

INSTRUCTOR OPINION ON PERSONAL WRITING IN
THE FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	1
II. SELF DISCLOSURE AND MOTIVATION.....	6
III. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	10
IV. METHODOLOGY	19
Methodology-Related Review of the Literature	19
Participants.....	22
First Round Data Collection	26
Second Round Data Collection.....	30
Reflections on Methodology.....	32
V. RESULTS	36
Survey Results	36
Interview Results	39
VI. DISCUSSION.....	42
Reflections on Results.....	42
Reflections on Participant Pool.....	46
VII. CONCLUSIONS	52
Implications.....	53
Final Thoughts	57
APPENDIX SECTION.....	58
WORKS CITED	83

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

September 20, 2013, on the Writing Programs Administration (WPA) listserv, a discussion began about new changes to the SAT's writing section ("New SAT and Possible New Writing Test"). The topic quickly jumped, though, when one of the first respondents to the original message commented that writing prompts that allow personal writing are easier than those that don't due to the potential for authors to make up an experience. This drew a flurry of responses. Some respondents talked about how they're assigning less personal writing in their classroom, some about how they're using more. Eventually a new discussion split off from the original, and that discussion continues heatedly even as I write this paragraph ("Personal Writing").

Two weeks after the initial message, there are more than sixty responses to the topic. It also inspired several blog entries from a professor, in which the discussion continues in the form of blog posts and comments to those posts (Peckham). One of the most common themes in the responses to both threads within the listserv is a definite division between what was referred to as "evidence-supported writing" and "personal essays." Even a new professor, in response to the conversation, says that he teaches developmental writing primarily as a personal experience course and intends to make his higher level courses more text-response based.

The discussion going on within the WPA listserv is surprisingly different from the one going on in the pages of composition books and journals. In the last two decades,

composition scholarship has experienced an explosion of literature aimed at defining and legitimizing the use of personal writing, both in the classroom and in professional publications. Academics carry the banner of personal writing under a slew of different labels and genres to be discussed later in this thesis: narratology (Phelan), narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly), narrating personal experience, narration as knowledge (Trimmer), experience as evidence, experiential writing, personal narrative, “I” writing (Paley), and others. The common string throughout is the argument that using personal writing is a rhetorically sound maneuver within large swaths the humanities and the social sciences. The argument for personal writing is made in books such as Jean Clandinin’s *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry*, Candace Spigelman’s *Personally Speaking*, and Joseph Trimmer’s *Narration as Knowledge*.

However, in my experience both as a graduate student and a four-year writing center staff member, classroom practices tend to be closer in philosophy to the opinions presented in the listserv rather than the scholarship available on the subject: Personal writing is limited to specific classes or assignments, or to specific levels of writers. Interestingly, this can go either way. Based on the listserv, personal experience, and common strands in composition literature, some view personal writing as a way to ease novice writers into the academy, while others believe personal writing should be reserved for experienced writers. First-year composition handbooks, texts that are located somewhere between practice and theory, mirror this idea that personal writing should be limited in its academic deployment. The one in use by my institution—*The Bedford Handbook*—does not mention personal writing at all (Hacker and Sommers). Others, including Faigley’s *Penguin Handbook*, isolate it as its own genre, separate in purpose

from writing used to “inform” or “persuade.” Still others, including *The Little, Brown Handbook*, mention first-person writing only in the context of discussing styles that are too informal for academic papers (Fowler and Aaron).

Within this thesis, I interrogate this perceived divide between scholarship and classroom practices of personal writing. Specifically, I’m interested in the attitudes of instructors of first-year composition toward the use of personal writing as a rhetorical tool within a larger, argumentative essay that has a purpose beyond simply sharing a personal experience. In order to conduct an inquiry into these attitudes, I surveyed a group of first-year composition instructors at Texas State University. The survey was used to collect demographic information about the instructors then ask them to evaluate a writing sample by giving it a numeric grade. Instructors received one of two possible writing samples to evaluate and give a numeric grade: one containing personal writing and one without. After this initial data collection, I used the results to conduct additional qualitative research in the form of interviews and analyses of syllabi, with the intention of illuminating the motivation behind any patterns in the grading responses. I compared the results of this investigation with modern scholarship on personal writing, which includes work on narrative inquiry within both the composition and rhetoric fields, as well as work on genre studies, and on the pedagogical practices of the teaching of first-year composition.

The specific research questions that guided this research project are as follows:

- Is there a bias among instructors of first-year composition at Texas State University for or against the use of personal writing within their students’ essays?

- Does the amount of teaching experience of instructors correlate with their views toward personal writing?
- Do the instructors' identified subdiscipline or educational background? within English (literature, creative writing, rhetoric and composition, technical communication) influence their evaluation of an argumentative essay that contains personal writing?
- Do instructors' rank (from teaching assistant to tenured professor) correlate with their reception of personal writing?

Throughout this thesis, I will also address questions that arise on the peripheries of this investigation. For example, are the instructors conscious of their views toward the use of personal writing, or is it primarily subconscious? How is personal writing treated within the instructors' pedagogical practices outside of evaluation? What experiences lead to the radically different attitudes toward personal writing from faculty who are at relatively similar points in their career, as demonstrated by the messages present on the WPA listserv?

In Chapter II, I discuss my motivation behind this thesis topic and the internal biases that that motivation creates. Part of that motivation is a desire to analyze the academic and nonacademic writing binary. As someone who intends on teaching writing, both academic and nonacademic, and plans on continuing to write academically and nonacademically in my career, I have a large stake in this perceived dichotomy.

As I planned my methodology, I had to decide what could be considered personal writing and what is not. Given that there are so many forms of personal writing, and that the terms associated with personal writing are fairly ambiguous or have differing

meanings depending on which scholars are referenced, this necessitates some discussion of what personal writing *is*, especially within my review of the literature. Because of the nature of this study—perceptions of instructors toward personal writing—I do not provide a working definition of personal writing. Every participant in the research has their own definition of personal writing, and this in turn influences their behavior and response to the study.

Ultimately this thesis is a jumping off point for future discussions. I am fully aware that my sample size is limited, both in quantity and in representation of faculty at large. However, my primary purpose in this study is to point out that regarding the topic of personal writing a serious divide exists between those writing about composition pedagogy and those practicing composition pedagogy. After identifying that divide, I offer a path for future research.

CHAPTER II

SELF DISCLOSURE AND MOTIVATION

As someone pursuing a rhetoric and composition degree with the intention of teaching composition on a collegiate level in the future, the relevance of my thesis topic to my interests and career feels fairly obvious. After all, at some point in the future I am going to have to decide what my “policy” is on personal writing within my classroom. How will I talk to my students about it? How will I assess it? I also need to be informed of the theoretical underpinnings of my stance, so that in the event my policy or pedagogy is at odds with my department or colleagues, I have the ability to articulate my stance or execute a compromise. Interestingly, performing this study made me interrogate what my own subconscious thoughts might be as I read writing with personal elements. When we express our prejudices for or against particular writing via evaluation, we might not always be aware of what factors are influencing our decisions, or what consequences it has.

However, my choice of topics belies an additional, larger motivation. I am very interested in the shifting line that divides academic versus nonacademic writing, and the intersection of personal writing in the first-year composition classroom is a way to look at that divide in a narrow, researchable manner. In a foreword for the book *Nonacademic Writing: Social Theory and Technology*, Marilyn M. Cooper defines nonacademic writing thusly: “workplace writing, technical and business writing, real-world writing, or as Ackerman and Oates suggest in this collection, writing in ‘settings of consequence’”

(Duin and Hansen ix). Cooper's quote here takes Ackerman and Oates a little out of context; they state that nonacademic writing is used in places that can have "direct consequences on how people live and communicate," and they state this to validate the meaningfulness of what is perceived as nonacademic writing (Duin and Hansen 82). In their chapter, they also argue that the distinction between academic and nonacademic is blurry and problematic. "The *nonacademic* label," they argue, "further mythologizes the boundaries between literacy in the real world and academic settings" (81). Still, as demonstrated by Cooper's foreword and by the title of the collection itself, there are perceived categories of academic and nonacademic writing, and those labels assume that overlap between the two doesn't exist.

The follow-up question to consider is whether or not members of the academy expect the writing in first-year composition classrooms to achieve whatever their definition of academic might be. In the strictest sense of the word, though, the writing done *is* academic, as it is done to fulfill the academic requirements of a college-level class. A grade, in this situation, becomes a measure of how successful the student is in meeting the evaluator's expectations of academic writing. As such, by analyzing the grading tendencies of instructors of first-year composition towards writing with and without personal experience, I set the stage for a discussion about whether personal writing is viewed as inherently less academic than writing that focuses on other, more traditional methods of academic argument.

Although an analysis of the academic/nonacademic writing dichotomy might seem fairly distant from the guiding research questions of this thesis project, I argue that there's an inherent connection. The duty of teaching first-year writing at Texas State

falls, in large part, to TAs and non-tenure-track faculty members. All of these instructors have notions about what values should be present in academic writing, and those values are to some degree a result of their own experiences within the academy. It stands to reason that the same source that influences their grading practices in the classroom would also influence the hiring practices and attitudes of a department. Furthermore, the first-year composition classroom might be the first interaction future academics have with the hegemony of the academy's attitudes toward writing, and could play a large role in the formation of their future work and attitudes.

I have a vested interest in the validation of the use of personal writing in the first-year composition classroom. While I believe that scholarship within our field of composition already takes nontraditional forms of academic writing, including personal writing, seriously, I am not sure the same can be said for the instructors who lead composition classrooms. This is not a complete surprise given that instructors of composition are often not scholars in the field of composition, and are instead more aligned with related disciplines/programs (at Texas State, typically literature or creative writing, and occasionally technical communication). As part of my motivation for this research, I would like to analyze the difference between theory and practice within composition, and that that exposure will directly or indirectly help to effect change in the field and in the attitudes of the academy.

It should also be noted that as an Anglo, middle-class male, I am a member of the dominant culture. Personal writing is often seen as a way to combat the dominant culture's hegemony. This can work in more than one way, both by giving voice to the nondominant culture and by disrupting the dominant methods of discourse. Candace

Spigelman notes that “the argument-narrative dichotomy is often grounded in gender, the rhetorically masculine thesis-driven essay contrasted with the rhetorically feminine personal essay” (8). Furthermore, works like Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* as well as Victor Villanueva’s *Bootstraps* demonstrate that personal writing can call attention to marginalized narratives that are typically suppressed by the dominant culture. As such, my attitudes toward personal writing might be influenced by my position within the dominant culture. This could manifest itself in terms of how I interpret the findings, or it could be a factor in my assumptions about personal writing as a whole.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Becoming popular with Joseph Trimmer's 1997 collection *Narration as Knowledge: Tales of the Teaching Life* and continued by his keynote address of the same title at the 1999 NCTE conference on "Stories in the Classroom," the conversation around personal writing has moved past its uses as a method for engaging student writers. Trimmer summarizes the typical attitudes of academia toward "stories" within the introduction to the book:

But while we treasure such stories for their wit, we do not trust them to convey knowledge. [...] They are not reliable. They are not verifiable. They are not statistically generalizable. We use them as anecdotes, as introductions [...] but this is simply a hook--a rhetorical device [...] to attract our readers' attention. (x-xi)

This is how Trimmer justifies a collection of essays that tell stories to impart a lesson, hence, *Narration as Knowledge*. Yet despite these assertions, the book indicates on its back cover that it "does not follow the sanctioned procedures of educational research. Nor is it written in the privileged forms of academic discourse." Even a book entirely about using storytelling as a form of instruction is separated out from mainstream academia.

Other scholars continue Trimmer's work, but blur the line between personal writing and what he called "privileged forms of academic discourse." The primary text from which I draw upon my understanding of personal writing and its relationship to

academic work both in and out of the classroom is Spigelman's *Personally Speaking: Experience and Evidence in Academic Discourse*. Like Trimmer, she was told early on in her career not to assign students personal writing. "‘Never teach personal writing,’ he said. ‘Every student has a bunch of stories to tell. They don’t need more stories. They need writing that will serve’" (xiii). This eventually motivated her to undertake the project of *Personally Speaking*, to show that stories are "writing that will serve": "This book is my effort to demonstrate the serious scholarly project that is personal academic writing" (28). She zooms in on personal writing as "the ways in which writers make sense of their lives by organizing their experience into first-person stories" (3). Unlike some of the participants in the listserv discussion from my introduction, who reserved personal writing for students they viewed as not yet up to the challenges of rigorous academic writing, she argues that among scholars "opportunities for personal writing in academic discourse still tend to be confined to those who have already paid their professional dues" (13). She points out that the division between personal and academic writing can fall along a gendered dichotomy, with argumentative and thesis driven essays seen as masculine and in opposition to personal, feminine writing (8). Her wish is that instructors "must understand how the experiential example and narrative proof can function within academic arguments; they must also be able to evaluate arguments that invoke personal evidence" (xiv). Finally, Spigelman provides a catalog of other terms that have been used to describe the type of writing that is the subject of her book: "experiential writing and personal narrative [...] life writing, self-writing, autobiographical account, memoir, personal reference, some types of creative nonfiction, and even, in Karen Surman Paley's phrase, I-writing" (3-4).

Spigelman looks to Aristotle for a justification of why and when to use personal writing. She uses Aristotle's arguments to call for personal writing to include a mix of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* (19). Just as Aristotle emphasizes the importance of *kairos*—the window of opportunity for the use of a rhetorical device—so too must we be conscious of our deployment of personal writing (Spigelman 20). Spigelman builds upon this idea throughout the rest of the book: that personal writing is just one valid rhetorical tool of many, that it's not appropriate for all situations, and that it must be more than “emotion-laden disclosures” (20). But Spigelman doesn't use Aristotle just to dictate the proper use of personal writing. She also argues that Aristotle's rhetorical playbook calls *specifically* for the use of personal writing in his description of “catharsis,” which requires the audience's identification with the orator for full persuasive effect (19). By focusing on the *kairos* and the execution of personal writing, Spigelman offers a way for instructors to overcome the uncomfortable feeling that by grading personal writing they are evaluating the students' personal experiences.

While the above writing dissects the reasons for using personal writing, the pitfalls in doing so, and the positive implications of students learning to use personal writing as a rhetorical tool, there does not appear to be studies that look at how personal writing is used in a large sampling of writing classrooms. Most studies look specifically at the practices of the researchers and the results of those practices. I was also unable to find any studies that compare the implementation of personal writing as a rhetorical maneuver in the first-year composition classroom versus higher level classes. I created my study to begin to address that gap in the literature by focusing on the teaching and

assessment practices of a group representative of instructors of first-year composition instead just the scholars.

Like our current explosion of narrative inquiry theory, the expressivist movement in composition also holds personal writing in the spotlight. For expressivists, personal writing serves as a way to achieve a personal truth, which in turn creates an authentic voice within the text. In his 1972 essay “Teach Writing as a Process Not Product,” Donald Murray states that “We have to respect the student, not for his product, not for the paper we call literature by giving it a grade, but for the search for truth in which he is engaged” (5). He continues that “The student finds his own subject [...] It is the responsibility of the student to explore his own world” (5). Expressivist scholars sought to provide “counter approaches to current traditional pedagogy” (Burnham 22). They saw personal writing as a tool to be used in the classroom. It’s a means to an end, providing a way for “individuals to connect abstract concepts with personal experience” (Burnham 26). This bleeds over into expressivist scholarship, which Burnham argues used “anecdotal narrative, metadiscourse rather than theory, to rationalize their practices” (24).

Clandinin argues that there are four factors that have turned the tide for acceptance of narrative ways of knowing in the academic setting:

...a change in the relationship between the researcher and the researched; a move from the use of number toward the use of words as data; a change from a focus on the general and universal toward the local and specific; and a widening in acceptance of alternative epistemologies or ways of knowing. (1)

Three out of four of these changes (all but the move from general to local) do not indicate a significant shift in research methodologies or in the writing of scholarly articles, but

instead mark a reframing in the way scholars think about and approach knowledge. In essence, the rise of narrative inquiry coincides with composition's acclimation to the postmodern ideal that authorship and objectivity are incompatible. The first move removes the researcher's position "from a position of objectivity defined from the positivistic, realist perspective toward a research perspective focused on interpretation and the understanding of meaning" (Clandinin 9). The move from numbers to words as data signifies the same theoretical shift, that objective research is either limited or unrealistic.

This is the major difference between the expressivist movement and the narrative inquiry movement. Expressivists were interested in what personal writing could do for the student in the classroom, how it could teach them, and were not as interested in the value of personal writing as a rhetorical tool, or as a research method. On the other hand, narrative inquiry seeks to validate personal writing as a means of research at all levels of academia. In the *Handbook for Narrative Inquiry*, which the introduction states is a "first for the field," the opening chapter declares that "the academy opened up in a way that made space for narrative inquiry" (Clandinin ix; Pinnegar and Daynes 3). Later in the book, Freeman specifically includes autobiographical work in the narrative inquiry realm. "Autobiography is itself," Freeman says, "a fundamental form of narrative inquiry" (120). Theory surrounding narrative inquiry holds that the researcher is simply another factor within the argument being presented. What the *Handbook for Narrative Inquiry* describes as narrative inquiry is a significantly more rigorous form of researched and self-examined writing than the example of personal writing I use for the study in this thesis project. However, they are two forms of writing on one continuum, and both are a

declaration of the validity of the personal narrative within the academic setting. Currently there do not appear to be any studies that attempt to determine whether current instructors of first-year composition subscribe more to the narrative inquiry or the expressivist motivation for having students write about personal experience. My study can begin to provide some illumination to that question through the qualitative analysis.

Just as the use of personal writing in pedagogy has roots in the past, the boundaries of that use can also be found in previous composition scholarship. For example, in 1978, Miller and Judy (a previous NCTE president and an editor of *English Journal*, respectively) wrote that “all good writing is personal” in their book *Writing in Reality* (12). However, the quote continues by giving examples that are decidedly outside of the professional academic realm: “whether it be an abstract essay or a private letter” (12). These examples mirror the attitude of the expressivity movement Miller and Judy’s text was born out of, that personal writing is a means of engaging students in writing and facilitating the creation of *authentic* texts, not texts that belong in the academic conversation.

In contemporary scholarship, this divide continues, although in a different context. Melanie Kill writes about her use of autobiographical prompts in her first-year composition in the article “Acknowledging the Rough Edges of Resistance: Negotiation of Identities for First-Year Composition.” She emphasizes her use of the assignment as a way to teach several rhetorical strategies to the students, including “developing flexible and rhetorically aware language” and becoming aware of “performances of self” within essays (218; 222). However, Kill primarily uses the assignment to address concerns of genre: “one of the larger pedagogical aims of this prompt is to blur the divide between

personal motivations for writing and those for academic writing, as I don't think this division makes for interesting thinking or interested students" (224). She hopes to help students navigate the differences between their self present in their writing and their "true" self.

Kill's reasoning for the intersection of personal writing and first-year composition mirrors my own. She states that "most recent scholarship suggests rhetorical agility as the most productive goal for first-year composition" (214). Combine this with the extensive scholarship already covered that demonstrates the rhetorical ability of personal writing and narrative inquiry, we're provided with the incentive for teaching personal writing in the first-year composition classroom.

The hope Kill mentions of blurring personal and academic motivations and writing can also be expressed as a problem of genres. Making students cognizant of the differences and able to transverse the divide is a form of what genre studies refers to as "genre awareness" (Soliday). Soliday points to genre awareness as part of the reason students are successful; genre-aware students understand what constitutes evidence in different disciplines and different assignments. However, Soliday also calls upon instructors to assist students in the process: "because genre is a social practice, an assignment must be aligned with the social motives the genre performs for readers" (11). Soliday argues that this understanding of genre and its emphasis in a first-year composition classroom can help students throughout their academic careers, regardless of what degree they pursue. Soliday also points to a potential pitfall in the teaching of personal writing within first-year composition: if first-year composition essays are seen as their own, separate genre, it's possible that it might also be seen as one of the only

academic genres where personal writing is acceptable. Thus, genre divisions might limit where instructors are willing to allow personal writing.

The premise that first-year composition can effectively provide an understanding of later academic genres is not without contention. Other scholars in genre studies, specifically Wardle and Russell, argue that the division between genres prevents first-year composition from being a meaningful training grounds for the rest of the students' time in the academy. Wardle writes that "there is no evidence that FYC has taught students to write for the university and none to suggest it will start to do so as soon as we discover the next best teaching method" (784). Her primary argument is that by removing writing from individual disciplines and placing it within a generic writing course, we are training students to write for a genre that either they won't be writing for in the future, or doesn't exist at all. However, her suggestion of the replacement of first-year composition with a course entitled "Writing about Writing" (WAW) is not sufficiently developed to explain the difference between WAW and the current course offerings. Russell is more direct in his criticism of first-year composition: "Lack of content, lack of intellectual rigor, unrealistic expectations, difficulty—all are inherent in the assumptions about the nature of writing that undergird the course and in the course's institutional position" (75). The attitudes toward first-year writing, as described by Russell, could be essential in understanding the motivation for whether or not an instructor encourages or dismisses personal writing within the first-year composition classroom.

A final text that was influential in guiding this study was the 1994 book *Writing Students: Composition Testimonials and Representations of Students* by Marguerite Helmers. This book dissects the power relationship between teachers and students in the

composition classroom, and it does so in a way that relies upon examining testimonials. Helmers spends a significant amount of time discussing the narrative structure and the uses of testimonials. In doing so, she comments on the shifting role that stories play within the field. “At present,” she writes, “a growing number of scholars are turning once again to lore, storytelling, and experiential knowledge to define composition and its areas of inquiry. Now, however, the lore is augmented by theory elevated from an association with observation, experience, and emotion” (Helmers 126). While Helmers’s voice joins the choir of those scholars who argue for the importance of narrative within composition scholarship’s inquiry, her text is also important to this study for its commentary on the relationship between composition instructor and composition student. Helmers shows how “within the testimonial is the stock figure of *the student*, a character whose inability to perform well in school is his defining feature” (4). She cites numerous studies, articles, and interviews in which instructors describe students as “listless,” “apathetic,” and “catatonic” (5). Given the attitudes of the instructors depicted by Helmers, it’s not a stretch to argue that instructors would invalidate the experience of students as being meaningful to the academic conversation, *especially* first-year composition students who are at the proverbial bottom rung of the academic ladder. The descriptions Helmers provides echoes some of the discussion from the WPA listserv. Understanding the way instructors perceive students in the composition classroom is essential in understanding the attitudes of instructors towards those students’ personal writing.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

My goal in this research project was to measure first-year composition (FYC) instructors' opinions of writing with personal experience versus writing without personal experience. To this end, I asked instructors who had taught FYC (ENG 1310 or 1320) at Texas State University within the last five years to complete a survey. As part of this survey, they were asked to provide some demographic information about their career and assign a grade to a short writing sample. Each survey contained one of two possible writing samples. Both samples were constructed from the same essay written by a first-year composition student, but one sample included a section of personal writing and the other section included a different section bereft of personal writing.

After the data collection, I looked for patterns based upon which sample received a higher grade and the attributes of the professors who assigned those grades. I then performed additional qualitative research—via analysis of syllabi and interviews with some of the survey participants—to explore why the observed patterns exist.

The research performed for this thesis was exempted from full or expedited review by the Texas State Institutional Review Board on 12 November 2013.

Methodology-Related Review of the Literature

In triangulating my approach for this research, I drew upon primarily drew upon three studies, described below. Each of these studies is only peripherally related to the target of my research, and yet each offers relevant guidance. While designing this study, I

considered using surveys, interviews, observations, and case studies. Ultimately I chose to primarily use a survey with some supplemental interviews for three main reasons: 1) Given the lack of published scholarship that specifically looks at instructor attitudes toward the use of personal writing, I felt approaching the matter in as broad a way as possible would be beneficial for guiding future research. 2) I felt given the timeline for my thesis and my role as the sole researcher that it would not be possible to arrange enough case studies or observations to develop a meaningful analysis of the topic. 3) Finally, I discounted relying on interviews alone, as I felt that asking instructors about their practice would yield different results than providing an opportunity for them to demonstrate their practice. These considerations resulted in a survey that gathered demographic data about the participants and asked them to evaluate, in the form of a numerical grade on a scale of 0-100, a writing sample.

Future researchers with more time and resources might follow the footsteps of a 2008 study by Lunsford and Lunsford. In “‘Mistakes Are a Fact of Life’: A National Comparative Study,” they outline how they sought to update a previous 1986 study on first-year composition instructor attitudes toward errors in student papers. They achieved this through a significant case study; they reviewed 877 graded essays from multiple institutions, using the actual corrections that the instructors marked as the basis for their study. This study was very resource-intensive. Much of the article is devoted to describing the difficulties the authors had in obtaining permission to carry out their study at other institutions. For the papers they were able to collect, they had more than thirty research assistants who helped with stratification of the samples and coding the errors. Given the authors’ prominence in the field and the difficulty of their task, recreating their

process for personal writing is daunting, but the results of their study were significant and will undoubtedly fuel future work in the area. Besides their methodology, Lunsford and Lunsford also provided some relevant data to my study. They found that whereas in the 1986 study personal narratives accounted for a majority of sampled first-year composition papers, in 2006 they only made up 8.6%. Lunsford and Lunsford make a poignant comment on the comparison, stating that “these results suggest that emphasis on personal narrative has been replaced by an emphasis on argument in research” (793). By using this language, the authors dichotomize personal narrative with argument in research.

Michael Hopkins’s study, “A Descriptive Case Study of Two Veteran String Teachers’ Perceptions of Including Composing in Middle School Orchestra,” used an in-depth observation to explore a similar research question to my own. The author noted that music composition was rarely taught in middle school music classrooms, and that no research existed to understand why. Hopkins coordinated with a middle school instructor and arranged an eight-week observation of a unit lesson on composition. While Hopkins gains a significant amount of information on the obstacles and attitudes of the instructor toward composition, he is quick to note that his research method has made his results very limited. He states that the school’s resources and philosophy as well as the instructor’s educational and career background could all have a significant influence on why music instructors are reluctant to teach music composition. Thus, like my study, Hopkins seeks to begin a conversation using the data he’s gathered and calls for further study on the topic.

The article that most influenced my choice of methodology was a questionnaire supplemented by classroom observations and open-ended interviews performed by Takako Nishino. Like my study, Nishino's work was motivated by an observation of a dissonance between scholarship and classroom practices, although he focused on the instruction of English in Japanese high schools. He cites previous work by Kagan and Pajares as his motivation for not relying solely on the questionnaire:

Kagan (1992) indicates that some teachers' questionnaire responses are potentially influenced by social desirability and that teachers cannot express unconsciously held beliefs in a short-answer questionnaire. Pajares (1992) suggests that additional measures such as open-ended interviews and observations of behavior should be used to make up for the limitations of questionnaire studies. (383)

Ultimately Nishino found that the beliefs instilled in instructors by training and evidence-based research gets overwritten by their experiences in the classroom. Similar forces might be at work in first-year composition instructors' attitudes toward personal writing.

Participants

I limited my participants to instructors of record at all career levels who have taught or are currently teaching FYC (ENG 1310 or 1320) at Texas State University within the last five years. There are several reasons for this selection. Due to the state of Texas's House Bill 2504, the names, contact information, and syllabi of all the courses and instructors at Texas State University since the spring semester of 2012 are publicly available online. This allowed me to directly contact potential participants without relying on indirect sampling methods or approaching the department for instructor

information. This also allowed me to compare the results of the survey to the instructors' syllabi, even ones who did not participate in the survey. It also allowed me to compare the results of the survey with Texas State's English department's messaging, both in terms of their expectations for ENG 1310 and 1320 and their philosophy as a whole.

In total, 129 eligible instructors were identified via the HB 2504 site. However, as mentioned, the site only has information going back to the spring semester of 2012, which means there were a significant number of instructors eligible to take the survey who were not directly contacted. I hoped to reach these additional potential participants via sample snowballing efforts, by encouraging acquaintances to spread the word about the survey. Also, as part of the survey process outlined later, I asked instructors' familiar with my research goal to recuse themselves from the survey, in order to prevent a response bias. I estimate this affected 6-8 potential participants.

Overall, there were significant limitations to this study due to the participant pool. First-year composition at Texas State is taught largely by teaching assistants or lecturers, which means the voices of more experienced faculty were not present. However, given that part of the thrust of this study was to compare the difference between the voices in scholarship versus the practices in the classroom, I would argue that this is a minor limitation. It does mean that the participants are significantly different from those that would be chosen from other universities. As an example, my undergraduate institution was a small liberal arts college: Southwestern University. There, the first-year composition equivalent is a writing-intensive seminar class taught by faculty across the disciplines. Using the same criteria there would have netted a group of instructors much, much different than the ones selected at Texas State, especially since Southwestern has

no teaching assistants at all given its lack of a graduate school. The limiting of the participants to primarily teaching assistants and lecturers also meant that a significant portion of the participants would have obtained a graduate degree at Texas State, making them homogenous in that regard as well. Finally, the participant limitations also meant that a significant number of potential candidates were no longer associated with Texas State University, and therefore the email account associated with their instruction was no longer in use or valid. Of the 129 directly messaged, 11 were not valid. In one case, an instructor whose Texas State account was no longer active had a personal email address listed on their syllabus, so I emailed the request to that address.

Another limitation of the study was the sampling of only one institution. It's conceivable that Texas State instills a bias into its first-year composition classroom either for or against personal writing, especially given that the teaching assistants who make up the bulk of the instructors receive a significant amount of guidance in their teaching from the same source: a graduate practicum taught by the Director of Lower Division Studies. By only surveying Texas State instructors, I am unable to comment on whether such a bias exists, as I have no basis for comparison outside of the institution. Similar biases might exist for the state of Texas, schools the size of Texas State, and English departments that contain similar programs like Texas State's. Using my home institution as the only source of participants gave me at least one benefit, however, as I believe it resulted in a higher response rate than I would have achieved at other institutions. This is due both to potential name recognition since I move in the same academic and social spaces as the participants, but also a potentially increased sympathy in my research cause as members of the same institution.

Despite the limitations, though, this participant selection appears to have been a good choice for this study. Anything larger would have been difficult to accomplish within the time period and with the resources available for this thesis project. A larger scale study that would have included multiple institutions would have taken exponentially more time, as evidenced by the experience of Lunsford and Lunsford outlined in the methodology literature review above. This study does achieve its goal of being a jumping off point for future studies with more resources to command, and with a researcher who has more social capital to expend in obtaining participant responses.

Furthermore, I believe some of the limitations in participant selection and sample size were supplemented by the additional qualitative measures of interviews and the analysis of syllabi and departmental messaging.

In deciding who to survey, I excluded a group of first-year composition instructors. Texas State offers one other first-year composition course: ENG 1300, Developmental Writing. I purposefully chose not to include instructors of this course in the study because, as evidenced by the comments in the listserv discussion on personal writing, some instructors feel that personal writing is more or less appropriate for different levels of writers. By not including ENG 1300, I hoped to focus just on a single level of writer, to limit it as an influencing factor. For the same reason, I didn't include the honors courses HON 1390E or 1390L, which replace ENG 1310 and 1320. However, the exclusion of these courses did not affect my participant pool at all. Every ENG 1300 instructor listed on the HB 2504 site also taught ENG 1310 or 1320 within the studied period, and the only instructor of HON 1390E who wasn't already part of the participant pool is a member of my thesis committee and therefore ineligible for the survey anyway.

First Round Data Collection

The first step in beginning my data collection process was to construct the writing samples to be used. To this end, I contacted members of my graduate program cohort who were teaching first-year composition and asked them for writing samples from their students. I specified that the ideal candidate would have personal writing in part of their essay, but not in the entire piece, so that the personal writing would be easily extractable. The email I sent requesting writing samples is attached as Appendix A.

I received multiple responses to this request and read through roughly twenty essays that my cohort felt met the criteria I requested. Most of the essays either had too much personal writing, to the extent that it would have been difficult to construct a sample from it that did not include personal writing. Some also had too little personal writing, and only mentioned themselves in a sentence or two. Ultimately I chose an essay by a student in a colleague's 1310 class. The essay was a response to Paulo Freire's "banking concept of education" as outlined in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In the essay, the student primarily talks abstractly about how the banking system is still used by teachers and how our educational process would be better served by listening to Freire. While a significant amount of the student's essay is written using "we," only one section directly refers to a specific personal experience in which they speak of a friend who didn't attend college due to disillusionment with the education system.

First, my colleague sought permission for me to contact the student about using the essay. They agreed, and I followed up with an email explaining my research and how the essay would be used. That email is attached as Appendix B. The student agreed to take part.

The student's complete, unedited essay is attached as Appendix C. After receiving permission, I created two writing samples from the essay. Both samples were just under 500 words (the original essay was roughly 950 words long). In both, I moved the content of the essay around so that the samples were both coherent and included or omitted his experience with the student's friend. I also performed minor edits to remove errors and reduce the chances of participants focusing more on the style than the content of the essay. The first sample, with the personal experience, is attached as Appendix D, with the second *sans* personal experience attached as Appendix E. Using this method, the two writing samples are as similar as they could be, given that they are both from the same essay, while also being definitively different in terms of their use of personal experience. I then made the two writing samples publicly available, without any additional information (no title or author listed), on Google Drive.

Next, I created two electronic surveys using Google Drive's "Form" feature. The two surveys were identical except for which writing sample they included. The reason for multiple surveys was to ensure that different instructors received different writing samples to respond to. The surveys began by verifying that the respondent was eligible to take the survey. If the respondent indicated they were not, the survey terminated. After determining eligibility, the surveys asked for information about the respondent's career and position and the respondent's response (in the form of a grade on a scale of 0-100) to the writing sample. The demographic information asked for was selected to determine if any of the factors identified could be correlated with the respondent's response to the samples. The surveys requested institution(s) where the respondent was currently employed, department(s) or program(s) the respondent self-identified with, the

respondent's current position(s) title(s) and rank(s), the respondent's degree(s) held or in progress, and the respondent's years of experience teaching at a collegiate level. The surveys also specifically asked for a numerical grade instead of a letter grade to allow small differences between responses to be more measurable. For instance, if instructors tended to give Bs as a grade, then using a number still allows for comparative analysis between an 86 and an 88.

I edited a single question after the survey had been sent out. In the demographics section, I originally asked for the instructors to list their degree(s) held. After three responses, I noticed that one of the responses specified their degree was in progress. Given that it seemed important to also know degrees in progress, I edited the question to indicate they should list degree(s) held and in progress.

At the end of the surveys, the respondent was given the opportunity to input their email address if they agreed to be contacted for future questions. The writing samples were not included in the body of the surveys. Instead, the surveys included links to the writing sample, which made them open in a new window. This was for two main reasons: 1) It prevented the respondent from opening the surveys and seeing a large block of writing and possibly not continuing with the study due to being overwhelmed by the length. 2) It simulated the way an instructor would traditionally receive an essay as part of their teaching. A copy of the surveys is provided as Appendix F.

I then took the email addresses for the instructors that I had culled from the HB 2504 site and began sending out requests for participants. I sent the emails out in batches of no more than twenty-five recipients each, and I included myself as a recipient for each, to ensure delivery. I did not include links to the survey in the initial solicitation email,

because I wanted to ensure that each writing sample would receive roughly half of the responses. The solicitation email is attached as Appendix G. In it, I provide some basic information about myself and the research, although I do not go as far as to identify the research goal as being about personal writing. Instead, I state that the research goal is to measure “how instructors of first-year composition react to specific student approaches within writing.” I believe that if the goal of the research had been identified as being about personal writing, that this would have created a response bias from instructors. They might have purposefully used the survey as a way to make a statement about how they felt academically about personal writing, rather than respond in a way that was in line with their teaching practices.

Whenever a potential participant responded to the solicitation email, I sent them the link to the survey in a follow-up email, attached as Appendix H. I kept track of which survey I sent with each response, making sure that I alternated which survey I sent each time. Responses to the survey automatically populated a private spreadsheet on Google Drive.

I sent the solicitation email twice. The first time was on the morning of Thursday, 30 January 2014. The second was Wednesday, 5 January 2014. I chose those dates as most instructors’ schedules have a large teaching load on Monday/Wednesday/Friday or Tuesday/Thursday, so by sending on Wednesday and Thursday I hoped for the email to arrive at a convenient time for both schedules. For the second solicitation email, I removed from the pool any email addresses that had bounced back as invalid, as well as the addresses of anyone who had already responded.

On the same day as the solicitation emails went out, I posted on my Facebook account about the study and requested that any of my friends who were eligible take the survey, and for anyone who was eligible or ineligible to spread the words to their acquaintances who might be eligible.

Second Round Data Collection

Once I received all the responses from the survey that I expected to get, I analyzed the results to look for potential candidates for follow-up qualitative analysis. I chose two respondents. One received the writing sample with personal writing and one the sample without. One was a lecturer and one was a teaching assistant. I felt this was appropriate given those two positions made up 26% and 48% of respondents, respectively. Both assigned a score to their sample near the average score, and both had teaching experience near the median number of years of respondents: two. Finally, both candidates had responded to the survey relatively quickly, which I hoped would carry over into an enthusiastic response to an interview.

After I chose the two candidates, I sent them a personal email thanking them for their participation in the survey and then asking for permission to interview them. In the email, I gave them the choice of what format the interview could take. Both respondents agreed to the interview and chose to answer the interview questions through email.

The email I sent both respondents with the interview questions is attached as Appendix I. I first explained the premise of my thesis project and described how the survey they participated in worked, and what it was intended to measure. However, I did not reveal any of the results of that survey, as I did not want the results to affect their answers to the questions I posed.

I asked both of the interviewees five questions. I encouraged them to be as broad in their answers as they wanted and to feel free to go off on tangents. The five questions were as follows:

- What do you expect the outcome of my research to be? Why?
- How would you compare the roles of your education (in terms of actual classes and teaches), your area of study, and your experience as an instructor (including both in the classroom and your training/guidance from the department) in forming your teaching style?
- How do you approach personal writing in your classroom? Is it reserved for specific assignments, or could it fit into any assignments?
- Do you spend time teaching first-year writing students how to use personal writing?
- Do you think personal writing should be used more or less (or possibly the same amount) in first-year composition versus higher level writing classes (including writing assignments in other disciplines)?

These questions were designed to draw connections between the survey results and the conscious thoughts of the “average” respondent. They also sought to give voice to the instructors’ thoughts on topics addressed in my literature review as well as in the WPA listserv discussion.

Along with the information obtained from the interview, I also downloaded both of the interviewed instructors’ syllabi from the HB 2504 website. I looked to their syllabi to see how personal writing was treated, if at all, in their teaching.

Reflections on Methodology

Despite the numerous limitations with my participant selection, I feel that the main body of my methodology was effective and well-designed. None of the participants reported problems with the process. The data yielded from the study allowed for the level of analysis I was hoping for. All of the larger changes to the methodology I would make would require more participants and more incentive for participants to respond. The interview questions appeared to yield significant response, and while there are always additional relevant questions, more questions might have reduced interviewees' likelihood of responding as thoroughly as they did for this study.

In my initial thesis proposal, I intended to incorporate participants from other universities beyond Texas State University. Given that my methodology is done primarily via email and uses publicly available data to send out those emails, the actual execution of including other institutions would not be difficult, as long as they were public universities in Texas. Private universities in Texas are not required to participate in HB 2504, and other states might not have equivalent laws. The biggest potential stumbling block and the reason why ultimately other universities were not included in this study (beyond the limitation of time and resources to process the larger set of results) was the possibility of having to wait on the other institutions' independent research boards' approvals.

Part of the reason I proposed to study multiple institutions was also to prevent response bias from people who had heard what my research interests were. I do not think this was an issue despite the study being limited to Texas State. I was genuinely unacquainted with the vast majority of people who responded to the solicitation email.

Using only my home institution provided an additional, unexpected challenge, though. Because I had access to a significant amount of information about the respondents due to my knowledge of our department and the HB 2504 site, I had an impulse to correct or supplement information they provided in the survey. The majority of respondents (twelve of twenty-three) provided their email address and thus identified themselves in responding to the survey. With their identification, I could have looked up their curriculum vitae on the HB 2504 site and added more information about what degrees they held, since many people did not fully identify their area of study. I chose not to, although I am not sure if that choice was appropriate or not.

Also in my initial proposal, I intended for each survey respondent to evaluate two separate writing samples, in order to draw a more direct comparison between their response to a sample that included personal writing and one that did not. Given my low number of respondents, this methodology would simply not have worked with the current participant pool without additional incentives. However, I do believe evaluating two writing samples would be a strong addition to future similarly designed studies, as it allows the researcher to limit the impact of the writing styles of a single writing sample and to see how individual respondents' ranges of responses compare to the sample as a whole.

There are some minor facets of my methodology I would also consider changing. I designed the experiment with a two-step participation process. Respondents had to answer an email and then, separately, fill out the survey. I did this due to a limitation in technology—I needed to be able to send individual emails to participants to control half of the participants receiving one survey and half receiving the other survey. Ideally, I

would have instead been able to send a single link to the survey to participants and that survey link would randomize which writing sample they saw. The results hint at the damage the two-step process did. While twenty-three people filled out a survey, thirty-two people responded to the solicitation email, meaning that at least nine people asked to receive the survey but never completed it. This could be due to their having available time when they received the solicitation email but not when they received the link to the survey. (To combat this, I tried to respond to all requests as fast as possible, but it's unclear how effective this was.) It's also possible that they opened the survey and quit due to its length or having to read the writing sample (survey fatigue). Finally, not having a single survey link made the possibility of snowballing or public advertisement more difficult, as I could not just publicize a single direct link to a survey. This two-step process might not have been entirely negative, though. It's possible that it weeded out some participants who might not have taken the survey in good faith.

Because of the dissonance between who requested a survey and who actually filled out the survey, I regret the decision not to send the second solicitation email to people who had already requested a survey. The second solicitation email might have acted as a reminder for people who had already received a survey link.

There's a single wording change I would make to the survey. I asked how many years of experience the instructors had teaching at the collegiate level. Because many of the respondents were just beginning their teaching careers as TAs, many respondents indicated half a year or one and a half years of experience. However, it became apparent in my analysis of the results that some respondents counted the semester that was in progress at the time of the survey as part of their experience, and some did not. Thus,

future surveys should be more specific on this point, if being able to differentiate experience at the semester level is important for their conclusions.

In choosing whom to interview, I wanted to have a representation of the thoughts behind the most average responders to the survey. To that end, I believe I succeeded, and I was fortunate that the two interviewees differed in their views enough to demonstrate varying schools of thought on the topic. However, it might have also been interesting to see how their responses compared to one of the outliers, such as the participants who assigned the lowest grade (65) or the highest (95) to the writing samples, or the participants with 20+ years of teaching experience.

Finally, for this specific study, I would have liked to know whether or not each respondent was teaching first-year composition at the time of taking the survey, and if so, which course (1310 or 1320). It would be interesting to see if being a current instructor of the course affected individuals' responses. Also, since 1310 and 1320 have slightly different focuses, there might have been variation based on whether they were teaching one or the other, or both. This was indicated in the interviews, with the first respondent stating that "In English 1320, I don't focus as much on personal experience," and then in response to whether they spent time teaching how to use personal writing, they said, "Yes. This is almost the entire content of my English 1310 course." Since the two courses have different expectations, this could have influenced results.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

In total, twenty-three people filled out the survey. Ten responded to the survey with the personal writing sample, thirteen to the other sample. The overall results showed a significant preference among the instructors toward the sample segment of writing that contained personal experience versus the sample without, with the first receiving an average score of 82.11 and the latter receiving an average score of 74.69.

Following the survey, I emailed two participants and interviewed them about their teaching practices and the use of personal writing in the first-year classroom. Both participants in the interview responded to the entire set of questions electronically. Their responses have been attached as Appendices J and K. The first set of responses belongs to the lecturer, the second to the TA. Their names are not present in the responses; however, enough information is present that their identities might possibly be guessed by their colleagues. This was addressed in the survey, wherein they agreed that they might not remain anonymous if they provided their email address for the follow-up study.

Survey Results

The complete results of the survey have been attached as Appendix L (response to sample with personal writing) and Appendix M (response to sample without personal writing). Also included in the related appendices are keys to understanding some of the abbreviations found in the data, and a few snapshot facts about the data (averages and medians). The facts included in the appendices are discussed further in this section.

These results have been codified in numerous ways. First, responses were modified for consistency. As an example, some respondents referred to Texas State University as “Tx St,” “Texas State,” “Texas State University,” or “Texas State University – San Marcos.” Similar variations occurred in references to titles, departments, programs, and degrees. No information was removed; the codified results are as specific as the respondents were. They were made consistent for ease of reading. Note that in this case MFA always refers to an MFA in Creative Writing. Also as part of the codifying process, any higher education institution besides Texas State was changed to “Other.” This only affected three respondents: one who taught at Texas State University and another institution and two others who had both moved on to teach at other institutions after Texas State. Given there were only three data points like this and that in each case the institution besides Texas State was different, thus allowing for no meaningful analysis beyond the fact that they teach somewhere else, their institution was removed to help maintain their anonymity. Finally, multiple respondents who were teaching assistants did not indicate a degree in progress. If a respondent identified as a teaching assistant and listed a single graduate-level degree, I assumed that degree was in progress and marked it as such.

The responses to two survey questions were removed entirely. Given that everyone who responded selected that they agreed, the response to whether the participant agreed or disagreed to participate in the study was removed. Also, the space available for the participants to include their email address has been removed to maintain privacy. In total, twelve of the twenty-three participants provided their email address. A

breakdown of which groups of respondents were more likely to provide their email address is provided in the “Interview Results” section of this chapter.

I also made three small modifications to correct some data entry. In one case, a respondent listed a business unrelated to education as their institution. Based on the rest of their response, it would appear this person is no longer working in higher education. I replaced the business they listed in the institution column as well as their position at that business listed in the title column with “business” and “nonacademic,” respectively. The second modification was to change a score given from “.70” to “70.” I believe the .70 was either a typo or a reference to 70% (as the form wouldn’t accept the % sign as part of the answer since it asks for a number). Finally, one respondent gave the writing sample a score of “68-70.” I did not modify that in the appendix; however, for the purposes of calculating averages the range was replaced with a “69” instead.

The two most easily analyzed points of data were years of experience and score assigned to the writing sample. For the writing sample with personal writing, the respondents’ average years of experience was 5.45. However, one respondent was a significant outlier with 34 years of experience. Thus, the median of 1.25 years of experience is also very relevant. The personal writing sample received an average score of 82.11. The median score assigned was 82, showing that the scores were all fairly consistent. For the writing sample without personal writing, the average years of experience was 4.27. Once again, there was an outlier, this time with 25 years of experience. The median for this group of respondents was two years of experience. The average score assigned was 74.69; the median was 78. For all respondents combined, the

average years of experience was 4.78, the median years of experience was 2, the average score assigned was 77.73, and the median score assigned was 78.

The rest of the data was more inconclusive. Many respondents did not include their undergraduate degree details, and some did not include their graduate degree details. Only twelve of the twenty-three respondents self-identified as being a part of a program or department besides the English department. Eleven respondents were teaching assistants, six were lecturers, one was a senior lecturer, three were professors (one adjunct, one associate, and one assistant), one had the title of “English Instructor,” and one did not appear to currently be teaching at the college level. In addition to their teaching responsibilities, two listed other job titles: one in the grants department, one in the writing center. Of the graduate degrees held or in progress, fourteen of the twenty-three listed an MFA (three specified poetry, two fiction, and the rest did not specify their specialization), four listed an MA in Rhetoric and Composition, two listed an MA in Literature, one listed a nonspecific MA, and two listed a nonspecific PhD. No respondents listed multiple graduate degrees. Of the twenty-three, twelve listed an undergraduate degree, but only six specified the associated major. Two specified a BA in English, two specified a BA in Creative Writing, one specified a BA in Rhetoric and Composition, and one specified a BS in Psychology.

Interview Results

As stated in the Methodology chapter, the two interviewees were chosen for being close to the average in terms of their years of experience, their position, and the score they assigned to their writing sample, as well as for being prompt respondents to the survey. The first respondent, whose questions and answers are attached as Appendix J,

was a lecturer who completed an MA in Literature at Texas State University. This respondent had two years of experience teaching at the college level, and assigned the writing sample without personal writing a score of 78 (compared with the average of 74.69 and the median of 78). The second respondent, whose questions and answers are attached as Appendix K, was a TA who was in the process of completing an MFA. The second respondent had one year of experience teaching at the college level, and assigned the writing sample with personal writing a score of 89 (compared with an average of 82.11 and a median of 82). For the purposes of discussion, I will refer to the first respondent as “MA Lit” and the second respondent as “MFA.”

Both respondents replied with answers to the questions within twenty-four hours. Their answers were lengthy and thorough; MA Lit wrote roughly 600 words MFA wrote roughly 800 words, which exceeded my expectations in terms of an email-based response. The answers to the questions met my expectations in terms of providing the information that I was seeking in designing the interview.

They gave similar answers to the first question. Both predicted the results to the survey correctly by stating that they felt personal writing would receive the higher grades. MA Lit attributed that to Texas State in general, and MFA specifically stated their hypothesis only applied to instructors from the MFA program.

In other responses, however, the two respondents differed significantly. MA Lit stated almost their entire 1310 curriculum revolves around using personal writing; MFA stated that they do not specifically teach personal writing. Based on their responses, MA Lit appears to be shaped in their teaching style largely by their own experiences as a student, specifically as an undergraduate student. MFA cites their experiences as a

teacher and as part of a cohort of new instructors as guiding their curriculum. MA Lit believed personal writing should be available to be used in any writing assignment, whereas MFA argued that “there should be a clear demarcation between when a student should use personal writing and when they should rely on the nonpersonal.” Overall, though, both respondents had a very positive view of personal writing as a tool in academic writing. The first respondent viewed it as a potential maneuver at all levels, stating that “personal experience always adds interest to writing and can be used as a contextual frame for any writing assignment.” The second respondent appeared to view it more as a pedagogical tool within the academy, saying “it makes sense to use personal writing as a stepping stone to higher level writing where you cannot rely on personal experience.”

Following the interviews, I examined the syllabi for both instructors, as well as the learning outcomes provided by the English department for the two first-year composition courses. Both interviewees had similar syllabi. Since the second interviewee indicated they did not spend time teaching personal writing in first-year composition, it’s unsurprising that their syllabi for both ENG 1310 and 1320 did not mention personal writing at all. Neither did the learning outcomes provided by the department, although it should be noted that those learning outcomes are very brief. The first respondent, who indicated that they spent a significant amount of time in their first-year composition classrooms working on personal writing, featured personal writing very briefly in their syllabi. In 1310, it was labeled as the topic for a week’s worth of curriculum. In 1320, it was not mentioned at all. This would appear to indicate that looking at syllabi is not a good measure for the instructor’s emphasis or acceptance of personal writing.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

The results from my investigation ran completely counter to what I expected. While a bias was present, it was in favor of the writing sample that had personal writing. This bias was fairly well defined, being a nearly eight point difference in average grades. This is significant especially given that the twenty-three grades only had a thirty point range, from 65 to 95.

The results from the survey as well as the follow-up qualitative research open the door for further questions about who teaches first-year composition and how their relationship with personal writing is shaped. This chapter outlines what my results illuminate when it comes to my research questions and reflects upon the research design to assist future work on the topic.

In terms of the research questions I posed in the introduction, I have many tentative answers and more questions to explore. The amount of experience, subdiscipline that an instructor aligns with, and position of the instructor appears to have little or no bearing on the score the participants assigned to the writing samples. However, my sample is very limited both in terms of size and in terms of diversity.

Reflections on Results

While I had hoped for achieving a higher response rate from the survey, twenty-three responses out of roughly 110 potential participants who received exposure to the survey (129 original, minus the people with an invalid email address and an estimation of

people ineligible due to familiarity with the research) is a roughly twenty percent response rate.

My two interviewees provided significantly more of a response than I had hoped for. Both spoke extensively to how their own experience has shaped their relationship with teaching personal writing and teaching first-year composition as a whole. Both also provided meaningful analysis as to their perceptions of how personal writing is treated by their teaching cohort.

Based on the results obtained, there is a bias among the instructors sampled toward writing with personal experience. The individual grades assigned are fairly clustered (especially in the responses to the non-personal writing sample), which leads me to believe that the majority of the respondents took the survey in earnest. This is especially true for the TAs, as they go through some grade calibration exercises using a standardized rubric and some model papers as part of their training. That training is provided in the fall, and since this survey was executed in the spring, all TA participants had undergone that training. It's possible that the clumping of grades around the average is a negative sign as well. It could indicate a lack of investment in the survey and the assigning of a fairly standard, mediocre grade just to provide a response. It should be noted, however, that the personal writing sample had a wider range of grades assigned to it: 65-95, as opposed to 68-82 for the non-personal writing sample. This is indicative of a more varied response among instructors toward personal writing.

There are not enough data points to draw significant conclusions about the different groups of instructors, but this small group appears to point to degree program and years of experience having little bearing on grade assigned.

The possible reasons the study yielded this set of results, counter to my expectations at the onset of this project, are numerous. The simplest explanation could be that the writing sample with personal writing might be more appealing for a reason besides its inclusion of personal experience. Despite coming from the same author and the same paper, some quality of that particular section of the writing could have influenced the grades. Respondents could have valued personal and non-personal writing equally in the academic essay, but the rhetorical value of this particular sample that included personal writing might have outweighed the rhetorical value of the other sample. The small sample size could also have been a problem; the set of results might simply be a fluke based on who responded to the survey.

Additionally, either of the interviewees' hypotheses could be correct. Texas State's English department as an institution might encourage the approval of personal writing, as suggested by the first respondent. Or, as the second respondent suggested, the MFA program's influence might shape perceptions of personal writing for their graduates and students who teach first-year composition as well as the department as a whole. I discuss in the next section how the respondents associated with the MFA program did not grade the personal writing more favorably than the rest of the sample size. In fact, the opposite turned out to be true. Despite this, the MFA program produces a significant portion of the instructors and is the largest graduate program in the English department, and as such it's possible that they influence the instructors outside of their program.

Another possible explanation is the relatively young ages of the respondents. Their role as graduate students or recent graduates might position them to be more sympathetic to the personal experiences of the student writer than an instructor who is

more removed. It's also possible that additional years of experience could make them more cynical or dismissive of personal writing. My current data set does not support that, as the respondent with the most experience assigned the median score to the personal writing sample.

One of the most interesting results, in my mind, was the MFA interviewee's response to the question about whether personal writing should be used more or less in first-year composition than in higher level classes: "I think it makes sense to use personal writing as a stepping stone to higher level writing where you cannot rely on personal experience," mirrors almost exactly some of the messages from the WPA listserv, especially the professor I cited in the introduction who said he uses personal writing primarily in his developmental writing classes ("Personal Writing"). Based on the interviewee's statement, a similar study to this one aimed at upper-level courses with writing might have significantly different results. It's possible that a positive bias toward personal writing only exists when it's in the context of novice academic writers.

In my literature review, I described diverging motivations for personal writing from the expressivist and narrative inquiry camps within composition. It is difficult to say definitely which camp aligns more with the motivations of the two interviewees. Both interviewees make positive statements about the ability of personal writing to supplement an essay. The first respondent specifically hopes that students in other disciplines are allowed to use personal writing "to provide context or a thread of interest to their writing." The second respondent says that a benefit of personal writing is that it's "less intimidating for most students." It appears that the interviewees would agree with parts of both expressivist and narrative inquiry camps: that personal writing is a way to

motivate students to engage with topics, but also that personal writing has the potential to increase the quality of an essay overall if used correctly.

A second surprise from the results, besides the bias toward the personal writing sample, was the relatively low overall scores assigned to the paper. In selecting the paper I used for the sample, I had thought it to be strongly written for a first semester college student. Based on the referring TA's emails, I'm confident she did as well. The grades assigned to it, which averaged 77.73 across all twenty-three responses, were much lower than I would've guessed. Two explanations jump to mind. One is that the disconnect between the instructor and the writer might result in a lower grade. Since the instructors were unaware of the identity of the writer and had not developed a relationship with them in the classroom, they might have tended to grade lower than they would have otherwise, or were less likely to inflate grades. Another possible explanation is that in the process of creating the smaller writing samples out of the longer paper, the writing lost some measure of meaning or cohesion that led to the lower grades.

Reflections on Participant Pool

In the follow-up interviews, both respondents predicted the results of the survey, and they both explained it in different ways. The first respondent stated that "At least at TSU, I believe there is a bias towards using personal experience as evidence to support points/thesis." The second wrote that, "Since I'm in a graduate program for creative writing, I would guess that first-year comp teachers within this concentration would favor personal writing more when grading." In other words, while both respondents predicted the results, they also couched that prediction in an implication that the results might not

be the same at a different institution, or among instructors from backgrounds besides an MFA program.

Ultimately, the second respondent's prediction was incorrect. If I removed the scores from the respondents who either held an MFA or were in the progress of getting their MFA, the average score for the piece with personal writing was 85.67 and the average score for the non-personal sample was 78—an even bigger difference in favor of the personal writing. However, the sample size was tiny for this comparison, since only nine of the respondents were not associated with an MFA program.

I wanted to investigate the idea that who is teaching first-year writing at Texas State might make an impact on the attitudes toward personal writing. After all, my sample size was significantly different in terms of where they were in their career when compared with the average participant in the WPA listserv, or the people writing scholarship about composition. In order to get a clearer picture of who was teaching first-year English at Texas State University, I realized I needed to look beyond my relatively small sample size.

To do this, I returned to the spreadsheet I had created with all of the names and email addresses of my eligible participants (which was originally used to mail out the survey solicitations). I went back to the HB 2504 site and compiled all the relevant data I could extract from it and added it to my spreadsheet. When I was finished, I had a list of every instructor who had taught first-year composition at Texas State University since the spring semester of 2012. I had their most recent title (some instructors might have taught first as a TA and then as a lecturer; in this case they would only be listed as a lecturer), their graduate degree(s) held or in progress, whether or not they attended Texas State

University as a student, and how many sections of both English 1310 and 1320 they had taught.

What I found was surprising. Of the 129 people who had been a first-year composition instructor since spring 2012, only eleven did not have a degree from Texas State University. Eighty-four either held an MFA or were working on one at the time of their teaching. Only two of those eighty-four MFAs were held from institutions other than Texas State University. Twenty-one held or were working on MAs in literature (one not from Texas State), and nine held or were working on MAs in rhetoric and composition (all from Texas State). Fifteen of the instructors held PhDs. Fifty-seven instructors were teaching assistants, forty-eight were lecturers, eleven were senior lecturers, ten held professor positions of some sort, and two held other positions at the university. These numbers are slightly misrepresentative, however, as those with professor ranks taught fewer sections than the others, especially lecturers. While professors made up 7.7% of the instructors, they only taught 3.8% of sections. An abridged version of the data is attached as Appendix N. Note that the breakdown in percentage terms of the overall participant pool of instructors almost mirrors the breakdown in percentages of my sample. In the sample, rhetoric and composition degrees were overrepresented and literature degrees were underrepresented relative to the participant pool, but the MFA percentage was nearly identical (60.8% in the sample versus 65.1% in the potential participant pool). TAs were proportionally well represented with 44.1% of the participant pool identified as TAs compared to 47.8% of the sample, although there was some variation in the number of lecturers. In the participant pool,

37.2% were lecturers compared to 26.1% of the sample. Overall, this comparison makes me confident in the sample being representative of the instructor pool as a whole.

It's important to note though that being representative of the instructor pool is not equivalent to being representative of sections being taught. Lecturers teach more sections, on average, of first-year composition than either TAs or higher ranking instructors. Therefore the breakdown presented above cannot be said to apply to first-year composition classes, just to the instructors teaching them. This might seem like a semantic or obvious note, but it's a crucial thing to consider if one were to draw any kind of policy-affecting conclusions from these results.

As mentioned in the methodology, I knew that Texas State's system would be significantly skewed towards younger and less experienced teachers, due to first-year composition being the only class that teaching assistants in the English department teach. If you compare this with a university that does not have teaching assistants in the English department, or uses those teaching assistants to teach other classes, then the demographics of their instructors would look significantly different. At this point in my research, I am not sure how Texas State University's first-year composition instructors' demographics compare with similarly sized schools. To compare, I reviewed several instructors of the equivalent courses at Texas Tech University and the University of Texas at Austin using their institutions' HB 2504 sites. The former seemed to primarily have instructors with degrees from other universities and more average teaching experience, while the latter seemed to rely primarily on graduate students and recent graduates. (It is important to note that all of UT's TAs were PhD candidates. How

important that might be to defining their relationship with personal writing is unknown.) However, this was just a cursory glance and more study is needed.

In my methodology chapter I mentioned the limitations both of sample size and of looking at a single institution. Based on my results, I believe both of those limitations are still true. Additional participants at Texas State would allow more comparisons between people of varying levels of experience, as well as between people from varying degree programs. Having participants from multiple institutions would allow for a comparison between those instructors at Texas State University and elsewhere.

However, this raises an important question. Texas State's practice of using primarily instructors with little experience might be the norm. In that case, it's possible that a second divide exists. I demonstrated in my introduction and literature review that there is a divide between scholarship about personal writing and the feelings toward personal writing expressed on the Writing Programs Administrators listserv. It's possible, though, that another divide exists between the users on the WPA listserv and the bulk of the actual instructors of first-year composition. In setting out on this research experiment, I assumed that the voices on the listserv represented people on the "front lines" of teaching, as opposed to the voices in scholarship that were more removed from the actual instruction. After performing this study, though, I now believe it's possible that the voices on the listserv more closely align with the professors in my study in terms of how often they teach first-year writing: that they represent a portion of the instructors, but a very small portion. Of the two professors who responded to my study, one provided a grade higher than the average and one lower. Neither identified which program they were with or what their PhD was in.

Based on my results alone, I am unable to say definitively what the relationship is between the different groups of instructors. Further study with a larger participant pool is needed to determine if there is any clear division at all. The bulk of instructors at Texas State University (both among my sample size and my potential participant pool) are distanced from the composition field, therefore it stands to reason that a significant divide between them, the people participating in the WPA listserv, and the people creating composition scholarship exists.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

My results point to a bias amongst instructors of first-year composition at Texas State University for the use of personal writing within their students' essays. While my sample size was small, it still provided a significant set of data that could guide future studies. The reasons for the bias are possibly due to the specific makeup of Texas State University's first-year composition instruction. Further study is needed to find out how typical Texas State's first-year composition instruction is compared to other universities', and how typical the responses to this survey are compared to those from other schools. Based on my limited results, none of the factors I selected for analysis (years of experience, position, or degree acquired or in progress) appeared to impact the score assigned by respondents, although some demographics were woefully unrepresented.

At this point I do not view a bias toward or against personal writing positively or negatively. Instead, I would argue that the important point to draw from this study is a significant divide exists between attitudes on this subject of people writing composition scholarship, people in administrative roles (represented by the participants of the WPA listserv), and people teaching first-year composition. One of my interviewees noted that, "I haven't taken any rhetorical composition pedagogy classes; so I am unfamiliar with the literature or current schools of thought." If that interviewee is representative of first-year composition instructors at large, this statement has significant implications for the field of composition pedagogy. If the scholarship being published about first-year composition is

not being read by the people teaching first-year composition, then we must ask serious questions about who the intended audience is, what the point of the scholarship is, and how we go about selecting and training first-year composition instructors.

I would like to emphasize that in no way am I suggesting that the interviewee or any of Texas State's first-year composition instructors are inadequate as teachers or in need of assistance. Neither am I suggesting that Texas State's methodology for selecting or training first-year instructors is lacking or damaging. Instead, I want this work to be part of a much larger conversation about what the role of composition pedagogy scholarship is in the actual execution of college-level English curriculum.

In addition, I would like this work to be a part of a conversation on the role of personal writing in academic writing. If a bias exists, as this study appears to show, it would be useful to understand why that bias exists and where it originates. Based on the responses of my two interviewees, their views appear to be shaped largely by their experiences as a student. Future studies should see if the same holds true for instructors who are further removed from being a student. That data could lead to understanding whether the bias originates out of sympathy and understanding of the students' personal experiences, belief in the value or lack of value of the role of personal writing in pedagogy, the influence of composition scholarship, or other factors.

Implications

Beyond research that might further and supplement this study, my findings also open up a host of other implications. However, what those implications are depend largely on a multitude of factors: the amount of power a department should have over individual course content, whether or not a range of attitudes toward personal writing

from instructors is an issue, what role personal writing should have within the academy, and others. The voices from the listserv, as well as those who subscribe to Wardle and Russell's arguments about the limitations of first-year composition (especially considered in relation to the lack of personal writing outside of the humanities, where many of the FYC students will end up), might be disappointed in the higher valuation of personal writing and seek to address that. As another example, Texas State has a required practicum for TAs, but not for other instructors; the philosophy behind this policy might overwrite the will for any changes that would impact the institution's instructors' attitudes toward personal writing. Finally, instructors' motivations for assigning personal writing might vary on the continuum from the expressivist motivation of validating and encouraging student writing to the narrative inquiry motivation of another tool to be used in research. These varying motivations would shape extensively what problems are perceived from this research and what solutions those problems need.

I've written above that I don't view individual instructors' attitudes toward personal writing as positive or negative, regardless of where they fall. In my mind, the benefits of teaching personal writing as a rhetorical maneuver might very well be trumped by the potential negatives of asking an instructor to teach a form of writing they don't perceive as valid or meaningful. Thus my implications do not focus on how to encourage or discourage the use of personal writing in the FYC classroom. Instead, the problem I focus on that arises from my research is the dissonance from one instructor to another in how they assess personal writing and the dissonance between the groups represented by my sample size, the WPA listserv, and composition scholars. The disconnect between composition administrators and the scholars would require a global

solution that is beyond the scope of my imagination. Nor do I have an idea to increase the penetration of composition scholarship into the composition classroom. However, some of the institutional level solutions, along with the further research I have previously proposed could echo upwards and effect change.

To address the problem I perceive, I would recommend two changes to Texas State or any institution in a similar position:

The inclusion of personal writing in TA training. Spigelman's *Personally Speaking* outlines many of the problems instructors face when evaluating personal writing: fear of judging the experience instead of the writing, discomfort at content seen as inappropriate, etc. Since FYC instructors at Texas State will face personal writing, they should be comfortable with grading it before they enter the classroom. Training could include reading relevant passages from *Personally Speaking* or Trimmer's *Narration as Knowledge* and completing a grade norming exercise on an essay that features personal writing heavily. Discussion after such a grade norming exercise could revolve around the rhetorical value of the personal writing, giving the instructors ideas about how best to evaluate the rhetorical merit of their students' essays. While my findings point to a bias among Texas State's instructors toward personal writing, it's a very likely possibility that the instructors are unaware of such a bias. By simply going through a grading exercise in a purposeful manner, they could be made aware of this bias and interrogate it for themselves.

This solution has three perceivable problems. One, it would not reach every FYC instructor at Texas State given that they are not all TAs. However, I believe that if the department has made the decision that instructors at levels above TA do not require the

same training as TAs, then the dissonance over personal writing would not change that belief. Further, as an overwhelming majority of FYC courses are taught by TAs or Lecturers, and many of the Lecturers were previously TAs, this method would still reach a significant amount of FYC sections eventually. The second problem is related: the addition of this training would require the displacement of other training or the extension of training time, which it's unclear if that's warranted. Finally, this solution assumes that training will affect the teaching strategies of the instructors. This is a large assumption—after all, when asked about the formation of their teaching styles, neither of my interviewees cited the TA practicum.

Considering personal writing in choosing a handbook. Handbooks serve as an extension and reinforcement of what's expected by the academy and classroom from students. In *The Bedford Handbook*, there are sections entitled “Writing about Texts,” “Constructing Reasonable Arguments,” and “Writing in the Disciplines” underneath the larger heading of “Part II Academic Writing.” Each of these sections is about a rhetorical maneuver or shift expected of the student. Because there are many other potential rhetorical maneuvers or shifts not covered in these sections, the absence of personal writing is not evidence of a philosophical adversity on the part of the publishers. Since personal writing will be used by students, though, using a handbook that provides guidance on how to be rhetorically effective while also writing about experience could enhance the quality of writing of the students. More importantly, such a section of text could also make instructors more comfortable with the assigning and assessing of personal writing.

It's possible that such a handbook does not exist. None of the handbooks I reviewed (*Little, Brown; Bedford; Penguin*) would meet the criteria above. In addition, even the supplementary text *They Say/I Say* sometimes recommended to students by FYC instructors which focuses purely on how to word specific rhetorical maneuvers does not mention personal writing at all. It does have a section on how to blend a personal voice with an academic voice (“Ain’t So / Is Not”), and directions on how to segue between a depiction of a personal experience would seem to be a good fit with its other content (Graff and Birkenstein 115). This absence suggests that either a need is not being met and that we should call for handbooks which include the rhetorical use of personal writing, or that users and creators of handbooks do not view the rhetorical use of personal writing as a topic needed within the handbooks.

Final Thoughts

Ultimately, Texas State has chosen to value personal writing by purposefully asking for it in the prompts provided to TAs, and values it based on the responses to my study. The changes outlined above would help instructors of FYC contextualize personal writing as a rhetorical maneuver. By doing so, this would then ease the dissonance shown in my study between instructor evaluation of personal writing, and hopefully help FYC students better learn to use personal writing rhetorically.

APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A

Dearest Colleagues,

For my thesis research, I need a sample of first-year writing. I turn to you for help! The ideal essay would be 500-1000 words and use personal experience / personal writing in a section as part of their argument. Examples - "I believe this because this happened to me," or, "my experience supports this logic." Their personal experience should be easily extractable from the essay - in other words, it should not be present throughout all of the sample, but instead limited to one paragraph or something similar.

I have an IRB exemption to obtain this writing, and would ask the student for permission. As you go about your grading for the end of the semester, I would be greatly appreciative if you keep me in mind.

Thanks for your help. Let me know if you have any questions.

-Graham

APPENDIX B

Hi <name removed>,

My name is Graham Oliver, and I'm doing my thesis research about students who use their personal experience in their first-year essays, and how professors react to that experience. Your professor, Ms. McGee, shared your essay with me and it would be a great match for my research. It's a good essay for this project because it's well-written, and because it uses your personal experience as part of your argument but not the whole thing.

What I would like to do, with your permission, is to use your essay as part of an experiment. Basically, I want to send two versions of your essay - one almost the same as it is now, and one where I remove your personal experience from the piece - to professors, and see which one they grade higher. Your work would be anonymous when I send it to professors - no one would know it was you during that process. However, after the research is done, I am happy to give you credit in the paper itself, probably in the acknowledgments section.

I would need to edit your paper to make it a little shorter, and to remove any mistakes (if there are any, I have not looked for them) before I send it. I also need you to respond in email and say I have your permission to use your essay. Later in the spring semester, I might need to ask you some questions about your experience with writing as a first-year, but I am not sure on that yet.

Let me know if this sounds okay with you, and if you have any questions at all.

Thank you for your time, and enjoy your break.

-Graham Oliver
MA Rhet/Comp Student
Round Rock Writing Center Coordinator

APPENDIX C

“The Holes of the Banking Method”

What is the true meaning of education? Is it simply teaching individuals things they are *required* to know for an exam? Or is education supposed to be learning the *importance* of subjects such as English or Science and *why* they are practical? In Paulo Freire’s *The Banking Concept of Education*, Freire states that most educators are “narrators” and only “deposit” meanings and facts into a student’s mind, rather than teaching the importance of what they are learning. Unfortunately, some teachers still use the banking method today. Although the banking system seems like it has been a success to test makers, it has failed to truly educate students. The banking method is ineffective because students are forced to learn dull material, are not able to use what they learned outside of the classroom, and lose desire to learn and seek higher education.

There is a dramatic difference between choosing to learn and being forced to learn. When a student is forced to learn, they feel trapped in a factory-like classroom, where students are all taught the same thing, the same way. That goes against what education is meant to be. Education is not meant to make someone feel like a puppet. Education is supposed to help students realize what they are capable of and expand their knowledge of themselves and the world around them. However, the banking system does the opposite. The banking system forces individuals to learn grey and plain material. Material that is only asked in exams. Teachers try to stuff this material into students, without realizing that they are not teaching with relevancy and effectiveness. In the past, I have had teachers whose purpose throughout the school year was to only teach what

would be asked for in the final exam. These dull facts and formulas were the centerpiece of the classroom. We weren't being challenged to think critically. We were merely *memorizing* formulas and facts without truly understanding them. Is that really effective teaching? Some teachers focus on getting all the material that is on the curriculum into our heads, only for us to forget what we "learned" after the big test.

So what happens after the big test? The next step for some students after high school is college. However, can we say that we were properly prepared for the transition into college? That is another big hole in the banking method. Once we learn that the derivative of $2x$ is 2 or that gravity is the reason why apples fall off tree, we are supposed to be prepared for life beyond high school. Students are not taught the relevance of subjects and why they are that way. Students can't take what they learn in the classroom and apply it to everyday situations. Instead, they can only apply it to exams, textbooks, and the classroom. If students were taught how to think critically, more students would be willing to challenge theories and become innovators. The banking method creates students who aren't able to explain why theories and formulas that are already in place are correct.

Finally, the banking method drains a student's desire to seek higher education. Students who have been taught under the banking method become easily bored after so many years. Students feel that education after high school will be the exact same: repetitive and dull. The fact that some students lose the desire to seek higher education is the biggest consequence of the banking method. Many young and vibrant minds are not able to reach their full potential because of the banking method's boring and repetitive nature. This brings me to a personal example. My best friend Ricardo has a unique way

of thinking and is great at challenging theories. When we talked about our plans after high school, he revealed to me that he didn't want to go to college. I was shocked. However, once he explained to me why he didn't want to continue his education I realized I could not blame him. He was tired of the routine of getting handouts. He was tired of boring and dispassionate teachers. He was tired of the factory-like routine of going to school, hearing boring lectures, and doing boring assignments, assignments that never tested one's ability. Luckily, I was able to look past all those negatives and go on to college with the hope that college would be different. So now I pose a question for those who believe the banking method is effective. Is it worth losing young and talented individuals' desire to seek higher education for higher test scores? Only teachers who truly care for education and their students will step away from the banking method and teach with a true purpose. That alone can give students hope that higher education will truly challenge their minds and help them reach their full potential.

Freire's *The Banking Concept of Education* helps enlighten the minds of students and teachers who are unaware of the banking method's consequences. The banking method may be effective in producing students who only memorize terms and meanings but is ineffective in challenging young minds to think critically and differently. Freire, an educator himself, gives insight into what goes on in the typical classroom. He states that a mind is empty until a teacher "deposits" information such as meanings, formulas, and facts. This banking method almost brainwashes students to believe only what they are taught, instead of encouraging students to challenge themselves and what they have learned. Teaching under the banking method becomes hollow and meaningless, only using students' minds as containers for upcoming test material. We become waste baskets

at the mercy of instructor.s Although this method will produce decent test scores, we ultimately lose the most precious things in this world: young minds that could change the future of this country.

APPENDIX D

What is the true meaning of education? Is it simply teaching individuals things they are *required* to know for an exam? Or is education supposed to be learning the *importance* of subjects such as English or Science and *why* they are practical? In Paulo Freire's *The Banking Concept of Education*, Freire states that most educators are "narrators" and only "deposit" meanings and facts into a student's mind, rather than teaching the importance of what they are learning. Unfortunately, some teachers still use the banking method today. Although the banking system may seem like a success to test makers, it has failed to truly educate students. The banking method is ineffective because students are forced to learn dull material, are not able to use what they learned outside of the classroom, and lose desire to learn and seek higher education.

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APPENDIX E

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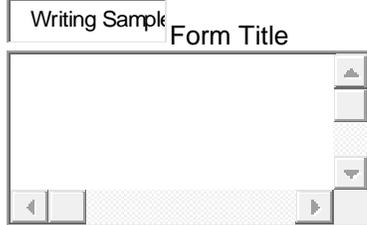
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APPENDIX F

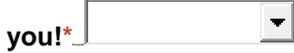
Page 1 of 4

Writing Sample Form Title



By taking this survey, you agree that you have taught ENG 1310 or 1320 at Texas State University in the past five years AND that you are unfamiliar with the research being conducted for Graham Oliver's thesis project beyond the emails received and this survey. Please select "I agree" if you meet that criteria, otherwise please close the page. Thank

you!*



Add item

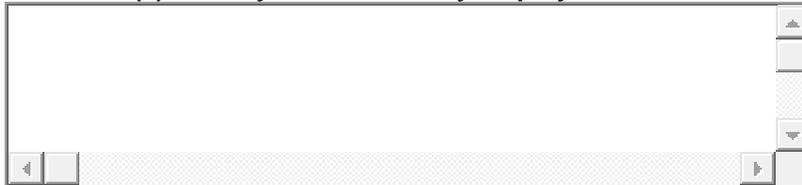
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Continue to next page

Page 2 of 4

Demographic Information

Institution(s) where you are currently employed:*



Department(s)/program(s) you self-identify as belonging to:*



Current position(s) title(s) and rank(s):*



Degree(s) held/in progress:*

Years of experience teaching at a college level:* _

Add item

After page 2

Continue to next page

Page 3 of 4

Writing Sample

Below, you will find a link to a first-year student's writing sample. Please review the writing sample and assign it a numerical value out of 100, based on whatever criteria you would use to judge the writing in your first-year teaching. To view your writing sample, please click the following link: <LINK>

Score:* _

Add item

After page 3

Continue to next page

Page 4 of 4

Email

If you give permission for me to contact you for a possible interview or to publish potentially identifying information in your response, please indicate so by putting your email here:

Add item

Confirmation Page

Show link to submit another response

Publish and show a link to the results of this form to all respondents

Allow responders to edit responses after submitting

Send form

APPENDIX G

Subject: First-Year Composition Instructors Survey

Hi. My name is Graham Oliver, and I'm a graduate student in the Rhetoric and Composition Program at Texas State University. As part of my thesis research, I'm examining how instructors of first-year composition react to specific student approaches within writing. I'm requesting that, as someone who has taught first-year composition (1310 or 1320) at least once in the past five years, you take part in a survey.

The survey asks that you provide some brief demographic information then assign a grade to a short (<500 words) writing sample. Do not take the survey if you are already familiar with the details of this research project.

Data received will be anonymous unless you choose to provide your e-mail address, indicating that you agree to be contacted to answer follow-up questions. Anything published as a result of this study will not reference individual results without the participants' approval; however, within the information collected in the survey, there is a very slight possibility that there are enough clues for me or my readers to guess your identity.

I hope you consider taking a few moments to participate in this research. To do so, respond acknowledging that you would like to take part. To decline, simply do not respond to this email. I will send this email one more time next week as a follow-up.

Thank you for your time.

-Graham Oliver
MA Rhetoric and Composition Student
Texas State University
gmo14@txstate.edu

APPENDIX H

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in my study. Please click the link below to be taken to the survey.

<LINK>

-Graham Oliver
MA Rhetoric and Composition Student
Texas State University
gmo14@txstate.edu

APPENDIX I

I chose you because your score was close the average response, and your demographic information was also near the average.

I'll list out the questions. You can respond as much or as little as you want, and you can go off on any tangents you'd like to as well.

The point of my study was to look at instructor reactions (in the form of a grade) to writing with personal experience included in it. My basic research question was whether or not there was a bias among first-year composition instructors toward or against the use of personal writing. Half of the surveys I sent out had a writing sample that included a story about the writer's friend (yours), and the other half had a different paragraph that relied on non-personal argument.

Questions:

What do you expect the outcome of my research to be? Why?

How would you compare the roles of your education (in terms of actual classes and teachers), your area of study, and your experience as an instructor (including both in the classroom and your training/guidance from the department) in forming your teaching style?

How do you approach personal writing in your classroom? Is it reserved for specific assignments, or could it fit into any assignments?

Do you spend time teaching first-year writing students how to use personal writing?

Do you think personal writing should be used more or less (or possibly the same amount) in first-year composition versus higher level writing classes (including writing assignments in other disciplines)?

Thank you so much for your time. Let me know if I can clarify anything.

-Graham

APPENDIX J

What do you expect the outcome of my research to be? Why?

At least at TSU, I believe there is a bias towards using personal experience as evidence to support points/thesis. I'm not sure that this bias exists elsewhere in American universities. Students seem to be initially resistant to using personal experience, so I have the impression that this is NOT encouraged in Texas high schools. As an undergraduate and a graduate student in Northern California, I was never discouraged from using personal experience in my academic writing. At the same time, I'm not sure that I was taught how to incorporate it either.

How would you compare the roles of your education (in terms of actual classes and teachers), your area of study, and your experience as an instructor (including both in the classroom and your training/guidance from the department) in forming your teaching style?

Oops. I started answering this question above. My education in northern California was very typical of liberal artsyness. I was a student in the late 90's and most of the texts I read and the courses offered had to do with multiple identities and perspectives. As an English major, I read very few old-school canonical works as my program preferred to focus on the alternative canons of post-colonial and multi-cultural literature. My area of study is also on multiple perspectives/identities and I'm interested in bringing to light what we try NOT to see. So, as an instructor, I really enjoy English 1310 because the course is focused around students beginning to articulate/see their own identity through their use of personal experience in their writing. I try to get students to see that they have an identity/background and assumptions about the world but that they are unique in that way. Once they know who they are, they can begin to learn how to engage/interact/be curious about other identities/experiences/people. As a graduate student, until I began writing my thesis, I felt that I had to absent my own experience from my academic writing. I found this very frustrating and confusing. Perhaps because my undergraduate program was so open to inclusion of personal experience, traditional academic writing and close reading were particularly difficult for me when I began graduate school here at Texas State. I couldn't take my context as a reader out of my interpretation of a text. So I try to move in the other direction with my students.

At the same time, I struggle a little bit with teaching English 1320 because I don't know how to honor/shine a light on student's identities and perspectives in a research based class. I also worry that by letting them insert their identity/personal experiences into a research paper, I am setting them up for failure when they write for instructors with more traditional expectations.

How do you approach personal writing in your classroom? Is it reserved for specific assignments, or could it fit into any assignments?

Oops again. I think I answered some of this above. In English 1310, every assignment depends entirely on personal experience. Students are expected to incorporate personal experience into their essay to illustrate their points. If they do not have direct personal experience with the topic, they're expected to write about personal observations, etc.

In English 1320, I don't focus as much on personal experience. One purpose of the course is for students to get outside of their own context and explore other perspectives on an issue through their research. At the same time, I would not penalize a student for using personal experience in their writing as long as they also effectively use their research to support their points.

Do you spend time teaching first-year writing students how to use personal writing?
Yes. This is almost the entire content of my English 1310 course.

Do you think personal writing should be used more or less (or possibly the same amount) in first-year composition versus higher level writing classes (including writing assignments in other disciplines)?

In an ideal world, yes. Although, as students progress in their studies, their use of personal experience will inevitably become mixed with the ideas and experiences of their primary and secondary sources. I believe that personal experience always adds interest to writing and can be used as a contextual frame for any writing assignment. I hope that students are not penalized in other disciplines for using personal experience to provide initial context or a thread of interest to their writing. I am curious to know how instructors in other disciplines view the use of personal experience in academic writing.

APPENDIX K

What do you expect the outcome of my research to be? Why?

I honestly have no idea where the bias toward personal writing will land overall. I haven't taken any rhetorical composition pedagogy classes; so I am unfamiliar with the literature or current schools of thought. Since I'm in a graduate program for creative writing, I would guess that first-year comp teachers within this concentration would favor personal writing more when grading. I think the benefit of having students incorporate personal experience is that they are able to illustrate vivid examples or provide analysis toward the main point. It's less intimidating for most students.

How would you compare the roles of your education (in terms of actual classes and teachers), your area of study, and your experience as an instructor (including both in the classroom and your training/guidance from the department) in forming your teaching style?

When I began this graduate program, I was completely unsure if I was going to like teaching. I thought I would try it out and discover that it wasn't for me. It's been really surprising that I not only feel confident while teaching (I'm very aware that I still have a lot to learn) but also that it's been rewarding on a personal level.

I would characterize my teaching style as methodical but organic. I don't like to crack the whip, and I don't like to intimidate or chastise the students when they're not doing well. I feel like the best advice sells itself. So when I present information, I try to explain how it is useful to them or why they should care about the information based on my experiences/opinions. I let them know that ultimately whatever happens is their choice, but they should consider me a resource. I would be doing them a disservice if I didn't explain information to them in a thorough, diligent manner. When I'm organized, on top of everything, and keeping them on task, that makes me feel a sense of authority, especially with regard to dispensing grades. My favorite teachers have always been firm when dispensing judgments and opinions while also exhibiting transparency about the limits to their personal knowledge. I try to emulate this. I know what I know, and I know what I don't know.

I study and write fiction at the graduate level. Within this program, there is a stark difference between the way a literature class talks about stories and the way an MFA fiction class talks about stories. In an MFA fiction class, stories are deconstructed and analyzed for technique. It's sort of like dismantling a toaster and understanding how the gears and sprockets work separately and together. You study the mechanics of language and narrative. This requires attention to detail, critical thinking, and leaps of insight. I feel like these analytical skills come into play within a composition class when I have to target how an essay could be revised toward a better draft. I have to isolate specific problems and gauge how revision will improve the overall argument.

I'm always very open to trying other teachers' lesson plans or hearing about what classroom activity worked for them and why. I think I'm very fortunate in that I have a

natural understanding of what works for my teaching style and what doesn't. I can't do anything that requires a big performance or acting theatrically to illustrate a point. I also can't play the demanding hard ass teacher either. I prefer to be reasonable and laid back. I think a consistent routine is very important, but if the students aren't performing to the best of their abilities, I'm not going to scold or guilt them. My first instinct is: what can I change? How can I make it better? I put the responsibility of the classroom on myself first since I'm older and know better than a roomful of 18-year-olds. I feel like sometimes first-year teachers get frustrated and just blame it on the students being lazy. And yes, sometimes they are. But I think teachers have to adapt to that and work harder to engage the students.

How do you approach personal writing in your classroom? Is it reserved for specific assignments, or could it fit into any assignments?

I think personal writing is ideal for diagnostic prompts. I also would incorporate freewriting on a routine basis in 1310 (Give a guided question and have the students write for 7-10 minutes), but I haven't done any personal writing for 1320 except for the diagnostic prompt. My favorite prompt for 1310 (an analysis of the rhetorical appeals within an essay or speech) didn't utilize personal writing at all. I feel like that prompt was the most valuable because I could gauge and help improve their analytical skills. I think analysis and articulation are important for life in general; so that's what I tend to emphasize when talking with the students. I would say that personal writing has a place in the curriculum, and I utilize it for certain assignments. But I'd place more value and currency on critical thinking, analysis, and persuasive rhetoric. I'm more into using personal writing as a means to illuminate an abstract or difficult concept.

Do you spend time teaching first-year writing students how to use personal writing?

I don't.

Do you think personal writing should be used more or less (or possibly the same amount) in first-year composition versus higher level writing classes (including writing assignments in other disciplines)?

I think there should be a clear demarcation between when a student should use personal writing and when they should rely on the nonpersonal. I don't necessarily think that a severe segregation needs to exist, but students should understand how to have the best of both worlds. I think it makes sense to use personal writing as a stepping stone to higher level writing where you cannot rely on personal experience.

APPENDIX L

Results of Survey with Personal Writing Sample Attached

Inst.	Dept./Prog.	Title	Degrees	Experience	Score
TxSt	ENG	TA	BA, MFA in prog	1.5	65
TxSt	ENG MFA	TA	BA, MFA in prog	1	89
TxSt	ENG MFA Poetry	TA	BA ENG, MFA in prog	1	90
TxSt	ENG, Honors	Senior Lecturer	MA	34	82
TxSt	ENG	Lecturer	BA, MFA	3	81
TxSt	ENG	TA	MFA Poetry in prog	3	68-70
TxSt	ENG	Lecturer	BA, MFA	9	72
TxSt	ENG, RhetComp	TA	BA, MARC in prog	1	80
TxSt	ENG, RhetComp	TA	BA Rhet Comp, MARC in prog	0.5	95

Average Years of Experience: 5.45

Median Years of Experience: 1.25

Average Assigned Score: 82.11

Median Assigned Score: 82

Key:

TxSt – Texas State University

ENG – English

TA – Teaching Assistant

MFA – Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

MARC – Master of Arts in Rhetoric and Composition

APPENDIX M

Results of Survey with Non-Personal Writing Sample Attached

Inst.	Dept./Prog.	Title	Degrees	Experience	Score
TxSt, Other	ENG	Lecturer	MFA Fiction	5	68
TxSt	ENG, FY ENG	Lecturer	MA Lit, BA ENG, AA Humanities	2	78
Business	ENG	Nonacademic	Writing, MFA Fiction	2	69
TxSt	ENG	Lecturer	MA Lit	1	82
TxSt	ENG, MFA Poetry	TA	Writing, MFA Poetry in prog	1	75
TxSt	EDU	TA	MARC, BA ENGLit	1	78
Other	Grants Dept., ENG	Grants Development Coordinator, Adjunct Professor	BS Psych, MFA Creative Writing	3.5	78
Other	ENG, Writing Center	English Instructor and Asst. Dir. of Writing Center	MARC	3	78
TxSt	ENG	Associate Professor	PhD	25	70
TxSt	ENG, CSSW	Lecturer	BA ENG, MFA	4.5	78
TxSt	ENG	TA	MFA in prog	0.5	65
TxSt	ENG, MFA	TA	MFA Poetry in prog	1	70
TxSt	ENG	Assistant Professor	PhD	6	82

Average Years of Experience: 4.27

Median Years of Experience: 2

Average Assigned Score: 74.69

Median Assigned Score: 78

Key:

TxSt – Texas State University

ENG – English

TA – Teaching Assistant

MFA – Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

MARC – Master of Arts in Rhetoric and Composition

APPENDIX N

TOTAL	Title	Degree(s)	Total 1310	Total 1320	Total Sections
				350	492
	Assistant Professor	PhD / MA	1	1	2
	Assistant Professor	PhD English	8	5	13
	Assistant Professor	PhD/MFA	2	0	2
	Associate Professor	PhD / MA	4	1	5
	Associate Professor	PhD MA	0	4	4
	Distinguished Professor Emeritus	PhD	0	1	1
	Grant Specialist	MFA	0	2	2
	Lecturer	MA Lit	5	6	11
	Lecturer	MA Lit	4	5	9
	Lecturer	MA Lit	0	3	3
	Lecturer	MA Lit	6	5	11
	Lecturer	MA Lit	3	3	6
	Lecturer	MA Lit	2	4	6
	Lecturer	MA Lit	0	15	15
	Lecturer	MA Lit	2	17	19
	Lecturer	MA Lit	0	9	9
	Lecturer	MA Lit	1	12	13
	Lecturer	MA Lit	2	3	5
	Lecturer	MA Lit	4	7	11
	Lecturer	MARC	2	6	8
	Lecturer	MARC	5	3	8
	Lecturer	MFA	4	4	8
	Lecturer	MFA	5	12	17
	Lecturer	MFA	0	2	2
	Lecturer	MFA	2	10	12
	Lecturer	MFA	5	8	13
	Lecturer	MFA	2	3	5
	Lecturer	MFA	4	4	8
	Lecturer	MFA	0	4	4
	Lecturer	MFA	0	20	20
	Lecturer	MFA	4	6	10
	Lecturer	MFA	0	12	12

Lecturer	MFA	6	14	20
Lecturer	MFA	4	0	4
Lecturer	MFA	9	8	17
Lecturer	MFA	4	9	13
Lecturer	MFA	4	11	15
Lecturer	MFA	3	3	6
Lecturer	MFA	10	6	16
Lecturer	MFA	4	7	11
Lecturer	MFA	6	14	20
Lecturer	MFA	2	13	15
Lecturer	MFA	4	5	9
Lecturer	MFA	6	9	15
Lecturer	MFA	4	7	11
Lecturer	MFA	5	6	11
Lecturer	MFA	6	5	11
Lecturer	MFA	2	11	13
Lecturer	MFA	10	8	18
Lecturer	MFA	0	3	3
Lecturer	MFA	4	11	15
Lecturer	MFA MA	1	18	19
Lecturer	MFA MA	2	8	10
Lecturer	MFA PhD	0	3	3
Lecturer	PhD MLIS MA	0	3	3
Professor	MFA	2	0	2
Professor	PhD	0	1	1
Professor	PhD / MA	1	0	1
Professor	PhD MA	0	1	1
Program Faculty	MFA	2	3	5
Senior Lecturer	MA	0	1	1
Senior Lecturer	MA English	0	4	4
Senior Lecturer	MA English	8	2	10
Senior Lecturer	MA Lit	0	7	7
Senior Lecturer	MA Lit	8	0	8
Senior Lecturer	MA Lit / PhD Comm	9	2	11
Senior Lecturer	MFA	6	5	11
Senior Lecturer	MFA	3	5	8
Senior Lecturer	MFA	2	6	8

Senior Lecturer	MFA	6	0	6
Senior Lecturer	PhD / MA	5	0	5
Student Development Specialist I	MFA	2	1	3
TA	???	4	2	6
TA	MA Lit	2	1	3
TA	MA Lit	1	2	3
TA	MA Lit	2	1	3
TA	MA Lit	2	1	3
TA	MA Lit	0	2	2
TA	MA Lit	0	1	1
TA	MARC	0	1	1
TA	MARC	2	1	3
TA	MARC	2	1	3
TA	MARC	0	1	1
TA	MARC	2	1	3
TA	MARC	1	1	2
TA	MARC	1	2	3
TA	MFA	0	0	0
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA	0	2	2
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA	4	2	6
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA	0	1	1
TA	MFA	3	1	4
TA	MFA	5	2	7
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA	4	1	5
TA	MFA	1	0	1
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA	1	0	1
TA	MFA	2	2	4
TA	MFA	5	1	6

TA	MFA	5	1	6
TA	MFA	0	1	1
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA	5	1	6
TA	MFA	7	2	9
TA	MFA	5	1	6
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA	3	2	5
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA	4	1	5
TA	MFA	4	2	6
TA	MFA	5	1	6
TA	MFA	1	2	3
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA	0	1	1
TA	MFA	1	0	1
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA	2	1	3
TA	MFA / MEd / PhD	3	8	11
TA	MFA PhD	0	4	4

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