Building Bridges in First-Year Composition: Investigating the Support of Threshold Concepts in Writing-Related Transfer Across the Curriculum

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BUILDING BRIDGES IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION: INVESTIGATING THE SUPPORT OF THRESHOLD CONCEPTS IN WRITING-RELATED TRANSFER ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

BUILDING BRIDGES IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION: INVESTIGATING THE SUPPORT OF THRESHOLD CONCEPTS IN WRITING-RELATED TRANSFER ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Elise Antoinette Green
Old Dominion University, 2021
Director: Dr. Michelle Fowler-Amato

Drawing on a multiple-case, embedded design (Yin, 2018), I highlight the in-depth differences and similarities that exist across students’ experiences in first-year composition (FYC), looking specifically at whether learners used genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts to transfer writing-related knowledge and skills across the curriculum. I designed and conducted this research by drawing on theories of learning transfer (Perkins & Salomon, 1988; 1989; 1992; Salomon & Perkins, 1989), writing-related transfer (Moore, 2017; Nowacek, 2011; Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014; Yancey et al., 2019), and threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2006). Across this study, I collected data as I facilitated focus groups and interviews. In addition, I drew on course artifacts that student participants shared in order to better understand their perception of threshold concepts introduced in FYC, as well as to determine if this understanding supported them in negotiating writing invitations across the curriculum. Results showed that students seemed to draw on language, structure, and reference, concepts which were highlighted in their course text, more so than the threshold concepts, genre and rhetorical situation. Most participants possessed an awareness of disciplinary language conventions; however, when presented with the opportunity to apply specific language practices in disciplinary contexts, students returned to their frame of audience awareness—instructor as audience—rather than drawing on their disciplinary knowledge. Further, while students
possessed at least some awareness of how reference varies across the disciplines, they often tied this awareness to a specific citation style that defined rules for what they were doing. Though participants did not consistently draw on genre and rhetorical situations as threshold concepts, one participant demonstrated the potential of this initiative.

This study contributes to the conversation scholars in Writing Studies are having on writing-related transfer, teaching for transfer, and writing across the curriculum. Additionally, this dissertation highlights the need for recognizing and building on prior knowledge of both students and instructors, greater contextualization of disciplinary writing conventions in instruction, and a shared vocabulary and approach to teaching writing that builds bridges across the curriculum.
For T.M.A., and For A.H.G.—

Two women who may never know how their stories have impacted the trajectory of my life.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation and the degree it satisfies are not the product of my efforts alone. Through the entirety of my educational journey, God’s grace and the prayerful support of family and friends have held me up. I do not have the space here to name everyone, but with what simple language I have, I will attempt to say “thank you” to those who have been integral in the production of this project.

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And to my sweet family—

Moses, As a puppy, you slept in my lap while I wrote my ENGL 334 paper. Today, you are gray and sleep in your bed where you won’t be bothered, but I can still hear the steady rhythm of your breathing—the background music that helps me focus while I work. In this way, we have pulled many all-nighters together. Thank you for your warm and faithful friendship.

Westmoreland, After years of praying for a boy, God gifted me with you. Now, at two-years-old, as I watch you push your trucks across the kitchen floor, you remind me to continue to be relentless in everything I do. Thank you for your example. Your focus and intensity make you a force to be reckoned with—a great glimpse of all that you will become.

Antoinette Grace, A month after I was accepted into my PhD program, I learned I was pregnant with you. Now you are the brightest four-year-old I know. You have patience beyond your years, and I thank you for enduring through this program with me from before you can remember. The sun rises and sets in your eyes. You are my favorite girl in the whole, wide world.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

My first spring semester as a full-time faculty member had just ended, and less than 48 hours after submitting final grades, I found myself, an English lecturer, at a professional development workshop with several of my tenured colleagues. As we discussed the syllabi for our first-year composition classes, one attendee explained his list of major assignments: “A restaurant review, a cover letter, oh, and a definition paper.” In response, one of our peers at the table grinned sheepishly and said, “Is there any chance you will ever have your students do real writing in your class?”

That day, I was amused by my colleagues’ friendly banter over whose course design was better, but I also began to question the purpose of the writing I invited students in my classes to create. What is “real” writing? Who gets to define this? And what types of writing assignments might best prepare students for the “real” writing they will do beyond my course? This moment also prompted me to reflect on my own educational experience, and consider where along the way I began to build conceptual bridges, or make connections, that enabled me to negotiate situations effectively and to communicate well. My questioning brought me to a body of writing studies literature that taught me a name for these connections: “transfer.” As a writing instructor, I saw this as a valuable theory that could inform my teaching practices to support students in their movement from one class to another. But as I reflected on the significance of this definition beyond one’s college experience, I could also see how studying learning transfer might help us better understand the links between the events that inevitably shape the story arc of an individual’s life. To explore transfer theory is to delve deeply into the interconnectedness of an individual’s experiences, and to realize how life choices may impact the potential and the
trajectory of one’s future—an understanding that should influence the meaningfulness of this area of study among scholars. We should not just focus on the what, but we must also focus on the who we are studying. Our students are people, and the trajectory of their lives is strongly influenced by their educational journey with every year, every class, and every assignment.

This dissertation is a multiple-case study that follows five students from the end of their 2019 fall semester, first-year composition course to the end of their 2020 spring semester at Longwood University. It explores to what extent, if at all, students are transferring their writing-related knowledge and skills across the curriculum, focusing specifically on the impact of instruction that utilizes specific threshold concepts. In the introduction that follows, I will share the relevant background information and introduce the institutional context in which this study was conducted. I will also highlight the research questions that inform the design of this study as well as my own positionality as a full-time faculty member at the institution where the study was conducted.

**Institutional Background and Researcher Interest**

Longwood University is located in Farmville, Virginia. Founded in 1839 as the Farmville Female Seminary Association, Longwood has a rich history in educating teachers. Longwood turned co-ed in 1976, and today, it is a small, liberal arts institution of about 5,000 undergraduate and 1,000 graduate students. Yet its roots as an all-female school are still strong, as nearly 70% of the student body is made up of women. At Longwood, there is a strong institutional mission of cultivating citizen leaders—Longwood graduates who “embody the values required to advance communities: a commitment to learning, critical thinking, selflessness and personal integrity” (“What is Citizen Leadership?”).
The curriculum, however, did not always support this institutional mission. The first move toward emphasizing a commitment to cultivating citizen leaders at Longwood came in 2004 with a revision to the then General Education Curriculum. More recently, in 2014, a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) was implemented. That same year, I began working at Longwood as a full-time lecturer, teaching a variety of composition and rhetoric courses. I watched as the QEP—required for reaccreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), Longwood’s regional accreditor—organized, mobilized, and funded the joint goals of the faculty and administration to strengthen research initiatives on our campus. They kept an eye toward critical thinking, information literacy, and communication skills, and after completing an institutional assessment process and surveying faculty across the university, the QEP Committee identified “student research” as an emerging issue across the institution; thus, the focus of the QEP emerged, and the plan was titled, “R.E.A.L. Inquiry: Research Experience for Aspiring Leaders.” Following approval of the QEP by SACSCOC, funding was provided for plan implementation. This funding became key in the enhancement of numerous courses across the curriculum, including what was then our first-year composition component,\(^1\) ENGL 150: Writing and Research.

Assessment data from ENGL 150 revealed that the outcomes for the course were not written to be measurable, necessitating a revision of the language—a timely finding, for as the

\(^1\) In keeping with Longwood University, the educational site for this study, I use the language “first-year composition” to describe the programmatic context in which this research took place. The design of this course was influenced by the theory and practices set forth in the Council of Writing Program Administrators’ Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (2014). I also recognize first-year writing and freshman composition as alternate names suitable for characterizing this core curriculum course, as a “course [that] prepares students for the writing and research they will do throughout their university experience” (Longwood University Undergraduate Course Catalog, 2019).
language was revised, the goals of the course also shifted to a focus on research across the curriculum with the vision that first-year composition (FYC) at Longwood could better support the student research initiative of the QEP. Beyond this, because ENGL 150 was viewed as a service course to the university, the revised outcomes intended to help students examine writing across the disciplines. Simultaneously, faculty were meeting about revising the General Education Curriculum, which would become the Civitae Core Curriculum. During these talks, the Composition Committee, who revised ENGL 150 first-year composition course, proposed the course ENGL 165: Writing & Rhetoric to take its place.

I was one of the faculty members who, in the fall of 2017, participated on the committee that piloted ENGL 165. In doing so, I was part of a team that drafted the course by-laws. In the time I have been at Longwood, I have observed my students struggle with identifying how what they learned in one context can be repurposed in another. Students too often take courses across the curriculum, seeing every class they enter as an isolated challenge that prompts them to learn new skills and develop new knowledge for successful completion of the course. As an FYC instructor, I spend much time helping students think about places across the curriculum where their writing-related skills and knowledge can support them in negotiating unfamiliar writing tasks. I therefore saw my position on the pilot committee as an opportunity to play a role in addressing the challenges of writing-related transfer at Longwood University. The ENGL 165 by-laws reflect this effort and introduce the focus of my dissertation.

**Focus of the Study**

The ENGL 165 course is governed by a set of 11 by-laws that promote consistency in course design among its instructional faculty. This consistency is necessitated by the fact that ENGL 165 is designated as a “Foundations” course in our core curriculum meant to support
students in their development of foundational knowledge and skills in the disciplines (Civitae Core, 2018). During our research for the ENGL 165 pilot, we familiarized ourselves with the literature on writing-related transfer. In doing so, we found Adler-Kassner and Wardle (2015) particularly helpful in framing our pedagogical goals for our first-year composition course. Drawing on this work, we identified genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts for ENGL 165, as they could be used not only to support individual instructor pedagogy, but they could also be explicitly taught to students as frameworks for their own understanding of writing tasks in other disciplinary contexts, not just first-year composition. We also agreed that the concept of learning transfer should be explicitly taught in order to give students a vocabulary to explain their purpose in using genre and rhetorical situation to negotiate writing situations in contexts beyond ENGL 165.

The language for by-law #2 was then developed. For this study, I will draw on the second by-law for ENGL 165, which states that faculty will “Teach the concepts of genre, rhetorical situation, and transfer as part of the disciplinary knowledge of writing for the university.” This by-law prompts instructors to explicitly teach “genre,” “rhetorical situation,” and “transfer” to ENGL 165 students to help build their foundational knowledge for writing in the university as well as sync ENGL 165 instructors with the vision of Civitae. Though three concepts are identified—genre, rhetorical situation, and transfer—the intention is that two specific concepts—genre and rhetorical situation—are used to facilitate student transfer of writing-related knowledge and skills.

The ENGL 165 Pilot Committee formally defined these terms for faculty reference. These definitions were shared in a hand-out in a professional learning workshop in May of 2018 with the first cohort of ENGL 165 instructors, who would teach the course for the first time in
the fall of 2018. Since that time, these definitions have been available on Canvas, Longwood’s learning management system (LMS), and any new instructors who are slated to teach ENGL 165 are introduced to these definitions during their orientation to the course. Rhetorical situation, for purposes of ENGL 165, highlights the relationship between the audience, topic, and context, and how this relationship can be negotiated in order to communicate effectively:

Rhetorical situation is a more complex way of representing communication. Rather than representing communication as operating as a one-way sender-receiver channel or even as a two-way channel for a dialogue, the concept of rhetorical situation takes into consideration the communicator as having a set of options/tools/contexts with which they approach a message crafted to reach an audience within a context(s).

Rhetorical situation as a concept to teach in FYC is about writer, audience, message, and context. Teaching this concept helps students understand that the more they know about audience, the topic, and the context, the better received the message will be. It also allows students to see that the elements that constitute RS change and that the more successful communicator must adapt and keep these elements in balance. Furthermore, the rhetorical situation is a heuristic rather than a rule or algorithm for good writing. (Lettner-Rust, 2018)

Genre, for purposes of ENGL 165, focuses on how a particular form of writing guides a writer through its style and conventions, and student writers must be aware of different genres that exist in different disciplines:

Put broadly, genre refers to a category of writing that has a particular form, style, or content guiding the writer. In other words, it is a set of expectations and practices from a community or audience that influences writers to engage in a particular form of writing.
For example, a cover letter would be a genre of letter that one attaches to a résumé, and which contains particular uses of language and expected content. As we discuss academic disciplines in FYC, we must make students aware that genres exist and have conventions, remind them that each field has multiple genres, and teach them to decipher those expectations or to ask the right questions about those genres. (Magill, 2018)

These definitions offer an explanation of what each term means for ENGL 165 and its instructors at Longwood, but also comment on how teaching these terms to students as a means to negotiate writing situations in ENGL 165 can be beneficial to them in other writing contexts. The premise for these definitions holds that if students grasp rhetorical situation and genre as useful concepts for understanding a writing situation, then they will better be able to negotiate that writing situation. Meyer and Land (2006) have theorized that such concepts are “akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something” (p. 3). For first-year composition students at Longwood, these concepts are intended to be transformational for student learning in ENGL 165 and throughout Civitae, but to this point, we did not know to what extent, if at all, students were actually using them. Thus, my research questions are as follows:

- How do students understand “threshold concepts” after completing ENGL 165?
- How do students understand “genre” after completing ENGL 165?
- How do students understand “rhetorical situation” after completing ENGL 165?
- Are students using genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts to transfer writing related knowledge and skills from ENGL 165 to other courses across the curriculum in the following semester? If so, what does this look like in practice? If not, how are students negotiating these writing situations?
Significance of the Study

This dissertation is timely for both Longwood University and the discipline of Writing Studies. Since participating in the ENGL 165 pilot, I have been tasked with serving as the Assistant Writing Coordinator, overseeing ENGL 165. The findings and analysis in this project will inform future faculty development and assessment work. In addition, information gathered in this study will also be useful to the Civitae Core Curriculum Committee (CCCC), as we are both committed to better understanding how our revised FYC component and its emphasis on writing-related transfer is supporting students as they move from writing situations in their FYC course to other writing situations across the curriculum.

Since Meyer and Land’s (2006) introduction of threshold concepts, scholars have examined the use of threshold concepts in practice across the disciplines. In Writing Studies scholarship, the body of empirical work regarding threshold concepts is likewise emerging. Adler-Kassner and Wardle’s (2015) collection begins to theorize threshold concepts for the field, two of which are identified as “writing as a social and rhetorical activity,” and “writing speaks to situations through recognizable forms.” Responding to this work, however, their (2019) collection raises “questions about the ideas of certainty and consensus associated with naming

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2 I situate this research in the discipline of Writing Studies, which, according to Bazerman (2002), is defined as “the study of writing—its production, its circulation, its uses, its role in the development of individuals, societies and cultures” (Bazerman, 2002, p. 32). Specifically, this dissertation is classified within the National Research Council (NRC) and the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) general classification codes of Rhetoric and Composition/Writing Studies, where the field of rhetoric and composition is defined as “A program that focuses on the humanistic and scientific study of rhetoric, composition, literacy, and language/linguistic theories and their practical and pedagogical applications” (Phelps & Ackerman, 2010, p. 209).

3 I acknowledge that this acronym is the same acronym used for the Conference on College Communication and Composition, but for purposes of this dissertation, when CCCC is used, it will reference the Civitae Core Curriculum Committee, as this is the same acronym used to identify this cohort at Longwood University.
threshold concepts of a discipline” (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2019, p. 6). For example, Sullivan (2019) proposes deep reading as a threshold concept, holding that the field of rhetoric and composition is not ready to acknowledge reading as a necessary core activity in the composition classroom. And yet, Vieira et al. (2019) argue that “literacy is a sociohistoric phenomenon” that can both oppress and liberate learners (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2019, p. 36), extending and nuancing the threshold concept discussed by Roozen (2015), “writing is linked to identity” (cited in Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015, p. 50). Some learners find freedom in literacy development and are thus confident in their writing skills and knowledge, resulting in an identity that exudes confidence in their college preparedness; others do not have the same experience. Additionally, in Adler-Kassner and Wardle’s (2019) work, other scholars add to the conversation by highlighting the use of threshold concepts in faculty development and curriculum design. Blaauw-Hara et al. (2019) examine the use of threshold concepts in a community college writing program. Estrem, Shepherd, and Shadle (2019) describe their implementation of threshold concepts in the revision of a first-year writing curriculum. Mapes and Miller-Cochran (2019) report and reflect on their experience employing threshold concepts in the training of Graduate Teaching Assistants. These discussions point to the diverse paths for exploration and scholarship in writing studies, and invite scholars to continue the existing conversation. This dissertation creates a new space for exploration, focusing on student uptake.

**Overview of the Dissertation**

In this chapter, I shared how a personal and professional experience inspired my interest in the overarching topic for this study. I then shared the institutional background for my specific research context, Longwood University, as well as described my specific role within the research site. This context informs the focus of this study: if and how ENGL 165 students use genre and
rhetorical situation as threshold concepts to transfer their writing-related knowledge and skills. I then shared the ENGL 165 program definitions for genre and rhetorical situation and presented the research questions for this study. To conclude, I noted the significance and timeliness of this study for Longwood University as well as how it expands on recent Writing Studies scholarship.

In chapter two, I introduce the theoretical framework for this project, which includes a discussion of learning transfer, writing-related transfer, and threshold concepts. I then define genre and rhetorical situation to show how they have been positioned as threshold concepts in Writing Studies pedagogy. This is followed by an in-depth review of the literature on writing-related transfer in FYC and on writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC).

Chapter three details the methodology for this research project. Drawing on Merriam (1998) and Yin (2018), I provide a rationale for multiple-case, embedded design for this study. Further, I show the embedded nature of this study through a detailed description of the Longwood University Civitae Core Curriculum, the first-year composition curriculum, and the use of threshold concepts within ENGL 165. In addition, chapter three discusses the phases of research and sources of data for this study, and my approach to data analysis.

Chapter four identifies the principal findings from the data collected across five cases in this study. I organize results based on three themes, and within each theme, I organize findings by each participant, exploring whether and how the threshold concepts of genre and rhetorical situation are supporting writing-related transfer. This contextualizes the cross-case analysis presented in chapter five, in which two focal cases are highlighted, Tamara and Zeke. These exemplar cases bring to the forefront a discussion of the vast difference in students’ prior knowledge that FYC faculty must negotiate to effectively support each learner. In exploring
these two cases, I also make connections and disconnections to the larger data set presented in chapter four.

Chapter six presents reflections from the ENGL 165 faculty community on these findings. I use these reflections and the findings from this study to discuss specific implications for Longwood University with relation to how this project might support future instruction, research, and professional learning. I then make recommendations for the greater writing program across the curriculum. Finally, I present how the findings and analysis from this study further existing conversations regarding threshold concepts and writing-related transfer, and offer suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the previous chapter, I introduced the institutional context in which this study took place and my research questions. I also highlighted the ENGL 165 definitions for rhetorical situation and genre, which are situated as threshold concepts in Longwood University’s first-year composition by-laws. This second chapter will first explore my theoretical framework for this study, transfer theory and threshold concepts. Beyond this discussion, I will highlight the field’s definitions of rhetorical situation and genre as well as show how these concepts have been positioned as threshold concepts by other scholars. In addition, I will review the literature regarding writing-related transfer, specifically in first-year composition contexts as well as provide a history and overview of writing across the curriculum.

Theoretical Framework

Transfer Theory

Put broadly, transfer is a complex phenomenon that refers to a learner’s ability to transform prior skills and knowledge. As scholars of many disciplinary backgrounds have continued their inquiry into this concept, they have offered varied interpretations of transfer to achieve a greater understanding of the theoretical connections that can be made to understand it. Below is not an exhaustive list of definitions of transfer; however, these interpretations are frequently drawn on by Writing Studies scholars in their inquiry into writing-related transfer.

Perkins and Salomon (1988; 1989; 1992; Salomon & Perkins, 1989) define transfer as something learned in one context that can be helpful in negotiating another context. To understand more deeply how transfer works, Perkins and Salomon developed theories for near and far transfer as well as low road and high road transfer. They prescribe that “near transfer,” is the carrying of a skill from one context to another, while “far transfer,” is the carrying of
knowledge across contexts. Transfer is occurring in both instances, but these definitions distinguish between skill and knowledge, suggesting that the transfer of knowledge is a higher-level accomplishment. Perkins and Salomon (1988) also introduce “low road transfer” and “high road transfer” as a model for examining “the role of transfer in the teaching of thinking” (p. 25). The former reflects the repeated practice of a skill to the extent that the skill is automatically triggered in a variety of contexts regardless of the learner’s familiarity with them, while the latter depends on the “deliberate mindful abstraction” (p. 25) of skill or knowledge. There are two types of high road transfer: “forward reaching” and “backward reaching.” Forward reaching transfer is when the learner abstracts knowledge in preparation for using it in future situations. Backward reaching transfer describes the learner’s act of recalling experience and “abstract[ing] key characteristics” (p. 26) from it to apply in the current situation. Perkins and Salomon furthered their theory in 1992 when they argued that researchers should consider conditions and contexts when evaluating the potential for the transfer of knowledge. Perkins and Salomon (1988) also promote “hugging” and “bridging” as strategies for teaching for transfer. Hugging involves teaching for low road transfer by shaping a learning situation to resemble a future context a learner might encounter. Bridging aims to achieve high road transfer, and means encouraging learners to attempt to make their own connections beyond the existing context.

Rather than distinguishing between near and far transfer and low road and high road transfer as Perkins and Salomon do, Beach (1999) distinguishes between intentional and unintentional transfer. In doing so, he describes a movement, explaining that a person “carries” their skills and knowledge from one situation to another. Beach holds that learners intentionally generalize knowledge and skills for purposes of applying them to new situations. Unintentional transfer occurs without purposeful generalization. In this case, the learner is not prompted nor
does the learner see the need to generalize his or her skills and knowledge. Generalization, therefore, is the “continuity and transformation of knowledge, skill, and identity across various forms of social organization” (p. 112), and Beach terms the developmental change that occurs as a result of an individual moving across contexts from one social organization to another as a “consequential transition.” He explains, “Transitions are consequential when they are consciously reflected on, often struggled with, and the eventual outcome changes one’s sense of self and social positioning” (p. 114). Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström (2003) build on Beach, terming what we understand as “boundary-crossing.” Here, consequential transitions are identified as functioning within activity systems (Russell, 1995), and learners develop “boundary tools” at the intersections of these systems in order to move across them.

In seeking to understand this movement across contexts more deeply, scholars investigating transfer have drawn on Wenger (2002), who describes the learning spaces between which movement occurs as “communities of practice.” In his work, Wenger proposes a social theory of learning that hinges on participation, where learners are “active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities” (p. 4). For Wenger, there are four components that should be used to characterize participation as a process of learning—meaning, practice, community, and identity—and each of these components are interchangeable with another. In other words, they do not have to present in a certain order, and any one component can be central to learning. “Communities of practice,” then, is a point of entry into Wenger’s framework and is representative of these four components. A learner must participate in the community in order to learn how to learn. Through this, the learner cultivates strategies that support themselves while moving in the existing learning space, but also across communities or contexts.
Writing Transfer

Writing transfer builds on the theory of learning transfer, focusing on a learner’s ability to repurpose writing-related knowledge and skills from one context to another. Some scholars’ research has related to writing transfer theory without explicitly using this language (Sommers & Saltz, 2004; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011), demonstrating that students who view themselves as novices are often better positioned and enabled to synthesize their new knowledge with their prior learning for use in future writing situations. McCarthy (1987) and Beaufort (2007) likewise explored themes of writing transfer without using the specific language, “transfer,” by following the writing experiences of students, Dave and Tim, respectively, across their college curriculums. In exploring the student experience to understand transfer, other research has led scholars to focus on second-language (L2) writers (DePalma & Ringer, 2011), multimodality (DePalma, 2015), workplace writing (Yancey, et al., 2019), and lifespan writing (Bazerman, et al., 2018; Bowen & Rumsey, 2018; Dipple & Phillips, 2020).

Each of these areas of study, whether they have been referred to as transfer research or not, highlight the point that in order for writing transfer to occur, prior knowledge must be transformed. Nowacek’s (2011) work, which positions students as “agents of integration,” demonstrates that without this shift, learning transfer may be hindered. In the case of Olivia and Maggie, the constraints of real time classroom instruction made this even more difficult: Olivia’s lack of opportunity to unpack the rhetorical purposes of an assignment left Maggie continuing to grasp onto formal conventions learned in high school, such as five-paragraph themes comprised of three-to-five sentence paragraphs. Similarly, Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak (2014) also see prior knowledge is an important factor in how writers do or do not develop. Through a study of the student experience within their teaching for transfer (TFT) curriculum, they found that
students did successfully repurpose writing-related knowledge, and pointed to the role of reflective writing practice as a catalyst for this outcome.

Moore (2017) expands on this discussion of teaching for transfer by explaining that university programs such as first-year composition (FYC) and writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) programs that offer “rhetorically based concepts, such as genre, purpose, audience, and other elements of rhetorical situations, enable students to analyze expectations for writing and learning within and across specific contexts” (p. 8). Yancey et al.’s (2019) work furthers this position. Their study followed students from four institutions where the TFT curriculum was utilized, and emphasized the need for transfer as a course goal alongside the use of key terms that are used in the course to frame writing tasks and practices. This vocabulary enabled students to name the similarities and differences in new writing situations beyond FYC, across the curriculum, and in outside-school contexts. Wardle and Downs (2020) also aim to promote writing transfer with their curriculum, Writing about Writing, now in its fourth edition. They argue that instructors should teach the content knowledge of Writing Studies in first-year composition—which can be framed through Meyer and Land’s (2006) theory of threshold concepts—including “Writing is Impacted by Identities and Prior Experiences” and “‘Good’ Writing is Contextual.”

Theory of Threshold Concepts

Meyer and Land (2006) consider the definitions of transfer and the intellectual movement of learners from context to context, and submit the idea of threshold concepts, holding that though learners may be challenged to understand conversations and grasp ideas in a new field, grasping some central concepts are key to a deeper conceptualization of the subject area. This idea is different from general or core concepts. Meyer and Land (2006) describe threshold
concepts as disciplinary lenses that learners can embrace and thereby use to gain access to, or develop a deeper understanding of, disciplinary knowledge. These lenses are ‘conceptual gateways’ that give learners the ability to move beyond the fundamental knowledge of a discipline, and enter a deeper disciplinary understanding.

To further establish the significance of these gateways, Meyer and Land describe threshold concepts as “bounded,” “troublesome,” “transformative,” “irreversible,” and “integrative.” Threshold concepts are, first, bounded because they are community-specific. Adler-Kassner and Wardle (2019) explain, “they are not threshold concepts in all communities of practice but are associated with different communities of practice” (p. 4). They also note that in the field of Writing Studies, the language of “communities of practice” is preferred over the use of “disciplines” to describe different learning spaces, as threshold concepts can be put into practice in sites other than academic disciplines. To describe learning spaces as “communities” acknowledges the many fields and sub-fields that exist within the disciplines.

Second, threshold concepts have the potential to be troublesome, a characterization that Meyer and Land (2006) extend from Perkins’ (1999) notion of troublesome knowledge, knowledge that is counter-intuitive or conceptually difficult to grasp. A learner who is introduced to a threshold concept may struggle to synthesize this learning with prior knowledge, leaving the notion of threshold concepts as “merely an interesting issue of cognitive organisation [sic] and perspective” (Meyer & Land, 2006, p. 9). The learner may then enter a state of liminality, a dissonance that exists between the time the learner is exposed to the threshold concept and the time they acquire it. Here, the learner “oscillates” between old and new understandings (Heading & Loughlin, 2017).
Threshold concepts are also transformative. Once a learner grasps a threshold concept, their perception of a subject is changed, and “a transfiguration of identity and adoption of an extended or elaborated discourse” occurs (Meyer & Land, 2006, p. 21). Boyd (2017) sees this shift in student identity as integral in the development of writing strategies and essential to the agency they assume in their writing behavior. The learning that occurs in these instances, then, is irreversible, a fourth characteristic. Once a learner understands a subject through the lens of a threshold concept, it is very difficult to turn back to the original way of thinking or understanding. This supports the fifth characteristic of threshold concepts—they are integrative. Once a learner begins to see with a threshold concept, the learner may also begin to view other subjects through this same conceptual gateway.

Within the field of Writing Studies, some work has been done to identify what threshold concepts, often identified as categories, exist (Adler-Kassner, Majewski, & Koshnick, 2012; Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015; 2019; Anson & Moore, 2017; Gere, 2019; Gogan, 2013). These core principles are often labeled in the form of a phrase or sentence, such as “Writing Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies” (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015) and “Processes: How are Texts Composed” (Wardle & Downs, 2014; 2017). They have also been represented as a “framework for designing for and understanding transfer of learning across contexts” (Moore & Anson, 2016, p. 6). Threshold concepts have also supported writing faculty in their pedagogical approach, especially those who do not have a “deep disciplinary attachment to the field of writing studies” (Estrem, Shepherd, & Shadle, 2019, p. 195). Like the broader Writing Studies field, Longwood University composition faculty have done work to identify and name threshold concepts, though more simplistically, in one to two word phrases—“genre and “rhetorical situation”—with the idea that teaching with threshold concepts can support students in writing
more effectively within Longwood’s unique institutional context and beyond. Other scholars have also explored the use of threshold concepts in first-year composition courses (Blaauw-Haara, 2014; Downs & Robertson, 2016; Rifenburg, 2016) to determine their usefulness.

**Literature Review**

In the literature review that follows, I will briefly define genre and rhetorical situation to show how they have been positioned as threshold concepts in Writing Studies pedagogy. I will then provide an overview of some of the key studies that have been conducted on writing-related transfer in first-year composition. Following this, I will provide a brief history and overview of writing across the curriculum.

**Genre for Transfer: Toward a Definition of Genre as a Threshold Concept**

Miller’s (1984) oft-cited notion of genre prescribes that it is “organized around situated actions” (p. 155), suggesting that genre is social and negotiable in spite of situational constraints. She underscores the idea that choices in writing impact more than the final product—choices influence the writer and his process, as he experiences an identity shift, moving recursively around a text, revisiting prewriting, extensively drafting, and voraciously revising. The writing process is often unwieldy. Bawarshi (2003) defines genre as “discursive sites that coordinate the acquisition and production of motives by maintaining specific relations between scene, act, agent, agency, and purpose” (p. 17). He continues by extending Miller’s position, noting that genres “define and organize kinds of situations and social actions” (pp. 17-18). So while negotiating genre has the potential to be unwieldy, it is important to recognize the structure genre provides.

Understanding genre in this way is to understand a reconceptualization of the definition of genre, which leads to Bawarshi’s (2003) purpose: “we can and should make these ‘genred’
discursive spaces (Bazerman, 2002, p. 17) visible to students, not only for the sake of fostering in students a critical awareness of what genres help us do and not do, but also for the sake of helping students participate in these spaces more meaningfully and critically” (p. 18). This is particularly important as we discuss the student’s ability to identify that every writing situation is different. Bawarshi additionally draws on Foucault to support his position that genres are “sites of action” (p. 19). This furthers Miller’s (1984) idea that genres have social implications, and every situation possesses a different set of constraints that student writers must be able to identify and negotiate for appropriate management of that situation.

The student’s ability to identify and effectively negotiate two or more situations is indicative of an awareness of genre. A writer, who recognizes similarities between two different genres, according to Devitt (2009), can acquire new genres by using the skills learned in previous writing situations. Likewise, Clark and Hernandez (2011) identify genre awareness as “a means of enabling transfer” (p. 66), positing that genre is a threshold concept. Once students master a threshold concept—in this case, an awareness of genre—they are better equipped to engage in future learning and writing situations. They recognize the different needs of various disciplines beyond FYC and argue that by teaching students how to be aware of these needs via genre awareness, then students will be able to approach writing situations beyond FYC with great insight (p. 65). Ultimately, when students have gained genre awareness, they can then determine how “a given genre fulfills a rhetorical purpose.” In contrast, when students lack genre awareness, they do not understand how the writing should meet the conventions of a particular genre (pp. 66-67). Rounsaville (2012) agrees with this notion of genre awareness as a means to promote transfer, as she draws on Bazerman (1997), noting that writers “carry” their knowledge of genre from one “frame” to the next, “knitting” their knowledge together in each new
encounter (Rounsaville, 2012, “Transfer, Composition Studies, and Rhetorical Genre Studies” section). Each frame, or event, is separate from the next, and the learner experiences these frames individually, but once the learner has experienced them, he or she is able to find commonality between them and patterns begin to emerge. This solidifies Nowacek’s (2011) argument that learners are “agents of integration” that must “experience the exigencies that give form and meaning to genres” (p. 128). In other words, genre awareness is learned over time, cultivated as the learner grows with experience and practice, and may not result in the transfer of writing-related skills and knowledge following a single- or even two-sequence FYC course. The potential for negative transfer exists, as well. To avoid this, Wardle (2009) cautions against teaching “mutt genres,” or genres that do not demand students create meaningful texts that respond to rhetorical situations. By teaching students how to write using mutt genres, we are teaching them “decontextualized ‘skills,’” which inhibit learners from recognizing opportunities to apply their skills in future writing situations; this could also lead to negative transfer (Perkins & Salomon, 1992; Wardle, 2009). Thus, for Wardle (2009), “one reason for lack of transfer is instruction that does not encourage it” (p. 770). As a result, instructor and writing programs might draw on some pedagogical methods that have been studied and shown to be useful, such as abstraction (Gick & Holyoak, 1983), self-reflection (Belmont, Butterfield, & Ferretti, 1982), and mindfulness (Langer, 1989).

**Rhetorical Situation for Transfer: Toward a Definition of Rhetorical Situation as a Threshold Concept**

Like the study of genre, the scholarship on the rhetorical situation is vast. Authors have written extensively to define these terms and understand how they shape our reading and writing practices. The exploration and study of rhetoric can be traced back to ancient Greece. Socrates
and his student Plato held that rhetoric was used to obscure truth and justice, characterizing it as evil (Stone, 1989). The Sophists disagreed, seeing rhetoric as essential to citizenship in Athenian democracy. They saw rhetoric as an art that prompted delight (Kennedy, 1999). Aristotle was influenced by his teacher, Plato, as well as Sophist thought. He defined rhetoric as an art but also as useful, arguing that it should therefore be systematized. In doing so, he identified the essential elements of every communicative act: a speaker, a subject, and an audience (Kennedy, 1994).

Cicero’s *De Oratore* likewise explored the ideas of rhetor, audience, exigence, and context (May & Wisse, 2001).

Many notable thinkers and scholars have reflected on and discussed various rhetorical constituents over time, but the phrase “rhetorical situation,” was first introduced by Bitzer (1968), who defined it as “the context in which speakers or writers create rhetorical discourse” (p. 382). He argues that the situation surrounding any communicative event influences the decisions made by the speaker or writer, and the chosen genre gives shape to the rhetor’s response. Bitzer (1968) identifies exigence, audience, and constraints as the three constituents that are negotiated in any rhetorical situation. Bitzer’s definition of exigence suggests that a situation prompts discourse, but is also resolved by discourse. A situation is “marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (p. 6). Audience is identified as those who might be influenced, and, in effect, able to mediate change. Multiple audiences may exist within any given situation, and unlike speakers, writers cannot be certain of who their audiences are (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). Yet, the writer is not included in Bitzer’s list of rhetorical constituents; rather, it is an aspect of the constraints:
Every rhetorical situation contains a set of constraints made up of persons, events, objects and relations which are parts or elements of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence . . . [i.e.] beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives. (p. 8)

The rhetor not only negotiates the constraints of a situation, but they also introduce additional constraints through their own ethos and logical proofs (Bitzer, 1968). In contrast to Bitzer, Vatz (1973) holds that context does not exist without a rhetor, so the writer is essential in creating the situations, not merely discovering and negotiating them. For Vatz, to acknowledge the rhetor and their choices is to assign responsibility for the decisions, interpretations, and translations performed within a situation. In this way, communication is an event of choice, and the choices are not the result of the event.

The negotiation of elements in any communicative act highlights the social nature of the rhetorical situation. Some moves to standardize this notion across U.S. postsecondary contexts have been made, including the Council of Writing Program Administrators’ (CWPA, 2014) “Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition,” which underscores the significance of—as well as defines—rhetorical knowledge: “the ability to analyze contexts and audiences and then to act on that analysis in comprehending and creating texts. Rhetorical knowledge is the basis of composing” (para. 5). Thus, the CWPA Outcomes Statement emphasizes that faculty can help students learn to negotiate key rhetorical concepts, and has identified this as a core competency of first-year composition (CWPA, 2014). This statement aligns with the “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing,” co-authored by the CWPA, National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the National Writing Project (NWP) in 2011, which also stresses the need to cultivate “flexibility and rhetorical versatility” among learners (para. 4). Further, the CWPA,
NCTE, and the NWP each see the teaching of rhetorical knowledge as a shared responsibility across the disciplines and across educational levels, including high school to college.

Exploration of rhetorical situation as a concept has evolved from content knowledge of the field of Writing Studies to a lens that can help learners think through writing tasks. This is recognized in Adler-Kassner and Wardle’s (2015) first collection on threshold concepts in Writing Studies, in which “writing is a social and rhetorical activity” is identified and then explored by several scholars (Bazerman; Brooke & Grabill; Dryer; Dryer; Duffy; Estrem; Lunsford; Roozen; Russell; Scott & Inoue). Throughout these works, the rhetorical elements of writing are highlighted. Adler-Kassner and Wardle’s (2019) second collection responds to their 2015 work by presenting challenges, critiques, and new conceptions of threshold concepts in writing studies. Though, arguments continue to offer a widespread consensus that writing is, in fact, a social and rhetorical activity. Roozen (2019), for example, recognizes the unconscious work a writer performs in addressing the needs and interests of the audience while Dryer (2019) discusses context as key for interpreting the meaning of a word and thus a message. Maher (2019) affirms this discussion, noting that rhetoric is “an essential threshold concept” (p. 95), and “[l]ike the concept of heat transfer in physics, rhetoric stands to transform how individuals understand a symbol system like writing and the kind of work it does” (p. 103). Beyond Adler-Kassner and Wardle’s (2015, 2019) works, Gere’s (2019) longitudinal study also builds on the notion that writing is a social and rhetorical activity, arguing that undergraduate college students “cannot address the writing challenges of higher education (and beyond)” without understanding the rhetorical dimensions of writing (p. 21).
Writing-Related Transfer in First-Year Composition

The study of writing transfer in first-year composition (FYC) courses has been of particular interest to Writing Studies scholars, as FYC is often characterized as the introductory writing course for college. In their understanding of writing-related transfer, Nelms and Dively (2007) draw on Perkins and Salomon, who have been widely referenced, while also highlighting Carter’s (1990) not-as-frequently cited position that writing involves both near and far transfer, which relies on both local and general knowledge. Because of the question surrounding the existence of far transfer, Nelms and Dively (2007) developed a study on the potential for far transfer beyond the general composition, or FYC course at their institution, questioning what may be complicating the potential for far transfer among their students. Ultimately, they had several findings—most notably that students compartmentalize knowledge and there is a disparity in vocabulary between composition and other disciplinary instructors, both of which inhibit knowledge transfer beyond FYC. Nelms and Dively (2007) determined that a common language among faculty to describe disciplinary writing conventions as well as reflective exercises to provide spaces for students to consider the connections between their courses could likely facilitate writing-related knowledge transfer.

Downs and Wardle (2007) also inquired into writing transfer as it relates to FYC, but they instead proposed a pedagogical approach to FYC that teaches about writing in college, rather than the traditional FYC course that teaches how-to write in college. Downs and Wardle (2007) recognize Russell’s (1995) activity theory as helpful in understanding that a unified academic discourse does not exist—a discourse is different from one context to the next; thus, a FYC class that teaches how-to write for the university is insufficient, as it does not provide students with the disciplinary awareness needed to write effectively for each new context, or
activity system, they enter. For Downs and Wardle, an “Intro to Writing Studies” FYC pedagogy that teaches about writing in college seeks to improve student understanding of writing, rhetoric, language, and literacy thereby positioning students to better transfer writing-related skills and knowledge to the activities in which they engage in various disciplinary discourses.

Wardle (2009) continued the inquiry into transfer, but took yet another approach, considering the significance of and challenge with teaching disciplinary genres out of context and in FYC. She used Russell’s (1995) notion of activity systems to question the preparedness of students as they attempted to transfer their learning to other courses when they had not experienced disciplinary genres in their true contexts, thus naming them “mutt genres,” as described above. She posits that the activity systems that exist in FYC position students to learn ways of writing (genre and genre knowledge), but they limit the potential for transfer because they are not written in response to rhetorical situations outside of FYC.

To examine this notion more closely, Wardle studied the assignments given in twenty-two FYC courses, finding that by assigning mutt genres—“mimic genres that mediate activities in other activity systems” (p. 774)—students felt as though they were being asked to practice skills and writing outside of the corresponding rhetorical situation. To analyze her findings, Wardle draws on Wenger’s (2002) concept of a “boundary practice,” or a place from where students can understand the connections between what they were writing and what they will write. In this, Wenger warns that boundary practices have the potential to disconnect students from future writing situations rather than connect them. This concept is relevant as boundary practices often work within an isolated context, such as FYC, and not beyond. Because this notion of mutt genres complicates the effort to encourage transfer from FYC to other courses,
Wardle proposes that goals of FYC should be re-envisioned, an argument she pursued collaboratively with Downs (2007).

Nowacek’s (2011) work intersects with Wardle (2009), as Nowacek also considers the significance of genre in writing transfer, and ultimately proposed that compositionists revise their approach to FYC. Yet she holds a different position regarding previous scholarship on transfer, noting that it offers too limited a view because it has not acknowledged the frequency to which transfer occurs nor the complexity of the phenomenon. She thereby extends the meaning of transfer as “transfer as recontextualization” in order to invoke genre and our understanding of it as a rhetorical act. Building on the genre related discussions of Bakhtin, (1981; 1986) Miller, (1984) and others, Nowacek draws on case study methodology to better understand transfer as recontextualization. These case studies highlight students as “agents of integration,” or “individuals actively working to perceive as well as to convey effectively to others connections between distinct contexts” (p. 38). As a result of her study, Nowacek (2011) recommends that FYC curricula should reflect interdisciplinarity and teach the rhetorical domains of disciplines.

Like Nowacek, Clark and Hernandez (2011) also take up the question of genre in their study of transfer in FYC contexts, but instead of theorizing transfer as a rhetorical act that is parallel to genre theory, they identify genre awareness as a threshold concept, building on Meyer and Land (2006). Their study on fostering genre awareness among first-year writing students enabled them to develop a curriculum with the goal of promoting a metacognitive understanding of genre so students can better make connections between the types of writing assignments they encounter from discipline to discipline. Genre awareness is therefore a means through which transfer can occur, and while Clark and Hernandez found that teaching disciplinary genres apart from their discipline can cause students to focus more on structural rather than rhetorical features
of writing, they determined that genre awareness is potentially a concept that students must master before they can write effectively in various contexts.

Adler-Kassner, Majewski, and Koshnick (2012) also used Meyer and Land’s lens of threshold concepts to understand writing-related transfer, explaining that through threshold concepts, learners can shape questions about the field, design studies to answer those questions, and then explore and realize the implications of their findings. This understanding proved useful to Adler-Kassner, Majewski, and Koshnick (2012) as they examined issues related to learning in two general education courses, ultimately determining that threshold concepts can enable faculty “to productively engage with questions about the purposes of GE” and thereby determine how to support students as they progress from FYC and through their coursework.

Driscoll (2011) maintains the interest in writing transfer across disciplines, but she returns the discussion back to the lens of Perkins and Salomon (1989) to understand low road and high road transfer. In explaining her understanding of students’ difficulty with transfer across the disciplines, she introduced Osman (2008) to highlight “negative transfer,” or prior knowledge that interferes with the creation of new knowledge and its transfer. For Driscoll, “many students have difficulty seeing the similarities among writing situations; this lack of awareness translates into difficulty in transferring writing knowledge into other courses successfully” (p. 4). Because this negative transfer inhibits students’ success from FYC into their disciplinary coursework, Driscoll draws on Royer’s (1986) conception of near and far transfer to understand the relationship between these two areas: “Near transfer refers to tasks quite similar from the initial learning event while far transfer refers to tasks that require much different skills from the initial learning event” (p. 4). Driscoll ultimately conducted a study to learn about the connection between student attitudes and perceptions of writing transfer from FYC and into
other disciplinary contexts, finding a significant disconnect between the two. For Driscoll, adopting a teaching for transfer pedagogy that emphasizes the value of previous knowledge, metacognitive reflection, and explicit instruction can help counter this disconnect and promote the transfer of writing knowledge and skills from FYC into other contexts.

Similar to Driscoll (2011), Reiff and Bawarshi (2011) raise interest in the discussion of prior knowledge while also exploring the concepts of low road and high road transfer. Their study in which they explored how students make connections across contexts led them to understand that “boundary guarders” were less likely to deviate from their existing writing strategies or habits because they viewed themselves as experts. Conversely, students who Reiff and Bawarshi identified as “boundary crossers” were generally novice—they were more adaptable and willing to negotiate contexts with new strategies. Their findings interestingly aligned with Sommers and Saltz’s (2004) study, which found that how students viewed themselves—as novice versus expert writers—affected their development as mature writers over time.

Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak (2012) continue the conversation on prior knowledge, theorizing that students make use of their prior knowledge when entering new rhetorical situations. Like Reiff and Bawarshi (2011), Yancey et al. (2012) draw on Perkins and Salomon (1992), this time highlighting their call to researchers to investigate the conditions and contexts through which transfer might occur. Yancey, et al. (2012) ultimately point to Russell’s concept of activity systems to emphasize the importance of students making connections between contexts. Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak (2014) further their inquiry into the concept of writing transfer by exploring how instructors can “support students’ transfer of knowledge and practice in writing” (p. 2), specifically through the use of a sequenced FYC curriculum that is content-
based. On this premise, they developed a Teaching for Transfer (TFT) pedagogical model that emphasizes student reflection and ultimately illustrates how students make use of their prior knowledge in the transfer of knowledge and skills in writing.

As described above, while furthering their inquiry into writing transfer, some scholars have shaped pedagogical approaches for propagating skill and knowledge transfer in their local FYC contexts. Some of these approaches in particular have been used widely by practitioners as frameworks for studying and describing this complex phenomenon. Some scholars have used a writing-about-writing approach while others have adopted a “communities of practice/threshold concepts approach” (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015, p. 4). Regardless of the specific pedagogical approach a practitioner uses, there are pedagogical strategies such as reflection, portfolio development, rhetorical awareness, and cross-disciplinary communication that may be utilized for purposes of encouraging transfer not just from FYC, but also as students move from educational to civic to professional contexts. Moore and Bass (2017) identify these different contexts as “critical sites of impact,” or areas where scholars should focus their study of writing transfer. They suggest that critical sites of impact include various stakeholders, including administrators, faculty decision makers, and others who are committed to preparing students for success beyond the university. Hence, the “sites” where scholars should focus their attention are not only in academia, but they include professional and civic spaces as well. Moore and Anson (2016) furthers this notion that transfer occurs in diverse locations, describing sites as “cross-institutional, cross-disciplinary, and cross-cultural” (p. 9).

Discussions of writing transfer—the study of and the pedagogy for—are ultimately designed with the mission to cultivate effective communicators who will be able to make positive contributions to society. For The New London Group (2003), these sites that require
study support the mission of education: “to ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life” (p. 9). The New London Group’s support of a multiliteracies pedagogy focuses on our culturally and linguistically diverse society and has the potential to support students’ writing transfer as they transition out of the university and into civic life. Wenger’s (2002) explanation of communities of practice intersects with such a pedagogy: in a learner’s participation in a community where they will learn how to learn, the learner will also encounter diverse literacies through which he or she can cultivate strategies for transferring between communities—strategies that will enable them to function effectively beyond FYC, and indeed, beyond the university.

Writing Across the Curriculum

Before discussing the theories behind WAC and how these theories support WAC pedagogy in the classroom, it is necessary to provide first a brief explanation of its historical evolution. This evolution informs the key philosophical arms of WAC: the writing-to-learn model and the writing-in-the-disciplines model. After defining these two models, I will identify the early pioneers of WAC—those who implemented initiatives at their institutions for the purpose of improving student writing across the curriculum. It is through these early initiatives that teacher-scholars at other institutions were inspired to implement their own WAC programs, and classroom pedagogies began to take shape.

Historical Background of WAC

WAC’s history in America has been widely explored and documented by writing studies scholars in an effort to—in part—create a meaningful account of the intellectual history for the field to stand on. Yet, the influence of British education reforms in the 1960s and 1970s must be accounted for in understanding the history of the American WAC movement (Anson, 2010;
At the time, both British and American practitioners and scholars were questioning the reading and writing skills of students (Bazerman, et al., 2005; Kinneavy, 1983; Russell, 1994). The 1966 month-long “Anglo-American Conference on the Teaching and Learning of English,” or perhaps better known as the Dartmouth Conference, focused on pedagogical reform and is where James Britton’s work on curricular developments and the development of student writing abilities was first introduced (Dixon, 1967). This coupled with his (1971) later work on language and learning prompted scholarly inquiry into the role that language plays in discipline-specific learning—not just composition classes (Russell, 2002). Through this, American educational reformers not only borrowed the term “writing-across-the-curriculum,” but they also embraced and drew heavily on British theoretical and research models (Bazerman, et al., 2005; Russell, 1994).

Writing across the curriculum (WAC) is a pedagogical movement supported by a multi-dimensional philosophical basis (Bazerman, et al., 2005; Fulwiler & Young, 1982; Maimon, 1981; McLeod, 1987). These bases, cognitive and rhetorical (McLeod, 1987), are distinct from each other, but are not in conflict, often working with each other in practice (Bazerman et al., 2005; McLeod, 1987) and providing practitioners with the theoretical support needed to move students from being passive to active learners in the classroom.-The cognitive basis—more often and broadly referred to as the writing-to-learn movement within WAC—is built on Britton’s (1971) expressive model, which explained that learners develop their writing skills by first composing personal forms of writing to later composing more transactional types of writing. This model highlights the development of writing in relation to the development of thinking. Emig (1977) extends Britton’s approach to describe how students process knowledge through different means of “languaging”: listening, talking, reading, and writing. For Emig, writing is a
mode of learning. Flower and Hayes (1981) also build on Britton, exploring cognitive process theory. Flower and Hayes counter Britton’s stage process model, which states that writing is a linear process with gradual development toward a final product, and in doing so, they present a cognitive process model. This model maintains that writing is a process, but the individual elements of the process are elementary mental procedures that have a hierarchical structure.

Flower and Hayes claim that the major advantage of understanding these mental processes is that we can begin to develop more detailed knowledge of the comparison between writing strategies of poor versus strong writers.

Like the cognitive philosophy, the rhetorical philosophy behind WAC also positions writing as a mode of learning, but extends this theory to acknowledge the contextual and social constraints of writing. Disciplinary writing is a reflection of the social behavior, or discourse community that exists within a given discipline. Bruffee (1984) describes writing as a beneficial result of languaging, and offers a rationale for collaborative learning that makes clearer the nature of the community the learning lives within, thereby providing “a context in which students can practice and master the normal discourse exercised in established knowledge communities in the academic world and in business, government, and the professions” (p. 644). Thus, we widely refer to this movement within WAC as writing-in-the-disciplines (WID). Some, though, have examined WID as “WAC’s second stage” (Bazerman, 1991; Carter et al., 2007; McLeod, 1989).

These cognitive and rhetorical philosophies served as the foundation for early American pioneers and adopters of WAC, and several teacher-scholars were among the first to put WAC into action in their institutions through various initiatives. Walvoord is credited with implementing the first WAC program in 1970 at Central College by holding a WAC seminar for
faculty (Bazerman, et al., 2005; Russell, 2002; Walvoord, et al., 1997). Over time, additional faculty development workshops, a faculty-wide supervisory committee, and a writing lab with trained student tutors shaped the writing across the curriculum program at Central College. While Walvoord acknowledges Bruffee’s contributions to collaborative and social aspects of knowledge, her pedagogical strategies agree with Britton’s expressive approach, reflecting both the poetic and transactional nature of writing (Walvoord, 1986).

Like Walvoord, Sheridan (1975) was influenced by Britton. She argued for moving away from the notion that teaching writing is solely the responsibility of the English instructor, but rather it is a shared responsibility among faculty of all disciplines. As the then-Chair of English at Carleton College, she adopted an “extra-territorial” approach to writing that encouraged faculty to attend a summer rhetoric institute to learn how to teach writing more intentionally in their courses. With this, she also had several advanced students trained as rhetoric assistants to faculty. The culture of writing instruction at Carleton thus shifted from assigning writing across the curriculum to teaching writing across the curriculum (Russell, 1994; Rutz & Grawe, 2017).

Walvoord and Sheridan embraced and shared Britton’s philosophy with other faculty, and in doing so, began to establish the American WAC movement in practice; in contrast, Maimon (1981) implemented her Bruffee-inspired approach with a WAC program at Beaver College. Charged by her Dean with the task of improving student writing, Maimon and her colleagues began collaborative teaching and research experiments, and in 1977, she began a series of workshops in which faculty were trained to view writing as a scholarly activity tied to disciplinary interests rather than an elementary skill that led to the marginalized remediation of students (Russell, 1994). Kirscht, Levine, and Reiff (1994) clarify that Maimon and her colleagues were in fact WAC organizers, but they “created the context for faculty from other
disciplines to help composition specialists understand the nature of academic writing in various disciplines and ways it could be taught” (p. 371). For Maimon and her composition colleagues, then, a WAC program had a strong WID bent, as it must give guidance to methods of inquiry and writing in different fields, encouraging a focus on the discourse of other, non-composition communities.

In contrast, Fulwiler and Young (1982) taught in a technical setting in which faculty made calls for improved grammar and mechanics in student writing—this was unlike the teaching contexts encountered by Walvoord, Sheridan, and Maimon. Yet Fulwiler and Young were able to support their writing to learn movement at Michigan Technological University by recruiting colleagues, designing workshops, and teaching the difference between learning to write and writing to learn—rather than grammar instruction. Influenced by Britton and Emig, Fulwiler and Young encouraged expressivist approaches, positing that expressive writing is an aspect of the composing process that ultimately leads to the final product. Elbow’s (1973) explanation of and support of journaling also influenced their pedagogical approaches, as they saw free writing as a means to document intellectual growth and encouraged their colleagues to utilize such practices.

The initiatives of these early WAC advocates have been adopted and revised for implementation at the institutions of other teacher-scholars over the years. And as these initiatives have been localized in order to best serve faculty in their institutional context, WAC as a pedagogical movement has greatly expanded, now housing varied pedagogical approaches that not only shape programs and programmatic initiatives, but also classroom instruction. Thus, the history of WAC teaching and learning, the writing to learn movement, and the “second stage”
writing in the disciplines movement has been essential to shaping classroom pedagogy and practice.

**The Modern WAC Movement**

As the WAC movement has increased in popularity, various journals, conferences, resources, and organizations have been established to support those who are interested in beginning, or those who are already running WAC programs. One such organization is the International Network of WAC Programs (INWAC), through which an Ad Hoc Committee comprised of INWAC members developed the “Statement of WAC Principles and Practices” (2014). In this document, four guiding principles and practices for WAC pedagogy that will encourage the development of student writing are specified: writing as rhetorical, writing as a process, writing as a mode of learning, and learning to write. A discussion of classroom pedagogies as evidenced in WAC literature can be framed by these four principles.

**Writing as Rhetorical.** This guiding principle for WAC pedagogy emphasizes that students need to understand that all writing is affected by the rhetorical situation, so they should think rhetorically in order to negotiate new contexts and produce effective writing. Some scholars have presented pedagogies that can encourage this behavior, particularly through cultivating not only rhetorical awareness but also genre awareness in the WAC classroom. Bean’s (2011) work can fit into several of the guiding principles for WAC pedagogies, but many of his recommendations specifically encourage rhetorical awareness through the design of writing tasks that promote active thinking and learning. For example, an instructor may prompt the student to explain a course concept to a new learner, creating a rhetorical situation in which the student author has a clear purpose and audience for writing. He also recommends role-playing of unfamiliar perspectives or imagining “what-if” situations. Such tasks prompt students
to think outside of their own assumptions and worldview. Bean further draws on Bligh (2000),
who makes the call for improving student learning during lecture. For Bligh, the lecture positions
students in a passive rather than active role. In response to Bligh, Bean suggests using variations
of a think-pair-share strategy or asking students to generate their own discussion questions that
have been prompted by assigned reading material.

Genre awareness can likewise be cultivated in the WAC classroom to support students’
understanding that writing is rhetorical. Devitt (2009) argues that genre awareness can lead to
greater rhetorical agency, drawing on Miller’s (1984) oft-cited work, where she identifies “genre
as rhetorical action” (p. 155). Devitt’s approach is to first identify the previous genres students
have encountered and experienced in academic settings and then build on those antecedents to
help students compose more complex and thoughtful writing. Her intention is to provide students
with writing experiences that highlight tasks they have done previously while cultivating skills
and knowledge that may transfer into future writing tasks in their disciplinary coursework.

**Writing as a Process.** Writing as a process as a guiding principle for WAC pedagogy
highlights the long and complex process in which student writers engage to produce high-stakes
writing. Developing effective writing processes among students, then, requires effective
instructional scaffolding in which students are offered support and opportunities for reflection at
every stage of their writing. Scaffolding is best explained through Bloom’s Taxonomy, a
framework for moving students through tasks that require basic knowledge to more difficult
cognitive tasks that require abstraction. Bean (2011) offers specific suggestions for scaffolding
assignments, recommending short assignments that teach students how to identify the types of
evidence a discipline uses, which can illuminate a discipline’s methods of inquiry and analysis.
From there, students may move to literature reviews, first summarizing one scholarly article, and then responding to it.

Some scholars have also utilized assignment sequencing, a pedagogical strategy that is closely related to scaffolding. Sequencing emphasizes planning through the writing process such as prewriting, composing a rough thesis statement, and establishing rough draft due dates. Though, it also encourages instructional support via feedback on ungraded drafts through conferences or small writing groups comprised of a few students from the same class. Both Lindemann (2001) and Walvoord (1986) exemplify these methods in their work, arguing for writing assignments that are designed to challenge students by building on their prior learning.

**Writing as a Mode of Learning.** As a guiding principle for WAC pedagogy, writing as a mode of learning is of course the result of Britton and Emig’s influence on the field, as it emphasizes forms of exploratory writing. Writing as a mode of learning, or writing-to-learn (WTL) activities are generally informal and low-stakes and encourage student thinking in support of a particular learning outcome. For example, freewriting exercises, such as those recommended by Elbow (1973), allow students to write without editing their grammar or thoughts. The ideas communicated in the writing are therefore more original and ultimately coherent, even if they do not begin that way. Fulwiler’s (1987) compilation likewise addresses the power of freewriting, but through journaling methods in which students are encouraged to create a space for themselves where their learning is documented by exploring topics, asking questions, responding to reading assignments, practicing fluency, and generally becoming more aware of themselves as writers.

**Learning to Write.** The “Statement on WAC Principles and Practices” identifies learning-to-write (LTW) assignments as formal and high-stakes. In them, students must
demonstrate an effective negotiation of the rhetorical context while engaging in a multi-draft process. Academic and civic genres such as annotated bibliographies, analyses, and proposals are representative of LTW assignments. Composition instructors are, of course, familiar with these genres, but they should not be assigned for the simple sake of exposing students to new genres or just teaching them how to write. Carter (2007) points out that through learning to write in genres that are representative of a discipline, students are also writing to learn not only the subject matter of the discipline, but also the ways of knowing and doing in the discipline. A lab report, for example, is an academic genre typically assigned as representative of certain science-related disciplines, and as it engages students by doing, students learn to write while also developing reasoning skills that help them make sense of a greater experiment and thus a way of knowing.

These four principles may overlap in the classroom. An instructor may develop his or her curriculum in such a way that assignments are scaffolded and cultivate genre awareness while also incorporating WTL and LTW exercises. Writing is a dynamic and complex process—writing instruction should be as well. Young (2006) encourages the overlap of such pedagogies and notes a specific distinction between WTL and LTW exercises, or what he refers to as Writing to Learn and Writing to Communicate. He draws on Britton, explaining that a student must take time to understand the topic or issue by explaining it to his or herself via writing. As a result of this writing-to-learn exercise, a student is then better equipped to explain the topic or issue to someone else, and he or she should do so—also in writing. For Young (2006), this is a logical progression of critical thinking but an underutilized pedagogical strategy in WAC classrooms that could otherwise support students in improved learning of material as well as improved written communication.
In addition to the pedagogical practices offered in the “Statement of WAC Principles and Practices” designed for WAC program leaders, faculty, and administrators, Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) offer seven practices that they identified as helpful instructional guidelines strictly for WAC faculty. These practices were developed as the result of a four-year cross-disciplinary study of the WAC program at their home institution, George Mason University, and align with the pedagogical principles offered by INWAC—specifically, “writing as rhetorical” and “writing as a mode of learning.” Intended for college instructors across disciplines, these strategies should be kept in mind when designing writing courses and assignments, but it is worth pointing out how they fit within the framework provided by INWAC. Thaiss and Zawacki’s (2006) first, third, sixth, and seventh practices support the writing as rhetorical practice presented by INWAC. They state that:

1. expectations should be defined clearly and contextually in accordance with the discipline,

2. feedback to students should be contextualized, pointing students toward an awareness of disciplinary writing conventions,

6. students should be given opportunities to explore the potential rhetorical environments they will encounter in future, professional contexts, and

7. students should be taught the academic principles that all majors share. For example, the meaning of research in a psychology course and a literature course is similar in some ways but different in others.

The emphasis on rhetorical awareness in the above practices underscores INWAC’s emphasis on writing as rhetorical, but more generally represents how WAC programs can support institution-wide writing structures that seek to improve student writing across disciplines. Thaiss
and Zawacki’s (2006) second, fourth, and fifth practices support the writing as a mode of learning practice presented by INWAC. They state that:

3. the faculty member should conduct his or her own personal reflection as a scholar/writer and as a teacher,

4. the faculty member should seek ways to help students find their own passions within the discipline and be validated as potential contributors to the field, and

5. students should be given opportunities to reflect on their development as scholars/writers and consider how this growth will support them in future, professional contexts.

In these three pedagogical practices, opportunities for writing to learn are apparent not only for the student, but the faculty member as well. Reflective writing helps make learners’ thinking visible, facilitating connections between prior and new knowledge. Overall, the similarity in recommendations between INWAC and Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) in addition to the consistency in recommendations between INWAC and Young (2006) strengthens the case for particular pedagogical strategies as recommended by INWAC.

Holmes (2015) reminds us that defining WAC is a challenging task due to the widespread pedagogy and philosophy that supports it. WAC programs are localized, as they do not possess a single, identifiable structure (Condon & Rutz, 2012); therefore, the widespread pedagogies and philosophies represented at different institutions are diverse, supporting the statement I opened with, which describes WAC as a multi-dimensional movement. In spite of the diverse representations of WAC across our university and college campuses, much of the WAC literature interestingly concludes with similar questions pertaining to program sustainability, location, and
momentum. In spite of its history, theoretical inquiry and development, and pedagogical accomplishments, scholars still seek to identify what a “successful” WAC program is.

**Conclusion**

In chapter two, I presented my theoretical framework, transfer theory and theory of threshold concepts, for this dissertation study. This was followed by a literature review, which highlighted the definitions of genre and rhetorical situation, and addressed their capacity to be used as threshold concepts and writing-related transfer. I then reviewed the writing-related transfer research specific to first-year composition contexts as well as writing across the curriculum literature.

While there have been studies in the area of WAC curricular design and transfer as well as discussions of how threshold concepts can support students’ writing-related transfer, the question of whether students are using threshold concepts taught in their FYC coursework and across the curriculum has yet to be explored. My study begins to explore this question, zooming in on two specific concepts: genre and rhetorical situation. These concepts are taught at the “Foundational” level of my home institution’s core curriculum to support students in their negotiation of different writing situations in their disciplinary coursework.

In chapter three, I will detail the methods and methodology used to design this study, research site and curricular context, participants, and data sources. I will also highlight my approach to analysis and discuss my positionality.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

To explore how and whether students are using genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts to negotiate writing situations in their coursework following ENGL 165, I will be using case study as my methodological approach. Since Herrington’s (1985) early WAC study that explored the context for writing in two college courses, viewing them as disciplinary communities, writing across the curriculum (WAC) researchers have continued to ask questions about their own institutional contexts, using a case study framework to better understand the various phenomena that are taking place. In the area of writing-related transfer, scholars have similarly used case study as a means to closely examine how students are repurposing their skills and knowledge as they move from context to context. Some WAC case studies (Carroll, 2002; McCarthy, 1987; Walvoord and McCarthy, 1990) discuss writing-related transfer in first-year composition contexts, though these studies were not originally or primarily interested in transfer (Wardle, 2007). Case study allows researchers and scholars to ask how and why questions about events over which they have little or no control (Yin, 2018). Because each institutional context is different, different methods of data collection are needed, yielding multiple sources of information, a great affordance that case study methodology offers.

In the chapter that follows, I highlight how case study has been defined according to Mirriam (1998) and Yin (2018), acknowledging its affordances as a methodological approach to research. This situates the detailed explanation of the curricular context for my study that follows. Subsequently, I highlight my Institutional Review Board process, describe my research protocol, including my data collection and analysis procedures, and address my positionality as a researcher conducting a study in my primary work space.
Methodological Framework

Defining Case Study

Case study can be defined as a methodological approach that allows a researcher to explore a particular context or setting for purposes of describing and documenting a phenomenon or understanding an issue or problem. Several scholars have weighed in on how to best define case study, helping us understand it in new ways: MacNealy (1999) posits that a case study is a “carefully designed project to systematically collect information . . . for the purpose of exploring, describing, and/or explaining aspects not previously known or considered” (p. 197), highlighting the potential for us to learn something new from each case. Patton (2015) builds our understanding of what an actual “case” is, noting that while a case still exists within a bounded system, a single case study is the result of many smaller cases such as stories of individuals and organizational units. MacNealy’s (1999) definition goes beyond Patton’s description of a case, as she identifies smaller cases of study as events, situations, or small groups of objects or persons. Though, her position aligns with that of Creswell (2013), who explains that case study is a qualitative approach to research in which the researcher identifies and investigates an object of study within a particular context, or bounded system. Likewise, MacNealy (1999) aligns with Yin (2018), as she describes potential cases as those that can be bounded by time and space.

Yin (2018) points out, however, that these boundaries may not be concrete. “Boundaries” in case study designate a time and place, or parameters within which the case functions. Such boundaries define the object of study, highlighting it as the product of the inquiry. In addition, they further support the researcher in delineating between cultures; though, as Yin (2018) notes, the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident—they are entangled and
require multiple sources of evidence, distinguishing case study from many other research methodologies.

**Affordances of Case Study as a Methodology**

Case study methodologists widely agree that case study is advantageous in the flexibility it allows. Features of case study offer researchers multiple methods of design and data collection and analysis. Being able to collect data with an array of methods allows a researcher to present not only an in-depth understanding of the case, but also ensure that the researcher understands what he or she is observing in the context. Data collection methods such as observation, interview, survey, questionnaire, artifact collection, audio and visual recordings, and composing aloud protocols are commonly drawn on when designing a case study (Lauer & Asher, 1988; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2017). In addition to the various collection methods case study allows for, scholars engage in various types of data analysis, including coding, developing data displays and matrices of categories (Creswell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013), helping a researcher understand a study from many angles, creating a rich picture, leading to analytical insights from which we can learn.

**Context of the Study**

**Description of the Research Site**

Longwood University is a small, liberal arts institution of about 5,000 undergraduate and 1,000 graduate students. The 2019-2020 first-year class welcomed 922 students. Table 1 provides information on student ethnicity and race during the 2019-2020 academic year, when the study was facilitated.
Table 1

Ethnicity and Race, Longwood University (2019-2020)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity and Race</th>
<th>% at Longwood University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Resident Alien</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(blank)</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15% of the 922 total students in the 2019-2020 first-year class were transfer students, and 34% were first-generation college students. The incoming average GPA of the 2019-2020 class was 3.48 and the average SAT score was 1056 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2019). At the start of the fall of 2019 semester, 30% of freshmen were undeclared. By October of 2019, this number decreased to 10%. 530 out of 922, or 57% of students in the first-year class took ENGL 165. 360 out of 922 students transferred credit to satisfy the ENGL 165 requirement. The remaining 32 out of 922 took ENGL 265 instead of ENGL 165, a core course for any first-time, full-time first-year student who enters with an associate's degree through dual enrollment. Table 2 provides a visual illustration of the breakdown of the 2019-2020 first-year cohort and how they satisfied Longwood’s FYC requirement.
The Core Curriculum

From the fall of 2013 to the spring of 2016, the Academic Core Curriculum Committee (ACCC) at Longwood University worked to revise the former general education curriculum to the new core curriculum, now known as Civitae. The purpose of Civitae is to support Longwood’s institutional mission in developing the citizen leader: “someone who is academically and personally transformed by knowledge of fundamental modes of inquiry and informed civic engagement and who then applies the virtues of a Longwood education to serve and transform communities” (Civitae core, 2018). It was the hope of the committee that students would recognize the interdisciplinary links between the skills and knowledge they develop in Civitae and their major in fluid ways, using them from one disciplinary context to the next, and
then eventually apply them in civic settings after graduation. Longwood students therefore are encouraged to *transfer* their knowledge and skills not only throughout their course of study, but also as graduates in civic roles.

Civitae has three levels. To explain how a student will progress through Civitae, the curriculum is represented visually by a rotunda. On the campus of Longwood University, the rotunda has a rich history. A depiction of this structure is the official unifying emblem that can be found on campus signage, university letterhead, and student sweatshirts. Likewise, a graphic image of a rotunda that emphasizes levels of vertical progression is used to marry a historical campus artifact with our modern core curriculum. See Figure 1.
At the “Foundations” level of the core, students take two required first-year courses: first-year composition (ENGL 165: Writing & Rhetoric) and first-year seminar (CTZN 110: Inquiry into Citizenship). Together, these two courses are designed to develop nine college readiness skills, which Longwood University has defined:
1. Investigate the foundations of citizenship, which include ethical reasoning, critical thought, and civil discourse.

2. Describe and analyze continuity and change in one or more cultures.

3. Evaluate cultural norms, societal institutions, and implicit and explicit assumptions about themselves.

4. Develop skills for global citizenship through the study of world languages and cultures.

5. Explore and/or engage in creative and artistic expression.

6. Analyze which quantitative reasoning methods best address different types of questions and apply them to various problems in context.

7. Use scientific reasoning to address a variety of questions in context.

8. Analyze and use writing conventions appropriate to different audiences. Students will identify strengths and weaknesses in their own writing in order to improve.

9. Analyze and use speaking conventions appropriate to different audiences. Students will identify strengths and weaknesses in their own speaking in order to improve.

(“Foundation Level,” 2018)

The outcomes for ENGL 165 support the development of these skills with a writing-infused approach, and CTZN 110 focuses on the development of these skills with a speaking-infused approach. One course is taken in the fall, and the other is taken in the spring of each student's first year at Longwood University. As mentioned above, some first-year students will not take ENGL 165, however. ENGL 265 is a core course for any first-time, full-time students who enter with an associate's degree through dual enrollment.

Beyond these two first-year courses at the Foundations level, students are required to take 18-19 credits in the “Pillars.” The Pillars represent students’ vertical movement through the
curriculum, engaging them in an understanding of historical and contemporary insights, cultural norms and societal institutions, world languages and culture, the arts, and quantitative and scientific reasoning. The Foundations and Pillar courses are waived for transfer students, who enroll in Longwood with an associate’s degree, which was not earned through dual enrollment.

Students are then required to take 12 credits at the “Perspectives” level. Perspectives courses are upper-level, disciplinary-based courses. Students may choose one Perspectives course from each of the following categories:

- Historical & Contemporary Insights Perspectives OR Behavioral & Social Institutions Perspectives (3 credits)
- Global Citizenship Perspectives OR Aesthetic Expression Perspectives (3 credits)
- Quantitative Reasoning Perspectives OR Scientific Reasoning Perspectives (3 credits)
- Integrating World Languages Perspectives (3 credits)

The students’ core experience concludes at the “Symposium” level, in which they take a capstone course (CTZN 400) to apply the knowledge, skills, and perspectives cultivated throughout the curriculum. All courses in Civitae have a communication requirement that specifies whether the course is writing-infused, speaking-infused, or arts-applied. Of particular interest here is the writing-infused (WI) designation, which requires regular written exercises and assignments coupled with consistent faculty feedback throughout the course. The implementation of Civitae formally began in the fall of 2018 at which point the work of the ACCC concluded, and the Civitae Core Curriculum Committee (CCCC) was formed.

**The Inception and Design of FYC in the Core Curriculum**

While the QEP was ongoing, the Composition Committee considered the strengths and weaknesses of the previous FYC component, ENGL 150, as well as the Council of Writing
Program Administrators (CWPA) 2014 revision of the common outcomes used for FYC (CWPA, 2014). With this information, the course outcomes for ENGL 165 were written. The course outcomes state that students will:

1. Identify and explain the significance of language, structure, and reference among at least 3 of these 4 academic disciplines: humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and applied fields.

2. Convey the results of research through an appropriate academic genre to achieve specific informational and/or persuasive purposes for defined academic audiences.

3. Identify appropriate digital and print references for use in specific writing tasks after explicit instruction in evaluating a variety of sources.

4. Identify and evaluate at least 3 strategies for improvement. Those strategies include: structure, language, and (composing) planning, drafting, revising, and proofreading processes of their own texts.

5. Produce polished original prose that rarely interferes with reader comprehension and writer ethos.

The first outcome highlights the WAC/WID approach used in ENGL 165. Linton, Madigan, and Johnson (1994) propose that the terms “language,” “structure,” and “reference” (LSR) represent three categories of conventions which occur in all academic genres and can thereby support writing faculty in introducing disciplinary genres to students. The Composition Committee determined that explicitly teaching the LSR vocabulary to students would promote an awareness of the kinds of conventions that exist as well as how they change across disciplinary communities. The second through fifth outcomes reflect the CWPA (2014) Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition.
These outcomes were introduced to the ENGL 165 Pilot Committee in the summer of 2017, when four faculty members, including myself, were preparing to pilot this new first-year composition course that, in conjunction with CTZN 110, would satisfy the Foundations level of the Civitae Core Curriculum. The task of the ENGL 165 Pilot Committee was, in part, to test the course outcomes, but also to develop the by-laws that would help sync ENGL 165 instructors with the vision of the new core. To do this, we primarily drew on Lettner-Rust (2010), whose study of writing-related transfer is specific to Longwood University, as well as Adler-Kassner and Wardle’s (2015) work on threshold concepts. We agreed that the concepts of genre and rhetorical situation, when taught to students, had the potential to transform their understanding of writing tasks, not just in first-year composition, but also in other disciplinary contexts. Genre and rhetorical situation would therefore serve as frameworks for students to use in their learning, but beyond this framework, an understanding of LSR would provide students with a vocabulary for communicating about writing. We also agreed that the concept of transfer should be explicitly taught in order to give students a vocabulary to explain their purpose in using genre and rhetorical situation to negotiate writing situations in contexts beyond ENGL 165. To support faculty in their instruction of these concepts, they were required to use Miller-Cochran, Stamper, and Cochran’s (2018) *Insider’s Guide to Academic Writing* as the textbook for the course. These decisions led to the drafting of the by-laws for ENGL 165.

This study explores the requirement in by-law #2, “Teach the concepts of genre, rhetorical situation, and transfer as part of the disciplinary knowledge of writing for the university,” as it specifically identifies two threshold concepts, genre and rhetorical situation, which have the potential to support students in their transfer of writing-related skills and knowledge across the curriculum, directly supporting the initiative of Civitae. Though, after four
semesters of implementation of ENGL 165, there has not yet been any qualitative evaluation to assess whether by-law #2 is actually doing what we envisioned it would or could do. Thus, my research questions are as follows:

- How do students understand “threshold concepts” after completing ENGL 165?
- How do students understand “genre” after completing ENGL 165?
- How do students understand “rhetorical situation” after completing ENGL 165?
- Are students using genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts to transfer writing related knowledge and skills from ENGL 165 to other courses across the curriculum in the following semester? If so, what does this look like in practice? If not, how are students negotiating these writing situations?

**Student Participants**

As described above, the participants for this study were selected through the call I sent out to ENGL 165 classes in the fall 2019 semester; thus, each of the five participants in this study were taking ENGL 165 at that time. Table 3 identifies each participant by their pseudonym as well as their declared major at the time this study was conducted. Additionally, this table includes a breakdown of their spring 2020 coursework.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Declared Major(s)</th>
<th>Declared Minor (if applicable)</th>
<th>Spring 2020 Coursework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Danielle  | 1. English and 2. German, Pre K-12 Teaching Endorsement |  | CMSC 140: Introduction to Programming  
CTZN 110: On Superman and Sheep  
EDUC 260: Introduction to Teaching Profession  
GERM 342: German Literature II Survey  
GERM 390: German Independent Study  
HIST 125: World History I |
| Monica    | Criminal Justice  |  | CRIM 200: Introduction to Corrections  
CRIM 205: Introduction to US Court System  
CTZN 110: The Art of Visual Making  
ENGL 215: Defining the Land of the Free  
PSYC 101: Introduction to Psychology |
| Noelle    | Psychology        | Criminology                    | ANTH 200: Cultural Anthropology  
CTZN 110: Civil Rights and Disobedience  
ENGL 210: Detective Fiction  
PSYC 233: Psychology Research Methods  
PSYC 234: Quantitative Methods |
| Tamara    | Kinesiology       |  | COMM 101: Public Speaking  
CRIM 100: Survey of Criminal Justice  
CTZN 110: Sports and Citizenship  
HIST 150: Historical Inquiry I |
| Zeke      | History           |  | CRIM 210: Introduction to Policing  
CTZN 110: Be a Change-Maker  
FINA 250: Personal Finance  
HBSI 100: Introduction to Human Services  
HIST 125: World History I |
None of the five participants\(^4\) in this study have the same declared major. In addition, their majors reflect the four academic disciplines represented at Longwood University. Each of the participants lacked enthusiasm toward having to sign up to take ENGL 165. They anticipated that the class would be “boring” and simplistic. They believed the course would be “all about writing papers,” but their views shifted, as they ultimately concluded the course with a range of impressions that were neutral—“I still don’t love the class, but I know it’s important to take”—to transformative—“now I actually like writing essays.” Each of the individuals represented in this study expressed interest in serving as a participant because they were “curious to see how research works.”

**Institutional Review Board Approval**

This research project was conducted for completion of my doctoral degree at Old Dominion University. While pursuing my doctoral degree, I was also a full-time lecturer at Longwood University. Due to my student-researcher role, it was necessary to obtain approval for this research from both institutions. Because Longwood University was the site of this research, I first submitted a proposal for this study and obtained approval for it from Longwood’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), making Longwood University the Institution of Record for this project. Upon receiving approval, I shared the necessary documentation with Old Dominion University (ODU) via IRBNet, identifying my dissertation chair at ODU as the Principal Investigator (PI). I also submitted my Longwood-approved IRB materials to ODU’s IRB for review, and received their secondary approval for this study.

\(^4\) In discussing the positionality of the students, I am specifically drawing on the language participants’ used to describe themselves.
Design of the Study

In facilitating this study, I drew on a multiple-case, embedded design (Yin, 2018). I aimed to highlight the in-depth differences and similarities that exist across the ENGL 165 student experience, looking specifically at whether students are using genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts to transfer writing related knowledge and skills from first-year composition to other courses across the curriculum. Such information is not only valuable to the field, but also my home institution, Longwood University, where specific threshold concepts are used in FYC. Yin (2018) argues that the findings of a multiple-case design are likely to be more “robust” (p. 57) and allow for theoretical replication within the study. In this case, I theorized that not all participants who completed ENGL 165 would embrace genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts.
Figure 2

Study Design Overview

Phases of Research

Focus groups commenced the data collection process. And, similar to the collection practices in the writing-related transfer studies conducted by Wardle (2007), Anson (2016), and Rosinski (2017), data sources for this study included course artifacts (course syllabi, assignment descriptions, and participant writing samples) and participant interviews. I collected data over three phases, using various methods, highlighted in Table 4.
Table 4

Phases of Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase Sequence</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1:</strong> Recruiting</td>
<td>October 2019</td>
<td>• Released call for volunteers to all ENGL 165 sections (excluding those taught by the researcher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Held audio-recorded focus groups with participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Composed field notes, following each focus group</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Maintained research journal, archiving correspondence with participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 2:</strong> Interviews and Artifact Collection</td>
<td>November 2019 - April 2020</td>
<td>• Conducted audio-recorded, initial interviews with participants</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Collected spring 2020 course syllabi, assignment descriptions, and student work from participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Conducted audio-recorded, artifact-guided interviews with participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Conducted audio-recorded, final interviews with participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Made notations in research journal, following each interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 3:</strong> Consolidating Findings</td>
<td>May-June 2020</td>
<td>• Transcribed audio-recordings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Coded transcriptions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Composed analytic memos while coding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Phase 1: Recruiting**

In October of 2019, I sent out a call for "participants" via email to all ENGL 165 classes, inviting students to participate in this research study. I did not seek to control any variables with regards to participant identity (e.g. gender, race, etc.). I also did not share my call for volunteers with my own sections of ENGL 165, or sections that were reserved for honors students. I determined that a sample of students from standard ENGL 165 sections would offer insight into the learning experiences of the larger population of Longwood students. Each ENGL 165 course
is governed by the same by-laws and taught to the same outcomes in an effort to work toward consistency in instruction. This should not suggest, however, that each student who completes ENGL 165 will have the same experience.

After receiving responses from interested participants, I scheduled two focus groups for early November based on student availability, following course registration for the spring of 2020 semester. It was my hope that because students would be near completion of ENGL 165 at this time, they would already be considering how their experiences in their first-year composition course might support them in the classes they knew they would be taking the following semester. Beyond this, it was also my hope to see students in different sections of ENGL 165 interact with one another in response to the content of the course.

From conducting the focus groups, I was able to learn about the participants’ experiences in and opinions of the ENGL 165 course. This was different from what I learned in phase two of the research, in which I interviewed participants individually and asked questions that pointed students to discuss if and how they were using what they had learned. Though I initially designed the focus groups to support me in narrowing down respondents to my call to select participants, I was able to include all five of the interested individual’s voices, from which I eventually selected two in an effort to delve more deeply into their experiences. This allowed me to learn from students whose experiences and academic interests varied. At the conclusion of the focus group meetings, all five students read and signed an interview consent form, agreeing to participate in this study. Following the focus groups, I assigned each participant a pseudonym to represent them and the data I collected across the study.
Phase 2: Interviews and Artifact Collection

The second phase of data collection began in November of 2019 toward the conclusion of the fall semester, during which time I interviewed the five participants to understand what they learned while in ENGL 165 and how this impacted their thinking as writers. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. After each interview, I captured my thinking in response to what I heard in my researcher journal. Unlike in the focus groups, where students were asked about what they were learning in ENGL 165 and how they thought it was helping them at the time, interview questions invited students to reflect individually on how they were using what they had learned in ENGL 165 beyond the course.

The first interview was held at the end of the participants’ ENGL 165 experience, and provided an opportunity to collect data on what they felt they had learned from the course. In February of 2020, prior to the second interview, I asked participants to share materials from a written assignment they had completed in one of their spring 2020 classes. During this interview, I utilized a projection technique (Patton, 2015), where I asked participants to draw on these course artifacts—the syllabus, the assignment description, and their submission—to explain how they came to understand and complete the task.

The first and second interviews were conducted face-to-face, and I had planned for the third interview to be conducted face-to-face, but in mid-March of 2020, Longwood University, like most institutions across the country, moved to online instruction for the remainder of the semester due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. As a result, the third interview was conducted via Zoom in April of 2020. This did not impact my research, however. I asked participants in advance of the online interview if they were agreeable to meeting on a video conferencing platform, and they consented. I felt comfortable making this adaptation request, as by this time, I
had developed a rapport with participants through the focus groups and other two interviews.

During the third interview, I asked participants explicitly about their perception and use of genre and rhetorical situation in their coursework beyond ENGL 165.

**Phase 3: Consolidating Findings**

Following data collection and transcribing each of the audio-recorded focus groups and interviews, I worked to analyze and consolidate the data into themes. Saldaña’s (2016) model for streamlining codes to theory in qualitative inquiry allowed me to “transcend the ‘particular reality’ of [the] data and progress toward the thematic” (p. 14). Figure 3 is a replica of this model.

**Figure 3**

*Saldaña’s (2016) Streamlined Codes-to-Theory Model for Qualitative Inquiry*

![Diagram showing Saldaña’s model](image)

Sources of Data

Through the three phases of data collection described above, I utilized several data sources to ensure validity and reliability of the evidence (Yin, 2018). This included audio recordings of focus groups and interviews that captured the thinking of participants as well as artifacts that participants shared and used to discuss their writing experiences. In addition, I maintained and drew on a researcher’s journal to document my own thinking throughout data collection. Also, in January of 2021, I invited ENGL 165 faculty to a professional learning opportunity via a virtual focus group in which they discussed the findings and reflected on how they might be useful to our teaching and learning context. This ensured that other stakeholders had an opportunity to respond to the data and offer interpretations, as we continue to refine our approach to the course. Participation in this discussion was anonymous. It was my hope this would allow faculty to freely express their reactions and feedback to both the data and each other.

Focus Groups

During the focus group meetings, I posed questions in order to collect identifying information on potential participants’ majors, interests, and courses they planned to take in spring of 2020. I also asked questions that prompted them to reflect on their ENGL 165 experience in an effort to surface individual views on the course (Krueger & Casey, 2015) as well as understand participants’ willingness to describe their experiences in their coursework. This data, in addition to my analytic memoing and coding procedures, described below, contributed to my selection of the cases highlighted in chapter five of this dissertation study.
**Interviews**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, each of the five participants were interviewed three times throughout the study. I conducted an initial interview, “Interview I,” an artifact-guided interview, “Interview II,” and a final interview, “Interview III.” In conducting these fifteen interviews (three for each participant), I hoped to understand what participants learned while in ENGL 165 and how this impacted their approach to writing across the curriculum. I prepared questions for Interviews I, II, and III, but during individual interviews with each participant, there were times when I asked them to elaborate (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

**Artifacts**

During phase three of the research for this study, I collected course artifacts from participants. In doing so, I prompted participants to determine a spring of 2020 course in which they were enrolled, where they had completed and submitted a writing assignment. Once they identified a course, I asked them to also provide their written assignment, the corresponding assignment description, and the syllabus for that particular course. I did not offer any specifics about what type of assignment participants should provide, nor did I identify any specific disciplinary courses from which students might select writing. My goal was to give participants autonomy in self-selecting from their own work, as they might be more eager to discuss a written product of their choosing as well as the choices they made during the writing process for that assignment.

**Research Journal**

Throughout the data collection process, I maintained a research journal, recording my reflections, decisions, and actions, as I collected data and interacted with participants. The journal served as a space in which I made note of tasks I needed to engage in, related to the
research. In addition to recording my reflections, decisions, and actions as well as information I needed to remember, I often used the journal to document the personal information that participants shared with me before and after the audio-recorded interviews and drew on these notes to greet participants and initiate small-talk before subsequent interviews. At times, these notes were composed on a Post-it because I was away from my desk, but they were later adhered to a relevant page in the research journal for my reference. Following Saldaña’s (2016) recommendation, I composed my notes with an informal tone, but worked to be as thoughtful as possible in composing them, as I anticipated they might highlight the “categories of codes” I would ultimately use during the coding phase. This research journal also included a digital archive, where I saved copies of the correspondence I had with participants.

**Audio Recordings**

Both focus groups and all 15 participant interviews were audio-recorded. Before I began asking questions to a participant during an interview, I asked for their consent to audio record with two devices. I used two primarily so that in the event there was a technology failure with one, the audio would be preserved on another device. Using two devices also allowed me to ensure I was capturing our entire dialogue. One recording device was placed in front of the interviewee while the second recording device was placed in front of me. At the conclusion of the interviews, I uploaded the recordings online into a password protected space. Each of these recordings were later transcribed for data analysis.

**Data Analysis**

**Research Journal**

In recording my reflections, the notes in my research journal provided a space where I began to consider how I might structure the themes emerging from the data in later chapters of
this dissertation, particularly with regard to highlighting two participants from this study as focal cases. Brandt's (2001) description of her study, *Literacy in American Lives*, helped me think through this:

In several chapters I have chosen to concentrate on extended exemplar cases. Where exemplar cases are used, they have been chosen for the clarity and robustness with which they illustrate [the broader findings]. In other chapters, the data have been sliced more thickly, across groups and at times across the entire set of interviews. (p. 21)

Likewise, Williamson’s (2018) embedded case study served as a useful model for considering how I might negotiate the multi-layered context in which this study lives, as the curricular structure of Longwood is just as significant as the design of its first-year composition course.

**Analytic Memos**

Like the research journal, analytic memos were an “intellectual workplace” (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014, p. 163) that afforded me a reflective space to document my thinking while coding, noting the patterns I saw emerging in the data. Saldaña (2016) explains that the coding process has “an ongoing interrelationship with analytic memo writing” (p. 55). This process was recursive for me: I coded the interviews with each participant one at a time, but as I did this, I began to notice emerging themes, so I would write them down, ask questions about what I was learning, and consider how what I was observing responded to the research questions for this study. Then, I returned to coding the same interview and artifacts in interviews in which they were referenced. Upon finishing the first phase of coding for each set of participant interviews and artifacts, I returned to the analytic memo space to reflect further on the meaning I was taking away from the data. Analytic memoing was used in the same way during the second phase of coding. Additionally, memos were composed at “unexpected” times, when I would experience
the “ah-ha” moments that Saldaña (2016) describes as typical of a researcher engaged in data analysis.

Coding

While in data collection, I took preliminary jottings, documenting beginning codes and phrases that served as ideas for analytic consideration as my study progressed (Merriam, 1998; Saldaña, 2016). Beyond the preliminary jottings, formal coding occurred in two cycles. During the first cycle, I engaged in micro-analysis of the data across all five cases, using In Vivo and Process Coding. In Vivo Coding highlights “the terms used by [participants] themselves” (Strauss, 1987, p. 33), and captures the actual language used by the participant in the data record. Using an In Vivo Coding procedure allowed me to honor the participants’ voices while helping me see the meaning inherent in their experiences (Saldaña, 2016; Stringer, 2014). I also utilized a Process Coding procedure during this micro-analysis cycle. Saldaña (2016) explains that Process Coding highlights “simple observable activity . . . and more general conceptual action” (p. 111). Because data was collected over the course of six months, Process Coding enabled me to observe how participant processes (e.g. thinking and learning) changed over time. Employing both In Vivo and Process procedures during the initial coding cycle enabled me to explore the data line-by-line and “focus in on pieces of data that seem[ed] relevant but whose meaning remain[ed] elusive” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 59).

The second coding cycle occurred in two phases. First, I used a Focused Coding procedure to identify the most frequent codes across all five cases to develop salient categories (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). I then engaged in a metasynthesis of the categories: a “systematic comparison of case studies to draw cross-case conclusions” (Noblit & Hare, 1988, pp. 13-14; Saldaña, 2016). At this point, the words and phrases that were identified during the
first coding cycle began to take shape as statements to identify “more subtle and tacit processes” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 282). The resulting statements were the themes that provided a map of how all five cases fit together (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), and became the findings I discuss in the cross-case analysis reported in chapter four. The second phase of the second coding cycle isolated the data from two cases: Tamara and Zeke. I again engaged in Focused Coding to identify categories, followed by a metasynthesis of the data, which led to the cross-case analysis presented and discussed in chapter five. Table 5 provides an example of the codes categorized.

### Table 5

*Example of Select Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Cycle Coding</th>
<th>Second Coding Cycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>In Vivo Codes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Process Codes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“grab a reader’s attention”</td>
<td>writing (toward audiences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“it’s important”</td>
<td>learning (how to write)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“how to write”</td>
<td>helping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“exactly what she wanted”</td>
<td>figuring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“followed the instructions”</td>
<td>listening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rigor

To establish rigor in this study, I engaged in triangulation (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016), collecting and analyzing data from multiple sources over a six-month period. The data included transcriptions of interviews, focus groups, and course artifacts participants selected in order to highlight their writing processes. I also maintained a researcher journal during data collection that allowed for transparency, as I reflected on my role and experience as an instructor within the context in which I was researching. In my analysis, I cross-referenced data sources, showing patterns and changes over time. To construct validity (Yin, 2018), I shared the findings from this study with ENGL 165 instructors in the form of a virtual focus group, where they participated anonymously and were positioned to respond freely. And further, to establish confirmability, I looked for examples within my data that countered my findings to ensure my analysis and claims were supported and not influenced by my own background (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Researcher Positionality

This dissertation study supports my research interests and work as a practitioner in the field, but it also intersects with my personal experiences. Like 34% of the 2019-2020 Longwood University first-year class, I am also a first-generation college student. When I arrived at Longwood six years ago, I saw myself in my students. I related to the anecdotes they shared that expressed pains of imposter syndrome and desires for additional financial support. Because of the high percentage of “first-gen” students on our campus, Longwood’s Office of Student Engagement has been working to promote awareness of the challenges that many first-generation college students experience as well as the barriers that have the potential to stand in the way of their success. A network of faculty was created in the 2018-2019 academic year to provide
support for these students. As a participant in this initiative, I seek to mentor and empower our first-generation students, many of whom are not aware of the institutional structure, the resources available to them, or the strength within themselves to achieve their goals. While this dissertation is not a study of first-generation college students, I take seriously the fact that the results of this study will directly impact the curriculum many of them experience.

Conversely, as an instructor, I desire to know the student experience better, so I can identify gaps in instruction and pedagogy in the ENGL 165 design. Thus, my positionality as a researcher is driven by the fact that I am, like my students, a learner. As the Assistant Writing Coordinator at Longwood, I hope this research will help us better understand whether and how students are repurposing their learning from ENGL 165 to other courses, and this may be used to inform administrative decisions later. More broadly, for both Longwood and the field of writing studies, I anticipate this study will be a helpful discussion of students’ uptake of genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts in FYC as a means of engaging in other disciplinary writing contexts in the university.

**Conclusion**

In chapter three, I described the methodology and highlighted the context and design of this study. I also addressed my positionality as a researcher collecting data within her home-institutional context. In chapter four, I will discuss my findings and analysis from this study, highlighting four significant themes that surfaced in the data.
CHAPTER IV
WRITING IN THE UNIVERSITY: CULTIVATING AWARENESS IN AND BEYOND

ENGL 165

This study explores if students who have completed ENGL 165 at Longwood University are using genre and rhetorical situation to transfer writing-related knowledge and skills across the curriculum. To facilitate this research, I draw on the second by-law for ENGL 165, which states that faculty will “Teach the concepts of genre, rhetorical situation, and transfer as part of the disciplinary knowledge of writing for the university.” This by-law prompts instructors to explicitly teach “genre,” “rhetorical situation,” and “transfer” to ENGL 165 students to help build their foundational knowledge for writing in the university as well as sync ENGL 165 instructors with the vision of the Civitae Core Curriculum. Though three concepts are identified—genre, rhetorical situation, and transfer—the intention is that two specific concepts—genre and rhetorical situation—are positioned as threshold concepts and are used to facilitate student transfer of writing-related knowledge and skills. Thus, through a multiple-case, embedded design, I seek to answer the following questions:

1. How do students understand “threshold concepts” after completing ENGL 165?
2. How do students understand “genre” after completing ENGL 165?
3. How do students understand “rhetorical situation” after completing ENGL 165?
4. Are students using genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts to transfer writing related knowledge and skills from ENGL 165 to other courses across the curriculum in the following semester? If so, what does this look like in practice? If not, how are students negotiating these writing situations?
While these research questions focused on specific threshold concepts—genre and rhetorical situation—that should have been explicitly taught to ENGL 165 students, none of the five participants ever used the exact language of “rhetorical situation” when describing their learning, and only one of the five participants referenced “genre” explicitly. Though, at times, there is evidence of awareness of these concepts. The principal findings presented in chapter four explore the major themes that arose from this study:

1. Instructor as Audience
2. Language Awareness across the Disciplines
3. Reference Awareness across the Disciplines

These themes highlight student understandings of not only different aspects of the threshold concepts, genre and rhetorical situation, but also other general concepts discussed in ENGL 165.

**Theories Assisting Analysis**

In chapter two, I explored transfer theory (Perkins & Salomon, 1988; 1989; 1992; Salomon & Perkins, 1989) as the foundation for what we have learned about writing transfer (Adler-Kassner, Majewski, & Koshnick, 2012; Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015; Clark & Hernandez, 2011; Driscoll, 2011; Downs & Wardle, 2007; Moore, 2017; Nelms & Dively, 2007; Nowacek, 2011; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011; Wardle, 2009; Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014; Yancey et al., 2019). In their discussion of learning transfer, Perkins and Salomon (1988) define “forward reaching transfer” and “backward reaching transfer” as concepts to help us understand more deeply about how transfer works. Figure 4 offers a visual representation of these concepts. I created the initial draft of this graphic for a professional learning workshop in May of 2018, but because I found myself referring to it often throughout my analysis, I recreated it for purposes of this study.
In addition to using learning transfer theory as a frame for understanding this study’s findings, I also use Meyer and Land’s (2006) theory of threshold concepts. Threshold concepts are characterized as “bounded,” “troublesome,” “transformative,” “irreversible,” and “integrative” (Meyer & Land, 2006). Table 6 summarizes the definitions of these terms.
Table 6

Characteristics of Threshold Concepts

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bounded</td>
<td>Threshold concepts are community-specific, and can be put into practice in sites other than academic disciplines.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Troublesome</td>
<td>A learner who is introduced to a threshold concept may struggle to synthesize this learning with prior knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative</td>
<td>Once a learner grasps a threshold concept, their perception of a subject is changed, and “a transfiguration of identity and adoption of an extended or elaborated discourse” occurs (Meyer &amp; Land, 2006, p. 21).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irreversible</td>
<td>Once a learner understands a subject through the lens of a threshold concept, it is difficult to turn back to the original way of thinking or understanding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrative</td>
<td>Once a learner begins to see with a threshold concept, the learner may also begin to view other subjects through this same conceptual gateway.</td>
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For Adler-Kassner and Wardle (2019), “the presence of these characteristics in a learner’s experiences . . . can be helpful for identifying what makes something a threshold concept” (p. 4), thus distinguishing it from being merely a concept. These frameworks are used in the cross-case analysis below for understanding the study participants’ ENGL 165 experience, and whether they use genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts to transfer writing-related knowledge and skills.

Required Textbook in ENGL 165

Before exploring the themes that arose from the data, it is first important to discuss how the use of a common textbook in ENGL 165 seems to have influenced what students internalized upon completing the course. As described in chapter one, faculty are provided with definitions of genre and rhetorical situation specific to the ENGL 165 context, and prompted to position these concepts as threshold concepts. Genre and rhetorical situation are also highlighted in the required
course text, *Insider’s Guide to Academic Writing (IGAW)* by Miller-Cochran, Stamper, and Cochran (2018). This creates multi-layered course terminology that our faculty, many of whom have a background in literature, must negotiate. Table 7 highlights the definitions of genre and rhetorical situation given to ENGL 165 faculty as well as those used in *IGAW*.

**Table 7**

*Genre and Rhetorical Situation in ENGL 165 and IGAW*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threshold Concept</th>
<th>ENGL 165 Definition</th>
<th>IGAW Definition</th>
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| Rhetorical Situation | For purposes of ENGL 165, rhetorical situation is defined as “a concept to teach in FYC about writer, audience, message, and context. Teaching this concept helps students understand that the more they know about audience, the topic, and the context, the better received the message will be” (Lettner-Rust, 2018). | *IGAW* does not use the language of “rhetorical situation,” but rather “rhetorical context,” which is defined through four elements:  
  ● Who the author is, and what background and experience he or she brings to the text  
  ● Who the intended audience is for the text  
  ● What issue or topic the author is addressing  
  ● What the author’s purpose is for writing (p. 46) |
| Genre             | In ENGL 165, genre is defined as “a category of writing that has a particular form, style, or content guiding the writer. In other words, it is a set of expectations and practices from a community or audience that influences writers to engage in a particular form of writing” (Magill, 2018). | *IGAW* defines genre as, “approaches to writing situations that share some common features, or conventions” (p. 48).                                                                                         |
The definitions provided by Miller-Cochran, Stamper, and Cochran (2018) are not problematic in and of themselves, but because they live within the required text for the course, they have the potential to become the working definitions during both instructional time as well as during the students’ individual study. While this study does not focus on ENGL 165 faculty instruction or the differences in definitions between the course by-laws and the course text, it is important to point out that because every instructor and student is using this required text, it has the potential to become the central artifact around which the course develops and thus might interfere with a focus on genre and rhetorical situation as primary and transformational lenses.

ENGL 165 faculty use IGAW to plan the shape of the semester in its entirety as well as individual class meetings, as they anticipate that this is the foremost material students will use to complete their work. Chapter one provides an introduction to the university, defining what higher education is, the academic disciplines, and how college writing compares to writing in other contexts. Chapter two teaches writing as a process. It is not until chapter three, titled “Reading and Writing Rhetorically,” that “genre” and “rhetorical context” are introduced. Subsequent chapters focus on the different disciplines: humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and applied fields.

Within each of those chapters, conventions of writing in the disciplines (Miller-Cochran, Stamper, & Cochran, 2019) are developed according to three specific principles—language, structure, and reference—which provide a framework for students to comprehend the similarities and differences of writing practices across the university. Genre is also discussed explicitly, but only after language, structure, and reference conventions have been explored. Further, genre is represented in the discipline-focused chapters through the use of presenting either 1.) writing projects an instructor might assign, or 2.) student samples that are representative of genres within
particular disciplines. Thus, genre is not seated as a lens through which students might understand the demands of a writing situation, or a threshold concept. Additionally, rhetorical context is not discussed at all in any of the discipline-focused chapters. Differences in inquiry across the disciplines, research methods, analytical strategies, and language, structure, and reference conventions are highlighted, but emphasis on the negotiation of audience, topic, and context is lacking.

I am not suggesting that in order for concepts to be positioned as threshold concepts in a textbook that they need to be highlighted in the first chapter or that other terminology cannot be utilized as a framework for learning. Though, from this study, I have found that the emphasis areas of this required course text are more strongly reflected in the principal findings of this study than are indications that students walked away from ENGL 165 using genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts. The sections that follow are organized by the principal findings from this study. Within each section, I will discuss how participant experiences related to each other as well as the overarching theme.

**Instructor as Audience**

In ENGL 165, the concept of audience is presented as an element of the rhetorical situation that should not only affect, but also inform a writer’s decisions as they negotiate the delivery of a particular message within a given context. Audience is also defined as a group of people with feelings, values, and knowledge, who can be informed or persuaded. The participants in this study possessed an awareness of audience though not all explicitly articulated

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5 This definition is used in Longwood University’s ENGL 165-specific professional development with faculty and represents generally how the concept of audience is presented to students in these faculty-led sections.
their understanding of this concept. Yet, in spite of their learning in ENGL 165, the participants in this study identified audience as one person with a specific role: the instructor who evaluates.

**Danielle**

During the focus groups and during Interview I, Danielle described the concept of audience as new to her, noting it was helpful in deciding whether to use a formal or informal tone, depending on the class in which she was invited to write. The following semester, during Interview II, Danielle shared a writing sample from her education class (EDUC 260). The assignment, titled, “Interview About Education Changes,” prompted students to interview a grandparent to learn about their grade school experience. The submission was not supposed to be formatted as an interview, however. Students were tasked with composing a narrative to document what they learned from the interview.

In describing how she approached the assignment, Danielle shared that she paid close attention to the verbal and written instructions given in class by the professor:

she, like, explained what we were supposed to be doing, and then we had the instructions on Canvas, um, and then she gave us like a bunch of options for how to do it, and whatever would really work for us. And then, basically just don’t do it in question and answer style and it should be in narrative. So, I mainly just read the instructions and listened to her—what she told us in class.

Danielle also recalled learning about narratives in ENGL 165 by reading examples of them. She noted that they are a “personal account” that might show “how everything felt.” Her recollection of this genre accurately casts a narrative as a story, and the models shared with her in ENGL 165 supported her in EDUC 260, as she considered what is “acceptable” in a narrative and what is not. Despite her familiarity with the genre, Danielle felt she was successful on this assignment.
not because of her exposure to model narratives in ENGL 165, but because she did what the instructor told her to do: “I followed the instructions, like, to a T pretty much, and I ended up getting a good grade on it, so I assumed that [the instructor] enjoyed it.” Though Danielle had a foundational understanding of what a narrative is, she did not indicate that she sees her writing as effective as the result of the story she told and how it might have made her audience feel. Her notion that a reader can “enjoy” a reading experience was indicative of her audience awareness, but nevertheless, Danielle saw the effectiveness of her writing as dependent upon the evaluation of the instructor.

Thus, Danielle’s awareness of audience, as illustrated in this instance, was narrow. In reviewing the syllabus for this course, EDUC 260, it was evident that the instructor situated the primary audience for most of the assignments as the existing class learning community, which was made up of future educators, and eventually, the students’ future professional communities. This particular assignment was meant to support the learners’ thinking about changes in education, which would eventually support them in developing future course projects, such as a teaching philosophy. Yet, because the concept of audience was new to Danielle in ENGL 165, and because of her limited experience in using the concept by the time she entered EDUC 260 the following semester, she did not see her surrounding learning community or future professional community as her audience. Rather, she understood that her instructor, who determined the grade of the assignment, was the most immediate reader and therefore the primary audience.
Monica

When I first met Monica during the focus groups, she identified audience as an important concept she was learning about in ENGL 165. In doing so, she highlighted how the concepts of audience might impact a writer’s thinking:

I feel like now, like, when I’m writing, I’m not just writing just to get the information.

I’m writing to have a—like a reader actually enjoy it, and, want to know what I’m writing about. And to actually finish what I’m writing. Er—what I’ve written.

During Interview I, she elaborated on her understanding of this concept, noting that a writer needs to “grab an audience” and “persuade” them. She also indicated an awareness of other purposes for writing, as she described the writer as always “arguing” something, even if the purpose is not specifically to persuade or to convince. She added that these discussions in ENGL 165 were a helpful review of material she learned in high school.

However, when she shared a writing sample from her criminal justice class (CRIM 205) during Interview II, she did not use the same definition of audience. The assignment was to compose a reflective essay in response to a documentary on the juvenile court system. Monica’s description of her approach to completing the assignment highlighted the role of the instructor as an evaluator:

she kinda made it really clear exactly what she wanted us—and in class she was, like, do you have anything else to say, and people just asked, like, how long or whatever. She was like, it really doesn’t matter, as long as you have—answer the questions on there. And she graded on the effort, and like, the accuracy of it.

Monica’s understanding of the assignment was shaped not only by in-class conversations with the instructor, but also by the rubric, which states, “The essay has no minimum length but must
answer all of the questions in the prompt! You will be graded on effort and accuracy.” Here, the instructor positioned herself as an evaluator, as she explicitly stated the grading criteria for submissions, but did not offer definitions for “effort” and “accuracy.” Without this detail on the rubric, a learner is left to make assumptions about not only the instructor’s expectations for an assignment, but also the greater rhetorical situation. Even if Monica might have drawn on her ENGL 165 understanding of audience, her effort to create effective writing in response to this rhetorical situation was negated.

Noelle

Like Danielle and Monica, Noelle also recalled learning about audience in high school, and saw this review as helpful. But Noelle additionally saw ENGL 165 as exposing her to a more complex understanding of audience through the course’s focus on writing in the disciplines. This new awareness of audience, however, did not influence her approach to an essay she completed the following semester for her detective fiction class (ENGL 210). While she acknowledged that writing choices are affected by audience and by discipline, she did not consider the broader English field or humanities discipline when weighing how to complete the assignment. Rather, like Danielle and Monica, Noelle prioritized the instructor’s preferences:

she wanted us to read a short story of a author [sic] that we already read in class. So it was either between, um, Poe, Doyle, or Agatha Christie, and we had to basically take the elements of the story and say how it contributes to the overall effectiveness of the work. Noelle’s understanding of audience positioned the instructor as an evaluator, believing that if she fulfilled the assignment instructions, then she had sufficiently completed it, and in effect, would do well.
Unlike Danielle and Monica, Noelle extended this notion of the evaluating audience to her peer colleagues, when she reflected on whether she thought she satisfactorily completed the assignment:

we actually did peer review, and I, like, read other people’s stories, and I thought mine’s was, like, way better than theirs’—not to be rude or anything, but that’s what I thought.

Noelle thought favorably of her work, but not because of how she responded to the task of arguing for the effectiveness of a literary text. Rather, when Noelle had the opportunity to review her peers’ work, she felt that she done the best job of following the instructor’s directions.

Zeke

Like Noelle, Zeke offered a more nuanced definition of audience. During the focus groups, he identified audience as the most important concept he had been learning about in ENGL 165, as it was helping him consider his writing choices in terms of diction and tone. He was also coming to see his audience as real people, who have expectations and can be persuaded. He later commented in Interview I that much of the content he was learning in ENGL 165 was review from high school, but ENGL 165’s focus on writing in the disciplines complicated his understanding of audience, noting that audience needs shift depending on the discipline and the genre.6

The following semester, Zeke shared an assignment from his personal finance class (FINA 250). The task prompted students to answer a series of questions that were developed around a hypothetical financial scenario provided by the instructor. Zeke explained that similar assignments from his high school AP economics class as well as the “practice problems” the

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6 Of the five participants in this study, Zeke was the only one to use the vocabulary of “genre,” and in doing so, he recognizes the social nature of the concept. I will highlight Zeke as a focal case in chapter five, and explore his understanding of genre in more detail.
instructor presented in class served as helpful models—a form of genre study—for him as he completed his work. Zeke’s writing process was systematic, and he used the assignment rubric as his guide: he wrote down and labeled the figures from the scenario, found the equations he needed from his course notes, and “plugged” in the numbers to find the needed solutions. Then he wrote out his procedures step-by-step, and considered the task complete. Though Zeke was aware of the concept of audience—communicating a more nuanced definition than the other participants in this study offered—he did not apply this understanding when completing his FINA 250 assignment. Ultimately, Zeke felt he was successful on the assignment because he had done what the instructor asked him to do. While he utilized models that were shared in class, he was not sure if his math was correct, but “writing-wise, [he] did what was required.”

Tamera

Unlike the other participants, Tamera never used the vocabulary, “audience.” During both the focus groups and the interviews, she excitedly shared that ENGL 165 consisted of all new material for her, and credited the course for providing her with new knowledge on how to write a thesis statement and conclusion, and how to use APA style and formatting. She cited her awareness of these elements as the reasons for which she is now confident in her writing, and saw herself as now having concrete, structural guidance for how to approach any writing situation.7

In Tamera’s Sports and Citizenship class (CTZN 110), she was tasked with watching a documentary, and then responding to a series of questions about it in the form of a short-

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7 Tamera sees her experience in ENGL 165 as personally and academically transformational. In chapter five, I will highlight her story as a focal case to further explore how her articulation of her learning intersects with Meyer and Land’s (2006) theory of threshold concepts as transformative.
response paper. The instructor asked students to refer back to the syllabus for directions and to ensure they answered all of the questions. Tamara noted, “[The instructor] was very clear about what she wanted us to do. She wanted our own personal opinion of what we felt about it.” Tamera’s submission revealed her awareness of thesis statements and recognition of the importance of organization, as her writing was neat and easy-to-follow.

But Tamara did not measure her effectiveness in this situation based on how she incorporated these writing elements. Upon reflecting on her success of the short-response that she composed, Tamara said, “I feel like I did [do well] cuz I know I got a good grade on this. And [the instructor] was, like—she was just, like, you did great, like, explaining it, and stuff. . . I did exactly what she wanted me to do.” Tamera was sensitive to how the instructor perceived her writing, whose quantitative evaluation of the assignment was the measure of a successful submission.

**Language Awareness Across the Disciplines**

As discussed above, the participants in this study defined audience according to its role in the rhetorical situation, but they applied the concept of audience by positioning their instructors as evaluators. This is the frame that participants often built on as they extended their audience awareness to their choices about language use when writing across disciplinary boundaries. Language, in ENGL 165, is discussed as a broad concept that includes, but is not limited to, tone, voice, diction, grammar, and punctuation.

The first outcome for ENGL 165 notes that students will “Identify and explain the significance of language, structure, and reference among at least 3 of these 4 academic disciplines: humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and applied fields.” This is achieved by having students examine samples of writing from each of these four disciplines, and consider the
similarities and differences across them. Different instructors elect to use different samples, often revolving around different themes, such as “love, marriage, and family” or “food, sustainability, and class” (Miller-Cochran, Stamper, & Cochran, 2019). Some samples are provided in the reader version of IGAW, but instructors have the option to locate and use materials that are not included in the required course text. When studying these samples, students analyze the types of questions different disciplines ask, and how their lines of inquiry support specific language, structure, and reference styles. This analysis supports students in recognizing the similarities and differences in writing across the disciplines. However, given the results of this study, when presented the opportunity to apply specific language practices in context, students seemed to return to their frame of audience awareness rather than drawing on disciplinary knowledge.

Danielle

For Danielle, language awareness was knowing what tone to use, depending on the audience and the discipline in which she is writing. The concept of audience was new to her in ENGL 165, but she said it helped her make decisions about tone and formality. She identified the range of courses she was taking across the curriculum—English, German, education, and health—and explained that each class had different expectations for how students should sound when they write:

[L]earning how to write to a specific audience was definitely kind of new. Um, and that was helpful because I’ve had to write many papers. . . I’ve had to write for English classes, and education classes, and health class, so those are different levels of formality, to be honest. So, like, knowing how to really work for my audience was helpful, and, so, working with strict formality for English and then with my health class it was a little more laid back, cuz, it’s a health class.
Danielle’s explanation did not offer insight into why a health class is more “laid back,” versus an English class, which required “strict formality.” She did, however, recognize that language use may vary depending on the disciplinary content of the course.

**Monica**

Monica saw much of her learning in ENGL 165 as a “good refresher” from her high school English experience. In describing how this review of material in FYC was helpful, Monica revealed some understanding of language awareness across the disciplines:

> there’s writing in, like, every [college] class, and now all this is going to help me with my writing in all the classes. Like, all the other classes. Just essays in general, and to, like, grab a reader, and all that.

For Monica, the skill of ‘grabbing a reader’s attention,’ which she learned in high school and then further explored in ENGL 165, would continue to be useful in not just her college English classes, but every other class, including those with a different disciplinary focus. In addition, utilizing this writing strategy would require her to make intentional language choices. Her understanding of this skill suggests she experienced low road transfer, where the repeated practice of ‘hooking a reader’ led her to believe she mastered a significant element of academic writing. She saw this skill as essential to successful writing across the curriculum.

Though, Monica’s understanding of this skill highlighted her lack of rhetorical awareness and of genre, two concepts ENGL 165 positions as threshold concepts. While many documents require an introductory element in the beginning, not every document will necessitate a persuasive hook, and Monica did not consider the variety of documents she will have to negotiate as she progresses through her college curriculum.
Additionally, Monica struggled to articulate the types of writing she completed during her first semester:

I had to write a paper in theater and archaeology about—like, one was about a play—the one in theater, obviously, was about the play—and that was kind of—was kind of explaining the play, but also writing your own idea about it. I felt like in English we learned to—like that kind of stuff—how to—like, what kind of writing—I don't know how to explain it—like. there’s definitely different prompts and everything, and like the types of writing—like, the persuasive and informing—and so learning all that in English kinda helped me with the different kinds of writing in all the different classes. Yeah, so that helped.

Here, Monica attempted to describe the reading response task she was given for her theater class. In doing so, she began to name different purposes for writing, but did not succinctly connect potential purposes for writing to the reason for which she wrote her theater paper. Her explanation of both the writing task and her negotiation of it is general, much like her explanation of how ENGL 165 was a useful review. She also did not elaborate on her archeology assignment, though she mentions it, signaling that ENGL 165 supported her in writing for that class somehow. Ultimately, at the core of Monica’s language awareness across the disciplines was her recognition that different writing does exist depending on the class, but the skills used in all classes across the curriculum are the same.

Noelle

In addition to citing the concept of audience as significant to her learning in ENGL 165, Noelle identified the framework of language, structure, and reference as “important.” During the focus groups, she highlighted this vocabulary as supporting her in writing “towards certain
audiences.” Later, during Interview I, she described how exposure to this framework disrupted her learning:

I would say learning about language, structure, and reference was different for me. And it kind of took me a while to grasp on to cuz I wasn’t used to writing about those three different areas . . . the language, structure, and reference, um, those three things were actually new to me.

Noelle’s reflection on the introduction of this framework suggested that during ENGL 165, she might have entered a state of liminality, a dissonance that exists between the time the learner is exposed to a threshold concept and the time they acquire it (Meyer & Land, 2006). Though the LSR framework is not intended to be a threshold concept in ENGL 165, Noelle may have embraced it as a lens through which she now understands disciplinary material. This is evidenced by Noelle’s explanation of her other coursework, when she isolated language awareness across the disciplines as supporting her:

Um, certain language. [pause] I did use qualifiers. I know I had to use that. I used active voice, too, because that was, well, that was what my education [class] required.

Noelle understood the flexibility of the term “language” in ENGL 165 and across the university. For example, her awareness was not limited to English versus Spanish. Rather, she saw elements of English language usage as language because they are used differently for varying circumstances. Through her awareness of language, Noelle specifically identified elements she chose to incorporate in the work she negotiated for her education class in order to respond effectively to the writing conventions of that field. She noted that she “use[d]” qualifiers and active voice, highlighting these elements as language skills. Perkins and Salomon (1988; 1989; 1992; Salomon & Perkins, 1989) recognized that skills are used and practiced across contexts, as
opposed to knowledge, which is carried and applied across contexts. Qualifiers and active voice are concrete concepts that can be identified, defined, and practiced. A writer chooses to use them or not, depending on the discipline and its conventions. But moreover, these concepts are highlighted in *IGAW*. The focus on the LSR framework throughout this text positions it as a threshold concept. While the Miller-Cochran, Stamper, and Cochran (2019) do not indicate that the LSR framework is a threshold concept in their text, its repeated emphasis while discussing writing in the disciplines has made this framework meaningful to Noelle in a way that supported her learning and/or thinking across the curriculum.

Zeke

Similar to Monica, Zeke argued that his ENGL 165 experience provided a useful review of high school English; however, it also benefited him by cultivating an awareness of writing across the disciplines. While he did not specifically identify how he might use language differently from one area of study to the next, he did reveal his awareness of different audiences across the curriculum. In doing so, his understanding of audience awareness was echoed in his understanding of language awareness:

I know a lot of it [ENGL 165] was focused on just writing towards the college curriculum about how it’s different from what we learned before. Focusing more on—instead of one just style of writing—having to adapt to multiple different styles of writing depending on who your audience, or in this case, like, who your professor was based on, like, the discipline you were writing in. I think that was the biggest takeaway from that class.

Unlike the other participants in this study, Zeke highlighted the writer’s need to adapt—a type of high road transfer that is the result of “deliberate mindful abstraction” (Perkins & Salomon, 1988, p. 25). While other participants described “writing toward the audience,” Zeke described
“writing towards the college curriculum,” recognizing that audience is a concept much broader than any singular person who might read his paper; audience is a corporate entity with an identity, an agenda, and needs, just like any individual. Adaptation for Zeke, therefore, occurred on several levels, and was not limited to language use. Writing toward an audience, as the other participants indicated, suggests that a writer might choose between which tone to use, such as formal versus informal. Writing toward a college curriculum, however, prompts the writer to make adjustments and modifications as they are writing to not only fulfill specific disciplinary conventions, but also respond to potential interdisciplinary needs.

Early in his interview sequence, Zeke explained that ENGL 165 complicated his understanding of audience, yet during Interview II, he positioned the instructor as the primary audience when completing coursework. Above, when describing the need to adapt to different styles of writing, Zeke again prioritized the instructor. But this time, he positioned the instructor as a lens through which a student may come to understand disciplinary inquiry and knowledge, highlighting not only his language awareness across the disciplines, but also his awareness of reference and structure. Zeke’s language awareness was thus more advanced than the other participants, as he described his knowledge of audience across the disciplines.

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8 Zeke’s understanding of corporate audience is primarily shaped by his educational experience at Longwood University: “Longwood University is an institution of higher learning dedicated to the development of citizen leaders who are prepared to make positive contributions to the common good of society. Building upon its strong foundation in the liberal arts and sciences, the University provides an environment in which exceptional teaching fosters student learning, scholarship, and achievement. As the only four-year public institution in south central Virginia, Longwood University serves as a catalyst for regional prosperity and advancement” (“Mission”).

9 A discussion of Zeke’s reference awareness across the disciplines will follow later in this chapter. I will explore his structure awareness in chapter five.
Later, during Interview III, Zeke did not use the language of “discipline” or “audience,” but he echoed the concepts in describing how his fall semester ENGL 165 had supported his spring semester learning experience:

Um, during the spring semester, it [ENGL 165] definitely has helped me, just kind of compartmentalize each, uh, different, like, division, or, not division, but, like, section of learning, like, how I write for my History class as opposed to my Citizen class or my Personal Finance class. It’s all kind of different—I don’t write the same way for each of ‘em. That’s definitely been like the biggest thing I’ve used since taking 165.

Zeke continued to recognize that different approaches to writing are needed depending on the class, though this explanation of his choices as a writer was more general here than it was earlier in his interview sequence when he was still enrolled in ENGL 165.

**Tamera**

Like Danielle, Tamara’s language awareness was similarly tied to her audience awareness. Where Danielle defined language usage as more contextual, Tamera saw language awareness as audience-driven. But like Monica, Tamara struggled to articulate her understanding of this, and how she made choices to negotiate different writing situations:

About, like the audience, and? Um, I’ve used it a lot, like, when, um, we’re writing papers in his class, because they were mainly towards, like, writing papers towards your audience and stuff. So, um, it was mainly like that, like, um, and then, like, when I, um, and I could reference it, to like, a class I’m taking now? So, my Public Speaking class, like, all my speeches and stuff that I have to write refers back to the audience and stuff, so I can say it’s—it’s been useful a lot.
The practice of writing toward an audience is not an easy skill to master, yet with practice, it can become a habitual part of a writer’s process. To achieve this, a writer, as Tamera indicated, must make the intentional choice to consider and understand who she is writing toward, or “refer[ring] back to.” Tamara felt she gained this skill in ENGL 165, which proved to be useful for her in other contexts, such as her public speaking course, where she was able to practice adapting her language use, depending on who her message was intended for. While she did not provide an example of how she modified her communication according to her audience, she did suggest that audience awareness supported her in the near-transfer of the skill of language adaptation.

**Reference Awareness Across the Disciplines**

At its most foundational level, “reference” for ENGL 165 students is realizing the basic need to integrate sources for support and evidence, regardless of the discipline, field, or topic. Through reference, writers are able to contribute to existing research by identifying gaps, countering and building on others’ arguments, and creating knowledge. Thus, reference is broadly understood as how scholars gesture toward another, giving the proper credit to someone else’s work or ideas to prevent plagiarism and advance the written conversation. As with the definition of language, the definition of reference is flexible across the disciplines. It includes APA, MLA, and Chicago Style as systems of evolving rules for citing sources. These systems offer guidance for structuring academic and professional documents as well as best practice for language use that is bias-free and professional, but their focus on integrating outside source material generally highlights the use of signal phrases, ending citations, and appropriate back matter (e.g. MLA Works Cited or APA References page) in ways that support the value systems of their corresponding disciplines. For example, fields in the natural sciences, such as microbiology and chemical engineering, use APA in their writing practices to emphasize the
relevance of the research from which they draw, as APA signal phrases incorporate the year in which an author’s work was published.

While the participants in this study demonstrated at least some awareness of reference across the disciplines, they usually tied this awareness to a specific citation style that defines rules for what to do instead of describing the significance of integrating sources for support, for giving credit to others for their work, or for contributing to the scholarly conversation. There were moments, however, when writing transfer was evident, either with the use of threshold concepts or without.

**Danielle**

Danielle credited much of her reference awareness to the fact that ENGL 165 was primarily review from high school. During Interview I, she described the ENGL 165 focus on MLA as “helpful because it’s easy to forget.” But Danielle’s description of her FYC experience suggested that she cultivated a more complicated understanding of reference than just knowing citation rules. During Interview III, she explained that ENGL 165 prepared her to read and write at a collegiate level, and offered a definition of academic reading and writing that was influenced by reference awareness:

I definitely got skills from learning how to read academically, learning how to write academically, that I still use. Cuz I—that’s something that you have to do as a college student. . . you need to learn these skills and how to deep read a thing or think about the author’s bias and stuff, and that’s all things that we went over [in] English 165. And then academically, you still need to think about these things like bias, and, like, all of this, um, in order to create, like, an actual good academic, uh, paper.
Reference manuals such as the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2020) and the *Chicago Manual of Style* (2017) point writers to consider their positionality and language practices to communicate unbiased research. These guidelines are highlighted in ENGL 165 when discussing reading and writing across the disciplines. Deep reading, a skill that is often used during research, is essential to understanding the depths of an academic conversation, and Danielle saw engaging in this exercise with an understanding of the potential for bias as useful for both her reading and writing skill sets. But moreover, for a student writer who positions the instructor as an evaluating audience, awareness of and adherence to style manual guidelines results in “good academic papers.” For Danielle, genre knowledge and reference awareness were supporting her across the curriculum, as she was using these concepts to carry (Perkins & Salomon, 1988; 1989; 1992; Salomon & Perkins, 1989) her writing knowledge across contexts.

**Monica**

Monica’s reference awareness was evident in Interview II when she described her writing process for completing an assignment in her CRIM 205 class. But, as with her language awareness, Monica struggled to articulate her approach to reference:

> Um, I—I looked online, like, pretty much—I either put into the Google the question and then the sex offense courts, like, in that. Um, and then, like, I found—I—most of my information came from one, like, big article about it, because it had a lot of information, and then from there, I did the, um, like control-“f” and put in specific words to help me look for—exactly, and it helped me, to like, I don’t know, I felt more organized doing it, instead of having to read the whole thing, I would just get confused. Did all that. And

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10 This assignment prompted students to compose a reflective essay in response to a documentary on the juvenile court system.
then once I had all the questions answered, then I formed it into an essay—or into paragraphs, and then changed up, like, the wording and made it my own words, and stuff.

Though Monica realized the importance of drawing on source material as an essential element of college-level writing, she limited her research to one source that she did not read in its entirety. She offered a detailed explanation of her reading strategy, but in doing so, demonstrated that she saw reference as a requirement to be fulfilled within a writing task rather than a means of entering an existing conversation on a topic.

This finding is reinforced during Interview III when Monica reflected on what she learned in ENGL 165 the previous semester. She recalled that the course was helpful, but similar to her simplistic view of reference, her explanation suggested that she saw all courses across the curriculum as milestones to be completed rather than stepping stones that are overlapped and scaffolded:

It [ENGL 165] helped me understand, like, if I get an assignment, and there’s, like, a specific way to write it, how to write it, and then, like, the best way to write it that gets me the best grade.

For Monica, a writing situation was a one-time, isolated event that required a specific approach. And upon completion of any assignment, the numerical evaluation was the greatest indicator of whether a student passed or failed. With this view, Monica siloed writing not only in each discipline, but also in each field, and did not see variations in writing across the university as the result of different approaches to inquiry or disciplinary conventions.

Noelle

During both the focus group and Interview I, Noelle commented on her interest in learning the LSR framework because it was new to her. In particular, she found herself using
APA in her education class as soon as she was introduced to it in ENGL 165. Unlike the other participants in this study, Noelle’s understanding of citation styles informed not only her reference awareness, but also her language and structure awareness. When discussing APA, for example, she contextualized it as a “format,” which guided the appearance of a document through its rules for front and back matter, headings, page numbers, and typeface and size.

Noelle respected the style rules she was exposed to in ENGL 165, and continued to adhere to them the following semester, noting that she used Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab (OWL) to support her in writing in MLA for her ENGL 210: Detective Fiction class. In addition, she purchased the APA style manual for her PSYC 233: Psychology Research Methods class, as that professor was “critical with the grading.” Noelle’s view of her success when using reference was determined by how well she adhered to the rules regardless of the class, indicating that she experienced low road transfer (Perkins & Salomon, 1988; 1989; 1992; Salomon & Perkins, 1989). She recognized that different reference styles are used in different classes and drew on the style manuals as needed, but she did not see these differences as a result of disciplinary conventions. Doing so would suggest that her choices were informed by a fluid movement across contexts, which necessitates reference adaptation. She knew she must use reference in every context, but because she did not carry her reference knowledge from one space to the next, the extent of Noelle’s transfer was local. She demonstrated her resourcefulness in drawing on Purdue OWL and the APA Publication Manual, but the measure of her success through formulaic rules resulted in near transfer.

Zeke

Zeke also indicated that he possessed reference awareness as he discussed the use of different citation styles across disciplines. Though, Zeke was more explicit and thoughtful about
these connections than the other participants. Early in Interview I, he identified when and where he anticipated he would use reference, explaining that ENGL 165 gave him experience with APA and Chicago style. As a history major, he recognized that Chicago style would support him in his future coursework. With this view, Zeke conveyed his awareness of disciplinary conventions in his understanding of reference. Similar to Noelle, Zeke also contextualized referencing styles as types of “formats” that are built upon a system of rules, yet he also described APA and Chicago as “approaches” and “styles”—language that ultimately led him to reflect on the affordances of genre knowledge. In his explanation of how learning APA and Chicago was helpful, he echoed Danielle’s view that ENGL 165 supported him in reading for other classes. Where Danielle saw ENGL 165 as supporting her ability to deep read, however, Zeke indicated that different structures of writing support different purposes:

I think just being able to expand my knowledge of, like, different approaches to writing, and different styles of writing. It’s helped me understand other pieces I’ve had to read for other classes actually. Um, being able to kind of hone in on what a different—how different genres try to convey things differently. Um, so it’s definitely helped in that way. It’s helped across all my classes, for the most part.

Though Zeke did not discuss reference after this point, he did further demonstrate his general awareness of different writing expectations across the disciplines. In Interview III, his explanation of adapting across the curriculum, in particular, demonstrated that Zeke reached backward and carried (Perkins & Salomon, 1988; 1989; 1992; Salomon & Perkins, 1989) his knowledge about reference across contexts as a subconscious act.
Tamera

Throughout her interviews, Tamara repeatedly emphasized that ENGL 165 taught her how to write a paper “the correct way,” which involved developing a thesis and supporting it with three main points. She prioritized foundational writing skills over reference as she discussed her learning. This suggested that, for Tamara, learning how to cite source material was lower-order. It wasn’t until she used APA in the following spring semester that ENGL 165 lessons on reference became meaningful.

Similar to Noelle, Tamera’s understanding of APA suggested that it informed her structure awareness as she, too, described APA as a “format.” And, as with her previous explanations of the “correct way” to write, Tamera’s description of reference highlighted a right versus wrong approach to producing a text: “Like, to actually head the paper the correct way, like, how to, um, you know, do the different APA, MLA styles for the paper.” It is possible that this thinking stemmed from the influence of her high school experience, where Tamara felt she was not taught “how” to write a paper; rather, she was “just told to write a paper.”

Such thinking has led Tamara to feel as though there is one way to write and she is expected to know how to do it. Her explanation of reference in ENGL 165 supported this position, as she identified Purdue OWL as a useful tool for citing sources:

I have used it a lot because being that, um, most of my papers are APA format, so by me learning—cuz the class was basically based off of AP—I think it was APA format—or, or was it MLA? I don’t know. I know it was both. . . but I learned the format of the paper, like, I—and then, he showed me Purdue OWL, too, so, that’s like, a good thing, because I didn’t—I didn’t know about Purdue OWL, how it creates your citations for you and stuff,
so, yeah. Like, I take all of that, like with writing my criminology paper, it’s in APA style, so from what he taught me, I’m using that now with writing a paper.

Like Danielle and Noelle, Tamara demonstrated reference awareness through her recognition of the importance of APA, though Tamera did not confidently articulate what reference is or how she used it. For Tamara, it was more important to recognize that referencing is a system of rules that a writer either does or does not adhere to; reference is not rhetorical nor is it influenced by genre. Further, reference rules transcend disciplinary conventions. As a result, this student writer embraced resources such as Purdue OWL, as it provided a safe space to obtain useful answers.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed my findings and analysis across the data I collected from five student participants. In chapter five, I will highlight two cases with the goal of delving more deeply into the student experience and the potential for learning transfer of writing-related knowledge and skills via genre and rhetorical situation from ENGL 165 to other coursework across the curriculum.
CHAPTER V

THE CASES OF TAMARA AND ZEKE: PRIOR KNOWLEDGE AND THE POTENTIAL FOR TRANSFER

In chapter four, I presented the principal findings for this study through a cross-case analysis that explored common themes across the data from each of the five participants. This study seeks to determine if and how students are using the threshold concepts genre and rhetorical situation to transfer their writing-related knowledge and skills from their first-year composition experience at Longwood University. The principal findings demonstrate that while there was some awareness of these concepts, participants rarely drew on them, and instead, more often used the framework of language, structure, and reference to negotiate writing situations across the curriculum.

Chapter five also presents a cross-case analysis, but instead delves more deeply into the cases of two participants: Tamara and Zeke. I chose to highlight these participants as focal cases in this report for several reasons. First, they offered a stark contrast in their college preparedness. Their high school experiences and personal support systems differed greatly, which seemed to affect not only the knowledge and skills they brought to college, but also their positionality as learners. Tamara saw herself as unprepared, but was open to learning and drawing on the available writing resources that she gained awareness of in ENGL 165. In contrast, Zeke saw himself as an experienced writer, and chose not to cultivate a writing support system beyond ENGL 165. Thus, how Tamara and Zeke embraced the ENGL 165 curriculum and then used their learning beyond ENGL 165 differed greatly, also.

Because of the range between their experiences, the cases of Tamara and Zeke bring to the forefront a challenge for faculty teaching this course: the need to meet a wide-range of
learners that are often found in the same course section. Indeed, this is not a challenge specific to Longwood University; across higher education, those who teach first-year composition as well as in the disciplines have similar classroom dynamics (Dosch & Zidon, 2014). In spite of the range of experiences that Tamara and Zeke represent, we see the role of prior knowledge in learning transfer in both cases in two ways. First, we see immediate application, or concurrent transfer (Moore, 2012; Yancey et al., 2019), of ENGL 165 concepts during the same fall of 2019 semester in which they took FYC. And second, we see transfer in the short-term, where learning from ENGL 165 is applied in the following spring of 2020 semester’s coursework. Further, my analysis, as seen in this chapter, demonstrates that rhetorical situation did not serve as a threshold concept for Tamara or Zeke. Genre also did not serve as a threshold concept for Tamara, but for Zeke, contributed to high road transfer.

Throughout this discussion, I continue to utilize the theoretical frames of learning transfer (Perkins & Salomon, 1988; 1989; 1992; Salomon & Perkins, 1989) and threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2006) for analysis. As discussed in chapters two and four, Perkins and Salomon (1988; 1989; 1992; Salomon & Perkins, 1989) define different types of learning transfer that help us understand how an individual repurposes their learning from one context to another, as outlined in Table 8.
Table 8


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transfer Type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low road transfer</td>
<td>“automatic triggering of well-practiced routines” (p. 25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High road transfer</td>
<td>“abstracts in preparation for applications elsewhere” (p. 26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Forward reaching”</td>
<td>reaches backward into experience and “abstracts key characteristics” to apply in the current situation (p. 26)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Detailed Participant Profiles**

**The Case of Tamara: “Hard work does pay off.”**

Tamara identified herself as a first-generation college student. This population made up 314 out of the 922 total students in the 2019-2020 first-year class—a statistic Longwood University celebrates. The “First Gen All In” coalition of faculty and students was established in 2018 to encourage such students to be proud of this positionality, utilize their resources, and make connections with other identifying first-generation individuals—students and faculty—across campus (“First-Generation”). Among the 922 students in Tamara’s class, 900 received financial aid of various forms (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2019). Tamara was one of them, as she participated in the work study program as an employee of the university dining hall from 6:00 to 10:00 a.m. every weekday. As a result, scheduling focus groups and interviews with Tamara was challenging because we had to plan around both her class schedule and her job. She frequently visited professor office hours as well as the university writing center for additional assistance with coursework and writing.
In high school, Tamara took honors-level classes, but she regarded herself as someone who was not prepared well for college-level work. She noted that she was not given much help from her teachers or parents, and often struggled. She felt she “didn’t have the chance to actually learn how to become a strong writer.” Like many first-year students, Tamara registered for English 165 her first semester at Longwood University, but during the first-half of her first college semester, she was challenged by having to establish a new routine as well as maintain strong study habits. By the end of the semester she had bought herself a planner, committed to eating breakfast every morning, and started going to the gym. Longwood University makes intentional efforts to support the whole-health—physical, mental, social, and academic—wellness of their students. Though Tamara did not cite this campus culture as inspiration for making these changes in her routine, her choices align with the university’s aim to “nurture” future citizen leaders who are well-rounded (“Longwood”).

The health-related resources available to support Tamara in achieving such goals would have been shared with her during both university orientation and throughout her first semester at Longwood, including ENGL 165. Additionally, she would have been encouraged by her advisors and mentors to use this resource, given her status as a first-generation college student. Tamara felt strongly that her physical wellness was tied to her academic success, and because of the changes she was making in her life at the end of the fall semester, she was looking forward to a better spring semester.

At the time of this study, Tamara was a kinesiology major, but was considering switching to criminal justice because of her desire to serve in a civic role where she felt she could be a

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11 Longwood University has been recognized for its intentional efforts to create a culture of whole-health wellness on its campus, and was named a gold level designee in the 2019 Exercise is Medicine awards. Exercise is Medicine (EIM), a global health initiative managed by the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM).
positive influence in her community. She also aspired to earn a master’s degree, as she felt this would help her achieve her professional goals. Table 9 outlines her coursework for the fall of 2019 and spring of 2020 semesters.

Table 9

*Tamara’s First-Year Coursework*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2020 Coursework</th>
<th>Spring 2020 Coursework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENGL 165: Writing and Rhetoric</td>
<td>COMM 101: Public Speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KINS 205: Intro to Kinesiology</td>
<td>CRIM 100: Survey of Criminal Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KINS 210: Intro to Health Profession</td>
<td>CTZN 110: Sports and Citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KINS 218: Motor Learning and Control</td>
<td>HIST 150: Historical Inquiry I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATH 171: Statistical Decision Making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In spite of what she saw as a challenging transition to college, Tamara shared a positive reflection of ENGL 165. She credited her professor and the Longwood University Writing Center for helping her learn the “basics of writing papers,” noting that ENGL 165 did not provide any review of her high school English experience. Rather, ENGL 165 was all new material. Tamara saw ENGL 165 as empowering, saying that it was “mainly about writing papers and becoming a strong writer,” which was something she was not taught in high school. And though she did not exit the course using rhetorical situation and genre as threshold concepts to transfer her writing-related skills and knowledge, she believed she could “use the techniques” she learned to be productive in her other college coursework.

**The Case of Zeke: “I’m not exactly a stranger.”**

Of the five participants in this study, Zeke demonstrated the most awareness of genre and rhetorical situation, as he shared the significance of genre in writing across the disciplines, and
exhibited rhetorical awareness on several occasions. But Zeke was a confident student, who seemed to be well-prepared for undergraduate study. This was demonstrated through the whole-health awareness he entered college with, which seemed to support a smooth transition for him. For example, as a high school athlete, Zeke played baseball, which cultivated some health consciousness that he drew on during his first-year. During the second interview, he shared with me that at the start of college, he felt he had moved away from healthy habits and a fitness routine, so he was trying to exercise more and make better dietary choices, and the Longwood University Health and Fitness Center was supporting him in these goals.

As a high school student, Zeke took advanced placement (AP) classes, and before the start of his first year at Longwood, he was admitted into the Honors College. Zeke aimed to be intentional in the choices he made about his coursework, though, and he ultimately elected not to accept this invitation because he believed doing so might “result in extra work that is not necessary for obtaining a college degree.” As a result, his college classes did not seem to challenge him. When reflecting on his experience in ENGL 165, he saw much of the material as review, noting that “honestly, we haven’t really learned a lot of new stuff.” Table 10 lists Zeke’s coursework for his fall of 2019 and spring of 2020 semesters. At the time of the study, Zeke was a history major who planned to pursue a minor in criminal justice. Beyond Longwood, his goal was to earn a PhD in history and teach at the college level.
Table 10

Zeke’s First-Year Coursework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2020 Coursework</th>
<th>Spring 2020 Coursework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BIO 101: Biological Concepts</td>
<td>CRIM 210: Introduction to Policing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRIM 100: Survey of Criminal Justice</td>
<td>CTZN 110: Be a Change-Maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGL 165: Writing and Rhetoric</td>
<td>FINA 250: Personal Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIST 151: Historical Inquiry II</td>
<td>HBSI 100: Introduction to Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEA 101: Issues in Theatre</td>
<td>HIST 125: World History I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further, Zeke possessed social wellness, as he was not a first-year student who struggled with homesickness. He shared that he missed home and visited often, but he enjoyed his time at college, too. In order to be more involved on campus, he pledged a social Greek organization in the spring of 2020. Ultimately, Zeke’s overall adaptability seemed to be the result of a pre-existing whole-health awareness he possessed upon entering college. With the exception of the Health and Fitness Center, Zeke did not utilize the campus resources that he would have learned about during his university orientation and ENGL 165 class, as he was intentional in maintaining the existing support system he entered college with as well as personally cultivating new support systems during his first-year.

Seeing the Continuum: ENGL 165 as All New or Mostly Review

Tamara and Zeke’s explanations of what they learned in ENGL 165 revealed a significant contrast between the two cases in terms of their prior knowledge, and how they perceived the course curriculum. For Tamara, ENGL 165 was essential, but for Zeke, ENGL 165 was somewhat futile. In spite of the contrast between their responses to the course, both participants were very direct when sharing these views.
The Case of Tamara: ENGL 165 as All New

Although we know that young people bring understandings about writing into the classroom from the many spaces in which they compose, Tamara was adamant that she brought no writing-related knowledge or skills to ENGL 165. When she reflected on her lack of preparedness for college, she criticized her high school Honors English experience:

No, [English 165] was new material that I was learning. I didn’t know anything when I came here, like, at all. And, like, people say college is very different from high school. It was really different for me. Like, and I took Honors English in high school, but it—it didn’t do anything for me. I still struggled.

While Tamara certainly possessed the abilities to read and write, her claim that “I didn’t know anything” offered insight into her perception of the challenges through which she struggled as a first-semester, first-year student, suggesting that college as a whole presented her with a new experience she was unprepared to negotiate.

Although Tamara did not enter college with confidence in her writing skills or possess a support system that made resources accessible, Tamara was motivated, and her growth during ENGL 165 primarily seemed to be the result of her investment in her learning. ENGL 165 provided some foundation for a writing support system, as it was a space in which Tamara had the opportunity to participate in peer review as well as learn about the resources provided by the writing center. In addition, her instructor held conferences to discuss her ongoing work.12 Yet, Tamara ultimately made choices as a learner to attend instructor office hours and schedule her own visits to the writing center. Through her participation in ENGL 165, Tamara came to

12 Teacher conferences are a required element in the design of ENGL 165. By-law #9 states that instructors will “[h]old a face-to-face conference with students at least once a semester.”
understand the social nature of the writing process. She drew on the support of other writers beyond what was planned as part of the English 165 experience to obtain feedback on her work. Though Tamara's motivation and effort seemed to be a key factor in her growth as a writer, she acknowledged both the positive influence of her professor and the University Writing Center on several occasions. For example, in Interview I, she compared the availability and patience of her high school and ENGL 165 instructors:

When I got here, and I started going to like office hours, and just sit, like, going to office hours and talking to him—it helped me a lot, cuz I couldn’t do that back at school, like, I just couldn’t, because the teachers, like I said—they were just so frustrated cuz they were overwhelmed with lot students and stuff, so when I came here, I actually took the time to go to office hours and tell him—can you help me with this? I can’t understand this. I can’t pronounce this word right. And he just helped me with all of it.

College English instructors do not always realize the impact of their teaching, especially outside of the classroom. For Tamara, her learning outside of the classroom was as influential as the learning she experienced within:

And then, like, with speech, too. I struggled, so it’s just, like, when I got here, my professor, like, he helped me progress in my writing areas. Like, I’m strong at writing thesis statements now. I’m strong at just jotting down and brainstorming stuff. Like, I can just get it just like that. And like I said, I can just thank him for it. And the writing center, as well. They helped me a lot, too.

Tamara was grateful for the writing support she experienced beyond the FYC classroom, and recognized how it assisted her growth in a number of ways.
In reflecting on what she specifically learned in ENGL 165, Tamara named some foundational writing skills:

I learned how to start my paper off the correct way when I’m writing essays. I learned the different styles of formats when writing papers. I learned how to head my paper the right way when I’m writing a paper cuz I did not know how to do that. And, just, um, what else did I learn? Um, I learned those three things. And I learned how to write a good conclusion, cuz I could not write good conclusions—like, how to close a paper up? I had—and like, I didn’t know that you could use like your three main points that you were pointing out in the whole essay, and use those for the conclusion, I thought it was something else bigger than that. So I was just like, the conclusion is really the easiest part when finishing it up.

For Tamara, there was a “correct” way to start a paper, and style manuals such as MLA and APA offer helpful guidance on formatting-related matters such as headings. This categorical understanding of writing as right or wrong suggests Tamara left ENGL 165 with a knowledge of some low road (Perkins & Salomon, 1988; 1989; 1992; Salomon & Perkins, 1989) writing skills, but a lack of rhetorical awareness. Tamara underscored this notion when she gestured toward a five-paragraph essay structure in highlighting the importance of a “good conclusion” that summarizes the “three main points that you were pointing out in the whole essay.” The content and structure of conclusions vary depending on the writing situation, but Tamara suggested she did not possess an awareness of the need to be flexible in this way. Though she found the knowledge and skills she gained in FYC to be all new, and though she was encouraged by the support she experienced outside of class, she did not demonstrate through her participation in
this study that she developed the understanding needed to adapt to the range of writing situations she might encounter beyond ENGL 165.

**The Case of Zeke: ENGL 165 as Mostly Review**

During the focus groups, Zeke was skeptical about the relevance of his FYC experience, as he often did not see how the concepts discussed in ENGL 165 were benefitting him in negotiating writing across the curriculum:

I think it’s definitely useful, but I’m essentially getting some of the same information in the other classes when they ask for writing within that specific class. For example, writing in biology or history, like, they usually give us specific examples of how they want us to write. So while it is useful, it could be rendered obsolete at times because of the other classes.

He recognized the importance of writing in the disciplines, but at this point, the disciplinary writing practice that occurred in his first-year composition course was less meaningful than that which occurred within the discipline itself. Through this reflection, Zeke suggested that he understood the value of learning to write through participating in disciplinary communities (Wenger, 1998).

During Interview I, Zeke was again critical of ENGL 165 when reflecting on what material was review, suggesting that the course lacked substance:

Um, I think just like basic structure things and formatting, stuff like that. Um, it’s basically anything you learn in English during high school, uh, but most of it’s been pretty—like, honestly, we haven’t really learned a lot of new stuff. It’s more just, like, refining what we know, I think, is mainly what the class has been more about—helping better organize.
He saw much of his ENGL 165 experience as an intentional review of high school; in other words, the curriculum was purposefully designed to recap what students were taught in high school, and enhance the writing strategies they possessed upon beginning college. Moreover, Zeke suggested that all ENGL 165 students have the same experience, which is evidenced by his casual use of language such as “stuff” and “basic,” as well as his use of first and second-person in “we” and “you,” respectively. For Zeke, the writing knowledge gained during the high school English experience is fundamental and standard for all; the first-year college English class is a transitional stepping stone. And yet, Tamara’s experience negates Zeke’s assumption that all students experience the same level of review in ENGL 165. Nevertheless, Zeke described ENGL 165 as intending to “organize” his writing knowledge—a statement that draws attention to his self-awareness as a learner, who realizes the importance of naming what he knows for the purpose of building on it. His preparation for college-level writing enabled him to look across the disciplines when reflecting on the specific knowledge and skills he gained in ENGL 165:

Um, I would say learning how to write in different disciplines. I think that’s one of the biggest parts we’ve talked about in class. Um, just having to write to different audiences, but, well, I’ve learned how to write to different audiences but when it concerns a whole nother genre, I think that’s, that’s nothing I’ve ever really touched on before in my academic career. Um, one other thing I hadn’t really learned was different formatting. Um, It was basically strictly MLA throughout high school so being able to, like, dabble in APA a little bit of Chicago, um, that’s definitely been helpful, considering I’m a history major, and literally all my papers will be in Chicago.

Like Tamara, Zeke acknowledged the value of learning new formats for writing. Though, unlike Tamara, Zeke did not seem intimidated by writing, as he suggests he entered the course with
some pre-existing awareness of audience. Although Zeke did not use the language of “rhetorical situation,” his discussion here reflects an awareness of different elements within writing that must be negotiated for producing a text—an awareness Tamara did not demonstrate. Beyond this, Zeke suggested that audience is a foundational concept for understanding genre. In doing so, he communicated his awareness that genres vary across the disciplines based on their conventions and needs. He further noted that the specific formats of APA and Chicago are different from MLA, and would support him in his coursework after ENGL 165. Through his naming of what he learned in ENGL 165, we are given a glimpse of genre and rhetorical situation functioning as threshold concepts, supporting Zeke in seeing beyond ENGL 165. But this does not seem to be the result of his ENGL 165 experience alone. Because of the prior knowledge Zeke entered first-year composition with, he had a strong foundation from which he might build his writing-related knowledge and skills.

**Genre for Transfer**

In the cases of Tamara and Zeke, we are able to see the immediate application of their learning from their fall of 2019 ENGL 165 course to other writing spaces during that same semester. For purposes of this discussion, I draw on Moore’s (2012) term “concurrent transfer,” which Yancey et al. (2019) define as a learner’s transfer and application of writing-related knowledge and skills to other sites while the FYC course is in progress. As Tamara and Zeke reflected on these other sites of academic writing they experienced while taking FYC, they both show evidence of performing new writing capabilities based on the concept of genre, but not rhetorical situation.
Tamara’s Concurrent Transfer: The Pursuit of Genre Knowledge

In describing her growth in ENGL 165, Tamara suggested that she developed confidence from what she learned in the course, stating, “now I can just write essays—just knock them out [waves hand] like that.” She felt the material was supporting her in starting and finishing writing assignments in her coursework beyond ENGL 165, as she “just “knock[ed] them out.” Though, she also exhibited a limited understanding of genre here, as she used the term “essay” to discuss the various forms of writing invitations she encountered across the curriculum.

Tamara’s confidence as a writer increased as a result of what she learned in ENGL 165 during the fall of 2019, and she began to utilize her new writing-related knowledge and skills that same semester. Though, her limited understanding of genre became particularly evident when she reflected on her final exam for her fall of 2019 Kinesiology (KINS 205) class, as she again referenced the five-paragraph essay structure:

My final exam for my kins class—we had to write a three-to-five-page paper about what we wanted to be and why we chose the class, and what I took from English 165, was just, like, organization, how the paper should be written, and I had the introduction, the three body paragraph, and the conclusion, and that’s how I summed it up. And then, each paragraph would be—the one, like—I know I chose three different things that like I wanted to do, if I did decide to do it, so whichever item I chose, that one paragraph was for it, then the next paragraph was for it, then the third paragraph was for it, then I summed it all up together.
ENGL 165 instructors are not required to teach the five-paragraph essay; however, they are not discouraged from doing so either. Through her detailed explanation of her KINS 205 exam, Tamara indicated that she learned the five-paragraph essay structure in ENGL 165. Such thesis-driven writing is often critiqued as lacking flexibility, and as poor modeling of real genres and writing in the disciplines (Clark & Hernandez, 2011; Lynch, 2011). Further, such a structure can be limiting to a writer, but for Tamara, learning to compose within this structure demystified writing and made it less intimidating for her. Tamara’s writing process for composing her kinesiology exam utilized the foundational writing skills she learned in ENGL 165, suggesting she experienced low road transfer (Perkins & Salomon, 1988; 1989; 1992; Salomon & Perkins, 1989). She was conscious of the assignment prompt and worked to respond to it directly, via a thesis-driven essay supported by three main points with corresponding body paragraphs. This is the extent to which she negotiated the writing situation, however, as her explanation does not demonstrate that she considered either a disciplinary audience or purpose in this task, or the nuances of the genre in which she was composing. She saw this writing task as a high-stakes assignment and course requirement.

After completing a draft of her final exam, Tamara went to the writing center for feedback. She was pleased with the positive response from the consultants there, and then the strong final grade:

I went to the Writing Center. They was like, [Tamara], why are you in here? They was like, your paper is great. And I was like, are you sure? They was like, yes, you have no mistakes, you have a strong thesis statement, and you wrote a great persuasive essay. And

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13 ENGL by-law #7 states that course instructors will “Design writing assignments for a range of different academic purposes and audiences.”
I was just like, okay, well, maybe I did pay attention in class, and maybe I did—maybe I am doing something cuz I thought I was doing it wrong, and they was like “no, it’s great.” And I had got a 97 on it for my final exam.

At this point for Tamara, the five-paragraph essay began to function as a genre suitable for many writing situations across the curriculum. Whence she previously felt she “didn’t have the chance to actually learn how to become a strong writer,” the five-paragraph essay seemed to empower her, making her feel as though she had a mode through which she could communicate on an academic level. Tamara’s approach to writing was thus been transformed. This is, of course, not the type of transformation Meyer and Land (2006) describe when characterizing threshold concepts: “a transfiguration of identity and adoption of an extended or elaborated discourse” (p. 21). Such transformation would indicate that Tamara realized the social and rhetorical nature of genre (Miller, 1984; Wardle, 2009). Though she had grown to utilize the writing resources available to her outside of class, she still placed much emphasis on the evaluation of her work—in this case, from both the writing center and the course instructor. Nevertheless, Tamara’s growth in agency positioned her to be productive and enthusiastic about her work, and she is likely to continue to seek out support across her coursework and beyond, which will have an impact on her development as a writer.

Zeke’s Concurrent Transfer: Genre as Troublesome Knowledge

Like the case of Tamara, the case of Zeke showed evidence of concurrent transfer. He used skills and knowledge learned in ENGL 165 during the same semester he took the course, but not to the same extent, and not as enthusiastically as Tamara. When reflecting on the new material he learned in the course, Zeke highlighted learning to write in different disciplines. He also indicated that learning Chicago Style was meaningful for him. Of course, it was also
relevant to his individual goals. His specific statement on this was shared earlier in this chapter when showing the contrast in prior knowledge across the cases of Tamara and Zeke, but because of its relevance to the discussion of Zeke’s concurrent transfer, it is included again below:

Um, I would say learning how to write in different disciplines. I think that’s one of the biggest parts we’ve talked about in class. Um, just having to write to different audiences, but, well, I’ve learned how to write to different audiences but when it concerns a whole nother genre, I think that’s, that’s nothing I’ve ever really touched on before in my academic career. Um, one other thing I hadn’t really learned was different formatting. Um, it was basically strictly MLA throughout high school so being able to, like, dabble in APA, a little bit of Chicago—that’s definitely been helpful, considering I’m a history major, and literally all my papers will be in Chicago.

Though Zeke was describing new learning, he maintained a self-assured tone as he reflected on his “academic career.” He learned MLA in high school, and recognized how such systems inform the appearance of writing. Through this reflection on his prior knowledge, Zeke ‘reached forward’ and considered the future, repeated practice he will have as a history major utilizing Chicago Style. Yet, his focus on the importance of Chicago Style reinforces the phenomenon in which learners exhibit low road transfer through their gravitation toward concrete skills. Because documentation styles offer rules and guides for how to use them, both Zeke and Tamara found comfort in learning this material. The content from one history course to the next will be similar, and the learner can pick up documentation rules and put them down as needed.

Though Zeke highlighted learning Chicago style as particularly “helpful,” when he further described how he applied this new knowledge outside of ENGL 165, his tone shifted:
Um, I definitely found it helpful in my other classes. Particularly history because we had a very—one of our biggest assignments was a five to seven page paper on our own research topic, so, um, being able to kinda learn Chicago beforehand kinda helped. I was able to use some of the material provided in class to kinda learn Chicago a bit better—be able to understand a bit more. Especially when it comes to endnotes and its system of citations and references are very different from MLA, which is what I've exclusively worked with before. So, I think that, that is the biggest part was, uh, doing. I mean, I did okay on that paper, but I think I would have done a lot worse had it not been for what 165 has been able to kinda provide me so far this year.

When discussing other topics, Zeke was typically confident and assertive, but here, as he reflected on the understandings he gained from ENGL 165, his language was tempered through the repeated use of “kinda.” This reflection demonstrates that Zeke recognized he still had more to learn. This was suggested by his overall diffidence and awareness that his submission for this HIST 151 project was not as strong as it could have been. And again, Zeke exhibited near transfer as he described the significance of Chicago Style to his learning.

When reflecting on his most significant takeaways from ENGL 165, Zeke equated “discipline” and “genre,” as the course complicated his understanding of audience through its discussions of disciplinary writing. According to Zeke, he was familiar with the concept of audience before first-year composition, but a new awareness of disciplinary writing conventions led him to realize that material should not only appear differently as he encounters it across the curriculum—he should also expect to negotiate writing differently as he moves from one disciplinary course to the next. This was affirmed when he reflected on how this learning had been useful, and identified the interplay between reading and writing:
I think just being able to expand my knowledge of, like, different approaches to writing, and different styles of writing. It’s helped me understand other pieces I’ve had to read for other classes, actually. Being able to kind of hone in on what a different—how different genres try to convey things differently. So it’s definitely helped in that way. It’s helped across all my classes, for the most part.

Here, Zeke further unfolded his definition of genre, as he pointed to the different purposes varying genres serve, but he described this term through an awareness of disciplinary inquiry and research. He did not consider how genre informs the structure of a text; rather, he ultimately relied on documentation styles and instructor rubrics to offer this guidance. Zeke’s imperfect definition highlighted the threshold concept of genre as troublesome (Meyer & Land, 2006) for him, and indicates that Zeke seemed to be in a liminal space where he was oscillating between old and new learning (Heading & Loughlin, 2017).

This chapter is not intended to be an analysis of who learned more, but it does again point to the significance of prior knowledge and a student’s positionality as a learner. It is possible that Zeke could have developed new understandings in ENGL 165 and thus seen more value in what the course offered, but he entered the course with foundational knowledge that allowed him to accomplish assignments and tasks satisfactorily and with confidence. Like Tamara, Zeke experienced teacher conferences and was introduced to the writing center in ENGL 165, but unlike Tamara, he did not choose to utilize these resources. Zeke also did not see the transferable value of the course to the extent Tamara did. As was described in his participant profile, Zeke is intentional in how he approaches college. This intentionality is reflected in his description of

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14 Miller-Cochran, Stamper, and Cochran (2019), authors of the ENGL 165 required course text, define academic disciplines as “areas of teaching, research, and inquiry that academics pursue” (p. 7).
what he used from ENGL 165, as he primarily focused on what he needed and what he felt would be explicitly useful beyond the course.

**The Semester after ENGL 165**

**The Case of Tamara: CTZN 110 in Early Spring**

The semester following ENGL 165, Tamara participated in Citizen (CTZN) 110—a complementary course to ENGL 165, designed to round out a student’s first-year experience at Longwood University. While both courses are designed to support students in the development of college readiness skills, CTZN 110 maintains a speaking-infused approach, unlike the writing-infused approach of FYC. Tamara reflected on how ENGL 165 was helpful in supporting the work she was doing as a student enrolled in CTZN 110:

> [Citizen 110] is very different from my English 165 class because we talk about sports and politics and history behind sports, but [English 165] did help me, and I know we have papers that we have to write in there, so I can just, like, use techniques that my professor taught me last semester, and put it into papers that we have to write for this class . . . like pulling out important things. Because, like, and the key points, like, the main points—did not know how to do that. And he would tell me, look for the things that really mean something. So, I’ll pull from what I have in the paper, like the thesis statement or a prompt? Pull the most important things out that needs to be written about.

Tamara saw a difference in content between CTZN 110 and ENGL 165, but she also recognized that she would still participate in writing even though her FYC course had concluded. Her description of “techniques” indicated that in addition to the writing strategies she gained in

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15 These skills have been defined by Longwood University as essential to the Foundations level of the Civitae Core Curriculum, and thus a student’s success in their vertical ascent through their academic program (“Foundation Level,” 2018).
ENGL 165, the reading strategies were also helpful, as they supported her in interpreting the texts she drew on as support in her writing. Here, Tamara’s awareness highlighted her potential to reach forward and experience low road transfer (Perkins & Salomon, 1988; 1989; 1992; Salomon & Perkins, 1989). Her reflection did not, however, indicate that the threshold concepts of rhetorical situation or genre influenced her negotiation of CTZN 110 tasks.

The instructor of this course had invited students to watch a documentary and then answer a series of questions about it in the form of a short-response paper. Tamara’s submission, highlighted in Figure 5, revealed her awareness of the need to develop writing that has a purpose, which the first sentence intended to establish. Further, in the development of the sample, Tamara made assertions, offered evidence to support her claims, and then reflected on the connections she was hoping to make.

Figure 5

*Tamara’s Writing Sample from CTZN 110*

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16 This CTZN 110 assignment was referenced in chapter four when exploring Tamara’s understanding of audience.
Additional detail and explanation, as well as some formatting choices such as breaking the text into two paragraphs and indenting the first line of each could strengthen this writing, but nevertheless, this sample reflects the efforts of a writer who aimed to be persuasive. Though, when asked about her approach to completing the assignment, she became so enthusiastic about the content, Tamara did not describe her writing choices at all:

We had, like, watched—like, it—I watched an interview from him, actually. I could see the emotion and stuff in his eyes. And it was, like, very devastating just to know, like, how things were back then, and like, all he wanted to do was play basketball, and he got criticized because of his color . . . he didn’t let those people get him down, and he just kept playing—he just kept playing basketball, and I know, overall, like in history, he’s, like, one of the first people—He only played for 13 years. . . he’s still alive today. I think he’s, like, 85. He’s the only athlete in history to bring home 13 championships. And he played for the Boston Celtics.

Tamara’s reflection on her writing again highlighted the difference in content between ENGL 165 and CTZN 110—a difference that has been known to inhibit students from transferring their writing-related knowledge and skills from English composition classes to their other coursework (McCarthy, 1987). When questioned further about whether any writing strategies or particular coursework supported her in completing the assignment, she responded, “I don’t think so,” and instead discussed the newness of the topic of CTZN 110. Although Tamara was being asked questions about her writerly choices, this inquiry was in regard to a non-writing intensive class. Her focus, in effect, remained on the content of the course and the topic of the writing, and excluded reflection on the negotiation of other rhetorical elements such as audience and purpose (McCarthy, 1987). Moreover, Tamara did not comment on the genre in which she was asked to
write or any expectations in terms of length or source usage. Though, she saw the professor as “very clear” in her instructions: “She talked about it in class, and then she was just, like, refer back to the syllabus, and just look over it. . . She wanted our own personal opinion of what we felt about it.”

The Case of Zeke: FINA 250 in Early Spring

The semester following ENGL 165, Zeke participated in Personal Finance (FINA) 250. He was a history major, but he had an interest in economics and completed an Advanced Placement (AP) micromomics class in high school. In describing the type of work he engaged in for FINA 250, he referenced his familiarity with the conventions of the discipline:

I’m not exactly a stranger to these types of, like, questions and work. Um, it was just different topics and different equations than what I’ve used in the past. So, the structure of it was not alien to me. It was just the method of completing it that was alien.

Zeke saw the similarity in expectations between his high school and college courses, and sought to apply the new methods he was learning in FINA 250 to complete his work. He explained that in-class “practice problems” the instructor invited the class to negotiate provided helpful models—a form of genre study—for thinking through take-home assignments. A prompt\textsuperscript{17} for one of these tasks asked students to answer a series of questions that were developed around a hypothetical financial scenario created by the instructor, and highlighted in Figure 6.

\textsuperscript{17} This FINA 250 writing task was referenced in chapter four while exploring Zeke’s understanding of audience. The assignment prompted students to answer a series of questions in response to a hypothetical financial scenario that was developed by the instructor.
Figure 6

Writing Assignment from Zeke’s FINA 250

Writing Assignment #1

Rudabei, 34, and Donovan, 31, want to buy their first home. Their current combined net income is $65,000, and they have two auto loans totaling $32,000. They have saved approximately $12,000 for the purchase of their home and have total assets worth $55,000, which are mostly savings for retirement. Donovan has always been cautious about spending large amount of money, but Rudabei really likes the idea of owning their own home. They do not have a budget, but they do keep track of their expenses, which amounts to $55,000 last year, including taxes. They pay off all credit card bills on a monthly basis and do not have any other debt or loans outstanding. Other than that, they do not spend a great deal of time tracking their finances.

1. What financial statements should Rudabei and Donovan prepare to begin realizing their home purchase goal? What records should they use to compile these statements?

2. Calculate their net worth and income available for savings and investment. How does their net worth compare to that of other individuals younger than 35?

Zeke relied on not only the assignment description, but also the rubric and class discussion “to figure out what exactly [the instructor] was asking for.” As described in chapter four, Zeke’s process for accomplishing this task was systematic:

I wrote down each of the numbers that were given to us and the question and titled them, uh, so I would—could break it apart from the text, so I’d be able to kinda think about it more clearly. Uh, then I looked at each of the questions, uh, looked at what it was asking for, then went back into my notes, looked at the equations or the, uh, just how to set-up the question and do the math. And then once I got all that information, I would plug in
the numbers, um, and then write out what equation or what method of thought I used to arrive to my, um, answer, and just wrote it out step-by-step.

Because of the prior knowledge Zeke had gained from high school, he recognized the content—the material and the associated equations—differed from previous practice, but the structure for completing the assignment was familiar. His reflection gestured toward his awareness that the same or similar genres can be used across areas of study, seeing them as flexible documents that are social and negotiable (Bawarshi, 2003; Miller, 1984). As such, Zeke’s submission for this assignment—an excerpt from which is shared in Figure 7—reflected his awareness of disciplinary genre conventions.

**Figure 7**

*Zeke’s Writing Sample from FINA 250*

2. **Calculate** their net worth and income available for savings and investment. How does their net worth compare to that of other individuals younger than 35?

To find their net worth you must use the specific formula: Net worth = Assets - Liability. By taking their total assets of $55,000 and subtracting their total liabilities of $32,000 that calculates their net worth to $23,000. Next to find the income available for saving you must use this formula: Income available for savings = Net income – expenses. Their income available for saving is $10,000 which you get by subtracting their net income of $65,000 by their expenses of $55,000. For the question concerning how this couple stacks against other people under 35 years of age their net worth is lower than the national average by about $12,000 as the national average is $35,000 based upon the research completed (see citation below).
Zeke noted that the instructor had encouraged students to “talk through the steps,” and indeed, this sample reflects the disciplinary need to, at times, explain in writing how a mathematical procedure was followed. But ultimately, Zeke’s writing choices for completing the assignment were not rhetorically motivated; rather, he wrote in accordance with what he felt the instructor desired, as discussed in chapter four.

The End of Spring, and Foreseeing the Longevity of ENGL 165

During Interview III, participants were asked about what they remembered learning in ENGL 165. This was a follow-up to a similar question asked six months earlier in Interview I, when participants were asked to reflect on the new knowledge and skills they gained in ENGL 165. Table 11 situates both questions from Interviews I and III next to each other to show the shift in participant responses over the six month period. Tamara’s responses are identified first, and Zeke’s responses are identified second.

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18 This question and the participant responses to it were shared earlier in this chapter in discussing how participants saw their learning in ENGL 165 as new or review.
19 Here, I adapt Yin’s (2017) recommendation to utilize word tables for displaying data according to specific categories during cross-case analysis.
Table 11

Comparison of Initial and Concluding Focal Case Articulations of Knowledge and Skills Gained in ENGL 165

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Interview I</th>
<th>Interview III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What new things did you learn that you had not learned before?</td>
<td>What do you remember learning about in ENGL 165?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tamara</strong></td>
<td>I learned how to start my paper off the correct way when I’m writing essays. I learned the different styles of formats when writing papers. I learned how to head my paper the right way when I’m writing a paper cuz I did not know how to do that. And, just, um, what else did I learn? Um, I learned those three things. And I learned how to write a good conclusion, cuz I could not write good conclusions—like, how to close a paper up? I had—and like, I didn’t know that you could use like your three main points that you were pointing out in the whole essay, and use those for the conclusion, I thought it was something else bigger than that. So I was just like, the conclusion is really the easiest part when finishing it up.</td>
<td>Um, I remember, like, how to write a paper the correct way because I remember telling you when I was in high school, we didn’t have, like, that, like, um, mandatory, like, how to write a paper. We were just told just to write a paper. Like to actually head the paper the correct way, like, how to, um, you know, do the different APA, MLA styles for the paper, and how to, like, write a paper the correct way, like, come up with a good thesis statement and stuff, because at first, we didn’t have that—I couldn’t do that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zeke</strong></td>
<td>Um, I would say learning how to write in different disciplines. I think that’s one of the biggest parts we’ve talked about in class. Um, just having to write to different audiences, but, well, I’ve learned how to write to different audiences but when it concerns a whole other genre, I think that’s, that’s nothing I've ever really touched on before in my academic career. Um, one other thing I hadn’t really learned was different formatting. Um, It was basically strictly MLA throughout high school so being able to, like, dabble in APA a little bit of Chicago, um, that’s definitely been helpful, considering I’m a history major, and literally all my papers will be in Chicago.</td>
<td>I know a lot of it was focused on just writing towards the college curriculum about how it’s different from what we learned before. Focusing more on—instead of one just style of writing—having to adapt to multiple different styles of writing depending on who your audience, or in this case, like, who your professor was based on, like, the discipline you were writing in. I think that was the biggest take away from that class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Interview III, Tamara maintained that her high school experience did not prepare her for college-level writing, as she felt she was given writing assignments to complete but was not taught how to complete them (Applebee, 2011). She also again emphasized that ENGL 165 taught her the “correct way” to write. Though, her notion of the correct paper continued to rely on foundational writing strategies and systems such as MLA and APA that offer prescribed rules for documentation and formatting. And though she was specific in naming the knowledge she gained from the course, her view of the course was somewhat limited compared to Zeke’s. Like Tamara, his Interview III response also echoed his thoughts from Interview I, but his reflections identified the broader implications of ENGL 165 across the curriculum. Zeke again highlighted the importance of audience awareness, but in Interview III, he did not identify genre as influencing his writing choices; rather, he saw disciplinary awareness as key in the negotiation of a writing situation.

Beyond recalling what they learned in ENGL 165, Tamara and Zeke were prompted to consider further what they had used from their fall 2019 FYC course in their spring 2020 coursework. Table 12 highlights their responses, which are ultimately extensions of their initial Interview III responses above.
Table 12

Focal Case Articulations of Useful Knowledge and Skills from ENGL 165

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>How have you used what you learned in ENGL 165 during this spring semester?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tamara</td>
<td>I have used it a lot because being that, um, most of my papers are APA format, so by me learning, like, cuz the class was basically based off of AP—I think it was APA format—or, or was it MLA? I don’t know. I know it was both. I learned, like, the format of the paper, like, I—and then, [my professor] showed me Purdue OWL, too, so, like, that’s like, a good thing. Like, I take all of that with writing my criminology paper—it’s in APA style, so from what he taught me, I’m using that now. Like, coming up with the thesis statement and stuff, like pulling it out, and actually getting to the main point of what I want, and, not just putting just random stuff down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeke</td>
<td>Um, during the spring semester, it definitely has helped me, just kind of compartmentalize each, uh, different, like, division, or, not division, but, like, section of learning, like, how I write for my History class as opposed to my Citizen class or my Personal Finance class. It’s all kind of different—I don’t write the same way for each of ‘em. That’s definitely been like the biggest thing I’ve used since taking 165.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here, Tamara continued to describe ENGL 165 as useful. She added that she found Purdue OWL\textsuperscript{20} to be a helpful resource that she gained knowledge of during the course. She also gestured toward an understanding of purpose by identifying the significance of “getting to the main point of what [she] want[ed].” Though, she did this in the context of describing thesis-driven writing, underscoring her reliance on the five-paragraph essay, and not rhetorical awareness. Additionally, she did not cite genre as influential or useful.

Zeke’s position on ENGL 165 slightly shifted, however. Where he previously argued that the course was mostly review, here he specified that the course “helped” him. In the spring semester, he had the opportunity to draw on what he previously learned in FYC, and as a result,

\textsuperscript{20} Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab
he began to adapt some skills and knowledge gained from the course in new disciplinary contexts. Though Zeke did not use the exact language of “rhetorical situation,” it is apparent that he possessed rhetorical awareness, as his responses indicate that he was aware of the different demands of each new writing situation and his need to adapt to them (Lettner-Rust, 2010). This complicates the case of Zeke, as it suggests that he gained rhetorical awareness through learning about writing across the disciplines. And yet, his writing sample from his spring 2020 FINA 250 class indicated that he did not draw on his rhetorical awareness to complete the assignment—he instead considered the disciplinary genre conventions to negotiate the writing situation, and ultimately determined his success based upon his instructors’ expectations (see chapter four). With regard to genre as a threshold concept, this affirms his position in a liminal space (Meyer & Land, 2006), where he was transitioning from simply knowing and recalling the concept when it seemed relevant, to acquiring and applying it as a default part of his writing process.

Participant Reflections on Genre and Rhetorical Situation

Up until Interview III, I had not asked participants explicitly about rhetorical situation or genre, as I did not want my own language use to influence the vocabulary they chose to draw on to describe their learning. In the case of Tamara, she did not mention either phrase, and though she demonstrated some audience awareness, the evidence suggests that her awareness of genre was lacking. In contrast, Zeke had used the term “genre” twice, and his case demonstrates his genre awareness through the writing samples he shared and his reflections on producing them. In addition, though he never utilized the phrase “rhetorical situation,” he showed that he possessed rhetorical awareness. When Tamara and Zeke were finally asked explicitly about their recollection and use of genre and rhetorical situation, their responses differed in some ways, but were similar in others.
Genre

Initially, Tamara was not sure of the meaning of genre, and asked for a definition of it. In response, I shared with her that genre is, simply put, the different forms in which we compose and expectations associated with those forms. To form this summary, I drew on the definition of genre that was developed for ENGL 165 instructional design purposes:

Put broadly, genre refers to a category of writing that has a particular form, style, or content guiding the writer. In other words, it is a set of expectations and practices from a community or audience that influences writers to engage in a particular form of writing. For example, a cover letter would be a genre of letter that one attaches to a résumé, and which contains particular uses of language and expected content. As we discuss academic disciplines in FYC, we must make students aware that genres exist and have conventions, remind them that each field has multiple genres, and teach them to decipher those expectations or to ask the right questions about those genres. (Magill, 2018)

Tamara explained that she did not remember learning about such a concept at any point in ENGL 165. She did note, however, that she had composed emails. Zeke’s reflection was more nuanced, however. He said he recalled learning about genre, noting that it pertained to different fields of study: “not necessarily a genre like non-fiction or fictional. There most [sic] just focused toward educational-based, like, history, math, science—stuff like that.” He added that he had used the concept of genre in his spring coursework:

Writing for my history class, like I said before, [is] very different for how I would write for my personal finance class. For history, I have to tie in more context and bring in more information besides what I’m just writing about, but for personal finance—it’s very
narrow, to the point, question, answer, method. It’s definitely helped me, kind of, narrow my focus.

Here, Zeke described how the concept of genre helped him organize his knowledge and approach to negotiating writing situations. This statement echoes his reflection from six months earlier, during Interview I, when he positioned ENGL 165 as “helping better organize” the writing knowledge and skills he gained in high school. And now, Zeke’s conscious application of genre beyond ENGL 165 points to the possibility that he has achieved high road transfer (Perkins & Salomon, 1988; 1989; 1992; Salomon & Perkins, 1989). He added that, at times during the spring 2020 semester, he revisited his notes from ENGL 165 to interpret the rubric for his other classes; thus, he was reconstructing his learning from ENGL 165 and adapting it to new writing contexts (Nowacek, 2019; Wardle, 2012; Whicker & Stinson, 2020).

Rhetorical Situation

Tamara demonstrated that she was familiar with the concept of rhetorical situation, defining it as “strategies,” but did not recall learning about it in ENGL 165. This statement conflicted with her previous remarks that her high school experience did not prepare her for college-level writing, though it is possible she developed this understanding of rhetorical situation from a context other than an English class. Then, similar to her response when asked about her understandings of genre, she asked for a definition of rhetorical situation. I acknowledged that this concept involves “strategy,” but added that audience, purpose, and context are elements that writers realize and negotiate within any writing situation. To form this summary, I drew on the definition of rhetorical situation that was developed for ENGL 165 instructional design purposes:
Rhetorical situation is a more complex way of representing communication. Rather than representing communication as operating as a one-way sender-receiver channel or even as a two-way channel for a dialogue, the concept of rhetorical situation takes into consideration the communicator as having a set of options/tools/contexts with which they approach a message crafted to reach an audience within a context(s).

Rhetorical situation as a concept to teach in FYC is about writer, audience, message, and context. Teaching this concept helps students understand that the more they know about audience, the topic, and the context, the better received the message will be. It also allows students to see that the elements that constitute RS change and that the more successful communicator must adapt and keep these elements in balance.

Furthermore, the rhetorical situation is a heuristic rather than a rule or algorithm for good writing. (Lettner-Rust, 2018)

In response, Tamara again claimed that she still did not remember learning about it in ENGL 165, but was certain she had utilized the concept in her spring 2020 coursework:

About, like the audience, and? Um, I’ve used it a lot, like, when we’re writing papers, they were mainly towards your audience and stuff. So, it was mainly like that, and then, like, when I, and I could, like reference it, to like, a class I’m taking now? Like, my Public Speaking class—all my speeches and stuff that I have to write, like, refers back to the audience and stuff, so I can say it’s—it’s been useful a lot. . . and, not just writing random stuff. Just getting right there and letting people know, like, the purpose of the paper, or [if] I was writing a persuasive essay or something like that.

Tamara’s explanation of how she utilized the concept of rhetorical situation in her learning was simple and clear. Her language use echoed that which was included in the definition shared
during the interview, but she also further highlighted the ubiquitous nature of audience and purpose, having “used [them] a lot” in both written and oral contexts across the curriculum. Though Tamara did not have the language to explain rhetorical situation in a detailed way, the definition provided in that moment seemed to support her in articulating an awareness of context that she already possessed.

Like Tamara, Zeke struggled to recall learning about rhetorical situation in ENGL 165. The title of the concept was familiar to him, but in reflecting on its meaning, he circled back to the concept of genre:

Um, I remember it as a topic, but not necessarily the details of it... I believe it had something to do with, um, based on what you were writing about. Like, situations differ, um, like with different genres. It all kind of ties in together, if I remember correctly.

Throughout his case, Zeke at times demonstrated his rhetorical awareness even though he did not explicitly name rhetorical constituents such as “audience” or “purpose” along the way. In his reflection above, for example, he considered how both the topic and the context should affect a writer’s decisions. Yet, he associated this negotiation of writerly choices with the shift in form, or genre, a text may take as a result of the content.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented findings from a cross-case analysis of two focal cases: Tamara and Zeke. First, I shared their detailed participant profiles to offer context regarding the prior experiences and knowledge both participants brought to the Longwood classroom and community. I then discussed the contrast in their perceptions of their first-year composition course, ENGL 165. Next, I explored the role of genre for both cases in facilitating transfer during the same semester they took ENGL 165. After presenting these findings, I discussed the focal
case writing samples in relation to the reflections offered during the interviews to consider the extent to which writing-related transfer occurred during the semester immediately following ENGL 165. This led to the final sections of this chapter in which I explored Tamara and Zeke’s responses to specific questions about genre and rhetorical situation.
CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In the previous two chapters, I presented cross-case analyses of the experiences of five student participants, from their fall 2019 ENGL 165 to their spring 2020 courses. These findings offered insight into if students used the threshold concepts of genre and rhetorical situation to transfer their writing-related knowledge and skills from their first-year composition course as they negotiated invitations to write across the curriculum. In this final chapter, I discuss the findings and their implications for the teaching and learning context of Longwood University. In doing so, I also include ENGL 165 faculty reflections on the findings, which further contextualize my discussion of both the implications and my recommendations for the first-year writing program at Longwood University, its Civitae Core Curriculum, and relevant stakeholders. After presenting my recommendations as a result of this study, I conclude by offering suggestions for future research at Longwood University and for the field of writing studies.

Key Findings and Implications

Moore and Bass (2017) describe “critical sites of impact” as programmatic and curricular sites that consist of various stakeholders, including administrators, faculty decision makers, and others who are committed to preparing students for success beyond the university (pp. 1-2). With so many eyes on FYC at Longwood—the Office of Institutional Assessment, the Civitae Core Curriculum Committee, the Department of English and Modern Languages, the Composition Committee, and the Assistant Writing Coordinator—ENGL 165 certainly qualifies as a critical site of impact. As such, the findings and implications discussed in this section offer insight into
the work that has already been done to develop ENGL 165, as well as the conversations we might continue in the future.

**The Role of the Required Text**

The first important finding in this study revealed that the concepts of “language,” “structure,” and “reference” (LSR) as a framework for discussing disciplinary conventions—an emphasis area of the ENGL 165 required course text, and the first course outcome\(^{21}\)—seemed to have a greater impact on student learning than the threshold concepts of genre and rhetorical situation. Thus, participant understandings of LSR were prominent in the data. While intended to be a flexible framework for communicating about writing across the disciplines, the concrete nature of the LSR vocabulary promoted low road transfer of writing-related knowledge and skills—audience awareness, for example—developed in ENGL 165. Reiff (2015) noted a major finding of Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak’s (2014) study: “[W]hen students are given the language and vocabulary to talk about and conceptualize writing, they are better able to abstract and apply this knowledge in other contexts” (p. 207). The LSR framework supported participants in talking about and doing writing in different contexts, but they did not “abstract” their knowledge and skills from ENGL 165 to their other coursework. Only Zeke seemed to “conceptualize” genre in a way that allowed him to negotiate writing.

**Audience, Language, and Reference Awareness Across the Disciplines**

We also learned from this study that neither genre, nor rhetorical situation had a strong influence on the participants’ approach to negotiating writing invitations; they did possess

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\(^{21}\) As defined in chapter three, the first outcome for ENGL 165 states that upon completion of the course, students will “Identify and explain the significance of language, structure, and reference among at least 3 of these 4 academic disciplines: humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and applied fields.”
audience awareness, but this was limited to seeing the instructor as an evaluator. In addition, though most participants possessed an awareness of disciplinary language conventions, when presented with the opportunity to apply specific language practices in disciplinary contexts, students returned to their frame of audience awareness—instructor as audience—rather than drawing on their disciplinary knowledge. Nowacek (2011) recommends that FYC curricula should reflect interdisciplinarity and teach the rhetorical domains of disciplines. The LSR framework presented in the first outcome of the ENGL 165 course coupled with the positioning of rhetorical situation and genre in ENGL 165 by-law #2 aims to support such interdisciplinarity; however, Clark and Hernandez (2011) offer additional insight on this finding, as they argue that teaching disciplinary genres apart from their discipline can cause students to focus more on structural rather than rhetorical features of writing. This notion might be extended to better understand why participants continue to write to communicate to the instructor rather than write to enter a conversation with a field. Likewise, we might also consider Clark and Hernandez (2011) when revisiting another finding in this study: while students possessed at least some awareness of how reference varies across the disciplines, they usually tied this awareness to a specific citation style that defined rules for what they were doing, instead of seeing citation manuals as tools for integrating sources for support, for giving credit to others for their work, or for contributing to the scholarly conversation.

Cultivating student understanding of rhetorical features of writing in the disciplines is challenging in FYC, and more specifically, in ENGL 165, where learners are exploring language and reference conventions apart from the true disciplinary context. Like Clark and Hernandez

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22 The second by-law for ENGL 165 states that faculty will “Teach the concepts of genre, rhetorical situation, and transfer as part of the disciplinary knowledge of writing for the university.”
(2011), Wardle (2009) also takes up a discussion of decontextualization, as she cautions against teaching “mutt genres,” or genres that do not demand students to create meaningful texts that respond to authentic rhetorical situations. By inviting students to write using mutt genres, we are teaching them “decontextualized ‘skills,’” which may inhibit learners from recognizing opportunities to apply their skills in future writing situations (p. 770). Through this lens, ENGL 165 might be viewed as a type of “mutt context,” where disciplinary conventions are being taught outside of the communities to which students belong.

Following the data collection and analysis phases of this study, I invited ENGL 165 faculty to consider and discuss the findings via a virtual focus group. We viewed this as a professional learning opportunity, and reflected on how the results aligned and intersected with their own experiences as instructors of the course. Through this event, we expressed our shared commitment to teaching for transfer, and faculty considered their use of low- and high-stakes reflective activities that worked toward this goal. In considering how students negotiated language and reference awareness, there was a general consensus that the course goals make it “relevant to other disciplines.” But relevancy and authenticity are not synonymous. The findings suggest that we might consider strategies for contextualizing conversations and writing about disciplinary conventions that cultivate flexibility across the disciplines.

The Significance of Prior Knowledge

In the case of Zeke, previous learning from high school seemed to position him well for reaching high road transfer. But not all students bring the same prior knowledge to their university coursework, as was seen in the case of Tamara. In considering this finding with ENGL 165 faculty, one instructor shared that she intentionally encouraged students to draw on their prior knowledge, asking them to “loop back” to both previous and current experiences. In
response to this comment, others acknowledged that transfer doesn't have to be between ENGL 165 and disciplinary classes but can also occur within the FYC context itself. This understanding points to the definition of concurrent transfer (Yancey et al., 2019) shared in chapter five, where I explored Tamara and Zeke’s application of their ENGL 165 learning during the same semester in which they were taking the course. Because my focus was on transfer beyond the ENGL 165 class, I did not invite students to share writing that demonstrated if or how they were applying their learning within ENGL 165. However, the data collected in interviews and focus groups did demonstrate that they were able to reflect on the knowledge and skills they were finding useful from the course. The instructors’ responses to the findings confirm that ENGL 165 faculty are not only taking steps to encourage transfer, but they are also looking for evidence of it, even if that evidence suggests that the learning transfer is merely a learner’s comprehensive knowledge building within one course.

Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak (2014) found that reflective writing practice supports students in successfully repurposing writing-related knowledge, but prior knowledge is an important factor in how writers do or do not develop. To help bridge this gap, the CWPA, NCTE, and NWP’s (2011) “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing” offers eight habits of mind that instructors across both secondary and post-secondary contexts might work to foster through learning experiences that develop students’ rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, writing processes, and knowledge of conventions. Additionally, the NCTE's (2016) “Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing” describes how teachers might provide high-quality writing opportunities for students. Both statements emphasize the significance of rhetorical awareness and the social nature of genre, and beg the question for ENGL 165 faculty—and by
extension, instructors of FYC beyond Longwood—to consider: How might we shape writing invitations with an eye toward learners’ prior knowledge in order to cultivate consciousness?

**Negotiating the Findings: Seeing Prior Knowledge, and Prioritizing Threshold Concepts**

Before delving into my recommendations that are informed by the findings of this study, I think it is first important to re-center the significance of threshold concepts in the work of ENGL 165 and the greater curriculum. In the paragraphs that follow, I address the use of the LSR framework and its overshadowing of genre and rhetorical situation in the ENGL 165 curriculum, and propose that we draw on Meyer and Land’s (2006) characteristics of threshold concepts to describe where a student is in their learning vis-à-vis the prior knowledge they possess.

Indeed, a disparity exists in the vocabulary used among writing instructors and other disciplinary faculty, and a common language among faculty to describe disciplinary writing conventions might help learners make connections across contexts (Linton, Madigan, & Johnson, 1994; Nelms & Dively, 2007), regardless of the prior knowledge students possess upon entering FYC. The LSR framework does offer a vocabulary for naming conventions, but it does not necessarily provide the metacognitive space in which a student might conceptualize a broad understanding of writing across contexts. Though, the answer for combatting this disparity and supporting students in achieving the writerly flexibility we desire for them to have is in ENGL 165 by-law #2, where genre and rhetorical situation are positioned as threshold concepts. Threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2006) offer a more realistic reflection of a learner’s growth, where prior learning is built upon, liminal spaces allow for pauses, and integrative experiences lead to the passing through “a portal” (p. 1).
Yet, in the ENGL 165 classroom, genre and rhetorical situation did not always seem to be positioned as explicitly as the LSR framework and disciplinary writing conventions. For example, in discussing the findings from this study with ENGL 165 faculty, one colleague shared a high-stakes writing invitation through which they encouraged student writing transfer across the disciplines with an emphasis on audience analysis:

My second and third papers are interconnected with discussion about how writing happens in other fields. The third paper (their last one) asks them to identify a “hot” topic in their field of choice and examine one general audience source and one peer-reviewed source to analyze how L, S, R differ based on intended audience. In the midst of that, they examine how expectations re: writing in the field transfer to writing for a much broader audience.

Here, we see an ENGL 165 instructor inviting students to negotiate the framework of language, structure, and reference through a rhetorical lens, but the greater task prompts students to focus more so on naming and understanding LSR conventions in the disciplines, rather than considering the rhetorical constructs in relation to genre. This exercise, in conjunction with the “second and third papers,” aims to support students in achieving the first outcome, referenced above, for ENGL 165. Moreover, as described in the findings in chapter four and above, the required course text prioritizes the LSR framework. In considering this study’s findings with faculty, several acknowledged their heavy reliance on the book as a “useful resource.” In addition, faculty voiced awareness that student achievement in the area of the first outcome is measured during the course’s annual institutional juried assessment.\(^{23}\) Though it may not always

\(^{23}\) This event typically occurs at the end of each spring semester. Approximately six to seven ENGL 165 instructors score a sample of anonymized student essays to determine to what extent students are achieving all five outcomes for the course. This data has been collected each year
be intentional, it is, nevertheless, understandable that more emphasis might at times be placed on LSR rather than on threshold concepts.

The wording of the second outcome for ENGL 165, shared in chapter three, complicates this discussion. It states that upon completion of the course, students will “[c]onvey the results of research through an appropriate academic genre to achieve specific informational and/or persuasive purposes for defined academic audiences.” This outcome is likewise measurable, as it should be. Because of structures, such as the Office of Institutional Assessment and SACSCOC, that seek quantifiable information, we are obligated to design measurable outcomes that categorize learners’ achievements according to rubrics. Thus, what we seek to assess must be concrete. In effect, this second outcome points learners to genre and rhetorical situation as concrete concepts, and not as conceptual lenses. A learner’s growth toward embracing threshold concepts—namely genre and rhetorical situation—is difficult to measure, and further, difficult to quantify. Still, the presence of the second outcome provides a curricular structure to teach for transfer, where we might present genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts. I see the positioning of this structure, however, as secondary behind the framework of LSR in the first outcome, and it creates a conflict for both ENGL 165 faculty and students. We might consider, then, how to move beyond looking for concrete understandings that are represented by the use of a common language, and instead look for the “mindful abstraction” that we aim for students to achieve.

since the initial roll-out of ENGL 165 in 2018, and will be used for SACSCOC reaffirmation purposes in 2024. In the meantime, the Assistant Writing Coordinator will collaborate with campus stakeholders, and use the data to identify professional learning needs and design such opportunities.
The first move toward doing this involves being able to recognize the varying levels of prior knowledge students bring from their high school contexts. As described above, both the NCTE’s (2016) “Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing” and the CWPA, NCTE, and NWP’s (2011) “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing” acknowledge this need. I argue that we could make the prior knowledge with which a student comes to FYC—as well as the possible vertical growth they experience during the course—more transparent to us as instructors if we explicitly make use of Meyer and Land’s (2006) characteristics of threshold concepts—bounded, troublesome, transformative, irreversible, and integrative—five steps that a learner negotiates in a journey to access a “portal.” Building on this framework, Figure 8 offers a sketch of how we might depict the steps a learner takes toward embracing a threshold concept. Other pivotal learning development theories, such as Bloom’s (1956) Taxonomy and Erikson’s (1950) Stages of Psychosocial Development, have been represented using similar visual representations.
With this framework, I am not suggesting that a learner’s journey is linear and that there are not moments in which individuals move in directions other than forward. In Nowacek’s (2011) notion of transfer as recontextualization, she submits that “transfer can be both positive and negative” as learners engage in the complex task of knowledge reconstruction (p. 26). This is particularly true at moments in a student’s learning in which they experience troublesome
knowledge (Meyer & Land, 2016; Perkins, 1999). As a learner grapples with new and prior knowledge, they live in a state of liminality, where they are moving toward cognitive transformation, but are not yet fully experiencing it. Thus, such a framework might be used for seeing the extent to which a learner is nearing a threshold, has paused on the way, or has backtracked entirely.

Of course, as we teach for transfer and recognize that each learner enters ENGL 165 with different levels of prior knowledge, we must also realize that not every learner will reach the green step of integration during their time in FYC. But, if faculty have a vocabulary—a conceptual understanding rather than a rubric—to describe from where and how a learner is progressing, then we might be better positioned to meet real-time needs of students in the classroom and differentiate instruction as necessary (Dosch & Zidon, 2014). This might also prevent writing instructors from viewing students as unsuccessful, when in reality, they are growing a great deal, as exemplified in the case of Tamara. This graphic is not an end-point for discussion on this, but it is an effort to provide a framework for how we might acknowledge, and even “reward” (Nowacek, 2011, p. 37) learning in ways that allow for a deeper understanding than what a rubric may be able to provide.

**Recommendations: Building Bridges with Faculty Prior Knowledge**

In this section, I build on the findings from this study and the thinking from the ENGL 165 faculty focus group to offer recommendations for how we might continue to work toward growth as teacher-scholars, and in turn, better support our colleagues and our students in negotiating the teaching and learning of writing across the curriculum. INWAC’s (2014) “Statement of WAC Principles and Practices” reminds us to utilize the disciplinary writing expertise that already exists on campus and “see[k] to break down the silos that can divide
disciplines by creating common ground through [WAC’s] focus on teaching and learning, often accomplished through cross-disciplinary faculty development programming” (p. 1). As such, Longwood faculty can serve as their own resource, drawing on each other’s prior knowledge, and continuing to think together about how we might further refine our approach to writing instruction.

**Professional Learning**

Early in the spring of 2020 semester, Zeke suggested that audience is a foundational concept for understanding genre. In doing so, he communicated his awareness that genres vary across the disciplines based on their conventions and needs. Through his naming of what he learned in ENGL 165, we were given a glimpse of genre and rhetorical situation functioning as threshold concepts, supporting Zeke in seeing beyond ENGL 165. Later, when reflecting on the knowledge and skills from ENGL 165 that he had used, he affirmed his position in a liminal space (Meyer & Land, 2006), where he was transitioning from simply knowing and recalling genre when it seemed relevant, to acquiring and applying genre as a default part of his writing process. Zeke’s experience points to the need for all faculty, regardless of their disciplinary expertise, to be aware of the threshold concepts that support student writing transfer. Thus, professional learning with regards to writing instruction should not be limited to instructors of FYC, and further, it should not be positioned as a one-time event (NCTE, 2019).

**Defining Genre and Rhetorical Situation: Re-Positioning Threshold Concepts in ENGL 165**

As the second by-law for ENGL 165 positions genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts, we should continually consider our approach to teaching for transfer with this strategy. A series of professional learning opportunities has the potential to support us in improving our ongoing practices. This work should begin by revisiting the course definitions of these terms, and
reflecting on how we are currently interpreting and positioning them. ENGL 165 faculty should then be invited to read and think together about the complex nature of genre and rhetorical situation, so we might further explore and understand the nuanced definitions and challenges these terms might present as students negotiate them across contexts. Such discussions have the potential to inform future ENGL 165 curriculum and ideas for redesigning our approach to more explicitly position and teach genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts.

*Genre and Rhetorical Situation: Bridging Disciplinary Writing Instruction Across the University*

Though FYC faculty have been engaging in conversations about their roles in supporting students’ transfer of writing-related knowledge and skills, they voiced recognition of the importance of better understanding the contexts in which students write beyond their classrooms. In response to this, I propose a scaffolded workshop series that would provide opportunities for both ENGL 165 and disciplinary faculty to engage in professional learning. This would provide a space for interdisciplinary collaboration, and for FYC faculty to learn from disciplinary faculty about what genre and rhetorical situation look like as threshold concepts for writing in the disciplines. Beyond this, FYC faculty might draw on their own prior knowledge to model these terms from a writing studies perspective to support disciplinary faculty in realizing the presence of genre and rhetorical situation in their areas of expertise. These exercises would support ENGL 165 faculty in contextualizing conversations about disciplinary conventions with FYC students, and in turn, encourage disciplinary faculty uptake of genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts. Such conversations would also support workshops designed to explore intentional disciplinary scaffolding upon ENGL 165. In the aptly put words of one ENGL 165 colleague,
“We can always be more explicit!” and the intentional use of consistent approaches to writing instruction across the curriculum is a means of working toward this goal.

**Building Upon Genre and Rhetorical Situation: The LSR Framework to Bridge Disciplinary Writing Instruction**

I also recommend that beyond interdisciplinary collaboration between FYC and disciplinary faculty, the Civitae Writing Coordinator and the Assistant Writing Coordinator might begin a systematic effort to harmonize the vocabulary used in writing instruction across the curriculum. The cases of Noelle and Zeke demonstrate the support this framework offered with regard to low road transfer, as both embraced the concept of reference when considering citation practices in the disciplines. Genre and rhetorical situation should continue to be situated as conceptual lenses for understanding and negotiating writing invitations. However, disciplinary faculty should also be encouraged to adopt and utilize the LSR framework for vocabulary when describing writing in their areas of expertise, which might further enhance the pedagogical structure needed to “bridge” (Perkins & Salomon, 1988; 1989; 1992; Salomon & Perkins, 1989) to the desired transfer of writing-related skills and knowledge across contexts. The desire here is not to dismiss or replace the vocabulary, for example, that an expert in psychology uses to describe their work and teach their students; rather, this instructor might use this framework of vocabulary students gained in ENGL 165 to contextualize writing-related skills and knowledge in a new context. Beach’s (2003) notion of knowledge propagation helps describe such an event, where “systems of artifacts weave together changing individuals or social organizations in such a way that the person experiences becoming someone or something new” (p. 41). In the instance of ENGL 165, the LSR framework for vocabulary functions as a system of artifacts that can support learners in deconstructing new situations. But beyond this, because the outcomes for Civitae
coursework are scaffolded, utilizing this framework in writing instruction across the curriculum further positions ENGL 165 to be used in the way it was intended: as a Foundations course for Civitae, where the work done in FYC is a service to the inquiry, research, and writing students will perform in the Pillars, Perspectives, and Symposium on the Common Good.

**Faculty Reflection: Naming What We Know to Bridge Disciplinary Writing Instruction Across the University**

In addition to the workshop series proposal above, I recommend that a structure is implemented to invite all faculty—FYC and disciplinary—to compose reflections on their own teaching of writing and learning. Thaiss and Zawacki (2006), following their four-year cross-disciplinary study of the WAC program at George Mason University, recognized the need for a scholarly yet personal space when they recommended that faculty members conduct their own reflections as scholars/writers and as teachers. Writing studies scholars have likewise emphasized the value of metacognitive work for our students (Nowacek, 2011; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011; Rounsaville, Goldberg & Bawarshi, 2008; Taczak, 2011; Wardle, 2009). If this strategy is considered “essential” in facilitating student-learning about writing (Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English & National Writing Project, 2011), then we might begin to further explore metacognition as useful to professional learning at Longwood University, and by extension, the greater teaching population. Further, faculty reflection would provide a means of moving beyond one-time professional development events and toward ongoing learning and participation in a larger conversation.

Reflective exercises for faculty may be positioned in a few ways. Foremost, these activities should be viewed as low-stakes invitations for instructors to consider their pedagogical choices and classroom experiences. Thus, in accordance with the NCTE’s (2019) statement on
“Shifting from Professional Development to Professional Learning: Centering Teacher
Empowerment,” instructors have a choice of whether or not to accept these invitations, and their
approach to composing them may be in a stream of consciousness, where they are essentially
conversing with themselves. Prompts for such exercises can be emailed two to three times
throughout the semester. Periodical invitations to write reflectively will allow participants to
document their experiences and thinking processes over time, especially as they consider the
prior knowledge of the learners in their courses—ENGL 165 or otherwise—and the ‘journey
toward a threshold’ that learners may or may not be taking. Additionally, an “exit ticket” prompt
might be provided at the conclusion of the semester to support faculty in mentally decompressing
as well as documenting their teaching experience from the semester. The advantage for faculty
who participate in periodical reflections is that they will be able to look back on an archive of
their thinking as they consider areas of strengths and weaknesses for their teaching in future
semesters.

Further, questions that arise in this metacognitive work—should a faculty member choose
to share their questions—could be used to inform aspects of future professional learning. Second,
these activities might also be viewed as low-stakes writing invitations in a more formal writing
space—in a workshop, for example. In such a setting, the reflective activity would be positioned
as a free write and then used as a starting point for discussion amongst participants. These
reflections might be particularly meaningful in an end-of-spring-semester workshop, where some
faculty who have not recently taught writing-infused (WI) courses, but are expecting to do so,
are participants. Future instructors for WI courses might benefit from the shared thinking and
learning of a recent cohort of instructors. Prompts for these exercises can span a range of topics,
but at a minimum, should encourage faculty to consider how they chose to present rhetorical
situation and genre in their specific contexts, and in turn, how learners seemed to be negotiating these as threshold concepts.

Additionally, written faculty reflection could serve as a vehicle for continuing virtual professional learning via focus groups, such as the one described earlier in this chapter, which utilized a Google Sheet to facilitate and document asynchronous communication. These opportunities use fewer resources and enable those who teach writing to collaborate at their convenience, and in the future may utilize other online resources, including Canvas—the institution’s LMS. Through participating in discussion-based spaces, we will be able to archive our thinking, ask questions, pose strategies, and share resources for others to draw upon later, as instructors find the need for classroom innovations. Through this, faculty will be able to support each other at a distance even though we will all still be working in the same institutional context and toward the same goals.

**Instructional Archives**

Currently, through the university LMS, Longwood utilizes Canvas Commons, a repository of instructional content where faculty can find and share resources with educators from other institutions. This material is available to Canvas users only, as they are able to import specific items directly into a Canvas course, but little content is available for instructors of first-year composition. Though, even if a plethora of teaching resources existed in the Commons, it would not be specific to the FYC context at Longwood. Because of the need for a general space from which faculty can locate materials, an “English 165 Materials” course was created in Canvas, and all instructors who teach this course were enrolled. This space houses mostly essential materials, such as the course by-laws and the common final exam, but it also includes some relevant articles and handouts from previous professional learning workshops. While the
course is mostly organized, faculty do not visit it frequently, and when they do, their stay is minimal. I recommend that this Canvas course is re-situated as a hub for ENGL 165 engagement, where instructors might continue to locate and use materials, but also create and share their own.

Among these materials should be a repository of videos that present interviews of disciplinary faculty describing writing in their fields. Similar to Maimon’s (1981) efforts to organize writing across the curriculum, these videos can “creat[e] the context for faculty from other disciplines to help composition specialists understand the nature of academic writing in various disciplines and ways it could be taught” (Kirscht, Levine, & Reiff, 1994, p. 371). A few of these videos already exist in the English 165 Materials course: In preparing to facilitate the fall of 2020 workshop, I conducted and recorded Zoom interviews with three faculty members from three different fields, asking them questions about writing in their areas of study. I then shared these videos with ENGL 165 faculty to pre-empt our workshop discussion about the positioning of rhetorical situation and genre in writing situations across the university. Most workshop participants described these videos as useful for their own understanding of writing in the disciplines, and several asked if they could use these videos as instructional resources in their classrooms. To further build this repository, I propose that more videos are created. In the subsections below, I describe a three-phase plan for implementing this recommendation.

*Interviews of Disciplinary Faculty: Phase 1*

ENGL 165 instructors should be invited to facilitate video interviews of disciplinary faculty to further develop conversations about genre and rhetorical situation. Such interviews have the potential to serve as invitations to professional learning opportunities, but perhaps more significantly, this will better position FYC faculty to make explicit connections between the parallels in writing situations across the curriculum, allowing for more contextualized discussion
in the classroom. This may be a step toward helping students realize that disciplinary audiences are authentic, and contributions to research-based conversations are not achieved by writing for the teacher. This might also lead to authentic learning opportunities for FYC instructors, further forge FYC faculty relationships with colleagues across the disciplines, and begin new conversations about writing across the university. Indeed, such videos would enhance the instructional archives for ENGL 165 faculty to draw on for their own pedagogical purposes.

**Interviews of FYC Faculty: Phase 2**

After a repository of these videos is furnished, I propose that, in conjunction with Longwood’s Center for Faculty Enrichment (CAFÉ), a second phase of video interviews is initiated. Faculty across the disciplines—particularly those who teach Civitae Pillars courses—would be invited to interview ENGL 165 instructors about the pedagogical approach to the course as well as the key concepts that students explore while enrolled. Video series for professional learning purposes are not uncommon. The Elon University Center for Engaged Learning, for example, publishes videos on their website for the purpose of sharing resources with faculty and faculty developers regarding research-based, high-impact practices for engaged learning (“About Us”). At Longwood, rather than share such recordings on their website, CAFÉ maintains a YouTube channel, where instructional support videos created by Longwood faculty already exist. Though, these videos are currently limited to teaching in hy-flex contexts.24 If an archive of recorded interviews with ENGL 165 instructors existed, disciplinary faculty could access and use these recordings as resources for themselves, and for their students. For example, a biology professor might share such a video with students in a BIO 101 meeting as a reminder

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24 Longwood University uses the language of “blended environment” to describe the instructional setting in which some students physically attend class in an assigned meeting space while others participate virtually, via a video conferencing platform.
of the concepts explored during their ENGL 165 course. Such videos might help create bridges across student coursework and their learning, specifically ENGL 165 and disciplinary writing contexts. In addition, sharing these videos in class would likely create opportunities for discussions about writing in disciplinary courses, where students are invited to consider how and where they see ENGL 165 concepts present in their other courses.

**Cross-Disciplinary Interviews: Phase 3**

Finally, I propose that a third phase of video interviews is created, in which the Longwood University Writing Coordinator and the Assistant Writing Coordinator facilitate a conversation about writing between two disciplinary faculty, such as a sociology professor and an economics professor. As the disciplinary faculty reflect on and discuss writing in their fields, the interviewer should highlight points of intersection across interviewee commentary, as well as point out connections between their descriptions of rhetorical situations and genres in their fields, and how their discussion points back to the threshold concepts that guide instruction and are intended to support writing transfer from ENGL 165 and beyond. Again, these recordings should be created in collaboration with CAFÉ, and be available on their YouTube channel. Ultimately, once this video series is established, it would reflect the embedded nature of writing at Longwood University, where the pedagogical work done in ENGL 165 as a Foundations course in Civitae supports students’ vertical progression through their Pillars, Perspectives, and Symposium coursework.

**Broadcast Discussions about Writing Across the University**

ENGL 165, by nature of how it is defined and situated, is deeply embedded into Longwood University’s Civitae Core Curriculum. Crafting new professional learning experiences, strengthening the ENGL 165 instructional archives, and creating interdisciplinary
video interviews about writing that encourage the uptake of ENGL 165-related concepts and language are important moves in supporting faculty teaching and student learning. But these conversations have the potential to be short-lived if additional strides are not taken to harness the excitement that will be generated from these initiatives. To help sustain these discussions once they are in process, I recommend that the Civitae Writing Coordinator and Assistant Writing Coordinator collaborate to write and publish a bi-annual newsletter that is shared with both ENGL 165 and disciplinary faculty.

Features in a “Writing at Longwood” newsletter might spotlight suggestions for low-stakes student reflective practice, articles on writing pedagogy geared toward a non-writing studies audience, and spotlights on faculty experiences using the LSR vocabulary framework. This newsletter might also remind faculty of where to find campus resources and highlight newly published videos, upcoming workshops, and recent faculty reflection invitations. Other writing programs have taken similar steps to increase the visibility of writing on their campuses. In the past, these newsletters have included feature articles written by instructors of writing intensive courses, faculty interviews, instructional resources, and pedagogical topics to help cultivate and define a “culture of writing” (Oregon State University). Other newsletters share their programmatic accomplishments, address topics of student interest and concern, and spotlight faculty and student work (Grand Valley State University). In most cases, the intended audience for these newsletters is the local institution although the documents are published online and highlight discussions that are relevant to other writing programs. A newsletter that focuses on writing at Longwood University would likewise be intended for its local audience and aim to achieve similar goals as those of writing programs and their administrators at other colleges.
Future Research

At Longwood

This dissertation study primarily lives as a piece of a much larger discussion at Longwood University. The implementation of a new core curriculum in the fall of 2018 necessitated new assessment strategies, and in response, quantitative evaluations were created. This multiple-case study yielded qualitative findings that offer an understanding of student uptake of threshold concepts taught in FYC at Longwood. Though I sought to understand if and how students were understanding and using genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts, I gained insight into the significance of prior knowledge, the role of a required textbook, and the potential for writing-related transfer. Each of these findings, however, point to the student experience.

In the future, more research needs to be done to understand the ENGL 165 instructors’ approaches. This work began with the conversation I invited ENGL 165 faculty to engage in about the findings from this study. These exchanges marked the beginning of a new conversation with faculty, and highlighted the potential for a future, design-based research (DBR) study that explores instructors’ experiences and pedagogical choices in teaching for transfer. Such a methodology would afford the researcher an opportunity to collaborate with practitioners in real educational contexts. Through implementing a co-designed intervention that would be modified across iterations (Anderson and Shattuck, 2012), we could more closely examine how ENGL 165 faculty might better position genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts and consider how theory is informing instruction and supporting learners in this FYC context (Design-Based Research Collective, 2003). In planning for a design-based study, I would draw on this dissertation data as pre-study data, informing a two-part intervention. The first part would
involve an opportunity for ENGL 165 faculty learning in which I would invite 165 faculty to read and think together to better understand the complicated nature of genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts. This workshop would inform our discussion of the ENGL 165 curriculum and ideas for redesigning our approach to more explicitly position and teach genre and rhetorical situation as threshold concepts. The second part of the intervention would involve implementing the co-designed curriculum, making modifications, and drawing on the data to determine what needs to be done in order to accomplish our agreed-upon goal. Such an approach could be particularly useful in aiming to foster more contextualized disciplinary instruction in the ENGL 165 classroom. Condon and Rutz (2012) remind us that WAC programs are localized, as they do not possess a single, identifiable structure. Thus, beyond Longwood, similar work might be done at other “sites of impact,” (Moore & Bass, 2017) where the institutional context is unique, and programmatic needs are different.

In the Field

In the field of writing studies, our desire to teach for transfer continues. This research contributes to conversations about threshold concepts in FYC (Blaauw-Haara, 2014; Downs & Robertson, 2016; Downs & Wardle, 2007; Rifenburg, 2016), the significance of prior knowledge (Driscoll, 2011; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011; Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2012), and teaching for writing transfer (Adler-Kassner, Majewski, & Koshnick, 2012; Moore, 2017; Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014). This research also reminds us of the recommendations for best practices and policies (CWPA, 2011; NCTE, 2016; INWAC, 2014) that we might draw on for pedagogical practices, professional learning, and curricular refinement.

Though, further research to understand the complexities of writing-related transfer is needed. We must remember Nowacek’s (2011) recommendation that FYC curricula should
reflect interdisciplinarity and teach the rhetorical domains of disciplines, but as the findings of this study suggest, further inquiry that takes up Wardle’s (2009) discussion of the challenges in teaching disciplinary genres out of context and in FYC would be beneficial. This would create opportunities to further examine how students negotiate the concept of a disciplinary audience in a FYC context. Within this work, we might also seek to better understand how FYC instructors are positioning themselves when planning for writing invitations—as evaluators, as a disciplinary audience, or as something entirely different. And further, we might examine how FYC instructors position course texts in relation to disciplinary conversations and threshold concepts.

Additional longitudinal research that examines how learners progress toward embracing threshold concepts is also needed. Inquiry should continue to take up questions pertaining to prior knowledge and explore the student experience over time, particularly as learners enter the university. In particular, planning for research that aims to better understand students’ development of rhetorical and genre awareness across these contexts, from senior year to senior year, would help those of us supporting writers in post-secondary contexts more deeply understand moments in liminal spaces, as well as consider what activities seem to lead to progression toward a threshold. Of course, we recognize that writing transfer is not “a discrete point along a student’s educational path” (Moore, 2017, p. 7), and inquiry in the area of lifespan writing research has begun the work of understanding the many concurrent, lateral, and intersecting points in writing development over an individual’s lifetime (Bazerman, et al., 2018; Dippre & Phillips, 2020). Furthering this meaningful work will provide the ultimate contextual understanding needed to fully “see” an individual’s writing development.
Final Thought

The purpose of Civitae is to support the greater institutional mission in developing the citizen leader: “someone who is academically and personally transformed by knowledge of fundamental modes of inquiry and informed civic engagement and who then applies the virtues of a Longwood education to serve and transform communities” (Civitae core, 2018; emphasis added). In revisiting this statement after conducting this dissertation study and thinking extensively about threshold concepts and writing-related transfer theory, I am struck by the use of “transform” in Longwood University’s definition of a person who will make meaningful contributions to society. The description implies that a Longwood experience can change an individual’s understanding of the world, and of how they live within it. Indeed, for many students, college is “akin to a portal” (Meyer & Land, 2006, p. 1); it is a space where young people have bounded, troublesome, transformative, irreversible, and integrative experiences. They are not the same people on their first day as they are their last. And yet, their last day is marked by commencement—a ceremony that signals their passing through the portal of college, into a new beginning. Hence, there is much burden on the instructional shoulders of first-year composition faculty, who, in many cases, are a first-year student’s first college professor. Threshold concepts provide us with a pedagogical approach to teaching—but we are only able to ensure student uptake and transformation of learning through a systematic, cross-disciplinary effort that recognizes and builds bridges from all levels of prior knowledge.
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APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Purpose: to pose questions in order to gather information on potential participants’ majors, interests, courses they plan to take in spring of 2020, as well as their willingness to reflect on their experiences in their coursework.

1. Are you currently enrolled in ENGL 165?
2. If you have declared your major, what is it? If you have not declared your major, what areas are you interested in studying?
3. Do you think your courses this semester are preparing you for future courses? In what way or ways?
4. How important do you think ENGL 165 is to your future coursework? Explain your reasoning.
5. What are you learning about in ENGL 165 that you think is important? Explain your reasoning.
6. What other comments do you have about ENGL 165 or the other courses you are taking this semester?
7. What courses are you planning on taking in the spring of 2020?
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW I QUESTIONS

Purpose: I will interview the six participants to understand what they learned while in ENGL 165 and how they describe their learning.

1. Was any material covered in ENGL 165 that you had learned before? If so, what was it?
2. Did you find this review useful? How so?
3. What new things did you learn that you had not learned before?
4. Was any of this helpful? In what way or ways?
5. Have you used anything you have learned in ENGL 165 in your other coursework yet?
   a. If so, identify what you have used, and explain how it was or was not helpful.
   b. If not, explain what previous learning you have used to approach your other coursework.
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW II QUESTIONS

Purpose: I will collect course syllabi, assignment descriptions, and completed student work from two non-ENGL 165 courses that the student is taking in the spring of 2020. I will select one assignment description and the related student work to support an artifact-guided interview. In this interview, students will be prompted to draw on the assignment description and their work to recall how they came to understand and complete the task.

1. What class was this assignment for?
2. What was the instructor asking you to do in this assignment?
3. How did you come to understand what you were supposed to do? Feel free to point out areas in the course syllabus, assignment description, and/or completed assignment to explain.
4. Explain your approach to completing this assignment. Feel free to point out areas in the course syllabus, assignment description, and/or completed assignment to explain your approach.
5. Upon completion of this assignment, did you feel you had satisfactorily accomplished what the instructor had asked you to do? Feel free to point out areas in the course syllabus, assignment description, and/or completed assignment to support your explanation.
6. Did you draw on any previous learning and/or coursework to complete this assignment? If so, explain that learning and/or coursework and how it supported your ability to complete this assignment. Feel free to point out areas in the course syllabus, assignment description, and/or completed assignment to support your explanation.
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW III QUESTIONS

I will conduct final interviews with participants in which I will explicitly ask about their perception and use of genre and rhetorical situation in their coursework beyond ENGL 165.

1. What do you remember learning about in ENGL 165?
2. How have you used what you learned in ENGL 165 during this spring semester?
3. Do you recall learning about genre in ENGL 165 last semester?
4. What do you remember learning about this concept?
5. Have you used this concept in the coursework you have taken this spring?
6. In what ways has this concept been helpful?
7. In what ways has this concept not been helpful?
8. Do you recall learning about rhetorical situation in ENGL 165 last semester?
9. What do you remember learning about this concept?
10. Have you used this concept in the coursework you have taken this spring?
11. In what ways has this concept been helpful?
12. In what ways has this concept not been helpful?
13. In what ways do you see genre and/or rhetorical situation as being useful in future coursework?
14. In what ways do you see genre and/or rhetorical situation as being useful in writing outside of the university and beyond college?
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