ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: **STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF WRITING CONFERENCES IN A BLENDED FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION COURSE: A CASE STUDY**

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The purpose of this case study was to investigate student experiences in the writing conferences in a blended first year composition course at a large public institution in the Mid-Atlantic region. I applied a critical sociocultural framework, cultural mismatch theory, to examine the relationship between students' experiences and the culture of an instructor's writing conference practice. My central research question was: what are students' experiences in writing conferences in a blended first year composition course? I used an interpretive single-case study design to investigate the writing conference practice of one skillful instructor and the experiences of six students. The instructor offered three writing conferences per semester, each lasting twenty minutes. Data sources included: surveys, artifacts, field notes from observations, audio recorded writing conferences, and interviews. I analyzed the data deductively using a conceptual framework consisting of three key factors in the conference interaction: purpose,

participant roles, and classroom context. I presented key findings thematically and discussed them in terms of literature to develop analytic generalizations.

Study findings suggested cultural mismatches in the purpose and participant roles of the writing conference. The instructor's purpose of the conference was invention, yet students' purposes varied from generating ideas to getting instructor feedback and fixing errors. Students also reported varying familiarity and comfort with the prescribed participant role, which assumed students would prepare materials, direct the conversation, and answer questions. While all the students in this study evaluated their conferences as successful and reported positive outcomes in terms of learning, the students for whom the interaction was relatively culturally congruent described their experiences positively, reporting feelings of confidence and willingness to seek individualized help with their writing. In contrast, the students for whom the interaction was comparably culturally mismatched described their experiences in mixed terms. They reported persistent anxiety and opted not to seek additional individualized help because they did not trust the interaction would be productive. Study findings highlight the general utility of cultural mismatch theory to examine classroom practices. It also suggests a potential refinement of the conceptualization of educational equity to examine students' experiences of the learning process, in addition to outcomes.

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by

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Dedicated to
Sam E. Sadle

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CHAPTER ONE: PROBLEM STATEMENT

All writing instructors have written "See Me" in big bold letters at the top of a failing paper—essentially asking students to meet for a writing conference. Writing conferences are a staple pedagogy in the composition classroom (MacArthur, Graham, & Fitzgerald, 2015). Historically, they were considered one of the best ways to reach new, underprepared students: "Conferencing has been championed primarily at those moments when enrollments bulged, and students were from more diverse backgrounds and brought more varied preparation than ever before" (Lerner, 2005, p. 186). Scholars and practitioners alike champion their potential positive effects. Mina Shaughnessy (1977) argues: "the conference between teacher and student remains *the best way* to discover how students have interpreted their instructions and to create bonds of concern and encouragement that energize both teacher and student" (p. 287, emphasis added). Despite this long history of practice, conferences remain one of the least examined instructional practices in the composition classroom (Haswell, 2008), and little is known about their nature or effectiveness (Black, 1998; Hillocks, 2008). Indeed, there is a paucity of contemporary research examining writing conferences with the bulk of the literature being more than two decades old (with the most recent articles: Athanasourelis, 2006; Martin & Mottet, 2011).

The preponderance of the literature on writing conferences, written by practitioners for other practitioners, presents writing conferences as a neat, linear practice that instructors can simply follow step-by-step (Black, 1998; Tobin, 1993). This literature assumes that writing conferences are a universally effective way to improve students' writing; they are equally effective for all students regardless of background and ability;

and instructors conduct effective conferences in the same way, so these conferences have similar characteristics. Mary Hiatt (1975) characterized these assumptions as the "myth of the conference." She warned other composition instructors that not all students benefit from one-on-one instruction, and indeed, conferences might be detrimental for "academically weak" students (Hiatt, 1975). Research studies of writing conferences also question the practitioner literature's assumptions. Studies have not determined the effectiveness of conferences in comparison to whole group instructional methods (Graham & Perin, 2007) or identified the common features of effective writing conferences (Hillocks, 2008).

Complicating this line of inquiry further, researchers have identified a multitude of contextual factors that can influence conference practice, such as the purpose, participants, the rhetorical task, classroom setting, and timing (e.g., Sperling, 1990), which can make conferences susceptible to replicating and magnifying societal inequities (Black, 1998). Researchers have identified examples of inequitable conference practice with female students and students perceived as low-ability (Black, 1998; Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997; Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1985). Haswell (2008) summarized: "in teacher conferences, the weak, minority, and female writers often speak and learn the least" (p. 337). Although these research studies frequently have conceptual and methodological limitations, these findings point to ways that writing conferences may not be equally effective for all students.

Also noticeably absent from the literature are students' perspectives on writing conferences. Critical pedagogy scholars call for practitioners to elicit student experiences of the classroom, because they are essential to creating liberating learning experiences

(Giroux, 1988; Nieto, 2010). For researchers, students' perspectives can inform the effects of the pedagogy used, which may be different than instructors' original intent (Howard, 2001). Still researchers of conferencing rarely include students' perspectives in their study design. The few studies that do include students' perspectives (Black, 1998; Carnicelli, 1980; Martin & Mottet, 2011; Walker & Elias, 1987) suggest that students may have different needs in conferences and, indeed, different metrics of success than their instructors. These findings, however, are limited by study designs that do not make students' perspectives the central research purpose of the study. Instead, students' perspectives are treated almost as add-ons (i.e., student ratings of conferences or student course evaluations as one of many data sources rather than in-depth interviews or focus groups with students as the primary data source). Further limiting these studies are small, relatively homogenous samples of students that fail to address diversity in perspectives. More research is needed to understand students' experiences, including the experiences of students from underrepresented groups, in writing conferences. After all, with the potential for inequity and a long history of practice, it is time to hear from students about this widely used and accepted pedagogy.

A Promising Practice

Despite the limitations of the research base, writing conferences continue to hold great promise as an effective practice for the composition classroom. Conferences tap into education's most basic assumptions about teaching and learning: social constructivism. Social constructivism holds that individuals learn through sustained social interaction with experts (Vygotsky, 1930/1978). A typical writing conference potentially exemplifies social constructivism in that the writing instructor, an "expert,"

meets individually with the student, a "novice," about his or her writing. Ideally, through conferences students construct knowledge, acquire behaviors, and develop writing skills beyond what they could independently produce (Murphy, Alexander, & Muis, 2012, p. 216). Social constructivism remains one of education's most influential theories, potentially accounting for all learning experiences—from informal learning between a parent and a child to formal learning in a classroom. Since writing conferences enact a social constructivist ideal of learning, theoretically they should be effective. In Chapter 2, the Literature Typology section contains an expanded discussion of social constructivism.

Writing conferences effectiveness also resides in their close relationship with the oldest methods of teaching writing, the tutorial model of instruction. Haswell (2008) attributes the prominence of writing conferences to their similarity to the tutorial model:

> The one-on-one master-apprentice consultation goes back as far as writing can be construed as a profession. It is still institutionalized in the tutorial system at Oxford and Cambridge, where the student reads aloud an assignment paper in the room of the residential tutor, who then critiques it. (p. 336)

Writing conferences integrate the key element of the tutorial model, students and instructors meeting individually, into the traditional composition classroom. Notably, the tutorial model is also a prime example of social constructivism. The tutorial method's extensive history offers anecdotal evidence for conference effectiveness, after all the tutorial method has been in practice for hundreds of years and persist today at two of the most prominent universities in the world. It is logical to assume that writing conferences should also be effective.

Lastly, writing conferences should be effective because they offer a pragmatic solution to the challenge inherent to whole group instruction: too many students who bring distinct background experiences, abilities, and needs. Across disciplines, instructors struggle to effectively reach all the students in their class. This challenge is especially significant in the composition classroom, because writing is a highly individualized process, always dependent on the context and task at hand (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Kellogg, 1994). Conferences provide an opportunity for instructors to get to know students individually and tailor instruction to their particular needs. Black (1998) summarizes the benefits of conferences: "It allows teachers and students to enter each other's worlds, it affords teachers the opportunity to provide individualized help to students, and it extends collaboration beyond the classroom, beyond the peer-writing group" (p. 10). At their best, writing conferences are a way for instructors to establish a collaborative relationship with students and optimize instruction within a traditional classroom setting. Conferences have the potential to increase the effectiveness of whole group instruction for a greater number of students.

Writing conferences also hold particular promise for students, including underrepresented students from differing racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and college generation backgrounds. These students frequently come from different backgrounds than their instructors. Social constructivism assumes that optimal learning occurs when instructors and students come from the same community, meaning they have a similar cultural background and speak the same language. Culture and language are conceptualized in social constructivism as tools for understanding, constructing, and transmitting knowledge within a community (Vygotsky, 1978). Since instructors may

have varying familiarity with students' backgrounds, cultures, abilities, and needs, writing conferences enable instructors to learn more about students as individuals. Conferences also provide instructors with opportunities to differentiate instruction to meet students' particular needs, working to bridge the gap between their two backgrounds. In this way, conferences hold great promise to be an effective pedagogy for *all* students.

Contextualizing Conference Practice

To define writing conferences, it is helpful to contextualize this practice within the broader landscape of higher education pedagogy. Conferences are mandatory one-on-one conversations or individualized teaching between a student and a writing instructor about student writing (Hillocks, 2008). In many ways, conferences share elements with office hours and peer-to-peer tutoring at the writing center—all three consist of individualized meetings with students to help with their writing. I contend, however, that there are key differences in participation that make writing conferences a distinct pedagogy in the composition classroom.

The essential difference between writing conferences and office hours is the way participation is structured in these meetings—writing conferences are mandatory instruction while office hours are optional meetings. Instructors schedule writing conferences at specific points during the semester as a replacement for class time or homework. In contrast, instructors offer office hours weekly, but they are generally considered free time for students to drop in at will (i.e., "open door" policies).

These divergent participation structures influence the discourse conventions of the meeting by shifting the responsibility for the interaction from instructor to student.

Since conferences are mandatory, instructors are ultimately responsible for initiating the conversation. Consequently, they have greater control over the purpose, timing, and length of the interaction. Writing conferences focus primarily on students' writing, but instructors or students may introduce additional topics into the conversation. Conversely, the optional nature of office hours often places the onus of initiating and sustaining the conversation on students. Because students are required to set the agenda, they typically broach a broad range of topics that may not necessarily be related to their writing. Office hours can be shorter than conferences because they often feature students getting quick answers to a few questions. Lastly, the differences in participation structures are reflected in the institutional policies for conferences and office hours. English department policies on writing conferences tend to be broad, everything from a required practice to a practice at the instructor's discretion. In contrast, institutions have universally adopted office hours, often spelling out strict policies in employment contracts. As a result, instructors across all discipline and fields hold regular office hours.

Writing conferences also differ from peer-to-peer tutoring at the writing center in participants and their respective roles. In writing conferences, instructors provide feedback, which can be advantageous because instructors are presumably more experienced writers and teachers than peer tutors. Instructors may have a greater familiarity with students and their writing because they see them regularly in class and read more of their work. As the ultimate arbitrators of success, instructor feedback may also be better aligned with expectations for the assignment. Consequently, students may be more likely to revise accordingly. In contrast, peer tutors at the writing center can simultaneously offer suggestions and empathize with students' experiences, which may

allow them to connect to students in ways instructors cannot. As peer tutors and students hold similar power, students may feel that they can talk freely with peer tutors than they otherwise would with instructors. Students may also feel freer to ask questions of peer tutors because they are not evaluating their work.

While writing conferences, office hours, and peer-to-peer tutoring all provide students with individualized help with their writing, the fact that conferences are mandatory meetings between student and instructor sets them apart. Writing conferences are a distinct pedagogy in the composition classroom. The premise of this study is that conferences are worthy of further examination.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between students' experiences and the culture of an instructor's writing conference practice. To this end, my central research question is: *what are students' experiences in writing conferences in a blended first year composition course?* Sub-questions related to my inquiry include:

1. *How did the instructor describe the culture of her writing conference practice in relation to purpose, participant roles, and classroom context?*
2. *What is the culture of the writing conferences in practice?*
3. *What are students' perceptions (i.e., their viewpoints, interpretations, and responses) on writing conferences?*
4. *To what extent, if any, did the culture appear to shape students' experiences in writing conferences?*

In light of these questions, I use qualitative case study methodology to examine students' experiences in writing conferences within the broader context of their blended first year

composition course. This study is interpretive in nature, meaning I sought to describe student experiences as it relates to the conference culture rather than examine the effects of writing conferences on students' final writing product.

In my theoretical framework, I adopt a critical sociocultural approach. I frame writing conferences as a cultural practice embedded in a larger culture (Delpit, 1988/2006). Within a writing conference, the instructor may (inadvertently) reproduce the codes and rules of those in power, namely the White middle-class. Students may have varying understanding of, access to, and willingness to enact these codes. I theorize that student experiences in writing conferences may partially be shaped by the extent the writing conference is culturally congruent or mismatched (Au & Jordan, 1981; Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Jordan, 1985; Mohatt & Erickson, 1981).

In my conceptual framework, I map the factors that potentially shape the writing conference culture and describe the relationships between these factors. I identify from the literature three key factors in the conference interaction: the purpose, participant roles, and classroom context. These factors form the basis of the cultural codes or rules required to successfully participate in this cultural practice. I hypothesize they may also be the domains where cultural mismatch between the conference practice and students can potentially occur. Students may have different interpretations of the conference culture, which influences both the interaction itself and their responses. In this way, students' experiences collectively may be explained by students' understanding of, access to, and willingness to participate in the cultural practice, conferences. Chapter 2 contains a detailed discussion of my theoretical perspective and conceptual framework.

Problem Statement

My statement of the problem emanates from an equity perspective of education. The field of composition studies has a compelling reason to examine student experiences in writing conferences because of shifts in student demographics that have higher education serving greater numbers of students from underrepresented backgrounds than ever before (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013a). Despite these shifts, there remains persistent outcome inequality in higher education, where underrepresented students are comparatively more likely to encounter academic setbacks and less likely to graduate than students from mainstream backgrounds (Ross et al., 2012). Research in the fields of Multicultural Education and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) have found that underrepresented students are more likely to succeed when classes include varied pedagogies and assessments (e.g., Freeman et. al, 2014; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). Therefore, it is time to reexamine accepted beliefs and practices currently used in the college classroom, such as the writing conference. The literature on writing conferences presents prominent beliefs about the efficacy of conferences, yet researchers have identified cases where the conference interaction was inequitable for particular student groups (e.g., Black, 1998). One approach to reexamining pedagogy is to include students' perspectives, which provides insight how the effect of the pedagogy may or may not differ than the instructor's intent (Howard, 2001). Underrepresented students perspectives may be especially salient, because these students frequently perceive classroom climate differently than their white, middle-class, multigenerational peers (Smith, 1989). Subsequently, studying writing conferences from

students' perspectives may help identity new approaches or recommendations that could make this pedagogy beneficial for all students.

Shifting Higher Education Demographics

For the past four decades, higher education has seen a steady demographic shift in its underrepresented student populations. Due to the abolishment of de jure segregation and restrictive admission quota systems (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005), colleges and universities are serving more racially and ethnically diverse students, low-socioeconomic students, and first generation college students than ever before:

> From 1976 to 2011, the percentage of Hispanic students rose from 4 percent to 14 percent, the percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students rose from 2 percent to 6 percent, the percentage of Black students rose from 10 percent to 15 percent, and the percentage of American Indian/Alaska Native students rose from 0.7 to 0.9 percent. During the same period, the percentage of White students fell from 84 percent to 61 percent. (NCES, 2013a)

While White student enrollment decreased by 23%, Hispanic and Black student enrollment increased by 5% and 10% respectively. This trend holds for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The percentage of students who were awarded federal grants for tuition assistance aimed at low-income Americans increased 17% in 12 years, (31% in 2000; 48% in 2012) (NCES, 2013c).[1] Many of these students will be the first in their family to attend college. Researchers estimate 28% of all freshmen are first

[1] Similar to Free and Reduced Meal Students (FARMS) at elementary and secondary levels, federal grants (such as Pell Grants) have traditionally been used as a proxy to estimate students' socioeconomic status (SES) in higher education. This proxy, however, is increasingly imprecise because of tightening federal spending on Pell Grants restricted funding to families with the lowest SES. Therefore, the increase in students awarded federal grants (17%) is likely significant because more students qualified despite stricter requirements (NCES, 2013c). Most likely this increase masks the number of low-income students in need who would have otherwise qualified for aid in the past.

generation college students (Chen & Carroll, 2005).[2] As enrollments rise, some of these new students will bring with them distinct home cultures, varying education preparation, and needs that colleges and universities frequently struggle to meet.

While these statistics illustrate the changing demographics of higher education, it is important to underscore that these demographic categories are not discrete. Black, Hispanic, and Native American students are comparatively more likely to come from low-income families and be the first in their families to attend college (Bowen et al., 2005). These convergences are not happenstance, but a result of historic oppression that restricted admission of Black, Hispanic, and Native American students to college and ongoing systematic inequality in educational opportunities (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Persistent Outcome Inequality

Despite increased enrollment, there remain persistent achievement gaps in higher education. Researchers have documented gaps in opportunity and preparation between racially and ethnically diverse students, low-income students, and first generation college students and their White and Asian, middle-class, multigenerational counterparts. For example, Black and Hispanic students are more likely to be underprepared for college, having attended underfunded, understaffed schools without access to high quality curriculum, materials, and resources (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Engle, 2007). This gap also extends to the composition classroom as students frequently enter college unprepared to meet the writing demands of a bachelor's degree. ACT (2014) estimated one-third of all high school students are not ready for college-level composition courses. College instructors estimated that 50% of their students are not prepared for college-level

[2] Colleges and universities are also attracting more international students (a 9% increase in the last decade) (NCES, 2013b); however, the total percentage of international undergraduate students remains relatively small (2%).

writing (Graham, Harris, Hebert, 2011).[3]

These estimates are supported by the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2012) Writing 2011 Assessment. Although there remain significant concerns about the validity of the NAEP assessment due to limitations in instrumentation, scoring, and sampling (Huot, 1990), only one quarter (27%) of all 12th grade high school students performed at or above a proficient writing level (NAEP, 2012). A proficient level is often considered one indicator of student preparedness for college-level coursework. NAEP (2012) also found significant achievement gaps by racial and ethnic subgroup. Fewer Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native 12th grade students wrote at a proficient level than White and Asian students (Black: 9%; Hispanic: 11%; American Indian/Alaska Native: 20%; vs. White: 30%; Asian: 33%). Whereas these gaps reflects the educational inequality of the primary and secondary school systems (Darling-Hammond, 2010), they also provide evidence that students from underrepresented groups are frequently less academically prepared for college-level writing than their White, middle-income, multigenerational counterparts.

As a result, students from underrepresented groups often encounter academic setbacks in college that negatively impact graduation rates. Significantly more Hispanic and Black students report taking at least one remedial course, receiving an incomplete grade, or repeating a course for a higher grade than White and Asian students (Ross et al., 2012). First generation college students face similar obstacles such as lower grades,

[3] Notwithstanding a decade of federal policies that marginalized writing instruction at the primary and secondary levels (Graham, Harris, & Hebert, 2011), there has been some progress in improving high school students' writing performance according to NAEP scores. The average writing score has increased six points since 1998. Moreover, a majority of students performed at or above a basic level of writing, from 74% in 2002 to 82% in 2007 (Salahu-Din, Persky, & Miller, 2008). This modest gain suggests improvement in students' writing ability. However, with the percentage of students performing at or above a proficient level remaining relatively consistent at 24% (Salahu-Din, Persky, & Miller, 2008), more work is needed to ensure *all* students are prepared for the demands of college-level writing.

higher rates of remedial courses, withdrawals and repeated courses, especially in their first year (Engle, 2007; Orbe, 2004). These classroom outcomes contribute to delays in graduation and students leaving college altogether. Overall, White and Asian students are more likely to graduate in six years than their Hispanic and Black peers (Black: 29%; Hispanic: 50%; vs. White: 62%; Asian: 69%) (Ross et al., 2012). This gap carries through to four year, on-time graduation rates (Black: 20%; Hispanic: 28%; vs. White: 41%; Asian: 45%) (Ross et al., 2012). Similarly, students from the highest income families (earning more than $108,650) are 8 times more likely to complete a Bachelors degree than students from the lowest income families (earning below $34,160), 77% compared to 9% (Pell Institute, 2015).[4] Researchers have found similar trends for first generation college students, who are twice as likely to not complete their degree than students whose parents had a college degree, 20% compared to 43% (Engle, 2007).

Ultimately, higher education can be described as the last juncture in education's "leaky pipeline" (Darling-Hammond, 2010). It enrolls an increasingly diverse student population, yet it retains and graduates underrepresented students from racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds at significant lower rates than White, middle-class students.

Rationale for Reexamining Pedagogy

Colleges and universities have pursued various strategies at the institutional-level to improve outcomes for underrepresented students, such as fostering a positive campus climate (Hurtado, Clayton-Pedersen, Allen, & Milem, 1998) and expanding student

[4] Moreover, this achievement gap in graduation rates between students from low-income families and high families has grown since 1970: "the family income gap in bachelor's degree attainment rates by age 24 among those who entered college increased from 33 percentage points in 1970 to 78 percentage points in 2013" (Pell Institute, 2015). The widening gap in graduation rates suggests that college may not the solution to inequality but an institution that reifies exiting social and economic class distinctions.

support services (Smith, 1989). Most of these efforts have avoided substantial classroom-level interventions that could improve instruction. In general, researchers have identified several ways that higher education instruction is problematic:

> The overall pattern of teaching practices in higher education, for example, has never adequately reflected what we know about learning. Large lecture classes, lack of immediate feedback, multiple choice tests, and so on do not reflect the necessary variety in pedagogy for adequate learning. (Smith, 1989, p. 59)

While these instructional practices likely limit the learning of all students, they may unduly affect underrepresented students. Critical scholars explain that these practices are not neutral but rather reflect Western and middle-class culture—a small set of knowledge, behaviors, and values (Clark, 2002; Marchesani & Adams, 1992; Olneck, 2002; Smith, 1989; Tierney, 1999). They add that these practices privilege a small subset of students, namely White, male, middle-class, multigenerational students in what is taught (i.e., western canon), the way it is taught (i.e., lecture), and the way learning is assessed (i.e., exams) (Marchesani & Adams, 1992). Students from underrepresented groups may be less familiar with or prepared for the narrow set of skills and knowledge needed to succeed in these classroom learning environments.

Education researchers have theorized how the academic success of students from diverse background increases as instructional practices vary (Marchesani & Adams, 1992). Research in the field of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) has specifically examined the impact of varied pedagogy, frequently called active learning techniques, as a way to improve students' learning overall and close achievement gaps between student groups (see Freeman et. al, 2013). Indeed, a substantial body of research

emphasizes that instructors should employ diverse instructional practices in order to respond to and integrate the experiences of their students in the classroom. This research including, multicultural education (Clark, 2002; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; Nieto, 1999), culturally responsive (Gay, 2010), culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), all call for varied pedagogy. Fundamentally these approaches assume that "conditions can be created in schools that can help most students learn" (Nieto, 1999, p. 15). Therefore, they call for instructors to develop "teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse, ethnic, and cultural groups" (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 152). This research suggests that student outcomes would improve as instructors diversify their pedagogies. Olneck (2002) argues that changing pedagogy and assessment "may be even more pivotal than curricular change" (p. 336), because it redefines the learning process and terms of success, thereby "directly affect[ing] achievement and attainment" (p. 326). It holds that diversifying pedagogy could potentially address negative classroom outcomes, like incomplete grades or course repetition, that contribute to delayed graduate rates for underrepresented students.

One approach to diversifying pedagogy is to reexamine accepted practices currently used in the college classroom. Writing conferences are frequently considered one of the best ways to reach new, underprepared, and diverse students (Lerner, 2005), yet researchers have documented cases of inequitable conference practices with student subgroups (Black, 1998; Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997; Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1985). The field of composition must reconsider how instructors can adapt conferences to meet the needs of all students, including students

from underrepresented groups.

Student Perspectives on Classrooms

One way to reconsider writing conferences is to examine the experiences of students. It is especially important to analyze the experiences of underrepresented students because they frequently perceive classroom climate differently than their white, middle-class, multigenerational peers (Smith, 1989). Critical scholars argue for teaching approaches that consider students' perspectives as central to the learning process.[5] Nieto (1999) calls for educators to hear and understand students' perspectives "because their insights can be important for developing meaningful, liberating, and engaging educational experiences" (p. 123). Similarly, Giroux (1988) outlined a "dialectical theory of voice and empowerment" that calls for teachers to "develop pedagogical conditions in their classroom that allow different student voices to be heard and legitimized" (p. 71). Incorporating student voices enables instructors to reexamine and potentially modify their teaching practices by understanding student experiences learning in their classroom. It also is a way to empower students to become "authors" of their own experiences and stories, a central principle of any critical literacy approach (Giroux, 1988).

Student voices are also essential for researchers trying to understand classroom climate. Howard (2001) argued that "it is important for researchers to analyze student's perspectives on classroom instruction and learning environments because students ultimately respond to what is important. Moreover, the environment students experience may be quite different from observed or intended pedagogy" (p. 428). Students can

[5] Colleges and universities recognize the importance of student's perspectives and gather them through formal student evaluations at the end of each semester. However, research has tracked the numerous limitations of student evaluations (Centra, 1993). These evaluations lack real-time, systematic, detailed information about particular pedagogies and practices. In this study, I gather student's perspectives by interviewing students during the semester after each writing conference, which permits greater depth than student evaluations.

provide practitioners and researchers alike with valuable insight into accepted pedagogies and practices, identifying potential issues or areas for innovation. Examining writing conferences from students' perspectives may help identify new approaches or recommendations about conferencing with a range of students.

Significance

This study has potential significance for the fields of Composition and English Education. Since writing conferences remain one of the least researched and understood practices in the composition classroom (Haswell, 2008; Hillocks, 2008), this study adds to the general body of knowledge on writing conferences. It proposes a theoretical perspective and interview method to examine student experiences of the process of learning. It also explicitly seeks a variety of viewpoints by selecting student participants for maximum diversity in identity, background, and writing ability. By providing insights into students' experiences, instructors may identify areas in their own practice to consider further. This may also result in general policy recommendations for writing instruction and teaching at the undergraduate level as colleges and universities continue to develop positive learning environments for all their students and close gaps in outcomes. Chapter 5 concludes with a detailed explanation of the implications of this study.

The potential significance of this study is limited by the fact that this is a single case study. My findings are not generalizable to the experiences of all students in writing conferences (Merriam, 2009). Instead, the purpose of this study is to produce a working hypothesis about the relationship between the culture of writing conferences and student experiences. This hypothesis may be transferable to other situations, providing researchers with an emergent framework by which to examine student experiences and

practitioners with insights into their own practice (Cronbach in Merriam, 2009). In Chapter 5, the Limitations section contains an extensive discussion of this study's limitations in design, methods, and results.

Definition of Terms

Culture

This study's theoretical framework is built upon principles of educational sociology, which influenced my definition of *culture*:

> Culture provides the lens through which we view the world; it includes shared values, beliefs, perceptions, ideals, and assumptions about life that guide specific behaviors…. Cultural values are shared by members of the group, rather than reflecting individual beliefs. While not all members of a culture ascribe to these values, these beliefs represent group tendencies. (Garcia & Guerra, 2006, p. 105)

In other words, culture is not "deterministic" or "universal" (Garcia & Guerra, 2006, p. 105). Individuals' experiences and personality influence aspects of culture that are adopted or rejected. Moreover, individuals do not consistently express their culture. Their cultural expression is frequently context-dependent. That said, culture does provide a road map of values, communication styles, and behaviors that individuals use, especially in new or unfamiliar settings (Garcia & Guerra, 2006).

Cultural Congruency and Mismatch

Cultural mismatch posits that the "differences between schools and students is based on a mismatch between the structure of schools and the social, cultural, or economic backgrounds of students" (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001, p. 527). The culture of school—including its values, practices and pedagogies, participation structures,

discourse, or epistemological stances—does not align with the home culture of some students. The culture of schools frequently reflects those in power, namely the White middle-class. *Cultural congruency* is when school culture and a student's home culture align.

Although often discussed in absolutes, I conceptualize cultural congruency and mismatch as a continuum across multiple dimensions. It is likely that school culture is neither entirely mismatched nor congruent with a student's home culture. However, researchers have frequently found mismatches in school culture for students from marginalized groups (e.g., Au & Jordan, 1981). Recent research has used cultural congruency and mismatch theory to explain students' psychological state and biological functioning (Stephens, Townsend, Markus, & Phillips, 2012). This study is a continuation of this line of inquiry, framing cultural congruency and mismatch as a possible explanation of student experiences.

Culture of Power

The *culture of power* refers to a set of rules and codes that structure and are enacted in the classroom (Delpit, 1988/2006). These codes and rules are rooted in the culture of those who have power, which in the United States is the White, upper and middle-class. These codes refer to values, behaviors, presentation of self, and discourse conventions. Delpit (2006) hypothesized that students must learn to navigate the culture of power to succeed in school.

Practitioner and Research Literature

The literature on writing conferences comes from two distinct traditions with their own canons of evidence. The *practitioner literature* follows the humanities tradition in

that it analyzes primarily personal and textual evidence. In contrast, *research literature* follows a social science research tradition in that it employs some type of quantitative or qualitative research methods (i.e., collected data). Both types of literature are published in academic journals such as *College Composition and Communication* and *Research in the Teaching of English.* By dividing the literature this way, I was able to critique both literature bodies appropriately for the tradition.

Students' Experiences and Perceptions

I draw a distinction between these interrelated terms. Building on the definition provided by Howard (2009), *students' perceptions* refer to an individual student's viewpoints interpretations, and responses on the writing conference interaction. Included in responses is the emotions students felt, the affective dimensions. In contrast, *students' experiences* refer to students' collective experiences of the process of learning in writing conferences. *Experiences* synthesizes the perceptions of all the students in this study and contextualizes these experiences within the broader culture of conferences, captured through the instructor's interviews, researcher's observations and field notes, and conference recordings.

Underrepresented Students

Underrepresented students refer to students from backgrounds that have been historically excluded or structurally prevented from pursuing higher education. In this study, underrepresented encompasses students from low-income families, first generation college students, and students of color. These demographic categories are not discrete; a student can be a first generation college student and a student of color. Students from low-income families have been defined as receiving a federal Pell Grant. First generation

college students are the first in their nuclear family to complete college. Students of color are students from racial and ethnic minority groups, including Black, African American, Hispanic, Latino/a, Asian American, Native American, and bi-racial or multi-ethnic students.

Writing Conferences

I have adopted a broad definition of writing conferences based on the description in *The Handbook of Research on Writing* (2008). A broad definition is advantageous because conferencing practice varies from instructor to instructor. *Writing conferences* are mandatory one-on-one conversation or individualized teaching between a student and a writing instructor about student writing (Hillocks, 2008). Because conferences can be conducted in a variety of contexts and serve numerous purposes, this definition is broad enough to capture both long, scheduled, formal meetings in an instructor's office (Emig, 1960; Fassler, 1978; Murray, 1979) and short, spontaneous, informal conversations at the back of the classroom (Sperling, 1990). It also encompasses conferencing as a supplement to traditional classroom instruction (Emig, 1960; Fassler, 1978) or as the primary mode of writing instruction (Garrison, 1974; Murray, 1979). Additionally, I am limiting my definition to face-to-face conferences, excluding online interactions as the norms for such communication is likely to be distinct.

Researcher Positionality

My research stance has been informed by my positionality as a White, middle-class, monolingual, educated, woman. Similar to many other privileged Americans, I grew up with varying awareness of the facets of my identity. I attended a sought-after public school in Portland, Oregon. The demographics of my school's student body was

upper class, high achieving, and primarily White, yet my family did not perfectly fit this model. My single mother worked six days a week at a low-paying retail job to keep my sisters and me in the district. Because of my family background, I was acutely aware of class and gender differences between my classmates and me.

This awareness, however, did not extend to my racial identity. Although my school boasted a relatively progressive curriculum that embraced multiculturalism and emphasized equality, I had little exposure to people of color to truly understand these lessons. My school was segregated with just a handful of African American children bused in from surrounding areas and a few Indian American children whose parents worked at Intel, a technology company. Looking back, I now understand that my school was a symptom of prevalent racial discrimination in Oregon, a state that historically banned African American settlement and at one time contained the largest Ku Klux Klan membership west of the Mississippi. These experiences left me headed to college colorblind, claiming not to see differences in race or ethnicity—since we were all the same—and more significantly, unable to see how my identity conferred privilege.

Teaching composition at a local community college challenged my assumptions and led to my current research interests. As a new, untrained instructor, I struggled to teach writing to students who were often first in their family to attend college: students of color, recent immigrants, language learners, or from a lower socioeconomic status. The majority of students were balancing multiple responsibilities (family, children, work) with the demands of coursework. Often, they were unacquainted with the cultural norms of college, such as the "simple" task of using a syllabus, or unsuccessful in adhering to rigid course policies, such as missing no more than 5 classes or submitting assignments

on time. They found the writing required, discourse mode essays, disconnected from both their actual lives and future goals. Colleagues and administrators frequently described students in terms of their deficits—unprepared, irresponsible, lacking a strong work ethic. They stressed that my job as a first year composition instructor was to act as a gatekeeper, detaining students who were not ready for upper level college work.

In this role, I quickly became frustrated with the number of students dropping out and failing my course. I could not accept that my students were the sole problem. As the teacher, I surely played a part in their failure. Therefore, I began to experiment with my teaching. I developed group work activities, scaled back grammar instruction, and offered more choice in essay assignments. I also started meeting with my students individually, adding regular writing conferences to my teaching practice. Writing conferences were very popular on my campus. My colleagues frequently touted them as the *best* way to solve a host of problems. While my conferences did not solve all my problems, they did help me unearth my own negative assumptions about students. For example, I realized that students who turn in incomplete assignments might not be lazy or indifferent. They may have run out of time or had trouble brainstorming ideas. I began to experiment with the frequency, type, and length of conferences. Eventually holding both formal conferences outside the class and informal conferences inside of the class to support students throughout the writing process.

While my experience teaching at the community college was invaluable for challenging my assumptions, my education coursework provided me with the skills and language to critically reflect on my positionality and privilege. I learned how to identify my privilege compared to many of my community college students. For example, I grew

up speaking English as my native language. In high school, I was enrolled in an International Baccalaureate (IB) program that required writing in every discipline. In college, my family was familiar with college norms and always available to help me navigate challenges. I had my own computer, and I only worked part-time thanks to financial aid. Taken together, these factors gave me multiple advantages in college that many of my community college students did not have.

Teaching Philosophy

My education coursework also provided an equity theoretical framework that shaped my teaching philosophy. I believe writing is a powerful tool—crucial for success in college and the workplace—and therefore, a key issue of equity. At its best, composition helps students harness this power: writing their own stories, connecting their viewpoints to a larger discourse, and advocating for change. Yet, as my own teaching at the community college showed, this ideal is not always realized, especially with students from marginalized, underserved, or under resourced communities. Consequently, I strive to adapt the theories of equity pedagogy (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995) and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billing, 1995) for the college classroom. These pedagogies recognize that all students come to schools with different knowledge and skills, and therefore they need different resources to achieve the same learning outcomes. As a teacher, my role is to create equitable, culturally relevant classroom learning environments so *all* students develop their writing ability.

In practice, I pursue three goals in my writing instruction. First, I help students see the ways that they are already writers. My students are not blank slates; they are writers with rich experiences, cultures, and literacies that should be integrated into the

classroom. In my introductory composition courses, I attempt to position academic writing as one of multiple genres students use daily. Second, I help students explore the connection between writing and knowing. While many of my students believe that as the instructor I have all the right answers, I believe that knowledge is constructed through social interactions and experiences. Students create their own knowledge through writing. Therefore, I make writing an integral and active component of in-class activities. Third, I help students analyze and practice with a variety of genres and conventions inherent to academic discourse. To accomplish this goal, I do not assume students are familiar with academic discourse. Instead, I scaffold writing assignments by designing them to build in complexity and integrate supports like models and templates. The common thread throughout my pedagogy is that I seek to create active learning environments that integrate students' distinct cultural experiences. My hope is that by exploring the relationships between identity, knowledge, and writing, my students can access the genres of academic discourse and critique the power structures that uphold this discourse as the only "correct" way to write.

Equitable Writing Conferences

My teaching philosophy extends to my beliefs about writing conferences. My writing conferences at the community college were frequently tainted by my low-expectations of students and stilted by my formulaic approach to teaching. One salient experience was conferencing with a student who just completed the college's English as a second language series. His writing had multiple sentence-level construction problems that made his writing unclear and difficult to follow. After the first essay, I concluded that he was unlikely to pass my class on the first try. In writing conferences, he would

often push on me to be clearer, and specifically, to help him with sentence structure. I repeatedly refused these requests, instead referring him to the writing center for extra help. I had narrowly defined the purpose of my conferences as reviewing thesis statements and organization. I refused to shift this purpose even though I knew this student would not pass without extensive sentence-level help. I told myself that he must learn to write independently; that without independence, he would never succeed in later coursework. I was unwilling to change my pedagogy to teach equitably. I treated this student who was learning English exactly the same as students for whom English was their first language. Unsurprisingly, the outcomes were different. The student did not pass my class.

My current writing conference practice attempts to apply the theories of equitable and culturally relevant pedagogies. At the heart, these theories require me to change the purpose and methods of my conference practice in order to meet the needs of each student. I believe an equitable writing conference practice contains the following characteristics: demonstrates high expectations for students, cultivates a caring student-teacher relationship, differentiates instruction, and provides appropriate scaffolds at any point in the writing process. Of course, enacting all of these principles is easier said than done. In practice, these conferences would frequently be markedly different from one another. They would not sound like a scripted conversation where the exact same points are brought up each time because the goal of my conferences would be responsive to individual students' needs. For example, not all students need a caring relationship to be expressed in the same way. Some students may need instructors to inquire about their life while others would prefer to focus on the task at hand. Therefore, I attempt to be flexible

in my approach. I have moved my conferences out of my office space, which students frequently reported as intimidating, to a common café space. I allow students to sign up for their conferences in small groups if they would be more comfortable with a friend. Although I plan on responding to students' ideas and organization during conferences, I also work with students on sentence-level issues of style and grammar, especially if they identify that area as their primary concern or if it is a reoccurring issue. Finally, I work to improve my practice by asking for student feedback on my conferences and making adjustments.

Implications for Research

To be mindful of my positionality and teaching philosophy, I approached this study with an observer participant stance (Merriam, 2009). I had not taught at Mid-Atlantic University, a pseudonym, so I did not presume to know the culture of writing conferences at this institution. I did not know the participants prior to this study. That said, many of the student participants were of different racial and ethnic background than me. My research coursework and teaching experience prepared me to examine the power dynamics inherent to teaching and research. Despite this training, a completely objective or unbiased research stance was not possible. My research approach was to continue to critically reflect on the ways my positionality, privilege, and teaching philosophy influenced this study. I recorded these reflections in my researcher's journal as well as through consultations with members of my dissertation committee. Chapter 3, the Researcher's Stance section, describes my stance and collection procedures to examine my subjectivity.

Conclusion

While writing conferences are widely practiced and considered effective, more research is needed to understand the dynamics of this interaction. This case study examines the relationship between students' experiences and the culture of an instructor's writing conference practice. It makes two contributions to research and practice: 1) it adds to the general body of knowledge on writing conferences by addressing the gap in the conference literature, student experiences; 2) the findings may be able to help identify new insights for practice and policy recommendations by explicitly seeking viewpoints from students. In the following chapter, I comprehensively review the contemporary literature on writing conferences and propose a theoretical perspective and conceptual framework from which to examine student experiences in this practice.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The conceptualization of this study has been influenced by several bodies of literature in the fields of composition and education research. In the first section, I comprehensively review the literature on writing conferences. I describe the history and present a typology of the literature on this topic. I summarize the practitioner literature in order to identify the key assumptions made about conferences and then review the research literature to explore the extent these assumptions are supported or refuted. In the second section, I draw from critical sociocultural theory to develop a theoretical framework that attempts to explain the extent, if any, the culture of writing conferences appears to shape students' experiences. In the third section, I outline a conceptual framework of the factors that potentially influence the culture of writing conferences and hypothesize the relationships between these factors and students' perceptions.

Literature Typology

My line of inquiry has been informed by the long history of writing conference practice and thinking in the fields of composition and education (Appendix A includes search strategy).[6] While I have organized this comprehensive literature review thematically rather than chronologically, a brief history of the development of the literature is helpful to understand the typology of the subject. The literature on writing conference spans nearly sixty years. The earliest contemporary literature, from the 1960s through 1980s, followed a humanities rather than social science research tradition. Written by practitioners and composition scholars, this literature is composed primarily

[6] In summary, I reviewed the literature relevant to writing conferences in the first year composition classroom. I bounded the review by excluding articles from ancillary fields such English as a Second Language (ESL), creative writing, advanced composition, the writing center, and Language Arts Education. Refer to Appendix A for explanation of search methodology, inclusion and exclusion principles.

of first-person narratives that marshaled textual and testimonial evidence. The goal of the literature was two-fold: convince *other* practitioners to adopt a regular conference practice and describe *how* to conference. Research studies of writing conferences, which drew on formal education theories, research methodologies, or methods, emerged later in the late 1970s. Composition scholars frequently designed these research studies, so they adhered to a different canon of evidence. They commonly lacked research questions, a methodology, or description of methods, which are clear limitations. The literature on writing conferences culminated with Laurel Black's (1998) book, *Between Talk and Teaching*. My search strategy identified only 2 recent articles (Athanasourelis, 2006; Martin & Mottet, 2011), which I believe is be due to the rise of research examining writing centers that practice peer-to-peer conferences rather than instructor-to-student conferences.

Therefore, for the purpose of this review, I have opted to review the practitioner and research literature separately, because they come from distinct scholarly traditions with different canons of evidence. I categorized literature that analyzed personal and textual evidence as *practitioner literature,* and literature that employed quantitative or qualitative research methods *research literature*. My search strategy identified 46 composition and education articles from 6 decades to review. I classified 29 articles as practitioner literature and 17 as research studies. Within each type, I grouped the literature thematically in order to draw out the key assumptions in the practitioner literature, and then explore the extent these assumptions are supported or refuted by the research literature. Table 1 presents my categorization of the literature on writing conferences.

Table 1

Type and Theme of Literature on Writing Conferences (1960-2017)

Literature Type and Theme	Count (n = 48)	Articles/Studies
Practitioner Literature		
Scaffold writing	17	Arbur, 1977; **Beach, 1989**; Blenski, 1974; Davis, 1985; Dawes & Dornan, 1981; Emig, 1960; Fassler, 1978; Garrison, 1974; Harris, 1986; Harrison, 1979; Hiatt, 1975; Knapp, 1976; McGuire Simmons, 1984; Newkirk, 1989; Peirce, 1984; Rose, 1982; Shaughnessy, 1977
Change the student-instructor relationship	12	Athanasourelis, 2006; Duke, 1975; Fletcher, 1993; Harris, 1986; Johnson, 1993; King, 1993; **Murray, 1979,** 1985; Rubin, 1993; Schiff 1978; Taylor, 1993; Thomas & Thomas, 1985
Research Literature		
Conference effectiveness	3	Davis & Fulton, 1997; Flynn, 1993; Graham & Perin, 2007; **Hillocks, 1986**
Participant roles	5	Black, 1998; Freedman & Katz, 1987; French, 1999; **Jacobs & Karliner, 1977**; **Newkirk, 1995**
Student characteristics	4	Black, 1998; Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997; **Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1985**
Classroom context	3	**Sperling, 1990**, 1991, 1992
Students' perspectives	4	Black, 1998; Carnicelli, 1980; Martin & Mottet, 2011; **Walker & Elias, 1987**

Note. Table 1 depicts categorization of practitioner articles and research studies. Bolded articles and studies are considered foundational, frequently cited within the literature, and/or representational of the line of inquiry.
[a] Two books have been categorized in multiple themes. Harris (1986) wrote *Teaching one-to-one: The writing conference,* which summarizes the early practitioner literature of writing conferences. In *Between Talk and Teaching*, Black (1998) used social science research methods to examine the influence of a variety of factors in writing conferences.

[b] I included Sperling's (1992) practitioner article in the research section, because the article presents conclusions for practitioners from the case study described in Sperling (1990, 1991).

Evaluative Criteria for Practitioner Literature

This review focuses on the key assumptions made about writing conferences in the practitioner literature rather than critique validity and reliability of the literature. As part of the humanities tradition, the practitioner literature relied on a different canon of evidence: primarily textual and testimonial evidence. Many researchers would consider this evidence a significant limitation, because conclusions are based on a subjective interpretation of data collected in an undisclosed way—raising validity and reliability concerns. This literature also lacked explicit theoretical frameworks by which data were analyzed and interpreted. Composition scholars would disagree with these social science critiques. The humanities tradition considers human experiences—individual and collective—equally valuable. Consequently, objective scientific methods are not required to contribute to writing instruction knowledge.

I contend that issues of validity and reliability are less significant because of the way researchers have used the practitioner literature—each research study of writing conferences drew from the practitioner literature base to ground their study. I believe that by including this literature, researchers have signaled their acceptance (at least on a surface level) of the assertions made. Moreover, frequently early scholars designed their research studies to test an assertion presented in the practitioner literature (e.g., Jacobs & Karliner, 1977). I hold that this design illustrates the field's general acceptance of practitioner knowledge. Consequently, for the purposes of this review, my focus is on the underlying assumptions about the purpose and way to conduct writing conferences.

History of the Practitioner Literature

Scholars and researchers have traditionally approached the practitioner literature in two ways. First, they frequently examined the theoretical perspective that appears to inform writing conference practice. The practitioner literature does not explicitly reference a theoretical framework, which makes the literature atheoretical in nature. Instead, practitioners' thinking seems to be grounded in a social constructivism perspective of learning.

Social constructivism grew out of the work of Lev Vygotsky (1930/1978), which posited that learning is not solely developmental, but occurs through social interaction. He theorized a child's cognitive development can be conceptualized as two levels: an actual developmental level and a zone of proximal development (ZPD). A child learns through social interactions with another individual in his or her ZPD: "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by an independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined by problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Through prolonged social interaction, a child becomes a full member of society. Vygotsky argued that language and culture were also essential to cognitive development. Language provides a child with a culturally defined understanding and perception of the world. In this way, language and culture are tools for understanding, constructing, and transmitting knowledge within a community.

At its heart, writing conferences appear to be a social constructivist interaction: A student meets individually with an instructor, presumably a more capable writer, who coaches this student by interacting in his or her ZPD. In a review of learning theories,

Murphy, Alexander, and Muis (2012) added that in social constructivism the individual becomes "apprenticed into communities of practice" through this social interaction with a more capable other. This community of practice is where he or she constructs knowledge, acquires behaviors, and develops skills beyond what she could independently produce (Murphy, Alexander, & Muis, 2012, p. 216). Ideally, with frequent conferences, the student's writing improves beyond his or her original ability. In this way, writing conferences could be interpreted as one of many strategies that apprentice students into the academic writing community.

Second, composition scholars have interpreted the practitioner literature as reflective of the tension between traditional writing instruction and process theory instruction. Traditional writing instruction focused on the final product. It frequently emphasized narrow, formulaic concepts of arrangement (e.g., the five paragraph essay) and discourse (e.g., modes). Instruction frequently concentrated on usage and style, grammar and mechanics in an attempt to improve the text (Anson, 2014). The resulting writing pedagogy commonly was lectured-based as teachers explained the characteristics of "good" writing. Students wrote weekly, short themes that teachers evaluated based on their grammatical and mechanical correctness (Anson, 2014).

In contrast, process theory instruction emphasized the process of composing, or students developing the skills and knowledge to produce texts. Process theory was strongly influenced by Flower and Hayes' (1981) cognitive-process model, which proposed a series of hierarchical and embedded rhetorical and linguistic processes that a writer uses when composing. Process theory considered writing as an essential component of thinking; therefore, it stressed discovery, authentic voice, and ownership of

the text over conventions and mechanics (Anson, 2014). The resulting pedagogy had students write multiple drafts while the teacher became a coach, no longer merely dispensing knowledge but co-constructing it with the student.

Process theory peaked in the late 1970s and early 1980s when most of the literature about conferences was written. Tobin (1993) categorized conferences influenced by traditional product-focused instruction, "first-generation" and "teacher-centered," in that the instructor directs the talk by assuming the role of expert. He called conferences influenced by process instruction, "second-generation" and "student-centered," because the student takes an active role in the construction of knowledge. Black (1998) critiqued Tobin's categorization because in both conference types the instructor maintains control. Although first-generation instructors were more overt in their power, second-generation instructors still made all the structural decisions in that they decided the participant roles, topics of discussion, and discourse conventions. These choices lying with the instructor made these conferences less student-centered than they initially appear. Both Tobin (1993) Black (1998) agreed that the most prevalent beliefs about writing conferences continue to derive from the second-generation conference literature. Moreover, with little research on writing conferences in the past twenty years, this discussion has not progressed.

Practitioner Literature: The Dual Purposes of Conferences

I have opted to organize my review of the practitioner literature thematically by the purpose or intended outcome of conferences rather than theoretically or chronologically. The literature presents conferences as an instructional strategy to scaffold the writing process (i.e., Beach, 1989) and to change the instructor-student

relationship from adversarial to helping (i.e., Murray, 1979), thereby improving students' writing ability. It then goes on to describe steps to achieve these purposes by outlining what instructors should *do* and *say*. While these distinct purposes appear to align with the dominant theoretical perspective of their era, social constructivism and cognitive process theory, the practitioner literature does not explicitly cite a framework, making it largely atheoretical. By organizing the practitioner literature by the purpose of conferences, the key assumptions about writing conferences are drawn out.

Scaffold Writing Instruction

As an instructional strategy, writing conferences are thought to combat the problem inherent to most classrooms—students enter with diverse background experiences, varying abilities, and unique needs that are difficult to adequately meet in a whole group setting. This problem is especially salient in the composition classroom because learning how to write is an individual process that is highly dependent on the context and task at hand (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Kellogg, 1994).

According to the practitioner literature, the one-on-one nature of writing conferences enables instructors to scaffold the writing process for each student. Instructors can diagnose a student's strengths and weaknesses, give immediate feedback, model skills, and individualize instruction (Emig, 1960; Fassler, 1978; Harris, 1986; Garrison, 1974; Knapp, 1976; McGuire Simmons, 1984; Newkirk, 1989; Pierce, 1984; Rose, 1982; Shaughnessy, 1977). By interacting with the instructor, students are thought to develop their rhetorical awareness and self-evaluation skills (e.g., Beach, 1989; Harris, 1986; Garrison, 1974; Murray, 1979, 1985). With frequent conferences, students hopefully learn how to critique and revise their writing independently, becoming

increasingly motivated and proficient writers (Beach, 1989; Duke, 1975; Harris, 1986; Murray, 1979, 1985).

In order to scaffold, the literature recommended specific participant roles, approaches, and discourse conventions. First, instructors should take the lead in conferences by assuming the roles of diagnostician/editor (Emig, 1960; Davis, 1985; Fassler, 1978; Garrison, 1974; Knapp, 1976; McGuire Simmons, 1984; Rose, 1982; Shaughnessy, 1977) and learning coach (Harris, 1986; Dawes & Dornan, 1984). These roles call for instructors to identify strengths and weaknesses in students' writing and then brainstorm possible revisions in order to help students "make their own decisions about what to change in their writing" (Davis, 1985, p. 199). These roles position the instructor as an expert (Harris, 1986), and implicitly position the student as a novice, although the student's role is not clearly described by practitioners.

Second, practitioners described various approaches to modeling the evaluation of writing. Practitioners recommended grading conferences where the instructor provided oral feedback on an assignment (Emig, 1960; Fassler, 1978; Knapp, 1976; Rose, 1982). Arbur (1977) advised instructors to guide students through a problem-solving process to identify a writing problem and revision strategy. Ideally, this problem-solving process is linear, progressing neatly from one stage to the next, although Arbur admitted that steps might be skipped based on students' particular needs. Finally, Beach (1989) called for the instructor to model the process of assessing writing. He delineated three recursive stages—describing, judging, and selecting revisions—that instructors should consider within the larger rhetorical context. All of these approaches advised the instructor to show students *how* to evaluate their writing. However, these scholars differed in whether

they see this evaluation process as linear (as the grading conference and problem-solving conference) or recursive (as the modeling assessment conference).

Third, the literature advocated for a particular type of discourse within conferences. It focused on questioning strategies as a way to determine an agenda for conferences with students (Newkirk, 1989); assess the students' thinking and prior knowledge (Beach, 1989); get to know students (Graves, 1983); and direct students' attention to specific topics in their writing (Harris, 1986). These scholars asserted that questions are the best approach to engage students in conferences (as a way to determine the most effective scaffold) and then model evaluations strategies. Notably, other than Newkirk's discussion of determining an agenda, this discussion of discourse conventions overlooks students. This oversight implies students are expected to answer their instructor's questions, similar to traditional classroom discourse. In conclusion, the practitioner literature recommended that in order to scaffold writing, instructors should assume the role of an expert, model how to evaluate writing, and ask questions.

Change the Student-Instructor Relationship

In contrast, practitioners also argued that conferences change the nature of the student-instructor relationship. Rather than an adversarial relationship that characterizes many student-instructor interactions (especially when grading is involved), conferences are an opportunity to develop collaborative, helping relationships (Athanasourelis, 2006; Duke, 1975; King, 1993; Harris, 1986; Murray, 1979, 1985; Schiff 1978; Taylor, 1993; Thomas & Thomas, 1985). Practitioners asserted that this relationship is changed when instructors focus on the writing process rather than the final product (King, 1993; Murray, 1979, 1985; Schiff 1978) and when instructors acknowledge that they do not

always have the correct answers, thereby inviting students to co-construct knowledge (Duke, 1975; Harris, 1986; King, 1993). They argued that these shifts develop a positive helping relationship because it avoids a traditional student-teacher hierarchy where the instructor knows everything (Taylor, 1993; Thomas & Thomas, 1985). By establishing this stronger relationship, students were thought to be more willingly to integrate the feedback because it was generated by student and instructor alike (Duke, 1975; King, 1993; Harris, 1986; Murray, 1979, 1985). By integrating more of this feedback, practitioners believed the students writing would improve with time.

Naturally, the practitioner literature recommended different participant roles, approaches, and discourse conventions when the goal of writing conferences was to change the instructor-student relationship. It suggested several interconnected roles for the instructor to adopt: counselor, commentator, and listener. In the counselor role, the instructor investigated students' "previous experience[s], prior learning, motivation, outside problems, attitudes, and composing processes in order to form an adequate picture of how to proceed" (Harris, 1986, p. 36), while in the commentator role, instructors tried to help students see the bigger picture, connecting the conference conversation with the rhetorical context and their growth as a writer. Of course, these roles both depend on the instructor's ability to be a listener (Murray, 1979, 1985; Taylor, 1993; Thomas & Thomas, 1985).

These instructor roles required students to assume an active role in conferences. No longer can students merely answer questions. Instead, they were expected to direct the conversation by talking more than the instructor, determining an agenda, evaluating his or her work independently, and asking questions. The intended result of these new roles was

to move the conference interaction away from the inherent hierarchical instructor-student relationship to a relationship where one writer is helping another. Once again, these roles appear to reflect the process movement. They called for instructors to focus on students' experiences composing, their writing process, rather than the final product.

The literature also recommended a different approach to the conference discourse and conventions. Murray (1985) advocated for a conversation pattern where students initiate the topic and provide their own critique before instructors respond. Schiff (1978) described multiple activities adapted for writing conferences in the hopes of engaging students in this conversation pattern. These activities called for instructors to compose with students as a way of approaching conferences as a fellow writer rather than an expert. Several other practitioners drew from Rogerian, person-centered, counseling theory to describe specific phrases and rhetorical moves. These practitioners urged instructors to use counseling devices that reflect and clarify students' talk in a non-threatening and indirect way (Duke, 1975; Taylor, 1993; Thomas & Thomas, 1985). The intended result of these devices was to reduce instructor control of the conversation, and thus encourage students to talk. These scholars argued that counseling devices sent a message to students that their voices and knowledge are valued (Duke, 1975; Taylor, 1993; Thomas & Thomas, 1985). Implicit in this discussion of counseling devices was that students frequently were unable or resisted assuming an active role in conferences. These discourse conventions were intended to draw out students. Ultimately, to change the student-teacher relationship, the practitioner literature recommended instructors assume the role of listener and compose alongside students in order to get them to lead the conference conversation.

Practitioner Literature Discussion

The strength of the practitioner literature is that for more than three decades practitioners presented a compelling case for adopting a regular writing conference practice. They tapped into basic social constructivist assumptions about teaching and learning—that through targeted, individualized instruction students' writing will improve. They provided instructors with straightforward and practical advice on everything from when to schedule conferences to what to say during them. Their advice is easy to implement in the classroom, unlike the recommendations from the research studies that complicate our understanding of conference practice.

Despite these strengths, three problematic assumptions underpin the practitioner literature. *First, writing conferences are assumed to be universally effective.* Conferences are thought to improve student writing by scaffolding the writing process and changing the student-instructor relationship. This assumption is a significant limitation because it is made without any research backing. The prevalence of this assumption is reflected in the makeup of the practitioner literature. Of the 27 practitioner articles identified, only one questioned the effectiveness of writing conferences. Hiatt (1975) argued that conferences are not automatically beneficial and can even be detrimental for some students. She observed that reluctant students often feign "deafness" or passively agree with instructor comments as a way of ending conferences quicker. She did not perceive these students as making gains in their writing from conferences. Instead, she argued that conferences were more effective with motivated students with stronger writing skills than unmotivated students with weaker writing skills. These observations counter the body of the

practitioner literature but align with research findings discussed below (e.g., Newkirk, 1995).

Second, writing conferences are assumed to be equally effective for all students regardless of background and ability. Hiatt (1975) was the practitioner that questioned the effectiveness of the prescribed writing conference practice with specific types of students. The practitioner literature largely ignored student experiences in conferences. Moreover, it did not discuss how this instructional strategy might vary with different types of students (i.e., female, underrepresented racial and ethnic students, and novice writers). Instead, it relied on testimonial and textual evidence frequently drawn from the instructor's experience thereby prioritizing his or her viewpoint, a significant limitation. Moreover, since the early practitioner literature strove to convince other practitioners to adopt regular conferencing, it only makes sense that the evidence included was primarily positive.

Lastly, effective conferences are assumed to be conducted in the same way and have the same characteristics. The literature defined prescriptive, albeit contradictory, participant roles (expert vs. listener), approaches (modeling vs. composing activities), and discourse conventions (questioning vs. reflective counseling devices) for each conference purpose. While these contradictory recommendations likely are a result of the shift from traditional to process writing instruction, they both have significant limitations in that they present conferences as a neat, linear, activity that instructors can simply follow step-by-step. Tobin (1993) characterized conference practice as highly ritualized. Early conferences entailed "'Here is what is wrong; here is how you can fix it'" while later conferences entailed "'Always start by offering encouragement.' 'Focus on only one or

two things in each conference.' 'Do as little of the talking as possible'" (p. 43). The practitioner literature does not include suggestions on what needs to be done differently by instructors in various contexts and with different students. Agreeing with this limitation, Tobin (1993) called for a change in conference practice and thinking:

> [W]e need to move beyond a set of rigid rules for conference teachers to an approach that takes into account the dynamic aspects of each writing conference: the student's relationship to the text, the teacher's relationship to the text, and the student's and teacher's relationship to each other. (p. 43)

The research literature reviewed below examined these rigid rules for conferences (e.g., Freedman & Katz, 1987), provided insights into why they frequently do not work (e.g., Black, 1998), and explored the implications of the student-instructor relationship (e.g., Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1985).

Further complicating matters, this discussion about the way to conduct conferences drew the definition of an effective conference into question. Black (1998) commented: "conferences are identified more by the talk that occurs than the written texts under discussion" (p. 20). An effective conference frequently is defined not by the extent students' writing improves, but how closely the conference interaction aligns with the ideal role, approach, and discourse conventions. These competing definitions of effectiveness are a limitation because they shift the goal of writing conferences away from learning to other observable aspects of the conference interaction. The practitioner literature assumes that these observable aspects of the interaction will improve students' writing, but they do not have research to support this assertion. Several researchers of writing conferences take up this assertion by examining the roles and discourse

conventions of writing conferences (e.g., Jacobs & Karliner, 1977). However, as this review shows in the following section, the research findings are disparate and have severe limitations (such as missing checks of validity and small sample sizes) that make interpretation difficult.

Research Literature: Reexamining Writing Conferences

Three pervasive assumptions about writing conference effectiveness underpin the practitioner literature: 1) writing conferences are assumed to be universally effective; 2) writing conferences are assumed to be equally effective for *all* students regardless of background and ability; and 3) effective conferences are assumed to be conducted in the same way and have the same characteristics. This review now turns to the research literature on writing conferences to explore the extent these assumptions are supported or refuted.

Conference Effectiveness

While the practitioner literature assumed writing conferences are an effective instructional strategy, they remain largely unexamined by researchers (Haswell, 2005; Hillocks, 2005). Practitioners and researchers alike frequently cite Hillocks' (1986) meta-analysis, *Research on Written Composition*, when discussing writing conference effectiveness. This analysis examined "individual modes of instruction" or "students receiv[ing] instruction through tutorials, programmed materials of some kind, or a combination of the two" (Hillocks, 1986, p. 126). It determined that students who received individualized modes of instruction did not significantly improve their writing in comparison to students who received regular classroom teaching.

While this finding has been widely used in composition to question the effectiveness of writing conferences, Hillocks' meta-analysis has been extensively critiqued. Graham and Perin (2007) explained that Hillocks' modes-of-instruction category was widely critiqued "in terms of how treatments were defined and their overall distinctiveness" (p. 446), and they agreed with these previous critiques. They closely inspected six of the studies included in the individual modes of instruction and found that this definition included several treatment methods, such as peer assistance and tutoring, grammar instruction, analysis of models, and computer programmed materials. They concluded that the definition of individual modes of instruction included "instructional procedures [that] were too diverse to form a cogent treatment" (Graham & Perin, 2007, p. 450). Therefore, the assumption that writing conferences are generally effective is unsupported.

My search strategy identified one additional study that examined the effectiveness of writing conferences. Davis and Fulton (1997), using a quasi-experimental design, tested the effectiveness of mostly computer feedback from the instructor compared to feedback during writing conferences. The results indicated that students overall writing improvement was statistically significant for both feedback methods, but there was not a significant difference in improvement between the two groups. Students who received feedback during the writing process did show slight, non-significant, increased growth in their writing. While writing conferences were found to not significantly improve students' writing, they also did not hinder students' growth, measured by a pre-test and post-test where students had sixty minutes to write an essay on one of three predetermined essay topics.

Several limitations apply to Davis and Fulton's (1997) study design. This study investigated the effectiveness of two independent variables: response method (mostly computer feedback versus writing conference feedback) *and* timing (during the writing process versus after final paper). Since these two variables were not isolated and there was no control group, one limitation is that students' writing growth cannot be attributed a specific variable—a limitation acknowledged by Davis and Fulton. Moreover, the study does not capture the full potential of conferences (Flynn, 1993) because they were conducted *after* the final product, despite calls for conferences to be integral to the writing process (e.g., Murray, 1979).

Additional research is needed to determine the effectiveness of writing conferences in comparison to whole group instructional methods. Graham and Perin (2007) concluded that the literature is missing studies on the effectiveness of forms of instruction, such as writing conferences. Researchers have yet to design a study that accounts for all the purposes of conferences, including scaffolding and the student-instructor relationship.

Conference Discourse

The practitioner literature presented the assumption that effective writing conferences are conducted with specific participant roles, approaches, and discourse conventions. The majority of the research studies (11 of 17) examined the conference interaction by analyzing the discourse, or what was said and how. These studies also offer insight into ways conference practice may differ for particular types of students, drawing the practitioner assumption that conferences are effective for all students into question. In

this section, I grouped these studies that examine discourse by the contextual factor examined: participant roles, student characteristics, and classroom context.

Participant roles. A representative study in this line of inquiry is Jacobs and Karliner (1977), who conducted the earliest study of writing conferences. Jacobs and Karliner examined writing conferences between two different students and their instructors in order to determine the "kinds of verbal interaction found in individual writing conferences and the relationship between the nature of the interaction and the kinds of writing which result from it" (p. 490). They found the student and instructor who approached conferences with the same rigid roles as the classroom fell into familiar classroom discourse patterns—the instructor directed the conversation by adjudicating appropriate topics and responses while the student answered questions and listened. The student saw the purpose of this conference to get the correct answer from the instructor. In contrast, the student and instructor who adopted conversant roles had equal stake in initiating the conversation and directing the talk. Jacobs and Karliner asserted that these conversant roles permitted the student to engage in exploratory talk that generated ideas, which resulted in a paper with significant macro revisions to the ideas and structure of the work rather than just perfunctory grammatical revisions.

The strength of Jacobs and Karliner's (1977) study is that it examines writing conferences in an authentic context during the students' process of composing, therefore capturing what Flynn (1993) describes as the full potential of writing conferences. It provides support for the practitioner literature's assumption that participant roles can impact students' revisions, while also countering the assumption that writing conferences are automatically effective for all students—after all, one conference included in the

sample was deemed unsuccessful.

However, there are also four significant limitations that influence the interpretation of these findings: 1) this study does not pose research questions; 2) it does not disclose a theoretical framework, research methodology, data collection and data analysis procedure, raising questions of reliability; 3) it draws conclusions from only two cases that were selected with an undisclosed participant selection criteria; and 4) it does not take steps to address validity like triangulate data sources, test intercoder agreement, or conduct member checks. These limitations are symptomatic of composition scholars who adopt research methods yet adhere to a different canon of evidence. While similar conceptual limitations extend to five studies (Black, 1998; French, 1999; Freedman & Katz, 1987; Freedman & Sperling, 1987; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997), three studies are also exemplars of rigorous qualitative research (Newkirk, 1995; Sperling 1990; Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1985).

In a similar study design as Jacobs and Karliner (1977), French (1999) compared two conferences between an instructor and two students student (one Hispanic and one Asian American) in order to understand "the roles assumed by student and instructor [in writing conferences], the kinds of talk produced, and the changes effected (if any) in the student's conception of rhetorical objectives" (p. 136). This study confirmed Jacob and Karliner's finding that the roles participants adopted influenced the conference discourse and students' final product. However, these findings differed in that the student's role was considered more influential than the discourse produced, what Jacob and Karliner termed "exploratory talk."

French (1999) concluded that by adopting the role of "author" the student was

able to enter into a conversation with outside sources, and therefore improve his final paper. Problematically, these conclusions are from two cases with no description of case study methodology and selection criteria, other than they were drawn from a larger data set of fifteen conferences. It is difficult to interpret the significance of the findings of both Jacobs and Karliner (1977) and French (1999) without more information about the selection criteria and data analysis method. It could be that the cases were purposefully selected for a particular result or that individual students' writing ability could account for both their conference roles and subsequent revisions.

While the previous studies examined the potential impact of participant roles, several others examined the roles participants regularly adopt during writing conferences. Drawing from a critical pedagogy and sociolinguistic framework, Black (1998) analyzed 14 conference recordings between 7 instructors and 14 of their students to understand "how much of a role do students get in constructing knowledge? In actually shaping a conference?" (p. 41). This study used a strong theoretical framework to analyze a comparably large sample size of writing conferences (14 total) while most other studies only examine a case or two. The larger sample size coupled with tables and counts addressed reliability.

Black (1998) found that the conference discourse habitually aligned with the role of the participants, resulting in traditional classroom roles. The instructors were "overwhelmingly dominant" (p. 41), determining the structure of talk and knowledge constructed (aka. the revisions for the student's paper). In terms of word count alone, student participation ranged from a mere 2.3% of all words to a high of 40.2%. She noted that these counts indicated that the conference discourse was far from the ideal where

students took over the conversation.

Black (1998) identified a variety of discourse markers instructors used to maintain control of the conversation. For instance, the marker "*and*" connected and filled the gaps between ideas in order to prevent students from entering the conversation. Black also concluded that instructors' use of relationship markers undermined students' knowledge. On the surface, the relationship markers "*you know"* and "*I mean"* signaled that the instructor agreed with the student. They "evoke[d] the concept of shared knowledge and of student's entry into the community represented by the teacher," yet they simultaneously "reinforce[d] the status differences by complicating and reformulating the very information they just agreed upon as shared" (p. 53). Although Black (1998) included more information about her participants and data collection methods increasing reliability, one limitation of this finding is that no steps to address validity like intercoder agreement or member checks were taken. These findings suggested that writing conferences closely align with classroom discourses in linearity, hierarchy of relationships, and belief that knowledge is fixed. In other words, students were invited into the construction of knowledge, but the instructor held the power to reconfigure that knowledge, thus shutting them out again.

Newkirk (1995) provided insight into the difficulties students experience adopting the prescribed role in writing conferences. By viewing writing conferences through a performative theory framework, which examines social interactions as a type of performance where participants attempt to portray an idealized role, Newkirk (1995) sought to capture the difficulties "student experience in taking on the conversational roles" in conferences, the ways "participants in the conference account for these moments

of difficulty," and the "adjustments occurred when the student was experiencing difficulty with a performative role" (p. 198). The strength of this study is the innovative method Newkirk developed, oral commentary, which had both student and instructor listen to portions of the conference recording with the researcher, who stopped the tape periodically for reflection. Reminiscent of a think-aloud protocol, this oral commentary method gathered detailed in-context commentary about the tensions and miscommunications in writing conferences, providing greater insight into the participant's thinking than an interview.

With this method, Newkirk (1995) found that students and the instructor alike prioritized the appearance of competence. The instructor's position of power and authority required him or her to be perceived by the student as a "knowledgeable and lucid communicator"(p. 284). By being silent, students ensured that the instructor's role was never challenged. For example, both students did not ask questions when unfamiliar writing concepts were mentioned because these questions could be interpreted as an affront to the instructor's role. Instead, their silence was a way to fake comprehension. Newkirk (1995) uncovered that the instructor also reinforced students' passive role. She also wanted students to feel competent in conferences, so when students remained silent, she compensated by taking over the conversation. In this way, both the student and instructor saved face in conferences by reverting back to familiar classroom roles. Although this study is limited by its relatively small sample size of 1 instructor and 2 students, 3 writing conferences were analyzed for each student, resulting in an in-depth analysis of 6 conferences and 12 oral commentaries, a significant amount of data (Newkirk, 1995). Moreover, the design of the study included students' perspectives,

which are frequently overlooked in the literature, and a member check with the instructor, increasing validity.

Lastly, Freedman and Katz (1987) analyzed a successful conference between an instructor and a student. This study is limited in that they conducted an unknown "linguistic analysis" on a small portion of the writing conference in order to "describe the pattern of the discourse, the control and predictability or the language of that discourse in terms of participation" (Freedman & Katz, 1987, p. 63). They found that the power dynamics underpinning conferences required the instructor to shift roles for the student. When the instructor adopted a new role of "manager" rather than "controller," she disrupted the traditional Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) classroom discourse. She reduced her "I" and "E" time, which pushed the student to take an active role and determine a focus for the conversation. Notably, this study conducted no member checks with the instructor or the student to discuss the intention behind their roles. Instead, they draw the problematic conclusion that the conference conversation was considerably student-centered, almost like a natural conversation, because it contained extended pauses, latching, and topic shifts. They interpreted these elements of the discourse as indications that the conference structure was, to an extent, predictable for the participants. They suggested that this predictability enabled the student to participate more easily.

Multiple studies examined participant roles in writing conferences. The strength of these studies is that they examined participant roles from a range of theoretical perspectives, providing multiple viewpoints. These findings indicate that participant roles have the potential to positively shape the conference discourse and influence student's work (French, 1999; Jacobs & Karliner, 1977), yet these roles frequently do not change

from the traditional classroom ones (Black, 1998; Newkirk, 1995). This research suggests that writing conferences are not immune to the power dynamics that underpin the classroom. Instructors frequently adopt roles that maintain control of the conference discourse (Black, 1998; Freedman & Katz, 1987), yet somewhat paradoxically, students are expected to automatically and willingly assume active roles, essentially stepping outside of the traditional listening classroom role (Jacobs & Karliner, 1977; French, 1999; Newkirk, 1995).

Freedman and Katz (1987), Newkirk (1995), and Black (1998), all agreed that conferences are a unique discourse with its own conventions, roles, and rules. Consequently, they concluded that it is unfair to expect students to automatically assume a role different than the one inhabited in the classroom. They argued that students must be actively taught the conventions of writing conferences, just like they were taught classroom conventions. However, they differ in their recommendations of how to teach this role. Based on a single case study that examined a small portion of one writing conference, Freedman and Katz (1987) asserted that students can be taught by the instructor adopting a role of "manager," who "retains and release control in order to gather information necessary for her to be able to encourage learning" (p. 78). Yet, they only examined a small portion of a writing conference to illustrate this role. They do not explain if this role of manager was used in other parts of the writing conference or in subsequent conferences. Conversely, Newkirk (1995) recommended that instructors engage in a process of "role-shifting" to ease students: "the teacher may move into questioning mode so the student can begin to learn the language and expectations of a conference performance—and then back into a pattern of her taking more extended turns"

(p. 213). Although Newkirk did not observe such role-shifting, this recommendation is stronger because it is based on an in-depth analysis of regular writing conferences with multiple students. Lastly, Black's (1998) findings suggest that there is little evidence of instructors in practice explicitly teaching these conventions; instead, they fell back to "business as usual"—the familiar roles and discourse patterns found in the classroom.

Student characteristics. Four studies found student characteristics—gender, race or ethnicity, and writing ability—influenced the conference discourse. The strength of these studies is that they spotlight a previously unexamined aspect of writing conferences. While the practitioner literature assumed that effective writing conferences were conducted in the same way for all students, the research literature described ways that conferences differed for certain students in their studies. These differences in the conference discourse point to possible inequities for female, ethnic minority, and novice writers (Black, 1998; Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997; Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1985).

Analyzing the same conference transcripts, Black (1998) also studied the influence of gender on the conference discourse, concluding that both the instructor's and student's gender were significant. For instructors, the same discourse markers "*and*" and "*well,*" which maintained instructor control of the conversation, were used 3 times more frequently with female than male students. This finding is strengthened by the comparatively large sample of 14 conferences with an even gender split. Furthermore, male instructors were more likely than female instructors to use these markers and interrupt female students. Although this finding was drawn from a smaller sample of 7 instructors (4 male, 3 female), 2 conferences for each instructor were analyzed, adding

depth. Black (1998) concluded that female students were prevented from entering the conversation more than their male peers. Moreover, male instructors maintained greater control of the conversation with female students.

Black (1998) also found that students responded differently in conferences based on their gender. Female students encouraged male instructors' talk through cooperative overlapping, asking more questions, and requesting more opinions about their revision strategies. Black (1998) characterized these findings as representative of stereotypical female gender roles. Female students were more likely to be passive and position their male instructors as the "expert." In contrast, male students were more likely to challenge female instructors by using discourse markers, demonstrating their knowledge, and defending their work (Black, 1998). Consequently, male students asked fewer questions and said "I don't know fewer" times than they did with male instructors. Female instructors did not overtly confront these challenges, but they also did not stray from the conference purpose, perhaps because they were caught in "a balancing act between the control that teachers conventionally exert over students and the deference and support that women are supposed to show men" (Black, 1998, p. 71). These findings are difficult to interpret as Black does not conduct member checks, yet they point to subtle ways that writing conferences may replicate gender imbalances found in society at large.

Three research studies also examined the impact of ethnicity and achievement on writing conferences. A representative study in this line of inquiry is Ulichny and Watson-Gegeo's (1985) examination of one teacher's control of the discourse and the resulting knowledge. They analyzed 20 writing conferences in a "multiethnic" (many of whom speak African American English), working-class urban middle school. Due to tracking at

the district level, the students at this school were widely perceived academically as "average or 'low' students by school authorities and teachers" (Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1985, p. 314).

This study constructed a unique theoretical framework to conceptualize the difference in power between student and teacher. The "dominant interpretive framework (DIF)" identified "the teacher's definition and interpretation of the ongoing situation and what counts for knowledge" (Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1985, p. 313). They found that writing conferences mirrored traditional classroom instruction in that the teacher's DIF was the final arbiter of what is good writing and the meaning of students' work. Those students who accepted the teacher's DIF, her interpretation and authority, were evaluated as good. In contrast, students who resisted the teacher's interpretation of their work, which often devalued the students' personal knowledge, were silenced in conferences. While an impressive amount of data was collected, 60 tape-recorded writing conferences (20 randomly selected for analysis), field notes, and teacher interviews, only 3 conferences were discussed as representative of general trends in the data, a significant limitation. Counts from the rest of the data would have helped with the interpretation of the significance of these findings. Additionally, the analysis did not disclose how or if the field notes and teacher interviews were used to triangulate findings, which would have addressed validity.

Ulichny and Watson-Gegeo (1985) added that the teacher's expectations of students may be significant. They concluded that the teacher held low academic expectations for the student who resisted her DIF in the writing conference. This student was described by the teacher as having an attitude problem and unable to write at the end

of the year. Ulichny and Watson-Gegeo (1985) argued that this student could infer the instructor's "very low estimation of her [the student's] understanding of language, writing ability, and ability to perform like a good student" (p. 321). They asserted that the instructor sent a clear social message to the student, who responded by resisting the instructor's DIF. However, they do not follow up with this assertion by exploring the ways the instructor's expectations may have influenced her conference practice itself, most likely due to their theoretical framework that focused on power dynamics. Nevertheless, this finding is significant because it introduced the idea that an instructor's expectation of students may impact writing conferences.

Two additional studies also investigated the influence of students' ethnicity and writing ability on the conference discourse (Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997). The strength of these studies is that they identify ways writing conferences with students perceived by their instructor as low-ability are different than students perceived as high-ability. These findings, however, are limited because of study designs that had the instructor label their student's writing ability as a procedure in participant or case selection ("weaker or stronger writer" in Patthey-Chavez and Ferris; "high achieving or low-achieving" in Freedman and Sperling). These labels enabled researchers to select students with varying writing ability for comparison. However, the very act of labeling may have inadvertently skewed the findings. Labeling students has been shown to tap into the Pygmalion effect where instructors hold higher expectations and subconsciously behave in ways that assist students in meeting these expectations (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). The research process may have inadvertently and

subconsciously influenced the instructor's conduct in conferences, a significant limitation.

Patthey-Chavez and Ferris (1997) analyzed the effects of student characteristics on the conference discourse and the revision of student work. One strength is similar to Black (1998); this study examined a comparably large sample of writing conferences between 4 instructors and 2 of their students (one stronger writer and one weaker writer) for a total of 8 conferences. This sample was also diverse, including 6 English as a Second Language (ESL) students and 2 native English speakers. While there were no noticeable differences between conferences with ESL and native English speakers, conferences with weaker writers differed significantly in length, tone, and revision quality. Conferences with weaker students were comparably shorter in both time elapsed and words spoken. Instructors were more directive and elicited fewer student opinions. In contrast, conferences with stronger students were longer with a more equitable distribution of talk. These students were also more assertive about interjecting their opinions. Predictably, students with stronger writing ability produced better revisions that built on the instructor's suggestions while students with weaker writing ability merely copied the instructor's suggestions verbatim. However, this finding is limited because is it is difficult to know if the revisions were a product of student's ability, the instructor's perception of his or her ability, or the type of writing conference received. The strength of this study is that described several ways writing conference practice differed based on instructor's perceptions of students ability.

Freedman and Sperling (1985) examined four purposefully selected case studies (one high-achieving White and Asian American student; one low-achieving White and

Asian American student) in order to see "differences in how these four students interact with the same teacher, with implications about the interaction being more, or less, productive for the student, but also at how the teacher and student initially established the teaching/learning relationship" (p. 108). They found that conferences focused on different topics based on students' ethnicity (Freedman & Sperling, 1985). White students wanted to focus on discourse-level topics while the high-achieving Asian American student wanted to focus on surface-level topics. The low-achieving Asian American student, Cee, had no topic preference; instead, she posed topics "likely to alienate a teacher" (Freedman & Sperling, 1985, p. 128) and disrupted the synchrony of the conversation with backchannel signals. These findings are limited because they are based on four single cases without checks of validity, such as tests of intercoder agreement and member checks.

Interestingly, Freedman and Sperling (1985) also concluded that students that the instructor perceived as high-achieving were treated differently than those perceived as low-achieving. The instructor gave higher-achieving students more praise, "more expository explanations and with their explanations being delivered in a more formal, 'written-like' register," and "a more elaborate" invitation to conference again (p. 128). This study indicated that a student's perceived writing ability may not only affect the topics discussed, but also the type of teaching and the establishment of the student-instructor relationship in conferences. These findings converge with the other studies (Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997; Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1985).

The qualitative research on student characteristics theorizes that gender and ability may influence the conference discourse and interaction, sometimes in inequitable

ways. The gender of instructor and student interacted in complex ways, often resulting in greater instructor control of the discourse and knowledge constructed for female students (Black, 1998). Conferences also differed significantly for students based on the instructor's perception of student ability. Weaker students were more like to have shorter, more directive conferences (Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997). They received fewer explanations while those provided differed in tone, vocabulary, and depth. They were less like to be praised and receive warm invitations to return (Freedman & Sperling, 1985). As Ulichny and Watson-Gegeo (1985) concluded, these findings align with the research on teacher expectations. It is possible that these instructors held lower expectations for students they perceived as low-ability, which either consciously or subconsciously impacted their instruction (frequently referred to as the Pygmalion effect, see Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Notably, only one of the studies concluded that ethnicity impacted the conference discourse (Freedman & Sperling, 1985), perhaps due to theoretical frameworks that did not explicitly examine race or ethnicity. More research is needed to understand the influence of race and ethnicity in writing conferences. Ultimately, these studies indicate writing conferences are susceptible to replicating societal inequities of gender and ability.

Classroom context. Lastly, Sperling (1990, 1991, 1992) examines the ways one instructor integrates writing conferences into a secondary classroom. The design of this study is a model for examining writing conferences qualitatively. Sperling (1990) explored the writing conferences between a highly successful ninth grade English instructor and six case students during a six-week writing unit requiring the students to complete three writing assignments. The case students were purposefully selected.

Although overwhelming female (only 1 male), the students were racially and ethnically diverse (1 White, 2 Asian American, 1 Black, and 1 Native American) and varied in writing ability as determined by grades and standardized test scores. A sociolinguistic theoretical framework coupled with ethnographic case study methodology was employed to understand how "teacher and student accomplish a one-to-one conversation," how "variables in the conference context affect the construction of conference conversations," and how "conversations [were] accomplished for different students" (p. 284). The ethnographic methodology demonstrated a holistic approach to observing the interaction of participant roles, conference discourse, and classroom context. Moreover, Sperling collected, analyzed, and triangulated multiple data sources (audio and video tapes of conference talk and other classroom activities, observational field notes, interviews with teachers and students, and student writing).

Sperling (1990) found that conferences were "socially complex" because they are influenced by both the participants and the rhetorical context. The interactions were a type of unique student-instructor collaboration "in service of the student's learning to write" (p. 318). The instructor assumed a special leadership role that engaged students and sustained the conversation. This collaboration process was unique because it differed not just between students, but also for the same student depending on the sequence of the writing task, the type of talk, and the conference purpose (planning, written comment, feedback, and external). In other words, the collaboration process shifted due to the participants and the context. Moreover, collaboration occurred on a continuum. In highly collaborative conferences, students actively negotiated ideas and revisions with the teacher and had mutual control of the conversation. While in less collaborative

conferences, students tacitly participated through silence that required the teacher to fill, drawing them out. These findings are limited by the relatively small sample size of six students; however, the case study design enabled greater depth of analysis and understanding of the broader context of these conference interactions.

In a follow up analysis, Sperling (1991) described 3 contrasting case portraits of writing conference dialogue in order to "argue for an expanded notion of what constitutes productive teacher-student talk in the context of writing instruction" (p. 132). Her purpose was to counter the prevailing assumption that a productive writing conference must include the student adopting an active role. For each portrait, she analyzed a small portion of the conference dialogue and then triangulated the findings with other conference interactions, student interviews, and revisions made to the writing product. The result showed great variety in both the conference discourse as well as the social processes of writing. Sperling (1991) hypothesized that this variation may be due to student's different "notions of their student roles, personal ease in engaging an adult interlocutor or authority figure, or willingness to verbalize their writing efforts to a more experienced teacher" (p. 155). Therefore, she concluded that it is problematic for instructors to attempt to standardized pedagogical interactions with students. Instead, productive conference talk can take a variety of forms depending on the context, the student, and instructor.

The strength of these findings is that converge with her prior study of collaborative writing conferences while addressing a prevailing assumption about conference talk. One idea that needs to be developed further is how students' cultural background and ethnic identity may influence the conference discourse. For example,

Sperling (1991) described Donald, an Asian American student for whom English was his native language, as having a "quiet manner" (p. 150). She added in the last sentence, almost as a sidebar, that this manner may reflect a "culturally derived respect for authority" (p. 150). Future studies need to develop a theoretical framework that explicitly examines the influence of students' culture within writing conferences.

Lastly, in a practitioner article, Sperling (1992) described the classroom planning, timing, and organization strategies that permitted writing conferences in a secondary classroom. The instructor was able to incorporate conferences by structuring the class with various opportunities for students to initiate conversations while simultaneously gauging the class' tolerance for independent work. He remained flexible about the structure and duration of these conversations, switching gears when the class became fidgety. This article concluded that the classroom environment was significant in fostering a regular and effective writing conference practice.

The research literature counters the practitioner assumption that effective conferences are conducted in the same way and have the same characteristics. Sperling's (1990) in-depth case study found that an effective conference is not formulaic but collaborative. The instructor and student assumed a range of roles depending on the writing task, the type of talk, and purpose. Her follow-up case portraits described the wide variation in productive conference dialogue (Sperling, 1991). Moreover, her practitioner article describes the classroom environment that facilitated these writing conferences (Sperling, 1992). Taken together, these studies illustrated how one teacher created a classroom environment that permitted frequent and responsive writing conferences.

Student Perspectives

The practitioner literature and research literature alike rarely consulted students about their experiences in writing conferences. The practitioner literature assumed that writing conferences are equally effective for *all* students regardless of background and ability, with only one article countering this assertion (Hiatt, 1975). Yet research findings indicated that a student's characteristics, his or her gender, ethnicity, and ability, may impact the writing conference interaction in less equitable ways (Black, 1998; Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997; Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1985). Four research studies incorporated students' perspectives on writing conferences. The strength of these research studies is they draw attention to students, who are an essential participant in conferences. However, they are limited by study designs that position students' perspectives as ancillary rather than central to the study. In these studies, researchers also introduce new potential factors in conferences. Specifically, they theorized the importance of the affective dimension of the writing conference interaction, which had been previously overlooked.

In representative study that examines students' perspectives, Walker and Elias (1987) had 17 instructors and students at 2 colleges rank their writing conference on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) to understand "why students view conferences favorably, specifically by asking who was doing what in conferences" (p. 268). Although building on the practitioner literature and an earlier study (Carnicelli, 1980), this research question presumed students find conferences beneficial, a clear limitation. Walker and Elias (1987) analyzed only 10 of the conference transcripts; those where the instructor's and student's rankings matched, resulting in analysis of 5 high ranked and 5 low ranked

conferences. Overall, the study found that conferences rated "excellent" by both participants frequently outlined explicit standards and then evaluated the paper based on these standards while "poor" conferences were often instructor-dominated and included moments of confusion when the instructor or student made requests for more information about the paper, writing process, or writing task. These findings are strengthened by the relatively large sample, diversity of participants, and multi-site design. Moreover, Walker and Elias (1987) took steps to addressed reliability and validity by including a detailed method section with coding scheme and tests of intercoder agreement.

Walker and Elias' (1987) study is significant because it was the first one to suggest students have mixed perceptions of writing conferences—not all students find them successful or beneficial. The study design also illustrated that instructors and students may have different metrics of success in a writing conference. After all, participants disagreed in their ratings of 7 out of the 17 conferences. These findings also indicated writing improvement was not the only measure of a successful conference. The types of talk and topics covered in a conference mattered to participants, too. For example, several conferences included direct instructor feedback that improved the paper, yet one or both participants rated their conference as unsuccessful. One limitation of this study design is that students' perspectives are only ratings, not perspectives or experiences. Notably, the study design did not ask the participants *why* they rated their conference as successful or unsuccessful. This data could have helped triangulate the discourse analysis and enabled the researchers to offer an interpretation of conferences with different student and instructor ratings.

Walker and Elias (1987) study was designed in response to Carnicelli (1980), who analyzed 1,800 freshman English course evaluations for student responses to writing conferences. Although this is the earliest study to consider students' perspectives, several design flaws make interpreting these results difficult. Carnicelli concluded that students unanimously agreed that conferences were more useful than class time, yet several students also commented that their instructors sometimes appeared unprepared, lacked listening skills, and made unclear revision suggestions in conferences. Carnicelli drew these conclusions from the comments students made on a general course evaluation survey, rather than a survey specifically designed to gather feedback about writing conferences. If specific conferencing questions were not posed on the evaluation, responses may have been biased because students with extremely positive or negative feelings could have been more likely to respond. Simple counts and an appendix with the course evaluation questions would have addressed the reliability of the study.

Researchers also found that the affective dimension of conferencing may be significant for students. Black (1998) analyzed an unknown number of student testimonials where students were asked to recall their best or worst writing conference experience. While the missing information about the collection and analysis of these testimonials is a clear limitation, Black found that students frequently wrote about how they felt and their relationship with the instructor when recalling their writing conference experiences. These testimonials signaled the importance of the emotional aspects of conferences, so she analyzed the same 14 conference transcripts for the affective dimensions of conferences. She found that since instructors determined appropriate topics for the conversation, they frequently refused to discuss affective topics. For instance, one

instructor repeatedly avoided engaging with a student's feelings about her writing, her grades, and her other classes. Another ignored his student's requests while expressing his own feelings of frustration. These findings align with her analysis of participant roles and gender, which concluded that the power dynamics of writing conferences gave the instructor final say within conferences.

Lastly, in a quantitative study, Martin and Mottet (2011) tested the effect of affective dimensions on student learning. They designed an ANOVA factorial experiment to "show how instructor use of non-verbal immediacy behaviors influence Hispanic students' affective learning in ninth-grade writing conferences, regardless of the level of feedback sensitivity provided" (p. 1). A convenience sample of 179 ninth-grade students, 96% of whom were Hispanic, were given one of four writing conference scenarios to consider and then respond to in a survey. The scenarios operationalized two independent variables: nonverbal immediacy behaviors, or the perception of closeness expressed through body language like eye contact and nods, and feedback sensitivity, or feedback that attends to the emotions of the student. The result indicated that when instructors used non-verbal immediacy behaviors, students reported an increased affect for their instructor, writing conferences, and process of writing. Moreover, this increased affect held regardless of the sensitivity of the feedback.

The results suggested that instructors can build rapport with students through their behaviors without worrying about the harshness of their feedback. It also indicated that instructors may not need to discuss students' emotional topics if appropriate rapport was built. These findings are limited in two ways, which Martin and Mottet (2011) acknowledged. First, this study lacked ecological validity. It examined conference

scenarios rather than real writing conference interactions in an attempt to control variables. As this review has shown, a variety of context factors influence the writing conference interaction (i.e., participant roles, discourse conventions, student characteristics, and classroom context), making is difficult to test the impact of a single variable. Additionally, students' prior relationship with their teacher, who was known for her conference practice, could have confounded this finding, because they may have considered their relationship with her despite the scenario provided.

Ultimately, the research on students' perspectives on conferences is incomplete. Carnicelli's (1990) finding that students unanimously believed conferencing to be more useful than classes was contradicted by the ratings of Walker and Elias (1987), which showed that students did not always find conferences successful nor did they always like them. Their findings also challenged the assumption that if the paper improved then the conference was automatically successful. Black (1998) further complicated this discussion because students recalled their emotions, not the writing advice given during a conference. This suggests that a student's relationship with an instructor, along with an instructor's ability to respond to affective topics, may inform students' definition of a successful conference. Martin and Mottet (2011) countered that developing rapport may be more significant than attending to student emotions. Ultimately, students' perspectives on writing conferences have been researched in limited ways (such as ratings and brief statements in course evaluations). Moreover, this research did not explicitly recruit students from a variety of backgrounds. More research is needed to understand student experiences.

Research Literature Discussion

In conclusion, the research draws the practitioner literature's assumptions about conferences into question. First, the practitioner literature assumes that writing conferences are universally effective. Countering this claim, researchers do not know if writing conferences are more effective than whole class instruction strategies (Graham & Perin, 2007). More research is needed to under how and in what ways writing conferences are effective. Researchers must also design studies that capture the full potential of this instructional strategy (Davis & Fulton, 1997).

Second, writing conferences are assumed to be equally effective for *all* students regardless of background and ability. Yet researchers have concluded that writing conferences are influenced by multiple context factors that change the dynamics of the interaction. They also frequently have distinct discourse conventions that students may be unfamiliar with. Researchers recommended that these expectations must be explicitly taught to students (Black, 1998; Freedman & Katz, 1987; Newkirk, 1995). Pointing to differences in effectiveness, conferences are also susceptible to replicating and magnifying the broader social inequities of gender, race and ethnicity, and ability (Black, 1998; Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997; Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1985). Lastly, students' perspectives, which are rarely included in the literature, suggest that students may have different needs in conferences, and indeed, metrics of success (Black, 1998; Martin & Mottet, 2011; Walker & Elias, 1987).

Third, effective conferences are assumed to be conducted in the same way and have the same characteristics. Sperling's (1990, 1991, 1992) in-depth case study found that effective conferences in one classroom were not formulaic but collaborative. This

instructor understood the impact of a variety of contextual factors in writing conferences, so both participants assumed a range of roles depending on the writing task, type of talk, and purpose (Sperling, 1990). These findings suggest that effective conferences should be responsive to students at a particular movement rather than predetermined.

Theoretical Perspective

Maxwell (2012) stresses the importance of theory in qualitative research. Theory is inherently explanatory *and* illuminating; it explains how the world works while highlighting new insights and understandings of a phenomenon. This research on student experiences in writing conferences is grounded in sociocultural and critical perspectives, building from the existing research on writing conferences. In his conclusion, Newkirk (1995) called for writing conferences to be viewed not as an instructional strategy but a cultural practice. As such, writing conferences "may seem highly unnatural to students who have never been asked to extensively discuss their own work or to deal with authority figures in this way" (p. 197). He warned that without viewing conferences' culture as "arbitrary," instructors "might be tempted to treat the student's hesitations and silences as signs of linguistic or intellectual deficiency" (p. 197). Indeed, this warning resonates with the research findings that instructors' perception of students' writing ability may influence the conference interaction, frequently in inequitable ways (Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997; Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1985).

Therefore, I examine student experiences in writing conferences by positioning conferences as a cultural practice embedded in the culture of power (Delpit, 1988/2006). Within a writing conference, the instructor may (inadvertently and to varying degrees)

reproduce the codes and rules of those in power, namely the White middle-class. Students, especially those from cultures outside of power (i.e., low-income, first generation, students of color), may have varying familiarity with these codes. I theorize that student experiences in writing conferences may partially be explained by their familiarity with the culture of power—their ability to navigate and negotiate the rules and codes of this cultural practice.

Sociocultural Perspective

I ground this theoretical perspective in sociocultural learning theory. Developed from the work of Lev Vygotsky (1930/1978) and others, socioculturalism posits that learning occurs through continuous engagement in social and cultural settings. While social constructivism recognizes the role of individual cognition, socioculturalism considers the individual and society as inseparable phenomena. Therefore, the focus shifts away from knowledge, which implies an individual characteristic of knowing, to cultural process understandings: "the community or the primary group (e.g., family, classroom members or play group)…serves as the repository of legitimate cultural practices rather than knowledge" (Murphy, Alexander, & Muis, 2012, p. 217). Through both formal interactions with societal institutions and informal interactions with community members, the individual appropriates "the intellectual tools and skills of the surrounding community" (Rogoff, 1990, p. 11). Learning is conceptualized as a process of the individual moving "toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community" (Lave & Wenger, 1991 p. 29). Through these "everyday" interactions and practices, the social and cultural structures of the community are reproduced (Rogoff, 1990).

The emphasis of society and culture in socioculturalism has several explanatory limitations. Socioculturalism inherently disseminates a wide, panoramic view of learning rooted in culture. Therefore, it frequently overlooks the influence of human cognitive development and the individual's ability, needs, and interests. In other words, socioculturalism cannot account for the similarities of language development across cultures or the development of a genius or virtuoso. Second, socioculturalism frequently underestimates issues of power in learning and knowledge (Gutiérrez & Larson, 1994). While communities continue to be the source of behaviors, skills, and practices, not all communities are equally valued in society. Moje and Lewis (2007) comment: "an explicit analysis of the unpredictable productions of power, as well as the systemic working of power...is often missing from sociocultural perspectives" (p. 18). Socioculturalism often overlooks communities' relationships with each other in larger systems of power, and thereby, ignores the negative values assigned to cultural practices of marginalized communities.

Although sociocultural theory is described in terms of learning and knowledge in the field of education, it also provides a useful framework to examine pedagogy—how we teach. Socioculturalism has the potential to position conferences as one of many cultural practices in the composition classroom. In this way, writing conferences are not a "natural" or "neutral" instructional strategy. Instead, they are a cultural process that reproduces the behaviors, skills, and values of a specific community. Socioculturalism highlights the importance of social interaction between student and instructor while simultaneously recognizing that both participants are socially and culturally situated,

which impacts learning in conferences. It acknowledges that students may have varying familiarity with writing conferences depending on their background.

Moreover, socioculturalism's emphasis on social interaction has strong implications for research because the unit of analysis becomes less about individual cognition and more about "children appropriating or mastering patterns of participation in group activities" (Rogoff, 1996 cited in Murphy, Alexander, & Muis, 2012, p. 217). This unit of analysis is particularly appropriate for understanding student experiences as they learn *how* to participate in a particular pedagogy. Writing conferences have potentially strict rules for participation as evidenced by their participant roles and discourse conventions, which have been frequently used to measure the success of conferences (Black, 1998). I seek insight into students' experiences participating in this cultural practice.

Critical Perspective

Lisa Delpit's (2006) concept of "the culture of power" coupled with cultural congruency and mismatch theory (Au & Jordan, 1981; Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Jordan, 1985; Mohatt & Erickson, 1981) provides an especially useful critical perspective to understand student experiences in writing conferences. This critical perspective addresses several the limitations of socioculturalism, which were discussed above. Lastly, Delpit's framework is especially helpful because it explicitly discusses the relationship between pedagogy and the culture of power. This study examines a pedagogy, writing conferences, which is enacted within the broader culture of the composition classroom.

Delpit (2006) outlined the three basic principles of power that underpin the education system in the United States. While these principles reflect the basic tenets of

educational sociology and are widely accepted, Delpit's proposed solutions have met with several critiques. She argued that students from outside of the culture of power must be explicitly taught the codes, rules, and skills of the culture in order to succeed. For literacy instruction, she emphasized a return to "basic" skills instruction in place of progressive educational strategies. Her emphasis on skills has been seen as a return to direct literacy instruction devoid of critical and higher-order thinking and reasoning. This solution can be viewed as assimilationist in that students are taught to participate in the culture of power, abandoning their home communities and maintaining the status quo.

Scholars have also raised questions about the extent the culture of power can be explicitly taught. Newkirk (1995) explained that these codes are "regulated by complex rules that we [instructors] unconsciously follow and would have trouble specifying (e.g., what constitutes 'staring'?)," especially in "swiftly-moving language situations" (p. 212). Further complicating matters, these codes are frequently context-dependent and tacit for the participants. Therefore, students may only learn these rules by participating in writing conferences—an inherently sociocultural learning process. In this study, I did not examine particular solutions to teaching the culture of power; rather I focused solely on the principles of power as a way to situate writing conferences as a cultural practice within a broader culture.

The Culture of Power. Delpit outlines three issues of power that simultaneously structure and are shaped by the classroom: 1) "*Issues of power are enacted in classrooms;*" 2) "*There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a 'culture of power;'*" and 3) "*The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power"* (Delpit, 2006, p. 24, emphasis in original).

Delpit contends that power is especially present in the instructor's curricula, pedagogical, and assessment choices of what is taught, how it is taught, and how learning is evaluated and measured. Each of these choices is an example of power enacted. Individuals participate in power each and every day in their daily lives and interactions. Their participation is dictated by a set of codes or rules. Together, these codes or rules form a larger culture, the culture of power. In the United States, the White, upper- and middle-class primarily hold power. Institutions, like education, are primarily grounded in and reproduce their culture.

In terms of the classroom, the culture of power influences daily interactions. Delpit (2006) clarified that "The codes or rules I'm speaking of relate to linguistic forms, communicative strategies, and presentation of self; that is, ways of talking, ways of writing, ways of dressing, and ways of interacting" (p. 25). In the classroom, many of these codes are not taught explicitly (such as types of literacy) but implicitly transmitted (such as rules for body language and eye contact) through interactions with individuals seeped in the culture of power, often their teacher or peers. Moreover, these codes are neither arbitrary nor neutral. They are rooted in a culture of power that values some behaviors, skills, and ways of being over others.

Individuals must learn to adhere and navigate the rules and codes of this culture. Delpit (2006) explains that academic success is "predicated upon acquisition of the culture of those who are in power" (p. 25). Frequently upper and middle-class students are more successful in school because they grow up fully immersed in the culture of power, gaining what Delpit calls "the accouterments of the culture" or what Bourdieu (1986) refers to as "cultural capital." In contrast, non-white and not middle-class students

often come from cultures outside of power with their own distinct rules and codes. These students have varying exposure to the culture of power, and consequently, may struggle to identify and adhere to new codes crucial to success in education (Delpit, 2006). They may also recognize the arbitrariness of these codes, highly value the codes of their own cultural background, or recognize a conflict between the codes of their background and school codes, and therefore, refuse or resist adhering to the codes of the culture of power.

Cultural congruency and mismatch theory. When the cultures of school and students' homes do not align, education researchers call this phenomenon cultural incompatibility or cultural mismatch. Cultural mismatch theory posits: "the differences between schools and students are based on a mismatch between the structure of schools and the social, cultural, or economic backgrounds of students" (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001, p. 527). In other words, the culture of school—its values, practices, participation structures, discourse patterns, and epistemological stances—does not align with the home culture of some students, frequently students from marginalized communities. The opposite of cultural mismatch is cultural congruency where the culture of school closely aligns with the home culture of students. Cultural mismatch theory has been used to broadly explain the academic achievement of groups of students. Specifically, cultural mismatch theory posits that white, middle-class students as a group tend to have better academic outcomes because the majority of primary, secondary, and post-secondary school culture reflect their culture. Conversely, students from underrepresented groups tend to have worse academic outcomes because the school culture does not reflect their home culture, therefore fundamentally disadvantaging their learning.

Cultural mismatch theory was developed from ethnographic studies of communication between teacher and student (Au & Jordan, 1981; Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Jordan, 1985; Mohatt & Erickson, 1981). These studies identified multiple ways common classroom discourse and pedagogy was incompatible with students' home culture. They found that students' reading test scores improved as teachers adopted communication norms and pedagogies better aligned with students' home cultures. More recently, researchers have identified mismatches between school codes and student's storytelling (Miller et al., 2005), language play (Lee, 2007), and directives (Ballenger, 1999). Cultural mismatch theory provided the basis for new pedagogical theories aimed at bridging the gap between school and home cultures, including multicultural education (Clark, 2002; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; Nieto, 1999), culturally responsive (Gay, 2010), culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012).

There are several broad critiques of cultural mismatch theory. Similar to socioculturalism, cultural mismatch theory has the potential to overgeneralize the influence of culture and obscure natural variations within a community. In research studies, culture is frequently treated as static (e.g., the values of individualism versus cooperation) rather than dynamic and responsive to a particular context (e.g., the varying influence of individualism on a group of students' behavior and communication norms during a whole class discussion on a particular topic). Cultural mismatch theory also tends to view culture separate from broader societal structures and contexts. Villegas (1988) critiqued cultural mismatch theory for isolating student's home cultures from the dominant society at larger. This isolation ignores the power dynamics inherent to

education: “school is not a neutral ground for proving talent, as some would have us believe. As the education system is currently organized, it functions to maintain the advantage of the socially powerful” (p. 260). Focusing on the mismatch of language, values, or practices diverts attention from the social and political nature of education.

In practice, researchers and practitioners often misuse cultural mismatch theory by overlooking the social critique inherent to the theory. Cultural mismatch theory was developed to explain the effects of institutionalized schooling norms on groups of students from marginalized communities, yet it is often used to explain the academic failings of particular individuals. In these cases, students’ lack of academic achievement is attributed to them simply not fitting in (Secules et. al, 2016). This interpretation reflects a deficit perspective because it frames the individual as the singular source of the problem rather than critically examining the contribution of the learning environment.

Ladson-Billing (1995) echoed this critique, acknowledging that cultural mismatch theory positions the incompatibility between school and home cultures as a problem to be solved. Proposed solutions frequently are assimilationist rather than critical: “student ‘success’ is represented in achievement within the current social structures extant in schools” (Ladson-Billing, 1995, p. 467). Likewise, researchers using cultural mismatch theory frequently define success solely in terms academic achievement, frequently measured by grades and standardized test scores, rather than adopting a broader definition of success that could include an equitable classroom learning environment and student experiences. By defining success solely in terms of academic achievement, cultural mismatch theory fails to consider the processes by which students learn.

Despite these limitations, research suggests cultural mismatch can be a relevant framework to examine student experiences. For example, recent scholarship has tested the effects of cultural mismatch on students' psychological state. Stephens, Townsend, Markus, and Phillips (2012) hypothesized that cultural mismatch between independence cultural norms in higher education and interdependence cultural norms of first generation college students adversely affected first generation college students psychologically and physically. To test this hypothesis, 84 college freshman (35 first generation and 47 continuing generation) were randomly assigned to one of two intervention groups where they read different welcome messages emphasizing either independent or interdependent culture. The students then gave a short speech describing their college goals. The study found that first generation college students experienced cultural mismatch, evidenced by "higher increases in cortisol and less positive/more negative emotions than continuing-generation students while giving a speech" (Stephens et al., 2012, p. 1392). In other words, first generation college students reported more negative emotions, which influenced their physiological state negatively. This study's strength lies in its mixed-method design that measured cortisol levels and analyzed speech content according to predetermined conceptual categories.

Although additional studies are needed to replicate findings, this emerging line of inquiry suggests that cultural mismatch theory is a potentially useful theoretical framework to investigate student experiences of schooling. Specifically, it indicates that the emotions students experience while completing academic tasks may be influenced by their familiarity with the cultural norms of higher education. In this study, I used cultural mismatch theory to describe student experiences in writing conferences. This approach is

a departure from the traditional use of cultural mismatch theory to explain student academic achievement. By examining student experiences, this use of cultural mismatch theory expands the definition of success to include the classroom learning environment and the processes by which students learn.

Potential cultural mismatch of writing conferences. Delpit's (2006) culture of power has the potential to explain part of the dynamics of writing conferences. As a classroom pedagogy, researchers have unsurprisingly observed several issues of power in writing conferences. Black (1998) described how instructors controlled the knowledge constructed and the discourse within conferences. Newkirk (1995) concluded that instructors' role as expert necessitated a façade of competence, while Ulichny and Watson-Gegeo (1985) concluded that teachers may evaluate students' intelligence based on their cooperation and alignment with their interpretation of knowledge within the conference. Black (1998) surmised that the one-on-one nature of writing conferences frequently replicates inequitable power relations of gender, ethnicity, and ability found in the broader society. In each of these studies, the instructor is enacting power—power over the knowledge, participant roles, and parameters of intelligence.

Writing conferences also have been portrayed as having strict, albeit contradictory, codes or rules for participation. The practitioner literature outlined opposing roles and discourse conventions for students. Sometimes instructors expect students to remain passive in conferences, answering instructors' questions and watching them model how to evaluate writing (e.g., Beach, 1989). Other times, instructors may expect students to assume active roles, directing the conversation by talking more, determining an agenda, and evaluating their work independently (e.g., Murray, 1979).

While the practitioner literature discussed roles and discourse conventions explicitly, Delpit (2006) also stressed that classrooms have a variety of implicit codes. These codes are often invisible, especially for teachers who are frequently deeply acculturated in the culture of power. Indeed, there are likely unsaid codes for conference participation. For example, instructors expecting students to assume an active participant role in conferences may unwittingly consider sustained eye contact part of such a role. In this way, writing conferences may have strict codes (both explicit and implicit) that students must decipher to successfully participate.

Lastly, writing conferences are likely embedded in the culture of power because they are a part of two institutions—higher education and the field of composition—which inhabit unique positions in the culture. Scholars agreed that colleges and universities are not culturally "neutral," but the product of a hegemonic system that has codified Western and middle-class knowledge, behaviors, and values (Chang, 2002; Marchesani & Adams, 1992; Olneck, 2002; Smith, 1989; Tierney, 1999). Olneck (2002) added that while all education institutions value "particular knowledge, linguistic behavior, styles, dispositions, and modes of thought and expression" (p. 320), higher education serves as the final arbitrator of these elements. It determines what knowledge is valuable and who has the authority to decide through its daily operation—conducting research, defining the canon, and granting degrees. In this way, higher education plays a key role in establishing the codes and rules that make up the culture of power.

Furthermore, several composition scholars have argued that composition, and more specifically the first year composition (FYC) course, also maintains the culture of power. Historically, the field of composition studies developed in conjunction with FYC.

At the turn of the 19th century, FYC was created partially in response to an influx of students from diverse backgrounds enrolling in higher education (Crowley, 1998). The course was created to normalize the language of these new students, ensuring they wrote in a “pure” English discourse (Crowley, 1998, p. 78). Bloom (1996) characterized the contemporary FYC course as a “middle class enterprise” in that it taught specific values central to the middle class—self-reliance, propriety, efficiency, punctuality, and delayed gratification. Bloom concluded that FYC’s ultimate learning object was teaching values not writing skills. Lastly, Redd (2006) argued that FYC prescribes "a purpose, texts, rhetoric, and language that are rooted in the Euro-American values of the dominant culture in this country" (p. 72). FYC requires students to conform to White values and language codes, yet through this process, it represses many so-called “disadvantaged” students with rich linguistic backgrounds.

The composition scholars discussed above align with Delpit’s (2006) critique of the culture of power. They made the case that FYC replicates White, middle-class values and discourse. Moreover, they argued that FYC has a unique institutional role as a so-called “gatekeeper course,” as nearly all students must successfully complete a FYC course before progressing to upper division coursework. Bloom added that the gatekeeping function of the course often prevents students from continuing their education until they demonstrate the appropriate middle-class values.

As a staple pedagogy in the composition classroom, it can be argued that writing conferences are a cultural practice embedded in the culture of power. Newkirk (1995) surmised the relationship between this culture and writing conferences. Drawing from Delpit’s (2006) critique of process pedagogy, he explained that writing conferences

frequently “radically shift[] conversational and evaluative responsibility to the student” just like process pedagogy’s “highly implicit, often indirect conversational style that is characteristic of ‘mainstream’ middleclass talk” (Newkirk, 1995, p. 197). He argued that writing conferences enact the discourse codes of those in power, namely the White middle-class. He expounded that students, especially those from cultures outside of power (e.g., low-income, first generation, students of color) may have varying familiarity with these codes. Newkirk description points to areas of potential mismatch in the writing conference.

The culture of power and cultural mismatch theory provide a potentially useful frame to critically examine writing conferences. Socioculturalism holds that writing conferences are not a “natural” pedagogy as the practitioner literature asserts, but processes that reproduce the behaviors, skills, and values of a specific community. However, as Moje and Lewis (2007) argued, socioculturalism frequently underestimates the influence of systemic power. Writing conferences may reflect and reproduce the behaviors, skills, and values of the fields of composition studies and higher education, repositories of White, middle-class culture. Delpit (2006) critiqued the codes or rules required for everyday participation in the culture of power—the codes that writing conferences may reproduce.

This critical framework is especially helpful to reframe the common assumptions made about conferences. While the writing conference literature extensively discussed these codes—how to act and what to say—they rarely critiqued them (for exceptions, see Black, 1998; Newkirk, 1995). I assert that a critical framework is essential to exploring student experiences in writing conferences because it counters the prevalent assumption

from the practitioner literature that *all* students find writing conferences beneficial. There is potential for cultural mismatch between the codes of writing conferences and the codes of students' prior educational experiences and home culture. Students' experiences may be shaped by the extent they are familiar with or were exposed to the codes of this cultural practice—the extent the writing conference is culturally congruent or mismatched. My assertion is supported by recent research that has used to cultural mismatch theory to help explain first generation college students' experiences (Stephens, Townsend, Markus, & Phillips, 2012). The conceptual framework in the next section outlines a model for understanding student experiences in writing conferences.

As a final note, Delpit's (2006) framework also has significant explanatory limitations for the understanding individual interactions. The culture of power is helpful to understand the macro, structural level culture: classrooms as part of larger institutions, widespread phenomena like standardized testing, and accepted beliefs about pedagogy, such as writing conferences. However, it does not fully explain the process by which the culture of power is enacted at the micro, individual level through daily interactions. It also does not account for natural variation in the way individuals approach and enact this culture. Delpit simply points to individual interactions as sites of the culture of power. Therefore, in extending this theory to the micro level, I contend that individuals bring varying backgrounds, experiences, and expectations that influence the way the culture of power is enacted.

In the case of writing conferences, instructors have successfully completed an advanced degree, marking them as community members of English or composition and higher education. They have likely participated in writing conferences as a student. Yet

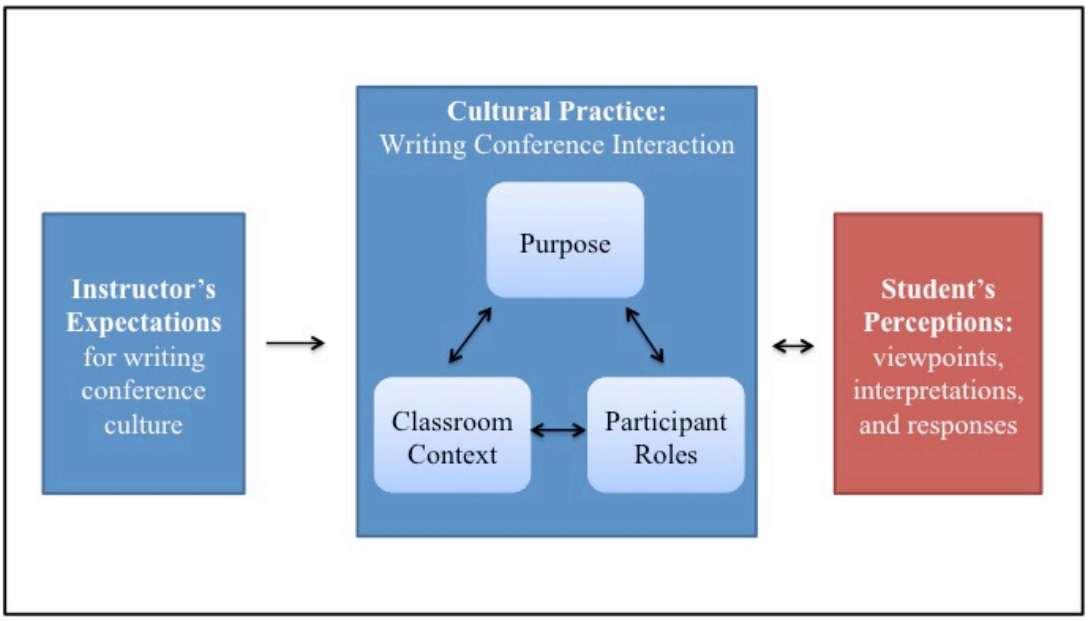
they may also bring with them a host of experiences, some of which may be from outside of the culture of power, that influence their conference practices. I believe that it is likely individual instructors stress different components of the culture of power in writing conferences. For instance, some instructors may feel strongly that students should direct conferences by setting an agenda while other instructors want to use their individual time for review of a particular concept or skill. Further complicating matters, these priorities likely shift depending on the purpose, classroom context, and student. My conceptual framework attempts to account for the way the instructor conceptualizes and enacts writing conferences as a cultural practice, translating the macro framework for micro interactions and localize understandings.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework outlines the "main things to be studied—the key factors, variables, or constructs—and the presumed interrelationship among them" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 20). In the previous theoretical discussion, I posited student experiences may be shaped by the extent the writing conference interaction is culturally congruent or mismatched. In Figure 1, I build on my theoretical understanding by proposing a conceptual framework. This framework maps the factors that potentially shape the writing conference culture and hypothesizes the relationships between these factors and students' perceptions. In the following section, I describe each of the factors depicted in Figure 1 and their relationships.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of Factors Influencing Students' Experiences



Cultural Practice: Writing Conference Interaction

The writing conference, the interaction between instructor and student, is at the heart of this conceptual framework. Based on my literature review findings, I have identified three primary factors that comprise any writing conference interaction: purpose, participant roles, and classroom context. These factors form the basis of the codes or rules required to successfully participate in this cultural practice. I hypothesize they may also be the domains where cultural mismatch between the conference and students can potentially occur.

Purpose. I define the purpose as *the objectives or intended outcomes of conferences*. Although a few practitioners envisioned students establishing an agenda for the conference (Newkirk, 1989; Murray, 1979), the literature mostly discussed purpose in terms of instructors' goals. The practitioner literature described two overarching purposes

for writing conferences: to scaffold the writing process (i.e., Beach, 1989) and to change the instructor-student relationship from adversarial to helping (i.e., Murray, 1979). The findings from my pilot study on writing conferences converged with the practitioner literature's discussion of purpose. Instructors viewed writing as an instructional strategy to address a difficult writing task and to build a relationship with a student. (Appendix B includes pilot study findings).

Only one research study extensively discussed the purpose of conferences. In a case study, Sperling (1990) identified four purposes of one instructor's writing conference practice: planning, written comment, feedback, and external. Notably, these purposes describe different approaches to scaffolding students' writing. Sperling (1991) also considered students' conceptions of the purpose of writing conferences: "students appeared to have differing ideas of what conference conversation would accomplish for them" (p. 136). This finding converges with the implications of Walker and Elias' (1987) study. They found that one-third of students (7 out of 17) rated the success of the conference differently than their instructor. This implies that instructor and student may have different expectations for the purpose of conferences.

Participant roles. I define participant roles as *the way participants act, communicate, and present themselves*. As my literature review has shown, the practitioner and research literature alike extensively discussed participant roles. The central tension throughout the literature is the role students should adopt during a conference: a traditional classroom, "student" role or a new "active" role. The new active student role has been labeled in various ways, "writer" (Murray, 1979), "conversant" (Jacobs & Karliner, 1977), or "author" (French, 1999). Sperling (1991) argued for a

broader interpretation of the student role as students may have "different notions of their student roles, personal ease in engaging an adult interlocutor or authority figure, or willingness to verbalize their writing efforts to a more experienced teacher" (p. 155). Notably, she hypothesized that a student's cultural heritage may influence his or her role (Sperling, 1991). Researchers discussed the instructor's role in the way that it supports, a "manager" (Freedman & Katz, 1987) or "special leadership" (Sperling, 1990) role. It also described how the instructor hinders the students' role (Black, 1998; Newkirk, 1995).

Classroom context. I define the classroom context as *the broader setting of the conference such as the rhetorical task, number of conferences, conference space, timing during student's writing process, and timing during the semester*. Sperling (1990, 1991, 1992) stressed the impact of the context in which the conference interaction occurred on the conference discourse: interaction patterns often vary not only for different students but also for groups of students as the place in the sequence of tasks in which the conference occur varies, as the type of conference varies, or as the purpose of the conference varies (Sperling, 1990, p. 306). It should be noted once more that the factors overlap in Sperling's explanation. For instance, the rhetorical task and conference purpose necessarily inform each other. Sperling goes on to explain that the conference discourse changed over time with tasks (i.e., as students wrote and conferenced more frequently, the discourse and participant roles shifted). Moreover, the conference space, which in this case was the classroom, was significant in that it created "multiple and variable opportunities" for regular conferences during class time. This space, however, forewent regularly scheduled conferences that ensured equal participation from students (Sperling, 1992, p. 70).

Relationships between factors. As the definitions above illustrate, the three conference factors, *purpose, classroom context*, and *participant roles*, frequently overlap and influence each other. The literature does not specify the relationship between these factors, such as prioritizing certain factors to suggest a hierarchy. Therefore, I have represented these factors as influencing each other through bidirectional arrows.

Instructor's Expectations

In addition to the conference interaction, I hypothesize two additional factors to explain the culture of writing conferences and students' experiences . I posit that the culture of the conference is directly influenced by the instructor's expectations for this practice. I operationalize the instructor's expectations as *the instructor's description of his or her writing conference practice*. Since the instructor is likely a full member of the culture of power, as signified by an advanced degree in English, he or she may have varying awareness of the cultural codes and norms of conferences (Delpit, 2006). Therefore, I opted to have the instructor describe his or her expectations for the conference factors: purpose, participant roles, and classroom context. These factors provide insights into the instructor's understanding of the cultural codes of conferences, the most apparent norms and assumptions. As the most powerful person in conferences, it is likely the instructor determines and enforces these codes according to his or her tacit cultural expectations. Indeed, researchers found that the instructor frequently controlled the topics of discussion, discourse, participant roles, and knowledge constructed in conferences (Black, 1998; Freedman & Katz, 1987; Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Newkirk, 1995; Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1985). Understanding the instructor's

expectations for conferences provide insight into the explicit and tacit culture, the codes and rules of the interaction.

Student's Perceptions

I define student's perceptions as *an individual student's viewpoints, interpretations, and responses to writing conferences*. The literature suggested several fruitful areas of students' perceptions to examine. First, students' viewpoints of conferences refer to their evaluation of the practice and class. Walker and Elias (1987) found that many students evaluate the success of their conferences differently than their instructors, which indicated differing viewpoints on the practice. Second, the way students interpret writing conferences. This interpretation includes their understanding of the purpose and participant roles, and the relationship between the classroom context and conferences. Student's interpretations of conferences have largely been overlooked in the conference literature. The only relevant finding is from Sperling (1990) study, which suggested that students may hold different understandings of the purpose of conferences. Lastly, the way students respond to writing conferences. These responses include the way the acted during the conference, the emotions they felt, and the actions they planned to take afterwards. The literature on students' perspectives on conferences has focused primarily on the affective dimensions of conferencing, student's emotions. Black (1998) suggested that the affective dimension of conferencing might be the most significant element, because students recalled their emotions most readily. In contrast, Martin and Mottet (2011) found that developing rapport might replace the need for attending to student emotions in writing conferences.

Relationships

I hypothesize multiple relationships between the instructor's expectations, the writing conference interaction, and students' perceptions. First, I represent the relationship between the instructor's expectations and the writing conference interaction with a single arrow because these expectations directly shape the conference factors and resulting cultural norms. This arrow points in a single direction because I theorize it is unlikely that a single conference significantly changes the instructor's expectations for his or her practice. Instead, I believe that these expectations generally change only after extensive critical reflection. Second, I represent the relationships between the writing conference interaction and students' perceptions with a bidirectional arrow. This bidirectional arrow shows the way the conference can change dynamically based on students' perceptions and reactions during the conference. For example, if a student becomes visibly angry or sad during the conference, it's likely the instructor's purpose and roles for the conference would shift accordingly. In this way, students' perceptions may influence the overall writing conference interaction.

Cultural Mismatch

My conceptual framework outlines the prominent factors that may influence the culture of writing conferences: the purpose, participant roles, and classroom context. I hypothesize that students' experiences, students' collective perceptions of conferences, are shaped by the extent conferences are culturally congruent or mismatched. Students may enter conferences with different interpretations of the purpose or participant roles for the interaction, which impacts their response to and evaluation of the conference itself. In

this way, students' experiences collectively may be explained by students' understanding of, access to, and willingness to participate in the cultural practice, writing conferences.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed the practitioner literature in order to understand the key assumptions about conference efficacy. I traced the extent these assumptions are supported or refuted in the research literature in order to understand the needs and approaches to writing conference research. Within this examination, I found that the research literature frequently missed steps to ensure reliability and validity, such as vague descriptions of methods and data collection procedures, drawing from small sample sizes, and omitting member checks. I also concluded that the literature rarely included students' perspectives when studying conferences. Therefore, I described a critical sociocultural framework, cultural mismatch theory, which attempts to explain the extent, if any, the culture of writing conferences appears to shape students' experiences . I then proposed a conceptual framework that theorized the factors that potentially shape the writing conference culture and hypothesize the relationship between these factors and students' perceptions. I conclude by positing that students' experiences in writing conference may be shaped by the extent conferences are culturally congruent or mismatched.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present my study design to answer my central research question: *What are students' experiences in writing conferences in a blended first year composition course?* The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between students' experiences and the culture of an instructor's writing conference practice. Therefore, I developed several sub-questions based on my conceptual framework to structure my inquiry:

1. *How did the instructor describe the culture of her writing conference practice in relation to purpose, participant roles, and classroom context?*
2. *What is the culture of the writing conferences in practice?*
3. *What are students' perceptions (i.e., their viewpoints, interpretations, and responses) on writing conferences?*
4. *To what extent, if any, did the culture appear to shape students' experiences in writing conferences?*

In alignment with the interpretive nature of these questions, I use qualitative case study methodology to examine the experiences of six students in an instructor's writing conferences in a blended first year composition course. I describe my rationale for a qualitative case study methodology, the case selection, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Within this discussion, I address possible threats to validity and reliability and the steps that I took to minimize them.

Study Design

Maxwell (2012) characterizes qualitative research as especially appropriate for studies that aim to understand "the *meaning* for participants," "the particular *context* of

within which the participants act," and "the *process* by which events and actions take place" (p. 19). Merriam (2009) adds that qualitative research "assume[s] that meaning is embedded in people's experience and that this meaning is mediated through the investigator's own perceptions" (p. 6). Unlike quantitative research, which often attempts to isolate generalizable variables in order to determine correlations, qualitative researchers study the relationship between these "variables" (referred to as factors onward) within a particular context. In my central research question, I seek to examine students' experiences in writing conferences within the broader context of their blended first year composition course. My purpose is to examine the relationship between students' experiences and the culture of the writing conference. Therefore, this study focuses on the *meanings* students make of their experiences. It situates these experiences within the broader *context*, the culture of the writing conference, and describes the *process* by which students participate in this practice. In these ways, I contend that both my research purpose and questions are well aligned with a qualitative approach to research.

I selected case study methodology to examine student experiences in writing conferences. Case study is best when researchers "desire to understand a complex social phenomena" (Yin, 2014, p. 4) because it provides a methodology to collect and analyze a variety of data sources—documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations. Flyvbjerg (2001) explains that case study is well suited to develop the context-dependent and particular knowledge that forms the basis of human affairs. He argues that this type of knowledge is frequently more useful than predictive theories. I contend that this type of knowledge may be especially helpful for pedagogies like writing conferences, which are

considered best practices yet are influenced by numerous contextual factors (e.g., Sperling, 1990). Merriam (2009) contends that case study is particularly appropriate for education research because of its potential to change practice: "Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of the phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminations meanings that expand its readers' experiences" (p. 41). I found case study's potential to impact practice especially appealing given the prominence of writing conferences in the composition classroom.

Nevertheless, there are several limitations to case study research. First, because researchers are the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, their ethics are significant. Researchers must examine how their own biases and subjectivity may impact data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009), and it is possible for researchers to oversimplify or exaggerate results (Yin, 2014). Consequently, researchers need to take steps to address validity and reliability concerns in study design, data collection, and analysis. Additionally, case study results can be lengthy and detailed, not making them easily accessible for readers. Readers can misinterpret a case study as representing the whole phenomenon rather than a narrow part (Merriam, 2009). Researchers must take care to consider their readers when drafting reports. I designed my case study, data collection and data analysis procedures with these strengths and limitations in mind.

To guide the design of my case study, I primarily consulted two texts: Merriam's (2009) *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* and Yin's (2014) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. I found Merriam's definition of case study and use of theory most helpful. She describes a pragmatic approach to case study that balances methodological rigor with the realities of conducting field research. Merriam's

vision of case study emphasizes iteration and discovery because the parameters of the study are frequently defined through the process of data collection and analysis. I coupled Merriam with Yin, who prescribes a meticulous, linear process to case study research. Yin pays particular attention to validity and reliability concerns in order to address many of the perceived limitations of case study methodology. He outlines clear steps with which researchers can align their case study design and procedures to meet the expectations of the broader positivistic canon of social science research. Taken together, Merriam and Yin provide a strong theoretical foundation for my study design, data collection, and data analysis.

Merriam (2009) defines a case study as "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40). The bounded system can be a phenomenon, a program, an institution, a person, or community. My bounded system is the writing conferences in a first year composition course (FYC) course. Conferences are intrinsically bound in that they are one-on-one meetings between student and teacher that last a finite amount of time (between 10-30 minutes), occur periodically (1 to 3 times a semester), and conclude at the end of the composition course. Yin (2014) adds that case study "investigates a contemporary phenomenon ('the case') in depth and within its real-world context" (p. 16). Therefore, he characterizes case study as appropriate for descriptive or explanatory research—often answering "how" and "why" questions. My research questions are descriptive in that I seek to examine student experiences in writing conferences within the broader context of the blended first year composition course.

Case study is a suitable methodology because of the nature of my research problem and questions. Merriam (2009) advises a case study when the research problem

is context-dependent: “The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (p. 41). Moreover, Yin (2014) counsels case study when the phenomenon and context are closely intertwined. Writing conferences are inextricably tied to the broader classroom and societal contexts. Research suggests that multiple factors influence conferences such as the purpose of conversation, participants, roles assumed, writing context, institutional context, and timing (e.g., Sperling, 1990). Moreover, conferences can be susceptible to replicating and magnifying inequities in society, such as gender, race, ethnicity, ability, and status (Black, 1998; Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997; Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1985). Since these factors cannot be isolated and controlled, I contend case study is a robust methodology to account for the relationship amongst these factors and identify factors students perceive as significant to their experiences.

Since I examine writing conferences from a critical sociocultural theoretical perspective, I chose a single case study design that is *interpretive* in approach. Yin (2014) explains that a single case is appropriate “when the relevant theory underlying the case study is itself of a holistic nature” (p. 55). My theoretical framework, cultural mismatch theory, attempts to explain the extent, if any, the culture of writing conferences appears to shape students’ experiences . This framing does not focus on the particularities of each individual student’s perceptions, which would call for a multiple-case design. Instead, it centers on students’ collective experience in the case, writing conferences. This single-case design mirrors previous case studies that examine conferences between a teacher and a small number of students (Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Sperling, 1990). Therefore, this

study is a single-case study design with multiple embedded units, which are the student participants.

An interpretive case study underscores the importance of theory by using descriptive data to "develop conceptual categories or to illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering" (Merriam, 2009, p. 38). This approach is especially salient for research on writing conferences given the field of composition's prevalent beliefs about the practice, namely they are a universally effective practice for all students regardless of background and ability. Interpretive case study affirms the need to collect multiple viewpoints that may challenge our assumptions about a phenomenon. The writing conference literature rarely includes students' perspectives on writing conferences (e.g., Carnicelli, 1980), and when students' perspectives are added, the samples frequently are homogenous, overlooking students from diverse backgrounds. My study seeks out students' perspectives, including students from underrepresented groups.

My choice of case study builds on and responds to the existing research about conferences. Writing conferences are examined primarily through qualitative research. These studies often neglect to include specifics regarding methods, participants, data collection, and analysis (e.g., Jacobs & Karliner, 1979). Frequently, they draw from small samples, one or two cases. A handful of larger studies include multiple teachers, but they have significant limitations in conceptualization and study design (e.g., Black, 1998). Only two relatively recent studies explicitly describe case study as their methodology (Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Sperling, 1990). I consider Sperling (1990) to be an exemplar of rigorous research in that the study uses a sociolinguistic theoretical

framework and couples it with ethnographic case study methodology. This study follows the tradition of qualitative research to examine writing conferences but expands to include an explicit theoretical framework and research methodology.

In this section, I make the case that the nature of my phenomenon and my research questions are well suited for a qualitative case study. Student experiences in writing conferences are a contextually bound phenomenon. Multiple data sources are available for collection and analysis, which provides a rich understanding of the culture of this classroom practice. An interpretative approach to case study is appropriate because of the strong theoretical assumptions practitioners and researchers hold about writing conferences. With these elements in mind, I turn to selecting my case and study participants.

Case Selection

In this study, I examine student experiences in writing conferences in a first year composition class. Since in my theoretical framework I posit that writing conferences are a cultural practice that reflect the culture of power (Delpit, 2006), I sought the perspectives of underrepresented students who are less familiar with the culture of power and commonly overlooked in the writing conference literature. Therefore, my case selection process consisted of searching for a college or university with an English department that encourages instructors to practice writing conferences regularly *and* enrolls a diverse student population that includes a significant number of underrepresented students. I considered recruiting an instructor from a local community college, which would have had the desirable student population. However, community college instructors' writing conference practices can vary widely due to varying

department requirements, larger class sizes, and expansive teaching commitments. Further complicating matters, I logistically did not have access to any community colleges and would have been unable to get permission in my timeframe for this study (Spring 2016).

With these considerations in mind, I selected a four-year research comprehensive university as the context to select my case instructor. Mid-Atlantic University (pseudonym) is a large, public, land grant institution that enrolls approximately 25,000 undergraduate students. As an institution located in a former slave state, Mid-Atlantic University was historically segregated, but now enrolls a significant number of racially and ethnically diverse students, which reflects the demographic makeup of the state (Asian: 16%; Black or African American: 12%; Hispanic or Latino 9%; two or more races: 4%; American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: less than 1%; White: 53%). Forty-one percent of undergraduate students identify as students of color, approximately 21% identify as an underrepresented minority, 3% as foreign. In this way, Mid-Atlantic University is a primarily white institution that now serves an increasingly diverse student population. This history aligns with the premise of the culture of power (Delpit, 2006), and it is likely that the FYC classroom culture at Mid-Atlantic could reflect the expectations and norms of the White, middle-class.

Mid-Atlantic University also has a strong first year composition program that endorses regular writing conferences. The first year composition (FYC) course is a cornerstone of the general education requirement—a robust core curriculum that aims to develop five fundamental skills and expose students to a variety of disciplines. All students, regardless of AP credits and placement scores, take the first year writing course

to develop their inquiry and argumentation skills. Through required series of six writing assignments, students learn how to analyze and employ rhetorical strategies, assess the credibility of resources, and write persuasively. The program is nationally recognized for its use of best practices and commitment to diversity. It considers writing conferences a best practice. The standard syllabus for FYC, which all new instructors and graduate students are required to follow, cancels class twice a semester for individual writing conferences. Considered a graded event, students who do not attend their scheduled writing conference are penalized with a class absence.

Although another college or university would have also been a productive setting for this study, I consider Mid-Atlantic University an appropriate context to study student experiences in writing conferences. Mid-Atlantic University combines the underrepresented student population found at many community colleges with the demanding academics found at prestigious private colleges and universities. I felt confident that I would find an appropriate instructor in its nationally recognized first year composition program that endorses regular writing conferences.

Instructor selection. After determining the institutional context, I selected an instructor with a classroom context and conference practice conducive to my case study. Using a purposeful sampling method, my goal was to find an instructor “from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 61). Stake (1995) argues that "it is often more useful to pick the one [case] most likely to enhance our understanding than to pick the one most typical. In fact, highly atypical cases can sometimes contribute to our understanding of other cases" (p. 134). Therefore, I looked for an experienced instructor with a writing conference practice central to his or her teaching commitments. To identify

potential instructor participants, I contacted two members of the FYC program, one the former director and a current administrator/senior lecturer. From discussions with them, I generated a recommended list of 10 instructors with 2 particular instructors widely known for their writing conference practice.

I followed up by email with all ten instructors identified, 7 of whom expressed a willingness to participate in the study (Appendix C includes IRB approval). I then evaluated each instructor on the following criteria: 1) experience-level, requiring a minimum of a Master's of Arts degree and two years of experience teaching college composition; 2) writing conference practice, requiring a minimum of two individual conferences per semester; and 3) writing conference beliefs, describing conferences as a central component of his or her pedagogy. I met in-person with instructors who met the minimum criteria, four in total, to discuss the case study purpose, time commitment, and logistics.

Ultimately, I selected Ms. Patti Collins (pseudonym) to participate in my study. One of the two instructors highly recommended by my contacts in the English Department, Patti identifies as a white woman who was the first person in her family to attend college. Patti is a highly prepared, both academically and pedagogically, first year composition instructor with 20 years of teaching experience. Unlike many of her graduate student instructor colleagues, Patti taught English for 15 years at private high schools and has spent the last five years as a part-time composition instructor at Mid-Atlantic. Her qualifications include both a Master's of Arts in English and a Master's of Fine Arts in creative writing from Mid-Atlantic University.

Patti holds strong beliefs about her writing conferences, which are reflected in her practice. In her initial email responding to my request to participate in this study, she wrote: "I believe strongly in the value of writing conferences and am very curious about your research. Count me in." As a high school teacher, Patti taught at a private school that gave students a great deal of freedom in both time and movement. The students' freedom enabled her to schedule regular writing conferences during the school day, a rare opportunity given the restrictions in most high schools. She reflected "it was really nice to be able to have students come and talk to me whenever about papers they were working on or ideas they were having." She attributed this experience with developing her strong beliefs about the effectiveness of regular writing conferences. She continues her conference practice at Mid-Atlantic University where she meets with students individually three times a semester for 20 minutes apiece. Her conferences are longer and occur more frequently than the standard writing conferences suggested by the FYC program (two per semester for 10 minutes apiece). In total, she meets with students every four to five weeks through the semester. Since Patti was amenable to participate in the study and fit my pre-established criteria, I considered her writing conferences a fitting context for my case study.

Student selection. Since my case is the phenomenon of students' experiences in writing conferences, I selected my within-case participants from the students enrolled in Patti's blended first year composition course. Merriam (2009) recommends sampling until data saturation is reached but acknowledges that the number of participants often needs to be adjusted during the course of a study. Prior studies of writing conferences focus on relatively small numbers of students, anywhere from two students (Jacobs &

Karliner, 1977; Newkirk, 1995) to six students (Sperling, 1990) to 14 students (Black, 1998). Since FYC classes at Mid-Atlantic University are capped at 19 students, I intended to select six students or approximately one-third of the class. I concluded that six students was an appropriate sample size to reach data saturation while balancing the feasibility of a study with a single researcher with ambitious data collection plans (i.e., course observations, conference recordings, multiple interviews, artifacts).

To select student participants, I administered a short survey with both structured and semi-structured questions to all consenting students (Appendix C includes IRB approval). Surveys allow researchers to "describe relevant characteristics of individuals, groups, or organizations" (Berends, 2006, p. 628). The survey included structured questions about students' race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and college generation status in order to ensure standardization in identification. Semi-structured questions, such as *do you ever meet with a tutor for help with your writing assignments*, inquired into students' backgrounds writing and working individually with their teachers (Appendix D includes protocols).

Since cultural mismatch theory posits that the culture of schools, including pedagogy like writing conferences, does not align with the home culture of some students (Delpit, 2006), my goal was to select student participants with a wide range of identities (gender, race, ethnicity), backgrounds (college generation status, family social economic status) and writing abilities (grades, perception of writing ability, prior writing experiences). I chose not to rank these elements since they frequently overlapped, and I was unable to predict the elements that would be germane to Patti's students. Instead, I evaluated survey responses for maximum sampling variation in order to identify the

"widest possible range of characteristics of interest" (Merriam, 2009). Maximum variation sampling often results in "important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity" (Patton qtd. in Merriam, 2009, p. 63). This sampling process addressed my central research purpose, describing students' experiences in a blended first year composition course, because it prioritizes a diversity of viewpoints.

During the semester I collected data (Spring 2016), Patti taught two sections of FYC back to back. I opted to observe and administer the survey to both sections in order to select from the largest pool of potential participants. Although I administered the survey to both sections, I planned to select my group of student participant from a single class in order to ensure that the particular classroom context is consistent for all participants. This choice compliments my research purpose of studying student experiences in writing conferences within a specific context. Students took the survey in-class during the third week of the semester, which due to inclement weather, happened to be only the second in-person class meeting (See Inclement Weather section for more information about the class schedule). A total of 21 students agreed to participate in the study, 9 students in the early class and 12 students in the later class. I opted to select my participants from the early class because the sample included greater variety in identity, background, and writing ability. Additionally, Patti encouraged me to select the early class because the later class had an Undergraduate Teaching Assistant (UTA), which she felt made the room crowded.

I initially planned to include all nine students who agreed to participate in the study, but was unable to do so due to difficulties of conducting time-sensitive fieldwork.

One student withdrew at the start of the study for personal reasons. I excluded two other students because I was unable to observe their first writing conference. In Spring 2016, Mid-Atlantic University's canceled classes impacting Patti's class' first and fourth meeting. The fourth meeting happened to be the week of the first writing conferences. Since Patti's class only meets once a week, the canceled class prevented me from meeting with students individually to confirm their participation in the study and conference schedule. Although I had Patti's master conference schedule, two students missed their conference and rescheduled without contacting me. Since I missed their first writing conference, and more importantly for data analysis, was unable to record it, I could not include them in the study.

In total, six students participated in this study. These students met my sample requirements for maximum variation. They are diverse in gender, race, ethnicity, and family background. Although they all have a proven track record of success in writing courses (which likely reflects the selectivity of admissions to Mid-Atlantic University), they have different levels of comfort with writing and perceive their writing ability differently. Despite initial difficulties in data collection, I met my intended sample size of six students and collected all the data necessary to complete the study. In Table 2, I include a brief profile of each student based on self-reported data. The Case Context section later in this chapter includes additional information about the student participants' backgrounds.

Table 2

Profile of Case Students

Student	Gender	Race	Writing-Intensive Courses	Grades	Writing Ability
Ellie	F	Asian American	AP Language AP Literature	As	3
John	M	White	AP Literature	Bs	3
Naomi	F	White	Honors English	As	4
Nicole	F	African American	AP Language AP Literature	As	4
Sydney	F	Asian American	AP Literature	As	3
Tayo	M	African American	IB English IB History	As	4

Note. All names are pseudonyms. This table describes student's self-reported gender, racial identity, writing-intensive courses took in high school, grades on prior writing assignments, and their perception of writing ability ranked on a scale from 1 (Novice) to 5 (Very Strong).

In this section, I describe my procedure to identify a case, and present my criteria for selecting a university context, instructor participant, and the six embedded student participants. I contend that Mid-Atlantic University is an appropriate context to study student experiences in writing conferences because of its rigorous academics combined with its significant underrepresented student population. I argue that Patti Collin's writing conference are a strong case because she is a highly prepared instructor with a demonstrated commitment to conferences. Lastly, I maintain that the six student participants were purposefully selected for maximum variation in identity, background, and writing ability. I now present the context of my case study.

Case Context

One of the strengths of case study is that it investigates a phenomenon within its broader context (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). In my theoretical framework, I make several theoretical propositions about the influence of context on student experiences. First, I contend that writing conferences are a cultural practice that reflects the culture of power (Delpit, 2006). Within this proposition is an assumption that the cultural norms and expectations of conferences are reflective of and influenced by instructors' expectations in addition to the broader classroom, disciplinary, and institutional conditions. Second, I posit that students may have varying familiarity with or acceptance of these norms and expectations. In other words, student's identity, background, and prior experiences may influence their understanding of and willingness to navigate these codes. With these propositions in mind, I collected documents, interviews, and observation field notes to describe the shared and unique contexts the six student participants of my study.

In many ways, the student participants shared a common context. They all attended Mid-Atlantic University, enrolled in the same composition course with the same instructor, and completed the same assignments. Yet their backgrounds, identities, and interests differed. They brought distinct experiences that shaped their perceptions on writing and writing conferences alike. Although it is not possible to account for all the contextual factors that potentially influenced students' experiences , I attempt to describe both students shared and unique conditions in the case context.

Classroom Context

The students' shared context included their university, blended composition course, curriculum including the assignments and online work, and writing conferences.

All student participants were in their first year at Mid-Atlantic University, a top public university, and enrolled in Patti Collin's First Year Composition (FYC) course. This course used a blended format (also referred to as hybrid) whereby face-to-face instructional time was reduced and replaced by asynchronous online work. Many colleges and universities have expanded their blended course offerings as an economical way to scale courses and meet non-traditional student's needs for flexible schedules. Traditional FYC courses meet face-to-face either Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for 50 minutes apiece or Tuesday and Thursday for 75 minutes. Patti's blended course met only once a week for 75 minutes. Students completed independent writing exercises and attended writing conferences to replace face-to-face instruction. In-class meetings consisted of active learning exercises and group work activities designed to help students' apply the concepts and skills taught online.

Mid-Atlantic University's FYC program permitted students to choose the format of their writing course. The FYC program website described blended learning environments as best for students with strong time management skills and adept with technology. It also recommended students should be comfortable communicating online, confident readers with the ability to follow written instructions, and comfortable with "reaching out to their instructor by email and during office hours for clarification on assignments and additional support." Mid-Atlantic University has seen an increase in blended course offerings, partially evidenced by several renovated classrooms that were specially designed to facilitate the active learning that comprise weekly face-to-face meetings.

Whole class meetings. Patti Collin's blended FYC class met weekly in one of the newly renovated classrooms at Mid-Atlantic University. The classroom was a large and bright space with soaring ceilings, approximately twelve feet tall. It featured two built-in projection screens connected to a computer system with a document camera. Flanking three sides of the room were white boards that provided ample surfaces for students to write collaboratively. Students sat in chairs with attached desks and wheels, so they could easily be moved. During the semester, students reconfigured their seats during class based on the activity.

Each of Patti's lessons followed a familiar format. It started off with general reminders. Patti checked in with students about their progress during the past week and announced upcoming assignments. She attempted to keep these moments light-hearted by making jokes and inquiring about student's feelings. For example, one day she opened with "What is your relationship with midterms right now?" Although appearing to genuinely want to engage students, these opening remarks were frequently met with silence and elicited few responses from students.

After opening remarks, the lesson then shifted to active-learning exercises that were completed in small groups that were formed during class and generally composed of students sitting near each other. These activities varied each week. Students would be asked to read a handout or model and then answer questions or annotate the model in groups. They also frequently peer reviewed each other's work. Students frequently worked collaboratively to write short pieces for different audiences and purposes. For example, in preparation for their position research papers, students wrote casual chains to support a claim, such as why the telephone could have lead to the loss of neighborhood

communities. Working together in groups of four, students wrote a sentence outline of their logic series on the white board.

Each lesson concluded with a reflection, which required the whole class to came back together and make sense of the knowledge constructed in their small groups. For the casual chain activity, students read their sentence outlines aloud and the class discussed the difference in arrangement between casual and proposal arguments. These reflections frequently featured Patti making explicit connections to their current writing assignment and describing tips or writing strategies to improve the writing process or final product. Overall, Patti's lessons were rigorous, engaging, and aligned with the assessments and learning outcomes for the course.

Online work. Students also completed several online assignments each week that were designed to replace the second weekly class meeting. For example, students learned new concepts by reading the textbook or watching short, pre-recorded video lectures by Patti. They took frequent quizzes to reinforce these new concepts and to ensure completion of the assignment. They also participated in online discussions by writing posts and responding to their peers' ideas. Several times during the semester, they reviewed each other's work in an online peer workshop or met individually with their instructor in writing conferences. Students completed this online work in *addition* to the regularly assigned homework for FYC. Meaning each week students completed three to four small assignments while drafting or revising a larger essay assignment. Patti aptly commented that students in her blended course were "writing all the time."

Curriculum and assignments. The University's FYC curriculum emphasizes inquiry, rhetoric, and conversation. The course emphasized rhetorical and research

strategies necessary to understand and participate in a scholarly conversation. Students wrote a series of assignments and essays designed to scaffold the development of a persuasive argument on a topic of their choosing. The FYC program prescribed a strict assignment sequence. FYC classes began with several formative assessments to guide students through the process of researching a topic: an article summary, annotated bibliography, and stasis grid. Then two short essay assignments, the argument of inquiry and rhetorical appeals, asked students to analyze the discourse of their research topic and the common methods of persuasion. Lastly, the summative assessment, a position essay, had students develop an original persuasive argument that draws on multiple scholarly sources. Coupled with these formal writing assignments, students completed weekly reflective writings about their writing process. The final assignment for the semester asked students revise their position paper for a new audience and reflect on their writing process over the course of the entire semester.

Although these assignments are mandated by the curriculum, instructors frequently adapted the sequence to their own aims. Patti's assignments diverged from the standard curriculum in three ways. First, she added a short paper, a Rogerian letter. Second, rather than simply revising the position paper for a new audience, students remediated their arguments for a digital audience. This shift required students to consider both the audience and mode of their argument. Lastly, Patti permitted students to choose a text for their rhetorical analysis essay. Mid-Atlantic University has a robust first-year book program that provides first year students with an interdisciplinary text that instructors across disciplines may integrate into their curriculum. At the time of this study, *Head Off & Split* by Nikky Finney was the first-year book at Mid-Atlantic

University. In Patti's class, students chose either a persuasive piece of writing on their research topic (essentially the department's assignment) or a poem from *Head Off & Split* for the rhetorical analysis paper. In Table 3, I provide Patti's assignment sequence and the descriptions included in her syllabus.

Table 3

Patti's First Year Composition Course Assignment Sequence

Assignment	Description
Academic Summary	The summary assignment tests your ability to read critically (isolating the main claim, categorizing and introducing coherently methods and kinds of evidence) and to write well (knowing when and how much to quote, adjusting your syntax and diction for clarity and fluidity). It presents, in microcosm, skills you'll need in all aspects of academic writing.
Stasis Grid	Use the stasis grid as a tool to organize your research. You'll review ten sources, categorizing them according to their main claims. This process will clarify your understanding of your sources and help you to see which ones you will want to use for your various papers (and where the holes are).
Annotated Bibliography	This assignment supports your work on the Argument of Inquiry. You'll find five scholarly sources that speak to your topic and annotate them. You'll demonstrate your ability to cite using MLA, to summarize the source in a way that shows your conversance with it (not just its abstract) and its main claims, to evaluate the logical soundness and fairness of the source, and to show how the source will feed your growing investigation of the issue. Each annotation is about 200 words.
Argument of Inquiry	Here, you enter the academic conversation by setting forth your own questions and tentative ideas even as you engage the experts on your topic. Stasis theory will inform your inquiry, helping you to understand what's being explored and omitted in the discourse surrounding your issue. Indeed, a major part of this project is exploring how scholarly research--that is, listening to the ideas of others--can inform, expand, and complicate your experiential understanding of a topic. You'll argue for the exigence of the issue, raise important questions that take the conversation beyond mere 'pro' and 'con,' and investigate possible responses to these questions.
Rhetorical Analysis	In this paper, you look closely at a popular persuasive piece on your topic (or, this semester at a poem in the first-year book, *Head Off & Split* by Nikky Finney) and analyze its means of persuasion. You'll consider an array of rhetorical tools and write about the ones that seem most important in the piece's persuasion of its audience. Your writing will reach beyond showing the existence of the aspects you choose; you'll show how the writer employs the devices to achieve certain effects.

Assignment	Description
Rogerian Letter	This assignment asks you to write a persuasive letter to an audience that would disagree with your position on your issue. The task is to consider another side deeply and well while holding fast to your beliefs. "Rogerian" refers to the psychotherapist Carl Rogers' technique of "empathic listening" as a way to solve problems.
Position Paper	This paper is the culmination of your research, writing, and discussion on your topic. In this essay you'll argue your stand in ways that show a thorough understanding of the discourse--you'll make your argument while refuting, conceding, or bridging opposing arguments along the way. This paper will reflect your collection of sources during the semester; you won't be daunted by the 20-source requirement or the 10-page length requirement because you will have done all the work along the way to compose a substantial, complex argument.
Digital Remediation Project and Reflective Letter	At the end of the semester, you have an opportunity to look back on your work and to publish some or all of it on the Web. Publication entails a reconsideration of audience and purpose, and you'll be invited to re-think the genres of your papers as well as a shift in your conception of the readers. "Re[-]mediation" suggests not only that you'll improve your work but also that you will rethink the work's relationship to its genre and medium. The Reflective Memo is a culmination of the smaller reflections you will have written over the semester--here you'll put together your ideas in progress about academic writing in general and yourself as an academic writer. You'll also make clear your process of revising the paper you chose, a process that can serve as a synecdoche for other academic writing tasks you will face after English 101.

Note. These assignment descriptions were included in Patti's syllabus.

In summary, Patti's blended FYC course emphasized rhetoric, inquiry, and conversation. Students wrote a series of assignments that required them to explore a topic by analyzing the discourse and developing a position.

Writing conferences. Patti planned three writing conferences into her FYC course but ended up only requiring students to attend two of the three writing conferences. Patti believed the flexibility of the asynchronous blended class format permitted longer and more frequent conferences. She reported that it was easy to assign

writing conferences as part of the weekly online work because the class was not required to meet face-to-face twice a week. She saw the blended course schedule as freeing up in-class time for conferences. Although conferences were scheduled for 20 minutes blocks, they frequently varied in length depending on the student. The shortest conference in this study was 12 minutes while the longest was 32 minutes.

At the start of the semester, there was little information about writing conferences available to students. In the syllabus, Patti advised students that frequent conferences were important for their learning: "While in BL [blended learning] we do much of our work online, nothing is better than a face-to-face writing conference to help you learn how to improve your work. Please plan to visit office hours at least 3-4 times during the semester." Yet the syllabus did not include a definition or specific description of how writing conferences functioned in this particular FYC course. The only other information about conferences were brief notations included in the course schedule: "Sign up for Week 4 conferences" and "Schedule a conference in Week 8 or Week 9 about a draft, to ask questions about graded papers, and/or get specific instructor feedback about your writing challenges" and "Conferences (strongly recommended) for Digital Remediation." Although the three conferences were introduced as mandatory in class at the start of the semester, the syllabus indicated that Patti was considering making the third conference recommended from the outset.

In class, Patti introduced conferences during the second in-person class meeting by making a quick announcement and sending around a clipboard with a sign up sheet. This announcement did not include a detailed description of the pedagogy. She explained that students were required to come to a writing conference, so she had prepared a sign

up sheet with different scheduling options. If the times listed on the sheet did not work with students' schedules, they should let her know and she would find additional options. The students did not ask any follow up questions about conferences. Instead, they quietly passed around the clipboard and signed up for a timeslot. A similar procedure was used for the second and third writing conferences.

Each conference was connected to an assignment for the course and students were told they must prepare work prior to the meeting. Each week, Patti provided students with a checklist of all the readings, online work, and essay assignments that needed to be completed. These checklists were frequently more specific than the course schedule provided in the syllabus, because they were developed in direct response to what had happened in class the previous week. Before each conference, these checklists tended to include explicit instructions on how to prepare.

The first conference was focused on students' research questions that framed their annotated bibliography and stasis grid. This research question would form the basis of all the work students completed during the semester, since students wrote on the same topic for all but one of their essays assignments. For the first conference, students were told through their online weekly checklist to prepare:

> Bring on paper to your conference: 1. your best possible version of your research question. 2. the MLA-style list of articles and main claims referenced in the preparation above. You should bring other articles and evidence of your research, but these other materials may be electronic (bring your laptop). If you have a later conference, bring a sample annotation or draft of your Stasis Grid.

Students were expected to have their research question printed along with their sources and main claims. These materials were the basis of the conference conversation.

The second conference was about the rhetorical analysis essay which asked students to analyze the persuasive appeals in a chosen a text: either a persuasive piece of writing on their research topic or a poem from *Head Off & Split* by Nikky Finney. These conferences were scheduled over two weeks, so students were provided with two sets of instructions on the assignment handout to prepare. For the first week, students were instructed, "you should have a thesis and an outline of your paper," while students for the second week were instructed, "you should have a full draft of your paper." These instructions reflected where students should be in their writing process, either nearing the end of the invention stage or finished with drafting, in order to successfully complete the assignment on time.

The third conference was about the digital remediation project. This project asked students to re-envision their research topic for a digital audience. The assignment sheet outlines four possible approaches to the assignment: 1) writing a digital forum; 2) reworking your position paper into a website; 3) developing a group website on a single theme; 4) selecting a different mode (i.e., blog, video, podcast, screencast of a PowerPoint or Prezi, or social media campaign). Students were told both orally during class and on the assignment sheet that conferences were strongly recommended for this assignment. They were not provided with written instructions on how to prepare for the conference. Instead, they were orally reminded to bring something to share with Patti, such as an outline of the project or draft of their website. Table 4 summarizes the structure of the writing conferences in Patti's blended FYC course.

Table 4

Summary of Writing Conferences Structure

#	Timing	Length	Requirement	Assignment(s)	Preparation
1	Week 4 (Mid-February)	20 min.	Mandatory	Annotated Bibliography; Stasis Grid	Thesis statement and five scholarly sources with main claim
2	Week 8 or 9 (Late March)	20 min.	Mandatory	Rhetorical Analysis Essay	Depending on week, thesis statement and sentence outline or draft of paper
3	Week 14 (Early May)	20 min.	Optional	Digital Remediation Project	Outline of project or draft of their website

In summary, Patti offered 3 writing conferences, 2 mandatory and 1 strongly recommended, the semester of this study. Her conferences were scheduled in twenty-minute blocks and focused on an assignment: the annotated bibliography and stasis grid; the rhetorical appeals essay; or the digital remediation project. She required students to prepare work prior to conferences, such as research statement or thesis statement, list of sources with main claims, sentence outline of main points, and outline of a digital project. This work formed the basis of the highly structured conference conversation.

Inclement weather. At the start of the semester (Spring 2016), the Mid-Atlantic region experienced highly unusual inclement weather that included a blizzard and several ice storms. Mid-Atlantic University ended up canceling classes multiple times in January and February, which unduly affected the start of Patti's FYC class because the class met face-to-face only once a week. As a result, the first class and the fourth class of the semester were canceled, meaning students only met with Patti twice in their first month

of coursework. These cancellations also had discernable impacts on the classroom climate and writing conferences.

Impact on classroom climate. I observed the classroom climate of Patti's FYC class as business-like, which I partially attribute to the difficult start of the semester caused by the inclement weather. Since the first day of class was canceled, when the whole group finally met face-to-face a week later they immediately launched into content. Patti did not have the class complete introductory activities and norm building that would require students and instructor to interact with each other. Instead, students prepared small group presentations that they gave during the first face-to-face class meeting. Since students had not met each other in person, they divided up the presentation online into sections. Each student was responsible for addressing a particular aspect of the presentation. Although these presentations had students lead the first class, there was no explicit teambuilding between students or conversations between Patti and individual students.

The delayed first class meeting established a pattern of interactions that persisted throughout the semester. I observed that students were reticent to speak up during whole class discussions. Patti frequently had to ask several follow up questions just to elicit a response from the one or two of the more extroverted students. In my field notes, I often characterized the classroom discussions as stilted because only a handful of students participated. This classroom climate did not go unnoticed by students in my study. Ellie described the class as "I feel like it's really quiet. Like awkward, like the atmosphere. I feel like, I dunno. I think people aren't really talking to each other." Although the classroom warmed as the semester progressed with students speaking more to each other

during group time, they remained reticent to speak up during whole class discussions. I believe that the sole focus on content at the start of the semester without any explicit team building and creation of norms likely contributed to the business-like classroom climate.

Impact on writing conferences. The inclement weather also had a discernable impact on the writing conferences. Since Patti and her class had only met face-to-face twice during the first month of class, they entered the first conference while still adjusting to the in-person aspects of the course. Additionally, the business-like climate coupled with few individual interactions between Patti and students meant that conferences were frequently the first time students spoke to Patti individually. John commented: "I never had actually spoken to her" prior to the first conference.

Second, the inclement weather contributed to Patti's decision to make the third writing conference optional rather than mandatory. She explained that her decision was in part due to the condensed semester: "I think a different semester I might have forced it [mandatory conferences], but…this whole semester, we were a little bit late on everything because of the snow." She added that her decision was also based on the timing during the semester and her grading: "at that point [so close to final exams] it seemed wrong for me to make everyone come to a conference…And also I was panting to catch up with all the grading and all the things." Ultimately, the inclement weather likely influenced the classroom climate, student-instructor interactions, and conference structure.

In summary, the six students in this case study shared multiple conditions, including the same blended course, curriculum, assignment, conference requirements,

and instructor. While these conditions were shared, students also brought unique backgrounds and conditions that influenced their experiences in writing conferences.

Students' Individual Contexts

All of the students in this study had unique backgrounds that influenced their familiarity with and perceptions of writing conferences. For instance, their family backgrounds and home cultures varied. Although all the students had a track record of success on writing assignments, earning grades of A's and B's in high school, they perceived their writing abilities differently. Some students described a nascent understanding of disciplinary writing in their majors, while others were still searching for a major and described writing in broader terms. Students also approached their participation during class meetings distinctively. In the next section, I describe each student's individual context.

Ellie's context. Ellie identified as Asian American with Thai heritage. Her parents both had post-secondary degrees; one had a master's degree. Growing up in the surrounding region, She attended a local parochial high school and still lived at home with her family. She commuted daily to Mid-Atlantic University with her older brother who was a junior. When asked why she selected Mid-Atlantic University, she recounted: "Because I don't have any money and it's 20 minutes from my house." During the semester of this study, Ellie was enrolled in an ambitious program of study—her schedule was overloaded with 18 credits. As a Bio-Chem major, all of Ellie's courses except first year composition (FYC) were in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. She was also part of a prestigious STEM mentoring and research program on campus that placed first year students into laboratories where they conducted

independent research. During her limited free time, Ellie maintained a part-time job teaching swimming lessons to children at a local recreational center. She swam with her club team from high school and enjoyed reading and baking. Ellie chose Patti's blended FYC course because of the flexibility of the course schedule, which better fit her STEM classes and laboratories.

Despite having taken advanced placement (AP) courses in language and literature and receiving mostly A's on her prior writing assignments, Ellie rated her writing ability as average. On her survey, she elaborated that she felt her "writing is good, but only on topics I'm interested/invested in. I never seem to write well on topics I don't know much about (like analytical essays for English Class) or when I'm unsure." This was a common narrative in Ellie's description of her writing ability. She frequently mentioned that she was "bad" or "terrible" at English. For example, she told me: "I'm not good at English. It's my worst subject. Like ever." She also repeated this refrain in her second writing conference with Patti, sharing that her papers were "generally very, very bad."

Although Ellie perceived herself as a poor writer, she also spoke frequently of her writing in science disciplines. She described science writing as "more straight forward" because "it's more like, this happened. Why do I think it happened?" rather than literary analysis with multiple interpretations. Despite this discomfort with writing in the humanities, she described an awareness of academic genre conventions that guided her writing process. In the previous semester, Ellie's instructor in English Literature responded to a first draft of an essay with the recommendation: "go to the writing center and get help because [my writing] sucked so much." Rather than seeking support from the writing center, Ellie described developing a writing process: "In my English class last

semester, I found a way to write papers that just like works for me. Like find sources, you get your quotes, and then relate the quotes and the thesis, and this how the quotes relate to each other, and this how they relate back to the thesis." She felt identifying these genre conventions had enabled her to succeed in her English Literature course from the previous semester.

I observed Ellie as a shy student who rarely spoke during whole class discussions. She did not feel comfortable reaching out to her instructors for individualized help: "I'll go to talk to teachers now, but for most of high school, I like would never ask for help. It was like forbidden." Even at Mid-Atlantic University, she was reluctant to visit her instructors during office hours, only following up with them about minor questions when she could not figure out an answer independently. She never had visited the writing center or any other tutoring centers on campus.

Relatedly, Ellie was not familiar with writing conferences prior to Patti's class. She came to her conference with prepared materials, yet I observed her as quiet compared to many of the students in this study. She frequently answered questions with straightforward responses and did not voluntarily elaborate on her ideas. Her research topic for the semester was education about water pollution in El Salvador. She wrote her rhetorical analysis essay on the poem, "Red Velvet" by Nikky Finney. She opted not to have a third writing conference.

Naomi's context. Naomi identified as White with Jewish heritage. Her parents had bachelor's degrees. As the only the only out-of-state participant in this study, Naomi grew up in the Midwest where she attended Jewish religious schools. She selected Mid-Atlantic University because she wanted a school on the East Coast with an established

Jewish community. Contributing to this decision was her familiarity with the school, her cousin had recently graduated and her brother was a junior at Mid-Atlantic University. Naomi was a criminal justice major, so she was taking a range of introductory classes like first year composition and calculus in addition to major courses in criminal justice and terrorism studies. Naomi was engaged in several co-curricular activities on campus including several Jewish organizations, hip hop dance classes, and mentoring children who are at-risk for entering the juvenile justice system.

Naomi described herself as a strong writer who "always enjoyed writing." On her survey, she explained that writing "comes fairly naturally to me. I was a designated author for a program I was on last year and had my writing published in their magazine and website." In high school, she took honors English, but the course did not include extensive writing because her high school held religious studies in the morning and academic subjects only in the afternoon. On the limited writing she completed for school, Naomi earned mostly A grades. She also occasionally wrote personally. For example, during her gap year trip to Poland, she regularly wrote in a journal because it was "an emotionally crazy experience." This writing helped "keep my thoughts focused." Naomi saw herself as a strong writer for both academic and personal purposes.

Naomi described the writing required in college as "pretty different because the papers I have to write are a lot more structured." She did not have specific areas where she wanted to improve her writing. She explained: "I think I'm a good writer in the sense that I understand the basic format of how to write. My grammar is pretty solid, so that helps also." That said, she added that there were many "styles" of writing that she had never written before, so she was looking forward to learning new genres in FYC.

Naomi selected a blended FYC course based on her friend's recommendation that blended courses were "great" because they only met once a week. Yet one month into Patti's blended FYC course, she reported struggling with the independent part of blended learning: "I like being able to have a conversation. I like being able to have the teacher be like, not spoon feed me of course, but like just be like 'Ok we're going to be doing this and this.'" She added that the emphasis on online learning left more room for miscommunications. For example, a miscommunication had resulted in her summarizing an inappropriate article for the first writing assignment of the course, the summary assignment. She selected an article that was a too complex, so Patti asked her to redo the assignment. She commented that a similar problem arose during her writing conference when she brought in annotated bibliography with both scholarly and popular sources rather than just scholarly sources. Despite these setbacks, Naomi recognized that she may be struggling to adjust overall to the expectations of college classrooms where "a lot of your courses are heavily based online and checking the website and stuff."

Sitting in the first row of class, Naomi was an eager participant in class. She raised her hand reliably and frequently asked clarifying questions during whole class discussions. Although an active participant in class, Naomi never attended office hours or sought help individually from her instructors. Writing conferences were a new experience. Despite this unfamiliarity, Naomi was always prepared for her conferences. I observed her to be an active participant in conferences, both responding to questions and posing her own. Her research topic for the semester was middle school dance education. She wrote her rhetorical analysis paper on the poem, "Cattails" by Nikky Finney, and opted not to have a third writing conference.

John's context. John identified as White. His parents both held bachelor's degrees, and one earned a doctorate. Mid-Atlantic University was his first choice of college because it was a large school with a nationally recognized computer science program that was close to his home. In addition to major-related courses in computer science and mathematics, John took courses in oral communications and Korean language. During the previous semester, John had his first job in the computer industry writing scripts for a local website, and he hoped to be invited back to work over the summer. His interests varied from Korean culture to rock climbing to volunteering for environmental causes.

On his survey, John described himself as an average writer because "I can write using high levels of language, but I'm bad at being concise and can sometimes lose focus." He added that he did not see writing as his strength and it wasn't a task he enjoyed doing. In high school, John took Honors English, which he perceived as an easy course. He commented: "the writing we did was graded [at a] pretty low standard. Honestly, I could get away with not putting a lot of effort into my work." He found AP Literature and History to be more challenging because he wrote literary and historical analysis essays. He earned mostly B grades on these assignments. At Mid-Atlantic University, John applied these analysis skills in a political theater course from the previous semester, which was his "favorite course." This course examined the political environments that influenced plays. Students were required to go see several plays, John's favorite being *Angels in America* by Tony Kushner.

As a computer science major, John saw FYC as a requirement: "Admittedly first coming into the class, I was just wanted to get this class over with." Therefore, John

selected a blended FYC option because the course met face-to-face only once a week. He enjoyed working independently on his computer at his dorm. He did not enter the course with a clear goal for his writing. However, after the first conference, he felt the course would help with the coherence of his writing. He cited stasis theory as especially helpful because it provided an "organizational pattern" for his ideas. Based on Patti's recommendation, he decided to focus his research question for the semester on a stasis of value.

John was a lively participant in the classroom. Alongside Naomi, he frequently raised his hand and asked questions during whole class discussions. Yet John had never gone to office hours because "I just never really have felt the need. Like I've always been comfortable." He had not found his coursework in both STEM and humanities courses to be challenging enough to seek additional help. Additionally, John never worked individually with his teachers in high school or had gone to the writing center. Instead, in high school, he asked his father, who held an advanced degree in Russian Literature, for help with his writing. His father would edit his papers: "a lot of the times what he would say about my papers was [that]….you can just cut this out completely." John's father had not edited his papers in college. Instead, John explained: "I just tried to do what he did to my papers. Read them out loud. Go through it that way. Like mark everything that just sounded boring *[laughs]*."

While John was unfamiliar with writing conferences, he always came prepared with the required written work. I observed him to be a talkative student who explained each of his ideas in great detail. His research topic for the semester examined the social advantages of teenagers consuming alcohol. He selected the poem "Red Velvet" by

Nikky Finney for his rhetorical analysis paper and did not participate in a third writing conference.

Sydney's context. Sydney identified as Asian American with Chinese heritage. Both her parents have postsecondary degrees, and one had a doctorate. Growing up Sydney moved several times from the Midwest to Northeast before settling in the Mid-Atlantic region. She had wanted to attend Mid-Atlantic University ever since she was a child. She described her family visiting her brother, ten years her senior, at a campus open-house event:

> he was a bio chemistry [major] and he minored in Japanese. I think he was part of this choreography group, and I watched him perform, and I was really surprised by how dedicated the dancers were…And I was just really amazed by the whole community and the campus was beautiful

This experience cemented Sydney's desire to attend Mid-Atlantic University. Sydney was planning on majoring in biology or chemistry, so she was taking organic chemistry and calculus at the time of this study. She was also enrolled in an honors living and learning community with a required colloquium in science and global change. She did not have many hobbies other than working out. Instead, her free time was spent primarily studying: "For now, I'm more worried about academics, so I mostly spend my time in my dorm or at the library."

For high school, Sydney attended a selective technical magnet where she studied allied health to prepare for a healthcare career. Her goal was to become a pharmacist, but she was concerned about the competitiveness of graduate programs:

> I'm not going to have as big of, like a high chance of getting in because a lot of the potential people are similar to me. Like Asian, smart, things like that. So I don't know if I apply, I feel like I'm just going to be like one of those other applicants. I'm not going to really stand out.

Consequently, in her free time, Sydney was studying for her pharmacy technician certification. She hoped this certificate would help her "learn how a lab works, and meeting a pharmacist and seeing their experiences, just learning from them." She thought gaining more experience would strengthen her application for graduate school.

Even though Sydney had taken AP English Literature and Language course and earned primarily A grades on her writing assignments, she described her writing ability as average. She identified several areas of concern in her writing for English classes: "I tend to be more concerned about listing every detail I believe is significant that the overall 'flow' of the writing is absent. Sometimes my writing doesn't reflect how I actually speak, which makes my papers messy and robotic, in a sense." Sydney reported feeling more confident in her writing for science disciplines. She explained that "one of the reasons why English and History are my least favorite compared to Math and Science because [in] Math and Science you usually have a definite answer or just one answer while English you have so many different answers that are all correct, and it's just hard for me to accept that." She felt more confident writing science research papers because "the facts are right there. The statistics are right there, so you don't really have to explain yourself."

Sydney did not have a particular rationale for signing up for a blended version of FYC. She was initially unfamiliar with the class structure, so she researched it online.

After learning the course was offered half online and half in person, she decided "that's not too bad. I can deal with that." She commented that she just needed to find a composition course to fulfill the University core requirement. Sydney hoped that Patti's FYC course could help her "organizing my thoughts and being able to use more, I guess more, advanced vocabulary. Because I feel every time I'm writing a paper I'm really redundant when I'm explaining things. I end up repeating myself and just to fill up space."

I observed Sydney as quiet during whole class discussions, yet engaged in small group work. She volunteered often to be the spokesperson for her group, sharing the work they produced. As the semester progressed, she also started to speak up more during whole class discussions. Despite talking more during class, Sydney reported not feeling comfortable seeking help from her instructors during office hours:

> I have barely gone to my office hours to be honest. Not because of inconvenience, but because, honestly, I'm a little nervous about going to office hours, even though everyone tells me I shouldn't. That they just there to help. But I'm not really good with one-on-one conversation… I felt like if I could just read it myself and then maybe take some time to think about then I'll understand eventually.

Sydney assumed that she could understand the same information with hard work as individualized help. Similarly, she never went to the writing center or worked with tutors.

Sydney was the only student who came unprepared to her first writing conference. Although she knew she wanted to research GMOs, she had not finalized a research question or identified scholarly sources for her annotated bibliography. For the second conference, Sydney was highly prepared, bringing in an extensive sentence outline with

supporting quotations from the poem, “Red Velvet” by Nikky Finney. Sydney originally signed up for a third writing conferences, but canceled the meeting once she learned it was not required.

Tayo’s context. Tayo identified as African American with Nigerian heritage. His parents both held postsecondary degrees. Mid-Atlantic University was his first choice for college because it is a large state school close to his home. Tayo initially planned to pursue a computer science degree, but he decided to change his major to business after his first semester. He was enrolled in an honors living and learning community with a required colloquium in science and global change. An athlete in high school, Tayo played junior varsity basketball and ran varsity track and cross-country. At Mid-Atlantic University, he joined the club basketball team. Although Tayo did not currently have a job, he was interviewing for a summer position working in the dorms on campus.

An International Baccalaureate (IB) student, Tayo had taken numerous writing-intensive courses in high school, including IB English, IB History, and IB Theory of Knowledge. He wrote a lengthy capstone essay for the IB Diploma on Nikola Tesla’s invention of the alternate electric current. Tayo rated his writing ability as strong because “my writing is clear in a way that a reader can understand my thought process and analysis without getting lost.” He felt confident in his analytical abilities and described writing essays on novels, such as *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison. In college, he had taken several classes that required intensive writing, such as his oral communication course. He described the writing in this course: “First we did write a proposal, and then submit a draft, and then we had the actual presentation, so it’s kind of the same thing [as FYC].

Like the three steps, proposal, draft, and then actually presenting." He felt his writing in college classes was successful.

Tayo selected a blended version of FYC because he enjoyed computers and online work. He also felt that he had "good time management skills and things like that" to help him be successful in the course. For the class, his goal was to improve the coherence and logic of his arguments. He explained: "using quotations more like, effectively, instead of just like quotation, explanation, quotation, explanation. I just want to make like, create the flow of my writing better…Instead of just like, being like straightforward. Trying to be more like fluid in my writing."

Tayo was the only student in this study who had a history of regularly meeting with his teachers about writing. In high school, he met with his IB English teacher about once a month. He described these meetings as way to get feedback from his teacher: "I guess it was just like, how can I make my analysis better? How can I get the deeper meaning things rather than just the surface meaning that everyone knows?" At Mid-Atlantic University, he regularly attended office hours for his computer science and oral communication classes. He saw office hours as a way to get his most pressing questions answered. He also had used several of the tutoring services on campus, including the Oral Communication Center and group study sessions.

Tayo was an active participant in both small group and whole class discussions. He frequently volunteered to share his group's work and asked Patti questions to clarify expectations. Similarly, I observed Tayo to be an active participant in shaping his writing conferences. He always came extra prepared to conferences. For the first conference, he brought in ten sources for his annotated bibliography—rather than the required five. He

also wrote a five-page draft of his rhetorical appeals essay in a mere two days for the second conference even though Patti asked only for a thesis statement and sentence outline. Tayo's research topic for the semester examined the psychological benefits of video games. He opted to analyze an article on his research topic rather than a poem. He selected the article "The Cognitive Benefits of Video Games" by Peter Grey. Tayo did not choose to schedule a third writing conference.

Nicole's context. Nicole identified as African American. Both her parents held postsecondary degrees. Similar to her mom, Nicole planned to study psychology at Mid-Atlantic University. She selected the university because campus was only 45 minutes away from home. Nicole added that Mid-Atlantic University was "far enough that my parents won't like bug me all the time, but it's close in case of emergency." In addition to her FYC course, Nicole was taking several psychology courses, calculus 2, and biology. In her free time, Nicole enjoyed reading and running. She had joined an advocacy service group on campus dedicating to fighting hunger and homelessness. Over summers, she worked as a line cook at a baseball stadium.

Nicole had a proven track record of success with her writing. She took Advanced Placement (AP) Literature and AP Language and earned primarily A grades on her assignments. She rated her writing ability as strong because "writing seems to come naturally to me and I have often been told that I am a strong writer." She had experience writing blogs, rhetorical analyses, and research papers for classes. Nicole also started a personal blog. She explained: "I actually kind of like writing when I get the inspiration to. So I just write out things [on the blog] that make me happy and stuff like that." Her

latest post described an early morning run exploring parts of campus she had never seen before. Nicole saw herself as a strong writer for both academic and personal purposes.

Nicole selected a blended version of FYC because traditional face-to-face sections were full by the time she registered, and the course needed to fit her biology lecture and lab schedule. When she saw the blended course option, she thought "I am very good at working independently, and also like, this is not a huge part of the reason why I chose it, but I don't have any classes on Thursday." Nicole's goal for her writing was to work on timed writing since she struggled to collect her ideas quickly enough for the AP Language exam. She recognized, however, that her FYC course might not address this specific skill. She was happy to have a course simply dedicated to writing: "I think it's just nice to have something where you can progressively work on your writing. Because that will always come in handy."

In her first semester at Mid-Atlantic University, Nicole had gone to office hours twice. Once to make sure she was on the right track for a group project on the brain. The second time she went to office hours to interview her instructor of the Psychology of Women for a class assignment. Nicole described the experience: "I had to interview her for another class, but she was very nice. I think if I end up taking another one of her courses, I'd go to her office hours more. Talk to her because she seems really nice and cool." Nicole had never gone to the writing center or worked individually with her teachers on her writing.

I observed Nicole to be quiet during class, but always diligently listening and taking notes. She often took a leadership role in small group activities by volunteering ideas and directing the discussion. As the semester progressed, she frequently

volunteered to share her group's work to the whole class. Nicole brought this same dedication to her writing conferences. She always came prepared with the required materials. I observed Nicole as adept at answering questions, responding to Patti's ideas, and taking notes. Nicole's research question for the semester examined if students with severe special needs should be required to go to special needs schools. She chose to write her rhetorical analysis essay on the poem "Red Velvet" by Nikky Finney. She opted to have a third writing conference on her digital remediation project. Her project was an informative blog dedicated to exploring issues of special needs education for parents.

The six students in this study had distinct identities, backgrounds, and experiences that likely influenced their perceptions of writing conferences. Table 5 summarizes students' topic and texts discussed during writing conferences.

Table 5

Summary of Students' Topics and Texts Discussed during Writing Conferences

Student	Research Topic	Rhetorical Appeals Text	Digital Remediation Project
Ellie	Education about water pollution in El Salvador	"Red Velvet" by Nikky Finney	n/a
Naomi	Middle school dance education	"Cattails" by Nikky Finney	n/a
John	Social advantages of teenagers consuming alcohol	"Red Velvet" by Nikky Finney	n/a
Sydney	GMOs	"Red Velvet" by Nikky Finney	n/a
Tayo	Psychological effects of video games	"The Cognitive Benefits of Video Games" by Peter Grey	n/a
Nicole	Special needs schools for students with severe special needs	"Red Velvet" by Nikky Finney	Informative blog about special needs education issues for parents

Since case study considers the broader context of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014), I describe the collective and individual contexts within which the six students were embedded. These students shared similar institutional, classroom, curricular, and instructor conditions that likely influenced the cultural norms and expectations of writing conferences. They also brought unique cultural backgrounds and experiences that may have influenced their individual perceptions of conferences. While it is not possible to identify all of the contextual factors that potentially influenced students' experiences , I described many of the salient conditions for this case study.

Data Collection

Case study research requires the collection and analysis of multiple data sources. While many qualitative studies rely primarily on interviews, case studies may include documentation, archival records, physical artifacts, and observations in addition to interviews (Yin, 2014). To examine student experiences in writing courses in their blended first year composition course, I considered a variety of data sources that would address my research questions as well as generate rich, thick descriptions of the broader context. Table 6 presents the data sources collected.

Table 6

Data Sources Collected

Data Type and Source	Description	Count
Documents		
Classroom	Documents pertaining to in-class meetings, assignments, and writing conferences, including the syllabus, weekly checklists, and handouts	20
Conference	Documents produced for and during writing conferences, including student work and instructor notes.	21
Reflective Writing	Documents produced by the student about writing conferences, including reflective blog posts and email responses.	21
Observations		
Classroom Field Notes	Researcher's field notes from classroom observations, focusing on context and observed student-teacher dynamics.	13
Conference Field Notes	Researcher's field notes from observations of writing conferences, focusing on the office setting, seating arrangement, conversation topics and tone, and participants' body language.	13
Conference Recordings	Audio recording of writing conferences.	13
Interviews		
Instructor	Semi-structured interviews with instructor about writing conference practice, purpose, participant roles, and classroom context.	4
Students	Semi-structured interviews with students about experiences in each writing conference.	13

Documents

I collected three types of documents in order to understand the classroom context, purpose, and the participant roles of writing conferences. Documents are advantageous because they are "stable" and "unobtrusive;" thus they cannot be influenced by interaction with the researcher (Merriam, 2009). Two limitations of documentation are that they can be difficult to systematically collect and there may be restrictions to accessing the records (Yin, 2014). Keeping these limitations in mind, I was granted full access to the course documents available to students through an online learning management system. The student participants also willingly shared their documents.

Classroom documents. First, I collected documents pertaining to the in-class meetings, assignments, and writing conferences. This included the syllabus, weekly checklists, and handouts. These provided rich details about the context of both the instructor's conference practice. I collected a total of 20 documents about the classroom context.

Conference documents. Second, I collected documents produced for and during writing conferences. Students were asked to prepare for conferences by developing thesis statements, sentence outlines, annotations, and drafts. I collected their work and any notes taken during conferences. Second, Patti frequently commented on students' prepared work or took notes on a scrap piece of paper during the interaction. She gave these notes to students at the end of conferences, so I was able to collect them as well. I used these documents to triangulate the participant roles described in the student and instructor interviews. I did not evaluate students' work for their level of preparedness or the effectiveness of Patti's notes because my research questions focused on students'

experiences and the culture of conferences. My interview protocol included asking participants to reflect on their intent behind creating these documents and the ways the documents were used during the writing conference. These reflections provided insight into students' perceptions of their role in conferences. I collected a total of 21 documents produced for or during writing conferences.

Reflective writings. Lastly, I collected any reflective writing students wrote about writing conferences. Since students were required to write weekly blog posts about their writing process, I asked for any posts that referenced writing conferences. Patti provided prompts each week with a series of questions for students to consider. These questions often explicitly asked about conferences. Although the posts were written for a grade with the instructor as the intended audience, which as Naomi aptly pointed out influenced the tone and content of the writing, they provide another point of triangulation about students' interpretation and responses to conferences. They were especially useful to identify if and in what the ways students changed their interpretation to be socially acceptable and align with their impression of Patti's expectations. I collected 2 to 3 blog posts per student, for a total of 16 posts.

Additionally, I asked the five students who chose not to schedule a third writing conference to reflect on their decision. During the last week of the semester, Patti announced that the third writing conference was optional. Since this announcement was made right before final exams and I only needed to ask students two follow up questions, I opted to have students respond by email rather than schedule an in-person interview. This method was advantageous because it ensured that I was able to get immediate responses from students. I asked the students to describe why they chose not to sign up

for a third writing conference and to identify any specific factors that influenced their thinking. These reflections were submitted by email. I collected a total of 5 responses.

Observations

I observed both the classroom meetings and writing conferences for this study. Maxwell (2012) explains that observations are particularly useful to capture "tacit understandings" and "theory-in-use" (p. 103). They also "provide some knowledge of the context or to provide specific incidents, behaviors that can be used as reference points for subsequent interviews" (Merriam, 2009, p. 96). One limitation of observations is the researcher's effect, which holds a phenomenon is changed by simply being observed. To address this concern, I was embedded in the classroom throughout the semester. I assumed the stance of an observer as participant where "the researcher's observer activities are known to the group; participation in the group is definitely secondary to the role of information gather" (Merriam, 2009, p. 101). My goal was to become part of the classroom community and be seen as an insider by participants. (See Researcher's Stance for more detailed information).

A second limitation of observations is researcher bias. A single researcher may be more susceptible to selectively focus their observation on particular aspects of the classroom, losing sight of other relevant information (Yin, 2014). In response to this concern, I developed an observation protocol based on contextual factors outlined in the literature to organize my field notes and observations. I also transcribed field notes after each observation and wrote reflective memos to interrogate my effect. I then used these observations as the basis of my follow up interviews with both the instructor and

students. These interviews provided another data source to triangulate findings based on observations.

Classroom field notes. Classroom observations provided a greater understanding of the classroom context, including insights into the classroom climate and student-teacher dynamics. I took field notes but opted not to record the class because my research questions focused on the relationship between student experiences and conference culture rather than the relationship between classroom and conference. My field notes focused on interactions between participants, their roles, characteristics, and interactions. I also took notes on the classroom climate, norms, and routines. After each observation, I transcribed and annotated my field notes in order to capture the rich, thick descriptions characteristic of case study research. I observed 13 of the 15 class meetings of Patti's first year composition class. Each class observation was 75 minute long.

Conference field notes. I observed the writing conferences between Patti and student participants. These observations provided insight into the culture of conferences in practice. Since conferences were conducted in Patti's shared office space, I positioned myself behind Patti and the student, frequently sitting at a colleague's desk. My goal was to remain outside of the participant's sightline whenever possible in order to minimize the researcher's effect. While I interacted with the student and Patti briefly at the outset of each conference, mostly in order to arrange the recorder, I did not talk to either participant once the conference conversation began.

During each observation, I took field notes to accompany audio recordings of conferences. My field notes described the office setting, seating arrangement, conversation topics and tone, and participants' behaviors and body language. I also

recorded significant moments during the interaction, such as when new ideas were discussed, students posed questions, or there appeared to be miscommunications. After each observation, I transcribed and summarized my field notes. I used these notes to identify follow-up interview questions with both the instructor and student. They also helped guide the selection of clips for the oral commentary interview questions.

Conference audio recordings. I audio recorded each writing conference in order to account for the culture of this practice. I opted to only record audio instead of video for obtrusiveness and reflexivity reasons. Patti scheduled her conferences in back-to-back appointments from which students selected a time. Setting up video equipment would have required extra time to be set aside before and after each of the students participating in the study. Since Patti and I could not predict precisely what time the student participants would sign up for conferences, it was not feasible to build extra time into the schedule. Additionally, setting up video equipment had the potential to disrupt Patti's conference routine and increase the conspicuousness of my presence. By audio recording conferences, I was able to quickly position the recorder as both Patti and the student settled into their seats. This procedure helped minimize disruptions in the interaction from the research process. One limitation of only capturing audio is that it prioritized the conference discourse over other subtle forms of interpersonal communication, such as eye contact and body language. I worked to capture these subtle behaviors in my field notes, but they could not be systematically analyzed like the conference discourse.

Interviews

I interviewed both Patti and student participants multiple times throughout the semester. Interviews are a significant qualitative method because they can be "targeted"

directly on the topic of interest (Yin, 2014). Through interviews, researchers can tap into unobservable things such as thoughts, feelings, understandings, perceptions, and experiences (Merriam, 2009). Since my research questions seek to describe student experiences in writing conferences, interviews were a central method to understand students' perceptions. The interviews complimented my observational data by providing insight into instructor and student thinking during the conference interaction.

Interviews are also susceptible to bias due to poorly written questions and reflexivity of interviewees providing socially acceptable responses (Yin, 2014). I took several steps to address these concerns about interviews. First, I developed a semi-structured interview protocol in consultation with my committee prior to the study. Interviews give participants "space to express meaning in his or her own words," unlike a survey with rigid questions (Brenner, 2006, p. 357). By using a semi-structured interview format, participants have greater latitude to mention and explore ideas unanticipated by the researcher and for the researcher to respond to these new ideas (Merriam, 2009). This latitude is also important when interviewing underrepresented or discriminated and marginalized groups who "may have hidden experiences and knowledge that have been excluded from mainstream use of quantitative research methods" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Since students generally have less power in the classroom and several of the students in my study were from underrepresented racial groups, a semi-structured format was a logical choice. Second, I strove to develop a relationship with students. I informally talked with students before and after class. At the start of each interview, I included personalized questions to establish a rapport. These steps were intended to address some of the limitations of interviews.

Instructor interviews. Before the start of the semester, I interviewed Patti about her writing conference practice, purpose, course structure, and classroom context. Then after each round of conferences, I interviewed Patti about the classroom context, specific elements of her conference talk and pedagogy, and her impressions of the students participating in my study. Sample questions from my interview protocol included *at what point during the writing process do you conference,* and *how would you characterize the conversation?* The initial interview was approximately 60 minutes long, with subsequent interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. Each interview was held in Patti's office approximately one week after conferences and was audio recorded.

Student interviews. I also interviewed students after each of their writing conferences. I scheduled these interviews within five days of the writing conference, and frequently held them less than 24 hours after the interaction. We met at common spaces on campus, often in the library. In general, I asked students about the conference process, their feelings, and plans for revision. The initial interview also included questions about the student's interests, background, writing believes, and initial impressions of FYC. Sample interview questions included *tell me a bit more about the types of writing you've done in college* and *what kind of help were you expecting from this conference?* The initial interview was approximately 60 minutes long, while subsequent interviews spanned from 30-45 minutes apiece. They were audio recorded.

Oral commentary questions. To avoid overgeneralizations from the instructor and students, I developed questions that drew on an oral commentary method. Developed by Newkirk (1995), oral commentary method is similar to a think-aloud-protocol where participants listen to and comment on their thinking during a particular moment of the

conference. In this case, both Patti and the students listened to clips of their writing conferences and commented on their thinking, actions, and feelings in the moment. I used this method to overcome the limitation of interviewing Patti and the students sometimes days after the writing conference interaction. It elicited greater depth in responses from student participants by providing insight into their thinking, responses, and affect during different moments of the interaction. It also provided insights into the tacit cultural norms and expectations of conferences, such as what in a particular movement prompted students to talk or how they interpreted a particular questioning strategy.

Each student listened to and responded to 10 to 12 clips from each conference. To select the clips, I reviewed my typed field notes and then listened to the conference recording two to three times prior to the interview. While listening, I made a list of the timestamps of key topics and moments. From this list, I selected clips to replay for students using three strategies. First, I always played the beginning and conclusion of the conference in order to capture student's first and final impressions. Second, I selected moments that were unique or distinctive in the conference. For example, I included conversations about the student's personal matters, moments when students posed their own questions or directed the conversation, or moments when students stated their emotions. Lastly, I selected typical moments in the conference. Since the conversations were frequently cyclical, a topic would be discussed multiples time or certain questions would be posed more than once. I selected moments that exemplified these conventions, such as the questioning strategies Patti employed or moments when decisions about a research topic, thesis statement, or organizational structure were made. I made a list of these clips to play back during the interview. To confirm my choice of oral commentary

clips, I asked students to recall specific moments from the conference at the start of the interview before beginning the oral commentary method. In all but two of the interviews, the moments students recalled aligned with one or two of the clips I had pre-selected, and in those cases that did not, I added an additional clip.

The oral commentary method asked students to listen to the clips and then respond. I played the clips on my laptop computer. These clips were short, generally lasting less than a minute. Students were told they should start talking if anything came to mind as they listened. If they did not speak up, I paused the recording and asked a follow up prompt, such as *what were you thinking during this exchange* or *how were you feeling*? Occasionally, students asked to rewind a clip or to listen beyond the selected timeframe. This procedure aligned with the description provided in Newkirk (1995).

The instructor's oral commentary questions followed the same procedure. I selected oral commentary clips that focused specifically on Patti's instructional choices, such as opening and concluding conferences, questioning strategies, and note taking. Since my research questions focused on the culture of the writing conference, my goal for the oral commentary questions was not to have Patti comment on each and every individual moment in conferences, rather to better understand her thinking behind her practice.

Researcher's Stance

For this study, I assumed the stance of an observer as participant where "the researcher's observer activities are known to the group; participation in the group is definitely secondary to the role of information gather" (Merriam, 2009, p. 101). In practice, this stance entailed me sitting with the students during the class and moving

seats to interact with different students. I participated in small group activities in order to develop a rapport with students. My goal was to be seen as a part of the classroom community in order to minimize the obtrusiveness of my presence during the conference interaction. In order to avoid students perceiving me as a teacher figure, I did not participate in whole group discussions or speak directly to Patti during class.

To reflect on the influence of my subjectivity and positionality, I kept a researcher's journal and consulted with members of my dissertation committee. Researchers use journals to "consider their identities as researchers in relation to the various research contexts that they find themselves in…comment about what occurs during interaction with participants as well as thoughts, ideas, hunches, and questions" (Roulston, 2010, p. 22). This process helped me bracket my personal assumptions and understand how they have influenced my research process and conclusions. Ultimately, I believe that my participants viewed me as a credible and understanding observer with whom they could share their experiences.

Human Subjects Protection

In accordance with the Internal Review Board (IRB), I took steps to protect the human subjects in this study throughout the data collection process (Appendix C includes IRB approval). Both the instructor and student participants signed consent forms. I reminded participants of their rights to not answer a question or withdraw before each interview. I did not use deception in this study. I protected the privacy and confidentiality of participants by not sharing any information obtained from other participants in the study. All member checks were conducted after the semester concluded and student

grades were submitted. Data was securely stored on the researcher's password-protected computer.

Data Storage

Yin (2014) recommends case study researchers develop a case study database to organize and document data collected (Refer to Appendix E for case study databases). To organize my database, I maintained a master list of all data sources collected, including detailed information about the date, time, length, participants, data type, location, and brief descriptions. I scanned all hardcopies of documents (i.e., classroom handouts, student work, notes from conferences) and placed them in a password protected computer folder with PDF documents (i.e., syllabus, assignment sheets, student reflective writing, information from an online learning management system). I kept original hardcopies of data in a locked file cabinet. I removed or redacted any identifying information from documents using Adobe Acrobat. I transferred all audio of interviews and writing conferences to my computer, stored in password-protected folders. I kept these recordings in a separate password-protected file from the transcribed content.

Data Analysis

In this study, I analyzed data in a continuous and recursive process. Yin (2014) explains that case study requires the researcher to analyze data during collection in order to "master the intricacies of the study's substantive issues" (p. 113). As such, my initial analysis was interwoven with data collection. After each classroom and conference observation, I typed my handwritten field notes, which included impressions about conference culture and questions to consider. I also listened to each conference audio recording two to three times in order to make a list of key topics and moments during the

conference. These lists were used to select oral commentary clips but also included my "preliminary jottings" (Saldaña, 2013) or ideas for further consideration. In addition to these jottings, I wrote preliminary memos after each round of interviews and took notes while I transcribing all data verbatim. I referred back to these field notes, memos, and jottings during my first-cycle coding.

To inform my coding process, I primarily consulted two texts: Saldaña's (2013) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* and Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. These texts outline a process whereby codes are consolidated into central themes or concepts that align or contradict theory. I used a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) to organize and manage my coding process. I selected NVivo because of its broad functionality coupled with its relative ease of use. Finally, my conceptual framework guided my coding process. My conceptual framework identifies three principle factors in the conference interaction: the purpose, participant roles, and classroom context. These factors offer insights into the most apparent norms and assumptions about the conference culture. I hypothesize a student's perceptions of the conference may be shaped by the extent the conference culture is culturally congruent or mismatch.

I started by coding interviews, field notes, and artifacts inductively. I used descriptive coding, which provides a holistic "inventory of topics for indexing and categorizing" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 84). I used this inventory to understand the classroom context and develop a case context that included rich, thick descriptions. I then applied deductive structural codes to the instructor and student interviews and student reflective writing. Structural coding "applies a content-based or conceptual phrase representing a

topic of inquiry to a segment of data that relates to a specific research question" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 87). I drew from my conceptual framework to determine these codes. The descriptive codes provided a holistic inventory rooted in the participant's own words while the structural codes connected their words to the conceptual framework. While writing analytic memos, I continued to refine these codes and look for patterns.

Aligned with my first research question, I structurally coded the instructor interviews, documents, and classroom field notes for purpose, participant roles, and classroom context. Table 7 displays the instructor data source codes. I followed a similar analysis procedure for student data. I coded student interviews, conference documents, and reflective writings for viewpoints, interpretations, and responses. Table 8 displays the student data source codes.

Table 7

Structural and Descriptive Codes for Instructor Data Sources

Structural and Descriptive Codes	Operational Definition	Example Code
Q1. How did the instructor describe the culture of her writing conference practice in relation to purpose, participant roles, and classroom context?		
Purpose Descriptive subcodes: • objective • intended outcomes	the objectives or intended outcomes of instructor's conferences	"[Conferences] help [students] edit. To figure out how to make it fit more precisely what the assignment is asking them to do. And so, to sort of help them manage their own creativity in ways."
Participant Roles Descriptive subcodes: • Instructor's role • Student's role	the way participants act, communicate, and present themselves	"just being able to say, 'These are my ideas. How do they look?' at that point in an invention conference, that's perfectly appropriate, and that's something I would expect to some degree."
Classroom Context Descriptive subcodes: • Blended classroom • Department influence • English 101 • Office space • Inclement Weather • Timing	the classroom context as the broader setting of the conference such as the rhetorical task, number of conferences, conference space, timing during student's writing process, and timing during the semester	"it's helpful for me to sit down with them and talk about what they think they want to do. In general, that's about looking at the scope of the project [and]…help them make sure that they are staying within the genre they established."

Table 8

Structural and Descriptive Codes for Student Data Sources

Structural Codes and Descriptive Subcodes	Operational Definition	Example Code
Q2. What are students' perceptions (i.e., their viewpoints, interpretations, and responses) on writing conferences?		
Viewpoints Descriptive subcodes: • Impressions of English 101 • Evaluation of conference • Suggestions for instructors	evaluation of the practice and class	"Kind of? I mean it was successful in that like I wasn't really looking for anything out of it. I mean, I guess I wasn't really looking for anything because I don't like to rely on people. And I, I don't, I don't know. Like things that have to do with other people, I don't expect good stuff to happen. It's just like it's happening whatever happens, you know happens. But. Yeah." (Ellie)
Interpretation Descriptive subcodes: • Meaning • Instructor's goal • Student's role • Instructor's role • Relationship	understanding of the purpose and participant roles, and the relationship between the classroom context and conferences	"I liked it. It seemed like I talked a lot more than she did. But that's probably like, but I thought that was good because like, because it was good to be able to talk through all the research I did and talk through like how I felt about it, and then get her insights into how she thought this research was going." (John)
Responses Descriptive subcodes: • Outcomes • Affective dimensions • 3rd conference decision • Moments recalled	the way the acted during the conference, the emotions they felt, and the actions they planned to take afterwards	"I guess I just had a better understanding the two assignments that are due next Tuesday, which is the draft of the two assignments, which is to bring at least one annotated bibliography to class. And then also the full stasis grid." (Tayo)

To answer the question, *what is the culture of the writing conferences in practice,* I examined the writing conference interactions. I began my analysis in the transcription process. I hired a colleague to assist with the initial transcription of the writing conferences. I then cleaned each draft transcription, and denoted participant actions, overlapping and latching speech, and pauses (Appendix F includes transcription key). I developed my codes based on my initial findings about the instructor's intended conference culture, which included choice, introductions and conclusions, instructor questions and direct instruction, offers to follow up, and personal matters. In addition, I calculated the overall rate of participation for the instructor and students. I computed the percentage of words spoken by participants and coded the conference discourse for who introduced ideas, effectively directing the conversation.

Finally, to determine *to what extent, if any, did the culture appear to shape students' experiences in writing conferences*, I developed visual matrixes to compare the conference culture with the student's perceptions. These matrixes identified areas of cultural congruency and mismatch. I triangulated my finding of mismatch or congruency with evidence from the conference discourse and field notes. Lastly, I synthesized my findings and compared it to my theoretical framework. This was a reflexive process as I recursively moved from my codes to theory to interpretation in order to develop my findings.

Validity and Reliability

Maxwell (2012) defines validity as the "correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account" (p. 122). Therefore, validity is an integral part of research design. Several steps have been taken in the design

of this study to address validity and reliability. To ensure reliability and internal validity, I carefully reported the methodology used to gather data and standardized collection processes. I developed a case study database to organize and document all data sources, including detailed information about the date, time, length, participants, data type, location, and brief descriptions. I also generated my codes in consultation with colleagues and shared analytical memos with tentative conclusions.

A second researcher coded selections of the data interview using the deductive codes generated from the literature. Our intercoder reliability was 81%. The primary difference between the coders was distinguishing between participant roles and classroom context when Patti discussed her general expectations for students' behavior. These differences were discussed and resolved. We also worked together to complete five coding tasks on a sample set of conference transcripts. We coded for who introduced ideas into the conference and reached consensus on the definition of an idea bracket, the acceptance and denial of these ideas.

For interpretive validity, I conducted member checks with student participants, which is a standard process for critical research. Brenner (2006) recommended member checking especially when the goal of the interview is to understand the creation of meaning (p. 368). Maxwell (2012) agreed that member checks are the "single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspectives they have on what is going on" (p. 126-127). I provided student participants with the transcripts of their interviews and their narrative for review. Disagreements were noted in my final write up. Member checks have the additional benefit of helping the researcher identify misconceptions and biases. I kept a

researcher's journal throughout the project to help me bracket my personal assumptions and understand how they have influenced my research process and conclusions.

To address external validity, I purposefully selected participants for maximum variation. Several methods were triangulated including interviews, observations, and artifacts (Roulston, 2010). This allowed me to triangulate individual data sources, including artifacts, observation recordings, field notes, and interviews transcripts that make robust findings (Yin, 2014). The combination of multiple methods and sources of data helped me develop rich, thick descriptions or "the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated" (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). These descriptions are essential to case study because of the importance placed on context. In this way, I took steps to address validity and reliability.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described my interpretive case study methodology with a bounded system of the writing conferences in a first year composition course (FYC) course. To describe student experiences in writing conferences, I examined the conference interaction between 1 instructor and 6 student participants, who were selected for maximum variation in identity, background, and writing ability. Data collection included surveys, artifacts, observations of course and writing conference interactions, and multiple interviews with oral commentary questions. In the data analysis process, the findings were coded both inductively and deductively in order to identify the extent the conference was culturally mismatched or congruent with student's perceptions. To address validity and reliability, I took steps like triangulation, intercoder agreement, and member checks. My findings from this study are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the results of my data analysis to address my central research question: *What are students' experiences in writing conferences in a blended first year composition course?* In adopting a cultural mismatch theoretical perspective, I describe the relationship between students' experiences and the culture of an instructor's writing conference practice. Through my analysis of the data sources presented in Chapter 3, I interpret the culture of Patti's conferences and describe the elements of this culture evident in the conference interaction. Then I interpret student's perceptions of conferences. Lastly, I conclude by identifying the extent the conference culture shaped student's experience of writing conferences. I organize these findings according to the sub-questions that structured this inquiry.

Instructor's Description of Writing Conference Culture

To examine my first research question, *how did the instructor describe the culture of her writing conference practice in relation to purpose, participant roles, and classroom context*, I started by investigating the instructor's descriptions of her pedagogy. Since the codes and norms of a culture are frequently tacit to those in power (Delpit, 2006), I interviewed Patti about her writing conference practice in relation to three factors identified from the research literature: purpose, participant roles, and classroom context. These factors offered insights into some of the most apparent norms and assumptions. However, it is likely they do not capture all of the elements underpinning the culture of Patti's practice. The following results provide an overview of the culture of Patti's writing conference practice. Research question two then describes the conference culture in practice.

To preface my analysis, I would like to underscore that the intention of this study is not to evaluate Patti Collin's teaching. I was embedded in Patti's course, observing for four months. I found her to be an excellent, dedicated teacher. Her lessons were rigorous, engaging, and aligned with the assignments and learning outcomes for the course. She consistently demonstrated a commitment to writing conferences by finding large blocks of time to meet individually with students. Instead, my analysis strives to describe the ways writing conferences are a cultural practice with strict norms and expectations. I interpret Patti's conference practice simultaneously as exemplary at Mid-Atlantic University, yet reflective of broader cultural norms in the field of composition and higher education.

Purpose

Patti described the purpose, *the objectives or intended outcomes of her conferences*, in somewhat contradictory terms that reveal a tension in her practice. She explained that her conferences are intended to help students generate new ideas, while also evaluating the appropriateness of their ideas. These two purposes are so closely intertwined that Patti frequently switches from one to the other in the same description:

> So it's a lot about their expectation about what's going to work and how they should really allow themselves to explore what they want to explore, and we can figure out whether and how to make it fit what we need for them to do, because there are rhetorical options that they don't know about.

Conferences give students permission to "explore" their ideas, but they also determine "whether and how" those ideas work with the assignment.

At their best, Patti believes that conferences encourage students to pursue topics they are passionate about, take risks, and even be original. She explained "sometimes [students] secretly want to do something that they are afraid is not right…So [conferences] gives us a way to talk about how they might carry out what they actually secretly want to do." For example, students in the past have explored timely and relevant topics, like student Adderall drug abuse, and developed proposal arguments, like changing Mid-Atlantic University's approach to sustainability. Conferences have also helped students consider how to transform their ideas for digital mediums, such as blogs, podcasts, and videos. For example, one student adopted the personae of a homeschooling mom and created a blog from that point of view. Patti attributed this conference with pushing this student "to think a little outside of what she'd normally think about." These anecdotes present conferences as helping students generate original ideas and approaches to their assignments.

Yet, conferences also serve a practical purpose. They provide an opportunity for Patti to evaluate the appropriateness of students' ideas and shape their final paper. This quote reveals the tension between exploring and limiting ideas in conferences:

> [Conferences] help [students] edit. To figure out how to make it fit more precisely what the assignment is asking them to do. And so, to sort of help them manage their own creativity in ways. That they should feel free to do different things, but that they will need to make sure that it fits the assignment and it's substantial enough and limited scope.

Conferences give students the freedom to talk through their ideas: explore, be creative, take risks, and think outside of the box. But conferences also provide a forum to evaluate

these ideas. As the instructor, Patti assists students to "manage" their creativity, "limit" their scope, and most importantly, "fit" the assignment. Taken together, these conferences have an element of requiring students to conform to preset boundaries, boundaries established by the instructor in the assignment.

The evaluation purpose for conferences became increasingly prominent as Patti described specific goals for each conference. For the first conference, Patti explained: "I wanted to talk to [students] about their research questions first of all, and make sure they were sufficiently narrow. Invariably that was the issue. Make sure the questions were pitched in a way that they could work with them." Her goal was to have students talk through their research questions in order to evaluate the fit of these questions with the assignment. For the second conference, she assessed students' progress: "I was interested in, you know, looking at what they had. What their ideas were. What pieces they had chosen. And what their approaches were" in addition to "assessing the topic sentences and make sure that they're hard-hitting, specific, and effect based enough." In both cases, the goal was to provide students with feedback on their ideas. Patti summarized her approach to conferences as "about ideas and making sure what they have brought fits the assignment and is appropriately thought through in terms of scope."

Patti also described several outcomes that she intended conferences to help students meet. They also aligned with her evaluation purpose for conferences. Patti planned for students to have a clear path to complete the assignment:

> my hope is…that when the student leaves the conference, the student a) feels better. Often they come in they have, you know, 25 ideas and my hope would be

> that they have a clear way forward. They know what the next step is, and they feel confident to go pursue whatever it is that they need to pursue next.

She frequently emphasized students' feelings as a positive outcome of conferences. She wanted students to feel "confident" about completing the assignment or "empowered to do more" with their ideas. She believed their confidence would come from students having a "stronger sense of what the assignment is asking for, so they know what groups of ideas to explore further." In this way, successful conferences concluded with students leaving with concrete plans of how to complete the assignment in accordance with the instructor's feedback.

While conferences are an opportunity to individualize instruction and develop a relationship with students, Patti emphasized that her conference purpose is consistent for all students. She noted that "students have different needs" that shape the writing conference conversations and outcomes, but she did not set individual goals for students. When asked about this approach, she responded: "I didn't think of [conferences] that way." Instead, Patti emphasized that office hours, extra conferences, and the writing center were avenues for students to seek individualized help on particular writing issues. Patti also rarely mentioned writing conferences' impact on her relationship with students. She commented that the first writing conference is positioned early in the semester "because I think it's important for them to know where my office is and to feel comfortable coming in and talking about their work." She wanted students to feel comfortable with discussing their writing, but her goal was not necessarily to develop a stronger relationship with students. The mandatory conferences had a specific purpose—generating and evaluating ideas.

In summary, Patti's principal purpose for writing conferences was to evaluate student's ideas in order to make sure they were of appropriate scope for the rhetorical task. She believed conferences gave students opportunities to explore ideas, but these ideas need to be evaluated for originality and appropriateness.

Classroom Context

The purpose of Patti's conferences was also reflected in the classroom context, *specifically the rhetorical task and timing during the writing process*. Although students were tasked with eight different writing assignments throughout the semester, only three assignments were selected for writing conferences: the annotated bibliography and stasis grid; the rhetorical analysis essay; and the digital remediation project and reflective letter. Her assignment selection aligned with the program's recommendations, which also suggested conferences before the annotated bibliography and the revision paper (what Patti changed to the digital remediation project). Patti added an additional conference for the rhetorical analysis essay. Patti explained that she selected these three assignments because "there are lots of different ways students can go." In other words, these assignments all included an element of choice.

While these assignments asked students to make a choice, these choices were constrained either in terms of topic, text, or rhetoric. For example, the annotated bibliography assignment required students to choose a topic that they could explore for the entire semester. Yet this choice was constrained by the assignment sequence for the course. Students needed to develop a research question that was appropriate for a lengthy, scholarly position research paper. Similarly, the rhetorical analysis essay featured choice in text: Students could select either a poem from Mid-Atlantic University's first year

book *Head Off & Split* by Nikki Finney or an article they reviewed for their annotated bibliography. However, students' choices were limited to just these two types of texts—they could not pick an outside text. Patti explained that in addition to the selection of a text, the rhetorical analysis assignment handout as written included "seventeen questions or whatever on the back of it and the students can go, you know, in vastly different directions." These questions offered students a range of approaches to analyzing the rhetorical appeals. In conferences, Patti was able to help them navigate these choices by "ask[ing] good questions about where they're coming from or how they can take something and make it more analytical." Lastly, the digital remediation project had students choose an audience, purpose, and digital medium to re-think their paper. She explained: "it's helpful for me to sit down with them and talk about what they think they want to do. In general, that's about looking at the scope of the project [and]…help them make sure that they are staying within the genre they established." Conferences helped students navigate the open-ended nature of this project and make choices that would be both original and appropriate for the rhetorical task.

Ultimately, each of these assignments included greater degrees of freedom, where students needed to make choices about their topics, texts, or rhetoric that would ultimately contribute to the success of the work. Therefore, Patti used writing conferences, evaluating students' ideas, to ensure they successfully meet the requirements of the assignment. She opted for writing conferences over peer workshops because the choices in these assignments meant that students wrote on vastly different topics and with varying approaches, which made it difficult for peers to effectively respond. In general, peers did not have the same knowledge of the various topics nor the rhetorical options for

the assignment as the instructor. Therefore, Patti "put a conference in a place where a peer workshop doesn't make sense." She explained that her role as the instructor is to help students "see all of the different possibilities" for the assignment and "provide advice" in navigating these choices.

Aligning with the purpose and rhetorical task, Patti also scheduled writing conferences early in students' writing process. Ideally, conferences came after students had determined a topic, but before they started drafting. Since the conference assignments offered students choice, Patti's goal was to provide students with early feedback to prevent them from going too far in the wrong direction. For example, Patti recalled conferences with a student who selected an inappropriate text and approach for his rhetorical analysis. She noted that it took two writing conferences to get the student to realize he needed to start over with a new text.

Additionally, Patti believed that the timing of conferences during the writing process was advantageous because it contains the conversation: "it makes the 20 minute conference appropriate, because it's not that some students need 3 minutes and some students need 40 minutes. It's everyone pretty much can use the 20 minutes." In other words, if the purpose of the conference was to brainstorm topics, some students may have few ideas while others may have their topics fully developed. This would create a wide range in conference lengths. By scheduling conferences at end of the invention stage, she was able to evaluate the ideas produced so far, helping students to clarify and refine their ideas. This timing also allowed her to influence the shape of the final essay by asking questions to guide students as they thought about their purpose, organizational choices, evidence, and other components of the essay.

Although Patti preferred to conference early in the writing process, this was difficult to accomplish logistically because it required all conferences to be scheduled in a narrow time period. For the second and third writing conference, Patti offered students the option to conference later in the week on complete drafts. For full drafts, her goal was "to really assess the topic sentences and make sure that they're hard-hitting, specific, and effect based enough. And to look at sort of the blending of evidence and those [items] you look for when you have a whole draft." Her emphasis was still on examining students' ideas, but rather than evaluating thesis statements and sentence outlines, she assessed how those ideas were developed in the paper.

The purpose of Patti's writing conference practice was reflected in the rhetorical task and timing of conferences. She preferred to conduct writing conferences on assignments that included options, albeit limited ones, for students to choose from. To help with these choices, she timed her writing conferences to meet with students at end of the invention stage, so she could evaluate the ideas students had produced. If this timing was not feasible, she reviewed students' full drafts for topic sentences and evidence.

Participant Roles

Patti had clear expectations for participant roles, *the way participants act, communicate, and present themselves,* during conferences. Patti emphasized that students' primary conference role was to talk about their ideas for the assignment. According to Patti, students with the strongest academic preparation are "able to talk intelligently about their articles and what they see happening there." They explain their ideas and how they relate to the research or paper assignment. They can easily answer questions posed by the instructor. These students also take charge of conferences by

asking pointed questions: "the best students have questions…[they say] 'this is my proposed thesis statement. This is my outline. These are the questions that I have at this point.'" In other words, students directed the conversation. While Patti's ideal was students speaking intelligently and directing the conversation, she acknowledged that most students are unable to meet these expectations. She noted that for many students: "just being able to say, 'These are my ideas. How do they look?' at that point in an invention conference, that's perfectly appropriate, and that's something I would expect to some degree." At the most basic level, Patti felt it was important for students to "get used to talking" about their articles and their ideas "in different ways." However, Patti's comparison of the strongest students and more typical students already indicates a disconnect between the role that she would like students to fulfill, talking freely about ideas, and the role most students end up adopting, quickly presenting some work and waiting for her opinion.

In addition to directing the conversation, Patti also described the strongest students taking notes on the conversation in order to develop a plan for their writing. She believed that it is fundamentally students' responsibility to capture feedback provided in conferences:

> I did sort of make them a list, but that's sort of their responsibility. I mean had I been a student coming to this conference, I would have had my notebook out, and I would have been throughout, 'oh so these are the four things I need to do, right?' And, you know, so there's the piece where I want to make sure that they get it, but they are also sort of responsible for capturing it.

Patti recognized that while some students inherently knew to take notes, most students did not. As the instructor, she ended up creating quick lists to ensure students left with the key points. She added that the expectation of note taking was frequently implicit like many of the conversational requirements. She commented that in the future she may even consider clarifying this expectation for future students.

Patti described the primary role of the instructor as including listening and posing questions. She explained a successful conference would include her listening and responding to students' ideas: "it would feature me listening a lot. And then the instruction that I give, is, is less generic and more personalized." She stressed that she frequently responds to students by asking questions, inquiring about key terms, ideas in articles, and organization plans. These questions were intended to scaffold student's thinking: "I'm asking the student questions in order to make sure that the topic is narrow enough and that it is researchable." Yet these questions also establish the instructor in an evaluation role. Patti's questions point out which of the students' ideas fit with the assignment and which need to be revised. This evaluative purpose also was apparent when Patti described her purpose for listening to students' talk: "I do a lot of listening to find out what [students] really want to do. And if it's possible for, what they really want to do to be turned into a kind of scholarly topic…for it to fit into the kind of questions that we have." She listens to students in order to assess the fit of their interests with the scholarly research project for the class.

While these communication strategies underscore the evaluation function the instructor plays, Patti did not believe in making decisions for students. Instead, she tended to emphasize choices. For example, she summarized the conclusion of a typical

conversation: “here are two choices. You may have other choices, but here are two choices. It seems like you are headed in this direction, but it might be useful to consider that direction also.” When selecting topics, she typically granted students permission to write on a particular topic but with caveats: “of course you can write about this topic, I’d like to see your question narrow” or “so often students received that response as sort of yes you may, this is a worthy topic, but the question itself needs work.” In this way, she saw her role as scaffolding students thinking in a way a peer could not:

> And in a way that their peer might not be forceful enough to say “you can do more,” I think that’s my job. They come in. They offer something and I say, well generally I say “you can do more,” or you know, [I] ask good questions about where they’re coming from or how they can take something and make it more analytical.

This quote reveals a tension in the instructor’s role. Patti did not explicitly instruct students to write something, instead offering several options. However, these choices are constrained like the choices offered in the rhetorical tasks of the conference assignments. Patti granted permission for students to write on certain topics with caveats and used questions to encourage students to explore particular ideas.

In this role, Patti stressed preparation as key to both the instructor’s and students’ roles. She generally asked students to prepare a thesis statement and a list of main claims or sentence outline. These materials were to be printed, so Patti could give feedback or jot down notes. For example, Patti described a prepared student for the first conference as one who “came in with the materials that I had asked for on paper. So I could mark things up. And a prepared student came in with a reasonably narrow research question because I

had approved the three topic memos." A prepared student came with both the materials and a narrow research question, indicating that students should be at the point in their writing process where they developed their ideas but had not started drafting. Interestingly, Patti asked students to create a product for her to review, but she did not explicitly stress their speaking role by requiring them to prepare questions to ask during conferences. Patti indicated that writing a thesis statement and basic outline would prepare students to talk about their ideas.

As the instructor, Patti prepared by familiarizing herself with student's prior work or general areas of interests, but she still wanted to bring a fresh perspective to conferences. She explained that keeping up with students' work allows her to get a good sense of "where their thinking seemed most developed, where the exigence really was for them, that those kinds of things that might be masked in one way or another in person." She used this same processes when students brought in drafts because "often my impression as I read are important, so like there is a value to the first reading." This preparation process allowed her to identify a "beginning idea that I can then develop or, you know, get rid of when the actual conference happened." Once again, both her and students' preparation steps emphasized the evaluation purpose of conferences. As the instructor, she provided a first read and determined which ideas to develop and which ones to reject.

Patti described the ideal student role featuring a student who is prepared with work to share, speak intelligently about their ideas, direct the conversation, ask and answer questions, and carefully document the conversation. The ideal instructor role required the instructor to listen to students' ideas, respond with thoughtful scaffolding

questions, and outline choices on how to proceed. Students had the ultimate authority to make decisions, but their decisions should be implicitly shaped by the instructor's questions.

Culture of Writing Conferences

In my theoretical framework, I posit that schools have a culture that prescribes specific epistemological stances, values, practices and pedagogies, participation structures, and discourse conventions. Patti's descriptions of her writing conferences in relation to the purpose, participant roles, and classroom context offer insights into the culture of her practice. Some of these cultural expectations are tacit, such as her epistemological stance, values, and assumptions, while others are more explicit, such as the participation structures, behaviors, and discourse conventions. While these factors provide insights into the elements of writing conference culture, they do not capture all of the possible elements of culture.

Patti's description of her writing conferences includes several tacit cultural expectations that were implied through her descriptions. Patti's conference purpose is to evaluate students' work for originality and appropriateness of scope. Epistemologically, this purpose implies that the instructor is the final arbitrator of knowledge. Patti has the authority to decide which ideas are worthy of exploration and which ones are not adequate. In many ways, this stance is earned. Patti is an experienced writer and teacher, who can draw on rhetorical strategies of which students may be unaware. Additionally, she is responsible for evaluating students' final writing product, determining the legitimacy and quality of knowledge produced. However, this stance may minimize, and

occasionally overlook, the knowledge students bring to their writing. It presumes the legitimacy of the instructor's knowledge to evaluate and change students' ideas.

Patti's implied epistemological stance appears to conflict with the values of originality and choice that were prominently described in the previous section. Patti views conferences as a way to help students develop original ideas, take risks, and pursue topics they are passionate about. Conferences make this risk-taking possible because the one-on-one nature enables Patti to learn more about students' ideas. Yet, Patti's epistemological stance allows her to define originality. She approves the originality of ideas, deeming what is appropriate for students to pursue. Therefore, conferences may manage students' creativity by ensuring their work meets the assignment requirements. While originality was an expressed value of conferences, original ideas were confined to specific parameters established by the rhetorical task and instructor.

Similarly, Patti offered students choices in conferences, but these choices are considerably constrained in practice. Patti selected three particular assignments for conferences because they all include an element of choice in topic, text, or rhetorical approach. However, these are choices are limited in that students are permitted to select from a subset of topics and texts (i.e., pick an article from your annotated bibliography or a poem from *Head Off & Split*). During conferences, choices are also present in the discourse. Explicitly, Patti will describe several options they may want to pursue. Implicitly, Patti helps students examine their ideas and navigate different rhetorical approaches by asking questions. These questions present students with alternatives. For example, asking questions about students' thesis statements inherently provides students with new options, yet the very act of questioning students' ideas implicitly signals that

Patti likely prefers a different approach. Students are given the ultimate decision on how to proceed, but only after Patti's evaluation. Consequently, the choices in conferences are in many ways limited and tightly controlled through the design of the assignment and writing conference discourse.

In contrast to these tacit cultural expectations, Patti clearly outlined participant roles that specified participation structures, behaviors, and discourse conventions. These cultural elements are interconnected. Ideally, students bring in work they prepared. They direct the conversation by talking about their ideas, which Patti listens to and then responds to by asking questions. Students answer these questions while taking notes on the conversation. They pose their own questions that Patti answers. Finally, Patti implicitly points to or explicitly offers choices of the different directions students can take. Students choose the most appropriate option that is original and fits with the scope of the assignment.

Ultimately, the cultural expectations of Patti's writing conference practice present several assumptions about students, their abilities, and understanding of conferences. First, there is an assumption that students understand and share Patti's focused purpose for conferencing. While some students may be interested in having their ideas evaluated, they may also want different types of help, such as locating sources, organizing their ideas, or proofreading. Second, there is the assumption that students are interested in the assignment and have independently developed ideas prior to conferences. Patti characterized typical students in conferences as having too many ideas for the assignment (i.e., "students come in with 25 ideas"). Third, the participant roles assume students know how to and can competently lead a conversation, answer questions, and pose new

questions all while taking notes. Lastly, there is an assumption that students understand that the choices presented are constrained and must be weighted within the larger context of the assignment.

Summary

Patti's descriptions of conferences purpose and participant roles provided a rich understanding of the cultural expectations of this practice. Her tacit cultural expectations included an epistemological stance where she is final arbitrator of knowledge, which conflicted with the values of originality and choice presented in the conference interaction. Her expectations for participant roles were more explicit. Students were expected to adopt a narrow participant role that includes directing the conversation, posing and answering questions. Now with these findings in mind, I examine the conference culture in practice with the six student participants in my study.

Culture of Writing Conferences in Practice

To examine my second research question, *what is the culture of the writing conferences in practice,* I analyzed the transcribed audio-recorded conferences to understand the conference culture in practice (Refer to Appendix F for transcription key). These recordings provide insights into the way the purpose and participant roles were enacted during conferences with the six students in this study. In this analysis, I focus specifically on the conference discourse, studying conference openers and closers; who talked and directed the conversation; instructor questions and direct instruction; and choice. Naturally, this analysis is only one of several ways the culture of the conference could be examined. My goal is to provide evidence of the conference culture that supplements and extends Patti's descriptions from the interviews.

Conference Openers

Aligning with Patti's description of the purpose, the conference conversations focused primarily on students' work. Patti and students rarely discussed topics other than the assignment. There was little time spent getting to know each other personally and establishing a relationship outside of the context of the classroom. The focus on students' work was apparent from the outset of the conference. Fewer than half of conferences began with quick pleasantries (6 of 13). These pleasantries were basic, a simple "hello" and "how are you?" Afterward these conferences opened in one of two ways. In many cases, Patti started the conversation with an introductory question, such as "what have you brought me today," "how has the research experience been," or "what have you chosen and why?" Otherwise, students stepped up and started the conference with a statement showing their work, like "I have an outline" or "I just took some notes on the poem" or "starting with the stasis grid?" No matter who spoke first, all conferences immediately focused on students' work.

In a subsequent interview, Patti reflected on the way she opened conferences. She explained that this approach was beneficial for students because they have the opportunity to collect themselves and prepare for the upcoming conversation:

> Yeah it's true that I didn't do any sort of "welcome to your conference" moment. Rather, [I said] "oh here you are," "Hi! Nice to see you. Have a seat." My feeling is that, and this is coming from my own experience as a student, if there is a lot of "Hi! How're you? Where are you from?" stuff, it actually makes me more nervous…And that talking about what you prepared puts people at ease in ways.

For Patti, the opening of her conferences was rooted in her experiences as a student. She personally felt more comfortable with the known structure of discussing work rather than the more open-ended structure of discussing personal matters. She noted, however, that opening the conference straight into students' work did not necessarily establish a personal connection with students beyond the assignment. Instead, Patti tended to discuss personal matters when "a connection came up organically" because then it would "become important to the conference."

As a result, there were only a two moments when students' personal matters were addressed in conferences examined for this study. In both cases, students' mentioned their personal topic more than once, and on the second mention, Patti responded to the comment. For example, Nicole described getting help from her mother when developing her research question. She told Patti about their conversation: "My mom actually went off on a rant when I read my question. It's like mom, I know. I'm doing research on this. It's ok." Patti responded by asking if Nicole's mother was a teacher. They then discussed how Nicole's mother could be used to identify people to interview as a unique data source for the final research paper. This exchange was an example of when Patti discussed a matter that was more personal in nature, although Nicole's conversation with her mother was still related to her research process.

The second occasion when personal matters were discussed was in response to Ellie's assertion that she was "very bad" at writing papers. Ellie mentioned several times during the conference that she was not a strong writer. At the conclusion, she exclaimed:

> Ellie: [This] is a lot more like papers I did last year, which were generally very bad.

Patti: *[Laughs]*

Ellie: Umm yeah. I think the best paper I wrote was freshman year on *Lord of the Flies.*

Patti: Oh wow.

Ellie: Never. Yeah I'm not good at this.

Patti: Ok well.

Ellie: I'm trying really [hard].

Patti: [Ok].

Ellie: Like to do this.

Although Ellie mentioned her writing ability earlier in the conference, Patti responded in this case. In a lengthy exchange, Patti tried to reassure Ellie that she did not see evidence of poor writing. First, she reiterated the feedback provided in the conference. She added that everything should be fine as long as she developed analytical topic sentences because "your reader is thinking about it that way because you said it first." Second, Patti offered to do an additional writing conference or review a portion of Ellie's paper by email. Lastly, Patti examined Ellie's prior work in the class, noting "I'm not seeing a lot of evidence of badness in your work." While Patti did not normally invite student's personal matters into conferences, in this case, she went to great lengths to reaffirm Ellie's writing ability and offer solutions for the upcoming assignment.

As a whole, the culture of the writing conferences focused on primarily on students work. Either Patti or students would initiate conferences by asking a question or showing prepared work. Students rarely shared personal matters in conferences, and Patti

addressed these matters only when they were mentioned more than once and became salient to the discussion.

Conference Talk and Direction

Patti's expectations for the conference culture were students directing the conversation by sharing their ideas and asking questions. She added that a successful conference featured her listening to students' ideas. In practice, Patti tended to direct the conversation and talk more than the six students in this study. Her control of the conversation was evident by the percentages of words participants spoke. Overall, students spoke fewer than 40% of the words in conferences. For the first conferences, Ellie, Sydney, and Tayo talked the least, 17%, 19%, and 22%, respectively. In contrast, John spoke almost twice as much, nearly 42% of the words. This pattern held for the second conference. The most students spoke was approximately 40% of the words in conference (Sydney 41%; John 36%). The rest of the students spoke less than 20% of the words in conferences. While in some cases the levels of student participation changed in the second conference, these percentages overall indicate that Patti spoke more than her students. See Table 9 for percentages of words spoken in conferences by participants.

Table 9

Presents Total Words Spoken in Conferences by Participants

Student	Conference	Length	Total Words	Percentage Instructor	Percentage Student	Relative Change
Ellie	First	16 minutes	2621	82.6%	17.4%	Similar
	Second	13 minutes	3772	84.1%	15.9%	
Naomi	First	16 minutes	2454	70.0%	30.0%	Fewer
	Second	27 minutes	4386	79.5%	20.5%	
John	First	18 minutes	3246	58.5%	41.5%	Similar
	Second	32 minutes	5409	63.7%	36.3%	
Sydney	First	21 minutes	3252	80.7%	19.2%	Greater
	Second	23 minutes	3798	59.0%	41.0%	
Tayo	First	19 minutes	3102	78.5%	21.5%	Fewer
	Second	26 minutes	4368	85.2%	14.8%	
Nicole	First	16 minutes	2550	72.2%	27.7%	Similar
	Second	24 minutes	3674	78.9%	21.1%	
	Third	27 minutes	4189	74.3%	25.7%	

Patti's control of the conference discourse was also evident in the idea brackets, who introduced ideas or topics into the conversation. To be counted, these ideas did not need to be necessarily new; instead, they had to add to the conversation or take it in a new direction. They were frequently as simple as Patti reading a thesis statement aloud, asking a question, or providing direct instruction. Students' ideas tended to focus on sharing new explanations or posing questions. For example, in the following exchange, both Sydney and Patti introduced new topics at the beginning of the second conference:

Sydney: So based on some of these notes I've taken. My thesis, I'm not really sure, it's obviously not perfect yet, but I was just thinking of like a couple of…device I could use. I was wondering if you could look like over them to see if it kind of makes sense?

Patti: Sure. Um. So it looks to me like your process, um so far has been to go through and see what's, what's standing out to you, and then to write it down and then to figure out what the patterns are.

Sydney asks a question about her thesis statement, a new idea. Patti accepts that turn by saying "sure." She then immediately introduces an idea, inquiring about Sydney's writing process. The conversation then proceeds as Patti examines Sydney's thesis statement.

Although the total number of ideas varied depending on the student and conference, Patti tended to direct the conversation. She introduced anywhere from 17 to 46 of the ideas in conferences, accounting for 68% to 94% of the total ideas. Of the six students in this study, John and Nicole introduced the most ideas 10 and 19, representing 32% and 31% of the total. In contrast, Tayo and Ellie initiated the fewest ideas respectively only 5 and 2, which represented only 9% and 6% of the total. For the remaining students, they ranged from 18% to 26% of the ideas introduced. This finding indicates that students presented fewer ideas and tended to have less control of the conversation than Patti. Table 10 displays the number of ideas introduced in conferences broken down by participant.

Table 10

Displays Number of Ideas Introduced in Conferences by Participant

Student	Conference	Total Ideas	Instructor Ideas Accepted	Student Ideas Accepted	Student Ideas Denied	Instructor Ideas Accepted	Student Ideas Accepted
Ellie	First	21	17	4	1	81.0 %	19.0%
	Second	33	31	2	0	93.9%	6.1%
Naomi	First	29	22	7	1	75.9%	24.1%
	Second	41	31	10	1	75.6%	24.4%
John	First	31	21	10	1	67.7%	32.3%
	Second	54	42	12	0	77.8%	22.2%
Sydney	First	27	20	7	0	74.1%	26.0%
	Second	43	33	10	1	76.7%	23.3%
Tayo	First	33	27	6	2	81.8%	18.2%
	Second	51	46	5	2	90.2%	9.8%
Nicole	First	29	22	7	0	75.9%	24.1%
	Second	43	35	8	0	81.4%	18.6%
	Third	61	42	19	3	68.9%	31.2%

Due to the power dynamics inherent to any student-teacher interaction, not all of the students' ideas were accepted into the conversation, meaning they were permitted to complete their idea without interruption. Each student had at least one idea denied by Patti when she talked over or cut off a student. These denials occurred quickly during normal conversation and were likely unintentional and inadvertent. For example, one

denied idea occurred when Naomi tried to explain why she had included popular sources in her list:

> Patti: So this looks to me like it's probably a fine journal but the source itself is probably not a peer reviewed article. So it's, in a scholarly journal, but not a peer reviewed article. So if you can switch this one out. I mean you can certainly use it. [It seems like it]
>
> Naomi: [But that one of the five]
>
> Patti: It seems like it's probably very useful. Yeah. It's probably not one of the five.

Patti's and Naomi's speech overlap in this instance, demarked by brackets. This overlap effectively cut off Naomi's response, because as the instructor, Patti had more authority to control the conversation. Naomi ended up deferring to Patti's turn. This is an example of Patti denying a student's idea.

In contrast, students denied only one of Patti's ideas in all 13 of the conferences. John was the student who denied Patti's idea, which is unsurprising because John overall had the highest rate of participation and introduced the most ideas out of his peers in this study. In the first conference, John accidentally spoke over Patti:

> Patti: There's not a change over time, rather they're taking up different approaches or, um, answering different aspects. [And]
>
> John: [Like] one of the, the interesting ones. Sorry, I didn't mean to.
>
> Patti: No, that's all right.

Unlike Patti who spoke over Naomi, John recognized his mistake immediately and quickly apologized for the interruption. Patti granted John permission to continue

speaking by saying it was "all right." This was the only instance of a student denying the instructor's ideas outright. In general, students did not have the authority to talk over or cut off Patti's ideas outright.

A closer examination of who presents the ideas in the conversation provides additional insights into the conference culture in practice. Patti characterized ideal conferences as including participant roles where students directed the conversation and talked more than her. In practice, students were responsible for talking and proposing ideas less than 25% of the time. Patti tended to talk and direct the conversation more than her students.

Questions and Direct Instruction

While tracking the ideas of a conversation provides insight into who directed the conversation, they do not assess the common discourse conventions of conferences. Patti's conferences had a strong pattern to the discourse. Patti asked questions to identify the key terms in a paper, the effects of literary devices, new textual evidence, and organization of ideas. Students responded with their ideas. These question and answer exchanges made up the bulk of the conference discourse. Patti generally started conferences with questions. She read students' prepared research question or thesis statement aloud and then asking students to elaborate on terminology or key concepts:

> Patti: So *[reads thesis aloud]* Nikky Finney uses symbolism, religious references and shift in writing style to demonstrate the importance of what one believes is the moral norm without fear of judgment or criticism. OK…symbolism, religious references and shift in writing style? What's shift in writing style?

Sydney: Mostly I'm talking about like the shift in tone because of in the poem at one point I think it's on page nine, she starts to shift point of view. So, in the beginning she was speaking in third person and then around page nine, she started speaking in second person. So she keeps saying you, you are this, you have done this. And then.

Patti: Ok. So shift in point of view.

These questions enabled Patti to evaluate students' ideas and propose new phrases and precise terminology to strengthen these ideas. In the previous example, Patti identified that Sydney was describing a shift in point of view rather than writing style.

Patti also posed open-ended questions without a precise correct answer. These questions were intended to help students think through their ideas instead of answer correctly. In the following exchange, Patti described the purpose of such questions to Nicole:

Nicole: *[reads research question aloud]* should elementary through high school students with special needs, with severe special needs be required to go to special needs schools?

Patti: Ok. And is severe a designation that's official?

Nicole: Um. Yes. Um. My mom told me like severe meaning as in they cause a disruption to the regular learning environment or they're potential harm to themselves or others.

Patti: Is that a classification that some students would get?

Nicole: Um yeah.

Patti: Ok, it's fine if you don't know the answers to any of these questions. It's,

it's your job to like say "oh that's [important.]

Nicole: [yeah.]

Patti: I should look that up."

Patti wants Nicole to understand that she is not expected to have all the right answers in conferences. Instead, these questions can point Nicole to an idea for further research. Patti relied on questions throughout conferences to scaffold students' thinking about their ideas, but she did not always explain the purpose of questions to students. This example was one of the few instances where she explicitly described her question to a student.

While all conferences included questions and answer exchanges, the discourse in several conferences also included extensive explicit direct instruction. This shift occurred in two cases. First, Patti relied on direct instruction when students' preparations diverged from the assignment. For example, Sydney did not prepare for her first conference, so Patti focused on explaining the annotated bibliography assignment and demonstrating how to conduct research through the library databases. At one point, Patti pulled out her computer and explained: "OK, so the kinds of things you're finding then. So you're doing this [*types on computer*], and you're doing this [*clicks*], and [*clicks for 11 seconds*]. Alright, so what are you doing? You're saying GMOs and what else?" Together they proceeded to identify several articles that Sydney could possible use for her research project. Similarly, when Tayo brought a complete draft of his rhetorical analysis, Patti read his paper aloud and commented on each section. For example, she responded after reading a section: "So I think that in this paragraph you have a comment about ethos, and a comment about how it's arranged in order to emphasize the strong point at the end. The stuff in the middle is summary. How can you focus the, um, or yeah, how can you take

this information in the middle and make it more analytical?" In both these exchanges, Patti asked questions, but only after explicit direct instruction. This pattern continued throughout conferences.

Second, Patti shifted to direct instruction when students did not adequately fulfill their participant role—responding to her questions. Such a shift to direct instruction was most prominent in Ellie's second conference. At several exchanges, Ellie offered only one word responses. She refused to elaborate freely on her ideas:

> Patti: So what are you thinking? Like [reads text aloud] the structure, separation, departs, the language and imagery, you say...um. And then, I didn't know Rosa Parks was a seamstress. Yeah. Um. Ok. So for me, structure and separation and departs, um, those are similar ideas.
>
> Ellie: Yeah
>
> Patti: Do you mean for them to be similar ideas?
>
> Ellie: Yeah
>
> Patti: Ok, structure or form. And then also language. When you say language and imagery do you mean for that to be two different ideas?
>
> Ellie: No.
>
> Patti: You meant that's [one]
>
> Ellie: [I think] I think so. I don't know.
>
> Patti: Ok. Um. So language and imagery. So imagistic language to start with
>
> Ellie: Yeah
>
> Patti: and maybe other, other aspects of language. So all right.

In this exchange, Patti asked Ellie a series of questions in order to get her to share her thinking, yet Ellie only responded with one-word answers. Later in the conference, Patti asked explicitly for Ellie's input: "Her authority as seamstress to impart to right? Is that what's she. So help me with this." Patti wanted Ellie to step into the conversation and explain her ideas. Yet Ellie's reluctance to participate forced Patti into a more traditional teacher role, relying on direct instruction. As the instructor, Patti has to keep the conversation going, so she answered her own questions and offered her own interpretations with little of Ellie's input.

Patti was responsible for a greater number of ideas than students because of the prominent question and answer discourse pattern she established in conferences. She intended these questions to scaffold students' thinking as they were frequently open-ended. When students prepared for conferences differently or did not respond extensively to questions, Patti relied more on direct instruction. This occurred in conferences with Ellie, Sydney, and Tayo. Indeed, the percentage of student talk reflected the shift to direct instruction. Ellie, Sydney, and Tayo tended to speak less (6%, 19%, 10% respectively) than the other students in this study.

Choice

The culture of conferences also included implicit and explicit choices for students' writing. Patti frequently concluded a lengthy exchange of questions and responses by reminding students they need to choose an interpretation. She told students repeatedly "you can decide what you think" and "you have to decide what's important," essentially cautioning students from blindly following her advice. She told Ellie: "So decide what you, the poem really does. I mean, don't, don't be, it seems like that's a

logical extension of what we're talking about. But make sure the poem really does it." Similarly, she warned Sydney: "so whatever you decide to do, make it make sense." These statements inform students they are ultimately responsible for choosing the ideas for their paper, yet they also imply that there is a correct choice—one that is well supported in the poem. In this way, Patti presents students with choices, but these choices are constrained by the comments provided in the conference.

Occasionally, Patti outlined students' options explicitly as a way to summarize a lengthy discussion. For example, Patti described two possible structures for Naomi's introduction:

> one option is to keep the introduction like it is, um, and to just handle that issue. Another option would be to, um, instead of having the, you know, the sort of triangle introduction that you're used to, you would have the sort of, the sort of trapezoid paragraph and then, the, the little, the little partition paragraph that gets us to the thesis.

Naomi had a choice: keep a traditional introductory paragraph that concludes with a thesis statement or revise the introduction to include additional background information about the poem and develop a new partition paragraph with a thesis statement. Patti and Naomi had just extensively discussed strategies for an expanded introduction, indicating that an additional paragraph may be best, but the final revision was up to Naomi.

Patti frequently posed additional rhetorical questions when describing student's choices. The combined effect presented students with multiple embedded choices. In the case of Ellie's research question, Patti explained:

> So I think that the question as you proceed is about whether or not you want to focus geographically, and what it does to your articles when you do that? Like do you, um, does it help you to foreground certain approaches to the problem? Or not? And so, that's, that's something to think about. Do you want to focus a little bit more geographically and do you want, um, the language here to be more centered around water? The question itself doesn't have to be.

Patti presented Ellie with several choices in this summary. The first choice was whether to revise the research question at all. Then there were choices to narrow the question by geography or content or both. While the ultimate decision resides with Ellie, the conference extensively discussed these different options, implying at the bare minimum the research question should be narrowed.

The conference discourse reveals the ways choice is embedded implicitly and explicitly into the conversation. Patti signaled implicit choices by reminding students to make a decision about their ideas. However, she frequently constrained these decisions by reminding students their choices need to be supported by the text. Patti also listed choices explicitly as way to summarize ideas, yet these choices were also limited by the prior conversation, which generally pointed to a particular approach. In this way, the choices presented in conferences were actually limited and tightly controlled.

Conference Closers

Since the conference discourse primarily consisted of Patti posing questions, Patti did not formally extend the opportunity for students to ask questions until the conclusion. In each conference, Patti signaled the conclusion with the same question: "anything else for me," "do you have any questions for me in terms of how to proceed," or "any other

questions?" This question signaled that Patti had completed her agenda for the conference and formally invited students to bring up any lingering ideas. Most students responded that they did not have any questions, so Patti summarized the key ideas of the conference if the conversation had not already covered them. This summary would frequently include a reminder for students that they could follow up with her: "if you want to email me, if you're concerned about your sources or the way they relate to each other, what you're finding or not finding, please feel free to send me an email over the next couple of days." She also recommended the writing center to two students, John and Tayo.

On the few occasions students did ask a follow up question, Patti would answer those questions. For example, John asked a "technical" question: "Like if I uh, use the, the Popplet, will there be just some sort of link that I submit to?" Patti promptly responded: "Yeah you'll submit the URL." These questions tended to be procedural in nature, clarifying the assignment and requirements for submission. Lastly, at the end of the conference, Patti thanked students for their time and hard work.

Summary

As a whole, the conference culture in practice closely resembled Patti's descriptions from the interviews. Students came into conferences to discuss their prepared work and generate new ideas. They rarely discussed students' personal matters. Patti asked students a series of questions but left students with constrained choices for their paper. The key discrepancy between Patti's conference description and conference in practice was the student's role. In practice, students spoke less frequently than Patti and tended not to direct the conversation. Examining the conference discourse provided

insights into the culture of Patti's writing conference in practice. Now, I examine student's individual perceptions of conferences.

Students' Perceptions on Writing Conferences

To understand student experiences in writing conferences, I began by examining my third research question: *What are students' perceptions (i.e., their viewpoints, interpretations, and responses) on writing conferences*. In some cases, these perceptions shifted as the student participated in conferences, which may suggest a process of enculturation whereby students learned the rules and norms of the culture. For the purpose of this study, I indicate when students' interpretations shifted, but I do not surmise what precisely caused the shift as this question is outside the scope of my study. This analysis relies primarily on interview data with students and draws on their reflective writing to triangulate findings. Notably, the students in this study had various levels of comfort and competency describing their participant roles in conferences. I have attempted to demarcate these differences when evident. Nevertheless, the following results present my interpretation of the six students' perceptions of writing conferences.

Students' Initial Perceptions

From the outset, five of the six student participants in this study did not have any prior experiences with writing conferences. John, Nicole, Naomi, Sydney, and Ellie reported rarely attending office hours or even talking one-on-one with their instructors and teachers. Indeed, none of them had heard of writing conferences as a formal pedagogy in the English classroom. Ellie described her initial reaction to Patti's classroom announcement about conferences:

> I didn't really know what to expect. Like when she said conference I was like, conference? Like what conference? Is it a big thing? Do I have to write like something for this? I didn't realize it was, like, I feel like a fancy word. Just set up a meeting with the teacher.

Ellie reflected that she did not know what to expect from conferences or how she should act, the purpose or participant roles. Likewise, Sydney and Nicole were also unsure about the expectations of conferences. For example, Nicole recounted: "I didn't know what to expect when I was going in really. I was like, do I have everything I need? You know? I am going to have to do something while I'm in there?" Naomi and John stressed that they only went to the conference because it was mandatory, not because they had their own goals for the meeting. Ultimately, writing conferences were a new pedagogy for these students—they had few prior experiences to inform them about the purpose and participant roles of the interaction.

Tayo's Perceptions

As the only student who had a history of working individually with teachers, Tayo described a clear purpose for conferences and even shaped the interaction to meet his personal goals. Tayo interpreted writing conferences as an opportunity to get Patti's feedback on his final writing product. For the first conference, he explained: "I was able to see like where I went wrong with how I thought the stasis theory worked and things like that. And also how [I] messed [up] my citations." He expressed a similar purpose for the second conference. Even though Patti had requested students prepare a thesis statement and sentence outline, Tayo went ahead and wrote a full draft in order to "learn information to make my paper better." He wanted Patti to read through the draft and

provide specific feedback. He explained his goal as "Just like polishing. [Learn] ways I can make my analysis more effective. How I can avoid not misusing things. Avoid mis-describing things or using things incorrectly." He saw writing conferences as an opportunity to improve his writing product through pointed and detailed instructor feedback.

Participant roles. Tayo's extensive experience working individually with instructors also impacted the way he interpreted the participant roles of conferences. He saw his role in terms of directing and listening to Patti's feedback. At the start of both conferences, Tayo initiated the conversation by immediately pulling out his work and directing Patti's attention to particular areas where he wanted feedback. For the first conference, Tayo explained that he immediately wanted Patti to know: "I numbered the five sources that I could use to for my annotated bibliography. The five scholarly sources, cause I had seven sources that were already scholarly, and then I had three popular sources." Tayo started the conference by explaining his numbering system because his goal was to get feedback on his scholarly sources. His directions were more explicit in the second conference. When Patti reviewed his full draft, Tayo specifically asked Patti to review the conclusion of his rhetorical analysis paper: "I knew she was going to ask a question by the end, what else I could help you look at it. So I wanted her to look at my conclusion to see how I can improve it or fix some parts of it." Once again, Tayo was focused on getting detailed feedback in order to polish his nearly finished product.

Tayo followed up with Patti's feedback by posing questions to clarify her instructions. For the first conference, he posed the question: "I just need to like fix my, fix my publishers?" He explained his thinking behind this question: "I guess just like to

get the understanding [of] what I have to do to fix my citations." For Tayo, these questions clarified the task, ensuring that could apply the feedback. Interestingly, Tayo did not take many notes to help him remember Patti's feedback rather he relied on Patti's mark up, which was made during the conference. Ultimately, Tayo saw his role as directing Patti's feedback and then listening to her response, not necessarily talking through his ideas for the paper.

Tayo's distinct purpose for conferences was also evident in the way he described his role. Of all of the students in the study, Tayo was the least likely to elaborate on his thinking during our interviews. He continually referred back to the results of the conversation, Patti's feedback, rather than describing his rationale for responding in a particular way (i.e., asking a question or describing his emotional response). During our second interview, he frequently spoke over the oral commentary clip to describe the changes he made based on Patti's feedback. He was the only student who responded to the oral commentary method in this way.

Although Tayo entered conferences with his own purpose and participant role, he also described instances where his role shifted. During the first conference, Tayo was "a little bit" surprised by Patti's questions. Therefore, when drafting his paper for the second conference, he considered answers to possible questions Patti may pose: "[I] went over the different points about how like, the possible questions I'll be asked" which included "my thesis, the audience of the article, exigence. Things like that." Tayo recognized that Patti may not just give feedback on his product, but may respond with questions that he should be prepared to answer. Similarly, Tayo described instances where Patti's questions prompted him to explain his ideas. He reflected: "I was trying to show that I

understand both sides of the argument of video games, and how like one side thinks it's detrimental." In another instance, he recalled explaining to Patti why he placed his thesis statement in a separate paragraph: "when I do like a separate paragraph I always just want to make it clear that this is my thesis. This is the focus of my paper." In this way, Tayo shifted his participant role at Patti's prompting, becoming more active and sharing his ideas.

Emotions. In general, Tayo recalled feeling few emotions, such as apprehension and confidence, during conferences. Similar to all the students in this study, Tayo was apprehensive prior to his conferences. He was concerned that Patti may respond critically to his work. He reflected after the second conference: "It just made me feel a little bit better she wasn't really mean." His apprehension was replaced by feelings of assurance at the conclusion of conferences. He described feeling confident: "I felt I had the feedback I need to like polish up my paper and make the revisions that will help to make it more specific and avoid confusing my audience." The most prominent emotions Tayo described were initial feelings of apprehension that were supplanted by feelings of confidence.

Outcomes. After his conferences, Tayo reported revising his thesis statement to be more precise and limited in scope. Patti provided Tayo with two slightly contradictory set of instructions. First, she pointed out areas of confusion from the word choice of Tayo's thesis. Tayo described the way Patti's questions strengthened his thesis:

> Tayo: I guess she gave me feedback in regards to like how I can make my thesis a little bit more specific to what I'm doing, the text, what I'm doing in my rhetorical analysis.

Researcher: Yeah. Were you thinking about revising your thesis?

Tayo: A little bit. Just saying like, just being more specific about what I mean by importance and also persuasion techniques.

Researcher: Yeah so you were going be more specific about those. Was that something you had thought about before coming into the conference?

Tayo: No not really. I thought my, it was good the way it was.

Patti helped Tayo realized he needed to more precisely define his key terms, like importance and persuasion techniques. However, Patti also recommended that his thesis overall needed more attention. She commented that it could be it could be " more meaningful." Tayo did not, however, choose to revise the ideas in his thesis. Tayo felt that specifying his terms was all the revision needed, which aligned with his personal goal for conferences of polishing his writing.

Conferences also helped Tayo develop a better understanding of his reader and rhetorical task. After Patti read his rhetorical analysis draft aloud, he understood why he needed to strengthen his topic sentences and add author tags. For instance, he recounted: "That was about my use of tags. I didn't tag myself right here, so it just made it confusing about who was saying what." Tayo realized the reader was unable to distinguish between his points and the information presented in the article. The conference provided Tayo with revision strategies, like topic sentences and author tags, to clarify his analysis for the reader. Tayo also described better understanding key concepts in assignments after conferences. He attributed the first conference with helping him understand the relationship between stasis theory and the annotated bibliography assignment: "just like how I could use the stasis theory to my advantage to be able to effectively do the

annotated bibliography" Tayo felt confident in his ability to complete the assignment. He added that he appreciated the extra instructions about the assignment because the snow days had canceled so many class meetings.

While Tayo was pleased with the outcomes of his conferences, he chose not to seek additional assistance with his writing. Patti recommended that Tayo go to the writing center since he drafted his rhetorical analysis so quickly. Tayo interpreted this request as an everyday recommendation: "'Cause I think most teachers usually recommend it. [In] oral communication, they recommend you go to the Oral Communication Center and things like that. Just to like help you improve your speaking or help you improve your writing." Therefore, he did not follow up with the writing center. Additionally, Tayo opted to not attend a third writing conference. He expressed confidence in his ability to complete the digital remediation project independently since the project asked him to revisit the same topics he had researched and wrote about all semester. Tayo added that a third conference was unnecessary because he had "gotten enough feedback" during the semester and did not anticipate "any technical issues." Once again, Tayo focused on the outcome of his conference, polishing his final product.

Summary. Tayo interpreted conferences as an opportunity to improve his final written product by getting detailed instructor feedback. Therefore, he understood his role as directing Patti's attention and listening to her feedback. Despite some initial anxiety, Tayo felt confident after his conferences. He described several positive learning outcomes, including revising his thesis statement and better understanding his rhetorical task and reader.

Sydney's Perceptions

While most of the students' interpretations of conferences remained relatively stable throughout the semester, Sydney's interpretation evolved as she participated in the practice. Sydney's unfamiliarity with conferences informed her assumption that the interaction would be similar to classroom instruction. She expected Patti to lecture: "With the conference, I just expected how to use the database, kind of go over some prompts, maybe ask if I had any questions or concerns about the bibliography or the paper itself." After the conference, Sydney concluded that conferences were intended to "kind of basically just to clear up all my points. Kind of to make sure that what I'm saying make sense to her. [That] still it would make sense to other readers." She understood conferences in terms of Patti evaluating her ideas based on the rhetorical task. She saw the second conference as having a similar purpose: "I was able to show her my points. And I was able to get more clarification as to how I should write the thesis statement or how I can include the rhetorical appeals into the paper." By participating in the practice, Sydney developed an understanding of conferences that was focused on getting Patti's feedback.

Participant roles. Sydney's understanding of her participant role shifted during the first conference. Sydney was the only student in this study who did not prepare for her first conference. She explained her thinking: "I just thought [Patti] would just discuss what the assignment was, and like maybe just ask me what I've been doing so far. I didn't really think that I had to bring anything to show." Sydney assumed that Patti would take the lead, and any questions Patti posed could easily be answered. Immediately upon entering the conference, however, Sydney realized her mistake: "when I came in she was

just looking at me. I felt like I was supposed to bring something, cause I felt like she was waiting for me to get something out. I was like, uhh, let me ask just in case." Patti responded to Sydney's preparation question by reading the checklist provided online. Sydney reflected that "I was pretty overwhelmed, because I didn't think I'd have to explain all that stuff." Subsequently, she understood her role as needing to produce work in order to get Patti's feedback.

Although Sydney initially misjudged the conference participant roles, she attempted to actively participate in the first conference by posing questions. She reflected that she came to the conference with "a couple of questions in mind regarding my topic." Indeed, Sydney posed four questions during the conference, more than any other student. She reflected that Patti "couldn't really go off what I had done yet, because I haven't really done much yet." Posing questions enabled Sydney to give Patti ideas to respond to.

By the second conference, Sydney understood her role in more active terms. For example, Sydney planned her introduction to the conference: "I decided this time that if I have to start the conference again, and if she's just waiting for me to say something first…I'd immediately ask is my thesis is ok? Like might as well?" Sydney entered the conference understanding that she might be asked to start the conversation. However, rather than taking the lead by sharing her ideas, she decided to immediately ask Patti for her feedback. She emphasized Patti's response in the conference: "I had prepared enough for [Patti] to kind of like manipulate and being able to discuss and have a full conversation about what I was describing, about what I was trying to explain." She saw Patti's feedback as "manipulating" or shaping her ideas. Interestingly, Sydney did not

attribute this shaping to Patti's question strategy. Instead, she perceived Patti's feedback as more directive:

> she was able to go off what I was writing…she was able to, first analyze and critique [my thesis], and then based off what I wrote, she could add on to [it]. Talking about like the different points I mentioned in thesis and just making the conference be able to go through faster and more easily.

In this description, Sydney emphasized Patti's feedback—her analysis, critique, and expansion of ideas. She saw Patti as directing the conversation, and while she responded to Patti's questions throughout the conversation, she did not comment on their effect. Additionally, Sydney did not to take notes during the conference, instead preferring to listen and take "mental notes." Although getting Patti's feedback was the purpose of conferences, Sydney did not meticulously record these ideas.

Emotions. At the outset of her conferences, Sydney described feeling overwhelmed and nervous. Sydney explained that for the first conference "at the beginning, I was OK, but then once I sat down, I started getting nervous because I did not feel prepared for the conference." Sydney added that she felt "overwhelmed" by the participation expectations, because she did not realize that she was supposed to adopt an active role. This nervous feeling carried through to the second conference. Sydney commented: "I kind of wanted to just get it over with it," and "I was worried that I would be totally messing up the assignment." Even though Sydney better understood the participant role going into the second conference, her anxiety persisted.

In both conferences, these anxious feelings subsided as the interaction progressed. In the first conference, Sydney explained that she "felt much more comfortable" once she

realized Patti was not going to mention her unpreparedness: "[Patti] knew I wasn't that prepared, but she didn't really say anything; she just went with it." By the conclusion of the second conference, Sydney described feeling "confident" while sharing her ideas and "happy" and "proud" that she had suitably prepared. Sydney's anxiety about conferences seemed to stem from her misunderstanding of the conference participant roles. It was replaced with feelings of pride as she adjusted to the expectations for the interaction.

Outcomes. Sydney described a wide range of positive outcomes after her conferences. She recalled narrowing her research question, generating new ideas, organizing her paper, and better understanding the rhetorical task. The first conference helped Sydney with her research process. She described struggling with "what else I could talk about besides positives and negatives" of GMOs. Sydney appreciated when Patti "went over the [stasis] grid that could be used to organize my ideas and looking through articles." By better understanding her rhetorical task, Sydney was able to move beyond a simple comparison and contrast essay on GMOs. Sydney also described Patti's questions narrowing her research question: "I never really thought about getting into the specifics and finding the effects of GMOs on malnourishment or the positive and negatives of GMOs. I only searched for GMOs in general." Sydney added narrowing her research question provided her with new keywords for the library databases. She appreciated that Patti showed her how to conduct a search: "I have a whole bunch of articles that I had to, like, filter out and then when she introduced me to using keywords and stuff, I was like 'Oh! This is so much easier than I thought.'" By the end of the conference, Sydney recalled feeling ready to complete her research on GMOs.

Sydney described similarly positive outcomes after her second conference. Sydney explained that the conference helped her understand the assignment was about analyzing rhetorical appeals rather than literary devices:

> Once she suggested ethos and pathos and logos, and kind of explained them and asked me to decide whether I should one of those three appeals, then it really put me into perspective as to what I really should be talking about. Rather than just talking about like, oh [Finney] uses a metaphor, oh she uses anaphora, but actually being able to portray how the author actually displays her persuasion and her feelings towards the topic.

This discussion helped Sydney understand the purpose of the assignment and influenced the way she cast her analysis. She also recalled understanding how to integrate the rhetorical appeals into the paper because Patti provided "more clarification on how I should write the thesis statement." In this way, the conference influenced Sydney's understanding of the rhetorical task and provided insights into how to shape her ideas to successfully meet this task.

Sydney also described generating new ideas and an organization structure for her paper. She reflected on how sharing her ideas resulted in her discovering new ideas that she had not considered before:

> I never really thought of the seamstress idea until as I was explaining it. It just kind of came up, so when I was talking about the seamstress bringing everything together, and then Patti continues by talking about cutting and manipulating the cloth and all the velvet, I was pretty like happy because that was another idea I

> had never thought of before. It's just like, oh yeah, that's, true too! I didn't even see that.

The act of talking resulted in Sydney generating a new insight into the symbolism of sewing in the poem. While Sydney generated this new idea, Patti suggested an organizational structure for the paper. In her reflective writings, Sydney described deciding to organize her paper thematically based on Patti's recommendation. She described the final structure as "I organized the body paragraphs, which were my four devices (symbolism, anaphora, enjambment, and shift in point of view) based on how I believed Finney used them in the poem." Sydney perceived conferences as helping her develop and organize ideas, understand the rhetorical task, and revise her main claim.

Although Sydney reported positive outcomes, she chose not to follow up with additional writing conferences. After the first conference, Patti commented that Sydney had a lot of work to complete; therefore, she should reach out by email for additional help. Sydney decided not to email Patti because:

> I never really email my teachers regarding like tips or just some advice, because I dunno. When she mentioned it, I was thinking "yeah I'll definitely email you because I have a lot to do and I'm going to need some more, and I might need some more help" but as of yet, I haven't emailed her regarding the articles yet, because I just found them.

Sydney canceled her third writing conference for a similar reason. Although she initially signed up for a conference, she described understanding the assignment without Patti's help:

> Regarding the third conference, I canceled it because I felt that the digital remediation project shouldn't be too difficult that I would need to meet with Professor Collins. Since my project was based on the position paper, I thought I was fine if I didn't go to the conference. I'm not saying it would have been a waste of time, but I think I had an idea of what Professor Collins wanted according to the assignment and the sample projects she showed us.

Sydney opted not to follow up with Patti because she was assured in her ability to complete the assignment independently. She interpreted optional conferences similar to sending following up emails. She only needed to do so if the project was "too difficult" to complete independently.

Summary. Ultimately, Sydney's understanding of the purpose and participant roles of conferences evolved as the semester progressed. She started by interpreting her role as passively listening to Patti lecture. Like Tayo, she stressed that conferences were an opportunity to get Patti's feedback. However, Tayo was comfortable shaping conferences by directing Patti's attention to particular aspects of his writing while Sydney was more reluctant to take control. She was unsure about the expectations for conferences, which resulted in her feeling overwhelmed and apprehensive about the interaction. These feelings subsided by the end of conferences, which may be partially due to her perceptions of the positive learning outcomes from the interaction. She reflected that conferences helped her develop her ideas and understand the assignment.

Naomi's Perceptions

While Tayo and Sydney interpreted conferences as an opportunity to get constructive feedback, Naomi viewed the purpose of conferences more negatively, as

identifying "errors" in her writing. She described her experience as "I went in and she told me things were wrong. Ok fine. So I'll fix that." For her second conference, Naomi explained that the conference was a way to tell if she was going in the right direction: "I wasn't sure if the thesis was even going to be good. And then my whole paper would be thrown out. So that was good to get it confirmed that the thesis was fine." She elaborated further in her reflective blog post:

> I was made aware of an error upon which I identified a literary technique as a "theme" instead of a "motif." There were a few small errors that were brought to my attention at the conference. I took all of these notes and corrections and was able to polish my rough draft into a final essay.

In many ways, Naomi's purpose for conferences, identifying errors, was similar to Tayo's. They both emphasized feedback, but with a key difference—Naomi was not seeking this feedback. She did not have a history of meeting individually with her instructors. She explained: "I wouldn't have gone in to get this clarified if it weren't mandatory. So [the conference] was just, you know, an extra. I didn't have a goal going in. I was like 'ok, so I have this done.'" Naomi viewed conferences similar to a grading event in that they were a way to fix errors.

Naomi's participant roles. Naomi also interpreted her role in conferences terms of right and wrong. Her role was to provide Patti with correct answers. She saw Patti's questions as similar to an exam where the goal was to evaluate her learning. For example, when preparing for the second conference, she described meticulously defining the references, allusions, and symbols in her chosen poem, "Cattails," in anticipation of Patti's questions. Despite this hard work, Naomi forgot the first reference Patti asked

about in the conference. She described the interaction: "All these words that I did know. You know? I like researched them. I looked at the significance, analyzing it. And for some reason that one just like slipped. And when it was the first thing she asked, I was like, shoot now it looks like I didn't do my research." Naomi wanted to correctly answer Patti's question in order to appear knowledgeable, demonstrating that she researched the references.

Naomi also described sharing her ideas, but not necessarily with the goal of generating new ideas. She wanted to explain her ideas especially after she did not correctly answer a question. One instance of such an explanation occurred after Patti pointed out that several of the sources Naomi included in her annotated bibliography were not scholarly. Naomi responded: "I just was trying to explain why I [included popular sources], you know? Almost as a defense, 'oh ok fine, that's not right, but I'm just explaining that I put that in there because. So that you understand, you know?'" Naomi wanted to justify her ideas, but in a few instances like the one described, she felt like she was not afforded the opportunity to fully respond. Indeed, examining the conference transcript closer, Patti denied this conversational turn.

When Patti posed difficult questions or mentioned unfamiliar concepts, Naomi described a strategy to avoid giving a wrong answer: simply go along with the conversation. For example, when Patti described stasis theory, Naomi recalled: "But it's one of those things I was just kind of like 'yeah, yeah' I get [it]. But I kind of have to go back and actually look at it, cause [it's] something I've never done before." Rather than admitting that she did not fully comprehend stasis theory, Naomi mimed agreement with Patti. This strategy, however, did not always work as planned. When Patti asked about

the definition of a prose poem, Naomi affirmed that she was familiar with the term even though she could not define it. She described the interaction:

> A prose poem? Like I had heard it. I didn't know. I didn't remember what it meant, so I was kind of like waiting to see where [Patti] was going with it to understand it better… But she called me on it. Not knowing what it was.

Naomi reflected that she was waiting to see if the discussion provided enough context clues to define a prose poem. Once again, Naomi interpreted her role as providing correct answers, yet when she did not, Patti "called" her on it, effectively catching her error.

Since Naomi interpreted the purpose of conferences as identifying errors, Naomi saw Patti's role in terms of prescribing changes and revisions. For example, after a series of questions about the term "ambiguous" in her thesis statement, Naomi explained:

> I thought she wasn't buying what I was saying. So I'm like, "right, so maybe ambiguous isn't the right word?" And she was like, "ok." I'm like, "see I can change it." To be like, yeah change it. So that was kind of how that played out. Just waiting for some kind of confirmation one way or another about what I should be doing.

Naomi interpreted Patti's questions about her thesis statement as a signal for revision, picking up on the implicit cue, yet she wanted "confirmation one way or another." She felt that Patti should provide a precise recommendation for the change, give her the correct answer. In contrast, she appreciated when Patti explicitly outlined possible choices for her writing: "It was helpful because if I decide that for myself, that's not what I want to do, then I know I'm not going to be penalized for it…It gives me still the freedom…she was explaining an option that I might not have known about." Naomi

understood the implicit cues in Patti's questions but preferred explicit instructions on future revisions.

Naomi also struggled with asking questions during conferences. Naomi simultaneously wanted the correct answers for her paper while also being seen by Patti as knowledgeable. This presented a challenge because simply posing questions signaled that Naomi did not have the answer. Naomi described her dilemma: "a lot of the question I was asking seem almost redundant, because I feared she said it, and then I'm like 'ok, just to clarify' just because if you are taking the time to meet and whatever, you might as well leave with clear understanding." Naomi framed her questions as clarifications in order to avoid being seen as uninformed. While this role enabled Naomi to appear competent, it prevented her from getting all of the information she needed. She acknowledged during our interview: "I might have asked a little bit more about that stasis thing *[laughs]* because I'm going to have to do that, so yeah." By the second conference, Naomi planned out her questions: "I thought [the conclusion of "Cattails"] was going to come up more when we were like reading the poem… I had planned on asking it had it not been addressed." Naomi became more comfortable with posing questions once she was assured the question had not been previous addressed in the class or the conference. Lastly, Naomi commented that she did not take many notes during the first conference, but "knew I was going to have to take notes" during the second. She felt it was important to record the feedback Patti provided.

Emotions. Naomi described feeling a combination of positive and negative emotions during her conferences. Since the purpose of conferences was to identify errors, Naomi felt apprehensive during the first conference. She wanted to provide the right

answers and was "afraid" of asking the wrong questions. She added that the start of her conference contributed to her feelings of unease. When Naomi was called into Patti's office for her first conference, Patti was finishing up a conversation with her undergraduate teaching assistant for a different section. The conversation took nearly a minute to end, during which time Patti did not greet Naomi. Naomi reflected: "And I'm just standing there. Yeah, I didn't want to be rude and just seat myself. I didn't know it was a private conversation. She didn't acknowledge me at all so I just like…yeah." Naomi commented that she "felt weird just standing over her." Naomi reported similar feelings coming into the second conference:

> Naomi: I was kind of dreading going to it cause
>
> Researcher: Oh really?
>
> Naomi: Not like dreading. Like, you know, I would rather kind of work on the paper and then just do it.

Unlike several other students in this study, Naomi did not feel more comfortable with conferences by the second meeting. Her feelings of apprehension persisted, resulting in her preference to simply write her paper independently.

Naomi also recalled several emotional reactions to specific moments in conferences. For example, she enjoyed that Patti asked if she had noticed the "shout out" to her research project in Patti's lecture video. She also described feeling proud when Patti complimented her introduction for establishing the relevance of *Head Off & Split* as a text. These moments of praise and affinity generated positive emotions for Naomi.

Naomi also described feeling frustrated with her conference experiences overall. She reflected: "Yeah because there is nothing more frustrating than thinking you have to

do something and like coming prepared for it, and then just being like, 'Ok, I see you have it there.'" Naomi attributed her frustration to not understanding Patti's expectations and response. After listening to several oral commentary clips, Naomi elaborated:

> I think [Patti] was like really trying to go through [the conference]…I mean clearly it didn't bother me that much that like I didn't remember. I'm fine. But listening back it's a little disheartening just 'cause [of] the lack of response to [my] comment.

Naomi felt occasionally dismayed by Patti's responses, and these feelings were heightened during our interviews. Altogether, Naomi was one of the students who most readily described her emotions about and during conferences. She described feeling happy about the praise given, yet apprehensive about the meeting and frustrated with some of Patti's responses.

Outcomes. The only outcome Naomi attributed to the first conference was a better understanding of the rhetorical tasks, the annotated bibliography and research assignment. Her key takeaway was an understanding of the source requirements and format of the annotations: "I wasn't exactly sure if I had the right format and I did. So now like all I have to do is find two other sources and then write up on them." She reflected that Patti also helped her understand that she could include articles that disagreed with her position for the research assignment. Naomi appreciated these clarifications because she was concerned about following directions correctly in this course. This concern was likely influenced by her experience completing the prior assignment in Patti's course, the article summary. Naomi had inadvertently summarized the wrong type of source, which meant that she had to revise and resubmit the

assignment. The first conference provided Naomi with helpful information about the assignment, preventing similar mistakes.

Naomi reported several new outcomes after the second conference, including generating new ideas, clarifying her thesis statement, and understanding her reader. Naomi described revising her introduction, including her thesis statement and topic sentences, because she realized that "the reader might not understand" her ideas. Patti questioning her thesis statement helped Naomi understand her key terms, "ambiguous" and "literary devices," were not specific enough. Naomi also planned to revise her introduction in order to explain in greater detail the context of the poetry book, *Head Off & Split*:

> I did have that line about what the book stands for and then I kind of just went into my thesis, and that can be confusing, I guess, to the reader, which is something that as, you know, not a professional myself, I wouldn't necessary understand that the reader doesn't have all the context behind it.

The conference helped Naomi understand that the reader would not necessarily be familiar with the background of Finney's book and how it connects to the poem she analyzed. These comments provided Naomi with specific areas to revise.

Naomi also described generating new ideas for her analysis. She described how the conversation helped her develop a new insight into Finney's unconventional representation of love: "I didn't go into the forbiddeness of their love or anything like that. I briefly mentioned the beginning…but I didn't go into detail about that. But I think that's something I will probably add in, you know, my new intro." She had not explicitly stressed this interpretation in her paper, but by discussing her ideas with Patti, she

decided to emphasize it. Similar to Sydney's description of discovering ideas through the act of talking, Naomi's new insights were also developed without the explicit direction or comments from Patti. These ideas were a result of talking through her work.

In addition to discovering new ideas, Patti generated several new ideas by describing formal poetic devices, what she called "free words," that students could explore and choose to integrate into their analysis. Naomi commented that learning about the structure of a prose poem was helpful: "that was actually a really interesting conversation because I just assumed that since there were no line breaks, I could just leave it out…even though I sensed this kind of fast-paced storytelling unfolding rhythm to the poem." Learning more about the formal elements of the poem helped Naomi expand her analysis.

Ultimately, Naomi's second writing conference provided her with a stronger understanding of the reader, new insights into the poem, and ideas for revision, yet she chose not to schedule a third writing conference. By the end of the second conference, Naomi described feeling ready to draft a conclusion to her rhetorical analysis paper, which she had purposefully left off until "you know, [I] get that approval on what I have so far. Steps to how to expand on these ideas and, kind of, fill in those gaps and make it better. Then I'll be able to do my conclusion." She described feeling confident in her ability to complete the assignment. Despite these positive learning outcomes, Naomi chose not to attend a third writing conference. She acknowledged the conference "might be useful to go and discuss some ideas about the digital remediation" but ultimately decided not to because she had a busy week with finals coming up. She added that she did not see a clear purpose for conferences: "In class, it didn't seem like there was an

agenda for the conference; rather, the purpose of the conference was to discuss possible questions I had." Naomi did not feel strongly conferences were helpful, so choose not to have a third conference.

Summary. For Naomi, conferences were similar to a grading event, in that they identified errors in writing that needed to be fixed. Therefore, Naomi's role was to answer Patti's questions correctly. She indicated that she struggled when Patti implicitly outlined choices rather than explicitly explaining possible revisions. Naomi reported many positive outcomes from her conferences, including generating new ideas, clarifying her thesis statement, and understanding her rhetorical task and reader. However, she described feeling a range of positive and negative emotions, from happiness to anxiety to frustration.

Ellie's Perceptions

Ellie's understanding of the purpose of conferences evolved as she participated in the practice. For the first conference, Ellie described the conference purpose as "I feel she told me most of the stuff that I had already watched in the screencast, in the videos, so it's kind of going over it." Ellie felt the conference purpose was to reinforce concepts already covered in the class like how to conduct research and identify scholarly sources. Her understanding was similar to the assumption that Sydney made coming into the conference, that Patti was simply going to review the materials, yet Ellie identified this didactic purpose *after* the conference. In contrast, Sydney quickly realized *during* the conference that there was a different goal for the interaction. Ellie added that she had a personal goal for the interaction. She would have preferred the first conference focus on:

> actually writing. But that's just because that's the biggest problem I have. I have problems with actually writing. I don't have problems with like finding sources, with reading sources, with knowing what sources are talking about if they're scholarly sources.

Ellie wanted help with micro level writing issues, such as clarity, style, and mechanics. Similar to Tayo, Ellie had her own preferences for conferences, but she did not have prior experiences working individually with her instructors. She did not shape the interaction by bringing in a complete draft of her annotated bibliography or directing Patti's attention.

Despite having her own goal for conferences, Ellie better understood the purpose of conferences as the semester progressed. After the second conference, she explained: "And it was good to actually like talk and be like remember, you can do this, you connect it in this way because some of the problems I have like connecting different topics with each other and then expanding on it more." To Ellie, the second conference was a way to talk through ideas and get instructor input on how to connect these ideas. Markedly, Ellie also felt that this purpose aligned better with her needs for the rhetorical appeals paper. She felt she struggled with developing her analysis in the paper.

Participant roles. In contrast to the conference purpose, Ellie's interpretation of her role in conferences did not appear to evolve during the semester. Ellie meticulously prepared for her conference, yet she was uncomfortable with sharing her ideas and answering questions. She described her initial reaction to Patti's questions as "surprised. Slightly unprepared, like I hadn't thought about it. Put on the spot…I have problems answering questions on the spot. Like it just like never works for me." Indeed, Patti's

questions frequently generated feelings of doubt for Ellie. For example, Ellie described thinking after a series of questions: "Am I just making this up? She said don't make it up. I didn't think I was making it up. But am I?" Ellie interpreted Patti's questions as potentially pointing out errors. She did not feel assured in her ideas.

Consequently, Ellie became increasingly quiet when she was unsure how to answer a question or did not agree with Patti's interpretation of her ideas. For example, when Patti proposed the idea that Rosa Parks was an activist, Ellie described her thinking:

> When I think activist, I think of someone who is like going out and doing something. The way you think Rosa Parks was somebody standing up and saying, "no!", instead of just being some tired lady who just wants to go home. So what I was thinking wasn't exactly what she was saying. I felt like she was kind of taking it a different way than me?

Ellie disagreed with Patti's activist interpretation of Rosa Parks, yet she simultaneously understood the implicit choice behind Patti's questions. These questions had the effect of redirecting Ellie's central claim, "taking it a different way." Ellie decided to disengage from the conversation rather than respond with her personal definition of activist or reassert her initial thesis:

> Researcher: But I noticed that your voice got, really, really, really quiet.
>
> Ellie: Yeah. Yeah. Because of that.
>
> Researcher: Because of that? Because you were feeling really unsure?
>
> Ellie: Yeah. Like, ehh ok, I will just stop talking now. Digging myself deeper into this. This is not going to go well. Just stop here.

Ellie saw becoming quiet as a strategy to avoid disagreeing with Patti's interpretation and potentially giving the wrong answer. At several other points during the conference, Ellie responded to Patti's questions in a comparable way. She provided short and perfunctory answers, often in general agreement to Patti's point and then became silent. Patti ended up having to fill in the conversation, frequently answering her own questions and explaining ideas to avoid prolong silence. Similar to Naomi's passive agreement (i.e., saying "yeah, yeah" to ideas she did not fully understand), Ellie did not want to elaborate on her ideas because she did not want to disagree with Patti.

Likewise Ellie struggled with the choices presented in conferences. For example, after a long discussion about the meaning of her poem, Patti recommended that Ellie should: "decide what you, the poem, really does…But make sure the poem really does it." This comment was likely intended to prevent Ellie from simply going along with Patti's ideas without first identifying her own support or evidence. Ellie characterized this exchange as an "insecurity moment" because it caused her to question her analysis:

> Like "make sure the poem *really* does it." Like, I am I making this entire thing up? Does the poem not actually do this? Like the second she said this, I was like oh no. Like oh no, oh no. This isn't going well. But it like turned out fine, of course.

Ellie understood that Patti was asking her to independently make a decision about the meaning of the poem. She also recognized the implicit constraints on this choice; after all, Patti had just extensively discussed an interpretation that departed from Ellie's. Nonetheless, Ellie interpreted Patti's statement, "make sure the poem really does it," as a

warning. She became concerned about making the wrong choice and picking an incorrect interpretation of the poem.

Later in the second conference, the element of choice reemerged when Ellie and Patti discussed the relationship between the literary devices and rhetorical appeals. Patti commented that she could see plausible connections between all of the appeals, so Ellie should pick the one that's most relevant for her paper. Ellie interpreted this interaction:

> I was thinking about how [Patti] was saying that like I don't really have an answer in mind. Even though, I think like everybody has an answer in mind even if it's not just that you think it's the *only* answer. It's like, yeah this is the answer I think, but you may think a different answer and you are open to a different answer, but you still know what you would respond. I think she had ethos in mind even though she was open to, I thought it was pathos. And then she went on to talk about ethos. And it's like yes, she did have ethos as the answer in her mind, but she didn't like straight out say that.

In this case, Ellie understood the constraints on her choice. Patti presented her with several options despite the fact that her response intimated her preferred answer.

Lastly, Ellie was hesitant to ask questions and take notes during the conference for fear of being perceived as unprepared. She commented that she did not like asking questions because "I felt like it could have been a really stupid question" but decided to ask one because "I need to do well in this class, so I need to ask questions. If I have questions, I need to ask questions." Despite the fear of being perceived as less competent, she felt questions were mandatory to success. Relatedly, Ellie rarely took notes during the conference. For example, she recalled "I actually thought of a better way to word the

thesis, but I didn't want to be like, I'm going to change this, because I feel like that would have made it look like I just kind of write down everything in my head, and I didn't look at it at all." She thought that taking notes on potential revision to her thesis statement would make her appear unprepared. While Ellie was aware of many of conferences' participant roles and norms, she struggled to participate in the prescribed manner. She frequently avoided sharing her ideas and answering Patti's questions because she did not want to provide the wrong answer or contradict Patti's interpretations.

Emotions. Ellie reported feeling anxiety, doubt, and frustration in her conferences. She commented that from the outset she was unsure about Patti's expectations, what she needed to say and do. She initially felt "flustered" at the start of the first conference. Patti's questioning strategy contributed to her feeling "doubt" about her ideas: "Doubt…so I was, I mean, like I know how to read. And I know how to like, does this work? Does it not work? I don't, like am I not actually doing this right?" Although Ellie reported feeling "ok" by the end of the conference, reassured in how to succeed in the course: "she basically said like it's working. It's like yes, just keep doing it," her feelings of uncertainty and anxiety reemerged before the second conference. She characterized this conference as a task to check off, so she didn't "have to worry about it."

During the second conference, Ellie described feeling frustrated by the assumptions Patti made about her paper's direction. After a prolonged discussion, Patti stated in an aside: "I think that it would be tempting to talk about voice. Um. But I think you don't want to. You want to talk about imagery." In our interview, Ellie responded to Patti's statement:

> I don't like it when people tell me what I'm trying to do. Or what I didn't [do], when she's like 'but you don't want to talk about. You want to talk about imagery.'…Like I know what I'm doing. I don't need you to tell me that especially if you are wrong.

Ellie had planned to analyze imagery in her essay, but Patti had overlooked that element in her sentence outline and assumed otherwise. Ellie added that she wanted to correct Patti's assumptions, but felt unable to: "I want to point it out, but I don't want to be a bitch about it." Altogether, Ellie described a range of negative emotions associated with her conferences, including anxiety, doubt, and frustration. Similar to Naomi, she was one of the students who readily spoke about the affective dimensions of conferences.

Outcomes. Ellie described several positive learning outcomes from her conferences, including refining her thesis and research question, understanding her reader, and generating and organizing ideas. Despite the concern Patti's questions created, Ellie responded that they frequently brought up ideas or issues she had not considered before. For example, she described how these questions helped her refine her thesis: "That was something I hadn't really thought about before. The question came from like my trip to El Salvador, so I was thinking about like this is such a big deal in El Salvador, I hadn't really thought about, like elsewhere." Ellie's research question did not specify El Salvador as her primary focus even though she was drawn to the topic because of her personal experiences.

Ellie added that she had a better understanding of how readers may respond to her research question: "I didn't think about what other people would read if they read [my question]." Similarly, when Patti read her thesis aloud in the second conference, Ellie

immediately understood "yep, yeah she like is having problems with that." The conference helped Ellie identify areas of miscommunication in her thesis and the subsequent conversation even helped her think of a new way to word her thesis, but Ellie did not write down these ideas for fear of being seen as unprepared. In this way, conferences helped Ellie understand her reader and identify revisions; however, these revisions were not always recorded and may or may not have appeared in the final draft.

Ellie acknowledged that conferences helped her generate new ideas and structure her paper. Ellie summarized that overall the second conference connected her ideas: "Connections…between the different topics. The connection between the structure of the poem and the different like images." These connections enabled her to generate new ideas. For instance, Ellie reflected after a series of questions from Patti about her choice of poem:

> that was something I had not thought about like, like why did this poem catch my interest? Besides like I didn't know Rosa Parks was a seamstress, and I guess that's not something that most people think about. Like they know Rosa Parks was like the lady that said no.

Patti's line of questioning led Ellie to reconsider how learning new information about Rosa Parks from the poem impacted her overall interest in the work. This question implicitly pointed Ellie to consider the rhetorical appeal of the poem, which was the purpose of the assignment.

In addition, Patti directed the organization of Ellie's paper. In her reflective writing, Ellie explained:

> The organization of my paper came from the conference. I had put together an outline with some vague idea of how I wanted it to progress, but I wasn't completely sure. I also hadn't completely rounded out my thesis and topic, so I had a lot to work with as I went from the outline to paper. I eventually chose to go more or less chronologically through the poem as was suggested in the conference.

Patti explicitly outlined two approaches to organizing Ellie's paper, either thematically or chronologically. She suggested that Ellie consider a chronological organization because of the interconnectedness of her ideas. Ellie reflected that she appreciated this idea because "I wasn't sure I wanted, if I wanted to do [it] that way. And then she like seemed to think it was a good idea." For Ellie, conferences helped her understand her reader, generate and organize ideas, and revise her thesis and research questions.

While the conference outcomes were positive, Ellie chose not to follow up with Patti after her conferences. During her second conference, Patti offered a follow up conference or review ideas by email in response to Ellie's assertion that she was "very bad" at writing papers. Ellie explained that "I probably wouldn't because I don't like to ask for help…I'll say 'yes' [in the meeting], but I know I'm not going to." Ellie did not have a history of working individually with instructors, believing that if she worked hard enough she would eventually solve her own problems. Similarly, Ellie did not schedule a third writing conference because she would rather dedicate her time to her STEM courses' finals. She added: "I don't feel like they've [conferences] made a radical difference in my writing. It's always good to take time and go over ideas, outline, any finished writing, but I think that that was all the conferences really were for me." Note

that Ellie described the conference purpose as a way to discuss ideas, yet she did not feel conferences markedly improved her writing. This may reflect the fact that Ellie's personal agenda for conferences would ideally focus on style and sentence-level concerns.

Summary. As the semester progressed, Ellie developed an understanding that the purpose of conferences was to talk through her ideas and make new connections, yet she did not stress sharing her ideas when describing her participant role. Instead, she saw her role in a similar way to Naomi. She attempted to provide a correct answer and not challenge Patti's feedback, even when she did not agree with Patti's interpretation. As a result, Ellie expressed feeling a range of emotions from anxiety to frustration during her conferences. She also attributed conferences with multiple positive learning outcomes, including generating new ideas.

John's Perceptions

John interpreted the purpose of conferences as an opportunity to share his ideas in order to get Patti's feedback. John explained: "it was good to be able to talk through all the research I did and talk [about] how I felt about it, and then get [Patti's] insights into how she thought the research was going." John's interpretation stressed his role in conferences, talking about his ideas. However, he also saw conferences as an opportunity for Patti to expand his analysis: "So I went in there with like these ideas and the support that I had, but I figured she would be able to offer up a lot more in-depth professional analysis on the decisions that I made." John described conferences as a way to get feedback on his ideas *prior* to developing a full draft. This differed from students like Tayo who wanted instructor feedback to polish his final writing product or Naomi who

saw Patti's feedback as pointing out errors. He wanted to ensure that he was on the "right track" with his ideas before writing.

Participant roles. Understandably, John interpreted his role in conferences as directing the conversation in order to explain his ideas. John specifically described his role as defending his ideas: "I was trying to justify the fact that this was a good question like this was a good area of research." In the second conference, he recounted his role comparably: "I'm going to have to defend these choices that I make. Like in such a way to prove that they are actually real choices, and I'm not just guessing." John stressed that that his goal was for Patti to see him as knowledgeable, having selected appropriate ideas that were arguable. Central to this role was explaining ideas: "I really wanted to make sure that she understood what I was trying to get at with this question, like what I was trying to ask." Indeed, John defended his ideas so thoroughly that at one point during the first conference he spoke over Patti, denying her conversational turn. He described this moment: "I sort of felt like I interrupted a thought there, but I just really wanted to mention something." This was an example of John defending his ideas so strongly that he cut off Patti's response.

Despite emphasizing his role in the interaction, John also developed a clear understanding of Patti's questioning strategy. From the outset, John was aware of a pattern to Patti's questions. For the first conference, he was not taken aback by her questions like Sydney and Ellie. Instead, he described their effect: "she like sort of asked me kind of probing questions on getting me into like each of these [articles] help answer this [research] question specifically and not just contributes to the overall discourse as she calls it or something." In this quote, he even started adopting Patti's vocabulary when

describing her role. By the second conference, John commented that there was an element of interrogation to Patti's questions: "But also not like completely interrogating me. Because she started with like what in a general sense that sort of the device did, and then asked me specifically in the poem what it did there." John understood how Patti's questions were intended to expand his thinking about his research topic or analysis. He described their effect as "her way of trying to push me" and "guiding." His descriptions identify the implicit direction embedded in these questions.

In this way, Patti's questions also influenced how John prepared for the second conference. For example, he considered his "key points" while writing his thesis statement and sentence outline, "so that I would be able to explain them later in the conference to her." He prepared to share his ideas, yet he did not consider questions to ask. He felt confident in his ability to pose questions as they arose from the conversation: "I didn't think about any questions that I might go in there asking her, but then like when she suggested that I asked questions those two things were things that sorted of popped up." Notably, John was one of the most loquacious students included in this study and appeared to be very comfortable discussing his role in conferences. He frequently commented on Patti's and his roles without any prompting. He may have been naturally predisposed to sharing his ideas.

Lastly, John did not report taking notes during his conference until Patti reminded him. At the conclusion of the second conference, Patti asked John to revise his thesis statement in the moment. John recounted: "that did catch me pretty off guard. And like I had the idea of how I was going to change my thesis, but like it was still sort of abstract. I wasn't expecting to like have to really put it in words right then and there."

Nonetheless, this request enabled John to leave the conference with a revised thesis statement that synthesized the key ideas discussed during the interaction.

Emotions. Like his peers in this study, John also reported feeling nervous prior to the first conference. He explained: "I was worried that, I dunno. That I was just going to get torn apart in there, and [Patti] was going to like rip on all my research and my paper, put questions and say it was terrible." John's worry appeared to stem from his lack of familiarity with conferences and how Patti may respond. He commented that this stress faded as the conversation progressed. He felt "reassured" by Patti's responses, even commenting that they were "sort of, like, responsive." He reported that in the end "I felt really comfortable with it," the conference process. For the second conference, he reported that his nerves had dissipated: "I was a lot more comfortable this time around. After the last one, I felt pretty normal going into. I know that I had prepared all my stuff, so there wasn't anything I was worried about." John described feeling reassured because he understood how best to prepare for the conversation: "I now knew exactly what [Patti was] looking for." He was familiar with the expectations for the practice and how to fulfill them.

Although John overall became comfortable with conferences, he described two specific moments as worrisome and nerve-racking. First, he expressed concerned after he interrupted Patti in his first conference. He explained: "I was a little worried that I might have upset her. Maybe not upset her, just like missed out on something she was going to say that would be helpful." John's concern may partially derive from him accidentally stepping out of an appropriate student role. His interruption broke the general participatory norm that the instructor has the power to decide who talked and when.

Second, John commented that he reacted with nervous laughter after Patti asked him to revise his thesis on the spot. He explained "I was just pretty afraid," but added later that "the fact that [Patti] did this now doesn't surprise me because it's like essential for me to have a strong thesis to continue on later. So having me do it right there was probably good." John recognized the usefulness of leaving the conference with a revised thesis, but the moment was "nerve-racking" because it was so unexpected. In both these instances, John recognized that the outcome was positive. However, he did feel additional "pressure" during these moments.

Outcomes. For John, his primary outcome from conferences was refining his research question and thesis statement. John explained that the first conference helped him understand the assignment and clarify his research question. He recalled that conferences "really helped me like understand what I was trying to do with the annotated bibliography and like what I was going to be writing about with each of the sources." He better understood the structure and purpose of the annotations. In his reflective writings, John summarized that the conference also raised important concerns about his research question: "whether I was referring to benefits of alcohol use socially as the actual effects of alcohol making socializing easier or the image that goes along with alcohol use causing others to gravitate toward you as a friend." He elaborated in an interview: "I didn't even make that distinction in my head. Like the fact that there are two separate ways that it can be looked at." Patti's feedback helped him clarify his research question and the direction for his research all semester.

Similarly, John reported developing a new thesis during his second conference. He explained that the conference conversation generated new ideas about his poem that

he never considered before. Specifically, Patti provided him with poetic literary devices to explore. He described the effect of the conference: "taking like the ideas that I found like the things that I found in the poem, and just taking them like a little bit further. From repetition into anaphora. From metaphor into conceit." He used these new ideas and terms to specify his thesis statement: "Like the thesis I wrote to start with felt pretty vague. And so, the fact that [Patti] was able to help me like make it more specific and like more like it was actually making a claim and not just kind of throwing a couple words out there." John's new thesis incorporated the ideas raised in the conference discussion.

John reported several positive learning outcomes from his conference, namely revising his research question and thesis statement. He also decided to seek additional help with his writing. At the conclusion of his second conference, Patti recommended that John go to the writing center for additional assistance at the sentence-level. He decided to follow her recommendation. In his reflective writing, John described his session with the tutor:

> The writing center helped me a lot with my organization as well. At first my paragraphs were incredibly long and contained a lot of information. I was able to, at their recommendation, find logical places in each of my explanations about use of devices to split up my paper into smaller arguments that were related.

For John, conferences with Patti helped him generate ideas and develop main claims while the writing center tutor assisted with paragraph organization and coherence. While John viewed his conferences and the writing center as helpful, he ultimately decided not to schedule a third writing conference. He attributed his decision to the timing of the conference so close to final exams and to the rhetorical task itself. He explained: "Since

this assignment has so much direction and so little new research, I just didn't feel I needed to go to the conference, and didn't want to waste time in that sense." John felt the assignment was clear, and therefore, he chose not to attend a third writing conference. Overall, John was one of the few students who sought additional individualized help with his writing.

Summary. John interpreted conferences as a way to feedback on his ideas prior to drafting his paper. Unlike Ellie and Naomi who were concerned with providing the correct answer, he approached his role as "defending" his ideas. He identified a pattern to Patti's questions, which he described provided implicit guidance on how to proceed. He recalled feeling relatively comfortable in conferences after overcoming his initial concern about the interaction expectations. He reported several positive outcomes, including rewriting his research question and thesis based on the feedback provided.

Nicole's Perceptions

Similar to John, Nicole's interpretation of the conference purpose also emphasized sharing her ideas in order to get Patti's feedback. Nicole remarked that conferences provided "clarification on things that need to be done in order to proceed forward with the topic. Maybe even some more questions that maybe I hadn't considered before and needed to look into." Conferences raised new questions and ideas for Nicole. She described the second conference as an opportunity to get feedback on her thesis statement for the rhetorical analysis, while the third identified ideas that needed to be developed further in her digital project:

> [Patti] was confused about the blog posts on the homepage. I was kind of thinking the same thing, but I wouldn't have known if I really need[ed] to fix that if I hadn't gone to her. And just, be more specific about the content that I have.

Unlike Tayo, who wanted instructor feedback to polish his final writing product, Nicole saw conferences as a way to get feedback on her ideas prior to developing a full draft. She summarized "I took notes on what I needed to do further in order to revise. I think that was like the purpose of the conference." Nicole implied how conferences fit into her writing process: her goal was to ensure she was on the "right track" with her ideas before drafting.

Participant Roles. Nicole interpreted her participant role as actively sharing her ideas. She described conferences in terms of a dialogue: "Really we just talked about some things that I didn't see before." She stressed the importance of explaining her ideas as in high school, "I didn't really have to really explain myself to someone else" like she did in conferences. She emphasized sharing both her ideas and her process of developing these ideas. For instance, she recalled an interaction with Patti at the end of the conference:

> I felt like I needed to explain you know some of the frustrations I had when I was going about the research I was doing. Just so I was like "oh not everything is going perfectly." And I did need help at this point. And I sought help. And I was able to come to a conclusion.

Nicole felt comfortable discussing her struggles with the research process, unlike Naomi and Ellie who felt pressure to appear knowledgeable. This could be because Nicole had determined a solution to the problem that Patti had previously praised. Nicole added that

not only was she given the opportunity to share her ideas, but Patti reciprocated by listening: "So I felt like she was really listening to what I was saying, and I was understanding what she was telling me and asking me to do." Nicole related her role in terms of a participant in a conversation rather than an argument like John. She felt the conversation was productive in that she shared her ideas while Patti listened and responded with appropriate feedback.

Nicole seemed to deduce Patti's approach to questions. In the second conference, she explained: "I was thinking she was gonna like have me go through and like see what else, what other literary devices were used in the poem. To kind of expound upon what I had in my thesis." Nicole identified a structure to the conference conversation based on her first conference. She understood she would be required to walk Patti through her different ideas. Relatedly, Nicole saw Patti's questions as having a particular purpose, "[Patti] asks a lot of questions to get my perspective on what I'm doing rather than just inferring that this what I'm trying to do," and described their effect, "they made me think about my project in a bigger sense. And maybe think about things I didn't consider before?" She interpreted Patti's questions as presenting new ideas rather than pointing out errors.

Nicole also reflected on the way Patti's questions implicitly guided her ideas. For example, after a prolonged conversation about the effects of repetition in the poem "Red Velvet," Nicole concluded that she needed to change her thesis to focus on the theme of "tiredness." She described the realization: "It was like, ahh, I gotta change *my thesis*. Ugh." She went on to explain that she chose to change her thesis "because I could see where [Patti] was going. Like it makes more sense to go along with the thesis of

tiredness." This description signaled that Nicole understood the implicit message behind Patti's questions and adjusted her ideas accordingly. While Patti never explicitly told Nicole she had to change her thesis, Nicole came to an understanding of the poem that aligned with Patti's suggestions. In this way, Nicole described the pattern of Patti's questioning strategy and its effects on her ideas.

Nicole reported that Patti's questions also influenced the way she prepared for conferences. For the second conference, Nicole made extensive annotations in her book rather than producing a sentence outline of her ideas. She explained this choice:

> well [Patti] had a book too, so it would be easier for her to physically see what I'm talking about, and that way like, I wasn't really sure how to describe what I was trying to describe, so maybe she would like catch on onto what I was trying to say by, you know, going back to the text or something like that.

Nicole recognized that drawing on textual evidence would supplement her explanations, enabling Patti to better understand her ideas. Sydney also employed ample textual evidence when describing her ideas, but she read from a prepared list. Nicole was the only student who relied primarily on her text and explicitly attributed this process with helping Patti understand.

Nicole understood the expectations that she would share her ideas and answer questions, yet she tended not to pose questions of her own. Nicole explained: "usually when people are like do you have any questions for me? I'm like 'I don't think so.' I didn't really come in with any questions other than just like 'do I have everything I need?'" Nicole did not prioritize asking specific questions in her conference. Interestingly, she did not describe any concern about asking questions. She simply

repeated that she didn't have any. Nicole's relative ease was in sharp contrast with Naomi and Ellie, who were concerned about asking "wrong" questions that would make them seem less knowledgeable.

Similar to all the students in this study, Nicole started out listening in conferences rather than taking notes. Nicole explained initially: "I don't really take a lot of notes at the conferences because I like to listen more than I like to write." However, during the first conference, Patti explicitly told her to "write this down," reminding her that note taking was important. For the second and third conference, Nicole continued in her note taking. Indeed, she stopped the third conference for almost a minute to types notes on her computer while Patti looked over her shoulder. Patti then responded directly to Nicole's notes and supplemented the feedback. Overall, Nicole developed one of the most thorough note taking habits of all the students in this study.

Emotions. Like her peers in this study, Nicole reported initially feeling hesitant about conferences, but left feeling confident and proud about her work. Nicole described her feelings coming into the first conference: "Maybe a little nervous? About just how the conference was going to go and if I was on the right track." She explained further:

> [At] the beginning I felt a little hesitant because, like again, I didn't know what to expect to get out of the conference and if I was prepared enough. That was really it. I was just kind of going through the motions. Like this is what I have to do. I'm just going to go with it.

Nicole was unsure about the expectations for conferences, which contributed to her nerves. However, she felt much better at the end of the conference: "I was kind of just like this is really it? Wow. Ok. I'm good to go. I felt more confident in my topic.

Knowing that I had her approval and that she thought, you know, I was well prepared to go further." This feeling of confidence carried through to her other conferences. She described feeling "proud" after Patti praised her analytical capabilities. Even when she less assured about her project, as in the third conference, she "felt better" about her topic after talking with Patti. Overall, Nicole reported conferences helped her feel confident about her ideas and writing.

Outcomes. Similar to John, Nicole also reported positive outcomes that focused on revising her research question and thesis statement. Nicole emphasized that conferences helped her generate new ideas and identify new questions to explore. For example, in the first conference she became aware of "just what other variables come into play when it comes to" special education. These ideas influenced her research question. She explained that Patti's questions helped her clarify her question: "I thought [Patti] would understand what I meant by suitable for them. Like inclusion or a special needs school, which will be conducive for them learning. Yeah. I didn't, I wasn't expecting her to ask me to clarify that." Relatedly, Nicole reported completely revising her thesis statement based on her conversation in the second conference. She changed her thesis on the poem "Red Velvet" from there was more than meets the eye about Rosa Parks to focus on the theme of "tiredness." She made this change after a prolonged series of questions about the effects of repetition in the poem. She added the conference helped her conclude that "the theme of tiredness is really the focal point of" the poem. For Nicole, conferences helped her generate new ideas in order to revise her main claim.

By the third conference, Nicole indicated that the interaction also helped her better understand her rhetorical task and reader. She explained that this conference helped

her develop a unique purpose for her blog about special needs education and make sure that the content speaks to the audience. She summarized: "So I really need to make sure I'm more specific about what I'm writing and make sure that it's appropriate for the audience to read, and that the audience feels like I'm speaking to them…Just to…develop my overall purpose of the blog." The third conference helped Nicole identify how to adapt her ideas to her rhetorical task, which may be due to the unique nature of the assignment that asked students to remediate their arguments for a new audience.

While the third writing conference was strongly recommended by Patti, Nicole was the only student in this study who chose to participate. Nicole elected to attend the third conference because "I really want to do well on the assignment. So that's really why I went. And I was like, why not? Like I'm not doing anything on Thursday. It's important to do good on the assignment." She believed that getting feedback from Patti was important in order to succeed in the course. She assumed that the conference would provide her with valuable feedback. This is a sharp contrast to students like Naomi and Ellie who did not see the usefulness of the interaction.

Summary. Similar to John, Nicole interpreted the conference purpose as getting feedback on her ideas prior to drafting. She described conferences as a conversation, where she shared her ideas and Patti responded. She deduced that Patti's questions followed a pattern and understood the implicit direction embedded in them. She described feeling comfortable during the interaction once she understood the expectations. She reported conferences as helping develop her ideas, revise her research question and thesis statements, and understand the rhetorical task and reader. These

learning outcomes and positive feelings may have influenced her decision to schedule a third writing conference.

Summary

In summary, students' perceptions of writing conferences varied. Students interpreted the conference purpose as anything from correcting errors and repeating instruction, to providing polishing feedback on drafts, to generating new ideas and thesis statements. For most of the students, these interpretations remained consistent throughout the semester while Sydney's and Ellie's interpretations noticeably evolved as they participated in the practice. Moreover, the students' interpretations of the conference purpose also appeared to influence their understanding of the participant roles. For example, John stressed that conferences were an opportunity to share his ideas; therefore, he described his participant role as "defending" his ideas. In contrast, Naomi understood conferences as "correcting errors," so her role was to provide the right answers. All the students reported initially feeling apprehensive about the conference interaction most likely because they were unfamiliar with the expectations. Yet in most cases, this apprehension was replaced feelings of confidence and comfort. For a few students, namely Naomi, Ellie, and Sydney, their anxiety persisted to the second conference. Lastly, all the students described learning as a result of their conferences. They generated new ideas, revised or changed their research questions and thesis statements, and better understood the rhetorical task and reader. In light of these findings, I now examine in what ways the conference culture appears to shape students' experiences in writing conferences.

Culture and Students' Experiences

In this section, I synthesize the findings from my previous three research questions to answer my final research question: *To what extent, if any, did the culture appear to shape students' experiences in writing conferences*. These findings provide insight into the extent the conference culture was congruent or mismatched with each student's interpretation and the way this congruency or mismatch appeared to manifest in the conference discourse. Lastly, I present my interpretation of how the cultural congruency or mismatch of conferences appeared to shape students' experiences in this practice. I conclude by returning to student's perspectives. I include their recommendations for instructors practicing writing conferences.

Culturally Congruent Conferences

The culture of writing conferences was comparably aligned with John's and Nicole's interpretations of the conference purpose and participant roles. While John and Nicole entered the first conference without a clear purpose, they quickly understood conferences were a way to generate new ideas prior to drafting their assignments. They approached their participant roles actively in that they explained their ideas and answered Patti's questions. They also described Patti's questions as having a clear pattern with embedded implicit directions, which they reported influenced their revisions after conferences (i.e.,, changing their thesis statements). This awareness of the culture also seemed to manifest itself in how John and Nicole prepared for conferences. After the first conference, their preparations included considering how best to convey ideas to Patti. Table 11 visually presents evidence from the findings from research questions one and

three to illustrate the alignment between Patti's, John's, and Nicole's interpretations of the conference purpose and participant roles.

Table 11

Patti's Conference Purpose and Participant Roles Compared with Nicole's and John's

Factor	Instructor	John	Nicole
Purpose	Conferences are "about ideas and making sure what they have brought fits the assignment and is appropriately thought through in terms of scope."	"it was good to be able to talk through all the research I did and talk [about] how I felt about it, and then get her insights into how she thought the research was going."	"clarification on things that need to be done in order to proceed forward with the topic. Maybe even some more questions that maybe I hadn't considered before and needed to look into."
Participant Roles	"talk intelligently about their articles and what they see happening there."	"I really wanted to make sure that she understood what I was trying to get at with this question, like what I was trying to ask."	"Really we just talked about some things that I didn't see before." In high school, "I didn't really have to really explain myself to someone else."
	"I'm asking the student questions in order to make sure that the topic is narrow enough and that it is researchable."	"she like sort of asked me kind of probing questions on getting me into like each of these [articles] help answer this [research] question specifically and not just contributes to the overall discourse as she calls it or something."	"I was thinking she was gonna like have me go through and like see what else, what other literary devices were used in the poem. To kind of expound upon what I had in my thesis."

More specifically, the cultural congruency of John's and Nicole's conferences appeared to be reflected in the conference discourse. John's conferences most closely

reflected Patti's intentions for participation norms: Students share their ideas and direct the conversation. John talked and directed the conversation more than any other student in this study. He spoke approximately 42% and 36% of words and introduced 32% and 22% of the ideas. Moreover, he was also the only student to deny one of Patti's ideas. This exchange may suggest that John embraced his directive role to the point he interrupted Patti, the person with the most power in the interaction. Similarly, Nicole's active role was also reflected in the conference discourse. Nicole spoke 21% to 27% of the words and introduced 19% to 31% of the ideas. Unsurprisingly, there was variation between John's and Nicole's rates of participation, which may be attributable to their individual personalities. I observed John as one of the most talkative students in class while Nicole was frequently quieter. Nonetheless, both students' participation rates were relatively high, and more significantly *consistent,* across all conferences. These findings suggest that John's and Nicole's understood and successfully navigated the writing conference culture, especially the norms of participation.

The writing conferences in this study appeared to be comparably culturally congruent for John and Nicole. These students developed an interpretation of the purpose that emphasized generating new ideas, which was similar to Patti's intent. They also described many of the implicit norms of the conference participant roles. This understanding manifested itself in the conference discourse in terms of the words spoken and direction. Relative to the other students in this study, John and Nicole were active conference participants who contributed to the conversation direction.

Culturally Mismatched Conferences

The culture of writing conferences appeared to be comparably mismatched with the other four students in this study. These mismatches differed in type and scope. For Tayo and Sydney, the mismatch appeared to be focused primarily on the conference purpose. Although their interpretation of the conference purpose influenced the participation roles, Tayo and Sydney expressed awareness of many of the implicit cultural norms of conferences. In contrast, the mismatch between the conference culture and Ellie's and Naomi's interpretation seemed to encompass both the purpose and participation roles. Their mismatches also manifested differently in the conference discourse.

Tayo and Sydney. Tayo and Sydney interpreted the conference purpose differently than the culture. They both emphasized that the purpose was getting instructor feedback. Tayo felt strongly that Patti's feedback should help him polish the final writing product, so he brought a full draft to the second conference to shift the focus of the conversation. Sydney also interpreted the purpose of conferences in terms of Patti's responses. After initially misconstruing conferences as a type of classroom instruction, she described them as an opportunity to check her ideas with Patti. Correspondingly, Tayo and Sydney emphasized Patti's evaluation role when describing the participant roles. Sydney stressed how Patti directed the conversation by "manipulating" her ideas. Tayo described explicitly directing Patti's feedback to particular aspects of his writing. In addition to emphasizing Patti's evaluatory role, they expressed an awareness of the expectations for students' participation. They described thinking that they might be asked to share their ideas. When preparing for the second conference, Tayo considered his

answers to the questions Patti previously posed while Sydney reflected on how she would open the conference if it came to it. Table 12 presents evidence to illustrate the differences between Patti's, Tayo's, and Sydney's interpretations of the conference purpose and participant roles.

Table 12

Patti's Conference Purpose and Participant Roles Compared with Tayo's and Sydney's

Factor	Instructor	Tayo	Sydney
Purpose	Conferences are "about ideas and making sure what they have brought fits the assignment and is appropriately thought through in terms of scope."	"Just like polishing. [Learn] ways I can make my analysis more effective. How I can avoid not misusing things. Avoid mis-describing things or using things incorrectly."	"kind of basically just to clear up all my points. Kind of to make sure that what I'm saying make sense to her. [That] still it would make sense to other readers."
Participant Roles	"talk intelligently about their articles and what they see happening there."	"I knew she was going to ask a question by the end, what else I could help you look at it. So I wanted her look at my conclusion to see how I can improve it or fix some parts of it."	"I decided this time that if I have to start the conference again, and if she's just waiting for me to say something first…I'd immediately ask is my thesis is ok? Like might as well?"
	"I'm asking the student questions in order to make sure that the topic is narrow enough and that it is researchable."	"[I] went over the different points about how like, the possible questions I'll be asked" which included "my thesis, the audience of the article, exigence. Things like that."	"I had prepared enough for [Patti] to kind of like manipulate and being able to discuss and have a full conversation about what I was describing, about what I was trying to explain."

The conference discourse also appeared to reflect the comparable cultural mismatches in participant roles for Tayo and Sydney. While culturally congruent

conferences included relatively steady levels of student participation in the conference discourse, Tayo's and Sydney's levels of participation changed over time. For example, Sydney's participation increased from the first to the second conference. Sydney moved from speaking 19% of the words to 41%—the second highest percentage of words spoken by a student in this study. However, the number of ideas she introduced remained relatively stable from the first to the second conference, 26% to 23%. This change in participation may be attributable to Sydney's evolving understanding of her role. She initially saw her role in terms of listening to Patti lecture. By the second conference, she described understanding the expectation of talking, but remained hesitant to direct the conversation. To this end, the ideas Sydney proposed were frequently questions that required Patti to answer, effectively taking control of the conversation.

In contrast, Tayo's participation reduced over time. Tayo spoke much more during the first conference than the second, 22% to 14%, and he introduced fewer ideas, 18% to 10%. The shift in participation may be a result of Tayo changing the conference culture to meet his personal goals. Tayo brought in a completed draft because he wanted Patti's feedback to polish his writing. Indeed, Patti ended up evaluating his paper by reading his writing aloud and making comments. This shift resulted in little interaction between student and instructor as Patti assumed a teacher evaluatory role. Contributing to this shift in roles, Tayo tended to direct Patti's feedback by asking her to evaluate particular aspects of his paper, like his conclusion, in place of him sharing his own ideas. Ultimately, Sydney's increase in participation likely reflected her development of a better understanding of the conference culture while Tayo's participation may indicate his

agency to shift the purpose and participation norms of the conference in order to meet his personal goals for the practice.

Ellie and Naomi. Ellie and Naomi interpreted both the purpose and participant roles differently than the writing conference culture. Naomi described the purpose of conferences as a way to identify and fix errors in her writing rather than share and develop ideas. Ellie's understanding evolved from reviewing key concepts to sharing and making new connections with her ideas. Although Ellie's interpretation became more aligned with the conference culture, she also expressed a personal goal for conferences. She wanted to focus on her "actual" writing rather than ideas because she struggled with style and clarity in her writing. Naomi also conveyed her own wish for the interaction: She preferred to skip conferences completely and work independently.

Despite these divergent interpretations of the purpose, Naomi and Ellie described their participant roles in terms of providing correct answers. Naomi wanted to be seen by Patti as knowledgeable; therefore, when she did not know how to answer questions, she became quiet. After incorrectly answering questions, she wanted the opportunity to justify her thinking. Ellie also interpreted Patti's questions as potentially pointing out errors. She described avoiding responding to these questions, because she wanted to give the right answer and not challenge Patti's feedback. Both Ellie and Naomi recognized they should ask questions of Patti, but they were concerned about asking a question that had already been answered. Lastly, while they recognized the implicit choices presented in conferences, they described struggling to interpret their next steps. They expressed a preference of Patti explicitly telling them how to proceed. Table 13 visually presents

evidence to illustrate the differences between Patti's, Ellie's, and Naomi's interpretations of the conference purpose and participant roles.

Table 13

Patti's Conference Purpose and Participant Roles Compared with Ellie's and Naomi's

Factor	Instructor	Ellie	Naomi
Purpose	Conferences are "about ideas and making sure what they have brought fits the assignment and is appropriately thought through in terms of scope."	"I feel she told me most of the stuff that I had already watched in the screencast, in the videos, so it's kind of going over it."	"I went in and she told me things were wrong. Ok fine. So I'll fix that."
Participant Role	"talk intelligently about their articles and what they see happening there."	"I will just stop talking now. Digging myself deeper into this. This is not going to go well. Just stop here."	"I just was trying to explain why I [included popular sources], you know? Almost as a defense, 'oh ok fine, that's not right, but I'm just explaining that I put that in there because. So that you understand, you know?'"
	"I'm asking the student questions in order to make sure that the topic is narrow enough and that it is researchable."	"Surprised. Slightly unprepared, like I hadn't thought about it. Put on the spot…I have problems answering questions on the spot. Like it just like never works for me."	"A prose poem? Like I had heard it. I didn't know. I didn't remember what it meant, so I was kind of like waiting to see where [Patti] was going with it to understand it better… But she called me on it. Not knowing what it was."

Unlike the other students in this study, the conference discourse for Ellie and Naomi did not appear to reflect the mismatches as neatly. Ellie's conferences seemed to align with an emerging pattern of participation whereby students with culturally

congruent conferences participated consistently at higher levels. With a comparably mismatched culture, Ellie had consistently the lowest rates of participation of all the students in this study. She spoke only 17% and 15% of the words and introduced 19% and 6% of the ideas. These relatively low rates of participation may reflect Ellie's hesitation to share her ideas and direct the conversation. Moreover, Ellie's conferences were the shortest recorded in this study. Clocking in at 16 minutes and 13 minutes, Ellie's conferences were half as long as John's and Nicole's at 32 minutes and 27 minutes respectively. The conference discourse seems to support the finding that the conference culture was comparably mismatched for Ellie.

In contrast, the conference discourse for Naomi does not appear to reflect a cultural mismatch in the same way. Naomi participated more than Ellie in her writing conferences. She spoke 30% of the words in her first conference and 21% in her second. She also introduced consistently more ideas, 24% in both conferences. This is a similar rate of participation as Sydney's second conference and several of Nicole's conferences. Naomi's conferences were also a similar length as the rest of the students in this study. In this case, Naomi's interpretation of her role did not as closely align with her actions in conferences. These findings suggest that Naomi may have been able to navigate the participant roles in conferences despite her different interpretation.

In summary, the writing conferences in this study appeared to be comparably culturally mismatched for Tayo, Sydney, Naomi, and Ellie. While Tayo and Sydney interpreted the purpose of conferences differently than the culture, they expressed a greater awareness of the participant roles, and their conferences seemed to be less mismatched than conferences with Naomi and Ellie, who interpreted both the purpose

and participant differently. The conference discourse seemed to manifest these cultural mismatches for Tayo, Sydney, and Ellie. Both Tayo's and Sydney's rates of participation changed over time. Sydney spoke more during her second conference, perhaps due to her evolving understanding of the conference purpose, which aligned more closely with the culture. In contrast, Tayo's participation rate decreased from the first to the second conference, which may be interpreted as a result of his agency to shift the conference purpose to meet his personal goals. Lastly, Ellie consistently spoke the least, introduced the fewest ideas, and had the shortest conferences in this study. In these cases, the conference discourse seems to indicate a cultural mismatch. In contrast, Naomi's conference discourse suggests the possibility of a different conclusion. Since Naomi consistently participated at rates similar to students with more culturally congruent conferences, there are likely unidentified factors at work.

Students' Experiences

The culture of conferences appeared to shape students' experiences in this practice, although this shaping was more distinct at the extremes. The more perceptible culture congruency or mismatch, the easier it was to distinguish the potential influence on students' experiences.

Positive experiences. John and Nicole described their conference experiences positively, which may reflect the cultural congruency of conferences. First, they interpreted their conferences as a good way to generate new ideas. They were the only students to develop entirely new thesis statements and fundamentally changing their ideas as a result of the interaction. Second, John and Nicole reported positive emotions after conferences. Although John and Nicole recounted feeling apprehensive coming into the

first conference, they felt confident going into all subsequent interactions because they understood the expectations for conferences and were able to prepare for the conversation. Lastly, John and Nicole were more likely to follow up for additional assistance with their writing. After the second conference, John went to the writing center for additional help with the paragraph organization of his work, whereas Nicole chose to attend a third writing conference. John and Nicole may have pursued additional individualized help with their writing because of their positive experiences in conferences.

While there seemed to be some mismatches in conference culture, Tayo and Sydney still described their experiences in primarily positive terms. For Tayo, his positive experience may be a result of his ability to shape conferences to meet his personal goals. Tayo emphasized the usefulness of Patti's feedback and the ease with which he was able to implement the necessary changes. Sydney saw conferences as helping her develop new ideas and a better understanding of the assignment. Yet these positive learning outcomes did not result in Tayo and Sydney seeking additional help for their writing. Both chose to skip the third conference. Tayo interpreted Patti's recommendation to go to the writing center as generic advice, so he did not follow up. Sydney commented that even though Patti offered additional assistance over email, she would not follow up. Sydney's reticence to follow up may be due to her persistent apprehension about meeting individually with Patti. She still described feeling worried entering the second conference, most likely because she was unprepared for the first conference.

Ultimately, John, Nicole, Tayo, and Sydney all evaluated their conferences as successful. John and Sydney attributed this success to the conference outcomes: They got questions answered, feedback on their research questions or thesis statements, and developed a better understanding of the assignment. For example, Sydney described the success of the second conference as

> being able to get more, add more, like supporting evidence into my paper and getting my questions answered. And kind of getting more feedback and revisions as to how I can write a thesis and how I could format and organize my paper.

They both stressed their own performance as contributing to the success of the interaction. John explained: "I think I made a good first impression on her." Similarly, Sydney was pleased with her ability to answer Patti's questions after the second conference.

Nicole and Tayo had a broader definition of conference success. Their conferences were successful because they learned something in general. Nicole responded: "Of course! I learned something! So I think every conference was successful whether you get positive or negative feedback. It's feedback. And you can utilize that to make your project better." For Nicole, any conference would be successful as long as her writing improved. This mindset may have contributed to Nicole's decision to have a third writing conference. Tayo also emphasized his learning in general: "Just the feedback I got, I was able to see the areas I can improve in. And just be able to make my paper even stronger than it was." Tayo also defined his conferences as successful because of Patti's feedback, but he did not want general feedback. His goal was to get feedback to polish

his writing, which possibly contributed to his decision to not schedule a third writing conference.

As a whole, John, Nicole, Tayo, and Sydney reported primarily positive experiences. The cultural congruency of John's and Nicole's conferences may have contributed to their overall feelings of confidence in conferences and willingness to seek additional help with their writing. Tayo and Sydney also reported positive experiences although the cultural mismatch may have influenced their apprehension before the interaction and decision to not follow up with Patti individually.

Mixed experiences. The cultural mismatch of conferences appears to have shaped Naomi's and Ellie's experiences, which they described in mixed terms. While they reported several positive learning outcomes as a result of conferences, such as generating new ideas and refining thesis statements, they interpreted the process of conferencing in negative terms. Conferences were intended to "correct" Naomi's writing or "repeat things said in class" and not address the "actual writing" issues Ellie identified. The affective dimensions of Naomi's and Ellie's conference experience may have contributed to their somewhat negative interpretations. They both reported feeling anxiety about interacting with Patti, which persisted through the second conference. These feelings lead Naomi to partially "dread" her conference. Naomi and Ellie were also the only students to describe specific moments of frustration with their conferences. Ellie was frustrated with the assumptions Patti made about her ideas while Naomi felt like Patti did not respond to her comments. These experiences may have also influenced their choice to not pursue additional help with their writing. Both students commented that they did not believe an additional conference would necessarily be productive.

Similar to their peers, Naomi and Ellie evaluated their conferences as successful, but with several caveats. For the first conference, Ellie explained: "it was successful in that like I wasn't really looking for anything out of it." Naomi also expressed that she saw conferences as successful because she did not have a list of questions or anything that needed to be answered. In other words, the success of the interaction was simply because they did not have precise expectations. By the second conference, Ellie was more specific in her definition of success while Naomi's definition remained consistent. Ellie concluded the success of conferences was because "we talked about stuff I hadn't really had time to think about yet. Like the rhetorical appeals and structure of the paper, and not just the topics and stuff." She appreciated the second conference's narrower focus on the rhetorical appeals over the first conference's general focus on research topics. In contrast, Naomi did not change her definition of success. She still felt the second conference was successful only because it was mandatory. She summarized "the fact it was mandatory made me realize I did need it. And it was helpful." Although Naomi and Ellie reported similar positive learning outcomes, they interpreted the success of their conferences differently. Their interpretation appeared to be influenced by the extent they agreed with or valued the purpose of conferences.

Students' Advice for Instructors

Part of my exigence for this study was a strong belief that the field of composition needs to examine students' experiences in our pedagogies, especially ones considered best practices. In keeping with this belief, I asked the students in this study if they had any suggestions for Patti or general advice for teachers who were new to practicing writing conferences. Unexpectedly, students' responses appeared to reflect their

interpretation of the conference culture, offering additional evidence of the cultural congruency or mismatch examined in this study.

John, Nicole, and Tayo recommended new instructors follow Patti's lead by probing student thinking. Nicole explicitly highlighted Patti's questions as key. She explained:

> Definitely ask questions. To see what the student is thinking. Have them explain it to you in their own way instead of maybe trying to infer what they're doing…[Patti] asks a lot of questions to get my perspective on what I'm doing rather than just inferring that this is what I'm trying to do.

John also commented on Patti's approach to the conversation, explaining that she had a "pretty good formula" for getting students talking. He recommended instructors:

> sort of put a little pressure on [students] to get their work done before the conference by setting up sort of an idea of like not exactly like an interrogation, but that it will be expected that it's going to be high-level conversation that you are going to be having.

John recommended instructors stress that conferences are an intensive conversation. In total, Nicole's and John's recommendations seem to mirror the cultural norms of Patti's conferences. They stressed that conferences were a conversation whereby instructors ask questions in order to understand student thinking.

Along similar lines, Tayo suggested instructors help students reexamine their writing: "I guess trying to just challenge the students' thinking (which aligned with Patti's purpose). And make them consider what they write rather than just having them write something on the paper and they forget about it." Tayo indicated that conferences

help students challenge their thinking. However, he did not stress the conversation aspect of conferences like Nicole and John. Instead, he focused more on the outcomes of conferences, providing students with additional insights into what is presented on the page. Tayo added that he would have preferred that Patti require a third writing conference prior to the position paper, so he could get additional feedback on the largest assignment for the semester, the research paper. In many ways, Tayo's advice for instructors aligns with his personal goal for conferences: to get polishing feedback on his final writing product.

In contrast, Sydney, Naomi, and Ellie recommended Patti and future instructors improve conferences by varying conference norms, respond to students' ideas, and establish clear expectations. Sydney recommended that instructors start conferences rather than waiting for students to direct. She described a few conference openers instructors could use:

> Well. I guess to kind of start off with a little, maybe like, do you have any questions on the paper so far? Do have any questions on the assignment so far? So that the student could have a better way of starting off with the paper.

Sydney recommended instructors change their expectations with regards to the conference participation norms. She was uncomfortable with the expectation that she should talk first and direct conferences. This dynamic manifested in both conferences as Patti remained silent until Sydney spoke. Sydney believed that varying these norms would help students start off the interaction smoothly.

Ellie and Naomi suggested instructors become increasingly responsive to students. Naomi suggested that Patti be "little more personable" by asking students if they understand a question. She clarified:

> I mean there is definitely things that, you know, that we paused on that you kind of pointed out that I, that when you listen to it again, as an outsider, you might think like, ok maybe there should have been a little, more of a response here. Maybe there should have been more clarification here. Whatever.

Naomi wanted Patti to be more responsive to her statements in conferences. Relatedly, Ellie commented that Patti's conferences had an explicit structure:

> she has a progression in the conference. Like talk about this, and then you go to this, and then you go to this. And it feels like she has ideas in her head. And that's mostly where, like we're going based on her ideas. Not like what's actually on the paper.

While John attributed Patti's "formula" with getting him talking, Naomi and Ellie perceived this structure as rigid. Ellie described it as channeling her to Patti's ideas rather than responding to her work. Naomi commented on the effects of this structure, which she perceived as Patti not responding to her statements. Lastly, Naomi wrote in a follow up email: "a way teacher's *[sic]* can improve the conferences would be to make clear to the students what would be accomplished in the meeting." She wanted the expectations for conferences to be clearer. All in all, Naomi was unsure about the purpose and her role in the interaction.

Summary

Culture appeared to be a discernable factor in shaping students' experiences in writing conferences. Students for whom the culture of writing conferences was culturally congruent interpreted their experiences positively both in terms of learning and their emotions. In contrast, students for whom the culture of writing conferences was culturally mismatch interpreted their learning more negatively and described persisted anxiety from the interaction. These differences may have influenced students' willingness to seek additional assistance with their writing. Students for whom conferences were comparably matched were more likely to schedule a third writing conference or go to the writing center, while students with more mismatched conferences chose to skip further individualized help. The students' recommendations for practice provide insights into ways instructors may adapt their conference practice to serve different students. They also appear to align with the extent the conferences were culturally congruent or mismatched.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I present the findings of the four sub-questions that structured this inquiry. I interpret the culture of writing conferences by examining Patti's expectations for the purpose and participant roles and the way these factors were exhibited in practice. I then describe students' perceptions on conferences, focusing on their meanings, interpretations of the purpose and participant roles, and responses including learning, follow up, and emotions. Lastly, I synthesize these findings to determine the extent the conference culture was comparably congruent or mismatched. I describe how this culture appeared to shape students' experiences collectively. In my final chapter, I discuss these

findings within the broader context of this study: the literature on writing conferences and my theoretical perspective. I also consider the implications of this study for research, theory, and practice.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

To conclude this study, I return to my central research question: *What are students' experiences in writing conferences in a blended first year composition course?* I designed an interpretive case study that examined the writing conferences between one instructor and six student participants to answer this question. In this chapter, I synthesize my findings and discuss them as they relate to my conceptual framework, theoretical perspective, and the relevant literature on writing conferences. I also identify potential areas for further research within this discussion. I describe the limitations in design, methods, and results of this study. I conclude by suggesting the implications of this study for research, practice, and policy.

Discussion

I organized my discussion into two sections. First, I synthesize my findings in light of my conceptual framework and the relevant literature on writing conferences. Then I relate these findings to my theoretical perspective in order to discuss the utility of cultural mismatch theory as a way to explain student experiences of the process of learning in writing conferences.

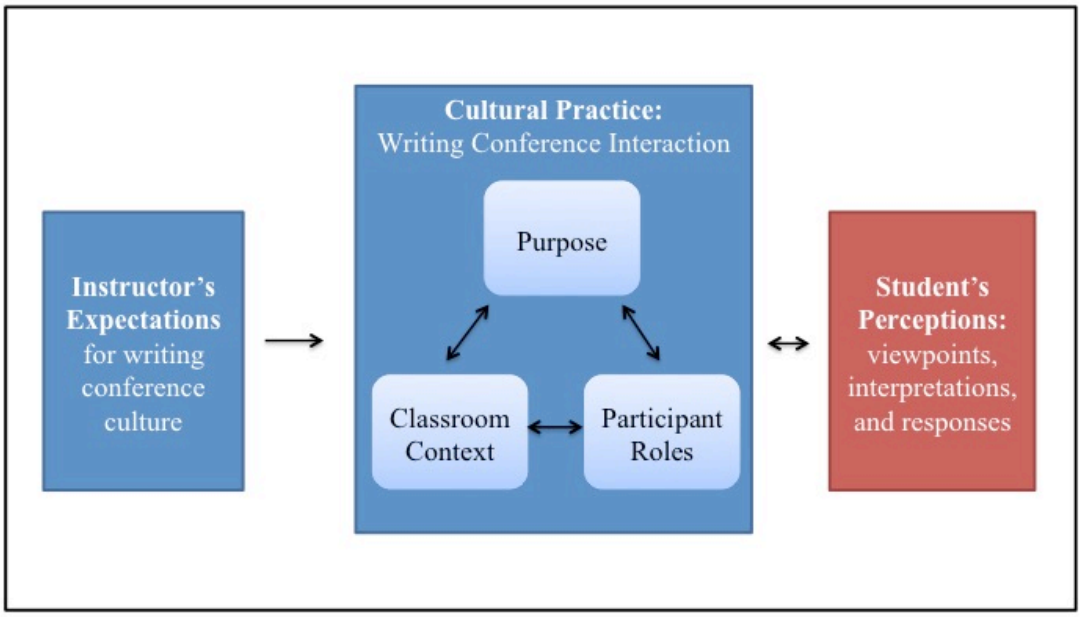
Conceptual Framework

At the center of my conceptual framework was the writing conference interaction. I identified from the conference literature three key factors, the purpose, participant roles, and classroom context, which I contended form the basis of the cultural codes or rules for the conference interaction. I posited that they are also domains where cultural mismatch can potentially occur. In the following section, I reexamine each factor in light of my

findings and the relevant literature. I then propose revisions to this framework. Figure 2 presents my original conceptual framework of factors influencing students' experiences.

Figure 2.

Original Conceptual Framework of Factors Influencing Students' Experiences



Purpose. The purpose referred to *the objective or intended outcomes of conferences*. Patti's principal purpose for conferences was to evaluate students' ideas in terms of fit and scope for the rhetorical task. Through this process, she saw conferences as generating new and original ideas with students. Patti's purpose reveals one of the central tensions between the theorization of conferences as a conversations and teaching interaction. Black (1995) argues that conferences frequently fall back on "the academic patterning of the classroom and the cultural patterning which the classroom reinscribes" (p. 11). Ideally, conferences are a conversation between two writers, yet practically conferences tend to be a traditional teaching interaction whereby the instructor takes control, establishes learning objectives, and evaluates students' work.

In the conference literature, practitioners discussed the conference purpose primarily in terms of instructors' goals, overlooking students (for exceptions see Newkirk, 1989; Murray, 1979). They outlined two overarching purposes for conferences: to scaffold the writing process (i.e., Beach, 1989) and to change the instructor-student relationship from adversarial to helping (i.e., Murray, 1979). Patti's purpose aligns with a scaffolding conference. She rarely mentioned building rapport with her students or individualizing instruction as a conference outcome. Instead, she conceptualized the purpose of conferences as consistent for all students regardless of their individual goals and needs.

The students in this study interpreted the conference purpose in a variety of ways. Students with the most culturally congruent conferences interpreted them similar to Patti, as a way to generate new ideas. Students with comparably culturally mismatched conferences described them as a way to get Patti's feedback, fix errors in writing, and review key concepts. These differing interpretations each recognize the inherent evaluation of ideas as central to conferences. Patti decides which ideas are good or bad and identifies what errors need fixing. This finding aligns with Black's (1995) observation: "students perceive conferences as goal-oriented: teachers and students meet in their institutional capacities to discuss a problem with a paper" (p. 160). The students in this study understood conferences as a type of teaching interaction to achieve a particular goal.

Although the literature indicates that students frequently have unique expectations for conferences (Sperling, 1991; Walker & Elias, 1987), it provides few insights into their expectations due to limitations in study designs. This study fills this gap. Of the six

students in this study, only John's and Nicole's purpose closely aligned with Patti's. The remaining four students interpreted the conference purpose differently. Two of the students' interpretations of the conference purpose evolved with participation. With time Sydney's and Ellie's understandings became more closely aligned with Patti's intended purpose. This finding provides additional evidence that conferences are a cultural practice—a practice that may enculturate students through participation. In contrast, Tayo's and Naomi's interpretations were consistently different from Patti's, which resulted in Tayo changing the conference purpose to meet his personal goals and Naomi viewing the conference purpose negatively. As a whole, the conference purpose was a discernable factor of cultural congruency or mismatch.

Participant roles. The participant roles refer to *the way participants act, communicate, and present themselves.* Patti explained her ideal conference participant roles in similar ways to the literature. She stressed that students should adopt an active role whereby they speak intelligently about their ideas, direct the conversation, ask and answer questions, all while carefully documenting the conversation. As the instructor, Patti's role was to listen, respond to students' ideas with thoughtful scaffolding questions, and indicate choices on how to proceed. Patti's description aligns with students' assuming a "writer" (Murray, 1979), "conversant" (Jacobs & Karliner, 1977), or "author" (French, 1999) role.

Patti acknowledged that the active student role she described was an ideal. Only her "best" students were able to fulfill it. She added that it was appropriate for the majority of her students to not necessarily direct the conversation but to ask her to evaluate their ideas. In this way, Patti recognized the cultural conventions behind her

expectations and how many of her students would not perform to these standards. However, unlike the literature's recommendation, she did not describe modifying her role to help students become more active. Two studies envision instructors assuming roles that enable students to be active, which they describe as a "manager" (Freedman & Katz, 1987) or "special leadership" (Sperling, 1990) role. Patti indicated that her role shifted to a traditional teacher one when students deviated from or were unable to adopt an active role. In these cases, Patti evaluated students' theses and assumed responsibility for directing the conversation.

Students described a range of participant roles that tended to closely align with their understanding of the conference purpose. Students with comparably culturally congruent conferences interpreted their participant roles similar to the roles described in the literature. John and Nicole stressed sharing their ideas. They described Patti's questions as having a pattern and implicitly guiding their thinking. In contrast, students with comparably culturally mismatched conferences did not necessarily stress an active student role. Tayo and Sydney emphasized Patti's evaluatory role. They wanted to get Patti's feedback, so they would ask questions and direct Patti's attention to particular areas of concern. Ellie and Naomi understood their roles in terms of assessment. They were to correctly answer Patti's questions. They described becoming passive as a strategy to avoid responding incorrectly or challenging Patti's interpretation. Ellie's and Naomi's strategy aligned with Newkirk's (1995) concept of competency. Newkirk found that both instructor and student wanted to be perceived as competent, so students stayed silent and avoided asking questions. My findings suggest that the prominence with which Ellie and Naomi attempted to save face could be connected to the extent the conference participant

roles were mismatched. Ultimately, the participant roles appeared to be a factor of potential cultural congruency or mismatch.

Classroom context. The classroom context refers to the broader setting of conferences, such as *the rhetorical task, number of conferences, conference space, timing during students' writing process, and timing during the semester*. The classroom context was most strongly reflected in Patti's expectations for conferences. Patti considered both the rhetorical task and timing when determining her conferences. She opted to conduct writing conferences on assignments that provided students choices in topic, rhetoric, or mode. To help students navigate these choices, Patti timed conferences to meet with students at a point in their writing process when they had developed ideas, but before they drafted their assignment. In this way, the broader context of conferences, both the assignment and timing, influenced the writing conference culture.

Unlike the purpose and participant roles, the classroom context did not appear to be a discernable factor influencing students' perceptions of writing conferences. Students in this study rarely described the classroom context. They did not describe their assignments as full of choices. Only one student mentioned the rhetorical task in conjunction with writing conferences. Tayo wanted Patti to switch the third conference to the final research paper because he wanted polishing feedback on the largest assignment for the semester. He was the only student to consider how writing conferences may help with a particular rhetorical task. The remaining students did not explicitly describe their rhetorical tasks in relation to conferences.

Students also rarely described the timing of conferences. Students tended to schedule their conferences based on their personal schedules rather than considering the

way conferences could impact their writing processes. For example, when Patti spread the second conferences over two weeks, she asked students to come prepared with a full draft during the second week. This reminder implicitly pointed students to consider their writing process, yet only one of the students in the study did. Tayo chose to sign up for a conference in the first week *and* bring a full draft. He commented that he was busy the second week, but he still wanted the polishing feedback on a final draft, so he rushed to produce a full draft in mere days. Relatedly, Naomi signed up for a week two conference not because she wanted feedback on a full draft but because there was a Jewish holiday the week before. In fact, she interpreted scheduling a conference during the second week as an additional burden because she had "to show more" for herself. Even John and Nicole—the students with the most culturally congruent conferences—did not describe their writing processes. They interpreted the purpose of conferences as a way to generate ideas, but they did not explicitly state they wanted these ideas prior to drafting their papers. Instead, it was implied in the way the students' described the purpose. The students' personal lives also influenced their decision to schedule a third writing conference. Several students indicated that they did not want to spend their time on a third writing conference so close to final exams.

As a whole, the classroom context appeared to not directly influence students' perceptions of writing conferences. This finding is unsurprising in many ways. After all, students are not trained teachers who by necessity must consider how a particular practice supports students' writing processes. Additionally, foundational composition concepts like the rhetorical situation and writing process may be new to students. Mid-Atlantic University's First Year Composition (FYC) course includes learning outcomes that call

for students to analyze various rhetorical situations and describe their individual writing process. As the conferences occurred throughout the semester, it is logical that students did not uniformly describe these concepts in their interviews.

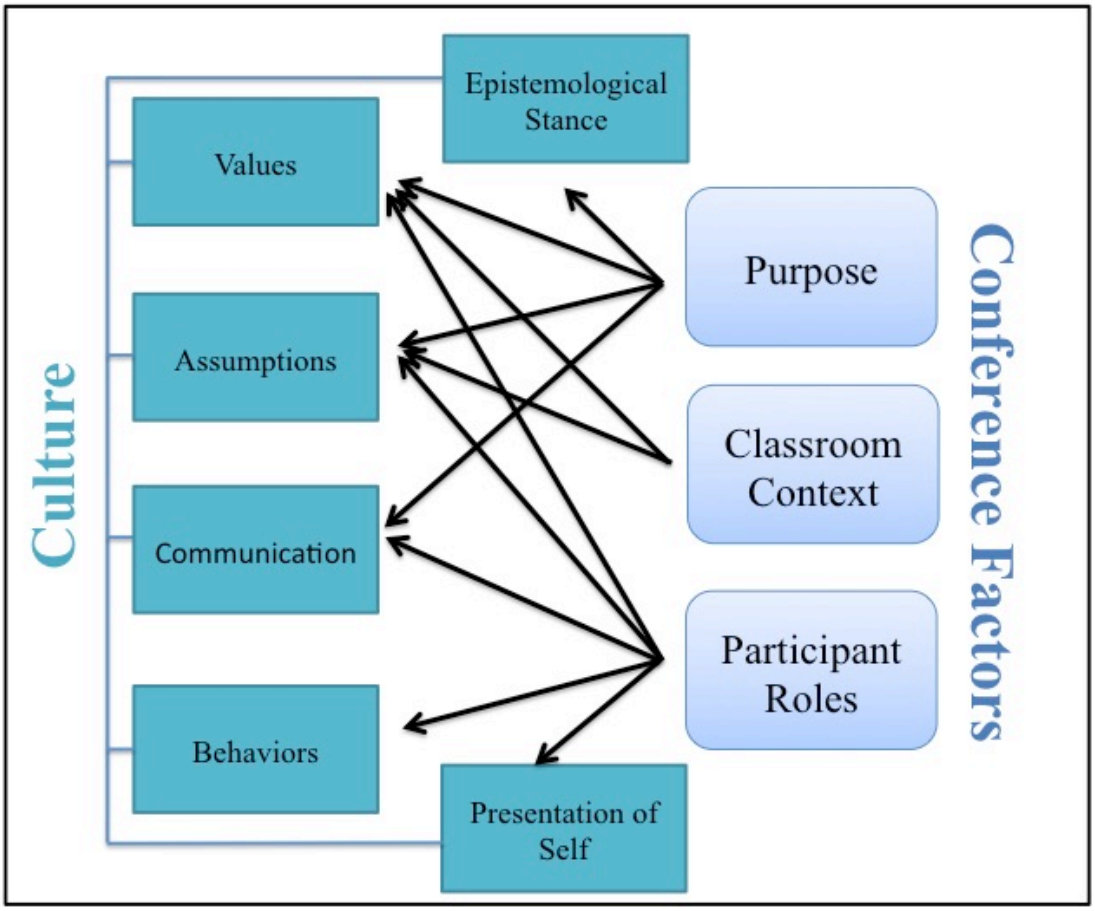
I opted to incorporate the classroom context into my conceptual framework because of the conference literature. The practitioner literature, written by practitioners for other practitioners, dedicates a considerable amount of time prescribing approaches to integrating regular conferences into various classroom contexts (e.g., Emig, 1960). The researcher literature confirms that the classroom context is significant. Sperling's (1990, 1991, 1992) research described how the broader classroom context influenced conferences. She identified the effect of numerous classroom factors, including the rhetorical task, number of conferences, conference space, timing during student's writing process, and timing during the semester. I hypothesize that the prominence of the classroom context in her study may have partially been a result of the setting. Sperling examined unscheduled, frequently impromptu, conference conversations between one instructor and six students in a secondary classroom. This is a vastly different conference practice than Patti's mandatory, scheduled conferences in a college FYC classroom. I believe one of Sperling's aims for her study was to provide a roadmap for other secondary teachers to integrate writing conferences into their classroom. In this way, it is logical that the classroom context was a discernable factor in determining the conference culture but did not appear to explicitly influence students' perspectives on conferences. It was not an apparent factor of cultural mismatch.

Cultural practice. To describe the conference culture, I hypothesized that the instructor's expectations, *the instructor's description of his or her writing conference*

practice, would provide insights into the most prominent cultural codes and norms of the pedagogy. Patti's descriptions of purpose and classroom context revealed her tacit expectations for the epistemological stance, values, and assumptions of conferences. As the instructor, she was positioned as the final arbitrator of knowledge whereby she evaluated students' work for its originality. Although she evaluated the work, she did not make the final decision for students about how to revise. Instead, she presented students with constrained and frequently implicit choices on ways to proceed. In contrast to these tacit norms, Patti also explicitly described her expectations for the conference participant roles, the cultural norms of communication, presentation of self, and behaviors, which I summarized above. In Figure 3, I present the relationships between the conference factors and culture.

Figure 3

Visual Representation of Key Conference Factors Relationship with Culture



The conference discourse showed the culture in practice closely aligned with Patti's expectations. This finding converges with Delpit's (2006) argument that the instructor determines and enforces the cultural codes and norms in the classroom. It is also supported by the research literature on conferences, which suggested that in conferences, the instructor frequently controlled the topics of discussion, discourse, participant roles, and knowledge constructed (Black, 1998; Freedman & Katz, 1987; Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Newkirk, 1995; Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1985). As the person with the most power and authority, Patti was able to determine and enforce the conference codes according to her expectations. The only discrepancy between Patti's

expectations and the conference culture was the participant roles. During the interaction, students spoke less frequently and tended not to direct the conversation. The analysis of the discourse showed that students shared their ideas, but primarily in response to the questions that Patti posed. These participant roles may reflect the way Patti's epistemological stance is enacted in practice. After all, it makes sense that the instructor, who is responsible for evaluating ideas, ends up directing the conversation and controlling the topics discussed.

Student's perceptions. Student's perceptions referred to *an individual student's viewpoints, interpretations, and response* to writing conferences. All the students in this study evaluated their conferences as successful and reported positive outcomes in terms of learning. They recalled generating new ideas, revising or changing their thesis statements, and understanding the rhetorical task and reader better. Despite these similarities in terms of learning, students perceived their conferences differently. Students with comparably culturally congruent conferences described their experiences positively. John and Nicole saw their conferences as a productive way to generate new ideas and evaluated their conferences as helpful. They described feelings of confidence after conferences, and they were more likely to seek additional individualized help for their writing. In contrast, students with comparably culturally mismatched conferences described their experiences in mixed terms. Ellie and Naomi reported feelings of anxiety that persisted through both conferences. They were frustrated at times with the interaction and opted not to seek additional individualized help because they did not trust the interaction would be productive.

These findings align with and expand the conference literature in several ways. First, Walker and Elias (1987) concluded that students likely evaluate the success of conferences differently than their instructors. This study provides insight into criteria students use to evaluate the success of conferences. For more congruent conferences, students defined the success based on concrete learning outcomes, such as developing a detailed thesis statement, while others were more general, considering any interaction that included feedback as successful. For comparably culturally mismatched conferences, students viewed conferences as compulsory, and therefore, they did not have their own goals for the interaction. They defined their conferences as successful simply because they had no expectations for it. Therefore, students' criteria for conferences seemed to reflect the extent students' agreed with the conference purpose their instructor established. This criterion reflects what Black (1995) labels a "goal-oriented" view of conferences in that it's all about the outcome of the interaction. Unsurprising, the student participants' evaluations differed than Patti's definition of a successful conference, which she described in term of learning outcomes *and* participation. For Patti, successful conferences were ones where students learned something that would improve their paper and adopted an active participant role.

Second, Black (1998) indicated that students recalled their emotions most readily, making the affective dimensions one of the most significant elements of conferencing. The findings of this study suggest that students reported feeling anxiety and frustration when conferences are less culturally congruent. In other words, students who interpreted the purpose and participant roles of conferences similar to Patti did not report as many

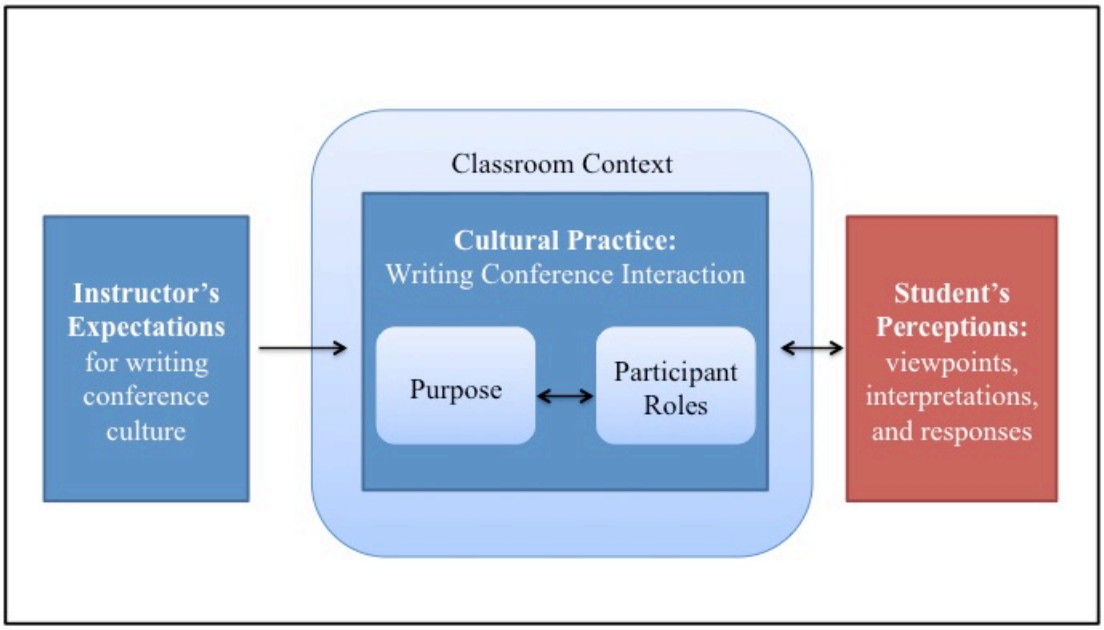
emotions, and the emotions they recalled were frequently positive such as feeling confident in their performance, work, and ability to complete the assignment.

Lastly, Sperling (1991) concluded that conferences positively influenced students' revisions even when students assumed a passive role in conferences. She argued that the literature needed to consider "an expanded notion of what constitutes productive teacher-student talk in the context of writing instruction" (p. 132). My findings indicate that even when students report learning from conferences they do not necessarily interpret their experiences positively. I argue that practitioners may need to consider students' experiences in the learning process in addition to outcomes. Further studies may want to examine the extent students' experiences in the learning process influences the revisions they ultimately implement. I contend their experiences could help account for the frequent disconnect between feedback and revision.

Revisions to conceptual framework. Based on my findings, I propose the following revision to my conceptual framework. I moved the classroom context from inside to outside the conference interaction. This change acknowledges the influence of the timing during writing process and rhetorical task on the instructor's cultural expectations for conferences. However, it removes the classroom context from directly influencing students' perceptions. Figure 4 presents my revised conceptual framework of the factors influencing students' experiences.

Figure 4

Revised Conceptual Framework of Factors Influencing Students' Experiences



Theoretical Perspective

In my theoretical perspective, I posited that writing conferences are a cultural practice embedded in the culture of power (Delpit, 2006). The writing conferences examined in this study appeared to prioritize many of the behaviors, skills, and values of the culture of power. Patti's conferences promoted the values of choice and originality, prioritized writing over personal matters, emphasized students' directing the conversation by their sharing ideas, and scaffolded learning primarily through questions. As theorized in the conference literature, these cultural norms tended to "radically shift conversational and evaluative responsibility to the student" (Newkirk, 1995, p. 197). As the instructor, Patti had the most power in establishing and enforcing the conference culture. Patti's writing conferences had a typical structure that several students described (John, Ellie, and Naomi). This structure included Patti opening and closing the interaction, asking

questions, and responding to students' ideas in similar ways. Overall, the culture of Patti's conferences aligned with conferences examined in previous research studies whereby the instructor controlled the topic of discussion, discourse, participant roles, and knowledge constructed in conferences (Black, 1998; Freedman & Katz, 1987; Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Newkirk, 1995; Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1985).

I theorized that the students in my study may have varying exposure to the culture of power (Delpit, 2006), which would lead to mismatches between the conference culture and students' prior experiences. Indeed, there appeared to be discernable mismatches between the writing conference culture and students' perceptions. Four of the six students in this study interpreted the purpose and participant roles differently than the culture. Race and ethnicity were not the primary characteristics determining cultural congruency and mismatch. For example, the most matched conferences were with John, a white male, and Nicole, a black female. The comparably mismatched conferences were with Naomi, a white female, and Ellie, an Asian American female. Several additional factors may have contributed to students' expectations and interpretations of conferences, including their conceptualization of writing and the writing process; their epistemological stance and beliefs about how knowledge is created (a dualistic or multiplicity viewpoint); and their expectations for interpersonal communication, which could be related to gender. Additional studies should examine the influence of these factors.

I also argued that students may struggle to identify and adhere to new codes crucial to participation. In this study, it did not appear that students were entirely unaware of the conference culture. Even in comparably mismatched conferences, Tayo, Sydney, Naomi, and Ellie identified many of the implicit norms of the interaction. Instead, the

mismatches seemed to derive from a conflict with students' expectations for the interaction. Tayo and Sydney both prioritized a different purpose for the interaction. They were able to successfully navigate the participant roles but to a different end. In contrast, Ellie and Naomi seemed to recognize the arbitrariness of the conference participant roles. They understood that by asking questions Patti was implying several choices, but they struggled to interpret the "correct" choice because they expected Patti to explicitly tell them. In this way, the cultural congruency and mismatch of conferences may stem not only from students' lack of knowledge, but also the extent students perceive the pedagogy as its accompanying cultural codes as rationale and helpful.

Lastly, I hypothesized that students' experiences of learning are shaped by the extent conferences are culturally congruent or mismatched. Cultural mismatch theory seemed to offer a plausible explanation of student experiences, but it had the most explanatory power at the extremes—in the most matched or mismatched conferences. The theory offered an interpretation of students' actions within conferences, evaluation of the practice, emotional response, and likelihood to pursue additional individualized help. This finding expands on Stephens et al. (2012) results that cultural mismatch adversely affected first generation college students psychologically and physically. My findings suggest that at a most basic level, students perceive the cultural mismatches in that they are aware of the extent the classroom pedagogies align with their expectations. However, they may not specifically point out the norms that comprise the culture.

Cultural mismatch theory also offers additional insights into Carnicelli's (1980) findings. He concluded students unanimously agreed that conferences were more useful than class time, but they critiqued aspects of conferences, such as their instructor's

listening skills and preparedness. Similarly, the students in this study reported learning and evaluating their conferences as successful, yet their perceptions—viewpoints, interpretations, and responses—differed. This finding suggests that students may still evaluate conferences as beneficial even if their experiences are more mixed. My study points to a need to consider students' broader experiences in addition to learning outcomes when examining pedagogy.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. As a single case study, my findings are not generalizable to the experiences of all students in writing conferences (Merriam, 2009). After all, individual students interpret their learning environments differently, and writing conferences can be influenced by multiple contextual factors, such as the participants, classroom environment, rhetorical context, and timing (Sperling, 1990). These factors likely impact the conference culture and student experiences in unique ways. Instead, the purpose of this study was to produce a working hypothesis about the relationship between the conference culture and student experiences. This hypothesis may be transferable to other situations depending on fit (Cronbach in Merriam, 2009). In order to support a reader's ability to assess fit, I employed several strategies in study design and reporting. I purposefully selected a case that was simultaneously exemplary in the university setting, yet reflective of broader cultural norms in the field of composition and higher education. I also developed a description of the case context with rich, thick descriptions and indicated the typicality of case to facilitate comparisons between contexts.

My study is also limited by my selection of within-case participants. I selected six students for maximum diversity in relation to their identity, background, and writing ability. Although I was able to successfully select a range of identities, the student participants were relatively homogenous in terms of background and writing ability. This result may partially be due to my participant recruitment procedures, which asked for volunteers at the start of the semester. It is likely that the most highly engaged students were more likely to volunteer. The setting of this study may have contributed to this result as well. By examining conferences at a public research university rather than an institution specializing in serving underrepresented students, I prioritized finding an instructor with a central commitment to her conference practice over variation in student participants. Despite these limitations, I contend this study still provides valuable insights into a typical context: mostly middle income and adequately prepared students at an institution with a strong composition program.

My research methods also have inherent limitations. Given the interpretive nature of my case study, researcher reflexivity, participants providing socially acceptable responses, was of particular concern (Yin, 2014). In this study, in addition to reflexivity with the researcher, this reflexivity may have also taken the form of students mirroring the instructor's desires as she holds the most power in the conference interaction. Indeed, students were frequently reluctant to negatively comment on or critique their conferences. I attempted to account for the potential reflexivity in a couple of ways. I adopted an observer as participant research stance, where I sat and participated in the class in similar ways as a student. I also offered students multiple ways to communicate with me outside

of the interview setting, including written reflections over email. Lastly, I conducted member checks with student participants to verify my interpretation of their experiences.

My cultural mismatch theoretical framework also has noteworthy explanatory limitations. I examined a single pedagogy, an inherently micro interaction, using a theoretical framework that emphasizes culture, a macro, structural-level concept. As a result, this framing does not account for the precise relationship between the conference culture and the broader classroom culture or the process of enculturation for students. These are all areas for additional research. My findings also do not describe all the cultural elements of writing conferences. Instead, they focus on the most prominent elements related to the purpose, participant roles, and classroom context. Specifically, I prioritized the cultural factors that are apparent in the conference discourse over other subtle forms of interpersonal communication. This emphasis was reinforced by the choice to only recording conference audio. Further research is needed to examine subtle cultural factors related to communication.

While these theoretical limitations are significant, the strength of this study's theoretical framework and design is the emphasis on individuals' perceptions of the conference culture. Many previous studies of cultural mismatch theory examined select cultural factors the researchers' perceived as significant, generally participation structures in reading instruction (Au & Jordan, 1981; Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Jordan, 1985; Mohatt & Erickson, 1981). These studies prioritized the researchers' point of view. They determined areas of cultural mismatch through discourse analysis, and therefore, did not account for the instructor's or students' understandings of culture. Nor did they consider

the effects of cultural mismatch beyond academic achievement. This study prioritized individuals' interpretation of culture.

Lastly, my findings have some limitations. I report on students' perception of their learning. I do not examine how writing conferences affected students' final writing product. Anecdotally, both students and the instructor expressed that student participants successfully completed their assignments, but this study cannot report on improvements to their writing ability. This study may have also impacted students' learning because the oral commentary protocol had students listen to clips from conferences and hear Patti's feedback once more before responding. The result was that students spent additional time reflecting on their writing after each conference. It is likely that students described additional learning that may have not naturally occurred after a standard writing conference. Confirming this limitation, Patti commented that she perceived the students who participated in my study as very successful in the class because of their regular interaction with me. Additional studies are needed to examine the effects of conferences on student's learning and writing.

Ultimately, I acknowledge the impact of these limitations but contend that this study provides insights into writing conferences as a cultural practice and the ways students interpret this practice. It presents an emergent theoretical perspective to help explain students' experiences in everyday classroom practices. With these limitations in mind, I now consider the possible implications of this study.

Implications

Although the experiences of the six students in this study are not generalizable to other contexts, I assert that this study has potential implications for research, policy, and

practice. This case study contributes to the general knowledge about writing conferences by examining student experiences. Writing conferences remain one of the least examined instructional practices in the composition classroom (Haswell, 2008). Little is know about their nature and effectiveness (Black, 1998; Hillocks, 2008), and few research studies have been conducted in the past twenty years. This case study describes six students' experiences in writing conferences in a blended first year composition course. It presents multiple perspectives on conferences from a racially and ethnically diverse group of students. It offers insights into the relationship between the conference culture and student experiences. In this way, this study provides a contemporary examination of writing conferences.

As an interpretive case study, this study also provides evidence countering the prevalent assumption from the practitioner literature, namely that all students find writing conferences beneficial. The research literature rarely included student perspectives, and when they were included, there were limitations in study design and methodology that made interpreting findings difficult (Black, 1998; Carnicelli, 1980; Martin & Mottet, 2011; Walker & Elias, 1987). Although all the students in this study reported learning from conferences, they described their experiences in both positive and mixed terms. This finding suggests that students may still evaluate conferences as beneficial even if their experiences are not entirely positive.

This study also provides new evidence countering the prevalent assumptions about conferences. Mary Hiatt's (1975) described what she called "the myth of conferences." She argued that the students who tended to benefit the most from one-on-one instructions were the most motivated and academically prepared. In this study, the

students with the most culturally congruent conferences described their experiences in positive terms. This finding suggests that it may not only be academic preparedness and motivation, but also the conference culture and its alignment with students' expectations contributing to the extent students' perceived the practice as beneficial. These findings indicate that students do not universally find conferences helpful.

For research, included in this study is an emerging theoretical framework, cultural mismatch theory, and method, oral commentaries, to examine student experiences. Cultural mismatch theory appears to be a potentially useful framework to identify differences between students' expectations and the culture of a particular classroom practice. Specifically, it partially accounted for the differences in students' experiences in writing conferences, offering an interpretation of students' actions within conferences, evaluation of the practice, emotional response, and likelihood to pursue additional individualized help. This finding indicates that cultural mismatch theory is not only a helpful framework to explain outcomes (e.g., academic achievement), but also the experience of learning (e.g., interpretations, emotions, and responses). Relatedly, interviews with oral commentary questions provided a method to elicit greater depth in responses from participants. Specifically, this method provided insights into participants' thinking, actions, and affect during different moments of the conference. It also addressed potential limitations of reflexivity and relying solely on participants' recall by replaying the interaction and asking specific follow up questions. Cultural mismatch theory combined with the oral commentary method provides an approach to gather multiple perspectives about a particular classroom practice.

This study also has potential implications for policy. It contributes to a broader discussion of educational equity. Equity is generally conceptualized in terms of outcomes, such as academic achievement, with scant attention paid to students and their wishes, expectations, and experiences. This conceptualization was apparent in the research literature on writing conferences, which identified examples of inequitable conference practice with female students and students perceived as low-ability (Black, 1998; Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997; Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1985). These studies examined measures like discourse markers, percentage of student talk, praise, and tone of the conversation to determine inequitable conference interactions. However, they disregarded students' perspectives and goals for the interaction. The findings of my study indicate that students who do not talk in conferences may interpret their participant role as beneficial because they prioritize hearing the instructor's feedback. Moreover, focusing solely on outcomes overlooks students with average participation but feel anxious or perceive the feedback as unhelpful. I contend these examples challenge our everyday understanding of equity. Ultimately, the conceptualization of equity may need to be expanded to include not just learning outcomes but students' experiences of the learning process. This conceptualization would consider students' perspectives and experiences as key elements for achieving educational equity.

This study has two potential implications for the fields of Composition and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). First, it indicates that even our most promising pedagogies and classroom practices may replicate cultural norms that are more aligned with some students' backgrounds, prior learning experiences, and expectations

than other students. As a result, these differences may inherently advantage some students in that they can be predisposed to having a positive learning experience while disadvantaging others.

This finding suggests that researchers and practitioners in Composition and SOTL may want to reconsider making blanket pedagogical recommendations. Frequently, texts written for practitioners espouse the benefits of adding a particular classroom practice, like writing conferences or active learning, with less attention paid to how to enact these practices. Yet, this study indicates that the way these practices are enacted can directly impact students' perceptions and experiences. Researchers and practitioners in these fields may want to consider creating professional development opportunities for instructors to learn how to implement, assess, and reflect on their classroom pedagogies within their particular institutional contexts. Training instructors to investigate the culture of their own classroom practices may help instructors implement promising pedagogies as well as identify strategies to individualize their practices for different students.

Second, while researchers and practitioners in the SoTL field continue to focus their work on integrating active learning techniques into STEM classes and large lectures (for example, see Freeman et. al, 2014), the findings from this study indicate there is still room for improvement in humanities and small classes. After all, many of the students in this study described their experiences in writing conferences in mixed terms, and these experiences contrasted with the instructor's intentions (Howard, 2001). SoTL needs to continue to examine and improve instruction practices in all disciplines and class formats across campus.

Lastly, this study points to a need for practitioners to continue to examine their pedagogical practices. Instructors must reconsider their practice and its culture, determining what about their pedagogies is fixed and what is flexible. Instructors can then go about demystifying their practice, establishing common norms with their students and adapting roles to meet students' needs. This recommendation is neither new nor novel. It mirrors the advice provided by Black (1998), who recommends instructors "consider not just structure, but purpose" of their conferences (p. 163), and Tobin (1993), who calls for instructors to "move beyond a set of rigid rules" in conferencing (p. 43). One option to move this area of research forward may be to examine the ways instructors develop and adapt their instructional practices, like writing conferences, when engaging equitable pedagogical approaches such as equity (Clark, 2002; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; Nieto, 1999), culturally responsive (Gay, 2010), culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995), or culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012) pedagogy. Understanding how instructors approach equitable pedagogies and students' perceptions of these approaches could provide valuable insights for composition research.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Literature Search Methodology

This literature review has focused primarily on the research in the fields of Composition and Education. By defining writing conferences, the literature was narrowed considerably. Since writing conferences are between *one* student and *one* instructor, literature about group conferences with multiple students, peer review, and peer-to-peer tutoring (i.e. writing centers tutors) were automatically excluded. Studies about conferencing in the developmental, English as a second language (ESL), creative writing, and advanced composition classrooms were also excluded because of their specialty focus not found in first year composition (FYC), the site for this study. For example, conferences in developmental and ESL may focus on the process of language acquisition, such as fluency, grammar, and mechanics of language learners or developing writers, rather than the composing process, rhetorical effectiveness, and research skills, which are emphasized in FYC. Finally, I excluded Language Arts Education research because of the age and cognitive differences between elementary students and high school and college students. It should be noted, however, that Language Arts Education research influenced the early Composition literature, and when possible, this influence has been noted. All unpublished manuscripts, dissertations, and thesis were excluded because they were not peer reviewed.

With these inclusion and exclusion principles established, I strove to comprehensively evaluate the composition literature on writing conferences from 1960 until October 2015. Nineteen-sixty was a natural starting point for this research because Janet Emig's article "We are Trying Conferences" was one of the earliest articles

prevalently cited in the literature. To begin the search, *The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Writing* (2008) was consulted. I focused on the "Response and Evaluation" section, identifying books, articles in anthologies, and prominent scholars such as Garrison (1974), Harris (1986), and Newkirk (1989). Others sources were found through a *JSTOR* search using the terms "Individual Conferenc*," "Writing Conferenc*," "One-to-One," and "Tutorial Method," with "Composition" and "College Writing." The results included articles in prominent Composition journals such as *College English* and *College Composition and Communication* as well as Secondary English Education journals such as *Research in the Teaching of English* and *The English Journal*. Education databases, *ERIC* and *Education Research Complete*, were also consulted to ensure Education articles were not overlooked. In consultation with a research librarian at the University of Maryland, search terms were refined and unpublished dissertations were identified. An extensive search of the bibliographies in these articles and dissertations led to an iterative search process.

Appendix B: Pilot Study of Instructors' Conference Practice

This pilot study was designed to explore writing conferences used in First Year Composition courses at Mid-Atlantic University. Two research questions were posed: *How writing conferences are conducted at Mid-Atlantic University and what meaning writing instructors make in these conferences?* Four participants, who currently teach FYC, were interviewed. Each forty-five minute to one-hour interview was conducted in the participant's shared office over a span of six weeks in the fall semester of 2013. The interviews were semi-structured, that is the same set of questions was posed, in order to encourage a conversational tone (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Finally, the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

All participants were graduate students or lecturers assigned to teach FYC. Three of the participants were male and one was female. Three of the participants were working towards or had recently completed a Masters of Fine Arts degree in fiction or poetry, and one participant was a doctoral student in rhetoric and composition. All the participants had completed a mandatory graduate course on composition theory. The participants had one to four years of experience teaching at the college level. Two of the participants had also taught English abroad or at the secondary level.

This study found that although the Mid-Atlantic University does not mandate writing conferences, they are considered a best practice in FYC. Likewise, all participants attested to the importance and usefulness of individual meetings with students about their writing. They conducted one to two writing conferences a semester per student for ten to twenty minutes apiece. These conferences were mandatory and listed in the schedules provided in the syllabi. One participant attempted to meet three times a semester, but

found that the additional meeting was not useful and thus adjusted her syllabus. The purpose of these writing conferences was either to improve the final writing product or build an individual relationship with a student. These purposes influenced both the timing and the frequency of conferences as well as the agenda, preparation, and subsidiary goals.

Conferences that focused on improving the final writing product were held once a semester approximately one to three weeks after midterms. These conferences lasted for about ten minutes per student. Both participants wanted students to improve their research project—a project that consisted of two interconnected papers students worked on for the final eight weeks of FYC. Participant 2 assisted students with identifying a feasible research topic and position to argue while Participant 1 assisted students with organizing ideas and supporting claims with evidence. Each conference focused on improving the final writing product, a research paper, but they conferenced at different points in the writing process.

The purpose of improving the final writing product influenced both the conference agenda and preparation steps. Both participants ran conferences with a concrete, paper-focused agenda. Participant 2 set out to help students determine research topics, so conferences were held prior to the fourth paper, a counter argument assignment. He instructed students to bring in their invention worksheet and stasis grid, two scaffolding activities for the project. He started each conference with a question about the project, "So what are you thinking" (personal communication, November 14, 2013) rather than inviting students to share how they are doing. This question coupled with the scaffolding activities immediately directed the conversation to the project at hand.

Participant 1 also had a set agenda for conferences, but he provided more latitude for student input. His conferences were held during the fifth and final paper of the semester after students have already conducted research and are in the process of writing up their final argument. Students consequently brought in a completed annotated bibliography, a thesis statement, and a passage or two from their paper. He asked students "how are things going?" and "tell me a little about your topic or thesis" (personal communication, October 21, 2013). These questions provide students with the opportunity to add to the conversation while remaining focused on the ultimate goal, the research paper. As a final note, the way the participants prepared for conferences also underscores their focus on the final research project. Both participants reported quickly reviewing students' graded papers before conferencing. This step allowed them to become familiar with the student's ideas and problem areas.

A subsidiary goal of these conferences was for students to have made progress on their papers. Participant 1 described the goal in terms of the entire class: "just trying to move a whole class ahead in the writing process" (personal communication, October 21, 2013). Participant 2 described it in terms of the individual student. For honor students, conferences helped students become motivated because they have the time to rest, work independently, and pace their work. For non-honors students, conferences provided them with a "life float," so a suitable topic is determined and a better grade is earned (personal communication, November 14, 2013). In both cases, conferences were a way for students to make progress on their research papers and receive help to improve the final writing product. They did not need to be longer or more frequent because the curriculum of FYC is set up for students to work on research only during the second half of the semester.

Indeed, a quick conference with a clear agenda can clear up any pressing questions or misconceptions.

In contrast, the participants that strove to establish an individual relationship with their students scheduled two writing conferences a semester. The first conference was held six to eight weeks into the semester and the second conference was held about a month later near the end of term. These conferences were longer, spanning from 15 to 20 minutes per student. Both participants used the conference to get to know their student. Participant 3 described the conferences as time for students to ask questions about his approach to the class and for him to understand student's research processes, interests, and projects. Participant 4 described the conferences as time for students to reflect on their own writing process and for her to identify any areas to support the student. These conferences were not necessarily focused on a writing product, although, with students prompting, both participants would assist students with their research projects.

The purpose of building an individual relationship influenced both the conference agenda and preparation steps. Both Participant 2's and Participant 3's first conference was after students have experienced the first half of the class, but before they transition into the research paper. For Participant 3, this allowed him to clear up any confusion about the different assignments prior to the culminating research project. To assist with this, he had students prepare by answering a series of reflective questions about the class and their research topic. In contrast, Participant 4 emphasized reflection in her conferences by having students turn in an assignment. This unique practice allowed students to refer to specifics within a paper, so they can understand how their writing was "growing and changing" (personal communication, December 2, 2013). She could then

identify and address specific struggles in a student's writing. Since the primary purpose of this conference was not progress on a project, neither participant prepared for the conference in advance. Additionally, neither participant prepared an agenda. Participant 4 wanted to give students "space to talk" (personal communication, December 2, 2013) while Participant 3 described his role as taking a "backseat" to the student (personal communication, November 15, 2013). Both ask broad opening questions such as "How's the project? What are you finding? What's interesting?" or "Talk to me about how you feel about the class." These questions both focus on the student's feelings or interests not necessarily just the project at hand.

This emphasis on the relationship is also apparent in the participants' general goals for students. Participant 3 wanted students to transition their unique way of writing into academic discourse (personal communication, November 15, 2013). He did not want to prescribe the way to achieve this discourse, but rather provide a flexible classroom environment where students can independently discover it. Participant 4 wanted students to understand that they have a "unique way of communicating with the world and that's what I am interested in focusing on in class" (personal communication, December 2, 2013). Both participants valued students' individuality. They even solicited feedback about their courses and then implemented changes based on these recommendations. Conferences were a way to establish a relationship with each student. Therefore, they conducted two longer format conferences in order to allow this relationship to develop.

In conclusion, the preliminary findings of this study suggest that the purpose of a writing conference provided insight into the structure, frequency, and agenda of a conference. The purpose also influenced the steps instructors and students take to prepare

for the meeting. Of course, with only four interviews conducted, these findings are extremely limited. I would like to continue to interview participants to see if there are any other conference structures, and ideally, find someone who has stopped conducting conferences. I also think to capture a fuller picture of conferences I need to observe a conference and then interview the participant afterwards. I do not feel comfortable discussing in detail approaches within conferences because many participants struggled with specific details. Participant 1 and 4 modeled their questioning style during a conference. Participant 3 and 4 described actions and activities done during a conference. Participant 2 provided few concrete details about his questions or activities. My interview questions about the conversation and actions inside a conference cannot be consistently answered. Further complicating matters, these answers were all abstract retellings. Observations would be a more powerful method to understand the meaning made within a particular conference situation. Observation would also allow me to create a more nuanced framework about how the purpose of a conference influences a particular instructor's approach. As a whole, I am thoroughly pleased with my progress on this topic, but more work needs to be done.

Appendix C: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

1204 Marie Mount Hall
College Park, MD 20742-5125
TEL 301.405.4212
FAX 301.314.1475
irb@umd.edu
www.umresearch.umd.edu/IRB

DATE:	November 17, 2015
TO:	Lisa Swan
FROM:	University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB
PROJECT TITLE:	[826910-1] Student Perspectives on Writing Conferences in First Year Composition: A Case Study
REFERENCE #:	
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	November 17, 2015
EXPIRATION DATE:	November 16, 2016
REVIEW TYPE:	Expedited Review
REVIEW CATEGORY:	Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

Prior to submission to the IRB Office, this project received scientific review from the departmental IRB Liaison.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulations.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of November 16, 2016.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Unless a consent waiver or alteration has been approved, Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of seven years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 or irb@umd.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB's records.

Appendix D: Protocols

This section includes the interview, observation, and survey protocols used in this study.

Student Survey

The purpose of this study is to understand student perspectives on writing conferences. I'd like to know more about your experiences in classes that emphasized writing.

1. Overall, how would you rate your writing ability? (circle one)

1	2	3	4	5
Novice		Average		Very Strong

2. Why would you describe your writing ability this way?

3. In general, what grades have you received on your writing assignments (e.g., essays, exams, labs, reports)? (circle one)

Mostly A's Mostly B's Mostly C's Below C

4. What writing-intensive courses did you take in high school and/or college? Identify your top three courses:

5. What types of writing did these courses assign? (e.g., essays, exams, labs, reports)

6. In any of these classes, did you ever meet with the instructor one-on-one to discuss your writing assignments?
   If so, how often?

7. Do you ever meet with a tutor for help with your writing assignments (e.g., writing center, OMSI tutors, AAP tutors)?
   If so, how often?

Tell me a bit about yourself.

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Career Aspiration:_____

Was UMD your first choice school? Why or why not?

8. What is the highest degree level of school your parents have completed?
   - Some high school, no diploma
   - High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent
   - Some college credit, no degree
   - Trade/technical/vocational training
   - Associate degree
   - Bachelor degree
   - Master degree
   - Doctorate or professional degree

9. Did you receive a Federal Pell grant as part of your financial aid package?
   - Yes, I received a Federal Pell grant
   - No, I did not
   - Unknown

10. Did you receive a Federal Work Study grant as part of your financial aid package?
    - Yes, I received a Federal Work Study grant
    - No, I did not
    - Unknown

11. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin?
    - No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
    - Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano
    - Yes, Puerto Rican
    - Yes, Cuban
    - Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin—print origin, (e.g., Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard)
      _____
    - I do not wish to identify Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.

12. What is your race?
    - White

- o Black, African American
- o American Indian or Alaska Native –print name of enrolled or principal tribe

  _____
- o Asian Indian
- o Chinese
- o Filipino
- o Japanese
- o Korean
- o Vietnamese

  Other Asian—print race, (e.g., Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian)

  _____
- o Native Hawaiian
- o Guamanian or Chamorro
- o Samoan

  Other Pacific Islander—print race, (e.g., Fijian, Tongan)

  _____
- o Some other race—print race.

  _____
- o I do not wish to identify race.

Instructor Protocol
First Interview
[Predicted Time: 45 minutes - 1 hour]

Warm-Up Questions

1. Tell me a bit about yourself. Where did you grow up? Go to college?

2. How did you come to Mid-Atlantic University?

3. How long have you taught writing?

4. What degree(s) do you hold? Do you have a specialization in composition?

[*RQ2: How do instructors' describe their writing conference practice in relation to purpose, participant roles, and classroom context?*]

[Factor: *Classroom Context*]

5. How often do you conference with students?
    a. When in the semester do you schedule them?

6. How do you organize your conferences?
    b. How much time do you allot per student?
    c. Where do you meet students?
    d. Are they conducted during class time or outside of class?

[Factor: *Purpose*]

7. At what point during the writing process do you conference? Why?
    a. What assignment are students working on?

8. Why do you use writing conferences in your class?

9. What are your goals for or purpose of conducting writing conferences?
    a. You mentioned you conferenced multiple times a semester. Does this purpose change from the first to second conference?
    b. Has your purpose or goals for conference changed since you've started practicing them? Why or why not?

[Factor: *Participant Roles*]

10. What steps do you take to prepare for a conference?
    a. Your students should take?

11. Please, walk me through a typical writing conference with a student.
    a. How does the discussion go typically?
    b. Do you have any questions that you typically ask?
    c. How do students typically respond?

12. Describe what you consider a successful conference.
    a. Why do you consider that a success?
    b. What do you consider an unsuccessful conference?

Demographic/Background Questions

13. What do you think is the department's beliefs about writing conferences?
    a. Is your practice comparable to other instructors' in the department?

14. What is your status at the university? (Professor (tenure-track), adjunct, instructor of record/graduate assistant, other)

15. How do you identify yourself?
    b. Gender
    c. Race/ethnicity

    This study especially interested in including underrepresented student perspectives. In college where you a…

    d. First generation college student?
    e. From a low-socioeconomic background?

Conclusion

16. These are all of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add about writing conferences?

17. This research will use pseudonyms for all participants. Did you have a name you would like used?

Instructor Protocol
Post-Conference Interview[s]
[Predicted Time: 30 minutes – 45 minutes]

[*RQ3: How is the instructor's practice negotiated in relation to the student's experience in the writing conference interaction?*]

1. Overall, how did the conferences go this week?

2. You mentioned in a prior interview that your goal for the [first/second] conference was generally PURPOSE. Was that still the goal?
    a. Did you have any individual goals for a student as well? Why?

3. Did any moments stand out to you? Successes? Points of tension or miscommunication?

4. What are students suppose to be working on after the conference?

Oral Commentary Questions (for select students and conferences)

5. What did you and [student name] work on?

6. How would you characterize the conversation?

7. I'd like to play a few instances of the conference back to you. Would you walk me through your thinking from that instance?
    a. I noticed DISCOURSE MOVE. What response did you hope to elicit?
    b. Did any part of the student's response stand out to you?
    c. How did you interpret the student's response in this moment? Now?

8. Was this conference successful? Why?

Student Protocol
First Interview
[Predicted Time: 30 minutes-45 minutes]

Warm-Up Questions

1. Tell me a bit about yourself. Where did you grow up? Go to High School?

2. Why did you choose Mid-Atlantic University?

3. What courses are you taking this semester?

4. What do you do with your free time? Job? Internship? Sports? Clubs?

Prior Writing Experiences Questions [follow up from survey]

5. Tell me a bit more about the types of writing you've done in high school.

6. Tell me a bit more about the types of writing you've done in college.

   [*Identify other questions to ask based on survey responses*]

Prior Teacher/Instructor Interaction Questions

7. On your survey, you mentioned that you have met with your teachers or professors one-on-one about your writing assignment.
   a. How did the meeting go?
   b. What did you talk about?
   c. Was the meeting helpful?
   d. Did you meet with them again? How often?

8. Have you gone to office hours for any of your classes?
   a. Why did you go to office hours? *[What motivated you to go?]*
   b. How did the meeting go?
   c. What did you talk about?
   d. Was the interaction helpful?
   e. Did you go back to office hours again? How often?

9. On your survey, you mentioned that you have met with a tutor with the writing center, OSMI, or APP one-on-one about your writing.
   a. Why did you met with a tutor? *[What motivated you to go?]*
   b. How did the meeting go?
   c. What did you talk about?
   d. Was the interaction helpful?
   e. Did you go back to office hours again? How often?

Future Expectations Questions

10. What do you want to work on in your writing?

11. Do you think English 101 will be able to support you in your goal? How?

Conclusion

12. These are all of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add?

13. This research will use pseudonyms for all participants. Did you have a name you would like used?

Student Protocol
Post-Conference Interview[s]
[Predicted Time: 30 minutes]

[RQ1: How do students describe their experiences in writing conferences?]

9. Overall, how did you think the conference went?

10. What did you talk about in the conference?

11. Did any moments stand out to you? Successes? Points of tension or miscommunication?

Oral Commentary Questions (for select students and conferences)

12. I'd like to play a few instances of the conference back to you. Talk me through your thinking at that moment.
    a. What do you mean by that?
    b. What were you feeling at the moment?
    c. I noticed DISCOURSE MOVE. What did you mean by that?
    d. What did you think your instructor meant by TERM? Have you talked about that in class?

[Factor: *Affective Dimensions*]

13. How did you feel at the end of the conference?
    a. How do you feel now about it?

[*RQ3: How is the instructor's practice negotiated in relation to the student's experience in the writing conference interaction?*]

14. What kind of help were you expecting from this conference?

15. Do you think the instructor had the same goal?
    e. If not, what do you think was their goal?

[Factor: *Meaning*]

16. What are your next steps after this conference?

17. Do you consider this conference successful? Why or why not?

18. What suggestions, if any, would you give your instructor about writing conferences?

19. Would you have done anything different in this conference?

Conference Observation
Field Notes

Student (pseudonym):
Date:
Time:

Topics Discussed	Evidence of non-verbal communication
Evidence of participant roles	Evidence of classroom context
Additional Notes	

Appendix E: Case Study Databases

Table 14

Case Study Database of Observations, Conference Recordings, and Interviews

Date	Length (mins)	Participant	Data Type	Description
1/26/16	75	All	Class Observation	CANCELLED due to snow
2/2/16	75	All	Class Observation	Introduction to Course, Theme Presentations/Voting
2/9/16	75	All	Class Observation	Conference sign up, introduction to 3 topic memo, workshop of summary, I present my study
2/16/16	75	All	Class Observation	CANCELLED due to snow
2/23/16	75	All	Class Observation	Housecleaning, rhetorical appeals lecture, stasis grid exercise, peer editing of annotation
3/1/16	75	All	Class Observation	Housecleaning, Argument of Inquiry assignment, genre activity
3/8/16	75	All	Class Observation	Housecleaning, Indians Are ___ activity, Harknese discussion
3/22/16	75	All	Class Observation	Housecleaning, Rhetorical Analysis assignment, 2 analysis activities
3/29/16	75	All	Class Observation	Housecleaning, logical fallacies activity, Fanny Lou Farmer thesis activity
4/5/16	75	All	Class Observation	Housecleaning, Rogerian paper, modeling activity reading example, audience group work activity
4/19/16	75	All	Class Observation	Housecleaning, causal chains and proposal argument presentations in groups

Date	Length (mins)	Participant	Data Type	Description
4/26/16	75	All	Class Observation	Housecleaning, read through model, peer review of position paper
5/3/16	75	All	Class Observation	Housecleaning, conference 3 sign up, group work evaluating websites
2/18/16	15:54	Naomi	Conference 1	Research Questions, sources, annotations, stasis grid
2/18/16	21:14	Sydney	Conference 1	Research Questions, sources, annotations, stasis grid
2/18/16	19:48	Tayo	Conference 1	Research Questions, sources, annotations, stasis grid
2/18/16	16:21	Nicole	Conference 1	Research Questions, sources, annotations, stasis grid
2/19/16	15:51	Ellie	Conference 1	Research Questions, sources, annotations, stasis grid
2/19/16	18:20	John	Conference 1	Research Questions, sources, annotations, stasis grid
3/24/16	24:54	Ellie	Conference 2	Ideas for rhetorical analysis paper "Red Velvet"
3/24/16	32:07	John	Conference 2	Ideas for rhetorical analysis paper "Red Velvet," new thesis statement
3/24/16	23:34	Nicole	Conference 2	Ideas for rhetorical analysis paper "Red Velvet," new thesis statement
3/24/16	23:02	Sydney	Conference 2	Ideas for rhetorical analysis paper "Red Velvet"
3/24/16	26	Tayo	Conference 2	Draft of rhetorical analysis paper on "The Cognitive Benefits of Video Games," thesis statement and topic sentences
3/31/16	26:55	Naomi	Conference 2	Draft of rhetorical analysis paper on "Cattails," thesis statement and topic sentences

Date	Length (mins)	Participant	Data Type	Description
5/5/16	27:17	Nicole	Conference 3	Ideas for Informative blog about special needs education issues for parents
1/28/16	45	Instructor	Interview 1	Discussed her background, purpose, structure, frequency, and relationship to class of conferences
2/19/16	39	Naomi	Interview 1	Background Info, Conference 1
2/19/16	40	Tayo	Interview 1	Background Info, Conference 1
2/22/16	50	John	Interview 1	Background Info, Conference 1
2/22/16	51	Sydney	Interview 1	Background Info, Conference 1
2/23/16	42	Nicole	Interview 1	Background Info, Conference 1
2/23/16	50	Ellie	Interview 1	Background Info, Conference 1
2/25/16	46	Instructor	Interview 2	Conference 1
3/25/16	35	Sydney	Interview 2	Conference 2
3/28/16	38	John	Interview 2	Conference 2
3/28/16	47	Ellie	Interview 2	Conference 2
3/29/16	37	Nicole	Interview 2	Conference 2
3/30/16	33	Tayo	Interview 2	Conference 2

Date	Length (mins)	Participant	Data Type	Description
3/31/16	41	Naomi	Interview 2	Conference 2
4/14/16	50	Instructor	Interview 3	Conference 2
5/5/16	27	Nicole	Interview 3	Conference 3
5/19/16	25	Instructor	Interview 4	Conference 3, member check
5/4/16	n/a	Naomi	Email	Explanation for not choosing to sign up for Conference #3
5/10/16	n/a	Ellie	Email	Explanation for not choosing to sign up for Conference #3
5/24/16	n/a	Sydney	Email	Explanation for not choosing to sign up for Conference #3
5/4/16	n/a	John	Email	Explanation for not choosing to sign up for Conference #3
5/4/16	n/a	Tayo	Email	Explanation for not choosing to sign up for Conference #3
5/4/16	n/a	Naomi	Email	Reflective Writing Posts
5/10/16	n/a	Ellie	Email	Reflective Writing Posts
5/24/16	n/a	Sydney	Email	Reflective Writing Posts
5/4/16	n/a	John	Email	Reflective Writing Posts
5/4/16	n/a	Tayo	Email	Reflective Writing Posts
5/5/16	n/a	Nicole	Email	Reflective Writing Posts
4/19/17	n/a	Naomi	Email	Member check of interview transcripts and researcher's write up
4/19/17	n/a	Ellie	Email	Member check of interview transcripts and researcher's write up

Date	Length (mins)	Participant	Data Type	Description
4/19/17	n/a	Sydney	Email	Member check of interview transcripts and researcher's write up
4/19/17	n/a	John	Email	Member check of interview transcripts and researcher's write up
4/19/17	n/a	Tayo	Email	Member check of interview transcripts and researcher's write up
4/19/17	n/a	Nicole	Email	Member check of interview transcripts and researcher's write up

Table 15

Case Study Database of Documents

Artifact	Type	Type	What Does It Say	How It Is Helpful
Syllabus	Policies/Instructions	Paper	Gives overview of course schedule, not policies etc.	Identifies weeks of conferences and reflection prompts
Academic Summary	Assignment	Paper	Overview of first assignment, including due dates	
Academic Summary Workshop	Peer Workshop Guide	Paper	Peer review questions for academic summary along with ample instructor questions and insight into the assignment	
Syllabus Details	Policies/Instructions	Electronic	Policies for course posted on ELMS pages	
ELMS Conference Instructions	Policies/Instructions	Electronic	Weekly instructions, includes the writing conference	Provides instructions on how to prepare for writing conferences. Triangulates with the idea of prepared/unprepared student
Kids, put down those sodas Stasis Exercise	Popular Source Article	Paper	Op-Ed used for analysis of stases in small groups	

Artifact	Type	Type	What Does It Say	How It Is Helpful
Annotated Bibliography Overview	Peer Workshop Guide	Paper	Checklist for annotated bibliography	
Argument of Inquiry	Assignment	Paper	Overview of first assignment with notes on instructor's instructions	
"No Big Deal" Student Paper	Model	Paper	Models of Argument of Inquiry papers	
Ellie RQ and Annotated Bibliography	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Research question and annotated sources	Includes instructor comments
Tayo RQ and Annotated Bibliography	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Research questions and annotated sources	Includes instructor comments and student fixes to stases
John Article Claims	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Research questions and paragraph about article claims	Includes instructor comments
John Bibliography	Conference Materials	Electro nic	List of sources	Includes instructor comments
Nicole Bibliography	Conference Materials	Electro nic	List of sources	
Nicole Stasis Grid	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Completed stasis grid	
Rhetorical Analysis Assignment	Assignment	Paper	Overview of assignment with notes on instructor's instructions	The assignment discussed in Conference 2

Artifact	Type	Type	What Does It Say	How It Is Helpful
Conference Sign Up	Sign Up Sheet	Electro nic		
John Rhetorical Analysis Outline	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Sentence outline of rhetorical analysis paper	Student revised thesis statement included on back.
John Instructor Notes/Outline	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Notes from conference	Instructor's initial outline
Ellie Rhetorical Analysis Outline	Conference Materials	Paper	Sentence outline of rhetorical analysis paper	
Ellie Instructor Notes/Outline	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Notes from conference	Instructor's initial outline
Nicole Student Annotations	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Student's notes for the conference in HOS book	
Nicole Thesis	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Student's thesis for conference	
Nicole Instructor Notes	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Notes from conference	Instructor's initial outline
Tayo Rhetorical Analysis Draft	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Student's full draft of rhetorical analysis paper	Includes instructor's comments and feedback
Sydney Rhetorical Analysis Outline	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Student's annotations, notes, and themes	
Sydney Instructor	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Notes from conference	Instructor's initial outline

Artifact	Type	Type	What Does It Say	How It Is Helpful
Notes/Outline				
Naomi Rhetorical Analysis Draft	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Student's full draft of rhetorical analysis paper	
Naomi Instructor Notes/Outline	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Notes from conference	Instructor's notes
Naomi Annotated Bibliography	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Research questions, main claims, and bibliography	Includes instructor's notes
Instructor Check Lists	Policies/Inst ructions	Electro nic	Semester long checklist for each week	Includes instructions for each week of the blended course and preparation for conferences
Blog Prompts	Assignment	Electro nic	Semester long reflective writing assignment prompts	Includes instructions on how to reflect on the conference
Evaluating Proposal Arguments	Handout	Paper	Checklist for argument of position paper	
Peer Workshop for Position Paper	Peer Workshop Guide	Paper	Peer review sheet for position paper, includes style and argument	
A Ban on In-Class Student Laptop Usage	Model	Paper	Model introduction of position paper	
Homeschoolin g: A Unique way to Educate	Model	Paper	Model introduction of position paper	

Artifact	Type	Type	What Does It Say	How It Is Helpful
Digital Remediation and Reflection Memo Assignment	Assignment	Paper	Assignment with notes on instructor's feedback	The assignment discussed in Conference 3
Reflective Memo Assignment	Assignment	Paper	Assignment that accompanies digital remediation project	
Nicole Blog Posts	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Digital remediation blog	
Nicole Notes	Conference Materials	Electro nic	Notes from conference	Student's own notes taken during the conference
English Department's Instructions on Blended	Department Background	Electro nic	Instructions for students on describing a blended course	Outlines key structures of a blended course and skills of successful students
101 Syllabus MWF Fall 2015	Department Background	Electro nic	Standard departmental syllabus	Lists conference schedule for department, their recommendations
Annotated Syllabus Fall 2015	Department Background	Electro nic	Syllabus with sample activities and instructions for new instructors	Describes different approaches to conferences outlined by the department
Discussion Board Prompts	Department Background	Electro nic	Standard discussion board prompts	Department assignments
Course Assignments	Department Background	Electro nic	Standard assignment sheets	Department assignments

Artifact	Type	Type	What Does It Say	How It Is Helpful
Participation Instructions	Policies/Instructions	Electronic	Participation instructions with examples	

Appendix E: Transcription Keys

Writing Conferences Transcription

- Verbatim transcription including all ums
- Questioning Intonation ?
- Participant actions *[actions]*
- Overlapping speech [ ]
- Short Pause of 3 secs or less …
- Long Pause more than 3 secs [#secs]
- Tape unclear [inaudible]

Interview Transcription

- Verbatim transcription
- Questioning Intonation ?
- Pause …
- Tape unclear [inaudible]
- Oral Commentary Clips: labeled, delineated with lines, Indented
- Commentary Talk during Clips [PARTICIPANT INTERJECTS]

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