Success
Week 12

- Rhetorical Situation
- Process
- Skills
- Resources
- Time Management

Perceived Factors of Success
Week 6

- Work hard/ Avoid Procrastination
- Organization/to do list
- Feedback/Questions
- Skills
- Motivation

Figure 8. Perceptions of success: Comparison of week 6 and week 12.
As reflected in Figure 8, a large shift in belief and perceptions occurred between Weeks 6 and 12. During the 6 weeks of working through their research processes, students more frequently talked about topics related to the rhetorical situation (51%) and less frequently talked about topics related to time management (6%), which had been the focus of most frequented categories (42%, 29%) in Week 6. While this could have been related to what was going on in class (Week 6/Covey; Week 12/research process), it could also reveal a shifting in perceptions of success. In responding to the question: “How is everyone's research going? Any struggles yet?,” students less frequently mentioned topics related to organized work when considering their research and struggles with research and more frequently discussed topics related to content and quality of work. While the students are responding to a different type of question in Week 12 than they were in Week 6, which focused on students’ mission statements and goals, both questions elicit responses regarding process. Week 6 focused on the goal setting process and Week 12 focused on their research processes. If students had not shifted in perceptions and beliefs, the greatest frequency of topics would have been related to time management and organization of work as students strove to finish the research project. Thus, the high frequency of the rhetorical situation category indicated a shifting of beliefs and perceptions, as students focused less on getting the project finished and focused more on analyzing the needs of the project's audience, purpose and context.

Additionally, the high frequency of the resource category (24%) also showed a concern with quality of content as opposed to having enough references. This showed that they were concerned with finding quality resources that would help them meet the
needs rendered important by assessing the rhetorical situation. It is also interesting to note
that skills (7%) is the second least frequented category, whereas in Week 1, skills was the
highest frequented category in students’ perceptions of success. This also tends to
coincide with the shift away from organization of work and a realization that process (12
%) is to be valued. While it might be argued that using a process also organizes work,
students’ earlier focus on an organization of work was more linear. The students earlier
posts involving work focused on time management and producing a finished product that
followed a “to do” list. It was concerned with getting things done and did not discuss
quality of work. Here, process focused on feedback that moved students’ work
recursively and had an emphasis on meeting the needs of the paper’s rhetorical situation
(audience, purpose, context). Time or deadline was not the focus of this process, but
rather the rhetorical situation, which is also evidenced by 51% of posts occurring in the
rhetorical situation category. Together, 51% (rhetorical situation) and 24% (process),
these posts total 75% of the posts. Only 6% of the posts in Week 12 were concerned with
time management. This shows a marked shift of perceptions from Week 6 where the
percentages working hard (42%) and organization (29 %) combined absolute an absolute
total of 71%.

I-Statements. Within the postings, I-Statements occurred and are listed and
categorized as shown below and in Figure 9. Again, the most frequent statements are
italicized. As reflected in the data, I-statements most frequently talked about students’
states and actions (51) and least frequently talked about students’ abilities and constraints
(3). In comparing the data with Weeks 1 and 6, shifting continued to occur with the state
and action category showing the largest increase. The achievement category also showed an increase in frequency. The ability and constraint and affective categories both showed decreases in frequency.

**Cognitive**

*I think*

*I know*

**Affective**

*I like*

**State and Action**

*I agree*

*I have*

*I found*

*I struggled*

*I added*

*I will switch*

*I chose*

*I can*
I suggest

I walked

I used

I signed

I recommend

I went

I need

I didn’t

I talked

I look

I plan

I am

I agree

I walked

I used

I signed
I recommend

I went

I didn’t

I talked

I look

**Ability and Constraint**

I can

**Achievement**

I got

I finished

I will

I apply
Length of postings. Analysis of the lengths of postings for Week 12 shows the continued trend of students to most frequently post 2 and 3 line postings. Students most frequently posted 2 line responses (19 posts) and least often posted 4 line responses (1 post). See Figure 10 for the specific frequency of line lengths for Week 12.
Sentence structure. The simple independent sentence construction beginning with the subject “I” continued to be the most frequent sentence structure amidst the postings. However, Week 12 brought a new sentence construction, as 15 sentences were constructed of 2 independent clauses linked with a conjunction. The frequency of using the dependent clause preceding the independent clause sentence construction also increased from weeks 1 and 6. In looking at sentence constructions, the following frequencies were noted:

Dependent, Independent: 6 (“If you have not had a consultation yet, I highly recommend to attend one before you start your paper.”)
Independent, conjunction, Independent: 15 ("I finished researching now, and I have plenty to work with.")

Independent: 39 ("I don’t think you should change your topic completely.")

Postings continued to reveal that students imitated the previous posts in the responses. For example, posting one begins "I have found," and 13 other posts out of the thirty posts also use the words “found” or “find.” However, Week 12 revealed some new trends in posting. Unlike Week 1, Week 12 posts did not follow the pattern of the question and use words from the question in the response as was done in Week 1. Rather, responses were more informal and random in relation to what they were working on in their research processes. For example, consider the following response. “I think that I will have to broaden my topic and sign up for my library orientation and then I think it will be easier to do my paper.” The question posted was “How is everyone’s research going? Any struggles yet?” The student did not respond in the typical “My research is going ______” format. Nor, did the student follow the pattern of the preceding post which was “I am able to find a lot of research . . . .” The post responded in an unique and random structure that did not directly relate to any responses around it.

Another new trend was referring to specific names of students and offering advice. Emoticons and ellipsis were also used for emphasis and expression. The following post reflects these trends:

Amy! [NAME CHANGED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY PURPOSES] I don’t think you should change your topic completely. However, what I’d suggest is that you add somethings in the book that relate to your initial topic and kind of link
them together under one specific them. And you’ll be just fine. :) . . . hope it helps.

Thus, it seemed that as cognitive activity increased and students began to reflect on the rhetorical situation, resources, and process, they also began to engage in community building. This might suggest that the formation of identity and community building are linked. As students reflected on a community discussion board about their own processes, they also showed increased engagement in social networking behaviors by referring to names, offering advice, and using emoticons to reflect feelings. For example, the :) in the example above indicated that the advice was meant to helpful, friendly, encouraging, and positive. This is reiterated with the phrase “hope it helps.”

Week 14

Themes and Metaphors: Perceptions of Success

Self-Systems. Once again using the same procedures as were used in analyzing Week 1, 6, and 12, data was analyzed for repetitive topics. One difference was that I had authored the question. The question was intended to be an end of the semester reflection about online discussion writing they had been in engaging in, as they finished putting together their portfolios and preparing for their final conference where they would present their portfolios to me as evidence of growth in their self-chosen literacy goals.

Question: This semester I have used WebCT to allow you to write less formally and to continue our discussions outside of class. Louise Rosenblatt in her reader response theory suggests that when we interact with texts with each other we write our own text--or poetry as she calls it. Our course WebCT page, certainly has become a written record of
our own texts—as we have interacted with each other and various texts.

How has writing on WebCT facilitated your learning? What have you learned (about humanity, yourself, writing, reading, others, the world, your field)?

In comparing and contrasting it with the more traditional writing assignments you have encountered in classes, which do you prefer and why?

Do you feel WebCT has contributed to building a community in our class? Made you more comfortable in sharing your writing with others? Why or why not?

In analyzing the 48 responses to this question, the following topics were found and then categorized as shown below and in Figure 12.

**Understanding of and Engaging of Self**

- Allows students to rethink one’s own views: 2
- Broadened minds: 3
- Allowed students to understand how others feel and think: 4
- Allowed students to look at themselves: 3
- Development of own writing style: 2
- Time to develop: 2
- Able to process one’s own thoughts, ideas, and research: 1
- Increased trial and error: 1
- Ability to feed off of what others say: 1
- Realize that others feel the same as you: 3
- Allowed for self-expression: 4
• Ability to not fear what others thought: 1

Total: 27

Learning Environment

• Everyone can share—even shy students: 8
• Connected to and prepared students for other classes, life, field, future career: 7
• Allowed students to hear different opinions and points of view: 23
• Could communicate despite bad handwriting: 1
• Saved paper: 2
• Everyone can see what it shared and everyone can be heard: 9
• Different ideas: 2
• Students can help each other: 2
• Provided a record of class to look back at: 10
• Students can give and receive [quick] feedback: 16
• Scary/confusing initially but became useful and beneficial over time: 7
• Relaxing and comfortable way to communicate/no need to worry about negative comments: 10
• The preferred method of communication for college students: 1
• Provided a record of class to look back at: 10
• Reduced stress of missing class and making up work: 2
• Improved discipline and organization/kept students on track: 8
• Kept students on track with other WebCT courses: 1
• Easy to use: 3
• Allowed for increased writing practice: 1
• Students could explore other writing styles: 2
• Could communicate immediate feedback to teacher about class: 1
• Wish other classes had WebCT discussion: 3
• Received an honest opinion: 1
• Interactive class: 2

Total: 132

**Improved Literacy Skills**

• Writing became more intrinsic/confidence and ownership of writing
  improved/improved writing abilities: 13
• Increased level of inquiry/ability to ask questions: 3
• Increased understanding and learning of material: 4
• Improved reading/comprehension: 1
• Improved APA format: 1
• Increased retention of information: 1

Total: 23
As revealed by the data, in Week 14, students saw self, learning environment and skills intertwined in the writing classroom. They were most concerned with their learning environment. They preferred an environment that allowed them to see, hear, and
understand others’ opinions. Students valued the ability to look back and reflect on their learning and others’ learning. They saw a connection to understanding others and themselves. They preferred interactive classes that allowed them to discuss inside and outside of class and that provided opportunities for those who are more introverted to share. They preferred relaxed and open communication and collaborative learning that allowed for feedback. As they engaged the self, they valued the ability to understand others, develop an open mind, look back at themselves, express themselves openly without fear, and find comfort in knowing that others felt the same as them. In contrast to Week 1 when students most frequently discussed skills, students in Week 14 most frequently discussed ownership and confidence in writing, the ability to ask questions, and understanding and retention of information.

This data showed a shifting away from the belief that focusing on skills improves one’s abilities in skills. While the category of skills does appear here and remained present in all of the weeks’ perceptions of success data, it shifted from the most frequented category to the least frequented category throughout the weeks. Additionally, this data showed that improvement of skills was linked to an understanding of self and others through the sharing of informal discussion. It also showed a shifting away from the notion that organized work will necessarily result in success.

Likewise, the data showed a progression from Week 12 in which students began to value understanding the rhetorical situation and writing process in achieving literacy success. Thus, the Week 14 data showing a valuing of a learning environment that offered feedback and included the voices and opinions of others showed an application of
the valuing of the rhetorical situation and process that was displayed in Week 12. The learning environment they valued in Week 14 included an ability to discern the rhetorical situation and apply a recursive writing process.

**I-Statements.** Within the postings, I-Statements occurred and are listed and categorized as shown below and in Figure 12. Again, the most frequent statements are italicized. As reflected in the data, I-statements showed an absolute decrease in posting about states and actions. While this category showed a small decrease of 2, the affective category showed a large increase of 32 and suggested that as the semester began to conclude students had an increased interest in talking about their literacy values and preferences. While the writing prompt does ask them (in regards to the writing assignment) “which do you prefer and why?,” it is toward the end of the questions and included with other broad questions, such as “How has WebCT facilitated your learning?; What have you learned about yourself, writing, reading, others, the world, your field, etc.” The fact that many students chose to respond with affective responses about their values and preferences, showed that at the end of the semester students were moving in a dialectical fashion, as revisited where they began in Week 1—defining of self. This suggests that literacy learning on a discussion board followed a recursive pattern rather than a linear pattern.

The cognitive category also showed an increase of 7, as this category peaked at 17 and indicated that students were more engaged in cognitive discussions at the end of the semester than they were at any other stage of the semester. The less frequented categories
of ability and achievement both had decreases and suggested that students were less inclined to talk about literacy ability and achievement at the end of the semester. This proved especially interesting, since the first two questions of the prompt asked them what they learned. These less frequented categories showed a decision to not discuss what they learned but rather to discuss what they valued, preferred, and thought about learning. This might indicate a shift away from objective knowing and a shift toward subjective knowing.

Cognitive

*I think*

I know

Affective

*I like*

I feel

State and Action

*I agree*

I get/got

I have

I found
I did

I plan

I am/was

I began

Ability and Constraint

I can/could

Achievement

I attained

Figure 12. I-Statements: Comparison of week 14 and week 12.
**Length of postings.** Analysis of the lengths of postings for Week 12 shows the continued trend of students to most frequently post 2 and 3 line postings. Students most frequently posted 2 line responses (17 posts) and 3 line responses (13 posts). However, Week 14 also showed an increase in students to post responses of greater length. For example, 6 students posted 4 line responses, and 4 students posted 6 line responses. While less frequent, some students also posted responses of 7 lines (1 post), 9 lines (1 post), 11 lines (1 post), and 16 lines (1 post). This data suggested that at the end of the semester, students were beginning to break away from the pattern of posting 2-3 line posts. Students were beginning to post longer responses that were less dependent on the length of their classmates’ posts. See Figure 14 below.

![Week 14: Length of Posts](image)

*Figure 13. Length of postings: Comparison of week 14 and week 12.*
Sentence Structure of Responses

The simple independent sentence construction beginning with I continued to be the most frequent sentence structure of the postings. And, while Week 12 had introduced the sentence structure of two independent clauses linked with a conjunction, Week 14 brought several new sentence constructions, such as: Dependent, Dependent, Independent; Independent, Conjunction, Dependent, Independent; Dependent, Independent, Conjunction, Independent; Independent, dependent; Dependent (sentence fragment); Dependent, Independent, Conjunction, Independent. The frequency of the sentence constructions used during Week 14 follows.

Independent: 120 ("WebCT has definitely been a help.")

Dependent, Independent: 15 ("In past cases, we would be told to write about a significant moment in our lives or a persuasive topic.")

Independent, Dependent: 7 ("I feel my writing has improved a lot, and especially with the personal essay.")

Independent, Conjunction, Dependent, Independent: 5 ("I totally agree with ____ in the fact that it was somewhat scary at first, but with more practice, I got a lot more comfortable with it.")
Independent, Conjunction, Independent: 5 ("I have really enjoyed reading others answers and thoughts about different topics, and I think that has helped me expand into being more open minded and a better writer overall.")

Dependent, Independent, Conjunction, Dependent, Independent: 4 ("With the discussions, I was able to write what I felt, and that in turn, helped me be more confident in voicing my thoughts and feelings in class.")

Dependent (sentence fragment): 3 ("From keeping up with what is happening in class to turning in assignments and getting feedback on papers.")

Dependent, Independent, Conjunction, Independent: 3 ("Instead of writing in class everyday and turning in papers and making copies for each of our classmates, we post it here, and everyone can see it.")

Postings began to decrease in the use of "I" as the subject. This showed an increase in students discussing ideas and topics and a shift toward using third person pronouns, such as "us" and "we." This shift suggests that students saw themselves as part of the classroom community. The following posting exemplifies these types of shifts:

I think WebCT was one of the key factors in this class that helped improve my writing. It not only gave us practice but it allowed us to write and respond to different journals, comments, and issues. I attained certain writing skills just from WebCT blogging that I can use when writing papers in future classes and later on in life. I have learned that to improve your writing, you have to experiment with other styles of writing and other peoples work. Writing skills are special attributes that take great time to develop. We use them every day of our lives and the more skills you have, the more you can achieve. In past classes, we would be told to write about a significant moment in our lives or a persuasive topic. We would
journal and then develop an outline then eventually a paper. Each assignment would be done this exact way. We would write many papers and go through them fast. I prefer the writing method we use in this class far more. In college writing and research we get the time to really look at ourselves as writers and develop our own unique style. Then we can process our thoughts, ideas and research and assemble them the best way we can with trial and error. I found that this method has far more effect and potential. A strong point of WebCT is that it allows us to see everybody's work, ideas, thoughts and processes. By interacting as a class, classmates can get ideas and feed off of what others have to say. WebCT is a powerful tool that should be used to its full potential. It helps students become better writers and prepares them for their life ahead.

Notice that while this student began by talking about how WebCT improved her writing, in the next sentence, she said it "gave us practice" and allowed "us to write and respond to different journals, comments, and issues." She then went on to discuss the value of writing "with other styles" and the need for "time" for writing to develop. Additionally, she began several sentences with "we," while also taking the time to differentiate herself individually. For example, in the third to last sentence, she said "I found that this method has far more effect and potential." Thus, in Week 14 this student saw herself as part of a community and commented on the community that had formed, but she was also able to differentiate herself as an individual within that community.

Another example of this type of behavior follows:

I think that WebCT has been a great way for us to communicate with each other in a manner that is relaxing, and in the way that we as college students like to learn. I thought that the fact that everyone could see what I thought about something was very scary but in reality it was nice to see other responses and get quick feedback. I have really enjoyed reading others answers and thoughts about different topics, and think this has helped me expand into being more open minded and a better writer overall.
Similar to the previous example, this student began with “us,” as she described the positive attributes of WebCT discussion. She then identified herself with the class community with “we,” by saying that WebCT allowed the students to communicate in “the way that we college students like to learn.” Also similar to the previous example, she concluded the post by discussing how WebCT has impacted her individually. She stated “I have really enjoyed reading others’ answers and thoughts about different topics, and think that this has helped me expand into being more open minded and a better writer overall.” This is a stark contrast to the first week posts, which did not show a value for community and seldom discussed ideas or topics. While the posts to Week 1 may have discussed skills because the question posted mentioned skills, it should be noted that the student posting the question equated literacy with skills and the students responded in a manner that agreed with that understanding. The Week 14 question invited for more variety of response than Week 1, but it began by asking what students learned. Had students not shifted in their beliefs and behaviors they all would have similarly responded with something like: I have learned how to punctuate my sentences and how to manage my time effectively. But students did not respond in this manner—as discussed in the findings above. Rather, they discussed a need for a learning environment that is rich with feedback, diverse opinions, and revision. Additionally, the varied use of the dependent clause and variety of posting lengths and sentence structures supports a shifting in literacy beliefs and behaviors from Week 1, when the dependent clause was seldom used and most posts were 2 lines in length.
Brief conclusions of these results reveal that students shifted from the valuing of a linear product-driven writing process to the valuing of a recursive writing process that was rich with feedback from other students in the class. Students became less concerned with skills as they engaged with one another in online discourse, and their posts became more varied in content and structure and became longer in length as the semester progressed. It is also interesting to note that content of I-Statements seemed to indicate a return to the self-system and re-evaluating of values and goals in the affective domain over the course of the semester, indicating that learning in the course was more recursive than linear. Chapter V will look at these conclusions in greater detail and draw some implications from the results showing areas that might warrant a need for further research.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Discourse Analysis

As mentioned previously, this study drew from hermeneutic principals to reflect on how literacy beliefs of students in an introductory course might shift over the course of a semester. Thus, in analyzing the discourse that occurred on the online discussion board, objective meaning was not sought in identifying topics and themes. Rather, an understanding of students' beliefs about writing and how they shifted within the course was sought. While some quantitative data was collected, it was not intended to draw objective conclusions. Rather, it was loosely and generally used to observe shifts and changes in student behavior as students engaged in online discourse over the course of the semester.

To discuss the shifts and changes observed in this manner, this chapter will chronologically discuss the data for each of the categories in which data was collected: perceptions of success, I-Statements, lengths of postings, and sentence structures of postings.

Themes and Metaphors: Perceptions of Success

Self-systems. Recalling from the literature review that our beliefs govern our cognitive behaviors (Schoenfeld, 1983) sheds light upon the results of this study. Figure 1 represents the literacy beliefs that students brought to their first semester writing course. As reflected in the figure, student posts most frequently (61%) discussed a need for
literacy skills in order to be successful in their academic careers. The next most frequented topic (14%) showed students valuing an ability to manage and organize time; the third most frequented category (11%) revealed a desire to produce quality products such as research papers. Less frequently, students discussed a need to use and apply rhetorical strategies (10%) and for an effective process (4%). Thus, students brought with them the belief that college literacy could be achieved if they acquired skills. The skills most frequently mentioned by the students included: comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, and use of transitions. While several different skills were mentioned, these 4 (in order from greatest to least) were the most frequently mentioned.

Therefore, students came to the course believing that literacy equaled certain skills that could be acquired by taking a course with a college professor. In other words, they believed they had a deficiency of skills and that the professor could solve the deficiency by instructing them during the semester. These beliefs mirror Perry’s (1999) findings that first-year students come to college with the belief that knowledge is an objective truth handed down to them from teachers.

While Week 1 showed an emphasis on acquiring extrinsic skills, Week 6 showed students believing that hard work (29%) and organized work (42%) would help them achieve their literacy goals. While this still shows a belief that skills are objective, it does reveal a shift in beliefs; acquiring skills is also dependent upon on their own behaviors. They perceive themselves as having control of their own environment. The harder they work, the better they will perform. In applying Schoenfeld’s (1983) conclusions about his
students' problem solving behaviors, we can see the students' perceptions of self in relation to achieving their literacy goals. The frequency of topics revealed that they see themselves as needing to work hard and in an organized and efficient manner in order to achieve their goals.

This theme also echoed Erickson, Peters and Strommer's (2006) statements discussed earlier in the review of literature that students lack a “transition” from high school to college, and thus their “initial concerns” focus on the “work it entails” (p. 8). The students’ emphasis on and concern with organized work also coincided with the findings of the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, 2004) that students come to college unprepared to meet faculty expectations that students spend 6 hours of work outside of class per week per course. Their high school habit of spending 10 hours or less total per week (Sax et al., 2004) leaves them feeling overwhelmed and unprepared to achieve their goals. The data from Week 6 captured this experience—right before midterms. Unsure of how else to prepare, their discussion showed their perception that working hard and in an efficient manner would help them achieve the success they desire.

Weeks 1 and 6 show what Marzano (2001) called the self-system engaged in setting goals with the metacognitive system. The data from these weeks suggest the self-system and metacognitive systems had engaged and begun to set goals toward literacy learning. As they discussed their goals on the discussion board, their comments showed a sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1994) that they could achieve their goals if they learned to
manage their time and work hard. Their social interactions on the discussion board also showed what Maslow (1954) observed as humans’ social need to interact with others.

The discussions show this interactive social behavior as students not only describe their own situation but also relate their situations to those of their classmates. For example, one student wrote on the discussion board:

“Also, like Adam and Megan I need to start doing things right away before I forget.”

The student recognized that she needs to “do things right away,” but also noted that she is similar to Adam and Megan in her needs and behaviors. This would concur with Bandura’s (1994) and Maslow’s (1954) theories that learning and efficacy is social.

This was also reflected in other postings. For example, the following posting shows the tendency of students on the discussion board to agree with each other and then discuss their own situation:

“I agree with Megan. Reviewing my goals every so often will help me stay focused on what I need to accomplish.”

Another posting, shows a similar pattern but goes even further in giving praise and credit to a student’s posting and then discussing the student’s own situation.

“John and Andrew brought up a good point about looking back on goals [...] I think is the same way for myself.”
The pattern of beginning with how others see the situation and then moving to the student’s own unique situation mirrors Mead’s (1934) findings of the shaping of the self. Mead found (1934) that in our social communications, we begin with the generalized other and then move to the significant other. Here the students began by drawing attention to the generalized other (their classmates’ postings) and then moved to the significant self when they applied their classmates’ postings to their own situation. For example, in the above posting, the student acknowledges that “Josh and Andrew brought up a good point about goals.” The student then acknowledges that “It is the same way for myself.” Thus, this student defines self by comparing herself to the situation of Josh and Andrew.

This social efficacy continued and intensified in Weeks 12 and 14; students shifted from believing that skills and work would bring success to realizing that understanding the rhetorical situations (51%) and accessing and using resources (24%) were important to literacy. In other words, students began to believe that process and quality of work should be prioritized above time management (6%) and skills (7%), which dropped to least frequented categories. Week 14 became especially telling as students ended the semester believing their environment (72 %) and selves (15 %) were most important to their success. And behind these 2 factors, students found skills (13 %) important. Disappearing from the discussion board was the mention of work and time management. Thus, this study mirrored Bandura (1994) and Maslow’s (1954) findings that learning is social.
Sociopsycholinguistics

I-Statements. As students immersed themselves in their culture and formed an online learning community with their postings and interactions, they co-authored a transcript of discourse rich with their perceptions. As Sapir (1929) and Whorf (1940) contended, our language is influenced and organized by our environment and community. And as members of the community, we agree to and negotiate the meaning of our language by two main principles: (1) thought is shaped by language, and (2) language affects our perceptions. Thus, in analyzing the discourse of the WebCT discussion board, the language and patterns of language should reveal the thoughts and perceptions the students had while during the course of the semester.

The analysis of I-Statements provided one method for finding and analyzing patterns of language. As explained in Chapter IV, I-Statements were identified and categorized as State and Action (statements about students' states and behaviors), Cognitive (statements about what students know and think), Ability (statements about students abilities), Affective (students about what students want and value), or Achievement (statements about what students will achieve in the future) statements (Gee, 1999). Figure 14 below shows the frequencies of the I-Statements for Weeks 1, 6, 12, and 14.
In analyzing the frequencies of each category and looking for patterns, parallels can be found between the students' perceptions of success and I-Statements. For example, in Week 1, students activated their self-systems as they spoke most frequently about their states and actions and engaged the metacognitive system as they made affective statements about their literacy goals. A few students began to engage their cognitive systems as they made statements about literacy, and none of the students made statements about what they would or could achieve in the future. In Week 6, students continued to speak about their self-systems, abilities and goals, and frequently began to make cognitive statements. Students also began to speak of their achievement. This movement depicted in Figure 14 and reported through multiple examples in Chapter IV.
mirrored Marzano's (2001) description in his revision of Bloom's taxonomy—where he stated that students first engage the self-systems and metacognitive systems and then engage the cognitive and knowledge systems as learning occurs. As shown in the Figure 14 data, students' I-Statements most frequently appeared in the State and Action and Affective categories. Then, in Week 6, the I-Statements decreased in frequency in the State and Action and Affective categories and began to move into the other categories of ability, cognitive, and achievement. As stated previously, this linear movement through the categories paralleled Marzano's (2001) findings that learning begins with the self-system and goal setting and then progresses into the cognitive domains.

It is also interesting to note what the students believed about literacy as most of their statements became cognitive in Week 6. As reflected in the data and postings in Chapter IV, in Week 6, students believed that their success relied on work and time management. They also focused on acquiring skills from the instructor. For example, students posted statements such as: "I could improve by recording a to do list" and "If I concentrate extremely hard and put a lot of work into it I can achieve every aspect of my mission statement." This became important because in Week 12 the I-Statements showed the shift that occurred in student beliefs. If the I-Statements were to continue in the manner that Marzano (2001) described, the most frequented categories would continue to be the cognitive and achievement categories. But as the data of the I-Statements revealed, students did not continue in this linear pattern. Rather, students I-Statements dialectically returned to the state and action category (showing an absolute increase of 36 I-Statements)—revealing a return to the self-system. This indicated that in Week 12
students were beginning to redefine their self-systems and beliefs about literacy, as their
I-Statements moved back into the State and Action and Affective categories.

While it might be argued that the question posted “How is everyone’s research
going? Any struggles yet?” might have prompted I-Statements to fall in the State and
Action categories, students might have just as easily composed cognitive and
achievement statements in response to this prompt, such as “I think my research ____ or I
will __________.” But instead, students posted responses with statements beginning “I
agree,” “I have,” “I found.” Thus, the increase in the frequency of the I-Statements in the
State and Action and Affective categories captured the cognitive dissonance that was
beginning to occur.

The recursive movement of the I-Statements in Week 12 was also paralleled with
the topics posted by students in Week 12. Their perceptions of success also shifted in this
Week from skills, hard work, and time management and to the use of rhetorical strategies
and quality of content and resources. For example, as reflected in the posts below,
students posted comments about the resources they were finding, what they thought about
their topics, and where they were in the research process.

For example, one student posted:

“WebCT has been a great way to get quick feedback from a lot of different
sources. It has made me a lot more confident in my writing abilities.”

Another student posted:
"Looking at other people's responses and linking it to mine actually broadened my mind, as there were a lot of different ideas. Due to this writing has become a part of me."

Both of these posts reflect the common theme that emerged during Week 14—an environment rich with diverse and varied feedback helps students to grow in their literacy abilities. Also shown in these comments, and representative of the other posts, are the students' beliefs that they have become stronger and more confident in their writing abilities as a result of their discussions on WebCT. In fact, one student summed this up very clearly when she said:

I think WebCT was one of the key factors in this class that helped improve my writing. It not only gave us practice but it allowed us to write and respond to different journals, comments, and issues. I attained certain writing skills just from WebCT blogging that I can use when writing papers in future classes and later on in life. I have learned that to improve your writing, you have to experiment with other styles of writing and other peoples' work.

Another student, in also noting that WebCT has improved his writing, found that WebCT made for more "relaxing" communication "in the way that we as college students like to learn." Also, preferring the "less formal" environment of WebCT, another student noted that the discussion board "allowed" her to "easily interact" with her classmates so that she could "easily share [her] writing" and "receive feedback."

Interestingly, none of the posts mentioned or valued feedback from the instructor. Rather, the posts noted feedback and discussion with classmates as integral to their literacy growth and development. These findings coincided with Surry and Ely's (2007) findings that positive learning environments facilitate efficacy and learning. As the
students' self and metacognitive systems shifted to value a literacy environment rich with
diverse opinions and positive, open feedback, the data revealed cognitive behaviors that
expressed a "dissatisfaction with the status quo" (p. 108) that had in Week 1 sought an
objective truth from the professor. This shifting showed a movement away from seeking
one answer and a movement toward the valuing of a multitude of different responses
from peers.

For example, in Weeks 1 and 6, students were most concerned with skills and
time management, indicating that knowledge was objective and extrinsically obtained
from an instructor and hard work. At the end of the semester, they were least concerned
with work and time management. Instead, they believed that their discussions on WebCT
contributed to their growth in their literacy abilities because of the discussion boards
allowance for open, informal, discussion that provided them with feedback and
communication with other classmates. Additionally, several posts valued an "open mind"
and ability to "interact with all of [their] classmates," so that they might learn to put
themselves "into someone else's shoes and think the way that they do." This revealed a
shift as students began to see knowledge and truth as subjective and linked with
community and self.

Thus, this study coincided with Perry's (1999) conclusions that first-year students
shift in their beliefs of objective truth toward subjective truth. And the data reiterated,
Bandura's (1994) and Maslow's (1954) findings that students' success is linked with their
social environment. Students' efficacy is shaped and formed by their social environment.
The students’ posts suggest that the discussion board provided a necessary venue for students to fulfill their need and desire to connect with others and find affirmation and respect from their classmates. It allowed them to find confidence and achieve their literacy goals. In reading each other’s posts, they found themselves. And, also of importance (Bandura, 1994), the discussion board allowed this to occur steadily over an extended period.

The students’ shift from valuing skills to valuing their learning environment through use of the WebCT discussion board also reiterated Vygotsky’s (1978) theories that students learn best when they are immersed in their own culture—using the tools and technology of their own culture. As he noted, the students showed here that writing is social and originates from a desire to communicate. Students posted on WebCT because as the postings stated they wanted to “get to know each other” and “know what everyone else thought” and get “different perspectives.” WebCT became the technological tool for them to communicate and immerse themselves in their culture.

This pattern continued in Week 14, as movement from the state and action category pushed into the affective category—showing that students were beginning to reformulate goals as they activated their metacognitive system. Thus, this study showed that literacy learning did not follow in the linear pattern that Marzano (1991) described but rather showed a recursive pattern where students returned to the self-systems and metacognitive systems as learning occurred. Also, it is interesting to note that the cognitive system peaked in Week 14 after the self-systems and metacognitive systems
were re-engaged. This might also suggest that the more students understood about themselves and others the more frequently they engaged in cognitive discussions about literacy and applied it to their future achievements.

**Length and structure.** The patterns of length and structure paralleled these findings. As students moved back and forth between the self-systems, metacognitive systems and cognitive systems over the course of the semester, the lengths of their postings became more varied and diverse. Figure 1 below shows that while postings were most frequently 2 and 3 lines in length throughout the semester, Week 14 had some posts as long as 16 lines and several that were 4 lines or longer. Additionally, as cognitive ability increased, length of postings increased. For example, Weeks 6 and 14 showed the highest frequency of cognitive I-Statements. These weeks also had the highest frequency of 4 line posts. This shows that student postings may be longer when talking about topics other than self and that an increase in cognitive ability may direct student discussion away from self and more toward topics other than self. This would concur with Weaver's (1953) findings that as the self moves back and forth in dialectical thought it progresses from making statements of fact to forming and expressing values and opinions about facts. This also substantiates Perry's (1999) finding that first-year college students move from believing knowledge to be objective to believing knowledge to be subjective.

The sentence structures appearing in the postings concurred with these findings, as Week 1 postings had mostly simple sentence constructions, and Week 14 had the most complex and diverse sentence constructions. When cognitive activity increased,
complexity of sentence structures increased. This would again coincide with Weaver’s (1953) findings that self communicates through three orders. In the first order, where the self is mostly reporting data and facts, language is simple. And as the self matures and grows in understanding and cognition, it progresses to more complex statements where opinions and values are formed about facts.

![Figure 15. Length of postings: Week 1, week 6, week 12, week 14.](image-url)
Implications

Literacy Learning is Linked with Understanding of Self

As this study sought to understand the literacy beliefs that first-year college
college students bring to the first-year writing course and how they might shift during a semester,
it was discovered that the students in this study validated Perry’s (1999) findings, as they
began Week 1 believing that literacy consisted of extrinsic, objective skills that could be
taught by an instructor and shifted over the course of the semester to believe literacy to be
a subjective process resulting from interactive discourse with classmates where diverse
opinions are openly shared and valued. Thus, this study agreed with Perry’s (1999)
findings that first-year students move from seeking objective truth to the realization that
truth is subjective.

This study also found Mead’s (1934) theories to be correct, as students used the
discussion board to frame their understanding of self with statements of generalized other
that then formed individualized self statements. These statements also revealed how the
online discussion board becomes a powerful tool that facilitates the social nature of
writing. Student postings valued the discussion board and credited it with their greater
understanding of self and improvement of writing ability. At the end of the semester, it
was repetitively stated in the postings that the WebCT discussion board made the greatest
contribution to their literacy growth because it allowed them to interact with their
classmates in “relaxed,” “informal” discussions that allowed them to receive honest
feedback from others. And in receiving feedback, they began to understand each other
and themselves. As one student stated, “reading other students’ responses has helped me
to open my mind and think about how other people feel. This has helped me to put myself into someone else’s shoes and think in the way that they do.” In other words the reading and writing on the discussion board facilitated what Moffet (1981) might call the “soliloquizing” and “unfolding” of self.

**Literacy Learning is Recursive**

As Marzano’s (2001) revision of Bloom’s taxonomy was applied to track the literacy learning during the course of the semester, it was discovered that the students in this study did not follow the linear progression described by Marzano. While they did begin by activating the self-system and moved through the metacognitive to the cognitive system, they did not conclude their learning in the knowledge domain. Rather, as they approached the knowledge domain, the social community of the discussion board began to challenge and question knowledge claims and then began to move recursively back to the self-system and metacognitive systems where they redefined self and reformulated beliefs and goals. It was also found that the cognitive level peaked at the end of the semester after the self-system and metacognitive systems had been re-engaged. Lengths and structures of postings paralleled this same movement. Thus, this study found that more research is needed to explore the literacy learning process to see if further studies validate that literacy learning may follow a recursive rather than linear pattern.

**Literacy Learning is Social**

Students in this study also validated Maslow’s (1954) and Bandura’s (1994) findings that learning is social, as students ended the semester believing that environment
and self were the key factors in successfully achieving literacy goals. The discussion board showed an increased sense of efficacy and confidence in literacy. Students valued an environment rich that allowed for the informal and free sharing of opinions and ideas. They believed that understanding others was key to understanding self and that this facilitated literacy learning. Overwhelmingly, Week 14 student postings placed a high value on WebCT discussion. They found it to be “a great way to communicate” and to allow college students to learn “in the way that [they] like to learn.”

Additionally, the WebCT discussion board proved to be a rich source of data for instructors to use to understand student beliefs and shifts in student beliefs. By understanding how students learn and process information in a learning environment, instructors can make informed decisions about the types of learning communities and environments they facilitate. As students found the online discussion board to facilitate community and learning, longer studies might be conducted to understand how the online discussion board affects learning over extended periods. For example, a study might seek to understand how facilitating discussion with the same online community over the period of 1 year, 2 years, or 4 years might affect literacy learning. Additionally, additional studies might research how students process literacy learning in relation to Marzano’s (2001) taxonomy. While this study found students’ literacy learning to follow a recursive process, more studies are needed to explore these findings.

In summary, this study found that further qualitative research similar to this study might provide additional insights on how self is influenced by online discourse within a
learning community. Additionally, more research might study how online discussion boards may facilitate positive social interactions and the formation of a recursive literacy process that values feedback in a first-year writing course. Of particular interest is how this type of online interaction might be used in a first-year college seminar and how this might increase retention by easing the transition from high school learning to college learning. Further research is also needed to see how instructors might effectively use online discussion as an assessment tool for gathering useful data about how students are processing literacy curriculum and how it is contributing to the formation of self and knowledge.
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APPENDIX A

ONLINE POSTINGS (WITHOUT EDITS)

Week 1

Posted Question.

I hope everyone is having fun with their first day of classes! Ok, let's see. This morning in class we scanned through the syllabus and discussed writing and reading assignments for first semester. Then we had a bit of a class discussion on what some challenges were from last semester and what to expect this semester.

It seemed like a pretty good first class to me. People were kind of quiet, but that's pretty much expected for the first day of class. Everyone has their first assignments of the semester (look over the syllabus, etc.) and it looks like this was a great way to kick off second semester.

Reflection Question: What part of your reading/writing skills do you want to improve on the most through this class?

Good luck with the rest of your classes!! And bring coffee to next class so it isn't so quiet and creepy...See you Wednesday!

Responses.

1
I would really like to grow as a formal writer, i want to be good with writing things like research papers. As well as improve on overall grammar, spelling, most of those basics in writing.

2
I would like to become better at doing my assignments before the last min. I would also like to work on using a broader vocabulary in my papers.

3
I hope to further my skills in reading comprehension and have a better understanding of literature I encounter. I would also like to learn new techniques with writing papers.

4
During the semester I would like to become a better/faster reader and get use to reading more/different types of literature.

5
I would like to improve my time management skills and learn to write formal papers better.

6
I would like to become a better writer, and learn to write longer papers that make sense.

7
I would like to learn how to write a good research paper and to improve on my time management skills.
Coming from a non-English speaking nation, English is my weakness. I want to acquire the ability to read, write, and speak better. What a wonderful opportunity I have now.

I would like to improve on getting everything done when it is given and become a better reader while not reading the whole page.

I've always "crammed" for tests and written papers the day before they were due. I'd like to get in the habit of studying earlier and not putting things off until the last minute. Even though I'm not required to write much within my major, I could still use some improvement there as well.

I would like to better my organization and word choice in my writing. Along with this, I want to improve my reading comprehension.

I would like to learn how to adapt any paper to any situation.

I would like to improve the most on being able to catch the attention of the audience. Also to write better formal essays.

I would very much like to improve upon my writing skills and most importantly, my time management skills and be well organized.

I would like to improve my paper by developing better transitions from one idea to the next, so the whole paper flows from the beginning to the end.

I would like to work on the entire writing process. I tend to put all of my ideas onto paper the very first time I write and make very few changes. My first draft, if I even take the time to write one, is almost always identical to my final draft. I would like to work on having a more complete writing process.

I would like to improve my time management skills. I usually procrastinate too much. I would also like to improve how well my papers flow together.

I would like to improve my writing by using better grammar and improving my vocabulary. I would also like to improve my transitions into different ideas and improve my proofreading.

I would love to improve my writing by the words I use strengthening my vocabulary to write on a college level. Also to get my papers to flow and not just be one big mess!

I would like to learn to read faster and learn to skim through big reading assignments and still get out of the reading what I'm supposed to without reading all of the pages. I would also like to improve my vocabulary.

I would like to grow as a writer and grab the attention of my audience better.
This semester I would like to improve on my grammar and reading skills. It is hard to know exactly what information in the readings is important and which information isn’t.

23 I would like to learn how to properly complete my work in a step by step manner in order to avoid procrastination and stress. Also, I would like to improve on not dwelling on wordings of small blogs similar to this.

24 I would like to learn how to retain information after I read it. I would also like to work on my vocabulary.

25 I would like to improve on my grammar and remembering what I’ve read.

26 The thing I would like to learn how to set up an easier process when writing papers.

27 I hope to improve in all aspects of my writing but there are certain things I could improve on that would significantly make me a better writer. I would like to improve on my grammar usage and utilizing my revising tools better. Also I would like to be better at citing my sources in my papers.

28 I would like to improve on my informal writing in this class so that I can make my writing more interesting. I feel like if I do this then it won’t be such a daunting task to write papers either.

29 I agree Will Jackson, I would also like to improve on my grammar and punctuation skills. I don’t think I’ll ever not need improvement on that.

30 In response to:

I agree with your bit about the reading comprehension. I try to read fast and then find myself having to go back and skim over the reading again.

31 I agree with. Reading comprehension would be a good way to improve this semester.

32 I agree with. Having a ton of random paragraphs within a paper loses the attention of the audience and it is hard to understand papers without good transitions.

33 I also agree with about not ever needing to improve on grammar and punctuation skills. I think everyone needs improvement on them all the time there really is no stopping point on improvement on them.

34 I agree with . I think the audience interest is very important. So if I can grow with my vocabulary and target my audience and keep them interested throughout my entire paper, I would be more successful.

35 I agree with . I have had to read some pretty boring papers in high school and I’m pretty sure mine were boring at some point, too.
I agree with __________, I would love to work on separating writing my essays in section, so I don’t procrastinate until the night before it is due.

37
I really want to improve on my ability to keep my story cohesive and not stray to ideas that aren’t necessary.

38
I like ‘s idea it would be really nice to get the process down to one where you couldn’t/wouldn’t procrastinate.

Week 6

Posted Question.

Today in class we wrote about our mission statements and how well we were following it. After that we went over some common grammatical errors and how to fix them. We also reviewed MLA and APA styles of documentation. Discussion question: What could you do for the remainder of the semester to improve upon your mission statement and complete your goals you set early in the semester?

Posted Responses.

1
For me just remembering to do my work in a set time and then bringing it to class so I can have the class look over it and make it better.

2
I need to get things done right away rather than waiting. Also ask questions if I am not sure rather than just skipping past it to get it done.

i also agree with it would make it better to have the materials at class to look at when you go over it

3
I need to stop procrastinating also.

4
I agree with and on materials in class.

5
I think i could continue to improve by reviewing my goals everyday so that i dont forget what im working towards. I think this will also keep me motivated even at some of those early monday classes where everyone is tired.

6
I agree with about reviewing my goals, maybe not everyday, but every so often so I can improve them and make sure I am improving on them.

7
I could improve by recording a to do list in each class period so that I remember specific thoughts I had during class, so that when I come back to work on something I can remember helpful thoughts.

8
I believe that if I concentrate extremely hard and put a lot of work into it, I can achieve every aspect of my mission statement. I think that if I work with my classmates, participate in formal and informal workshops as well as work on it in my free time, I will accomplish all of my goals.

9
I agree with , I think that if I wrote down my thoughts when I’m deep in them, it would help my writing process and eventually improve my writing dramatically.

10
One of my biggest issues is just remembering which book to bring to class, even if I write down which one I think it is, I still mess up. Also like and I need to start doing things right away before I forget.

11
I believe that just by doing the work required of me in this class will allow me to accomplish my goals. If I apply myself to the class and continue to try to improve and better myself, all of my goals should be obtainable.

12

AM
I agree with . Reviewing my goals every so often will help me stay focused on what I need to accomplish.

13
By doing the work assigned in class and throwing in some things from first things first will make it easier to fulfill my goals.

14
 and brought up a good point about looking back on goals in mind helps them to stay focused. I think it is the same way for myself.

15
There are many things I could do to fulfill my mission statement, but I think a big section of it has to do with documentation. That was one of the things I wanted to improve on and I haven’t worked on it yet. I need to practice a lot and use the writers handbook guide to help me achieve this goal.

16
Kyle brought up a good point having to do with our goals. I agree that reviewing your goals frequently keeps you motivated and on track. I also agree with Leah about procrastination. This is a common problem that can drastically slow down the improvement of one’s writing.

17
I think had a good idea by writing down a to-do list in each class. This can make staying on top of things less stressful and keep you more organized.

18
If I keep attending class and making use of my resources that this class offers, I think I should be able to accomplish my goals.

19
I agree with in that to accomplish our goals, we have to keep in mind what exactly we are working towards.

20
I usually tend to forget my goals and only focus on getting the work done. If I write my goals where I see them everyday, I think that will help me not to forget them.
I usually tend to not follow up on my goals but my plan is to stay organized and keep up with my assignments.

I think that if I would try to motivate myself to do some of my homework when I have a chance to do it, it would keep me from being so stressed out and it would help me reach my goals better. If I would do a little bit here and there instead of putting it off until the last few days, it would help a lot.

I agree with when she said that going for help when you have a question right away would help. I sometimes tend to wait until the last few days to get help on some things.

I usually don't go back and read my goals, but just think about things that I would still like to improve on, so it really isn't something that is set in stone, it's more a improve as you go type of thing.

I agree with that it is important to think about your goals because if you have them in mind while you do work, it is much easier to complete the goals. So what I should do is look back at my mission statement and goals to refocus myself towards achieving those goals.

I think that is right, it's important to review your goals frequently and also look to see if you should modify them.

Week 12

Posted Question.

We continued with presentations today. We have one more group to present so they will present on Friday and on Wednesday we will meet in the library by the reference desk. Gina will bring portfolios and research papers for us to look at as examples and she will be there to answer any of our questions. Our rough drafts will be due on Monday for the research papers. Good luck everyone!

Discussion Question: How is everyone's research going? Any struggles yet?

Posted Responses.

1 So far I have found some good resources. It is hard to find information for one of my questions but I have found some good information for my other questions.

2 I have struggled with finding research for my topic and others have had problems so I think I will have to switch my topic.
Because its hard to find stuff for the passage I chose, I have added a small section of another passage so I can actually get something to right on. Its really hard to find stuff.

4 I dont think you should change your topic completely. However, what I'd suggest is that you add somethings in the book that relate to your initial topic and kind of link them together under one specific theme. And you'll be just fine. :)...hope it helps.

5 I have found excellent resources for my research after the library consultation. I am almost done with my paper. Even after finding the material, it is extremely difficult to formulate the flow of the paper.

6 So far I have found quite a few sources very easily. I think I have chosen a fairly specific topic that is allowing me to have a fairly smooth research process.

7 I agree with Rashmiben about the library consultation. I walked away with more sources in 45 minutes than I found on my own in an entire day.

8 I agree with Amber, a specific topic will make research easy. You will still have volumes to play with.

9 I have found some wonderful sources because of my research consultation. They are the main sources I am using, and they seem really well written. I am struggling with how to put my paper together. I think I will use Wednesday to see how others have structured their papers, and go from their.

10 I agree with . I used the research consultation as well, and found it very helpful. I am also having a hard time formulating my paper.

11 I have had the same problem as Kellie with finding information on my topic. I think a change and some brief researching will help me decide.

12 It seems like the research consulations are the way to go. I just signed up for mine, and I am looking forward to getting lots of information on my topic.

13 The research consultations do help a lot!! I had mine with Chris and he was very helpful to show me how to find the information I needed. If you have not had a consultation yet, I highly recommend to attend one before you start your paper.

14 I have not really got started wirting but I have gone to a library consultation and got lots of information that way.

15 I do agree with the consulations help alot and they are very nice and give you a lot of options.

16 I am able to find a lot of research on Mary and most are saying the same things about her.
I think that I will have to broaden my topic and sign up for my library orientation and then I think it will be so much easier to do my paper.

The research is going really good. I am finding a lot of really good resources but I'm having a hard time putting them into my paper. I think once I get going though I'll be able to fly through it.

My research is going pretty well now that I know how to find the topics I need.

I agree with that the research consultation really sounds like the way to go. I am going to try to get one sometime soon.

I finished researching now and I have plenty to work with. The best sources I found were all the books held on reserve in the library. I didn't like looking on the internet because I think the internet has more sources that are unreliable.

I agree with and about the Library Consultation, I really need to get going and get that done soon so I can work on finishing my paper.

I was having the same problems that Kellie and Alex had, but I talked to Mrs. Burkart and she helped me find sources and web pages that could help me find more. Now I have really good sources to work from.

I agree with , the library consultation really helped. I am still, however, struggling to get my research done because a lot of the books the librarian and I were looking up either were checked out, or not on the right topic of what I am planning on researching.

So far I've found lots of good resources, but most of them have the same information and haven't helped me as much as I would like.

The research is going well, and I've pretty much found most of the information I need for my paper.

I agree with all the people that said they need to get going on the Library Consultation. Not only is it needed for class, but it will hopefully help with finishing this paper.

I found a couple books on my topic at my research consultation, but nothing that is super helpful. Hopefully, once I get more in depth with my paper I can find more information on my specific topic.

Brittney, my research consultation was helpful, but I didn't get as much from it either. It has been a struggle pulling all the important information from my sources as well.

Library Consultation is useful for me I got some important information from there but not completely done with my research.
Week 14

Posted Question.

Today, we began our second presentations. I have enjoyed hearing about your research. Many excellent questions were asked of our presenters, and our presenters did an excellent job of responding to questions. These are important skills. As you move into the workplace, you will find that employers want you to be able to think on your feet. They want you to ask important questions and to provide thought out and researched responses. There is a difference between going through the motions of your work and taking a sincere and critical interest in your work. The difference might be asking simple questions that have already been answered and asking the burning questions that need to be asked and will make a difference in the work of your field. I am hoping that this assignment will give you a chance to practice asking, researching, and answering those types of questions.

Discussion: This semester I have used WebCT to allow you to write less formally and to continue our discussions outside of class. Louise Rosenblatt in her reader response theory suggests that when we interact with texts with each other we write our own text—or poetry as she calls it. Our course WebCT page, certainly has become a written record of our own texts—as we have interacted with each other and various texts. How has writing on WebCT facilitated your learning? What have you learned (about humanity, yourself, writing, reading, others, the world, your field)? In comparing and contrasting it with the more traditional writing assignments you have encountered in classes, which do you prefer and why? Do you feel WebCT has contributed to building a community in our class? Made you more comfortable in sharing your writing with others? Why or why not?

Posted Responses.

1 WebCT has definitiely been a help. Looking at other's opinions, especially when we were reading one world many cultures has let me look at the articles from someone else's point of view. That was very interesting.

2 WebCT has been a huge help like says. I have terrible hand writing so whenever I get a chance to not have to write something I am extremely happy. Not only that, but look at how much paper we are saving; instead of writing in class everyday and turning in papers and making copies for each of our classmates of our papers, we post it on here and everyone can see it.

3 Initially this whole webct thing was scary but as time went on I began to be more engaged it it. Looking at other peoples responses and linking it to mine actually
broadened my mind, as there were a lot of different ideas. Due to this writing has become a part of me.

4

I think WebCT has helped a lot. I like how everyone can read each others and help each and everyone out when they need a chance. This has helped me express and ask more questions.

5

I agree with both Leah with looking at OWMC articles from other peoples side of veiw.

6 WebCT has been a great way to get quick feedback from a lot of different sources. It has made me a lot more confident in my writing abilities.

7 I totally agree with in the fact that it was somewhat scary at first, but with more practice I got a lot more comfortable with it.

8 I think that Webct has been a great way for us to communicate with eachother in a manner that is relaxing, and in the way that we as college students like to learn. I thought that the fact that everyone could see what I thought about something was very scary but in reality it was nice to see other respones and get quick feedback. I have really enjoyed reading others awnsers and thoughts about different topics, and think this has helped me expand into being more open minded and a better writer overall.

9 I also agree with I think that reading other peoples responses has helped me to open my mind and think about how other people feel. This has helped me to put myself into someone elses shoes and think in the way that they do. There are so many things that Webct discussion board has helped me to better understand. This overall was a really good learning experience.

10 I also liked the fact that everything that happened in class was recorded. This made it easy to know what went on in class if you were absent that day.

11 I really liked that we were able to use WebCT. I think it has helped me a lot in seeing other people's views and opinions on what was going on in class. I also liked how, if we couldn't make it to a class, it was posted on here. It made it a lot less stressful when trying to catch up with what you missed.

12 I also agree with and in that it was a little scary at first. It took me a while to discipline myself to get on here everyday and comment on stuff, but it has definely helped.

13 Webct has definitely helped me through out this class. It is nice to express my ideas outside of class and in writing. I think it's pretty cool that we have been given the opportunity to interact verbally in class and outside of class on Webct. I also think it will help me in my future career in physical therapy. After every appointment, physical therapists have to summarize what happened during the session with their client. These notes are then sent to the referring doctors. This is virtually the only contact the physical
therapist and the MD have, a written communication, which is in essence just like Webct. I do think it has contributed to building a community in our class. It allows everyone to express their opinion on a topic, whereas in class, there might only be time for a few people to answer. Also, it allows people how are on the shy side to share their opinions.

I agree with , it is nice that everything in the class has been recorded. It is really convenient to be able to go back and look at what we learned/discussed on a specific day.

I think WebCT was easy to use and was beneficial. I prefer it over traditional writing because I feel like I can write more freely and less formally. I also feel that WebCT has allowed me to easily interact with my class and has made it easy to share my writing with other people and receive feedback.

I agree with . WebCT has allowed us to save a lot of paper since we do not have to print out copies of papers.

I think WebCT was one of the key factors in this class that helped improve my writing. It not only gave us practice but it allowed us to write and respond to different journals, comments, and issues. I attained certain writing skills just from WebCT blogging that I can use when writing papers in future classes and later on in life. I have learned that to improve your writing, you have to experiment with other styles of writing and other peoples work. Writing skills are special attributes that take great time to develop. We use them every day of our lives and the more skills you have, the more you can achieve. In past classes, we would be told to write about a significant moment in our lives or a persuasive topic. We would journal and then develop an outline then eventually a paper. Each assignment would be done this exact way. We would write many papers and go through them fast. I prefer the writing method we use in this class far more. In college writing and research we get the time to really look at ourselves as writers and develop our own unique style. Then we can process our thoughts, ideas and research and assemble them the best way we can with trial and error. I found that this method has far more affect and potential. A strong point of WebCT is that it allows us to see everybody's work, ideas, thoughts and processes. By interacting as a class, classmates can get ideas and feed off of what others have to say. WebCT is powerful tool that should be used to its full potential. It helps students become better writers and prepares them for their life ahead.

I agree with everyone. I think everyone found this tool to be beneficial and easy to use as well. It was well organized and very useful. The people that design and run WebCT are doing a good job.

Writing on WebCT has facilitated my learning in various ways. I can get quick feedback about my presentations even though I don't have a precise grade. This helps me to change my next presentation to fix what I needed to work on. I have learned that it is easier to read when you mark up the reading passage. It tends to help me more with comprehension. I have also noticed that my writing has gotten better. I am slowly understanding how to become an efficient writer, and also how to use APA format. I will have a lot of writing and documenting to do in my field, because I plan to teach Special
Education. This class has helped me become a better writer. I really like the writing style on WebCT. It is a lot less formal, but there are still guidelines to follow. Yes, I feel WebCT has made me more comfortable during class. I feel as though I know the other students more because we correspond outside of class time. Overall, I liked WebCT and the way this class was set up.

20
I agree with . It is nice to express my ideas outside of class. This also helps me to retain the information for a longer period of time. I also like that we can interact in class and outside of class.

21
WebCT in this class is very helpful. I like the laid back vibe it has. I like the way we all communicate together on our discussion questions, its nice to hear the different opinions as well as the people that feel the same as you. This is very beneficial for those who are shy, this way they have a way to be heard. I like the feedback, we get for our papers and presentations, it helps so I know what things I need to work on.

22
I agree with as well, its nice to be able to express oneself and not be scared on what others might think. Also how the type of learning in and out of the class will really benefit our future endeavors.

23
I really like using webct because it can make the stuff when learn in class become clearer. If you aren't clean about something in class all you have to do is read some people's posts on webct and not only can you understand it better, but you can get it from another person's point of view. It's also a big help if you miss out on class.

24
I also agree with in saying that webct is very easy to use. At first it was kind of confusing but once you start working with it a little it becomes easier and very beneficial.

25
I really think writing on web ct has really helped because I'm not so afraid to speak my opinions and questions in class periods now. It helps to understand that people have the same questions and concerns with you.

26
I too, agree with . I thought WebCT really made it easy to interact with my classmates and also the style of my writing on WebCT is more laid back. Overall I thought that the writing styles in WebCT and in class were very useful and I do prefer them over other techniques used in my other classes. I feel that my writing has improved a lot, and especially with the personal essay. I found it easier for me to share my writings with my classmates because I could be more comfortable with my writings and then from what I was unsure about I could ask specific questions.

27
What I have really liked about WebCT is how everybody can give an opinion without any pressure. WebCT has an advantage over in-class discussions because everyone is willing to add to the conversations unlike in class when many people hold back. WebCT also gives each person more time to develop a well thought out answer to the discussion question. It has helped us get to know each other and creates an interactive class expanding beyond the 50 minutes two or three times each week.

28
I have enjoyed using webCT, because you can get an honest opinion from your peers and they don't have to worry about any negative results from the reciever. It has also helped
me to stay on task and given me some different perspectives on what my classmates have to say.

29
I agree with . He brings up a good point on not needing to worry about negative results and staying on task.

30
WebCT has helped me a lot throughout the semester. Initially when the class started, I found it difficult to follow the instructions. After I got used to WebCT, I found it very convenient because I could write whenever I wanted. I enjoyed reading my peer's comments as I got to know their perspectives. I got ideas about how to write papers as this concept was completely new for me. I got opinion on my writing which was especially helpful. My learning did not stop at 10 am. I could refer to the WebCT for our next assignment; I did not have to make special notes.

31
I agree with, introverted students can express their thoughts easily on the WebCT. They don't have to worry about what their peer's think about them. As Yaw mentions, It is easy to refer back to your earlier postings recorded on the WebCT.

32
In the first part of the semester I thought for sure I'd hate having to blog and everything we did on WebCT, but as the year has gone on I haven't really minded it at all. I enjoy how it isn't that formal and how we can all openly share opinions.

33
I agree with in that it has helped me to stay on task and also helps me to check other classes I have on WebCT.

34
I like how we were able to reflect on what happened that day and our own thoughts on the books that we are reading or discussion held in class. Some people don't like talking in front of the class and this helps get their ideas got there for people to read and have a debate about it.

35
I agree with , everything on the website has helped me in one way or another, from the daily comments to the presentation feedback. I just wish more of my classes would have discussion pages.

36
I really like WEBCT as well. I agree with that people who do not always like to talk in class can express themselves more on here. It has also helped me by showing my work to someone and getting feed back that was very helpful to make sure my writing is improving through out the semester.

37
I like webCT because I think that it gives us a chance to see what others think of our writing and it also gives us a chance to give feedback to others too. I think that it has helped me to improve my writing because I can see what others think I could work on.

38
I agree with too when he says that it has helped keep me on task because I can see what is due.
I enjoy writing on webCT because it gives us a chance to give immediate feedback to the teacher about assignments we like, dislike, or are struggling with.

40 I agree with that an advantage of WebCT is being able to see what everyone else thinks of our writing. Without WebCT, it would take a tremendous amount of time for each individual to read my work and give feedback on it.

41 I agree with , seeing other peoples views on One World Many Cultures was helpful.

42 I also agree with , all of us have had days when we did not want to speak out, so by being able to share our thoughts over WebCT has been a lot easier.

43 WebCT was an effective tool for us to keep on task. I think it helped us see what everyone else thought of our writing. I liked being able to give everyone else feedback and help them out with their papers also.

44 WebCT helped me a lot with expressing myself more in this class and other classes. With the discussions I was able to write what I felt and that in turn helped me be more confident in voicing my thoughts and feelings in class. WebCT also helped with giving people feedback on their papers and more than one person's thoughts on how to improve our paper and what not.

45 I think the webct thing is really cool, because we can interact with all of are classmates.

46 WebCT has helped me alot. From keeping up with what is happening in class to turning in assignments and getting feedback on papers. It also helps me learn about the people in my class and gives my different perspectives on subjects that I would only have 1 point of view otherwise. If I were to compare and contrast this type of writing with tradition writing I would say that I like this type alot better, mainly because it gives you the opportunity to get several different peoples opinions, ideas, and help on papers. Not to mention WebCT made it easier to get to know the people in my class and get to know what type of a person they are.

47 I agree with melissa it really helps my get involved more and express my feelings.

48 I agree with it's a really quick way to get feedback, and it's nice to see how everyone else it doing. It lets you know you're not the only one having trouble.
APPENDIX B

COURSE SYLLABUS

Gina Burkart

Hours: MWF 10-11 and by appointment

7 Baker

273-2377 (Office)

ginaburkart@mchsi.com

College Writing and Research

620:005

Category 1: Core Competencies

Courses in written and oral communication enhance the ability of individuals and groups to read and listen critically and to write and speak effectively by attention to how the gathering, analyzing, and presenting of evidence and conclusions can be designed for specific purposes and audiences.

Course Expectations:

In this course you will discover, develop, and learn how to write, read, and research successfully in various academic college contexts. In these contexts, you will consider audience, purpose, and context, as you make decisions about voice, usage, grammar, research, and documentation style. You will also learn how to apply these skills to achieve your career goals. These assignments will consist of:

1. Personal essay (to be included in portfolio)

2. Critical research review of The Devil in the White City, The Historian, or The Da Vinci Code (to be included in portfolio)

3. Power Point presentation of your research from The Devil in the White City, The Historian, or The Da Vinci Code (results to be included in portfolio)
4. Power point presentation and 3 page written response over a *chosen book from course list* (you may choose the form of the writing from any genre) (to be included in portfolio)

5. Blogging 100 pts. (You will serve as the class recorder for at least one class period and post the class notes, your reaction to the class, and a discussion question online for a chosen class period. You will also respond to one class discussion questions per week.)

7. Reading journal 100 pts. (Weekly posted response of at least 100 words to a course reading. Total of 14 posts for semester/no post required for spring break or final week of the semester.)

8. Portfolio, one page reflection of portfolio, and achievement of individual learning goals as represented in the portfolio. 400 pts. (See portfolio checklist and rubric in course guidelines binder).

9. Participation in class activities and daily assignments. 400 pts. (Includes workshop/lab log, annotated bibliography of research, documentation of library consultation, documentation of use of learning center (at least one visit), workshop participation, attendance, and participation in class discussions)

**Total Points Possible: 1000 pts.**

**Participation**

Participation is a focal part of this class because most of the learning takes place in class during interactive class periods. Thus, participation points are worth 400 points. Class activities will consist of the following.

*Large Group Discussion*

We will read and discuss a large variety of readings. Each of us will have different reactions and insights about the readings. By sharing your reactions and opinions about the readings, you will help your classmates come to a fuller understanding of the reading.

*Small Group Discussion*

You will also break into small groups to discuss the readings. This often allows for a more in-depth and personal discussion of the readings. It will also allow you to know your classmates better.
Writing Labs

Beginning the second week of the semester, every Friday will be a designated writing lab. This time is intended to help you work on the goals that you have listed for yourself. You are required to check in at the classroom and then inform the instructor of how you will utilize the lab hour. (If you do not check in, you will not receive credit for the lab). You may choose from: informal workshop, formal workshop, instructor conference, research, reading, writing, utilization of the learning center or library, or a combination of any of the listed activities. After the lab, record an entry in your learning log (keep in a notebook or type in a word document each week to later include in portfolio) describing how you spent your time. Also, react to the feedback you received, observations you made, or any growth that you made during the lab session. Relate the time back to your goals.

Informal Workshops

You will have the opportunity to participate in informal small group workshops for each of your papers. In these workshops, you will exchange your paper with 2-3 other students and give and receive feedback in class (lab). The feedback will be based on questions you bring to class about your writing. Feedback sheets prepared by the instructor will also be posted online for you to print and use as a guide. For these workshops, your paper can be in any stage of the writing process. They are designed to give you the feedback you need at the stage you are in of the writing process. Giving and receiving feedback will help you and your classmates strengthen and revise papers throughout the writing process. Likewise, by critiquing and evaluating others’ writing, you will learn to recognize weaknesses in your own writing.

Formal Workshops

Formal workshops will be scheduled when several students have final drafts of their writing prepared for feedback. These workshops will be facilitated by the instructor and require that you post your paper online in the appropriate area by the day and time designated. You will also be required to print, read, and respond to the other posted papers.

When you sign up for formal workshop, it is imperative that you have your work posted online by the designated time. It is also required that you spend time reading and responding to each of the posted papers. If you fail to post your paper by the designated time, do not provide thoughtful feedback for the posted papers, or do not show up for a workshop you signed up for, 50 points will be deducted from your final grade. It is expected that you participate in at least 2 formal workshops for an A level final grade. You may participate in all of the formal workshops provided.
Instructor Conferences

You are encouraged to bring your writing to class and ask for feedback from the instructor. Asking questions and for feedback is one of the best ways to improve in your writing. The day before lab, a sign-up sheet will be provided for you to sign up for an in-class conference. You are encouraged to sign up as often as necessary. You are also encouraged to sign up for out of class conferences. See the top of the syllabus for office hours.

Learning Center

You may choose to use the writing lab time to visit the learning center. Just let me know in advance that you will be in the learning center during our writing lab and ask for documentation of your session to place in your portfolio/learning log.

To receive full participation points, you must utilize the writing center at least once and provide documentation of the appointment in your portfolio. At the time of your visit, ask for a signed form from the writing assistant. The Learning center also offers assistance with math and reading. Below you will find further information about the center. The website is also on WebCT in Weblinks:

- The Writing Center offers one-on-one writing assistance open to all UNI undergraduate and graduate students. Writing Assistants offer strategies for getting started, citing and documenting, and editing your work. Visit the Online Writing Guide at www.uni.edu/unialc/writingcenter/ and schedule an appointment at 008 ITTC or 319-273-2361.
- The Math Center offers individual and small-group tutorials especially helpful for students in Liberal Arts Core math courses. No appointment is necessary, but contact the Math Center at 008 ITTC or 319-273-2361 to make certain a tutor will be available at a time convenient for you.
- The Reading and Learning Center provides an Ask-a-Tutor program, consultations with the reading specialist, and free, four-week, non-credit courses in Speed Reading, Effective Study Strategies, PPST-Reading and -Math, and GRE-Quantitative and Verbal. Visit http://www.uni.edu/unialc/ and 008 ITTC or call 319-273-2361.

Rod Library

As most of your assignments require you to include research, you are invited to use the Friday lab time in the library researching. You are required to set up at least one research consultation for your research, use the online chat, or visit with a reference librarian at the circulation desk. Please get documentation of the session and put it in your portfolio/learning log.
The librarians of the UNI Rod Library extend to you an ongoing offer to help you find the best possible materials for your papers, presentations, and research.

You can contact them by:

- visiting the Rod Library Reference Desk in person
- calling the Reference Desk at 273-2838
- sending your questions via e-mail
- contacting the Reference Desk via live chat
- setting up a research consultation with a library expert

*New! YouTube playlist* (Firefox web browser recommended) or search "Rod Library" on YouTube. (taken from the Rod Library website)

**Attendance**

Your attendance affects the entire class. Your presence is important. Your voice, ideas, and opinions will help all of us grow. It is vital that you come to class.

However, I do realize that illness is part of life, and family emergencies really do happen. For these circumstances, you are **allowed 3 personal days**. Please use these wisely. Missing more than 3 classes will affect your participation grade (10 points per class missed beyond the allowed three). If you find yourself facing a long term illness (such as Mono), talk to me as soon as you are diagnosed and present documentation from a physician. I will make some type of arrangements for you to make up missed points and assignments. **If you do not consult me in advance, you will not be able to make up missed points or assignments and may fail the course.**

Always find out what happened in class on days that you are absent. **You can do this by checking the schedule on WebCT. I will update it daily. Also check the student blogs written for each class period. If you miss more than 10 classes, you will not pass the class, as most of the material is presented and worked on during class.**

**In the event that class must be cancelled, I will email you through the class list and WebCT. Always check your email and WebCT before leaving for class. The university posts its closings and delays on the UNI Website home page and sends out notifications through the university alert system. Be sure to update your emergency contact information on MyUniverse.**

**Reading Journal**

In your reading journal (on webct), you will react and respond to our course readings on a weekly basis (total 14—no entries required for spring break or final week of classes). The
entry should be a response to your reading and include direct quotes and detailed discussion of the reading. The entry should be about 100 words in length. Examples of reactions might be: a paragraph of response to a particular scene or quote that you agreed, disagreed, or connected with; a research question that came from the reading; a memory triggered by the reading; a poem or song inspired by the reading—the goal is to connect or respond to what you are reading with other areas of your life. 100 points.

**Personal Journal (In-Class Reflections)**

At the beginning of each class period, you will be asked to write for five minutes about a particular topic. These exercises are intended to help you face a blank sheet of a paper and to help you explore and develop topics for your papers. They will not be collected and are for your own personal use.

**Online Discussion/WebCT**

We will use WebCT on a regular basis. It is important that you log in and learn how to use it. It will be used regularly in most of your classes. Here you will find the syllabus, schedule, handouts, and class discussions and postings. Check it daily for assignments and updates.

You are asked to be the class recorder for one class period of your choice. A sign-up sheet will be passed around the first week of class. For that class period, you will take notes and write a brief summary of what was presented and discussed in class. You will also provide your reactions to the class period and post a question related to the class for further discussion. (This need not be lengthy—one page limit).

You should also respond to at least one blog a week. 100 points.

**Portfolio**

Throughout the semester you will use the assignments and class sessions to improve in your specified goals for each of the following areas: reading, writing, presenting/communication, life leadership (1994, Covey), documentation. You will organize a portfolio around your goals and use your work from the course as support of your achievement and growth in these areas. You will write a one page reflection explaining your growth and present the portfolio to me during finals week in a 15 minute conference where you will receive your final grade. This allows you complete control of your grade. You do not need to demonstrate perfection in the goal areas—just growth and self-awareness of your growth and plans for further growth in these areas and how you can use the resources available to you to continue to grow. The entire semester will prepare you for this conference.
Required Texts

To facilitate your growth, we will read and discuss the following texts:


One book chosen from the following list:

The Devil in the White City, Erik Larson

The Historian, by Elizabeth Kostova

The Da Vinci Code, by Dan Brown

One book chosen from the following list:

The Memory Keeper’s Daughter, by Kim Edwards

Playing with the Enemy, by Gary Moore

My Sister’s Keeper by Jodi Picoult

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

Man’s Search for Meaning, by Victor Frankl

The Kite Runner, by Khaled Hosseini

Harry Potter, Twilight books, Narnia books, or Golden Compass books
These texts will be used to aid you in your assignments. It will be your responsibility to read the assigned selections and ask questions when necessary. Lectures will not discuss the texts page by page but will consist of a short elaboration or enhancement of what is covered in the texts. Class time will be used to apply what is discussed in the texts. Thus, **reading outside of class is crucial to successful participation and application of the skills.**

**Class Policies:**

**Your writings will be placed in a final portfolio with all of the various drafts and feedback received related to the writings. Save everything.** You will turn in the portfolio at the end of the semester. If you do not turn in the portfolio by the deadline, you will not pass the course.

This course is designed to help you organize your time and find productive writing, reading, and research processes. If you stay on schedule with the assignments, you shouldn’t have any trouble compiling a portfolio by the end of the semester.

**Cancelled Classes:**

All cancelled classes due to weather and illness will be reported to you through e-mail and on WebCT. **Please check your e-mail and WebCT before you leave for class each day. While it is rare, UNI sometimes cancels classes. The university posts its closings and delays on the UNI Website home page. They also will notify you through the university emergency alert system. Be sure that your emergency information is current by checking it on MyUniverse.**

**Final Conference:**

At the final conference, we will assess your portfolio, and you will receive your final course grade.

You are also welcome and encouraged to discuss your work with me whenever necessary. We can meet during writing lab, my office hours, or arrange another time if necessary.

**Grades:**

Your final grade will be based on the points you received for the assignments listed and described in this syllabus. The percentage is determined by dividing your total by the course total of 1000. Because the course is worth 1000 points, your point total is also your percentage. Ex. 970/1000 is 97%. 
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**Class Supplies**

Textbooks listed above

Dictionary

Thesaurus (optional)

Notebook

Three-ring binder with section dividers

Colored pens (for workshop feedback)

Post it flags (Optional)

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Any paper containing plagiarism will receive a 0 and will be reported to Academic Affairs. Plagiarism is not difficult to spot, and there are web sites that help instructors spot purchased papers.

The University of Northern Iowa has a very specific policy statement related to the issue of plagiarism. This policy statement can be found in several places on our UNI sites, but it is most prominent in the UNI Student Handbook in Section 3.01 “Academic Ethics/Discipline.” All students at UNI, when they enroll as students at UNI, agree to abide by this policy.
Americans with Disabilities Act

The University of Northern Iowa is an Affirmative Action Equal Opportunity Institution. Students with disabilities and other special needs should make arrangements for any services or adaptations that can be made to accommodate specific needs. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) provides protection from illegal discrimination for qualified individuals with disabilities. Students requesting instructional accommodations due to disabilities must arrange for such accommodation through the Office of Disability Services. The ODS is located at SHC 103, phone 273-2676.

Electronic Devices

Recently, a resolution was passed by both the UNI Faculty Senate AND the UNI Student Government that NO electronic devices of any type will be allowed in the classroom *unless* the devices are needed for a specific accommodation needed by individual students (as set up by the ADA regulations). Documentation must be provided by the student, who will receive the paperwork from the UNI Office of Disability Services.

This “no electronic devices” resolution means that no students are allowed to use laptop computers in classes while the classes are in session. They also may not use cell phones, i-Pods, or other similar devices in the classroom. However, students may have a cell phone in the classroom to receive emergency alerts from the university. For these purposes, it is asked that students set their phones on vibrate. Likewise, a computer may be left on if the screen is set to the UNI home page—where emergency alerts are posted by the university.

Schedule

Week 1

Discuss syllabus and other syllabi provided from your current courses in regard to this topic and audience, purpose, context

Choose and assign readings from One World, Many Cultures

Discuss syllabus and other syllabi provided from your current courses in regard to this topic and audience, purpose, context

Read Intro. of One World, Many Cultures up to p. 15.

Adler, How to Mark a Book (weblinks/WebCT)
Week 2
Read and discuss readings from One World, Many Cultures
Read Douglas and Stafford Essays (weblinks/WebCT)
Begin Reading First Things First (Section one)
Choose and assign readings from Education Matters

Week 3
Discuss First Things First (Section One)
Discuss Education Matters articles
Read FTF (Section 2)
Personal Essay/narrative
Workshop/Writing lab

Week 4
Effective Reading, Writing, and Research Processes
Formulate goals for course and portfolio
Discuss Section 2, FTF
Discuss Education Matters articles
Personal Essay/narrative
Workshop/writing lab
Read Section 3, FTF
Writing Lab/Workshop

Week 5
Discuss Section 3, FTF
Read and discuss What is College Level Writing
Effective Reading, Writing, and Research Processes
Introduce Research writing
Read Section 4, FTF

Week 6
Discuss Section 4, FTF
Choose research book from list and form literature circles
Begin reading chosen book
Research writing
Follow up on processes
Workshop/Writing lab

Week 7
Literature circles
Library session
Writing lab/Workshop

Week 8
Literature circles
Research writing
Powerpoint planning
Writing lab/workshop
**Week 9**

Finish books

Plan presentations

Writing lab/workshop

**Week 10**

Spring break

**Week 11**

Powerpoint presentations

Choose second book

*No Workshop/writing lab this week due to presentations.*

**Week 12**

Begin Literature circles with second book.

Discuss writing project and presentations for second book.

Essay exam strategies

Workshop/writing lab

**Week 13**

Discuss book with small lit. circles

Plan presentations

Work on written projects

Workshop/writing lab
**Week 14**

Discuss book with small lit. circles

Plan presentations

Work on written projects

Workshop/writing lab

**Week 15**

Powerpoint presentations

No workshop/writing lab due to presentations.

**Week 16**

Power point presentations

Work on portfolio

Workshop/writing lab

**Finals Week**

Final conference/turn in and assess portfolios
APPENDIX C

SAMPLE WRITING WORKSHOP

Workshop 1

Procedure: In your small group, exchange papers with one other student. Read the student’s essay completely. Then, respond honestly and specifically to the questions below. Avoid general statements such as “good job.” Give specific comments such as “Your introduction got my attention but it could better relate to your experience if you ______________.” Or “The dialogue really didn’t seem significant. Is there another conversation that might be more insightful? How about in the second paragraph when you described ________________.

After responding to all of the questions, score the essay in the two categories of your rubric below. Be honest in scoring and provide reasons for the score. Don’t just give 4 points because you want to be kind. It is more kind to be tough now so they get 4s from me in the final conference.

When you are both finished with the worksheet, verbally explain your feedback. Exchange e-mail addresses or phone numbers in case any questions come up during revision.

Save all of your drafts and workshop worksheets. You will bring them to the conference.

Title of Essay:

Author: Editor:

How did the essay begin? How could it be more engaging?

What message did you find in the essay? How was it carried throughout the essay?

Where could more sensory detail/description be used? How does the detail contribute to the meaning of the essay? How could it be used more effectively?

What additional examples/anecdotes/information/narration needs to be included? What needs to be cut? Where should the focus be?

How was dialogue used? Why was it key to the story? Where could more be added? What dialogue needs cut?

Where did the essay seem to jump around? How could this problem be resolved?
What literary devices/techniques would enhance this essay? Which seemed ineffective or out of place?

Can you hear the voice of the author in the essay? What is the voice of this essay? Is it fitting for the essay?

Does the title reflect the theme of the essay? What suggestions do you have?

Did the conclusion fit with rest of the essay? What was the “so what”? How did it tie back to the rest of the essay? How could it be strengthened?

What are the strengths of this essay?

What engaged you as a reader? What did you really like?

Where did you get lost or confused? What suggestions do you have for revision?

What additional changes do you recommend?

**Introduction and Conclusion** /4

• Gets attention, introduces theme, general to specific

• Wraps things up, specific to general, answers the “so what”

**Creativity and Voice** /4

• Literary devices and techniques

• Captivating voice—“you draw us in and keep us interested”

• Descriptive examples/attention to detail/narration

• Appropriate and creative title