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Students Talking About Assessment: Insights on Program Learning Outcomes

William J. Donohue

STUDENTS TALKING ABOUT ASSESSMENT:

INSIGHTS ON PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

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William J. Donohue

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

William J. Donohue

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 24, 2017 Signature on file
Gian S. Pagnucci, Ph.D.
Distinguished University Professor, Advisor

October 24, 2017 Signature on file

Bennett A. Rafoth, Ed.D.
Distinguished University Professor

October 24, 2017 Signature on file

Dana Lynn Driscoll, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of English

ACCEPTED

Signature on file
Randy L. Martin, Ph.D.
Dean
School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Students Talking About Assessment: Insights on Program Learning Outcomes

Author: William J. Donohue

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Gian S. Pagnucci

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Bennett A. Rafoth
Dr. Dana Lynn Driscoll

This study examines the student writer perspective of a first-year composition program's student learning outcomes. Student descriptions of learning are a valuable, yet often overlooked data source. The student voice broadens a first-year composition program's outcomes-based, student learning assessment process as program assessment data is often derived from the faculty perspective through analysis of student writing artifacts. This research project used learning outcome interviews based in a narrative inquiry methodology to seek and explore the experiences of student writers after completing the first-year composition program. The conceptual framework for this study is based on John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy and need for a balanced approach to education, Brian Huot's view of assessment-as-research, and Linda Adler-Kassner and Susanmaire Harrington's call for a reframing of assessment accountability. The narratives from the learning outcome interviews were used to develop a student learning narrative assessment model based on three identified themes: narratives of interpersonal interaction, narratives situated in time, and narratives of holistic learning. This model can illuminate these three valuable themes present in the student perspective of assessment to provide direction for renewal, further study, and growth of a writing program.

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PROLOGUE

"What do the students say they are learning in the first-year composition program?" "What is their assessment of the program?" Those were just two of the questions I had about the first-year composition program at Lincoln University when I unexpectedly became the Writing Program Administrator (WPA).

The former WPA and I have worked closely since I first started at the University as an adjunct over 10 years ago. We have debated and argued, collaborated and conspired, confided and confessed. I started directing the Basic Writing Program portion of the first-year composition program a few years ago and was serving as the unofficial assistant WPA. My first title was Director of Basic Writing, given to me from within the department to signify across the University that I was the person focused on the foundational writing program into which the majority of the students were placed upon admission. My main concentration was the Basic Writing curriculum, placement, assessment (with attention to activities for official reporting), and faculty coordination (i.e. assisting faculty, mainly adjuncts, teaching the courses, apprising them of curriculum changes, and developing the program with them). The WPA had a similar day-to-day function in the first-year composition (FYC) program, but his senior position necessitated additional administrative duties and pressures, such as program assessment of the student learning outcomes.

"I just want to teach. I have been WPA for 16 years—that is enough," he said while his gaze was fixed out the three small windows in my office. "I don't know this assessment stuff. I got by for a while, but I can't do it like you can. I am going to go talk to the Dean and tell her to make you the WPA."

One of the major, ongoing learning outcomes and accountability assessment issues that the WPA handled in his tenure came from the Lincoln University Board of Trustees (LUBOT). LUBOT resolved that every undergraduate student needed to pass a 500-word essay examination. This decision to implement a one-time, high stakes assessment measure was a reaction, in part, to feedback from employers about the writing quality of Lincoln University graduates (Donohue, 2015). However, the field of composition studies had long argued for portfolios as more authentic assessment tools of student writing (Black, Daiker, Sommers, & Stygall, 1994; Elbow & Belanoff, 1986; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000; Huot, 2002; White, 2005; Yancey, 2012), especially in Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines (WAC/WID) program assessment (Condon & Rutz, 2012). After LUBOT passed their resolution, the faculty, led by the former WPA, took a step in the direction of portfolio assessment. Based on the LUBOT resolution, the University faculty passed a writing proficiency requirement. The English Composition I (ENG 101) course would require in-class essay exams throughout the semester. Failure to receive a B- grade or better on at least one of the essay exams leads to course failure, a *gatekeeping* measure (Donohue, 2015). However, the WPA seized part of the resolution that the proficiency requirement was to be met by the junior year and created a writing portfolio review within each major rather than a university-wide essay exit exam to ensure that student development of writing skills continued throughout a student's academic career with time to remediate in the senior year, if necessary. The process for completing the writing portfolio offers feedback and assistance, creating a *gateway* for students to improve their writing as they move toward graduation (Donohue, 2015). This was a small, yet difficult step to shift towards a

WAC/WID model for the traditionally-minded school. These resolutions by both the LUBOT and the faculty, known as the Writing Proficiency Program (WPP), occurred before I started at the University, but I have witnessed and have had a voice in the implementation of the writing evaluation program.

The implementation of the WPP has been slow, punctuated by delays to make it an official graduation requirement and the departure of a new hire whose job was to build and direct the program. The former WPA stepped into the WPP director position and was successful in coordinating efforts to have all the programs start reviewing their student major's writing portfolios.

However, an ongoing discussion between me and the WPA revolves around the academic rigor of the program. I argue theory from the field; he argues from the position of what could be done administratively. I have questioned the use of the portfolios within this program as an authentic assessment measure that functions as a learning opportunity for the students. To me, the Writing Proficiency Program (WPP) used portfolios as mere collection devices of previously submitted and evaluated work. The major programs reviewed those examples to deem a student *proficient*, which focused on correctness. As a program assessment measure, the WPP has produced minimal data that is useful for the teaching and learning aspects within the first-year composition program. The WPA would counter by asking me what I would do if I were WPA. How would I work within the system, with the "landmines" as he would call the obstacles to progress by stakeholders at the University who thought they knew better than members of the composition field? These discussions started to show me the larger picture of writing program administration. My friend always found ways to compromise, and he made it

look easy. But the strain was building. Then came the day he walked into my office and announced he was done.

He wanted to be free of the administrative pressures and focus on teaching. And just like that, I became the new WPA.

While I had been preparing to become the WPA someday, as the many discussions I had with him would attest, I wasn't ready to be thrust into the position without warning. Most of my work had been within the department regarding the curriculum or supporting the WPA or our other Composition and Rhetoric colleague in our small English department with initiatives for the larger University. But I did have a reputation for assessment, having become a leader on the Faculty Committee on Assessment and Evaluation that assisted Lincoln University in navigating through an accreditation crisis brought on through the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) accrediting process.

When my world became larger after I was "appointed" WPA that afternoon in my office, I suddenly realized how much of a superficial understanding I had about the position. Or perhaps the better characterization is that I suddenly felt overwhelmed. I was not only steering a ship, but I was responsible for that ship. As first mate, I knew the various aspects of the job, had a better understanding of some aspects more than others, such as assessment, and would question the captain's decisions as a method to explore options, voice my opinion, and learn the WPA position but with the safety that comes from a rung down on the hierarchy. As captain, I was now responsible to coordinate all the aspects of the writing program under my charge and influence aspects that were not.

Even my strength of assessment, as pointed out by the former WPA, became a question for me. As chair of the assessment committee, I knew the mostly quantitative, analytic rubric-driven, education measurement reports from the first-year composition program were important, especially in reporting to our accreditation agency, but I wondered if those numbers were providing the entire picture. The outcomes-based assessment model was producing assessment data, but it wasn't telling me about the usefulness of the program or indicating issues beyond the narrow gaze of the prescribed Program Student Learner Outcomes (PSLOs). Now that I had to provide direction and steer the program, the larger assessment picture of the first-year composition program was more mysterious. I wanted to direct my gaze toward uncharted waters in the LU first-year composition program assessment process. It was my turn to stare out my office window in contemplation.

For me, what was missing from the narrative about the development of the first-year composition program was students' views.

The LU first-year composition program is currently comprised of three courses divided between a single Basic Writing course and a two course, first-year composition (FYC) sequence. The learning goals for the students concern future writing work that FYC is supposed to affect within our fledgling WAC/WID direction. The summative student learning outcomes within the first-year composition program are assessed through faculty scoring of student essays based on a rubric.

The assessment process, however, does not include any input from LU students. What do the students believe they are learning in the first-year composition program? What experiences within the program are developing their writing? What do the students

have to write in their general education or major courses? Are the student learning outcomes useful to the students for the writing situations they encounter after finishing the first-year composition program? What do the students think about the first-year composition program? What is the students' assessment of the learning outcomes of the first-year composition program? How would student inclusion in the assessment process affect the program?

After some time, I decided to focus my dissertation research on students' views of assessment at LU. The inclusion of student voices in the assessment process at Lincoln University is fitting when considering the founding of the University as the first degree granting intuition of higher education for African Americans. The University has been highly successful and counts a Supreme Court justice, a Harlem Renaissance poet, and two presidents of African countries among its alumni. The University was founded in 1854 with a mission characterized as "a gateway, creating an opportunity of higher education for African American people when most institutions had their gates closed, a symptom of the surrounding contempt and enslavement of African American peoples in the country at that time" (Donohue, 2015).

One of the first students, James Ralston Amos was a resident of the town of Hinsonville, a free black farming community just north of the Mason-Dixon Line that became the site of Lincoln University. Amos desired to become a missionary and was being tutored by a local minister named John Miller Dickey. According to Horace Mann Bond (1976/2014), the first African American president of Lincoln University, the founding of the University by Dickey was inspired by "an application made to him in 1852 by a 'very superior colored man,' James Ralston Amos, for advice as to how he

might perfect himself in the Christian ministry" (p. 209). The story of Amos' dedication and persistence is an important legacy in the history of the University, as retold in Bond's words:

> The ever-generous John Miller Dickey first responded to James Amos' appeal for help by volunteering his own services as instructor. The very first legend of Lincoln University relates that Amos, then living with his widowed mother in a house close by the African Union Methodist Protestant Church house, walked each day the four miles to and from Oxford for an hour's instruction in the pastor's study. At the beginning of his walk he would stop in a grove, a hundred yards from his house, later the sight of Ashmun Hall, to spend a period in his daily devotions of Bible reading and prayer. He knelt at a certain stone that provided a convenient altar. Four years later, when Ashmun Hall was being built on the same site, he noted that the stone of his prayers had been placed in the foundation of the edifice. (p. 210)

When Amos exceeded the learning that Dickey could provide, Dickey inquired at Princeton Theological Seminary, which had previously accepted Black students. However, Amos was not accepted for the stated reason in the rejection letter that "it would be a waste of time to set him to study Latin & Greek. It would … be far better to give him a good English education—then let him study Theology" (Bond, 1976/2014, p. 211). Bond considers the political and social reasons for the rejection as very few institutions would even consider accepting an African American student. But, Bond also indicates that Amos' level of education was a gatekeeper: "the simple fact was that James Amos could not qualify for admission to the Princeton Seminary on the basis of his

limited academic qualifications" (p. 211). According to Bond, "It was late in 1852 or early 1853 that John Miller Dickey said that he finally conceived the idea of establishing an academy for colored men, after 'trying vainly almost every school in the Union that he could hear of as entertaining views at all liberal toward the colored race" (p. 211). On April 29, 1854, the governor signed the bill granting charter to the Ashmun Institute, which was later renamed Lincoln University. On New Year's Day, 1857, James Ralston Amos began attending classes. A barred gate had become a gateway and a legacy of inclusion was created.

In the spirit of that legacy of inclusiveness, this dissertation study is the exploration of student voices about the first-year composition program's outcomes-based assessment process. This dissertation project is rooted in the stories of students. This study considers theoretical concepts related to program assessment. It also looks at theories of teaching and learning to create a praxis of assessment-as-research. The idea is to study student narratives about the learning outcomes of a composition program and to theorize how ideas in those narratives can be integrated into the assessment process. The study is located outside the assessment practice in place at the research site, but it uses the specific learning outcomes and outcomes-based assessment model of the first-year composition program as a typical example to study how the model may be made more inclusive of student views. This dissertation aims at "thinking narratively" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It uses the stories of students told in an interview about the first-year writing program to examine the student perspective on learning within that program.

CHAPTER ONE

FINDING DIRECTION

This dissertation study focuses on student narratives of learning within and after taking courses in a first-year composition program. The student narratives are data that demonstrate the student perspective on Program Student Learning Outcomes, which are prescribed knowledge, skills, attitudes, and habits of mind that students matriculating through a program will take with them at the end of the first-year writing program. Student descriptions of learning outcomes from a composition program are an often-overlooked data source. Such is the case at the research site of this study where program assessment data is derived from a faculty perspective through analysis of student writing artifacts produced from specific course work. The resulting assessment information is used to make decisions about the teaching and learning in the program. This study examined a way to broaden and expand the assessment information available to make those decisions. Through the study, a student learning narrative assessment model was developed that illuminates three important aspects of program assessment for identifying strengths and areas of concern that affect learning.

This project used a narrative inquiry based methodology to elicit critical tales of learning experiences to gain insights into the learning outcomes of the first-year writing program. This study privileges the participants' experiences with writing during and after completing the first-year composition program because those experiences are not included in the existing program assessment process. Typically in an outcomes-based model, faculty examine student writing to determine if students met the prescribed outcome. By centering on the reflections of the student writer participants, program

assessment that includes the student stakeholder—a term that is generally used in assessment to broadly include anyone who has an interest or concern in the education process and learning outcomes—can be studied. Instead of an assessment of a first-year composition program being done *to* student products by faculty, this project aimed to study student input as a potential data source for summative assessment of a first-year composition program that could be done *with* students, specifically students who have already completed the first-year composition program. Interviewing the students provides an additional perspective on the learning outcomes. This interview data provides insights into the strengths of the first-year composition program and draws attention to areas of concern not seen in typical outcomes-based assessment models.

The qualitative nature and social construction of assessment knowledge of this assessment-as-research study aligns with Huot's (1996) theory of writing assessment:

> Instead of generalizability, technical rigor, and large-scale measures that minimize context and aim for standardization of writing quality, these new procedures emphasize the context of the texts being read, the position of the readers, and the local, practical standards teachers and other stakeholders establish for written communication. (pp. 560-561)

Specifically, the study adheres to Huot's principles of being site-based, locally-controlled, and context-sensitive. By treating writing program assessment as research and inquiry, the essential goal is to "[ask] and [answer] questions about students' writing and the writing programs designed to teach students to write" (Huot, 2009, p. 148). The inductive nature of Huot's approach allows for continual refreshment on the prescriptive nature of outcomes-based assessment. Further, Huot's framing of assessment-as-research

"alters the relationship between teaching, learning, and assessment, since the teachers themselves are involved in articulating questions about their students, programs, and teaching, and are designing methods to answer the questions they have actually posed" (p. 150). The aim of this study was to investigate how students who are the closest to the learning would assess the program outcomes.

Research Questions

This study is focused on the student's narrated experiences for an assessment of a first-year composition Program Student Learner Outcomes (PSLOs). Narrative has a role in how people make sense of experience (Bruner, 1990). Therefore, the research questions guiding this study are focused on eliciting student narratives to investigate how students make sense of their learning experiences from a first-year composition program. The study seeks to relate these stories to the Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs) and the outcomes-based assessment model of the first-year composition program in which the students took part.

1. How do students who have completed a first-year composition program describe their learning in the program?
2. How do students' narratives about their experiences in a first-year composition program and beyond provide insight into the learning outcomes of that first-year composition program?

The study explores the student writing experience with participants who have completed the first-year composition program at the research site. These experiences are analyzed in relation to the learning outcomes of the first-year composition program under study through a pragmatic lens of assessment-as-research. The end goal is to reframe the

program assessment in order to make it respond better to the student stakeholders' concerns.

Setting the Student Learning Stage

"Micah Wilson," read Dr. Joseph, Dean of the College of Graduate Studies, as a proud smile crossed the face of a young man. About eight years before I saw him walking across the stage to receive his Master's degree, I first met Micah in a Basic Writing course. He was a first-year undergraduate student from Philadelphia, and I was a "visiting lecturer," teaching an overload and trying to prove my worth after having started a few years earlier at Lincoln University as an adjunct.

On a sunny graduation day eight years later, I sat among my colleagues in our formal academic regalia watching the graduates strut across the stage. Micah was receiving his Master's degree in education. He moved across the stage with the style and confidence I had seen him develop as he first worked at his own studies and then became a leader on campus, creating an organization called the "Boyz 2 Men Mentoring Program." I was not surprised that Micah found the field of education, although it took him some time to arrive at that decision. We talked extensively about his options, passions, and skills before he made the switch from history to education. After he received his undergraduate degree, Micah became a teacher and continued his mentoring philosophy to not only shape minds but also the character of his students.

I admit that my eyes watered behind my sunglasses as Micah made eye contact, smiled, and pointed in my direction before continuing his walk toward the official graduation photographer. He had come a long way since my Basic Writing class where one of the assignments was to write a literacy narrative. These literacy narratives were

eye-opening for me as they captured struggles with education that were foreign from my private school education. Micah's story is one of success as he worked hard to receive his undergraduate and Master's degrees. His story also led to questions about the first-year composition program. What did he think about his writing courses? Could hearing aspects of his higher education story, even as it was being written before graduation, help the assessment of the first-year composition program?

Most students at Lincoln University, the first Historically Black College/University (HBCU) in the country, make a big deal about the ceremony of commencement, and not all are as classy as Micah. Some students make the most of their walk across the stage with outlandish struts, exaggerated gestures to friends and family, and extended mugging for the camera. Others confidently walk across the stage, shaking hands with the dignitaries and exuding an air of professionalism. Many graduates are adorned with sashes and cords of multiple colors prominently placed atop the black gown to represent countries, achievements, and organizations.

A few students are so focused on the outward sign marking accomplishment of walking at graduation, they petition to do so even if they are a few credits shy. Unfortunately, some of these students fail to ever complete the degree. For others, the cliché statements about hard work and accomplishment are certainly apropos. But for a school where 97% of the students receive financial aid, many are first generation college students, and most of the students are members of social minority groups—predominantly African American—graduation is truly a celebration of having overcome great odds to receive a diploma. But what is represented by that piece of paper? Like Micah, everyone walking across the stage had the opportunity to learn *something* at the

institution. The completed degree represents a systematic completion of focused learning. From the standpoint of outcomes and outcomes-based assessment, the something relates to the outcome goals in the minds of many in attendance such as the faculty baking in the sun watching the graduates point and wave to their families in the grandstand.

Defining Assessment

When I talk to faculty about student learning outcomes in my various positions, as chair of the Faculty Committee on Assessment and Evaluation or WPA, I often use the walk across the stage as an aid to discuss outcomes: "What do you want those students walking across the stage to have learned in your program?" The exercise of envisioning the graduates usually helps to start the assessment project planning process by brainstorming a list that we can work with to establish student learning outcomes (SLOs). The idea of educational outcomes is rooted in Tyler's "Eight Year Study" in the 1930s, which was an objectives-based evaluation model (Guskey, 1994; Popham, 1988; Tyler, 1949/1969). The outcomes are the "aspects of the student's development that the institution either does influence or hopes to influence through its educational programs and practices" (Astin & Antonio, 2012, p. 41). Those outcomes represent what the students know and can do—truly a reason to don black caps complete with tassels, gowns, and colored sashes to strut across a stage to echoing cheers when your name is announced.

Outcomes assessment is a process that requires the examination of the teaching and learning processes that led to the degree of attainment of the outcomes. This resulting information is used to affect the teaching and learning process as it begins anew. Angelo (1995) defined assessment as "an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving

student learning" (p. 7). Banta and Palomba (2014) differentiate between *assessment* that measures "what an individual knows and can do" and *outcomes assessment* that involves "aggregating individual measures for the purpose of discovering group strengths and weaknesses that can guide improvement actions" (p. 1). This study seeks information regarding a first-year composition program; therefore, outcomes assessment of the program allows for the discovery of program strengths and weaknesses.

Rationale of the Study

As an educator and WPA engaged in assessment, I have never formally had a conversation with my writing students about outcomes, either for formative or summative outcomes assessment. I have never asked a first-year student, "What do you want to have learned by the time you walk across the graduation stage?" However, I do often ask my first-year students what goals they want to achieve in the Basic Writing or composition course in which they are enrolled, individual writing assessment questions for writing feedback, or what they want to do when they grow up. I have also assigned reflective writing about learning at the end of a semester. But none of these actions addressed the summative assessment need. I was interested in knowing what students learned in the program after they had a chance to apply that knowledge. The students' perspective on the learning outcomes was missing.

Following Huot's (1996, 2002) assessment-as-research approach, I had questions regarding student perspectives on the program. I was interested in what students would say about their learning in the program, similar to Rose and Weiser's (1999) purpose in writing *The Writing Program Administrator as Researcher: Inquiry in Action and Reflection* that "arose from our own interests: as experienced writing programs

administrators whose daily work raises questions about our program's practices" (p. v). Further, I wanted the students to be able tell me their stories to give me an intimate understanding of their learning experiences. My interest in the student perspective led me to select a narrative inquiry methodology for this assessment study. The narrative model provided an alternative to the model in use to assess the first-year composition program. That model is focused on the faculty perspective, an admittedly valuable and knowledgeable perspective, but not one without limits.

While prior to conducting this study I had not talked with students about their desired learning outcomes, I had been in many meeting rooms with many different university affiliated stakeholders—department colleagues, trustee members, university presidents, vice presidents, deans, faculty, alumni, assessment specialists, and staff. In those rooms, we were all trying to answer questions about the purpose and outcomes for a particular level of assessment, whether the level is national or institutional or program or course. The end goal of those meetings may have differed depending on each person's perspective, but one goal always seemed to be the same: determine what is best for the individual students by establishing the learning objectives for the students. This is a model that seems to parallel Freire's (1970/2000) banking concept critique of education where "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (p. 72). Huot (2002) recounts a similar trope in assessment of writing programs: "people who have little or no knowledge about the teaching of writing or the administration of writing programs are often in positions of power to decide how writing and writing programs should be assessed" (p. 172). Huot indicates that an issue with the standard assessment narrative is that the link between

assessment and teaching is often replaced by one of urgency and crisis. Learning outcomes are often banked on behalf of the students to meet an urgent need without including the students as stakeholders.

The program assessment process at Lincoln University is a typical case. Department faculty initiate program student learning outcomes (PSLOs) and create learning opportunities for students to engage with the skills and concepts in the PSLOs. Assessment tools are created to gather data that is then analyzed according to Banta and Palomba's (2014) outcomes assessment model to "aggregate individual measures for the purpose of discovering group strengths and weaknesses that can guide improvement actions" (p. 1). Numerous stakeholders from the university will use that data to make decisions through a spectrum of participation that spans from collaborative to hegemonic. Faculty in each program of the university interprets these guiding principles for use in their own job at the university and subsequently to measure through what Shupe (2008) calls an assessment project—one attempt to measure what has happened—and start the cycle anew. For a first-year composition program, a result of 90% of students using a writing process to complete an assignment would indicate success and contribute to an Institutional Learning Outcome for communication. The program would be doing its part toward the institution's desired outcome.

Generally, the purposes of program assessment are either for improvement or accountability. Yancey and Huot (1997b) parse the purposes of a program assessment to see what the program is doing well, determine how the program might be improved, and demonstrate to others why the program should continue. The first two of Yancey and Huot's purposes are addressed to an internal audience to indicate either maintaining the

status quo or improving the program to better achieve the outcome. The resulting information may be useful for the third purpose, which is focused on accountability for reporting to an interested, often external, audience. The external audience, however, often requires information that may not be useful to improve the program. These purposes are also present in Yancey's (2012) review of the "current moment in writing assessment" that indicates three major themes: the importance of learning outcomes, especially their use in assessment; the focus on program assessment; and the sophistication of assessment tools, such as portfolios, to use reflection (p. 172). Learning outcomes set criteria for assessment. Focusing the assessment on the program allows for systematic change, if necessary. Portfolios provide multiple artifacts to assess regarding the learning outcomes, including metacognitive understanding of learning. These themes work together as a strong foundation for assessment practice.

Therefore, outcomes-based assessment has value within a program assessment model for both improvement and accountability. Because outcomes help to meet this dual use, "many colleges and universities … have embraced outcomes-based assessment as a way of encouraging continual improvement in academic programs and of demonstrating accountability" (Carter, 2003/2009, p. 268). Although Yancey shows that learning outcomes can be controversial and are not universally used, outcomes reflect what students know and can do—the *something* of the students walking across the stage. Outcomes assessment attempts to examine a program to see if the inputs lead to certain prescribed and consensus-based outcomes—knowledge, skills, and other attributes (Carter, 2003/2009; White, Elliot, & Peckham, 2015). These outcomes are a focus of programs with a mission to teach students. They are also a focus of accrediting and

accountability agencies with a mission to monitor institutions and student learning therein. Insight to measuring this learning is often collected in written artifacts such as single event writing exercises, impromptu writing exams, portfolio collections, or reflective exercises. Yancey's (2012) themes—the importance of learning outcomes, the focus on program assessment, and the sophistication of assessment tools—are present at the research site of this study.

The accountability purpose can lend itself to a cynical view that I have often heard when discussing assessment, most often by those who see no value in assessment at all. This view reduces the graduation ceremony to a mere *dipstick* assessment event to test whether the institution has met an objective and can thus report the finding to accrediting agencies, the board of trustees, the federal government, the faculty, the staff, the students, the local community, or anyone else who will read the report with the finding or listen to the oral report at a meeting or read the PowerPoint slide with the finding as the presenter also reads aloud the PowerPoint slide with the finding. This reductive view of the commencement ceremony devalues it. What it loses is an understanding of those students walking across the stage. At worst, these assessment findings are filed away, only to be dusted off when someone from an accrediting agency wants to see if the institution has done what it said it would. Too often the findings have little effect on programmatic change. Even if used, the accountability process can be a circuitous and convoluted way to eventually reach improvement.

The centralizing and hyper-focus on assessment in the reductive view leads to Yancey and Huot's (1997b) reading of the word *assessment*:

> Assessment is a funny term. It sounds formal and institutional. It frequently generates fear and anxiety, and it's not something most people seem to want to do—voluntarily or otherwise. To say that you are being assessed, we concede, sounds too much like being victimized by oppressive actions associated with arbitrary and inefficient governmental edicts, or by the mandates of faceless educational management: actions that in both cases are at best irrelevant; at worst, quite simply bad, detrimental to the teaching and learning we work so hard to promote. (p. 7)

Yancey and Huot resolve this problematic definition by arguing that "it [assessment] can help us—as students, teachers, and administrators—learn about what we are doing well and about how we might do better…" (p. 7). Instead of a reductive view, I'm interested in a narrative of the graduation ceremony where the walk is made by a student from west Philadelphia who compares his high school experience to the HBO show *The Wire*, had to commute for one semester from Philly three hours on public transportation (one way), and wants to become a teacher in part to give back to his community and because *he really enjoyed your class*. Assessment can improve teaching and learning to empower the students, a goal of the accountability audience as well.

For assessment at the program level, I share the same self-effacing approach to assessment as Yancey and Huot. The examination of a first-year composition program with the intention of improving that program for the students retains assessment's *artistry,* as Schön (1987) would describe the essential characteristic to register knowledge from reflection-in-action. In *Assessment and Excellence,* Astin and Antonio (2012) similarly argue that "*the basic purpose of assessing students is to enhance their*

educational development" (p. 5, emphasis in the original). In assessing a program, the purpose is to enhance the features that will lead to student educational development. However, the accountability aspects of assessment alluded to by Yancey and Huot (1997b) are real aspects of assessment, and program leaders need to find a place for this accountability within an assessment frame. As Angelo (1999) argues, "Though accountability matters, learning still matters most" (para. 1). The focus of this study, therefore, was to study the student writer experience within and beyond the first-year composition program as a data source about program assessment focused on learning.

In this study, accountability, as a demonstration of accepted responsibility, is framed as a responsibility to the students by taking a small, initial step of cooperation between students and faculty in assessment activities to improve subsequent teaching and learning. With an assessment-as-research model outlined by Huot (2002), the assessment questions and methods are context-sensitive to those most directly involved in the program. The assessment activities go beyond the narrow frame of accountability that associates writing with *correctness* that can be tested via standardized tests (Harrington, 2013). This study aimed to explore one way to be responsible to student stakeholders by studying their experiences for assessment insights.

The socially constructed knowledge in the study is interpretative in nature. The framework applies the ideas of Piantanida and Garman (2009) that "the consciousness and self-consciousness of human beings as integral to the knowledge generating process" (p. 50). They continue to say that knowledge from individual education practitioners in local contexts that "unearth the meanings inherent in classroom action … is akin to what Flyvbjerg (2001) describes as Aristotle's concept of *phronesis*— 'Ethics. Deliberation

about values with reference to praxis. Pragmatic, variable, context dependent. Oriented toward action. Based on practical value rationality" (p. 50). The present study is a descriptive study based in narrative inquiry and situated in a local context where the phenomenon of experiencing learning within a first-year composition program is occurring and where the assessment situation has not included students as active, valuable, contributable stakeholders in the outcomes-based assessment model.

The study explored an untapped resource in an outcomes-based assessment model, where the goal of the assessment is to provide information as to the attainment of learning outcomes and taking action to improve teaching and learning in a first-year composition program. Assessment is based in action research (Suskie, 2009), and according to Herr and Anderson (2005), action research's purpose is to "address the immediate needs of people in specific settings, and it is this utility of knowledge generated by action research that represents one of its major strengths" (p. 6), an idea that works with Huot's (2002) assessment-as-research view as well. Assessments generate local knowledge, so the significance of any assessment is most felt by the stakeholders—the students and faculty most directly involved in teaching and learning at the research site. By exploring the untapped resource of the student perspective, this study worked to enhance assessment processes for Writing Program Administrators to use in local contexts and tweak an outcomes-based program assessment model.

As a WPA, I view assessment as a balancing act, looking at it from the perspective of an educator, with growing administrative responsibilities, who wants to practice equity in a learner centered environment and find a balance that is true to my worldview and which also benefits the multitude of stakeholders at the university. The

exploration of the experiences of students, within and beyond the first-year composition program, provided a rich data set derived from the assessment of that program to be used in future assessment and first-year composition program research projects.

Significance of the Study

This study addresses a gap in the field of program assessment by studying the student perspective of learning outcomes for a first-year composition program. This study addresses the limitation in outcomes-based assessment models that rely solely on the faculty perspective and the dominance of data derived from writing-as-a-product. These direct assessments of student learning provide evidence of *what* students learned. The present study responds to these limitations by focusing on the student perspective of learning outcomes from a first-year composition program. The student perspective draws attention to learning issues of *why* learning outcomes were or were not met in order to improve teaching and learning.

The student perspective used in the study expands the next wave in writing assessment to become an inclusive process. Yancey (2012) points out that changes in assessment happen in waves. Among these waves, significant work in writing assessment has been done on placement, formative and summative first-year composition program assessment, and individual writer assessment. Yancey, however, points toward the future by reflecting on the past:

> If past is prologue, the future of writing assessment will be shaped similarly, particularly with an emphasis on outcomes and outcomes based assessments; on program assessments; and on portfolios-all of which will continue to raise

> questions about construct(s) of writing, about validity, and about ways through writing assessment we can best foster students' development as writers. (p. 187)

Yancey calls for the expansion of assessments, including program assessment, to indicate directions for student-writer development. For this reason, the present study answers this call by expanding the perspectives able in program assessment.

Huot (2002) points out that within Yancey's waves, there is a change in the sample of student production—from objective tests to holistically scored essays to portfolios—but the analysis of those products remains the same (pp. 154-155). Huot concludes by calling for validation studies: "We must not only turn our research gaze outward toward our students and programs but inward toward the methods we are using to conduct this research on assessment" (p. 155). Huot provides two models of assessment. Both go beyond simple empirical assessment of writing; however, they also both utilize outside agents to assist in the assessment. To address the gap of using inside agents, this study focuses on student inclusivity in program assessment. Studying the student perspective is significant for that perspective to become a component in an equitable outcomes-based assessment model.

In an outcomes-based model, the intended effects of a writing program are expressed in the Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs). These outcomes most clearly align with the curricular context as described by Witte and Faigley (1983), who outline a basis for a composition curriculum that fluctuates between the "what" and the "how" (p. 48). The complex nature of the composition course context may be reflected in a body of knowledge about a topic, such as interpreting literature or understanding grammar conventions or the process for how to complete a task. In addition to evidence

from student writing, assessment and evaluation scholars suggest multiple measures from various domains, such as the cultural and social context, institutional context, program structure and administration, curricular context, and instructional methods (White, 1989; White et al., 2015; Witte & Faigley, 1983). Despite the call for multiple measures from various domains, writing-as-a-product is the dominant assessment measure. The present study responds to the dominance of writing-as-a-product for assessment by investigating an alternative domain.

Reliance on writing-as-a-product is a limitation with outcomes assessment. Slomp (2012) attributes reliance on assessing a written product to the need for a stable and easily measurable construct. Witte and Faigley (1983) found that exclusively using pretest and posttest writing samples for program evaluation was inadequate for determining the effectiveness of composition courses due to the complexity of interrelated activities within the institutional and interpersonal contexts. They argue that the short time may be inadequate for measuring growth, that cognitive skills may be enhanced without demonstration in the written product, or that improvements are due to the application of prior knowledge to new situations. Further, pretest-posttest models rarely incorporate classroom activities into the assessment.

An analysis of the model programs in the Council of Writing Program Administrators' Assessment Gallery (see NCTE-WPA Task Force Members, 2014) demonstrates the focus on writing-as-a-product. Of the seven program assessment models in the gallery, only one invites input about the program from students. The majority use a writing portfolio, which has shown to be a reliable mechanism for assessing student writing, especially in larger, quantitative studies. The writing portfolio can be designed to

demonstrate a more complex artifact of student writing that can demonstrate a multitude of writing constructs in various domains such as development over time, multiple genre examples, varying audiences or purposes, or metacognitive skills through the ubiquitous reflection letter.

While Slomp (2012) argues "that assessing the development of writing ability can be achieved through means other than the assessment of a series of student-generated products" (p. 87), current assessment practices rely heavily on the student-generated product. Slomp points out that longitudinal, ethnographic research studies, such as Sternglass (1993), Sommers and Saltz (2004), and Wardle (2007), use interview methodology mixed with the examination of student written products to study writing development (p. 87). However, Slomp adapts the ethnographic, metacognitive assessment approach at the course level through a writing artifact—specifically, a more extensive version of the traditional reflection letter within a writing portfolio.

The only WPA assessment gallery model that directly asks students about their learning in a construct other than a writing product is the University of Kentucky. The UK model incorporates three focus areas—examination of the course curriculums to provide learning opportunities to meet outcomes, assessment of written products as well as a survey of students and faculty regarding "perceptions of the scope and quality of writing instruction in meeting course objectives, as well as the extent to which instruction fostered the development of cognitive skills and affective dispositions relative to critical thinking capacities" (Kendall, Kirkman, & Thoune, 2005). The comprehensive approach to program assessment at the University of Kentucky differs from the typical case of

Lincoln University because the UK model appeals directly to students for their active participation in the process.

The UK model is based on the America Association for Higher Education's "Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning." By incorporating an assessment method that directly appeals to a primary stakeholder, the model follows the principle that assessment can enable educators to be responsible to students. Their model stresses the incorporation of both qualitative and quantitative measures as a best practice to collect data that will have meaning and value when using the information to make decisions. This approach provides a balance not seen in in typical case models such as Lincoln University.

As seen in the other WPA gallery models (NCTE-WPA Task Force Members, 2014), within the assessment of writing programs, the student perspective is often left out. Student writing, specifically the writing portfolio, is directly assessed, but students are not asked about that assessment. This dissertation study seeks to address this gap by talking to students directly about their experiences for assessment insights.

White, Elliot, and Peckham (2015) value the writing portfolio because it can be scored speedily and reliably. However, they also work to broaden the scope of the assessment product picture. In their book *Very Like a Whale: The Assessment of Writing Programs,* they trace the growth of construct scoring, which shows that holistic scoring works "for assessing timed, impromptu essays" but falls short in assessing metacognition or audience awareness (pp. 29-30). White, Elliot, and Peckham's conceptual modeling approach focusing on portfolios allows for a more expansive assessment including examining metacognition and audience awareness through reflective written products. To

account for the complexity of learning in a writing course, the *White Whale* approach heavily relies on a writing construct map charting first-year writing as well as writing across the curriculum and writing in the discipline courses throughout the institution: "We feel certain that, in the near future, it will be difficult for a writing program to be assessed in a valid fashion—perhaps even for it to exist—unless such a figure is available for all stakeholders as a representation, subject to revision and improvement, of the construct that consumes so much time, attention, and resources" (p. 76). The writing program mapping helps to broaden assessment, but at a cost.

While the *White Whale* approach has significant merits for assessing a writing program due to its inclusion of various writing tasks, placing greater emphasis on the written product may further marginalize student voice. This study includes student voices to study the learning within a first-year composition program. What students think about writing programs needs to be added to our knowledge base to illuminate strengths and identify areas of concern.

Although assessment literature often invokes student *participation*, it rarely discusses student *involvement*. White, Elliot, and Peckham (2015) admit that students are seldom taken into consideration in assessment. Guides such as *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide* (Suskie, 2009) dedicate limited space to strategies to involve students in assessment. Suskie does provide a list of ways students can assist with multidimensional assessment work including drafting learning outcomes, identifying assessment strategies, and sharing results (p. 77); however, these recommendations are focused on assessment at the course level to benefit the individual rather than outcomes

assessment at the program level. The present study investigates student involvement in the assessment of a first-year composition program's outcomes.

At the program level, Witte and Faigley (1983) indicate that program evaluation should be multidimensional, "consisting at least of a cultural context, an institution context, program structure and administration, a curriculum, as well as a pedagogy" (p. 64). The University of Kentucky model appears to cover all these dimensions. White, Elliot, and Peckman (2015) also posit that multiple domains need to be taken into consideration in preparation for an assessment project. One of those *White Whale* elements most applicable to the subject of this study is "emphasizing standpoint, writing assessment should be based on continuous conversations with as many stakeholders as possible" (p. 64). Analysis of only a written product limits the ability to hold a conversation with multiple stakeholders. To address the limitation, this study examines the overlooked student stakeholder perspective.

Lack of student involvement in the program assessment process is a problem at the present research site like it is at so many sites. Banta (2009, 2011b), Rodgers (2011), and Slomp (2012) all call for students to be actively involved in the program assessment process. Most program assessment models heavily focus on quantitative methods applied to student work rather than being designed to include student perspectives on learning. This oversight of the student voice is problematic because it usurps the authority of the one stakeholder group most directly affected by assessment. As Williamson (1997) argues, "Program assessment is a matter of continuing professional health for individual teachers and the programs that they comprise, but only if it is conducted in ways that are sensitive to the needs of the particular context in which they teach and in which their

students learn" (p. 257). Without asking students for their perceptions of learning and the learning outcomes, the health of a program may only be superficial.

The central question of this study directly seeks student perspectives on learning in a first-year composition program. My concern with the writing program under my purview is a lack of information regarding potential student needs beyond the program as well as potential blind spots in the assessment of the program itself. Huot (2002) echoes Williamson's (1997) argument: "Those closest to teaching and learning, like students and teachers, need to have the most input about writing assessment and all important teaching decisions" (Huot, 2002, p. 2). By neglecting student voices in outcomes assessment data, a program may be limited in its ability to further develop and improve. The goal of this study was to collect student narratives of learning from the first-year composition program to see how they discussed their learning and the relation of those narratives to the Program Student Learner Outcomes (PSLOs).

The benefits of examining the student experience are argued by Jarratt, Mack, Sartor, and Watson (2009) who call for cultivating *pedagogical memory* by showing students the logic behind the writing instruction they are being given. These authors to give students pedagogical authority over their learning (p. 66). They recommend interview projects by the WPA as a "student-oriented means of gauging the effects of writing pedagogy across years and disciplines." The interviews should take place outside the strictures of institutional assessment (p. 67). Their purpose was to seek evidence of writing transfer and how that transfer was enacted. This study builds on the pedogeological memory approach by also seeking to interview students outside the confines of institutional assessment. The present study is not trying to ascertain how

knowledge transfer took place. Rather, the present study follows the recommendation of using a student interview protocol and focuses that protocol on the student perspective for the assessment Program Student Learner Outcomes by students who have completed that program. The interviews are used to gather participants' self-reported narratives about the application of knowledge and skills from the first-year composition program for use in post-program writing situations.

As the present study investigated the inclusion of student input into program assessment, the study demonstrates how assessment practices can continually evolve through research. Rose and Wesier (1999) recount the recognition from the field of composition studies that "WPAs play a critical role in the development as well as application of knowledge in the field" (p. v). Harris (1999) indicates that "the interplay of knowledge for local use and knowledge for the profession is a complex one with borderlines that are, at best, hazy" (p. 3). As an example of how localized studies in a writing center contributed to the field, Harris cites her article that examined how student perceptions on tutorials contributed to writing growth. In that cited article, Harris (1995) concludes, based on student comments, that the individualized learning environment provided by writing centers contributed to thinking independently, applying writing knowledge to writing practice, handling affective concerns, and understanding academic language (p. 40). Harris's study shows the value of collecting student voices, and the present study tries to follow her lead.

WPAs need to learn more about their students' writing experiences, provide opportunity for students to assess their writing programs, and locate assessment with those closest to the teaching and learning found in that writing program and those making

decisions about that program. Diversified assessment projects that include qualitative assessment research practices that speak directly to those involved in the program can add greatly to the quantitative, product-focused assessment practices currently favored in program assessment models. Giving students an opportunity to talk about assessment can only help improve our understanding about how well assessment practices work.

Context of the Research Site

Academic Assessment Within the Institution

The outcomes-based, student learning assessment process across Lincoln University is mostly an internal process that is done *to* students as the faculty perform writing assessments without student input at any point. This process is carried out by actors other than the students. Although student learning assessment is done for the presumed betterment of the various programs for students, it is done *to* students rather than *with* students. The students have little input into any aspect of the four-part assessment process from selection of goals to the decisions made to effect change and close the assessment loop. Student writing artifacts, either presented in portfolios; final drafts; or timed, impromptu writing tasks, are evaluated by faculty, and the aggregated results are used to make changes and well as report to accountability agencies. The loop is closed without including the student perspective.

The first time the term *closing the loop* registered for me I was sitting in the back of a very long boardroom while at the other end a representative from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) informed the Lincoln University community about its non-compliance with Standard 14 regarding assessment of student learning. He, as politely as possible when delivering upsetting news, said the

University was being warned that its accreditation might be in jeopardy if certain actions were not taken. We had a year to make changes or face more serious repercussions. The warning about the inadequacy of learning assessment was in the context of accountability for a quasi-external audience.

Although some were incensed with the warning about Lincoln's lack of assessment evidence, thinking the University had plenty to satisfy Standard 14, much of what the MSCHE reviewers were saying rang true for me. As a relatively new teacher, I was constantly reflecting on my practice through *informal* assessment projects to improve my craft. However, as a member of the writing program, I had seen few instances of program assessment for improvement purposes; assessment reporting mostly seemed to be done for accountability of both the students and faculty—submit some samples as a check on student writing and evaluate the grading by faculty. As far as I could tell, little action was taken after those samples were submitted. There wasn't formal discussion of the student writing; the information wasn't used in discussing curriculum changes, etc. In other words, the loop was not truly being closed. MSCHE saw evidence supporting the *lack* of an assessment process and said *close the loop or else*.

The phrase *close the loop* refers to the completion of an assessment cycle and any actions taken based on the assessment findings as the reiterative process begins anew. Changes meant to improve the program are based on the feedback from the assessment process. As Carter (2003/2009) argues, "The main advantage of this outcomes perspective is that it provides data for closing the educational feedback loop, that is, faculty can use the results of program assessment to further improve programs" (p. 268). Closing the loop is akin to validity for Huot (1996) who writes, "validity focuses on the

adequacy of the theoretical and empirical evidence to construct an argument for making decisions based upon a specific assessment" (p. 38). Lynne (2004) uses the term "meaningfulness" to redefine the psychometric term of validity and would indicate how the assessment is productive. Among a few other issues, Lincoln's assessment process was not clearly, if at all, closing the loop, that vital last step in the assessment process. We may have been collecting information, but it wasn't clear to MSCHE if we were using the data and analysis moving forward. In response to the warning, the faculty and administration, including the Faculty Committee on Assessment and Evaluation of which I was a member, worked to implement an assessment system across the University in every academic program, including the first-year composition program. We implemented a formal outcomes-based assessment model for the University. When a MSCHE representative visited the following year, he found that the University had addressed the earlier criticisms and our accreditation was reaffirmed. The external review by MSCHE had formally brought outcomes-based assessment to Lincoln University.

First-Year Composition Program Assessment

Outcomes assessment within the first-year composition program at Lincoln University comprises two major assessments, initial placement and summative course assessments. For initial placement to ensure students start the curriculum at an appropriate instructional level to meet the outcomes, students are assessed via the College Board's ACCUPLACER assessment tests of "WritePlacer," a computer scored, written essay exam, as well as "Sentence Skills," a multiple-choice test with questions geared toward *sentence correction* and *sentence construction.* Cut scores determine if students are placed into the college curriculum courses of English Composition I (ENG 101) or

English Composition II (ENG 102) or the developmental course that does not carry gradation credit, Integrated Reading and Writing (ENG 099)[1]. The ACCUPLACER placements are reviewed to determine if the assessment tests and cut scores are providing an accurate placement within the curriculum through an evaluation of a sample of student writing artifacts. Analysis of the placement has shown positive results when compared to the previous placement system that used the SAT verbal score[2]. Students are placing into the composition sequence at the same frequency; however, about 50% of the students have a different course placement using ACCUPLACER than the SAT verbal score. Summative assessments suggest that the ACCUPLACER placement is a more precise placement test than the SAT verbal score for the local context and curriculum. However, the placement assessment relies on external evaluation as opposed to more student-centered placement models such as directed self-placement. A study has not been completed to determine the student perspective on this placement procedure. Getchell (2011) found that the student perspective can be valuable feedback into the writing assessment in the context of placement. The present study applies that knowledge to the context of program assessment.

As an additional check on student placement within the Basic Writing program that does build on directed self-placement models, qualifying students have an opportunity to submit a portfolio to the first-year composition program for review about ¾ of the way into the semester. These portfolios are weighed against the requirements and outcomes of the next course in the sequence via Smith's (1993) expert reader model.

[1] Previously, the developmental program included two courses, neither of which counted toward graduation credit. There are still students at Lincoln University who took both developmental courses in the Basic Writing sequences.

[2] A holistic placement system with trained readers assessing student writing had been in place before the use of the SAT verbal score but was discontinued for reasons unbeknownst to me.

A student enrolled in ENG 099 can submit a portfolio after the midterm of the semester. The work is scored by an ENG 101 faculty member. If the writing samples are all graded as a B- or higher and meeting the desired outcomes of ENG 101, the student is exempted from ENG 101. The ENG 099 course grade is substituted for the ENG 101 grade on the transcript, and the student receives graduation credit for the course. Not only is this a benefit for the students, the data from this program have also been used to assess and modify the initial placement cut scores.

Students begin the writing program sequence at whichever course they place into. Each of these three courses has a summative assessment process to check the rate of student learning outcome achievement, which is aggregated for the overall outcomes assessment. In each course, a rubric that corresponds to a specific learning outcome is applied by the course professor or the WPA to one or more writing artifacts produced by students toward the end of the semester. The artifacts range from a portfolio of work to a final essay exam or research paper. The students receive assessment in the form of feedback during the course; however, the overall program assessment results are not shared with the students nor do students participate in the assessment of the first-year composition program process beyond producing texts. Students are not asked to provide their thoughts about the program.

The assessment results for each Program Student Learning Outcomes under review in that cycle are analyzed mainly by the WPA and reported to the department and the University Assessment and Accreditation Office. The findings are used for such purposes as changes to the curriculum or budgetary requests, in an attempt to close the loop. For example, an argument for smaller class sizes that is born from the assessment

data analysis can be used to increase the faculty budget. More often, the data is used to make changes to the curriculum or to decide where faculty development is needed. Overall, the assessment process examines if outcomes were met and informs changes that may happen as a result.

To summarize, assessment in the first-year composition program exists for initial placement and re-evaluation of placement during the program. The thrust of program assessment is based on a summative assessment of individual Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs) from student written products assessed by faculty. These assessment projects are used to make changes to the program as well as for accountability reporting. For the purposes of the first-year composition program, student writing assessment beyond the last composition course in the sequence is not currently practiced. Although the students need to submit a writing portfolio in their program major before graduation as part of the Writing Proficiency Program, the evaluative procedures in that program follow the summative procedures in the first-year composition program, most simply evaluate "correctness," and have not yet yielded pertinent assessment data for the first-year composition program. The first-year composition program assessment is limited to course assessment projects and does not include Shupe's (2008) preferred "student learning outcomes system" (p. 88), which is Shupe's identified best practice to meet both improvement and accountability measures for internal and external audiences because of its integrated and continual attention to assessment.

The goals of the first-year composition program go beyond the program itself (Appendix A). A stated mission of the program is to prepare students for all writing assignments throughout their undergraduate academic experience. This is a common goal

of first-year composition programs; as Yancey et al. (2014) state, “Our goal for first-year composition, like the field’s collective goal, is to help writers develop and prepare students for the writing they will do in other college courses” (pp. 139-140). Development of writing skills does not end with a first-year composition program. The Council of Writing Program Administrators (2014 July) clearly outlines this idea in its guidelines for the outcomes of first-year composition programs:

> As students move beyond first-year composition, their writing abilities do not merely improve. Rather, students' abilities not only diversify along disciplinary and professional lines but also move into whole new levels where expected outcomes expand, multiply, and diverge. For this reason, each statement of outcomes for first-year composition is followed by suggestions for further work that builds on these outcomes. (para. 4)

Each outcome statement represents *something* to be learned by student writers in the first-year composition program. That learning is not meant to end with the program since students continue through the rest of their college curriculum and *build* on those initial learning outcomes. For example, the Council of Writing Program Administrators’ process outcome states that the “students should … develop flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading.” The first-year composition program at Lincoln University has a Program Student Learning Outcome (PSLO) that students will be able to “write and revise in multiple drafts to create a successful text.” Both outcome statements are intended to be a studied aspect of the theory of writing in a first-year composition program as well as used and further developed after completion of that program.

Underscoring the service aspect of first-year composition programs is the desire and purpose for those outcomes to be used in later college writing activities. The later application of learned activity to new situations is called transfer. Identifying writing transfer is difficult for researchers (Downs & Wardle, 2007) and for students (Beaufort, 2007; Carroll, 2002). Many have argued for and present ways to make transfer a more active part of the curriculum (Downs & Wardle, 2007; Driscoll, 2011; Yancey et al., 2014). Driscoll (2011) suggests that student attitudes during the first-year composition program can affect the ability to transfer skills. While not a prominent aspect of Lincoln's curriculum, it is hoped that transfer is occurring. Research on transfer at LU is needed. While assessment at the research site is focused on the students' level of attainment of the outcomes when they complete a first-year composition program course, assessment after later application of that knowledge is scant. In the present study, investigating these issues in how students discuss learning broadens the first-year composition program assessment landscape.

The Investigation Direction

As missions and goals are situated in the future and learning outcomes in the more immediate present, assessment needs to incorporate that future into the present. Yancey's (2012) review of the themes of writing assessment's current moment raises an important question: Who controls the writing assessment?

In the current assessment process at Lincoln University, the voices working to close the loop are those of the faculty, staff, and administrators who have created the goals and learning opportunities, designed the measurement tools, assessed the data, and made changes. The problem is that the voice of one interested stakeholder has been left

out of this conversation: the voice of the students who have been affected and will be affected by the decisions made in the assessment process. According to Astin and Antonio (2012), "No system of outcome assessment is adequate if it fails to incorporate some student perspective" (p. 43). At Lincoln University, and most other universities, writing assessment is controlled by stakeholders other than the students. Student insights about their experience of learning writing and attempting to transfer that learning to new writing situations is not part of the assessment process at most universities.

Researching student writing experiences with assessment is in line with the roots of composition studies. Back in 1971, Janet Emig asked twelfth graders to write an autobiography about their writing experiences. In Emig's case study, the students had a literal voice that was used to better understand how they enacted the composing process and led to recommended changes in the teaching of composition. The present study seeks to engage students to better understand what they learned in the first-year composition program in relation to the learning outcomes and the application of that knowledge to additional writing situations. The students' reflections on their learning can help drive change in the assessment process. Yancey (1998) argues for the use of reflection "to ask students to participate with us, not as objects of our study, but *as agents of their own learning*" (p. 5, emphasis in original).

This study aimed to include this missing voice of students and fulfill Walvoord's (2004) call to "*improve our assessment systems so that they help us enhance student learning* …" (p. 3, emphasis in original) while having a positive effect on the educational environment (Cronbach, 1988; Huot, 2002; Messick, 1989). The present study operates within the existing structure of the research sites' assessment model in an effort to work

with an internal audience for improvement that also expands the actively involved assessment stakeholders to include students and repositions the idea of accountability to include those same students. Students are not a part of the assessment process, like they are in the University of Kentucky model. The results of this study provide a model for an additional way that the student voice can be used within an assessment model.

Limitations of the Study

This qualitative study is limited by a small number of participants, which does not allow for generalizability to the larger population at the research site or beyond. Out of the 70 students who were informed of the study through the recruitment process, 25 agreed to be contacted. Of those 25, nine participants agreed to be interviewed. The study sought to get in depth stories from a small group of participants rather than pursuing a large number of participants through a survey.

The methodology chosen also relies on the human subjects' memory to retell stories and to do so as truthfully as possible. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) point out the illusions of causality that mark a difference between events-as-lived and events-as-told. However, within an assessment project, the data and analysis resulting from a narrative inquiry provides a rich description of the student experience for assessment of a first-year composition program. The critical even analysis was used to focus on those events that were most memorable.

As I was designing the study, I chose not to directly ask about racial issues that may be complicating the teaching and learning dynamic. I was not yet ready to investigate race within the teaching and learning framework. Quite frankly, I was cautious not to be a white male asking students of color about race. Rather, I sought to

create an inclusive, welcoming, safe environment for students to bring up the issues that mattered to them. Of course, students brought up issues of race because those issues are a daily part of their existence. The study is better for their openness and honesty.

Chapter One Summary

This chapter identified the research questions guiding the study. It explored the first-year composition program assessment context of the research site, which is an outcomes-based model that heavily relies on summative, course assessments using predetermined standards and outcomes created by stakeholders other than students. In addition, the program assessment is not capturing data beyond the immediate program completion. The argument made in this study is that through a pragmatic approach to assessment using narrative inquiry to capture the student experience, a broader, more inclusive assessment picture takes shape. The student perspective on the Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs) identifies why students learned or had difficulty learning. This information is useful in the assessment of a first-year writing program to close the loop to improve learning and teaching as well be accountable to the students of the program. Overall, this assessment study operates within Huot's (1996, 2002) qualitative theory of writing assessment applied to an outcomes-based assessment practice to include the student voice in the global assessment project of a first-year composition program. Ultimately, the value of student input is to create a larger assessment knowledge base for the decision-making process afforded by the outcomes-based assessment model. The study argues for the inclusion of student input in the program assessment process through an examination of the student experience. It provides a model from which manageable and sustainable assessment procedures can be derived. This study is part of the next wave

of inclusive assessment for outcomes-based assessment within the field of composition to close the assessment loop and point toward future research projects and areas of growth for a writing program.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter Two explores the conceptual framework, underlying theories, and pertinent studies informing this study. Assessment is further defined and examined through multiple *frames* that exist to understand how assessment is used and why. The chapter explores first-year composition program knowledge and knowledge transfer as a basis for examining the future impact of the first-year composition program to more broadly assess program outcomes. Further, the chapter relates Dewey's theories of education to assessment to provide pragmatic balance within an assessment model.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology of narrative inquiry and critical event analysis to gather data to answer the research questions. It outlines the participant qualifications, chain sampling to locate participants, and field data sources, including the learning outcome interviews that produced the bulk of the data. Ethical considerations and trustworthiness are addressed. Through narrative interviews, the student perspective on Program Learning Outcomes can be ascertained.

Chapter Four reviews that data analysis process and presents the three themes from the data collection:

Theme 1: Narratives of Interpersonal Interaction

Narratives of student learning describe interpersonal interactions that affect learning and attainment of outcomes.

Theme 2: Narratives Situated in Time

Narratives of student learning are situated in time that broaden assessment data to include prior knowledge and learning transfer.

Theme 3: Assessment Narratives of Holistic Learning

Narratives of student learning show concurrent critical events across multiple Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs) that provide a holistic view of learning within the program.

Chapter Four illustrates these themes with student interview responses that describe the student learning experiences and provides an interpretation and analysis of each theme.

Chapter Five discusses those themes to show how they relate to the research questions. The chapter theorizes how the student learning narrative assessment model can be used to fulfill the purposes of program assessment.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter situates the research study as an outcomes-based program assessment designed to improve teaching and learning by applying Huot's (2002) argument that assessment needs to include at the program level those closest to the teaching and learning, specifically the students. The principals for Huot's "new theory and practice of writing assessment" include being site-based, locally-controlled, context-sensitive, rhetorically-based, and accessible (Huot, 2002, p. 105). Huot's pragmatic assessment approach marks a break from the prevailing approach to outcomes assessment that is generally technocratic and economically influenced as well as primarily done to satisfy the accountability concerns of audiences further removed from the education site where any improvement needs to take place. Rather than primary accountability to outside agents, reframing accountability to students focuses program assessment on identifying strengths and areas for improvement within a program. This pragmatic assessment approach reflects Dewey's theories of education.

The Writing Program Administrator View

In *A Rhetoric for Writing Program Administrators,* Donahue (2013) asks "What is WPA research?" A distinction is made between research and assessment saying, "if we take *research* as description and explanation, rather than evaluation for action, we see the framing of this difference" (p. 382). The different end goals mark the distinction between the two actions—research describes and explains; assessment uses the conclusions for action. In an earlier chapter in *A Rhetoric for Writing Program Administrators*,

Harrington (2013) asks "What is Assessment?" and makes a distinction between assessment and evaluation. The difference again is in the end goal:

> Evaluation asks whether a course or program is effective, and the audience for evaluation is most often external. Assessment is a formative process, providing information for an inside audience who is interested in continued development of a course or program. (p. 165)

For Harrington, assessment is a research step that informs the action. Harrington then invokes Huot's (2002) argument that assessment is research: "The primary consideration in assessing student writing should be what we want to know about our students" (p. 148). Harington equates assessment to stories, as assessment "provides a narrative about writing, teachers, and students" as well as information about behaviors and thinking (p. 159). In Chapter 3, I will build off Harrington's view of assessment as narratively based by proposing a data collection method based in narrative inquiry. In another chapter of *A Rhetoric for Writing Program Administrators*, Wardle (2013) asks "What is Transfer?," a concept that asks fundamental questions related to the goals of teaching and administering writing courses: "We hope these courses will help students use what they know about writing, learn something new about writing, and ultimately be able to successfully tackle new writing tasks in different settings" (p. 143). These concepts from the WPA perspective are fundamental for this research study.

The specific research questions addressed in this study are asked as a WPA who seeks to do assessment research to uncover student writer stories regarding knowledge acquisition. Those narratives are informed by the use that of writing knowledge in contexts beyond the first-year writing program. Understanding the student perspective on

assessment can inform program assessment projects to continue to develop a writing program. In this way, the assessment aligns with Huot's (2002) principals for writing assessment of being site-based, locally controlled, and context sensitive. As seen in Chapter 1, the problem in the first-year composition program assessment process at the research site is twofold. first, student input in the assessment of the first-year composition program is absent, even though students are a primary stakeholder in the program. Second, assessment examining the use of the learning outcomes from a perspective beyond the program is not currently assessed. Students are positioned to provide data for that additional assessment dimension. The site based issue corresponds to the call from many researchers in the field of assessment for greater student participation in the assessment process (Astin & Antonio, 2012; Slomp, 2012; Suskie, 2009; Yancey, 2012).

A gap in the field of program assessment, including first-year composition programs, exists due to the reliance on writing-as-a-product assessments from the faculty perspective and a general ignorance of the usefulness of the student perspective on program assessment.

A pragmatic assessment process can situate assessment closer to the people most affected by the assessment and the decisions made based on that data by seeking the voice of the students regarding the learning within a composition. To learn about the student experience and understand the student perspective, this study asks the following questions:

1. How do students who have completed a first-year composition program describe their learning in the program?

2. How do students' narratives about their experiences in a first-year composition program and beyond provide insight into the learning outcomes of that first-year composition program?

These research questions require description and interpretation of the learning that has taken place to understand the learning phenomenon. In other words, the research questions are assessment questions, and they are not being answered through the outcomes-based assessment process at the research site. The answers provide insight program assessment from an ignored stakeholder voice.

Assessment—Learning About Learning

Assessment is concerned with the learning growth of the students in an effort to make necessary modifications. According to Walvoord (2004), "Assessment is the systematic collection of information about student learning, using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available, in order to inform decisions that affect student learning" (p. 3). From the perspective of student learning, those decisions may lead to improvement and changes reflected in the curriculum, courses, program structures, budget allocation, or faculty development (Walvoord, 2004). Assessment, then, attempts to capture what happened to inform a subsequent action.

Adler-Kassner and O'Neill (2010) ask three broad questions about assessment:

1. What is the purpose of an assessment?
2. Who is (or are) the primary audience(s) for an assessment and its results?
3. What decisions might, or will, result from an assessment? (p.3)

These questions allow for a review of the assessment practice and its role. The first two questions, which will be discussed more fully in the next section as they inform the role

of assessment in this study, are intrinsically linked, much like a rhetorical analysis of a writing situation. The third question is what any assessment is building towards, including this study. The answers to these questions are important for *closing the loop*, the completion of an assessment cycle and any actions taken based on the findings of that assessment as the reiterative process begins anew. Closing the loop was an identified issue in an accreditation review by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) at the research site of Lincoln University. This study creates a space for an excluded voice, students, to generate additional data useful for closing the loop.

For outcomes-based assessment of a first-year composition program to have real value, it must be used to further develop, grow, and improve the program. Simply knowing to what degree students meet outcomes provides limited insight into what to do next. The richer the data gathered from assessment, the more informed the process of closing the loop. Student contributions to assessment can provide direction to close the loop and inform future assessment projects.

Walvoord (2004) indicates that the end of an outcomes-based assessment project is action where information gained from the process can be used to close the loop. The cyclical process provides structure for an ongoing program assessment project and has four basic steps (Angelo, 1995; Carter, 2003/2009; Shupe, 2008; Suskie, 2009; Walvoord, 2004):

1. Establishing student learning outcomes,
2. Providing learning opportunities to achieve those outcomes,[3]

[3] Walvoord (2004) indicates that the mapping of the opportunities is not assessment. However, the exercise is useful for observing the curricular structure designed to focus the learning and, hence, lead to the outcomes.

3. Systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine if student learning matches the expectations,
4. Using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning.

The use of resulting information is important for the meaningfulness of the entire exercise (Lynne, 2004). In this research study, the preexisting assessment process excluded students from those four steps. The process did not allow for students to comment on the desired student learning outcomes, the opportunities designed to achieve those outcomes, the evidence of outcome achievement, or use of the data to improve student learning within the program.

Assessment Purpose and Audience

The purpose of assessment at the institutional, programmatic, or student level can be for improvement or accountability or both; the audiences for assessment are for either an internal or external audience or both (Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2010; Adler-Kassner & O'Neill, 2010; Shupe, 2008). The matrix shown in Figure 1 was developed by Shupe (2008) to show how the purpose of an assessment aligns with an audience.

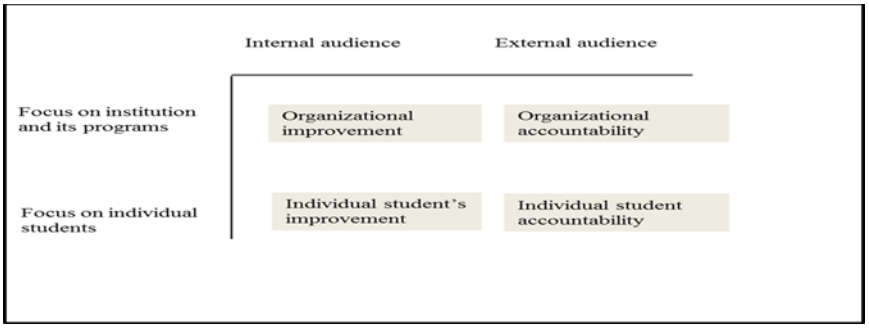

Figure 1. Matrix of assessment purpose and audience (Shupe 2008).

Whichever purpose and audience is privileged affects the choice of assessment model. The model chosen for the assessment project may yield different types of

information for use in decision making to close the assessment loop. Often, institutions will establish multiple types of assessments to meet demands from multiple audiences, even if those models produce inadequate information (Shupe, 2008). Inadequate information may still serve the purpose of an outside audience, but the information does not necessarily help the internal audience improve teaching and learning. For example, standardized test scores are often valued by outside audiences as indicators of acquired knowledge; however, educators may find this information inadequate because standardized tests do not always accurately measure what students need to know or can do, making the results difficult to use as a basis for decisions affecting the curriculum.

When Lincoln University was under accreditation review by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), organizational accountability for an external audience was privileged. The result for the first-year composition program was an assessment process in which faculty examined student writing artifacts, a typical program assessment process. Each writing artifact was assigned a numerical value based on a rubric that corresponded to the outcome under the assessment review. The assessment of the same data was to be used by the internal audience to make improvements. However, the quantitative assessment being practiced at Lincoln University and many other writing programs is better suited to the external audience than the internal audience for the purpose of student learning improvement. As an alternative to that model, this study investigates qualitative assessment data as an aid to an internal audience.

Building from Shupe's matrix, Adler-Kassner and Harrington (2010), in their argument for reframing accountability in assessment, show the programmatic focus of

assessment for either the internal purpose of improvement or the external purpose of accountability. They list students as the audience in only the individual accountability for an external audience segment. This placement ignores the potential for students as an internal audience for improvement at the programmatic level. If the programmatic assessment process is accountable to the students and faculty closest to the program, assessment can answer Yancey and Huot's (1997a) call to "help us—as students, teachers, and administrators—learn about what we are doing well and about how we might do better…." (p. 7) and Harrington's (2013) argument that assessment develops programs from the inside. In this research study, an internal audience can learn from students about what the program is doing well and areas of concern through those students' narratives and reflections on the Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs).

From the perspective of an internal audience, including students and educators, assessment is the opportunity to gain knowledge about student learning, seeking information regarding the operation of teaching and learning, and how the teaching and learning process can be improved. Astin and Antonio (2012) argue that "*the basic purpose of assessing students is to enhance their educational development*" (p. 5, emphasis in original). Focusing on the program level, the basic purpose of assessing a program would be to enhance the educational opportunities of that program. The focus on program improvement is a similar goal to many education researchers who discuss assessment (Suskie, 2009; Walvoord, 2004). Huot (2002) uses assessment to strengthen a program: "Instead of envisioning assessment as a way to enforce certain culturally positioned standards and refuse entrance to certain people and groups of people, we need to use our assessments to aid the learning environment for both teachers and students" (p.

8). This approach has a primary focus on learning with a secondary focus of using assessment to support learning. If the focus on student learning in a program is placed at the center, the temptation to focus on an assessment approach that may produce inadequate information for improvement but will satisfy outside audiences can be cast aside. Program assessment that focuses on student learning is a tool primarily for growth in teaching and learning, as Yancey and Huot (1997b) argue; hence, first-year composition program assessment needs to include students who have completed work in that program.

In the introduction to the book *Assessment and Learning*, Gardner (2012) states, "On first inspection, the title of this book arguably places learning, one of the most fundamental processes in a person's life course, secondary to one of the most contrived processes, the assessment of the learning" (p. 1). Gardner's goal as a member of the Assessment Reform Group of the British Educational Research Association is similar to that of many educators, including myself: assessment needs to support learning and teaching. The action of assessment follows the action of learning, which is why Gardner is quick to explain the title of his book. Assessment is a vehicle for acquiring knowledge about student learning in a course, program, institution, etc. that can then be used as evidence for a myriad of activities such as improving teaching and learning in addition to evidence that the students are learning something.

In contrast to assessment for improvement, assessment for accountability, which generally privileges quantitative evidence of outcome attainment from a large sample of students, is often the primary focus for others in academia, such as higher-level administrators who are more often concerned with outside audiences than internal ones.

Assessment that uses writing-as-a-product helps to fill the need of the outside audience. In a discussion of developmental programing primarily focused on funding, the then-president of Lincoln University said, “Everything you do in higher education is about one word—assessment” (personal communication, July 1, 2014). His focus on the *contrived process* took precedent over the *fundamental process* as he needed that generalized data in his search for continued funding from outside the institution for Lincoln’s developmental writing and math programs.

Assessment for the purpose of accountability is often in contrast to assessment for improvement, creating an either/or scenario between the two potential audiences—an internal audience who is generally more concerned with improvement of learning and an audience external to the assessment site that is often more concerned with accountability regarding the acquisition of learning outcomes. A problem with assessment to satisfy the external audience is that “assessment designed to address accountability demands—that is, using standardized test scores and value-added measures to compare the quality of institutions—may actually damage our years of work to make outcomes assessment serve to guide institutional improvement efforts” (Banta, 2011a, p. 6). The conflict is reflected in the president of Lincoln University’s statement “that everything is about assessment” and highlights the need to expand the assessment of the first-year composition program to provide data that can be used for the improvement of teaching and learning.

Higher education researcher Peter Ewell (2009) has shown that a tension in this either/or scenario has been present since the modern assessment movement began in the mid-1980s, and it can lead to contradictory interests. While assessment for improvement is often favored by teaching-focused educators, who are generally an internal audience

(Yancey & Huot, 1997b), accountability takes an external stance and is often associated with economic issues such as funding. Ewell indicates that the external audiences for accountability include the government, both state and federal, who provide direct and indirect funding to higher education institutions; the taxpaying public; "customers" who are deciding which colleges and universities to attend; accrediting agencies; and performance accountability reporters, such as *U.S. News and World Report* who have a financial interest in selling their ranking lists. In addition, membership-driven accrediting agencies are an external audience reviewing the standards put forth by their members. The accreditation reviews are used by funding agencies, and accrediting bodies often respond to external pressures to maintain credibility. For instance, MSCHE has recently revised its standards to include ethics (see Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2014), which will become effective for schools performing self-studies starting in the 2017-2018 academic year. This change is an example of Ewell's *accountability buffer* role that accrediting agencies play between intuitions of higher education and the other external audiences as a form of indirect regulation. As Ewell (2008) analyzes the two assessment paradigms of improvement and accountability, he pushes to bring them together for an internal audience: "Instead of seeing assessment as an aspect of higher education's responsibility to its funders, legitimate though this may be, both faculty and academic leaders need to see it as part of our accountability to ourselves" (p. 14). Ewell shifts the accountability audience of the assessment, as does the approach in this dissertation study.

Assessment accountability that is focused on the students, ourselves as faculty, and the programs we administer and in which students partake can influence the teaching

and learning. One form of this accountability is listening to the students, understanding them, and working with them to improve learning and teaching. The approach of this dissertation study counterbalances the existing assessment process at the research site by reframing assessment as being responsible to the students and away from the existing dominant frame that posits accountability to outside audiences.

The Existing Dominant Frame

As suggested in the discussion from Chapter One of the assessment situation at Lincoln University, the responsibility to be accountable to a predominantly outside audience fits Adler-Kassner and O'Neil's (2010) idea of a d*ominant frame* that has serious implications for the accreditation and survival of a university. In recent examples from the research site, Lincoln University faced accreditation warnings from MSCHE for inadequately demonstrating a process regarding Standard 14 Assessment of Student Learning (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2009). Also, the Lincoln University Board of Trustees (LUBOT) took action through a board resolution to institute a writing proficiency exam for all students. LUBOT's action has been attributed to unsubstantiated reports from employers that Lincoln University students could not write adequately. The resolution was premised on the ideas that "it is projected that the average undergraduate from a university or college during this century will change careers ten or more times during his/her lifetime" and "no matter what the graduate's major or minor is, there are certain fundamental skills that are and will be required for all majors and minors" (Lincoln University Board of Trustees, 2004). The premise provides a clear economic rationale for the requirement.

The purpose of education inherent in these actions is as preparation for the next stage of education ultimately leading to jobs or careers. The underlying purpose illustrates the argument of Adler-Kassner and O'Neil (2010):

> Stories about education … are shaped through one (very, very dominant) frame currently surrounding the idea of "what education should be," a *frame* that also profoundly influences discussions about assessments intended to provide information about what students are learning as well as how and why they should be learning it. (p. 15, emphasis in original)

The dominant frame is mainly concerned with the economic future of the country and sees education narrowly—preparing students for a career. Individual success is linked to collective success in this frame. Thus, assessment examines the outcomes of individuals to determine the success of an entire program. Contributing to this dominant frame are national policy reports from the U.S. Department of Education such as *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and *A Test of Leadership* (Spellings Commission, 2006).

These reports use a rhetoric of crisis that underscores the dominant frame to make an argument for change within education, especially one that makes education accountable to audiences outside of themselves. *A Nation at Risk* (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) states in the first paragraph that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" (para. 1). *A Test of Leadership* (Spellings Commission, 2006), also referred to as the "Spellings Report," posits that complacency within the higher education system is a problem when "literacy among college graduates has declined" (p. x) and "in this consumer-driven environment,

students increasingly care little about the distinctions that sometimes preoccupy the academic establishment…. They care—as we do—about results" (p. xi). Those results are mostly framed as quantifiable accountability outcomes that are discussed in terms of being necessary for obtaining employment.

The national reports do indicate that they have students' interests in mind. As *A Nation at Risk* (1983) states, "All children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself" (Preamble, para. 1). This philosophy links the best interest of the students and their learning to the progress of society and the economic aspects of the dominant frame. To further propel the value of the university experience, the recommendations from the Spellings Report have become a huge driver of accountability reporting to accrediting bodies and other external audiences, including the "College Scorecard" system where potential students can "find out more about a college's affordability and value so you can make more informed decisions about which college to attend" (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The message from these reports is that colleges need to be accountable, especially to the outside audiences such as accrediting agencies and potential students to ensure that students can find gainful employment, yet the assessment to make these determinations is limited in its ability to indicate to the inside audience what needs to change or which direction the program needs to grow.

The dominant frame relies on the more technocratic, quantifiable aspects of standardized testing for assessment. This reliance is rooted in a learning dynamic

attributed to Edward Thorndike. His view of learning is based on his behaviorism studies that started with his study of animals and were then transposed to human learning. He theorizes that learning is the association made between a stimulus and a response (Thorndike, 1913). The associations become task-oriented habits that can be strengthened based on the nature and number of the S-R exercises. Thorndike then used his connectionism learning theory for a measurement of learning that "resulted in a testing industry, which the public believed measured the totality of learning" (Herrick, 1996, p. 8). Thorndike, who was a statistician credited with saying "whatever exists does so in quantity, and, thus, can be measured," (Elliot, 2005, p. 58) was critical of the College Board examinations and the use of accreditation through entities such as MSCHE in the early part of the 20th century (Elliot, 2005; Lagemann, 1989). With the onset of World War I and the Selective Service Act, the belief in large-scale testing gained serious traction as literacy tests developed by Thorndike were modified and used to differentiate recruits based on "intelligence." The tests results led to each soldier's placement within the military (Elliot, 2005). Standardized testing, and those who created the tests, became the authoritative determiner of knowledge acquisition.

This authoritative educational philosophy differed from theorists such as the pragmatic philosopher John Dewey, who argued for a more progressive educational philosophy that balanced the authoritative interests of the teacher with the learning interests of students. As Lagemann (1989) wrote, "One cannot understand the history of education in the United States during the twentieth century unless one realizes that Edward L. Thorndike won and John Dewey lost" (p. 185). With the employment interests

of the dominant frame, Novack's (1975) Marxist critique of why Dewey *lost* acquires purchase:

> In reality, the kind of education he [Dewey] urged went counter to the demands of monopoly capitalism. The ruling class does not want a populace made up of outspoken, critical-minded, inquisitive individuals. (p. 231)

Nevertheless, in the 21st century, the tension between the differing educational philosophies, and assessments therein, still resonates.

In *Academically Adrift,* Arum and Roksa (2011) are also skeptical of outside accountability systems' ability to make changes to teaching and learning within a university, but they were not surprised by outside accountability actions, such as the Spellings report, because "the evidence of student and organizational cultures' inattention to learning and high levels of societal investment makes discussion of higher education's accountability both largely inevitable and in certain respects warranted" (p. 18). Using the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) standardized test as a longitudinal study, they concluded that "many students are only minimally improving their skills in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing during their journeys through higher education" (p. 35). Arum and Roksa's answer is reform and accountability from *within* to increase rigor. In "An HBCU Perspective on *Academically Adrift,*" Redd (2012), took action at her HBCU of Howard University as a response to Arum and Roksa's findings. She started a "Writing Matters" campaign that set guidelines for high expectations for writing from faculty, held students accountable for writing well, and offered writing support through the program. Criticism of Arum and Roska's study focused on methodology and data analysis that questions the assumption that students should perform at uniform levels

(Haswell, 2012; Kelly-Riley, 2015); nevertheless, the study became part of the dominant narrative that students were not learning much in college, increasing pressure from outside accountability audiences regarding student learning outcomes.

As Lincoln University faced its own accreditation crisis, the dominant frame and the urgency and crisis rhetoric of the Spellings Report (Spellings Commission, 2006) and *Academically Adrift* (Arum & Roksa, 2011) were certainly felt. The recommendation for outcomes-based assessment was heeded. Although these measures may have helped keep the University's accreditation and informed potential students about the school's *value*, a gap exists in improving learning and teaching through program assessment for those students at the University. This study used that local context to examine how to work from within the context to actively close the gap created by the dominant frame through engagement with the students.

Pragmatic Framework

The need for assessment to lead to improvement balances the needs of the individual and the larger society. A program assessment process that is accountable to its students and shows how it can further develop, grow, or improve to help those students will have an impact on the larger society that those students create. The same balance is needed for first-year composition programs. This balanced approach is counter to the premise of the national reports that overlap an individual's interests with society's interests, which sees the individual's need for employment as driver of society's "progress." Dewey held the inverse notion of individuality. A premise of his pedagogic creed says, "I believe that the individual who is to be educated is a social individual and that society is an organic union of individuals" (Dewey, 1897, p. 6). Dewey contends that

"only in social groups does a person have a chance to develop individuality" (Dewey, 1923/1983, p. 176), undermining the dichotomy between "their own interests" and "the progress of society." The interplay in the pluralistic world of the individual within the society affects each other:

> To gain an integrated individuality, each of us needs to cultivate his own garden. But there is no fence about this garden: it is no sharply marked-off enclosure. Our garden is the world, in the angle at which it touches our own manner of being. By accepting the corporate and industrial world in which we live, and by thus fulfilling the pre-condition for interaction with it, we, who are parts of the moving present, create ourselves as we create an unknown future. (Dewey, 1930/1984, pp. 122-123)

The individual must interact with the larger world to create both the larger world and the world of the individual. There is no individuality shut off from the larger world. However, the interaction creates a new world. Preparation for the new world and the ability to create within that world is a goal of education. A first-year composition program's student learning outcomes can help students meet those goals and can be monitored and adjusted based on the assessment process and the data collected and analyzed to close the loop.

When the Lincoln University Board of Trustees (LUBOT) makes an accountability argument for a writing exam to ensure that the fundamental skill of writing is present in graduates based on the idea that "it is projected that the average undergraduate from a university or college during this century will change careers ten or more times during his/her lifetime," (Lincoln University Board of Trustees, 2004, para. 1)

LUBOT is admitting that students face an unknown future. The students need to be prepared to create in the new world. The first-year composition program has a goal to prepare students for future writing endeavors and an accountability mandate from LUBOT to be a gatekeeper of students from graduating who do not meet the standard. These are actions that the program is adhering to through its curriculum and assessment efforts. However, the assessment of the program is limited to summative assessment measures at limited points in the students' academic careers mainly to satisfy outside audiences. The "accountability to ourselves" that Ewell (2009) seeks is missing.

In addition to the larger society to which a university wishes to contribute, a first-year composition program has a responsibility to be accountable to the community that makes up that program—current students and faculty. This view of internal accountability through formative program assessment meshes with Dewey's (1897) pedagogic creed when he writes, "I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living" (p. 7). When education is viewed in terms of the present moment, the accountability question begins to change. To whom is the first-year composition program accountable? The position of assessment in this study is that by including the student voice to relay stories of leaning in the program and application outside the program the assessment can be accountable to students as it strives to develop, grow, and improve.

Responsibility Frame

As an alternative to the accountability motivations of the dominant frame, Adler-Kassner and Harrington (2010) suggest the *responsibility frame*. The responsibility frame "draws on actions and literature attending to three key ideas: identifying and working

from principle and best practice; building alliances with others; and engaging in (and assessing) shared actions based on common interests." (p. 87). When juxtaposed with the assessment process, these ideas create curriculum and outcomes based on best practice, build alliances through "active listening and dialogue," and finally take action together to close the loop. The responsibility frame makes the assessment accountable to the students and faculty and writing program administers closest to the teaching as learning, which Huot (2002) argues is the ideal location.

With a degree of accountability in assessment firmly established at the research site of Lincoln University and the external audience crisis from MSCHE at bay, this study closes the gap with the internal audience of those closest to the teaching and learning. The process works towards the general assessment goal to improve learning and teaching while also being accountable to that internal audience of those closest to the teaching and learning through active listening and dialogue with the study participants to close the loop together. Through this reframing of assessment, learning and assessment efforts begin to be situated "*in relation* to one another, rather than in *opposition* to one another" (Adler-Kassner & O'Neill, 2010, p. 39, emphasis in original). The reframing provides information that may be more useful to improve the teaching and learning and grow a first-year composition program than the assessment data that satisfies the accountability demand.

Assessment of the FYC Program Student Learner Outcomes

Within the four-step sequence of outcomes-based program assessment of (1) establishing student learning outcomes, (2) providing opportunities to achieve those outcomes, (3) systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine

if student learning matches the expectations, and (4) using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning, this study operates at step 3. The study gathered student stories as evidence of learning related to step 2, the learning opportunities designed to meet step 1, the student learning outcomes.

The role of the composition course sequence at Lincoln University is to provide instruction and learning opportunities to meet the Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs). The PSLOs represent knowledge and skills needed for gaining writing expertise (Beaufort, 2012). Each course has specific course student learning outcomes that are tied to the more general PSLOs (Appendix A). Bloom's (1956) taxonomy and the revised version of the taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) are the most popular frameworks for developing student learning outcomes (Suskie, 2009), particularly in the cognitive domain. Effective learning objects are described as specific, measurable, action-oriented, reasonable, and time-bound (International Training and Education Center, 2010). Action-verb lists aligned with the hierarchy of learning categories in Bloom's taxonomy assist in the creation of learning objectives, such as the *Instructional Guide for University Faculty and Teaching Assistants* (Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, 2016) from Northern Illinois University, which is similar to the guide developed by Lincoln University's Office of Assessment and Accreditation. The recommendation from Lincoln University's Office of Assessment and Accreditation is for six learning outcomes that are derived from across multiple categories of Bloom's taxonomy.

As a comparison to a taxonomy from a composition based study, the LU Composition course and program student learning outcomes can be mapped out

according to Beaufort's (2007) five overlapping knowledge domains: discourse community knowledge, subject matter knowledge, genre knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, and writing process knowledge (p. 19). The main thrust of the first-year composition program outcomes is in the last three domains. While students will engage in different genres and the program SLOs indicate a variety of genres, the course SLOs specifically mention thesis-driven essay writing. The course SLOs also heavily focus on the mid to upper levels of Bloom's taxonomy hierarchy starting with the application of composition conventions such as organization, structure, evidence to support a thesis, grammar/mechanics, and MLA citations in the creation of a written text. The SLOs indicate a writing process as an outcome, referring to multiple drafts or writing process steps as an indicator. Rhetorical knowledge is represented by the demonstration of purpose, topic, and analysis. Evidence of outcomes related to these three domains are specifically sought in this assessment study of the first-year composition program.

The other two domains are not directly indicated in the SLOs. The first-year composition program is its own discourse community with different sections representing sub-communities. The SLOs may take on their own meaning, understanding, or level of engagement in these different communities. The concept of a discourse community takes on additional importance as participants in the study discuss their writing experiences beyond the first-year composition program in new and different discourse communities. As Beaufort (2012) indicates, subject matter knowledge "is often overlooked or treated in a cursory manner" (p. 182). The PSLOs address using writing to engage with other texts, but fall short of Beaufort's call for more specific outcome language regarding acquiring subject matter knowledge (p. 182). There is an assumption of the base knowledge in the

lower level of Bloom's hierarchy of remembering and understanding rather than specific SLOs geared toward assessment of that subject knowledge. Students need that subject knowledge, but the assessment process moves toward the application of that knowledge rather than an assessment of knowledge at the base level. In addition to the subject of writing in the first-year composition program courses, subjects of study may include themes from works of literature or research topics of the student's choosing. The various forms of subject matter knowledge play a role in the assessment of the program, especially when composition is not seen as the main thrust of the course. Student input towards these two domains has an impact on closing the loop.

Such was the case with the study by Bergmann and Zepernick (2007), whose respondents reportedly saw a difference between the more expressive writing of the English composition courses and the major courses in their chosen discipline. In their study, the students had a blank space between the "moral" imperatives of writing—what one should do—and the mechanical errors in need correction. Those students saw little connection between the discourse community of the composition classroom and their discipline. In addition, communication of the subject matter of their discipline required a more straightforward approach than those used in the composition courses. The implication for Bergmann and Zepernick (2007) is discipline focused writing instruction. From an assessment standpoint, these data create a path to further explore. Does the first-year composition program need to change or does it need to develop or grow in some facet to better serve the student stakeholders? These questions and subsequent answers create the action to close the loop and begin the assessment cycle anew.

Student Application of Learning Outcome Knowledge

By examining the present of those who have completed a first-year composition program, information about the application of learning from that program can be ascertained. Utilizing this information enables the learning program to grow and assist in closing the assessment loop, especially since the outcomes are thought to be applicable in the future. Specifically located in the field of composition, these outcomes are designed to answer what Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak (2014) historically refer to as *the transfer question*: "How can we help students develop writing knowledge and practices that they can draw upon, use, and repurpose for new writing tasks in new settings" (p. 2). This study uses an activity-based view of transfer. This view posits transfer as expanded learning (Wardle, 2007) that connects the individual to the first-year composition program (Yancey et al., 2014).

Transfer is applying knowledge from one context into another context. Wardle (2012), drawing from Prior and Shipka (2003) and Roozen (2010), has defined transfer as "creative repurposing for expansive learning" or simply "repurposing" to create a framework to view the phenomenon (Wardle, 2012, para. 7). Writing transfer relies on the premise that "[composition] courses will help students use what they already know about writing, learn something new about writing, and ultimately be able to successfully tackle new writing tasks in different settings" (Wardle, 2013, p. 143). Drawing from Bourdieu's idea of *habitus*, Wardle (2012) argues for a problem-solving approach of teaching students to learn within "messy," less structured systems. This approach enables the students to repurpose their previous learning in a new context creating further adaptation. Wardle contrasts this repurposing with the structured environment of

standardized testing where the focus is on answer-getting that does little for a student experiencing a new context.

Wardle's (2012) shift to define transfer as conceptual repurposing is a response to trends in education that argue for a cognitive depth to learning. Introduced by Webb (1999), "depth of knowledge can vary on a number of dimensions, including level of cognitive complexity of information students should be expected to know, how well they should be able to transfer this knowledge to different contexts, how well they should be able to form generalizations, and how much prerequisite knowledge they must have in order to grasp ideas" (p. 15). This cognitive depth to learning can be hard to measure, especially in the short term, as it requires the passage of time to take effect. Webb argues that the assessments need to be aligned with expectations to ensure the cognitive demand standard is met. Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) argue that to develop competence in a subject area requires a foundation of factual knowledge and deep enough understanding to transform factual information into useable knowledge (p. 16). They note that standardized testing focuses on surface knowledge, but assessments for the more subjective concept of depth of knowledge need to be developed. Hess, Jones, Carlock, and Walkup (2009) developed a matrix to assess cognitive rigor by superimposing Bloom's taxonomy with Webb's model. Assessment of Wardle's repurposing of transfer would need be situated at various points in the future, especially in novel contexts to allow for adaptations and changes in dispositions. This study invokes students' cognitive depth to assess the first-year composition program learning outcomes.

The conceptual approach to examining transfer grew from attempts to study near transfer, task-oriented transfer studies such as those in Thorndike's behavior-response

research. Perkins and Salomon (1992) define *near transfer* as similar learning contexts while more foreign applications of learning is *far transfer*. Near transfer is more likely to occur when tasks in the new situation are closely related to prior experience (Royer, Mestre, & Dufresne, 2005). Near transfer is assisted when the situations are *low road,* or activated by similar circumstances to a known situation as opposed to *high road.* High road transfer involves a more abstracted application of knowledge (Perkins & Salomon, 1992; Yancey et al., 2014).

Applied to writing knowledge, Smit (2004) argues that the transfer of general writing skills to later writing work is limited to students' ability to recognize that the writing tasks are similar. He says that discourse communities are better locations for the teaching of writing. These communities would establish more low road transfer situations. However, Slomp (2012) argues that "an important consequence of applying Thorndike's theories to research and assessment on development of writing ability is that it underrepresents people's capacity for far transfer, the issue that educators are primarily concerned with" (p. 83). In other words, it may be easier to see successful low road transfer outcomes. High road, far transfer of writing knowledge remains a more elusive goal of educators.

Downs and Wardle (2007) respond to the limits of the task oriented, skills approach to transfer, as purported by Smit, by arguing that far transfer is difficult to achieve (p. 555). They built a first-year composition curriculum that teaches for transfer by treating writing as its own subject. Teaching-for-transfer curriculums such as those by Downs and Wardle (2007); Driscoll (2011); and Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak (2014)

respond to many studies that indicate the difficulty and failure of writing transfer when writing situations are seen as different.

An additional view on transfer engages with the contradictory views of transfer exhibited by Smit and Wardle. The transfer concepts of near/far, low/road high road, and positive/negative can be difficult to reconcile and leave educators unsure of how to proceed. Smit's limit to low road transfer and Wardle's repurposing would be too narrow in scope for Schwartz, Sears, and Bransford (2005) who advocate for an alternative that includes preparation for future learning (PFL). Assessments that focus on the direct application of learning, associated with sequestered problem-solving, can make people "look dumb" if an outcome is not met (p. 6). Those assessments do not consider the learning that did take place and the usefulness of the learning experience for future learning experiences, especially interpretative measures of knowing. They differentiate between the knowledge and skills students bring to a learning situation, *transferring in*, and those that students away from a learning experience, *transferring out*—the traditional definition of transfer (p. 11). According to Schwartz et al. (2005), assessments through the lens of PFL would alter meaningfulness and accountability within the field of education.

In the current study of the assessment of a first-year composition program, the transfer question, as seen through the concepts of near and far transfer, low road and high road transfer, and PFL's transferring in and transferring out, is concerned with expanded learning. As participants are asked about connections between the first-year composition program and situations beyond program coursework, they are being asked to relay stories of transfer. This has a direct impact on the goals and SLOs of the first-year composition

program and may signal the need to make changes to the program's curriculum. From the standpoint of program assessment, the study is interested in near and far transfer experiences triggered by low and high road situations, the transferring in and out of knowledge and skills, and the student's perceptions on the role of the first-year composition program to inform those experiences. Additionally, a line of questioning in the interview methodology elicited these student writing experiences and attempted to draw connections about the expanded learning. This perceived connection, or lack thereof, can impact the SLOs for a first-year composition program and learning opportunities to meet those outcomes.

Longitudinal studies such as Carroll (2002) and Beaufort (2007) mimic the assessment process, as the goal is to see if learning outcomes had an effect throughout a student's academic career. Those studies indicate the difficulty of transferring universal writing skills and point toward writing across the disciplines approaches. Carroll's (2002) longitudinal study followed 20 students through their academic careers in order to assess their writing abilities over that time, partly in response to the questioning by professors as to why their students can't write after taking FYC courses. Her study concludes that FYC courses are useful in helping students transition to the more complex literacy acts of college writing. Students learn to write differently across the curriculum, not necessarily better, and so they need support to write in the different modes. For Carroll, first-year composition courses are a foundation for the learning that needs to happen throughout the academic career, a similar philosophy to the first-year composition program.

Present in Carroll's (2002) findings are near and far transfer issues as well as low road and high road transfer concepts. Carroll finds that in writing situations across the

curriculum students are able to recognize "homely skills" such as thesis, structure and organization, style, and editing even though there is "no one generic essay form" (p. 120). Conversely, when faced with a discipline-specific rhetorical convention farther removed from the thesis driven essay a deliberate and mindful abstraction of high road transfer is necessitated for the far transfer to occur. Such is the case with Carroll's subject Andrea who discovered difficulty in writing the analysis-heavy political science essays as opposed to the *frilly* writing of composition course work (p. 97).

The longitudinal assessment case study of "Tim" in Beaufort's (2007) *College Writing and Beyond* also argues for writing instruction for transfer as well as increased instruction throughout a student's career in order for that student to develop further as Tim's experience was marked by negative transfer—the misapplication of learning from one context to another. When faced with high road transfer situations, Wardle and Roozen (2012) characterize the writing development, such as with Beaufort's subject, as vertical and an indicator of Yancey's (2012) third wave of assessment marked by portfolios as writers develop over time and move from outsider positions to insider positions within a discipline. Wardle and Roozen's call for an ecological model of assessment that asks "why" and "how" questions to examine the complexity of writing assessment: "assessing the success of these programs and how students develop within them must entail examining the vertical, horizontal, and longitudinal—the fully ecological—nature of literate development" (p. 111). The analysis of LU's Composition Program called for a fuller ecological model for assessment to aid in the ongoing assessment project and aid in the decisions made by assessment insiders.

Another issue revealed by transfer studies is that students are not trying to transfer the writing knowledge. Bergmann and Zepernick (2007) and Jarratt, Mack, Sartor, and Watson (2009) found that students do not actively look to transfer their skills from one course to the next. However, Jarratt et al. (2009) found that reflective writing that engages the "pedagogical memory" (49), which is focused thinking on writing instruction, enables students to see the areas of transfer. They suggest that interviews with students would help assess effects of writing pedagogy through a student-oriented process. The pedagogical memory approach corresponds to Bransford et al. (2000) argument for metacognitive teaching approach that is designed to help students take control of their learning and aid in transfer (pp. 18-19). Both Jarratt et al. and Bransford et al. argue for incorporation of metacognitive skills into the curriculum. The approach in this study operates in similar manner as the focus of the interviews is to elicit narratives of the students' experiences learning to write at the University and to reflect on those experiences. For the student participants, the reflective nature of the interview lends itself to connecting prior learning to additional learning situations. For program assessment, the student reflection sheds light on the teaching and learning taking place while engaging students in a metacognitive exercise.

As goals-oriented assessment is mainly "vertical," the ecological model requires a broader set of questions to inform the global perspective of the assessment project. The student voice regarding writing development can provide information beyond analysis of written products. This study places the reflective nature and transfer of knowledge into assessment as I engage with students in narrative interviews to gain understanding of their perspective on assessment of the first-year composition program's SLOs and the

goal of expanded knowledge as students apply knowledge to various writing contexts. Assessment narratives that reflect the near/far, low/high, positive/negative transfer as well as PFL concepts enable those concepts to be part of program assessment. Further, narratives of preparation of learning further expand the concept of learning within the first-year composition program that can have major effects moving the program forward.

Assessment to Stimulate Growth

As stated earlier, assessment is concerned with the learning growth of students in an education environment. For a student in a specific educational program, education is formalized and placed in the forefront of directed activities, as opposed to people in general where education is often informal and in the background of activities. Learning is tantamount to a process of acquisition and use. In their recent book studying effective learning strategies, Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel (2014) define learning as "acquiring knowledge and skills and having them readily available from memory so you can make sense of future problems and opportunities" (p. 2). The scope in this definition of learning goes beyond some researchers, such as Smit (2004), who limits learning to the transfer of knowledge from one context to the another and ignores actions to gain the knowledge. I view transfer as an important step in the learning process and use assessment as reflection to consider the larger scope of the learning process for the goal of improving the teaching and learning.

In the example of students walking across the stage at graduation from Chapter One, the students have *something* different from what they had before; they have learned a series of *somethings* for use in the program of study, and that knowledge will be applied once they commence from the institution. Broadening the definition, learning would

include modifying, reinforcing, or changing knowledge, beliefs, behaviors or attitudes. This change often happens through a process based on interpretations and responses to experience (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010). Much of education and new learning requires a foundation of prior learning that can be modified or reinforced, a claim that Brown et al. (2014) connect with the idea of *elaboration* in order to provide personal meaning to new learning and connect the learning to that which is already known (p. 5). Dewey had a similar understanding of learning.

In *Democracy and Education,* Dewey (1916) argues that "life is a self-renewing process through action upon the environment." (p. 2) He later puts the self-renewing in terms of education:

> Life is development, and that developing, growing, is life. Translated into its educational equivalents, that means, (i) that the educational process has no end beyond itself; it is its own end; (ii) the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming." (p. 42)

So, whether a person has placed education in the foreground or background, and whether that education is formal or informal, education is an ongoing activity.

Within this ongoing activity of education is a multi-faceted, interdependent process of experiences including acquisition, transfer, and reflection that culminates in learning. For Dewey (1916), "This cumulative movement of action toward a later result is what is meant by growth" (p. 35). Through this learning process, a person, or student, changes or grows. For Dewey, this change constitutes a renewal that is necessary for life as the "continuity of life means continual readaption of the environment to the needs of living organisms" (p. 3). This pragmatic view of education forms the core of program

assessment. To move through the renewal and readaption process, education and learning are essential. That learning is rife with assessment as an individual has experiences and continually applies the "expressions of growth" or "habits," to use Dewey's term. In the context of formal education, assessment is a term that has become ubiquitous with determining if student learning outcomes have been met.

Currently for LU's Composition Program, summative assessment data are gathered at the completion of a writing course. Formative assessment is performed during the instructional timeframe and is often used to monitor learning progress and act as a guide for the next steps in teaching. These data are not used for Lincoln's formal first-year composition program assessment. However, experiences of acquisition, transfer, and reflection exist in both summative and formative assessment. An understanding of the student perspective on assessment can be useful for the internal audience to grow the program as it stimulates an action to close the loop.

Dewey sees education, and the learning therein, as *growth* and names the fourth chapter in *Democracy and Education* as such. Growth, for Dewey (1916), "is *the* characteristic of life, education is all one with growing; it has no end beyond itself" (p. 44). He further argues that growth is dynamic and something that people do *intrinsically*, yet is dependent on stimuli from others and learning from the experience. There is no *end* to this cycle, and so education is an *end* itself. The education leads to the formation of habits that are actively tested against new and changing conditions or new stimuli and the growth process repeats. However, this education, or growth process per Dewey, is not to be confused with pure preparation for the future but a continuous process of conceptual learning leading to the future:

> The mistake is not attaching importance to preparation for future need, but in making it the mainspring of present effort. Because the need of preparation for a continually developing life is great, it is imperative that every energy should be bent to making the present experience as rich and significant as possible. Then as the present merges insensibly into the future, the future is taken care of. (p. 46)

The future, then, depends significantly on the present, and by extension, on prior knowledge as well. These principles of a multifaceted past and uncertain future reflect Dewey's (1887/2008) notion of learning in the reflex arc, a broader view than Thorndike's simplistic behaviorism model. Dewey's view of the stimulus-response phenomena begins before the observed stimulus-response action and involves prior knowledge and interaction as opposed to passive receipt of the stimulus. In essence, a learner is never a blank slate waiting for something to affect it, an important aspect to Freire's (1970/2000) critique of education as well.

The nine learning principles from a joint report of the American Association for Higher Education, American College Personnel Association, and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (Joint Task Force on Student Learning, 1998) also reflect Dewey's (1887/2008) reflex arc and illustrate Brown et al.'s (2014) definition of learning. The principles say that learning "is about making and maintaining connections," and is "enhanced by taking place in the context of a compelling situation … [using the brain's] capacity and need for contemplation and reflection upon experiences" (Joint Task Force on Student Learning, 1998, p. 3). The principles describe learning as an "active search for meaning," "developmental, a cumulative process involving the whole person, relating past and present," "grounded in particular contexts

and individual experiences" and "done by individuals who are intrinsically tied to others as social beings" (pp. 4-9). When integrated with Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel's (2014) definition, students have acquired new knowledge and skills through whole person development of past and present in an active search enhanced by the context of the learning experience aided by reflection. Completing the recursive pattern, this new learning is now a past experience for use in a future context, just as the graduating student's university experience in the systematic completion of focused learning can be applied to future experiences.

Program assessment viewed through Dewey's notion of learning, which can be seen in current ideas about learning, needs to consider the growth that happens after the program, not just within one course or the program itself. A learning experience relies on prior knowledge that is affected by new learning experiences. Learning outcomes are the result of the new learning experience, and often the site of program assessment. But learning does not stop there. The outcomes are to be applied as new prior knowledge to new learning experiences. Program outcomes assessment must take these future applications into account.

This study uses the broader view of learning represented by Dewey's (1887/2008) reflex arc to provide assessment data to grow a first-year composition program. As the participants in this study have completed all the coursework within the first-year composition program, they are situated to relay information regarding their learning through the reflex arc. Narratives that relay stories of knowledge acquisition and examples of transfer are valuable data for understanding the effects of a first-year

composition program. This valuable assessment information is missing from the current program assessment.

Assessment Through the Responsibility Frame for Renewal

The three tenets of the responsibility frame suggested by Adler-Kassner and Harrington (2010) can also apply to the contextualized definition of learning of past present and future application. The first tenet—principle and best practice—focuses attention on a compelling situation in the present to provide an experience that builds on prior knowledge. This tenet turns the accountability from the external audience toward the internal, those closest to the learning and teaching. Assessment that focuses on the experiences of the students makes the assessment accountable to those constituents rather than to show how those experiences meet the expectations of the external audience. Within the research site, this first tenet draws attention to the students within the first-year composition program and then toward those who have completed aspects, or the entirety of the program, to apply those outcomes. The participants in this study fulfill the second and third tenets of the responsibility frame to create an alliance with others with whom the program can share assessment based on common interests. Assessment through the responsibility frame is a pragmatic assessment for improvement of teaching and learning.

As a parallel to Dewey's idea that there is no end to the education cycle, making education an end itself, there is no end to the assessment cycle, especially in the program or institutional context. One can continually assess an ongoing program. The ultimate goal of student learning assessment in a first-year composition program should be growth

that reflects improvement, as a reiteration of Dewey's previously stated focus on the present situation shows:

> Because the need of preparation for a continually developing life is great, it is imperative that every energy should be spent to making the present experience as rich and significant as possible. Then as the present merges insensibly into the future, the future is taken care of. (p. 46)

An assessment that is focused on studying student learning and is accountable to those students by seeking that improvement leads to change to that program if change is necessitated.

Therefore, assessment must be a process that is for the benefit of students in the program and those students who will be in the program in the future. The information gathered from the assessment cycle can be used to affect parts of the assessment process: modifying Program Student Learner Outcomes (PSLOs) that provide direction for learning opportunities for students to work toward those outcomes, future collection of artifacts of that learning (from multiple formative and summative points), analysis of the data to draw conclusions about student learning, and use of those conclusions to create change and close another assessment loop for the benefit of the next group of students exposed to the program.

Responsible assessment as its own learning experience fulfills the Dewey's (1916) notion of renewal: "Renewal is necessary for life—continuity of life means continual readaption of the environment to the needs of living organisms" (p. 3). That idea of renewal reflects the core of assessment for improvement of learning and teaching as it is a readaption to the needs to the living organism of the student learner. An

assessment project that is responsible to students by including the student voice and is therefore accountable to that constituency can help to balance the assessment equation with the pressures from the external audience. Program assessment that includes student voices can therefore aid in the Deweyan idea that education passes on the life of the society and that schools as a place of formal education play a role in that transmission while providing access to the books of knowledge at the same time:

> There is a standing danger that the material of formal instruction will be merely the subject matter of the schools, isolated from the subject matter of life—experience…. Hence one of the weightiest problems with which the philosophy of education has to cope with is the method of keeping proper balance between the informal and the formal, the incidental and intentional, modes of education." (pp. 8-9)

The outcomes of the first-year composition program have a dual purpose. One goal is for students to learn about writing and become better writers, but that learning does not exist in a vacuum. That learning is designed to be applied to future endeavors. This research study examined the program outcomes as they exist is near-future endeavors for the purpose of improving a first-year composition program.

Balanced Assessment

Assessment as a form of learning, while being accountable through the responsibility frame, meets the goals of both the internal and external assessment audiences, mitigates the tension within assessment identified by Ewell (2009) and thereby reaches the same conclusion as Huba and Freed (2000):

> It is becoming increasingly clear that the best way for institutions to be accountable to any audience is to incorporate the evaluation of student learning into the way they operate on a regular basis. When faculty collectively take charge of their educational programs, making visible their purpose and intent, and putting in place a data-based system of evaluation that focuses on improving student learning, the institution itself is the primary beneficiary while the external audiences are satisfied as well. (p. 19)

Learning about student learning in meaningful ways that can be used for improvement and program growth creates a middle ground to satisfy various audiences.

The idea of assessment as form of learning also parallels Dewey's ideas on education. According to Dewey (1938), education philosophy is simplistically subjugated to an "Either-Or" (p. 1) binary of traditional versus progressive theory. The traditional is marked by a "curriculum-centered education" (Hildebrand, 2008) where the teacher is the agent for knowledge transfer to the passive student in what Freire (1970/2000) would later call the banking concept of education. For Dewey, the objective of the traditional model is to prepare students for the future by "acquisition of organized bodies of information and prepared forms of skill" (p. 3). As Novack (1975) states about Dewey's educational philosophy, "Socially desirable qualities could not be brought forth in the child by pouring ready-made curriculum into a passive vessel" (p. 227). Dewey's criticism of the traditional model is that there is an assumption that the curriculum is desirable, which ultimately leads to a disciplinary pedagogy (Dewey, 1938; Hildebrand, 2008). As Dewey says, "The trouble with traditional education was not that educators took upon themselves the responsibility for providing an environment. The trouble was

that they did not consider the other factor in creating an experience; namely, the powers and purposes of those taught" (p. 44). The learning environment is unbalanced.

On the other side of the binary are those who privilege the students above all else, which is also referred to as romantic, progressive, new education, or child-centered (Dewey, 1938; Hildebrand, 2008). Hildebrand (2008) argues that Dewey is often associated with the child-centered, progressive model of education; however, Dewey was a critic of the progressive educational theory as well by citing the need of progressive education to overly differentiate from the traditional approach. Progressive education often assumes an overestimate of education from within the student that ultimately leads to more questions than answers about the underlying principles of a progressive education.

Instead, Dewey relies on a balanced education theory of experience with an active learner paradigm that situates the teacher as a guide for fruitful expression by the student. In this model of education, the objective is focused on growth of the individual, as a member of a society, and the notion of continuance where knowledge and skills are more likely to transfer form one experience to another experience. Dewey (1938) argues for the type of experience a student needs to encounter and postulates that "the central problem of an education based upon experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (pp. 16-17). The teacher is right to draw from personal experience, but also needs to realize that learning is social and interactive; thus, students are also bringing prior experience, knowledge, and interests to the situation. Creating an experience within the education context "to present experience as rich and significant as possible" (Dewey, 1916, p. 46) that allows for learning and

growth also allows for knowledge transfer to future experiences, a view that is further reflected in his explanation of the reflex arc that includes prior knowledge.

Dewey advocates a balance to life and society that leads to balance in education. For Dewey, there is a moral prerogative to live a purposeful life. Education needs to model that moral prerogative in its approach to educating students. Thus, the teacher must afford the student a place in the classroom closer to the power that is given to the teacher by position or tradition. Sharing the power within a composition classroom can have transformative effects (Wallace & Ewald, 2000). Sharing the power with assessment can have the same transformative effects leading to improvements in teaching and learning.

In a space between Dewey's Either-Or where he has situated the theory of experience lies the learner-centered paradigm that adopts a constructivist's theory of learning. This theory posits that knowledge and meaning is generated as humans engage in experience and make sense of those experiences (Bransford et al., 2000; Fosnot, 2013). This assessment study included the students in a more prominent way so the knowledge about the program is co-constructed. The knowledge is neither driven by external audiences nor those internal audiences that are farther removed from the learning and teaching center. Rather, "Those closest to teaching and learning, like students and teachers, need to have the most input about writing assessment and all important teaching decisions" (Huot, 2002, p. 2). By finding a space to include the students, the inside audience is expanded for improving the teaching and learning. The WPA role in this context is to perform assessment-as-research to include the student voice and gain insight into the student experience to be included in the global assessment picture to improve

teaching and learning while being responsible to the student stakeholders of that first-year composition program.

Chapter Two Summary

This chapter discussed assessment in an attempt to reframe the assessment conversation, specifically the role of assessment within a program to aid in the teaching and learning environment considering the multiple audiences for assessment, both internal and external. It made an argument for reframing assessment accountability to students and teachers in order to review the student learning outcomes and learning opportunities to take action when closing the assessment loop. The data collected, in the form of student narratives generated from interviews, are reviewed based on principles of learning within the first-year composition program and the use and application of writing knowledge to additional writing situations. This pragmatic, responsible approach to assessment of a writing program provides agency to students and promotes growth and renewal for improvement of the program by an internal audience, which is limited when assessment is focused on accountability to an outside audience.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the learning outcomes and situations from the perspective of students who have completed a first-year composition program. This study was based on a qualitative, pragmatic application of assessment rooted in Huot's (2002) assessment principals of being site-based, locally-controlled, and context-sensitive. Listening to descriptions of student-writer learning experiences provides insights into the learning outcomes of the writing program that cannot be fleshed out by the examination of student writing alone. This study brought the student voice into the assessment process by talking with students about their writing experiences and providing a space for those stories to be told to an assessment insider.

Research Design

This research project used learning outcome interviews based in narrative inquiry to seek and explore the experiences of student writers at a point after completing the formal first-year composition program at the research site to add to the assessment of that program. The process is adapted from various perspectives on narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2012; Daiute, 2013; Kim, 2015; Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011; Webster & Mertova, 2007). The purpose of narrative inquiry is to engage in the living and telling, retelling and reliving (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of the storied experience "as a way of studying people's experiences, nothing more and nothing less" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 38) through "collaboration between researcher and participants over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interactions with milieus" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

The characteristics of a quality narrative inquiry involve the collection of personal stories as data that provide rich insight into the phenomenon under study and provide for meaningful connections by both the student writer retelling their experiences and the audience.

Learning outcome interviews that are based in a narrative inquiry methodology focus on gathering detailed and accessible stories and descriptions about the learning in the participants' writing experiences. According to Webster and Mertova (2007), "Narrative inquiry is set in human stories of experience" (p. 1). Harrington (2013) equates assessment to the telling of stories, as "[assessment] provides a narrative about writing, teachers, and students" (p. 159). The descriptions found in experiential stories comprise the data for this study that is used to gain insight into the student experience for learning outcomes assessment of a first-year composition program.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) invoke Dewey as the "preeminent influence" on their work in their text *Narrative Inquiry* because Dewey "believed that examining experience is the key to education" (p. xiii). For Connelly and Clandinin (2012), story is a portal to make experience personally meaningful:

> Narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experiences of a story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as phenomena under study. (p. 477)

The view of the writing experience from the student perspective is missing from the current assessment practice under study at Lincoln University and from program assessment in the field.

Narrative inquiry provides a pragmatic methodology to engage with that student writer perspective. According to Polkinghorne (1995), "narrative is the linguistic form uniquely situated for displaying human existence as situated action" (p. 5). Van Manen (1990) also argues for the significance of using story in human research citing stories' ability to "enable us to experience life situations, feelings, emotions, and events *that we would not normally experience*" (p. 70, emphasis in orginal). The pragmatic approach of narrative descriptions provides a functional way for students, who may not be familiar with assessment or possess sophisticated metaknowledge of their learning, to report their experiences. The descriptions came from stories of the people who lived them, but still represent the institutional narratives that informed those experiences.

In addition, narrative inquiry has helped to capture the complex world of education. From the notions of teachers as reflective practitioners (Schön, 1983) to the stories of teachers and students gaining a better understanding of literacy and the composition classroom (Haswell & Lu, 2000; Meyer, 1996/2013; Pagnucci, 2004; Schaafsma, 1990), narrative is a way of capturing the experience of education. Pagnucci (2004) argues that narrative inquiry is a full-blown ideology, a way of living. Further, narrative inquiry has the potential for advancing educational research (Goodson, 2000; Kim, 2015) and is rooted in education philosophy (Dunne, 2005; Kim, 2015).

Thus, using an interview process based in narrative inquiry enables the exploration of the research puzzle to answer the research questions as a WPA further

investigates the learning outcomes from the writing experiences of the students affected by a first-year composition program:

1. How do students who have completed a first-year composition program describe their learning in the program?
2. How do students' narratives about their experiences in a first-year composition program and beyond provide insight into the learning outcomes of that first-year composition program?

Critical Event Model

Framing the interview data as stories focuses on the writing experiences of the participants to answer the two research questions. The resulting data provides an additional dimension for the assessment of a first-year composition program. Of importance is locating critical events within these experiences. The critical event/like event/other event model suggested by Webster and Mertova (2007) guided this narrative inquiry. A *critical event* has an impact on the storyteller, is a change experience, and can be identified at a later time (p. 74). These critical events in the student writer's development highlight profound learning experiences and qualify as rich data. They may be unique, illustrative events that stand out from other learning experiences. A *like event* is similar to the critical event and is further illustrative of the experience that may be used to confirm or broaden the critical event. *Other events* may have happened at the same time or place as the critical event and informed the critical event. The model's characteristics of critical, like, and other events structure the narratives collected for answering the research questions.

According to Webster and Metrova (2007), critical events are further characterized by time, challenge, and change (p. 74). The passing of time illuminates critical events. While elapsed time can fade memories, critical events tend to stay with a person and are only deemed critical if in retrospect they have an impact on the storyteller. The passing of time may also winnow unnecessary detail while the amount of time elevates the profound effect. The critical event challenges the person's prior understanding. Moving forward, the experience of the critical event creates change that affected a future experience and understanding that may have led to growth. The critical events are not always positive and may be accompanied by like events where similar, but less profound experiences occurred (p. 74).

The student narratives focused on past experiences, but may have had an impact on present experiences. As narratives are situated in a specific time and place, critical events resonate with the past experiences that may be informing the present experience. A like event that repeats the experience of the critical event in the present can further illustrate the importance of the critical event from the past. This scenario would be a possible location of successful application of prior knowledge. The model, therefore, guides the data collection and analysis for answering the research questions.

General Research Setting of First-Year Composition Program

Located in rural, southeastern Pennsylvania, Lincoln University is one of the federally designated historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU). The University's enrollment is approximately 1,800 undergraduate students, and the average SAT score is 863 (21 percentile). Each year, anywhere from 50% to 85% of the incoming students are placed into the developmental writing program, which was restructured in

2015. Students entering before Fall 2015 could be placed into one of two Basic Writing courses: Basic Writing I (ENG 098), which had a focus on sentences and paragraphs, and Basic Writing II (ENG 099), which had a focus on paragraphs and essays. Starting in 2015, 57% of the students placed into a restructured, single developmental course (ENG 099- Integrated Writing and Reading) with a focus on both developmental writing and reading.

The traditional first-year composition course sequence includes the academic essay-focused English Composition I (ENG 101) and the research writing-focused English Composition II (ENG 102). The Basic Writing and reading course followed by the composition sequence has a natural building approach to teaching composition. Skill sets are divided out by level, and students are expected to have knowledge of writing concepts from the previous course for use in the next course. The students are also required to pass a timed, in-class Writing Proficiency Exam in ENG 101 as part of both the Writing Proficiency Program (WPP) and the ENG 101 course curriculum. The essay exam is the first part of the WPP requirements that also require four writing intensive courses and a writing portfolio in the major as part of a writing-in-the-disciplines model.

The University developed a comprehensive and formal student learning assessment plan in response to a recent Middle States Commission on Higher Education accreditation review. The current first-year composition program assessment involves collecting student artifacts from each of the composition courses and the subsequent faculty evaluation of those artifacts relative to the student learning outcomes based on a rubric designed for that purpose.

Student Writer Participants

The nine participants for this study were Lincoln University students who had completed the composition sequence at the main campus. The nine participants were recruited through presentations at student group meetings and courses where there was a high concentration of eligible students. Participants were selected for inclusion in the study first on criterion sampling and then stratified purposeful sampling (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2010). The criterion included that participants were undergraduate students at Lincoln University of PA who were at least 18 years old, completed the English Composition course sequence through ENG 102 at Lincoln University, completed at least 45 earned credits, and were enrolled in courses at the main campus at the time of data collection. The population excluded from the study included non-students of Lincoln University of PA, students at Lincoln University of PA who were 17 years old or younger, students who had not completed the English Composition course sequence, students who had fewer than 45 earned credits, students who were not enrolled in courses at the main campus, and students enrolled in any course during the data collection phase where I was the instructor. No other particular population groups were excluded from participating, and the study did not necessitate the use of any vulnerable subjects.

Recruitment of participants started slowly, as I first tried to target large gatherings of students who would meet the inclusion criteria such as class meetings through the Student Government Association. While I had permission from the group leaders, they had to cancel their first scheduled meetings of the semester. I then sought alternative venues for recruitment. I contacted colleagues throughout the University who taught

courses with a fair number of potential participants. These recruitment opportunities yielded the majority of the participants in the study. Further participant recruitment came from word of mouth and opportunity. In total, 64 students completed contact forms (Appendix B). Of the 64, I was able to interview 9 students.

Recruitment of the participants continued until saturation was met per two conditions. The first condition was to fulfill the stratified purposeful sampling criteria of students who were initially placed in all three starting positions within the composition course sequence (ENG 099, ENG 101, and ENG 102). The second saturation condition was that no additional students who agreed to be contacted regarding the study were responding to the requests for an interview.

All participants consented to the study to be included (Appendix C). Participants were entered into a drawing for a $25 Amazon gift card that was drawn on April 24, 2017, the last day of classes and after the data collection phase had ended.

Insider Position

As the study was based on Huot's (1996, 2002) assessment principals of being site-based, locally-controlled, and context-sensitive, I was in a unique position to conduct the interviews. To briefly summarize my position that was previously stated in Chapter One, I had been teaching at Lincoln University for 12 years and held the rank of Instructor. I was a member of the Department of Languages and Literature, mainly taught composition courses, was the former director of the Basic Writing Program, and was the current Composition Coordinator for the first-year composition program, a title tantamount to the Writing Program Administrator The first-year composition program includes and is limited to both the Basic Writing Program and the first-year composition

program. I have been a part of the development of the assessment procedures for the first-year composition program. I had responsibilities to conduct assessment process, submit and analyze data, make decisions and recommendations based on the data analysis, and complete assessment reports. In addition, I was the chair of the Faculty Committee on Assessment and Evaluation and a standing member of the Writing Committee, which both serve the entire University.

I was an insider to the assessment process (Herr & Anderson, 2005) who sought additional information in order to add or tweak the current program assessment process to make more informed decisions as well as allow for a more inclusive, democratic system of assessment by including students in that process and sharing the student perspective with other stakeholders at the University. Although Jarratt, Mack, Sartor, and Watson (2009) argue for assessment outside of the "strictures of institutionally mandated assessment" (p. 67), I was interested in studying the student perspective as a formal aspect of the overall assessment process. My role in this study was a collaborator seeking to learn about the experiences of the students, continue the cycle of student learning assessment, and improve that assessment and the program where warranted.

While the emic perspective of the research was conducted in "my own backyard" (Glesne, 2014), assessment is a form of action research (Suskie, 2009), a methodology that is considered suitable for backyard research (Glesne, 2014). All faculty at Lincoln University are required to do assessment and WPAs routinely perform assessment as a means of gathering data about the teaching and learning in a writing program. This study was not part of that required assessment. Rather, the study hoped to inform that process by studying an alternative method to provide useful information. The backyard research

site was beneficial because "understanding the multiple voices, multiple subjectivities, and particularities or the local community where we live, is paramount in generating new knowledge" (Kim, 2015, p. 247). While assessment outside of "the strictures of institutionally mandated assessment" (Jarratt et al., 2009, p. 67) has merits, locally generated, site based assessment by assessment insiders who have goals of improving teaching and learning and have a voice to do so is important to routinely instill research based change. In this study, the student participants had a desire to voice their experiences. The researcher had an interest in hearing those stories to identify strengths and improve the program.

Still the concerns about conducting backyard research (Glesne, 2014) are valid. For instance, the perspective of the students could have revealed politically risky or "dangerous knowledge" about a colleague. However, since the meaningfulness of the study is based on how the knowledge is used in making decisions, a valid outcome of the research may be to use current practices at the research site or suggest further research to more appropriately investigate and make decisions based on any outcome of the study, including dangerous knowledge. Participants who reveled any dangerous knowledge were held in strict confidence. Steps were also taken to conceal the identities of faculty who were criticized by the students.

Field Data Sources and Collection

The interactions between the student writers and myself took place in the same building where the students engaged in their writing course work. From these interactions, data sources include two types of *field texts* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The texts are narrative interviews with participants and a researcher journal with

observational field notes, taken as the participants and I interacted, and reflective memos, recorded after the interviews or transcriptions. The combination of these two field texts provide for a picture of the experience leading to "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of the student writers' narratives.

Learning Outcome Interviews

The data source in this study was learning outcome interviews with the nine participants who were asked to describe their learning experiences from the first-year composition program in relation to the prescribed program student learning outcomes (Appendix A). Each interview was digitally recorded, and extensive notes were taken during the interview process. The interviews averaged 45 minutes in length. The interviews were transcribed by me shorty after each interview took place as recommended by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and focused on a sematic record of the interview with limited transcription of prosodic aspects. The transcriptions were saved in Microsoft Word files and manually coded in consultation with the interview notes. Microsoft Excel was used to record, organize, and synthesize analysis notes. Important quotes and relative codes were saved in an Excel file.

The learning outcome interviews provided detail regarding the descriptions and evaluations of the first-year composition program. The in-depth, responsive interview techniques outlined by Rubin and Rubin (2005) and the flexibility of responsive interviewing created a space for the student writer's narratives to guide my exploration of the learning opportunities, outcomes, and environments of the first-year composition program. In addition, preparing a semi-structured interview broken into segments related

to established learning outcomes ensured that multiple learning outcome domains were covered as the conversation flowed.

The five areas of focus for the interviews comprised introductory questions, the writing process, writing conventions, critical thinking, and concluding questions (Appendix D). The program student learning outcomes (PSLOs) currently used at the research site in the first-year composition program were created by the Department of Languages and Literature faculty and are based on the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) Outcomes Statement for first-year Composition (2014 July). The WPA outcomes have four categories: Rhetorical Knowledge; Critical Thinking, Reading, and Composing; Processes; and Knowledge of Conventions. Three of the five segments in the interview protocol for data collection in this study shared those category titles: Writing Process, Writing Conventions, Critical Thinking. Interview segments 1 and 5 were more open for the student to raise learning topics such as rhetorical knowledge.

After a brief period of background, demographic questions, and rapport building, the first segment provided the opportunity for students to recall previous writing instruction, their *pedogeological memory* (Jarratt et al., 2009), through general and reflective questions in the three dimensional space outlined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), which posits that past stories inform present standpoints, context shifts from the personal to the social, and the stories are situated in a defined place.

In addition, the questioning asked about the people, or characters, who were present in the learning environment. The interview interaction was a place for the student writers to tell their stories and to do it near where those stories took place. In this way, the locations of the interactions become a *memory box*, a trigger for important memories,

(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to inform the narrative of the participants. The interviews were conducted in the same building where students took their composition courses. The line of questioning could *open the floodgates* (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 123) of narrative experiences that could be probed for more detail on a broad spectrum of issues, many of which were topics covered in the other segments of the interview. A *main branches of a tree* (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 124) structure followed by asking general, open ended and probing questions about topics raised by the students' narratives or related to one of the established domains. As topics from the various interview segments were raised in the narrative, I would make a note and follow-up with probing questions. Thus, many of the interviews were non-linear, although all 5 segments of the interview protocol were conducted. The interviews took on a comfortable, conversation style interaction.

Researcher Journal

Throughout the research process I kept a researcher journal. I used this journal as a place to record my learning process, to write reflective memos, to aid with reflexivity, and to inform my narrative as a WPA. This journal was utilized in all aspects of the process including the preparation for the interviews, to take notes, to record observations, to record thoughts immediately following the interviews, and to write notes during the transcription and coding processes. At the completion of each interview, the notes were reviewed and memos were written regarding the interview content, initial thoughts, characterizations of participants, and intriguing initial themes to probe participants in future interviews. The journal was also used in the transcription writing and reading process to record pertinent thoughts.

Field Text Analysis

The data analysis process started immediately after each interview in the form of transcription and a general review to inform the subsequent interview in the series. A more substantive, first cycle code, descriptive analysis (Coulter & Smith, 2009; Creswell, 2007; Kim, 2015; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1995) commenced after the completed field interviews in order to organize the information presented by the students. Additional coding cycles and passes applied the critical event analysis and the literary analysis to construct each student writer participant's story including events, actions, characters, happenings, and other elements to form a plot of important learning experiences. The narrative coding provides for Saldaña's (2013) *literary perspective* "to understand [the narrative's] storied, structured forms, and to potentially create a richer aesthetic through a retelling" (p. 132). The multiple coding process is a step in what Kim (2015) refers to as "flirting with the data" to see the data from multiple perspectives. Plot analysis, significance analysis, and character mapping (Daiute, 2013) all helped to develop the student narratives. Relations between the codes were sought to form categories, identify patterns, and eventually thematize the data to draw conclusions and present the data.

Ethical Considerations

While it is impossible to plan for every ethical issue that may arise, I was guided by my professionalism as an educator and researcher. The risk for participants was no greater than a conversation with a professor. The Lincoln University principles concerning honesty and regulations concerning academic integrity were followed. The study had approval from both the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional

Review Board and the Lincoln University Institutional Review Board. All participants provided informed consent to participate.

My aim was to do no harm to the participants, and students could end their participation at any point. The students were not pressured to participate or answer any question. The purpose of the study was clearly explained during recruitment and before each interview session. Students who agreed to be contacted were emailed no more than twice if they did not respond to the first request for an interview. Participants were given room to answer questions how they chose and were not required to go into detail if they were reluctant to answer.

The identity of all participants is confidential. The participants selected a pseudonym at the start of the interview. The digital recorder was kept in plain view, and I would glance at it or fidget with in from time to time to not only make sure it was still running or record a time stamp, but also to remind the participants that the interview was being recorded. The interview transcripts and recordings were kept in password protected files.

Trustworthiness

Multiple steps were taken to address the issue of trustworthiness through the criteria of credibility, dependability, and transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The criterion of credibility reflects the idea of validity in quantitative research and is characterized by the researcher's ability to accurately and precisely convey the participant's perceptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 112). Member checks throughout the research process and reflexivity through the researcher journal demonstrate credibility and make bias clear and separate. All of the participants'

information and participants signed consent forms were kept confidential. Dependability was demonstrated through an "audit trail" (p. 113) to show the processes and procedures used to collect the data. Accounts of the participant's experiences were given in the data presentation. Also, firsthand accounts that contributed to the findings were included in the document. Finally, transferability was enabled through detailed information (p. 113) and "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973, 1977) in order for others who might wish to create a similar assessment-as-research study at their institution.

Chapter Three Summary

With a focus on the critical events of a person's life as a powerful and natural method to relate to other people, narrative inquiry is situated to collect data that will inform the research questions concerning the student experience in first-year composition and the transfer to later writing experiences. Students who have participated in the first-year composition program sequence were sought to participate in the study that consisted of a learning outcomes interview to learn about their experiences. As WPA, I also recorded my thoughts and ideas as I made sense of the student experience for use in assessment. Data were reviewed, analyzed, and grouped so each participant's voice could be heard regarding their experiences for the assessment of the writing program. While the study needed to stay open and flexible, I considered ethical principles and trustworthiness considerations of credibility, dependability, and transferability through member checks, an audit trail, and data presentation.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This chapter presents a description of the data analysis procedures and the themes found in the search for answers to the study's two research questions:

1. How do students who have completed a first-year composition program describe their learning in the program?
2. How do students' narratives about their experiences in a first-year composition program and beyond provide insight into the learning outcomes of that first-year composition program?

The purpose of this study was to examine the student-writer perspective of a first-year composition program's learning outcomes. Student descriptions of learning outcomes from a first-year composition program are an often-overlooked assessment data source that can broaden a first-year composition program's outcomes-based, student learning assessment process. Often, program assessment data are limited to a faculty perspective based on analysis of student writing artifacts produced from specific course work within a first-year composition program or other formal writing assessments such as exit portfolios. The present study was based on a qualitative, pragmatic application of assessment rooted in Huot's (2002) assessment principals of being site-based, locally-controlled, and context-sensitive. The study also is grounded in Dewey's (1897, 1938) educational theory and his creed that education should be a "process of living" (1897, p. 7). Using an assessment-as-research approach to program assessment, the data was in the

form of interviews from student writer participants to determine how these students discussed assessment of the first-year composition program.

The chapter is organized to present these themes:

Theme 1: Narratives of Interpersonal Interaction

Narratives of student learning describe interpersonal interactions that affect learning and attainment of outcomes.

Theme 2: Narratives Situated in Time

Narratives of student learning are situated in time that broaden assessment data to include prior knowledge and learning transfer.

Theme 3: Assessment Narratives of Holistic Learning

Narratives of student learning show concurrent critical events across multiple Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs) that provide a holistic view of learning within the program.

Data Analysis Process

The descriptive interview data from the learning outcome interviews were analyzed using critical event narrative analysis outlined by Webster and Mertova (2007) and informed by the notion of *flirtation* as described by Kim (2015) and Phillips (1994). The critical event narrative analysis was the most important as it provided context to the student responses to interview question through the sketching of an event and the examination of the details, or *burrowing* (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 87). The burrowing helped to identify "human-centered research issues." As described in Chapter 3, the critical event model extracts impactful experiences. The stories the students told during the interviews are their depictions of first-year composition learning experiences.

These depictions fill a gap in an outcomes-based assessment project and illuminate the strengths and areas for improvement of that first-year composition program.

For the impactful stories from alternative perspectives to be of value, I needed to maintain an open-mind towards them. The concept of flirtation with the data is based on Freud's notion of free association and serves "as an attempt to analyze and interpret research data to exploit the idea of surprise and curiosity, as we don't know what is going to evolve and emerge until we deal with the data" (Kim, 2015, p. 188). The idea, as Kim explains, is to question the legitimacy of knowledge in order to see ideas in a new light and from multiple perspectives. Kim (2015) bases the concept of flirtation on Latta's (2013) notion of aesthetic play, which draws from the "artistic/meaning making spirit in each of us" (p. 110). I see this meaning making spirit as an important aspect of understanding data in the form of a person's lived experiences. There is a special responsibility to data that comes from a person who has opened their life to you. For me, that responsibility meant trying to understand the student narratives from various perspectives.

A paradox in the free-spirited approach to research analysis is to be simultaneously playful and serious. Kim and Latta's response is to invoke Dewey's theories on aesthetics:

> To be playful and serious at the same time is possible, and it defines the ideal mental condition. Absence of dogmatism and prejudice, presence of intellectual curiosity and flexibility, are manifest in the free play of the mind upon a topic. To give the mind this free play is not to encourage toying with a subject, but is to be interested in the unfolding of the subject on its own account, apart from its

> subservience to a preconceived belief or habitual aim. Mental play is open-mindedness, faith in the power of thought to preserve its own integrity without external supports and arbitrary restrictions. (qtd. in Latta, 2013, p. xii)

The idea of the open-mindedness of play was intriguing to me because of the prescriptive nature of outcomes assessment. I was sensitive to Yancey and Huot's description that "to say that you are being assessed, we concede, sounds too much like being victimized by oppressive actions associated with arbitrary and inefficient governmental edicts, or by the mandates of faceless educational management" (Yancey & Huot, 1997b, p. 7). Buy in toward assessment is derived from the use of the information. My research project was a search for alternative perspectives on learning outcomes. Student perspectives on assessment are a little studied phenomenon. I wanted to see the first-year composition program not just through the lens of an administrator confined to the strictures of rubrics. I wanted to see the first-year composition program through the eyes of those who experienced it.

The descriptions of flirtation by both Kim (2015) and Phillips (1994) made the flirtation approach to the analysis alluring as I was excited to "create a space … to discover ways to reach and negotiate [my] research aims with data" (Kim, 2015). Based on the research questions, I aimed to find student descriptions of learning and the relation of those descriptions to the prescribed learning outcomes. My approach to the interviewing was born from a similar idea. I did not know what the students would say about their learning, so I adopted a responsive, semi-structured interview protocol. As much as I wanted to know about the student perspective on the learning outcomes, I wanted to create a space for the students to respond as they saw fit to allow for room to

play with their responses. An exercise in my journal was to write their stories from their perspective in an attempt to feel the frustration from interfering learning outcomes, the pride of doing well on the MCAT, or the belittlement from condescending remarks of a professor. The flirtation approach enabled me to experiment and explore the student responses to the interview questions.

Both the critical event narrative analysis and data flirtation approaches to the analysis aimed for identification of critical events in the student learning narratives. The identified critical events were examined and coded from different angles to generate the emergent themes and categorize the data.

Coding of Learning Outcome Interviews

The responsive, semi-structured interviewing methodology, outlined in Chapter 3, created space for students to engage in the conversation. The questions were grouped into segments based on prescribed Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs). As students answered the questions and recalled stories related to segment themes, I probed into topics displayed in their responses. The critical event narrative analysis and flirting with the data informed the various coding passes of the transcripts that ranged from 14 to 21 pages in length for a total of 164 pages. The coding process played out over multiple weeks as I explored the various topics raised in each of the interviews. I entered the space created for the students and attempted to balance the playfulness and seriousness of intellectual curiosity to identify and understand the impactful events relayed to me.

The first cycle of coding began with an a priori, descriptive coding scheme, based on Saldaña (2013, p. 86), to code for WPA learning outcome categories (see Appendix E for a full list of codes used). The second pass identified the specific, prescribed Program

Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs) from the first-year composition program. These two passes formed a base typical for outcomes-based assessment as the data needs to relate to specific outcomes. These two passes were familiar ground for outcomes assessment.

To delve deeper into the data, I further coded the learning outcome assessment categories. The subcoding was an attempt to achieve Saldaña's (2013) enrichment of the data analysis. In addition, the data flirtation characteristic of free association described by Kim (2015) was used to finalize the codes. This step led me down some interesting roads, many of which I abandoned. I ultimately settled on codes that described various learning events. When the critical event narrative analysis codes were applied, themes began to emerge that indicated impactful learning experiences leading to outcomes for the students. An additional pass that examined situational experiences and characters helped give shape to the student experiences.

Figure 2 gives an example of the coding procedure. In this example from James, the first coding pass identified the narrative as a critical thinking, reading, and composing example. This pass used a priori codes developed from the Council of Writing Program Administrators (2014 July) terminology to identify first-year composition outcomes. The second pass corresponded to the first-year composition Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs) at Lincoln University. The critical reading skill identified by the Council of Writing Program Administrators corresponds to PSLOs 1 and 5. Through the flirting process, I identified this example with a "Thinking Subcode," specifically a "Reading Thinking" code that focused on reading comprehension as well as a "Process Subcode" that described a strategy for completing a reading process. This narrative was

later identified as “Critical” in pass 7 because it showed the lasting impact of the first-year composition program on the participant. It was also coded “Practicality” because it showed the usefulness of learning.

James	Pass 1	Pass 2	Pass 3	Pass 4	Pass 7	Pass 8
Everyone calls it the CARS for the Critical Analysis and Reading Section. You get eight passages and huge body of texts for each passage. There are eight questions each, and you have to answer in under an hour. They are long and confusing. I would really say, of course I studied for it over the summer, but my background in these English classes definitely helped in terms of getting prepared. I had to really read this body of text and break it down and know what it means and be able to answer the questions.	CTRC	PSLO 1, 5	Rthink	RP	CRIT	PRAC

Figure 2. First cycle coding example.

In the second cycle, the examination of the “Critical” codes and a reorganization of the data as patterns were sought. Rather than focus on individual learning outcomes, further flirtation with the data attempted to link the outcomes based on the learning operations present. The learning outcomes do not exist in a vacuum. When the data were coded in search of the student’s critical narrative responses, the interplay between the prescribed learning outcomes and the student learning experience was illuminated. This pass helped me to attribute specific meaning to the student’s statements. I was drawn to the student’s narratives much like Goodall (2008) on stories: “To be drawn to stories as a researcher is to be drawn into a way of life that gives meaning and value to those sources

of knowledge that can be gotten at in no other discursive way" (p. 14). Figure 3 shows an example of the narrative coding schema.

Everyone calls it the CARS for the Critical Analysis and Reading Section. You get eight passages and huge body of texts for each passage. There are eight questions each, and you have to answer in under an hour. They are long and confusing. I would really say, of course I studied for it over the summer, but my background in these English classes definitely helped in terms of getting prepared. I had to really read this body of text and break it down and know what it means and be able to answer the questions.	TRANS	PLOT: James uses the reading skills honed in comp courses on the MCAT and is successfully admitted to medical school.	EVTS: MCAT; ACT: Reading involved in CARS section; HAP: long and confusing sections, but he was able to perform because of the learning opportunities in comp	CLMX: Use of analysis on exam

Figure 3. Second cycle coding example.

In addition, my interview notes provided descriptive context to the narratives being told in response to interview segments. In the case of James, my notes relayed his temperament retelling the narrative of being accepted to medical school and his performance on the MCAT:

> He is proud of his accomplishment. He was beaming when he told me he was accepted to a medical school… He connected the dots in front of me as he contemplated how the work in his Basic Writing course was useful in the CARS section of the MCAT.

These notes proved quite useful in identifying critical interview responses to demonstrate the complexity of the student narratives about learning.

The next phase of the data analysis process entailed charting and reorganizing the emerging themes. I created thematic charts based on Bloomberg and Volpe (2012)'s research. Preliminary categories were created and sometimes abandoned as I read and re-read the narratives of the students, made notes, and thought about the practicality of the assessment, the local context, the education theories at play, the need to be accountable to the students, the need to identify strengths and weaknesses of the program to improve the teaching and learning within the program, and the need to grow the program. Figure 4 shows an example of the thematic chart.

Category 3 Critical Thinking
Overview: Critical thinking entails analysis, idea assessment, use of thinking within writing and reading. Valued by students in both writing and reading exercises.
Participant Perspective: Critical: JAMES: MCAT—critical analysis section THERESA: Compulsory to read something and make up own mind LIKE: SIERRA: Couldn't understand assignment
Moving from Narratives to Outcome: How does curriculum move toward knowledge and skill acquisition? How is this a strength of the program? How can it be improved? How do I know? Where is the importance or value for the student?
Outcomes: Absolute Value Need various perspectives for scope Transferable skill Even in course sections/assignments that broke down students saw value Synthesis (Bloom taxonomy? Other taxonomies?)
Moving toward action: need to foster, ensure base functions while developing this skill set Assessment: Is critical thinking assessed? How? Why? For what purpose? How are valued aspects in the student perspective assessed? What decisions and actions would result from this assessment information at LU? What is the role of the student? How does this translate into important information for the field?

Figure 4. Thematic chart example.

To continue to flirt with the data, I performed a post-coding process. As described by Saldaña (2013), the post-coding and pre-writing step is a transitional analytic process.

The further engagement and juxtaposing of the codes helped me to identify patterns in the data which answered my research questions. To complete the analysis, I focused on the concepts of assessment and narrative within the data. I used elements of narrative, specifically situations, events, characters, and setting to identify strengths and areas of concern where teaching and learning could be improved.

The themes presented here are a result of this multi-layered process. The data analysis process was both typical of an outcomes-based assessment model as well as unique. I searched for the typical evidence that an outcome had been met. In the example of James, that evidence was his reporting that he learned and practiced critical thinking and reading skills that he applied to a future endeavor—the MCAT exam for acceptance to medical school. The analysis was unique for an outcomes-based assessment model as it was derived from the responses of students. Recording the students' triumphs and tribulations helped give greater voice to these experiences than simply looking for evidence of outcomes attainment. My analysis and understanding of those assessment stories led to the themes regarding how students relay learning outcomes from interviews.

Themes

The study is based in Huot's (1996, 2002) assessment principles of being site-based, locally-controlled, and context-sensitive and follows his argument that "those closest to teaching and learning, like students and teachers, need to have the most input about writing assessment and all-important teaching decisions" (2002, p. 2). The three themes are derived from viewing student responses in an interview as narratives about their learning experiences in a first-year composition program and in courses after completing the program.

Theme 1: Narratives of Interpersonal Interaction

Narratives of student learning describe interpersonal interactions that affect learning and attainment of outcomes.

In response to the first research question, one of the ways that students describe their learning is by describing the effects of other people within the learning environment. This theme describes the aspects of student learning that involved interactions with faculty and other students including interactions of support, interactions of concern, and interactions of teachable moments. For example, an interaction of concern for one student that negatively affected her learning was a condescending comment made by her writing professor. In the local context of this study, issues of culture, race, and identity were important factors in these critical interactions. For the second research question, this theme sheds light on the critical role people play in learning environment in order for students to meet the Program Student Learner Outcomes (PSLOs)

Theme 2: Narratives Situated in Time

Narratives of student learning are situated in time that broaden assessment data to include prior knowledge and learning transfer.

A second theme within the students' descriptions of their learning was the broad time scope students used to describe their learning. In describing their learning, the participants would point to examples of prior knowledge or examples of transfer in their narratives to illustrate the importance of a connection to a Program Student Learner Outcome (PSLO). For example, one student said that she had strong writing skills coming into the first-year writing program, but she learned citation style in the first-year composition program. She used this knowledge in a later course. For the purposes of

assessment, drawing attention to past and post-program learning episodes broadens the time scope of the data landscape than is typically found in an outcomes-based program assessment model.

Theme 3: Assessment Narratives of Holistic Learning

Narratives of student learning show concurrent critical events across multiple Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs) that provide a holistic view of learning within the program.

When describing their learning in the first-year composition program, every participant told narratives that identified a critical, impactful learning event that involved more than one Program Student Learning Outcome (PSLO). For example, on student describes an impactful learning opportunity that demonstrated learning associated with PSLO 1: Demonstrate knowledge of rhetorical concepts through analysis and composition of texts and PSLO 5: Locate and evaluate texts for rhetorical aims, credibility, sufficiency, accuracy, timeliness, and bias. When students told these important stories that included multiple PSLOs, they demonstrated a holistic learning environment than the singularly focused outcomes-based assessment model typically contains.

The three themes are presented below. For each theme, critical examples from three student narrative interviews are presented. The best and more diverse narratives were chosen to help illustrate each theme. Included in the presentation of each theme is analysis and interpretation of the data illustrated in the theme. This section seeks to unpack the narratives and aims to narrow the focus of the study to issues and concepts of vital importance found in the student descriptions of learning outcomes.

Theme 1: Narratives of Interpersonal Interaction

Narratives of student learning describe interpersonal interactions that affect learning and attainment of outcomes.

Narratives without character interaction are uncommon, but my original intent to ask the students about the people involved in the course who helped them learn to write was to open the *memory box,* as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to the triggering of memoires. This move also proved useful to identify people who had an impact on the students' learning. In the student descriptions of their learning, in relaying narratives about experiences, or when asked about program strengths and potential improvements, events regarding the interpersonal interactions with other students and faculty became a recurring theme. For a pragmatic use of this theme for program assessment, the interpersonal interactions can be categorized as interactions of support, interactions of concern, and interactions of teachable moments. These categories of critical interpersonal interactions marked the learning experiences, impacted attainment of outcomes, and can be used for program assessment.

The participants were asked to characterize themselves as students in the opening segment of the interview. Their responses provided understanding of the personal identities of the students beyond their production of texts, in the vein of Kent's (1999) post-process theory. The student identities provided insight, as Yagelski (2013) argues, "for writing is wrapped up in how we understand ourselves as beings in the world, and the act of writing has the potential to shape our sense of who we are and how we relate to the world around us" (p. 58). A glimpse of the student's worldview helps unpack the interactions described in their interviews.

While all the participants could relay narratives of interaction, the examples used in the Narratives of Interpersonal Interaction subtheme sections of interactions of support, interactions of concern, and interactions of teachable moments are drawn from critical examples of personal interactions affecting learning within the program. These interactions all shaped the students' abilities to learn and the program's ability to help students achieve the desired learning outcomes.

Interactions of support. Melissa found a supportive and caring environment that helped her to develop and thrive when the larger world presented obstacles to her success She is a biochemical and molecular biology major, which she is quick to explain is just one major. She describes herself as a hardworking, determined, ambitious, and *daring* student:

> I like to challenge myself and I am not afraid to actually take the leap into things that I have been expected to fail at or stereotyped to fail at.

When asked to elaborate on these perceived stereotypes, she nonchalantly described her position in the world:

> No one in my family has ever gone as far as I have gone in education. Also, being African American, there are a lot of stereotypes that we can't make it as far as the majority. Also, as a woman going into a field that is dominated by males.

The intersection of education, race, and gender was present from the very beginning of Mellissa's interview. She identified these issues as *potential* obstacles, and was sensitive to seeking a supportive environment from the beginning of her college experience. Griffin and Museus (2011) discuss the importance of intersectionality

frameworks in higher education. These frameworks more accurately reflect diversity, excavation of voices and realties at the margins, and promote greater understanding of how converging identities contribute to inequality (pp. 9-10). They point out that there is little research regarding the experiences of women of color in higher education and that intersectional analysis can point toward areas of concern. In this case, awareness by the student of the issues described by intersectionality allow for a successful experience. Melissa said she felt that the learning environment created by her peers as well as the composition faculty in the first-year composition program contributed positively to her development as a writer:

> I did get positive feedback from my peers. I wanted to work on how the voice was coming out in my papers—how I think I sound on paper versus how the paper actually sounds, the voice that is coming out. How it should sound, how it should feel, is not always how it is coming out, and I wanted to work on that with my peers.
>
> The composition faculty were very encouraging. I felt like they liked doing their job. They were actually working in the interest of their students. Compared to other departments, the English Department is very caring and concerned about their students. That's how I, at least, how I felt about the English Department. My professors gave me positive feedback on where I'm doing good and where I could improve my skills.

As a student of color, Melissa clearly understands that there are societal biases that might hold her back, and her comments show her appreciation for being helped to

learn in a caring environment. Melissa also reported that this caring, focused environment did more than just improve her writing abilities:

> Oh, it made me enjoy writing again.
>
> I had a very intensive schedule in high school. I enjoyed writing, but there was always so, so much back to back that I forgot to enjoy it. Like, I just got the writing done so that I could get to the next one.
>
> At Lincoln, I felt like I wasn't necessarily rushed. In high school, I never got to have sit-down moments with my professor to discuss what I'm writing, why I am writing it, how it is coming across, and I got that here from my composition professors.

Melissa's comments show that the interaction between her identity, how she believes she is perceived, her peers, and her professors were all key in developing her writing skills. She said she valued the depth of interactions with her peers and the faculty and actively sought out the people who she knew would take the time to work with her. Melissa is also self-aware of historical, racial, and gendered obstacles, much like the first Lincoln University student, James Ralston Amos. Melissa is aware of the stereotypes that affect her. However, she identifies herself as a daring student for her *leap* into a situation where the stereotype is that she will fail. To use her description, Melissa dares to be an African American woman in a white male dominated field. She sought a supportive environment to counter the knowledge that the odds were against her. Finding that environment contributed to her learning success. From Melissa's perspective, the first-year composition program fostered a supportive environment that enabled her to further develop her writing knowledge and skills.

Interactions of concern. Jessica's learning environment experience was quite different than Melissa's experience. While Melissa found peers to deftly read and comment on her work and found faculty caring and supportive of her development, Jessica said she felt isolated. She described a disruptive experience caused by other students and an adverse interaction with a professor that affected her learning and are cause for program concern. However, a sympathetic and supportive interaction with a different professor was a saving grace for Jessica.

Jessica discussed poignant interactions between herself and the people in her learning environment. The other students and her professors had both positive and negative influence on her ability to learn. These experiences took on added weight as Jessica, a graduating English major, was initially placed in the developmental writing course to start the composition sequence and realized that she did need to improve her writing abilities:

> When I came to Lincoln, I wasn't the strongest writer, so I did not pass the assessment to test me out of [ENG] 099 and I did take ENG 099. That course was full of freshmen— and immature freshman. I really felt for the teacher. I'm not sure of her name, but I know she is not here anymore. She was an adjunct, and it was just hard for her to teach because no one in the class was focused. But that's where I kind of started to be the type of student I am. I didn't want to add on to the rest of the kids who wasn't really focused. It was just hard work to get her point across. You know I really did feel for her…But I didn't really learn much in that class because the class was just so disruptive.

Jessica described her empathy toward adjunct faculty member's struggle with classroom management. According to Jessica, the learning environment was not conducive to learning, both due to the immaturity of the students and the inability of the faculty member to create a positive learning experience. The result, from Jessica's perspective, is that she did not learn much in the course.

In the next composition course in the sequence, English Composition I (ENG 101), Jessica had less empathy for the professor, who was a source of adversity in her eyes:

> When it came to [ENG] 101, I took it with … a very stern professor. You know, like I appreciate that. However, [the professor] was a little discouraging when it came to my writing. I know plenty of times [the professor], um, [the professor] kind of basically asked me like, "where did you learn to write like this?"

For Jessica, the comments from the professor were condescending:

> I felt like she meant "What *high school* did you go to school," "who told you how to write *that* way?" "Who told you that was right," so to say. I was like, "Oh! Hello! My teacher obviously did."

The perception of the condescending attitude present in the professor's comments created another negative learning environment for Jessica in addition to the environment in her basic writing course. Jessica saw the comments as ridiculing her previous educational experience. The experience was impactful for Jessica as she remembers her reaction vividly:

> It was just more so discouraging. It put my spirits down. I was like, "Ok, I know I'm not a good writer but, you know, you didn't necessarily have to say that."

Talking to Jessica, who started as a basic writing student and has progressed to a graduating English major, it was clear that the experience with that professor stayed with her. She felt she was treated unfairly and in a condescending manner. This interaction with the professor is further complicated when the race of the professor is considered. The professor is white while Jessica is African American. In my interview with her, Jessica talked about how this professor handled these racial issues in classroom discussions:

> If we were reading a certain poem on Langston Hughes and if – it was controversial because some of the comments – like [me] being African-American, sometimes the [professor's] comments seem – it just raised an eyebrow so to say. Like "okay, what did you mean by that comment?"

While Jessica does not report overt displays of racism by the professor, she clearly felt there was some racial bias present. Jessica's identities as a basic writing student and an African American intersect to create a unique experience, especially when juxtaposed with the professor's marginalization of both Jessica's writing skills and race. Program assessment attempts to provide a similar function by identify areas of strength and areas that need improvement regarding the learning outcomes.

While Jessica felt she faced some adversity in the course, she believed her self-motivation and perseverance enabled her to succeed in the face of this adversity:

> I went to [the professor] and I asked [the professor] to work with me. But I feel as if I didn't go to [the professor], it would have been like, “Oh I'm just going to write her off. She's a bad writer” type of thing. It is crazy because I'm a senior now and that [situation from three years ago] always stuck with me.

Ultimately, Jessica’s story is one of success. Her identity as self-determined enabled her to persist when she saw the other students disrupting the classroom environment. Her self-identity also helped her overcome what she felt was condescension by one of her professors. She was able to learn and improve her writing despite negative experiences in the first two composition courses she took. Jessica felt her interactions with her professor in her third composition course, English Composition II (ENG 102), were more positive because she thought the professor demonstrated empathy and compassion:

> [A great professor] takes time showing that [they] actually do care about the students, and just going above and beyond, and checking on your personal life sometimes too. My freshman year, actually when I was in [ENG] 102, my grandmother passed away, and it was just a rough time to academically stay on track and personally with everything going on.
>
> I got an extension because I had to go home for a week. So I got an extension and then I was able to come back with a fresh mindset and just really concentrate on everything that I missed. Going to the [professor’s] office hours and just being able to work on what I did miss and one-on-one—

> I just feel as though sometimes when you're in a rough place like that, you do need time to get your mind together to go back to the academic standpoint because stuff like that is hard and life hits everybody at different times.

The caring versus the condescending professors both impacted Jessica. While she reports learning from both professors, the interactions with her ENG 101 professor were marked with suspicion and discouragement. The interactions with the caring professor were a gateway to continue learning despite adversity. Jessica's responses in the narrative interview show how her interpersonal interactions affected her perceptions of learning from those courses. From a program assessment perspective, Jessica has indicated a critical event that demonstrates a positive aspect of the program—an empathetic teacher. But hers is predominately an example of concern: the attitudes of other students, the classroom management by faculty, the lack of respect from faculty, and the complications from the intersection of race and writing ability.

Interactions of teachable moments. Mimi described a diverse environment that was open to directly discussing difference and its effects on learning to write. Mimi describes herself as a worldly person. She was born in Nigeria, and she has lived in Texas and Ghana. Her family moved around due to her mother's occupation, so Mimi attended school and socialized in many different cultures. She responded to my interview questions by telling stories in a stream of consciousness that was both serious and humorous—often injecting pertinent one-liners that led to laughs.

In her interactions with faculty, Mimi said she appreciated the diversity of professors who taught her composition and literature courses:

> I love [my professors] greatly. They were from different parts of the world, so it was good. I feel I had an all-around kind of experience.
>
> In my [ENG] 101 class, my professor, she was white—she was Caucasian. So, it was good. She could relate to us from that. She was pretty cool. Honestly, she could pass for a black woman any day, but that [course] was good.
>
> And my [ENG]102 professor, he was – I don't know to say if he was black. But he wasn't black – he looked—I don't know what he looked. But he was around, too. He was more black. So, he would actually say, "Oh, black people do this," and "we do this"—I think he says "we," so he's black…it was a good mix.

Mimi said she valued this cultural diversity and cultural openness and the acceptance of difference shown by her professors. Mimi felt this made for a very positive learning environment:

> [The cultural representation] helped me mostly, because it's good to have a professor that understands the class a student is taking, if you know what I mean, because sometimes black people behave sometimes. They can be crazy sometimes, and it – you just need someone that understands that, "okay, this is you – I just have to work in this kind of way with this kind of person." Not like to pamper them, but to understand them. And I feel that all my professors actually – they actually did their work well within – they actually understood where we're coming from, and they would tell

you what you were doing right, and what you were doing wrong, and I feel it was good.

There was just a good understanding. That's what I'm trying to say.

And then, it just helped the students to be more – because, honestly, in my 101 class, students were so open to my white professor, like girls could tell her anything.

I had a guy in my class who had three kids. He actually needed to write something for the government to – I don't know what, sort of an aid thing, and he actually opened up to her. Like, "Look, I need to write something. I'm going write it and I need you to read it." And then, she spoke about it in class, and she was like "if you have anything you want to say to him to add to it, we could." So, I feel for like a black guy to open up to a white professor that was a lady, then there was something she was doing right. So, I feel you just have to have that understanding. You just have to be warm and you know, welcoming, and just be open-minded. And I feel all of them had that.

The ability of the faculty to relate to the students of color provided a positive environment for Mimi. The potential for a cultural clash did not manifest itself into an actualized clash that negatively affected the learning environment, as present in Jessica's experience reported earlier.

Mimi talked about the importance of openness and cultural sensitivity of her professors because she thought it helped in her learning of grammar. Mimi said she often

had difficulty writing in a consistent tense. Her ENG 102 professor worked with her to address this issue. He then eventually worked with the entire class on this issue:

> [The professor] kept saying how people had problems with [tense], and so, one of the midterms we did, attached to our regular essay we had to write in the Blue Book, he had to say, "okay, people, here are 20 words. Give me the past tense or the past perfect tense."
>
> Even at that, people were still writing – people were getting it wrong, and he's like, "No. You see like this, because this is important. This is not right. This is not actual English."

While she appreciated willingness of the professor to engage with her and be direct toward "actual English," she described situations where her cultural awareness was narrow. Mimi strove to write using what she believed was proper academic English. When she took part in peer editing activities in her classes, she said she saw other students using what she described as informal English. The informality in the academic setting disturbed her:

> I find it very offensive a student will talk in Ebonics and want to write in Ebonics. I feel it's not right, because, you know, where I'm from in Nigeria, we have like a different kind of – like the way Jamaicans have Patois, we have like a different – so, I feel it's just – [dialect] is something you just say with people of your same descent. It's just a common – you don't have to write – like nobody reads that [dialect]. So when he said [that's not actual English], I was like "Yes. Oh my God."

> I've always wanted to say that, but I was kind of excited that he actually would say that to every other person in my class, because I don't know how they felt, but I was actually glad that he mentioned it, because nobody ever talked about it.
>
> Teachers just tend to correct it and say, no, this is wrong. Just write it the right way, but for the fact that he spelled it out, that you know we don't do – you don't write Ebonics in actual English.

Mimi displays a cultural bias and saw the professor's attempt to teach academic English, a program student learner outcome of the first-year composition program, as validation of that bias. Mimi is not seeing the nuance dividing the Program Student Learning Outcome of using academic English and the respect for linguistic diversity.

Mimi's distinction between the formal and informal use of language is derived from her living in different countries and cultures.

> I was here [in the United States] when I was little, and then, we had to go back to Nigeria, and then, I moved to Ghana. So every country has their own [dialect]. You know what I'm saying? And then, I noticed that – I mean when we're talking with friends, or we're talking with normal people – like regular people, you use whatever is most comfortable to you, that people of that particular place can relate to. But writing is different, because it's just – it's different, because people from different – somebody from a different country can pick it up and read it, and people from Africa don't speak Ebonics, so there's no way they can read that. It's just like

> saying – writing Spanish in a French paper. It doesn't make sense, because then, a Frenchman can't read what you're writing.

While her world travels have given her an acute ability to successfully communicate, she fails to consider the perspective of others and is ignorant to the concept of World Englishes. According to Park and Henderson Lee (2014), the concept goes beyond mechanical understanding and application of a language. The concept of World Englishes speaks to the power dynamics inherent in the speaking of English:

> Englishes is an everchanging, critical, and complex phenomenon that controls how users position and are positioned by their surroundings. Being in the midst of and becoming users of Englishes leads us to reflect on the ways in which the varieties of English have transformed us and helps us to critically see how the varieties dictate and embrace different members of linguistic communities. But most importantly, Englishes guides us to imagined communities where all users can understand how it affects us to refashion our identities as owners of Englishes. (p. 396) This definition creates many Englishes tied to personal ownership. Mimi see English as fixed and standardized for the purpose clarity and universality in communication:

> > So, I feel English is all-around; just write the actual thing, so when somebody that has English as – even English as a second language, if the person picks [the text] up, the person can sort of relate to what you're saying. But then, if you put Ebonics somewhere in the sentence, he reads and is like – "okay, I'll just skip that," because they don't know what it means – so I feel it just makes sense to use what everybody knows and

> what people can relate to, because you're not writing for yourself. If you were writing for yourself you probably not come to school at all.

Mimi's comments show that she believed the first-year composition program reinforced her linguistic views. While this is positive because Mimi was improving her ability to write clearly thanks to her teachers, the program also needs to think about the values it is enculturating in its students. In the current era of World Englishes, students need to be taught to value linguistic diversity. In one case, there was a teachable moment regarding grammar, but in the other a teachable moment regarding diversity was missed.

Race as an example of an underlying concern. The interviews demonstrate that the students' perceptions of self and others affects their learning environment to varying degrees. These perceptions are underlying the direct assessments of student writing, but they are not captured by that basic assessment model. As these interview examples show, the interpersonal interactions that brought student's identities in contact with their learning environment affected their ability to learn and attain the PSLOs. In these three specific interview examples, race was contextualized as a critical event. For Melissa, race was a part of her identity that interacted with the learning environment. In Jessica and Mimi's interviews, race encapsulated cultural and racial issues that can affect teaching, learning, and assessment. Inoue (2015) describes writing assessment, "as an ecology with explicit features, namely a quality of *more than*, interconnectedness among everything and everyone in the ecology, and an explicit racial politics that students must engage with" (p. 9, emphasis in original). He further argues that classroom writing assessment scholarship has scantly addressed racial theory or practicality (p. 16). Jessica and Mimi's interviews show that those racial politics are regularly present.

Both Jessica and Mimi interacted with the dominant discourse of whiteness. Jessica perceived racially biased comments made by her white professor in the classroom. She was further marginalized by evaluative comments from that professor about where Jessica had learned to write. The professor's comment can be seen as marking Jessica's writing as distant from the professor's privileged language of Academic English. Mimi aspires to the privileged language of Academic English and looks with disdain at those who use informal variations of English, such as Ebonics. As Inoue (2015) clarifies, "racism in schools and college writing courses is still pervasive because most, if not all writing courses … promote or value first a local SEAE (Standardized Edited American English) and a dominant white discourse" (p. 14). Identification of these racial issues are valuable for program assessment.

The racial and political interaction of language becomes another marker in the assessment of the local context. Jessica felt pressure to go to the professor so she would not be written off as another bad writer. Even if completely unintentional, the racial implications that caused Jessica "to raise an eyebrow" affected the learning environment for her and her attainment of the Program Student Learner Outcomes (PSLOs), further complicating the teaching, learning, and assessment dynamic. Mimi encountered alternatives to the dominant white discourse, but she was offended by the usage even though she said she celebrates diversity. She did value the professor's direct address of dialects in writing, which Mimi described as "not actual English." Mimi sees Academic English as a universal, formal discourse and welcomes instruction to that end. She has similar views of language to the students in the Successful Group of Redd's (2001) study who "portrayed Standard English, especially EAE, as a 'universal' language that allows

Americans to understand one another" (p. 9). Yet, as Jordan (2012) points out, "the HBCU composition classroom with its mixture of Black southern, midwestern, and northern dialects, as well as, Afro-Latino, Jamaican, West African, and other influences, is undeniably diverse" (p. 101). Composition professors who are guided by the Conference on College Composition and Communication's (1974) resolution *Students' Right to Their Own Language* have to find a pedagogy that mitigates the pressures from the various positions on the racially charged issue of language usage.

This interview data goes beyond discussing attainment of Program Student Learner Outcomes (PSLOs) and begins to examine the *whys* of learning. A larger picture of the student takes shape due to the complexity of the interaction data. In this case, the interaction data showed student identities and a contextualization of race within the first-year composition program. A students' interactions within a writing program can dramatically affect the student's ability to learn and transfer knowledge. Bird (2013) articulates the importance of social practices to the teaching of writing:

> Approaches to curriculum and pedagogy that only emphasize cognitive knowledge not only limit students' understanding as whole beings, but they also reduce the impact of learning since students may not internalize the community understandings. Approaches that engage students' participation in "social practices," however, involve ways of thinking and "embodied ways of being," both of which promote a deeper internalization of community knowledge. Thus, students can develop self-identities as academic writers since they have the basic knowledge (purpose of academic writing) and dispositions that are essential components of this social identity. (p. 63)

This interview data, particularly about student self-identities that mark successful learning, can be used to drive meaningful decisions about how best to do assessment in the first-year composition program.

Theme 2: Narratives Situated in Time

Narratives of student learning are situated in time that broaden assessment data to include prior knowledge and learning transfer.

As expected when telling stories, the element of time was a relevant factor. Every participant could point to a learning outcome in the first-year composition program and describe a prior learning experience related to that outcome. However, understanding prior knowledge and examining the transfer of knowledge to learning situations after completing the first-year composition program is not typical in outcomes-based assessment models. A pre-test or writing diagnostic may be used as a baseline to measure change over time or value added for program assessment. But the narrative responses of the participants during the interviews show description of their learning in a much broader context that includes prior knowledge and transfer.

Understanding this theme in a learner-centered outcomes assessment approach is important as it situates the Program Student Learner Outcomes (PSLOs) in the educational reflex arc. As discussed in chapter two, Dewey's (1887/2008) reflex arc expanded the learning situation to include prior knowledge applicable to the current learning situation as compared to Thorndike's behaviorism model. Most participants had experience with the PSLO concepts before entering the first-year composition program; they had written essays in high school, used some sort of writing process, and had a foundation in grammar and punctuation. The participants also had an expectation that

these areas of prior knowledge would be covered in the first-year composition program courses. The students report value in the learning environment when they can build on their prior knowledge beyond a review of what they already know. Likewise, students reported value in the use of the knowledge and skills from the first-year composition program. The transfer of knowledge, however, is more difficult for the students to see. Nevertheless, students told critical event narratives that demonstrated their application of learning from their first-year composition program to future class settings. The element of time in the learning narratives expands the scope of the learning picture.

Prior knowledge and first-year composition. The interviews show that the students in the first-year composition program are continually responding to new stimuli relative to their previous learning experiences. Interview data from Lauren, Gemma Doyle, and Natalie illustrate critical events focused on prior knowledge.

Lauren—the editor. Lauren described herself as a better editor than writer. Lauren reported that she had a good writing base from her high school curriculum, although she said she was often slow to engage in the drafting phase of writing and felt dependent on others to assist her. She referred to herself as a better editor than writer as writers are better able to develop their own topics and editors work with existing material. While she was skilled at working with existing ideas, she had difficulty developing those ideas independently. Lauren said that her work in the first-year composition program further developed those skills as she moved from editor to writer:

> [In high school,] I was a good writer. But it took me a long time to write papers. I would have to get a lot of input from my sisters. I am usually more of an editor, I would say. If you give me a paper, I can add stuff to it

> and I am good. But writing my own, it was a long, long process. Like I would wait until the last day or the day before to do it and I would just be stressing out. So after [experiencing the first-year composition program], I did become a pretty strong writer. I would still wait until the last minute, but it wouldn't take as long. Like, I would already know what to write about, and how to format it.

Lauren said the learning opportunities in the first-year composition program made her a stronger writer because she became quicker at the writing process and felt less anxiety about writing, although she admitted that she did not always follow a protracted draft-writing process.

More difficult assignments did cause her to spend more time on the writing process and developing her own ideas. A critical example came from her coursework in English Composition II (ENG 102), a research writing course. Rather than being slowed by genre issues, Lauren said she tried to focus on ideas. For the impactful assignment, she had to write an argument against her own beliefs. She chose to answer one of the four prescribed questions, “Is there a God?” Lauren said this writing task was difficult for her as a Christian:

> It took me a long time to write that essay. I chose instances where he [God] didn’t help. And I thought that was hard because I am a Christian and I believe there is a God, but I didn’t really know how to go against that. But the three examples that I chose, I felt like he was nowhere to be found. For instance, in California there was a shooting at my cousin’s school. It involved football players, and they didn’t find who shot them. A

> couple weeks after that was the situation in Paris. So, I felt like it wasn't just one place; it was happening everywhere. If God was there, these things wouldn't have happened.

Lauren said that writing the essay did not change her belief in God, but it did affect her approach to thinking about issues. She began to approach controversial issues with a more open mind toward the ideas of others that conflicted with her own.

Beyond higher order thinking abilities, Lauren talked about the importance of the feedback to her writing that she received in the first-year composition program. One example was a correction to her notion of the comma rules that came from her intuitive theory about the marks of punctuation:

> In my mind, when I am reading something, commas mean pauses, in general. So, I'm like, "my sentence needed a pause, so I am going to put a comma there." So, I felt like that makes sense, but grammatically it wasn't right.

Over the course of time in first-year composition, Lauren was transitioning from editor to writer. She became more efficient at developing her ideas. She also refined her knowledge of the grammatical rules for comma usage beyond her previous inclination to place a comma wherever she felt a pause was needed in the sentence. Overall, Lauren built on her prior knowledge in the first-year composition program.

Gemma Doyle—The interviewer. Gemma Doyle placed into English Composition II (ENG 102) based on her scores on the ACCUPLACER placement exam, a rare placement feat. Although her placement score required her to take ENG 102,

Gemma said she did not find the first-year composition program to be very challenging in her first semester at Lincoln University:

> I came from a very structured high school environment. We knew what our professor wanted in a research paper. You had to have a certain structure, you had to be aware of the audience, you had to be concerned with language bias. We were routinely writing 7-10 page papers.
> I didn't really have to do that much writing [in Lincoln's first-year composition program]. I had to write mostly three page papers here [in ENG 102].

Gemma Doyle said she did fine on most of the papers she wrote that first semester. However, she did find the final paper for the course to be challenging. She said this was primarily because of the topic she had picked:

> In ENG 102, my term paper was tedious, but that was my fault because I chose to write about the distribution of power and wealth. I compared the United States to the EU. It was just statistics I was using. Just gathering that information, going to the World Bank's website, just became tedious after a while.

Although she said the course was not challenging, Gemma Doyle did say she learned new research skills in her course:

> Well I did learn MLA format, so that was good. And I had to do an interview. I remember the professor saying, "You are doing power and wealth distribution, why don't you call the President?" He wanted me to call President Barack Obama!

> I did email a professor in California and interviewed him. He was a sociologist and wrote one of the papers that I based my paper on. The [ENG 102] professor said we had to interview someone famous, so the person I interviewed had like two PhDs and wrote a lot of books. I can't remember his name, but if you Google "power and wealth in the US," you will probably find him.
>
> We emailed each other. It was nice.

Gemma Doyle said the instruction the professor provided focused on interview techniques:

> The [ENG 102] professor did review interview techniques and questions to ask, but depending on who you were interviewing you had to tweak [the questions]. And he told us how to cite an interview. Practicing MLA format was one of the best things that I got from that [assignment].

Gemma Doyle added primary research knowledge about interviewing to her research skill repertoire. In addition, she was able to apply the MLA citation techniques she learned earlier in the course. Gemma Doyle was a strong writer entering Lincoln University as shown by her placement into ENG 102. The learner outcomes that she acquired included primary research and citation style, both part of the course student learning outcomes and are linked to the first-year composition Program Student Learner Outcomes (PSLOs).

Learning something new about writing within the first-year composition program was not as straightforward in Gemma Doyle's description of her learning experience compared to Lauren's. Lauren clarified her ideas about writing structure and punctuation

rules, a straightforward building on prior knowledge she had gained in high school. Gemma Doyle, however, took an approach that the one course in the first-year composition program that she was required to take had little to offer her. However, through the lens of transfer as preparation for future learning (PFL), Gemma Doyle exhibited successful *transferring in*. The concept of interpretative knowing is significant for *transferring in* as the ways in which individuals decipher what to do can be beneficial when they are not directly applying prior knowledge (Schwartz et al., 2005). Gemma Doyle needed to conduct interview research in ENG 102. She learned how to solve challenges to recruit and successfully and effectively interview an expert. She tweaked the interview guidelines taught by her professor, used her prior knowledge to find an appropriate source, and successfully interacted with an expert on the topic she was researching. In addition, she reported learning citation format, a skill that she lacked.

***Natalie—The Evaluator*.** Natalie loves teeth. "I can look in people's mouths all day," she says. Natalie was born in Zambia in southern Africa but moved to the United States with her family when she was 13 to attend school. Like Gemma Doyle, Natalie reported a solid foundation of writing entering into the first-year composition program. Her learning opportunities in the LU courses allowed for further practice of outcomes that she believed she had already mastered. Natalie described a similar experience to Gemma Doyle of transferring in as her evaluation of the first-year composition program was good overall, but she said she saw room for improvement. She believed she had transferred in most of the skills necessary to be successful in this course and had little to learn.

> I think [the first-year composition program] is good in the sense that it prepares us to analyze things, to think, and really kind of comprehend what you're reading or whatever assignment you've been given. It's good in that regard. But when it comes to just writing in general, I think it could do better.

Natalie did not make the connection that reading and thinking skills are an important part of writing development. However, an impactful learning event for Natalie, which she described as learning communication rather than writing, occurred in her ENG 101 course:

> There was this one project that we had to do where – it was like writing except we had to act it out. So, [the professor] divided us into groups and asked us to pick a topic, something in society, and we had to portray that without talking. So, it was like acting it out. And that was very different for an English course, so I was very used to reading, writing, speaking, giving a speech, but it was very different.
>
> [The professor] took a different kind of route because language is not just talking. So, it was like a silent kind of acting. And then the class had to guess what the topic was, what were we trying to convey. Basically, analyze the five-minute piece that we acted out, so that was very memorable.
>
> I learned that communication isn't just always written or spoken. I definitely learned how to think in an abstract kind of form. So, that particular assignment helped me analyze things through, break it down—

this person did this, they did that. What are they trying to show? That sort of thing.

This unique learning experience required her to apply interpretative knowing based on prior experience with communication to solve the problem-based learning exercise. The exercise brought Natalie closer to connecting thinking and writing, the primary communication subject of the course.

Beyond first-year composition. As previously stated, writing transfer relies on the premise that "[composition] courses will help students use what they already know about writing, learn something new about writing, and ultimately be able to successfully tackle new writing tasks in different settings" (Wardle, 2013, p. 143). As shown in the previous section, all three examples showed that the first-year composition program provided opportunities to use prior knowledge. Those learning opportunities in the first-year composition program demonstrated low road transfer, near transfer situations because the students had developed an automaticity to writing an essay in an English course.

These traditional examples of transfer, in this case from prior experiences to the first-year composition program, are referred to as *transferring out* in the preparation for future learning model by Schwartz et al. (2005). Wardle refers to them as repurposing or, as stated earlier, being "able to successfully tackle new writing tasks in different settings" (Wardle, 2012; 2013, p. 143). Examining the transfer of knowledge beyond the first-year composition program the participants similarly showed examples of *transferring out* in low road, near transfer situations. As the following interview data will show, Lauren became more comfortable analyzing a text and writing an essay. Gemma Doyle reported

transferring her knowledge of citations learned in the first-year composition program to her science courses. Natalie reported repurposing reading skills to her literature course and science courses.

Lauren. Lauren said the development of her writing abilities was tested in the World Literature course:

> After composition, I had World Lit. We had an interpretive essay and a critical essay, but other than that we had in-class, short essays. I feel like I did better on those because I was thinking on the spot and I knew what we were reading. The composition courses helped me with that.

Lauren said she tried to apply the writing skills she had further developed in the first-year composition program to similar writing situations beyond the program. Further, she developed a greater understanding of essay structure. a lesson she could apply to her coursework beyond the first-year composition program. For instance, Lauren said that she used this complex thinking approach in the World Literature general education course that students usually take after completion of the first-year composition program:

> I became more open-minded. Specifically, in World Lit, we had to write about different cultures, so I felt like when I was exposed to that [having to argue the antithesis of her beliefs] I was able to say, "OK, some people think this way, but some people don't."

Based on Lauren's comments, it appears that achieving the learning outcomes from the Composition Program had an immediate and recognizable effect on her.

Gemma Doyle. Gemma Doyle said that understanding the concept of citation, and specifically MLA citation formatting, was applicable to her science and humanities courses.

> In writing lab reports you have to have an introduction or talk about the materials that you used. You often have to refer back to work that other scientists have used or other research articles, so you have to cite those. It also helped with Spanish papers that I had to write. Even though it is another language, [MLA style] still helped with the format and citations within the paper as well.

Gemma Doyle characterized herself as a strong and confident writer before she came to Lincoln University. While she believed that the one composition course she took added little new knowledge for her, she nevertheless said she built on her prior research knowledge of MLA style and formatting as well as interviewing techniques.

Natalie. At first, Natalie had difficulty identifying specific aspects of the first-year composition program that were beneficial or applicable to courses beyond the program, such as World Literature (ENG 207), which the first-year composition program courses serve as prerequisites:

> I honestly feel that if I went straight into [ENG] 207 from high school, I would still perform just as well as I did with taking 101 and 102. So, I don't think they really transitioned me per se because each class was very different, and each professor wanted different things, expected different things from the students. So, it was kind of like – it wasn't exactly like

> going from college algebra to pre-Calc to Calc one; it was just like different courses in its own regard.
>
> Overall, if I had to grade [the first-year composition program], I would give it a B. I think it could be better. More writing assignments to prepare students for writing outside of Lincoln because there're going to be jobs that require you to write grants or just to write about – let's say you have an idea for a company, you need to be able to write well [to receive funding].
>
> In terms of my writing development, honestly, no. I can only say it was worth it because I got to read books and some literature pieces that I never heard of. So, in that regard, it was good that I took [ENG 101 and 102] to have that experience, but not in the sense that it helped me transition to 207 or groomed me for 207.

Natalie's difficulty to see the correspondence between her first-year composition coursework and other courses is evocative of Bergmann and Zepernick (2007) who found that students' perceptions of learning in first-year composition courses contained few transferable attributes. She did identify citation style as an important skill learned in the first-year composition program. Natalie's description of her learning in the first-year composition program continued by identifying what she saw as *non-writing* related skills. The transfer value of the knowledge and skills from the first-year composition program manifested for Natalie when she could apply them to the reading and writing assignments she encountered in her World Literature I (ENG 207) course, specifically what she referred to as a review writing assignment:

> [The first-year composition program] was useful, and the fact that it's given me a skill to learn how to interpret information. So, it's definitely something that I've taken into my other courses and not just in English. Because reading a science paper is very different than reading a literary piece.
>
> Reading Gilgamesh versus reading something about cancer is totally different but you can utilize the same skills to sort of read it and break it down because science papers are really hard, especially if you don't know the terms and what they're talking about.
>
> Coming into college I always thought it was a waste of time to take – to be required to take an English course until I took [ENG] 207 because I hated writing. I love to read, I could read all day, but I hated writing. So, like I said, [ENG] 207 really did help me enjoy writing. I guess it's because of the topics we had to write about, but it definitely gave me a skill that anybody should have. You have to be able to read and write in any field you're working in, psychology, politics. It's very essential to learn how to read and write.

Natalie said the rhetorical analysis she had to perform in her literature course challenged her and sharpened her reading skills for use in her science courses:

> I would underline words that didn't make sense to me or just a sentence that would help me understand the rest of the paper. Other skills were just reading a paper to understand what it is. A scientific paper is broken down. So, they will have the abstract, you have the introduction, so you

know what exactly to look for in each sort of part of the paper versus – let's say I'm reading about Gilgamesh, it's just one story which you may not even understand what's going on till the middle of the book.

I feel like it was harder to read literary pieces than it is to read scientific papers because with literary pieces you have to kind of analyze as you go, take mental notes of this is what happened. Who is this? Why are they introducing this character? There's a lot of foreshadowing, which, if you're not paying attention when you start the paper, you won't really understand or catch a specific thing that the author was trying to convey towards the end or in the middle.

Versus a scientific [text], it's very straightforward. It's very structured in the sense where you know in this part you talk about – in the abstract they're going to have the results, the methods, the purpose. The introduction is just some background information on the topic. Then they have the method section, which just tells you what they did and then results and discussion.

Natalie perceives the more challenging curriculum in her 200 level courses as providing learning experiences that further developed her reading and writing skills, which then became useful in the major courses she took later. However, she described impactful experiences of reading and analysis that contributed to the development of her thinking abilities that she was able to transfer out to the 200 level courses and beyond.

Expanded reflex arc. Through the learning experiences in the first-year composition program, the participants such as Lauren and Gemma Doyle could (re)create their world within Dewey's idea of the integrated individual:

> To gain an integrated individuality, each of us needs to cultivate his own garden. But there is no fence about this garden: it is no sharply marked-off enclosure. Our garden is the world, in the angle at which it touches our own manner of being. By accepting the corporate and industrial world in which we live, and by thus fulfilling the pre-condition for interaction with it, we, who are parts of the moving present, create ourselves as we create an unknown future. (Dewey, 1930/1984, pp. 122-123)

The interplay in the reflex arc between the new experiences and the prior knowledge creates new knowledge or interpretative knowing that then becomes the basis for further interplay with new experiences. Narratives of student learning that are situated in time broaden the assessment data to help researchers see examples of transferring learning in and out of the program.

Theme 3: Assessment Narratives of Holistic Learning

Narratives of student learning show concurrent critical events across multiple Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs) that provide a holistic view of learning within the program.

A commonality in the responses amongst all nine of the participants was relaying narratives that provided a holistic view of their learning by discussing multiple Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLO). Data of holistic learning that covers more than one PSLO is atypical in outcomes assessment models as the data is usually collected for

analysis of one PSLO. All nine participants had narratives coded as critical events across multiple Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs). Figure 5 charts the participants critical events relative to the PSLOs present in their interviews.

Program Student Learning Outcome	Critical Event of Participant								
PSLO 1 Rhetorical Concepts		James			Melissa		Natalie		
PSLO 2 Communicate Ideas			Jessica	Lisa	Melissa	Mimi			Theresa
PSLO 3 Structure	Gemma Doyle		Jessica		Melissa			Sierra	
PSLO 4 Academic English				Lisa		Mimi		Sierra	
PSLO 5 Text Evaluation	Gemma Doyle	James					Natalie		Theresa
PSLO 6 Multiple Draft Process			Jessica	Lisa	Melissa				Theresa
PSLO 7 Life Long Learning		James	Jessica		Melissa	Mimi	Natalie		Theresa

Program Student Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate knowledge of rhetorical concepts through analysis and composition of texts.
2. Produce written texts that effectively communicate a writer's ideas through a variety of genres.
3. Design a written text with organizational and rhetorical structure to support and communicate the writer's ideas and the integration of the writer's ideas with those from appropriate sources.
4. Employ effective academic English in written texts that shows knowledge of linguistic structures, including grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
5. Locate and evaluate texts for rhetorical aims, credibility, sufficiency, accuracy, timeliness, and bias.
6. Write and revise in multiple drafts to create a successful text.
7. Assess prior and new writing knowledge and application to future writing situations in the pursuit of life-long learning.

Figure 5. Program student learning outcome critical event chart.

Typically during an assessment cycle, two to three PSLOs are selected for assessment. Methods and measurement tools are designed to obtain data for each PSLO. Data is collected and analyzed relative to the PSLO being measured. The remaining PSLOs are assessed in future assessment cycles until all PSLOs have been assessed. For example, in year 1 of an assessment cycle, the two PSLOs selected may be PSLO 1: Demonstrate knowledge of rhetorical concepts through analysis and composition of texts and PSLO 5: Locate and evaluate texts for rhetorical aims, credibility, sufficiency, accuracy, timeliness, and bias. A rubric measurement tool would be designed for PSLO 1 and a separate rubric would be designed for PSLO 5. If possible to streamline the assessment process, a single rubric or segments of an analytic rubric would be used to capture data for each PSLO. The final results would indicate the percentage of students who met PSLO 1 and PSLO 5. Statistical analysis to see who met both PSLO 1 and 5 or just one or the other is neither performed at the research site of Lincoln University nor outlined in the Lincoln University assessment manual. Of course, the belief is that students are learning relative to all of the PSLOs. There will be overlap in any given learning opportunity to practice or acquire a Course Learning Outcome or a Program Learning Outcome. However, outcomes assessment models do not often assess based on the overlap. They isolate the PSLOs. This is an issue pointed out by Schneider (2013) in the promotion of a more integrated assessment model referred to as the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP):

> The habit of treating college learning as a set of separate, discrete, and even "siloed" units—individual courses, the majors, general education, the co-

> curriculum, and so on—works at cross-purposes to the DQP's conception of more intentional and, ultimately, integrative educational experience. (p. 23)

The siloed approach to Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs) limits the ability to see how those outcomes affect each other.

In this study, each student's narrative was examined to see how they achieved a specific outcome. The interview structure also contained segments based on the different Program Student Learner Outcomes. The participants were asked how they attained an outcome in the first-year composition program, what challenges they experienced in attaining that outcome, and how they used that learning outcome in their coursework after the first-year composition program. Every time a student would tell one critical story of learning which involved one of the PSLOs, they would instinctively include additional PSLOs leading to a more holistic description of student learning.

The following examples from James, Theresa, and Jessica illustrate critical event narratives of learning and demonstrate this interplay with multiple Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs). During the course of their interviews, all three discussed events that had critically shaped their learning during the first-year composition program. These events were impactful and challenged the participants' prior understanding of how to write to different degrees of success. Their descriptions were coded to show that the students' learning experiences often included multiple PSLOs indicative of a holistic view of learning as opposed to the siloed view typical of outcomes-based models.

James—MCAT success showing three PSLOs. James is going to medical school. One reason for this is that James is very strong academically. He scored in the 90th percentile in the Critical Analysis and Reading section of the MCAT. Multiple

PSLOs are present in James' description of his learning in the first-year composition program and the relation of that learning to his success on the MCAT.

> Everyone calls it the CARS for the Critical Analysis and Reading Section. You get eight passages and huge body of texts for each passage. There are eight questions each, and you have to answer in under an hour. They are long and confusing. I would really say, of course I studied for it over the summer, but my background in these English classes definitely helped in terms of getting prepared. I had to really read this body of text and break it down and know what it means and be able to answer the questions.
>
> After ENG 102, I was completely removed from writing altogether. In my junior year, I started studying for the MCAT, and I am pretty impressed that I got in the 90th percentile in the critical reading and analysis. But it is because of my English background and that reading stamina.

James placed into a developmental writing course, a placement that he did not question and that he saw as an opportunity for learning. A review of his writing ¾ of the way through his first semester in the Basic Writing course exempted him from English Composition I (ENG 101) and enabled him to take English Composition II (ENG 102) in his second semester. His work in ENG 099 and ENG 102 gave him a foundation that he reports he used for the MCAT and throughout his course work:

> Trial and error in the [composition] classroom is how I developed my learning process. First, I would learn how to write an essay or how to properly analyze a body of texts or things like that. Then by doing the

assignments, turning in the paper, getting back what my mistakes are or what I need to do, I would learn.

It was the same way with my science courses. If my paper wasn't what it was supposed to be, the [professor] would give back the paper with what my mistakes were and I would correct for them.

The analysis of a reading was a big portion of English 099. Taking what we read, specifically like *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, and being able to analyze what the author's purpose for not only what is happening in the sentences but even like symbolic or thematic aspects in the reading.

After we read a passage or read a paragraph, we would have to stop and analyze it. And we would have to critically think about what the author was trying to convey throughout each chapter, so critical thinking was very prominent in ENG 099.

When I am analyzing a text, while I am looking for symbols, while I am looking for common themes, I am also relating that text to other pieces of literature that are fundamental for common themes and symbols. And not just in literature but in regular life. I didn't do that in high school. So yes, I did have a great experience, being in the long term, [the first-year composition program] has prepared me for my career and it has helped me get into my career, in a way, now that I think about it.

The critical thinking skills developed in James' first-year composition courses carried through to James' performance on the MCAT and his acceptance into medical school, a feat that he is very proud of. The coding of his narrative about post-program success on

the MCAT showed multiple Program Student Learner Outcomes (PSLOs). He invoked the analysis of texts (PSLO1), the evaluation of texts (PSLO 5), and the skill of life-long learning (PSLO 7) to transfer and further develop that knowledge and skills in pursuit of his dream to attend medical school.

Much of James' narrative focused on what he described as the critical thinking component of the first-year composition program. He felt critical thinking was valuable to his later course work and proved to be an important aspect of college level writing coursework. Like many of the participants, James relayed stories of critical thinking before I specifically asked about the subject in the course of the interview.

Multiple first-year composition Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs) pertain to critical thinking, although none specifically mention the term. PSLOs 1, 5, and 7 are linked to the Institutional Learning Outcome (ILO) concerning critical thinking. The Lincoln University Institutional Learning Outcomes define critical thinking as follows:

> Critical thinking is a comprehensive and systematic exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion. Integrative learning is an understanding and a disposition that a student builds across the curriculum and co-curriculum, from making simple connections among ideas and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus. (Lincoln University, 2016)

At LU, critical thinking entails a student's ability to analyze texts, develop ideas, and determine the best way to communicate those ideas through writing.

For James, critical thinking was present in his two first-year composition courses than in his major science courses.

> There's much more critical thinking in terms of really analyzing the text. If we're talking about a book, a poem, or an excerpt, when I'm in English 99 or English 102, I would have to really interpret every line or every passage in a way that I feel like the author is trying to get their point across.
>
> Also, their purpose of writing the paper. I would have to find out what their purpose is. Instead of something in my science textbooks where the purpose is clear from the first sentence, "This is what we are doing." The purpose of a poem is not that clear, just because that's how writing is, you have to really search for the purpose. That's why it's so – I would say so entertaining to read and so diverse. The purpose is not always there. That's something you have to look for, the purpose of why the author's writing this. What's he trying to convey? What's he trying to push forward?

James description of interpretation and determining purpose is indicative of PSLO 1 for the rhetorical analysis of texts. The English Composition II course (ENG 102) required him to conduct research on the issues conveyed in the literature he was reading as part of PSLO 5. Both of these PSLOs contributed to PSLO 7: Assess prior and new writing knowledge and application to future writing situations in the pursuit of life-long learning. PSLO 7 in the first-year composition program is a subset of the Institutional Learning Outcome (ILO)that defines life-long learning as an "all-purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, and

competence. Lincoln University prepares students to be this type of learner by developing specific dispositions and skills while in school." James description of learning links these three PSLOs and is buoyed by his transfer of learning to the MCAT.

Inherent in the above definition of critical thinking is the "transferring learning to new, complex situations." James displayed his transfer of the reading analysis skills he developed through the composition coursework. James said that in his basic writing course he was asked to focus on understanding and interpretation. The course provided him with the opportunity for "trial and error in the classroom." James' interview shows growth in reading ability, and he links this growth to writing-to-learn activities.

> I remember something that was prominent just in terms of just writing just to write – free writing. I guess what would sometimes be the first step is in free writing, specifically for first drafts. In free writing, I could sort of find what I'm looking for through my thoughts and everything because I'm putting my thoughts down on paper. That's what I like to do in the first place.
>
> The second thing I would say is in terms of finding the purpose of what – finding the author's purpose, analyzing the text, things like that. While I'm reading the text and while I'm looking for symbols and while I'm looking for common themes, kind of relate it back to other pieces of literature that are fundamental for common themes and symbols t. Not just in literature but in regular life. For example, how sunlight means that you're having a good day, or if it's dark and cloudy the character might be having – or it might be foreshadowing.

> Things like that are how I sort of try to interpret what the author is going through. I try to write that on the paper. I try to write it in a way that will be suitable for the class.

The critical thinking was a link between the reading requirements of a course and the writing requirements. The students said that the first-year composition program required them to engage actively in critical thinking. For the participants, critical thinking was an important characteristic of the first-year composition program. The participants said that engaging in critical thinking helped them improve their writing.

James's interview also showed the transferring of the learning from the first-year composition program to the MCAT, an example of the interconnectedness between the themes that the holistic perspective of learning provides. For James, the transfer of his critical reading skills developed in the first-year composition program to the MCAT shows low road, far transfer. The contexts were dissimilar enough that James had to think to make the connection, indicative of far transfer. Further, the high stakes MCAT exam and the reading passages of the CARS sections are a very different context from when James was asked to write about a memoir in his Basic Writing course. The reflexive act of reading and analysis, however, is a low road application of critical reading skills, which eased the transfer of the learning.

James' pragmatic disposition may also have been a factor in his successful transfer. He accepted his placement into Basic Writing without question because he trusted the logic that he needed to be in the course and could learn from the course. Driscoll and Wells (2012) identified four traits that affect a student's ability to transfer knowledge: value, self-efficacy, attribution, and self-regulation (p. 6). James said he

valued the comprehension and reading activities he did in the Basic Writing course. He was confident in his ability to learn and improve and subsequently was exempted from the Composition I course. He also attributed his success on the MCAT to his own preparation for the exam as well as skills he developed through the first-year composition program.

Theresa—Thinking for herself. Theresa's narrative also shows successful learning, attainment of multiple Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs), and a positive disposition. In a classic tale of college composition coursework, she engaged in writing-to-learn activities to develop her critical thinking skills. This course work was an important step in her development that enabled her to do more sophisticated writing later courses. She was used to doing formal writing where teachers focused on correctness. In her basic writing courses, Theresa was asked to do more informal writing which she said helped to develop her thinking. She was removed from her comfort zone, which was influenced by her Nigerian culture, as she engaged in a contact zone in the American classroom. Theresa's interview showed that in the end she experienced an impactful change.

Theresa characterizes herself as a good student. She likes to study and has a high GPA to show for that work. Her narrative was coded to demonstrate attainment of PSLOs 2, 5, 6: 2. Produce written texts that effectively communicate a writer's ideas through a variety of genres, 5. Locate and evaluate texts for rhetorical aims, credibility, sufficiency, accuracy, timeliness, and bias, and 6. Write and revise in multiple drafts to create a successful text. showed her engagement with the first-year composition curriculum and provided for a rewarding learning experience. Both her English Composition I (ENG

101) and English Composition II (ENG 102) courses were built around the study of literature. The learning opportunities in both courses taught her to become a better thinker and reader through the act of writing:

> In 101, [the professor] would give us choices of papers to read. And then he would make us write reflections on them. Most of reflections were very informal—just write what you feel about this [topic]. Sometimes he gave us Langston Hughes poems, and things like that, and told us to reflect on them—write what you thought about this.

The Writing-to-Learn approach was new and different for Theresa, but it created a space for her to do her own analysis.

> I had never done anything like that. Any time somebody tells me to write an essay, I switch up to you know proper English and good punctuation and everything. But he's like "No, I don't want you to write what you think I want to read. I want you to write your opinion." It helped me to form opinions. He gave me [a text] I've never seen before. And then I had to read through it to find themes or setting and give them meaning for myself and then write on that. So, I'm writing what I believe that the author thought— that setting up his work in this time or in this place was going to be useful to the readers in the future. It helped me think deeper and not focus too much on the writing itself.

The interview narrative from Theresa shows a process to her development as both a thinker and a writer. Within the scaffolding, the first-year composition professor removed

Theresa from her comfort zone to focus her on developing a weaker aspect of her skill set.

Theresa often found herself unable to take a position on an issue. She saw merit in the arguments of others, but had difficulty evaluating and forming her position:

> I often don't have an opinion on [an issue]. Like if somebody tells me this is what I think and someone else says this is what I think, I understand you and I can understand you. And then I'm like "oh, I'm in the middle," and I avoid having to find a reason about what I think. Doing the reflections helped me to avoid this whole you "not having an opinion" because it was compulsory for my class that I would read something and make up my own mind personally about what I thought and then write about it.

Theresa was non-committal toward a position and lacked the critical thinking skill of "comprehensive and systematic exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion" as indicated in the definition above.

However, through the first-year composition course work, she developed critical thinking skills. A critical learning example of establishing an argument for Theresa, who is from Nigeria, was a formal essay she had to write in response the Langston Hughes short story "One Friday Morning":

> It was about this black woman and her hope in America. As I said, I'm not from America, and I don't have the background to understand her hope. So, I had to put myself in somebody else's shoes, you know, and try to think about what the author had been writing about when he was writing about this woman. That assignment was actually a challenge because I had

> to read more about the author's views just to figure out at the time he was writing this [short story], what could he possibly have been thinking—what was going on—so that I could properly form my own opinion and write about it.

By putting herself in "somebody else's shoes" and conducting research on Langston Hughes, Theresa was able to consider an issue from multiple perspectives and develop her critical thinking skill set. Being from another country, Theresa was further removed from the cultural background of American hope that she identified as a theme of the poem. She came in contact with that differing cultural and engaged in more comprehensive process to understand and take a position than she had previously done.

The result astonished Theresa who concluded the narrative with a brimming smile on her face:

> When I was done, I was so surprised by myself. I did not know that I could do it. Even [the professor] called me outside and was like, "you did good in this essay."

Once Theresa understood this link between reading, writing, and thinking, she was able to make use of it in her next course, ENG 102, the research writing course. According to Theresa, the professor would assign readings for every class period and give the students very specific quizzes.

> [The professor] would ask us questions such as "what part of the couch did the wife sit on after dinner?" I loved questions like that because it made me read more carefully and more critically, not just scan through things.

The quizzes had given her a purpose to reading—find the specific details that will show up on a quiz. She reported that the active reading skills she developed paid off when she had to write the research papers in the ENG 102 course.

> I think the purpose [of the quizzes] was so that we could become better readers because he never used the quiz grades for anything really. It was just so like he could teach us how to read, so we could make a habit out of reading properly and not just read it to say you read it.

For Theresa, the Program Student Learner Outcomes (PSLOs) and related learning opportunities involving critical thinking and writing to discover her ideas were a novel and beneficial component to the first-year composition curriculum. Through the reflective and research writing genres as well as the literature and various genres read for her research, Theresa built on her prior knowledge. She reported that she applied that knowledge when she encountered various tasks in her science courses.

Theresa's learning follows the definition of learning from Ambrose et al. (2010) where learning is "a process that leads to change, which occurs as a result of experience" (p. 3). Theresa relayed how the writing-to-learn approach in the first-year composition program was a change from her previous learning experiences. While the professor facilitated and guided the experience, Theresa's learning across PSLOs 2, 5, 6 was a result of learning how to effectively engage with the various assignments she was given in her basic writing classes. She understood how she avoided formulating an opinion, she had to research Langston Hughes to understand his social context, and she developed her own ideas on the subject matter through reading and subsequent writing. The payoff was a learning experience that gave Theresa a great sense of accomplishment.

Jessica—The Queen of Rewrites. Jessica's narrative was not as positive as James and Theresa's in regard to the multiple Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs) she achieved. Jessica's narrative was coded to include PSLOS 2, 3, 4, and 6, Jessica placed into the developmental writing course. Her placement came as a surprise to her since she thought she was a strong writer in high school with good grades. However, the feedback on her writing from her professors showed her that she needed to develop as a writer in foundational aspects of writing present in the PSLOs. Specifically, Jessica needed to better communicate ideas within the essay genre (PSLO 2), develop and support those ideas (PSLO 3), use effective academic English (PSLO 4), and write in multiple drafts (PSLO 6). Overall, the learning opportunities in the first-year composition program helped her to develop skills and knowledge in those areas, which she later successfully applied to her English major courses in order to further develop her writing abilities.

As described in theme 1, Jessica brought the same persistent attitude to her composition coursework about writing and re-writing. She said that she believed the first-year composition curriculum was instrumental in her development especially writing through multiple drafts and receiving feedback form her professors:

> There are plenty of times when I write that I think "I know this is an A; this is an A." And then it's like the biggest slap in the face when its only C. So sometimes what we [students] think is good enough is not. But if you are able to hand in a rough draft or a pre-final draft, and then teacher marks it up, and then they give it back, then [the students] rewrite it and

> that's the final copy. I think that would really really really give an improvement on papers as a whole.

Jessica needed to learn to better assess her own writing. The feedback from the composition faculty was a method for her to learn that assessment skill. The more she was able to rewrite based on feedback, the better her writing became.

> I always have to do a rough draft. And it's funny because in [ENG] 101 and [ENG]102 I felt as though my rough drafts are for my final draft. But I hand it in and I see all these red marks. It's like OK this was just my rough draft and I see [what I did wrong]. But that's how I learned to become a better writer. I've learned to write out a rough draft, write out a pre-final copy, and then a final copy. So I would say I take the three steps to write my thoughts down. I start to formulate paragraphs where I want to organize each paragraph in the essay and then the actual final product of the paper.

Jessica did not view the *red marks* as errors but as areas that she needed to focus on to improve her writing. Jessica's described her writing process as one that involves many revisions; she keenly referred to herself as "The Queen of Rewrites" while in the first-year composition program because she always wanted to revise her work based on the feedback, even if intention of the professor was to limit the number of times a student was able to revise for a grade. A composition professor observing the process that Jessica described would have no problem identifying her as someone who meets Program Student Learner Outcome (PSLO) 6: Write and revise in multiple drafts to create a successful text.

> I always was a queen of rewrites. I always was “can I rewrite this? can I rewrite this?” because it's like, like I said— the self-motivation. I don't like to settle, so to say. So, I would actually rewrite it even if I wouldn't get an improvement on the grade. I would rewrite it just for me, just for my sake, and just to say like “OK, now this is a better paper.”

Jessica believed the multi-draft writing process taught and reinforced in her first-year composition courses was essential to developing a polished final piece of writing and in learning how to become a better judge of her own writing. During the interview, she talked excitedly about her writing process and would emphatically repeat phrases. She said her writing process often started with journaling, which is a part of her personal life and a skill she transferred in to the course work. The journaling was a desirable writing assignment that often an extra credit assignment as part of the multi-draft process taught in her composition courses.

Jessica said that starting her writing process by engaging with ideas was preferable for her to being given a topic and told to elaborate on it. Through journaling she could develop her own ideas for essays, develop her own arguments, and structure the essay to meet her purpose in writing.

> I feel like journaling makes my brain explore more and I get to just really interact with the things I experience in life.

She said that final draft that went through her writing and rewriting processes were better essays than ones that were single draft including the content and the grammar. In terms of Program Student Learner Outcomes (PSLOs), Jessica’s multi-draft essays would most likely be meeting the for PSLO 4: Employ effective academic English

in written texts that shows knowledge of linguistic structures, including grammar, punctuation, and spelling. However, in a timed writing examination that is often used to assess PSLO 4, the outcome was much different. Through the multi-draft writing process with feedback, she was learning how to write. In her narrative, there was tension between developing and using a writing process to produce a polished piece of writing, evident in PSLOs 2, 3, and 6, and the timed, single attempt to complete an essay exam that was mainly testing correct application of conventions, specifically grammar and punctuation, PSLO 4.

The high-stakes, timed essay writing examination is an example of a siloed PSLO assessment method. When using learning outcomes, the curriculum is often designed backwards. That is, curriculum designers start with the outcome and then work backwards to create learning opportunities which will help students to achieve those outcomes. This design process can create a linear linking of learning opportunities that are directly associated with a specific learning outcome. The outcomes-based assessment process often isolates specific PSLOs to assess for attainment. However, Jessica's narrative revealed that learning opportunities designed to meet one learning outcome sometimes interfered with the further development and established practice of a separate learning outcome. For her, one learning opportunity became a difficult to navigate roadblock on the way to overall learning promoted by attainment of multiple Program Student Learning Outcomes.

The development of her writing process and the feedback for improvement was not always present in her first-year composition program courses. Specifically, Jessica discussed how she felt the in-class writing exam, or *Blue Book*, was detrimental to the

development of her writing process outcome. The timed Blue Book essay exam is part of the Writing Proficiency Program in ENG 101 and is mostly concerned with outcomes associated with knowledge of conventions to evaluate and assess PSLO 4: Employ effective academic English in written texts that shows knowledge of linguistic structures, including grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Students usually write between four and six Blue Book essays in ENG 101 and some professors include Blue Book writing exams in ENG 102:

> I know the Blue Books were always something that was challenging for me in [ENG]101 and [ENG] 102. I only say that because of the type of writer I am. I'm a rough draft type of person and then the final. So, if I'm given a reading and then the next class we have a Blue Book, my Blue Book is like my rough draft. But then you are getting graded solely on the rough draft on the Blue Book. The Blue Book was something that was just really challenging for me.

Jessica had become comfortable in her rough draft-feedback-revise-repeat process that was teaching her how to become a better writer. The single draft, timed format of the essay exam, was a difficult adaptation for her:

> When it comes to a Blue Book, I would get the most grammatical errors towards the end when I look up and I only have five minutes, so now I am rushing to finish this.

Within her multi-draft process, those issues with conventions were not as problematic:

> When it comes to my first draft, it is always grammatically incorrect. Not always, but I catch a lot because you know I'm just trying to get my

> thoughts—this what I think and these are my topics that I'm going to write in my paper. So the pre-final I would say it [grammar] was a little better. But by the time of the final [draft], I would definitely make sure everything is grammatically correct.

The high-stakes, Blue Book writing exercise was challenging for Jessica, as it is for many students. Jessica could not use the multi-draft writing process taught in the course when doing the Blue Book writing examinations. This made it hard for Jessica to demonstrate her ability to write within the strictures of academic English. The conflict never resolved itself in ENG 101; however, over the course of her academic career as an English major, she was able to further develop her writing ability. She took advantage of opportunities for adjustment based on feedback. However, the holistic description of her learning in the program showed that the essay exam, designed to test proficiency in PSLO 4, interfered with the higher order outcomes present in PSLOs 2, 3, and 6.

Jessica's interview indicates an area of concern. The program relies on Blue Book, timed writing. However, Jessica did not perform well on this assessment. The high-stakes, timed essay caused her to rush. Jessica's preferred focus on the ideas, organization, structure, and support aspects of writing did not support her ability to meet a main purpose of the Blue Book exercise—writing with effective academic English (PSLO 4). The learning opportunity designed to meet one Program Student Learning Outcome (PSLO) interfered with Jessica's achievement of other PSLOs.

To the extent that Jessica experienced success may be attributed to her academic disposition rather than the learning outcome. Based on Driscoll and Wells' (2012) four traits that affect a student's ability to transfer knowledge, Jessica may not have seen value

in the Blue Book exercise as it differed from her known and preferred writing process. Jessica reports positive self-efficacy to become a better writer. She described a desire to learn from and incorporate feedback into an assignment that received a lower grade than she wanted. Her journal writing, ability to identify her writing challenges, and investment in her revisions would score high on Schmidt and Alexander's (2012) self-efficacy scale. Jessica also demonstrates attributes of high academic achievers and self-regulation by ultimately attributing her success to her ability to self-motivate. While James and Theresa demonstrate how a student's attitude plays a role in the successful attainment of a learning outcome, Jessica's interview is an example of the limited development of a learning outcome through a specific learning opportunity/assessment exercise.

Holistic assessment. While the three students told stories that were coded to cover different Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs), they all told stories that included multiple PSLOs. In describing a critical learning experience of one PSLO, they invoke additional PSLOs to make sense of the learning, demonstrate use of that learning, or indicate how learning was hampered by the PSLO interplay. The narratives use of multiple PSLOs in critical learning experiences is useful for understanding how the outcomes may be working together or interfering with each other in the development of student writing knowledge and skills.

Narratives of student learning that show concurrent critical events across multiple Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs) provide a holistic view of learning within the program. This holistic view is not one that is currently captured within outcomes-based assessment model at the research site. Further, the isolation of Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs) in assessment is a noted issue in assessment models

(Schneider, 2013). Holistic assessment narratives counteract that limitation and offer a different perspective on the overlap of the PSLOs.

Chapter Four Summary

This chapter described the data analysis process that led to the themes. The process invoked critical event narrative analysis to identify impactful learning narratives that emerged in interviews with students. Multiple coding cycles and analysis passes provided systematic organization of data that could be rearranged through the flirtation process of free association. Identifying the critical narratives as markers of assessment finalized the data analysis process.

The chapter then reported the three themes from that analysis of the student-writer perspective of a first-year composition program's learning outcomes:

Theme 1: Narratives of Interpersonal Interaction

Narratives of student learning describe interpersonal interactions that affect learning and attainment of outcomes.

Theme 2: Narratives Situated in Time

Narratives of student learning are situated in time that broaden assessment data to include prior knowledge and learning transfer.

Theme 3: Assessment Narratives of Holistic Learning

Narratives of student learning show concurrent critical events across multiple Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs) that provide a holistic view of learning within the program.

Each theme was presented with interview data that highlighted critical events described by three student research participants. Interpretation and analysis of the data

was made based on the relevant conceptual framework outlined in Chapter Two. The themes present in the critical event descriptions of learning in a first-year composition program shed light on the *why* of outcomes assessment and provide insight into the learning outcomes of that first-year composition program.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation study has worked to privilege student voice. The purpose of the study was to examine that voice as an assessment of a first-year composition program's learning outcomes. Using a narrative inquiry methodology, learning outcome interviews were designed to elicit student narratives of learning relative to the first-year composition Program Student Learner Outcomes (PSLOs). Learning outcomes interviews were conducted with nine participants who had completed the first-year composition program. The raw data produced from the interviews were enlightening regarding how college students discuss what they learned from their composition experiences. Once coded, the critical event narrative analysis focused on the impactful learning events within the students' experiences leading to the three key themes:

Theme 1: Narratives of Interpersonal Interaction

Narratives of student learning describe interpersonal interactions that affect learning and attainment of outcomes.

Theme 2: Narratives Situated in Time

Narratives of student learning are situated in time that broaden assessment data to include prior knowledge and learning transfer.

Theme 3: Assessment Narratives of Holistic Learning

Narratives of student learning show concurrent critical events across multiple Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs) that provide a holistic view of learning within the program.

The idea for this study began with a desire to bring student voice into an outcomes-based assessment program. This study achieves the goal of investigating student perspectives on program assessment and how that voice can be incorporated into program assessment through the research questions:

1. How do students who have completed a first-year composition program describe their learning in the program?
2. How do students' narratives about their experiences in a first-year composition program and beyond provide insight into the learning outcomes of that first-year composition program?

This chapter will examine the themes in relation to those research questions.

Research Question 1

Outcomes-based learning assessment asks a simple question: Have the program student learner outcomes been met? As discussed throughout this dissertation, the process to determine those outcomes is generally driven by authoritative voices such as faculty and administration within a university. The present study responded to Huot's (2002, 2009) call that assessment include those closest to the teaching and learning, such as students and teachers, as well as Williamson's (1997) observation that program assessment should be "sensitive to the needs of the particular context in which they teach and in which their students learn" (p. 257). Based on the Huot/Williamson localized philosophy, I set ought to learn what students would say about their learning and focused on the outcomes of the specific program they had experienced. Those interviews provided me with much information about the students' learning experiences in a first-year composition program.

The three themes focus on aspects of students' descriptions of learning in a first-year composition program. Understanding and searching for critical events that contain these themes can benefit programs that wish to bring student voices into their program assessment. These themes form a student learning narrative assessment model. This model can illuminate three important aspects of program assessment that are not easily seen through a more traditional and product-focused assessment model—the various factors that describe the *why* or *why not* of outcome attainment.

Theme 1: Narratives of Interpersonal Interaction

Narratives of student learning describe interpersonal interactions that affect learning and attainment of outcomes.

Narratives of interaction show relationships between people. These narratives move toward the affective assessment domain. According to Suskie (2009), Bloom's (1956) taxonomy and the revised version of the taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) are the most popular frameworks for developing student learning outcomes, particularly in the cognitive domain. Traits in the affective domain are much more difficult to observe in an outcomes-based assessment model, especially if that model is based on the cognitive domain.

In this study, when the students described as aspect of their learning that involved other people those narratives were categorized narratives of interpersonal interaction. The interviews reported here show student interactions with people that shed light on student attitudes, dispositions, and metacognition. These same traits are present in Shavelson's (2007) personal and social responsibility skills, which are not skills derived from the typical cognitive domains found in Bloom.

Theme 2: Narratives Situated in Time

Narratives of student learning are situated in time that broaden assessment data to include prior knowledge and learning transfer.

The second part of the student learning narrative assessment model broadens the scope of the learning experience to include learning experiences that took place before or after the targeted learning time period. As discussed in Chapter Two, this expansion shows learning similarly to Dewey's (1887/2008) reflex arc rather than Thorndike's (1913) stimulus-response model. When describing learning, the students are able to frame critical events based on events that happened before or after the first-year composition experience. Concepts such as prior knowledge, *transferring in,* and *transferring out* can be seen in these narratives. The students attitude toward their previous education experiences becomes part of their narrative affecting the current learning situation. This data becomes useful for identifying reasons for the learning that did or did not happen within a program or the usefulness of the learning beyond the program.

Theme 3: Assessment Narratives of Holistic Learning

Narratives of student learning show concurrent critical events across multiple Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs) that provide a holistic view of learning within the program.

When describing their learning in relation to the Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs), the students discussed concurrent learning in multiple PSLOs. Learning opportunities will often include multiple outcomes even if the assessment is targeting one outcome. A synthesis of learning outcomes is important to the overall development of the students within a first-year composition program. Taking note of a

critical event is important in identifying the specific learning of a student. These critical events stand the test of time and winnow out unnecessary detail. The amount of time helps illuminate how important the impact on learning was. If more than one PSLO is present in that holistic narrative, it is a narrative of concurrent learning. To move toward the end action of an assessment project, the identification of the concurrent PSLOs may reveal how the PSLOs are working in conjunction or causing interference with each other.

Research Question 2

Yancey and Huot (1997b) present three purposes for program assessment: to see what the program is doing well, to determine how the program might be improved, and to demonstrate to others why the program should continue. The audiences for these purposes fluctuate between those inside and outside of an institution. The internal audience is often concerned with improvement while the external audience focuses on accountability. Often the outcome-based assessment model tries to satisfy dual purposes (Carter, 2003/2009). However, the pressures for accountability from the outside audience are often privileged. The economic rationale for accountability is identified as a dominate frame by Adler-Kassner and O'Neill (2010).

To meet this demand, writing program assessors primarily rely on writing-as-a-product, which Slomp (2012) attributes to the need for a stable and easily measurable construct. Assessment of the products can provide data for accountability reporting while identifying areas that may need improvement. While this faculty focused model of assessment has its advantages (White et al., 2015), there is a call to give students, as the stakeholder closest to the learning, a more prominent role in assessment (Banta, 2009,

2011b; Huot, 2002; Rodgers, 2011; Slomp, 2012; Suskie, 2009). This study presents data based on students' experiences of concurrent learning outcomes, interactions, and time. These three markers from the student interviews point toward areas of success and improvement within the program while creating a process that is accountable to the student.

Accountability to Students

To make assessment accountable to students, the responsibility frame, suggested by Adler-Kassner and O'Neill (2010), aids assessment for improvement by drawing on alliances and shared actions as an accountability measure. The narrative framework of this study required an alliance with students and was a start to sharing the steps of an assessment project with those students. The alliance with students and shared action contributes to assessment as an ethical and value-focused social action outlined by Wall, Hursh, and Rodgers III (2014). They argue that "assessment practice should be constructed as a place of inclusive, sustained, and informed dialogue, not one that is simply a technical and procedure process that strives for validity rather than purpose and transparency" (p. 13).

The shared assessment act with students also reflects Lynne's (2004) notion of ethical assessment, which restructures fairness from the reproducibility of positivism to a dialogue with stakeholders that will fluctuate based on context. The privileging of student voice in this study fulfilled Yagelski's (2013) hope to "fix our scholarly gaze on the *writer writing*" (p. 58, emphasis on original). The narratives of the writers writing in this study were very different in content and opened the door to complexities that are outside the bounds of typical assessment. However, a search in those narratives for critical events

involving interpersonal interaction, situated in time relative to a broader reflex arc, and encompass holistic learning provides a heuristic for meeting Lynne's (2004) ethical assessment principal to create "procedures that will result in the fullest consideration possible for all concerned" (p. 195). This ethical framework, based on accountability to students, can provide an essential node on Lancaster, Bastian, Sevenker, and Williams (2015) networking map analysis. Their process identifies power structures and connectivity within an institution's assessment process and brings structure to the fluid dynamic of changing audiences.

One such power structure illuminated through the narratives of interaction in this study data is that of race. Inoue (2015) identified a gap in assessment scholarship to consider race as "students of color, which includes multilingual students, are often hurt by conventional writing assessment that uncritically uses a dominant discourse, which is informed by an unnamed white racial *habitus*" (p. 16). When students relate critical narratives of interaction involving race, much can be discovered about how racial identity can affect the learning in a program.

Melissa's narrative about the learning environment embodies an ideal, higher education learning environment. She was afforded a supportive environment by both her peers and her professors. She was able to engage in deep, reflective learning regarding her writing practice. The result of this supportive environment led to her renewed enjoyment of writing that provided her ample opportunity to further develop as a writer. She felt this aided her in the position she described of being a social minority and gendered minority within her field. She felt being supported helped her to resist those whose biases assumed she would fail.

Jessica was also concerned with failure, but did not have experience the supportive environment experience described by Melissa. The condescension that Jessica perceived from one of her white professors created an obstacle to her learning. The issue seemed to be less overtly racist and more related to being ignorant of the power dynamics between the accomplished professor in the dominate discourse and the struggling writer. The intention by the professor who made the remarks also does not appear to be cruel; the comments were the verbalization of what many professors might think when reading student writing, especially when experiencing frustration or discontent with the writing ability of multiple students and the enormity of the task to teach students who need vast assistance. Nevertheless, for this student, the vocalization and perceived condescending attitude of the reportedly *stern professor* became an obstacle for the student in acquiring the learning outcomes.

The relation of student descriptions of learning to assessment through an alliance with students helps show students that the first-year composition program wants to be accountable to students. This data can reveal areas where the program is supportive and also reveal areas of concern for greater attention or improvement so that more students meet the program's desired leaning outcomes. In the local context, information regarding the interaction of student racial identities and professor racial identities may create an opportunity for useful faculty development. Future assessment projects that focus on the interaction of racial identities could help determine the scope of the issue and could possibly account for the number of students meeting or not meeting a Program Student Learning Outcome (PSLO) through the traditional outcomes based assessment model.

Implications for the field

Power of a narrative. Narratives have power as indicated in Goodall's (2008) position on stories: "To be drawn to stories as a researcher is to be drawn into a way of life that gives meaning and value to those sources of knowledge that can be gotten at in no other discursive way" (p. 14). The student learning narrative assessment model advocated here strives to privilege student voices to counterbalance the current faculty driven model of assessment currently used by the program. Faculty driven assessment models that use empirical research methods have been shown to be useful and effective in discovering areas for improvement (Warnock, Rouse, Finnin, Linnehan, & Dryer, 2016; White et al., 2015). Including the additional, narrative perspective of students also can provide insight into program areas of strength and areas in need of improvement. Personal narratives can communicate a person's understanding of what transpired in an experience:

> Internalized and evolving narratives of the self provide people's lives with some measure of integration and purpose. Life stories speak directly to how people come to terms with their interpersonal worlds, with society, and with history and culture. (McAdams, 2008, p. 257)

Much like Dewey's (1938) balanced education theory between the authoritarian teacher-centered paradigm and the progressive, student focused paradigm, balancing assessment voices can be transformative. Sharing Jessica's story of the condescending professor can stimulate discussion on how faculty relate to students and the power a teacher's comments may have on the teaching and learning environment. The appeal to emotions shows the power of assessment through the narrative of a student who says, "It

was just more so discouraging. It put my spirits down. I was like, ‘Ok, I know I'm not a good writer but, you know, you didn't necessarily have to say that.” These narratives can have the power to affect buy-in to assessment and spur educators to take action to close the loop.

Broader view. An outcomes-based assessment process can create a myopic view of the program in its hyper-focus on each individual learning outcome and the learning opportunities used to meet that individual outcome. Schneider (2013) demonstrates that assessment of college learning often isolates aspects of the learning experience to the detriment of understanding the complex integration of issues that affect the learning. The issue that is created with this narrow approach is not considering the concurrent learning found in a holistic view of the learning outcomes.

One challenged identified at the research site was potential interference created when one learning outcome conflicts with another learning outcome. Jessica’s interview illuminated this issue. She was as a stakeholder who directly experienced some learning outcome interference. As the self-described “Queen of Rewrites,” Jessica preferred to use a multi-step writing process to create a text, especially if writing instruction was present in the form of feedback. The process enabled her to lay out ideas, develop those ideas further, receive feedback to aid revision of her writing, and give her time to focus on the later-order concerns of grammar and punctuation. Her writing process empowered her to meet multiple first-year composition Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs). Those outcomes speak to the areas of critical thinking, rhetorical conventions, effective academic English, and writing multiple drafts.

However, Jessica experienced some interference with the LU curriculum's requirement to write an in-class essay exam. The essay exam is part of a high-stakes writing assessment at LU known as the Writing Proficiency Program. A student needs to score a B- on at least one in-class essay to not only pass the class but also to complete the first of three stages of writing assessment measures to graduate from the University. Although PSLOs 2 and 3, critical thinking and rhetorical conventions, are tested and assessed through the in-class essay exam, the main concern for faculty using this assessment method is to ensure that students can practice effective and correct academic English. This use of multiple high-stakes, one-time writing events is in conflict with the first-year composition program student learning outcome that encourages having students write and revise through multiple drafts (PSLO 6). This drafting process was what Jessica preferred to use. She reported that using that process yielded a more authentic product representative of what she felt were her writing abilities. The in-class writing task is primarily assessed for English grammar and punctuation. This concern for grammatical accuracy was one that Jessica said she did not prioritize. Jessica said she was more concerned with higher order writing issues like development of ideas and effective communication than the lower-order concern of proper grammar. For Jessica, the learning opportunity designed to meet PSLO 4 interfered with her meeting PSLOs 2, 3, and 6.

The interference raises concerns about the student's ability to meet all the prescribed outcomes and sheds light on a possible reason why some students failed to meet an outcome. Although Jessica's experience may be unique or an outlier, it raises an issue that the first-year composition program may want to study. Assessment models that

include a broader view of integrated learning are able to discover areas of concern missed in narrower assessment models.

Scope of assessment. As a link to Adler-Kassner and O'Neill's (2010), narrative-based assessment can go beyond learning outcomes attainment to determine program strengths and areas for improvement. The attitudes of the professors and students can have a lasting and potentially devastating effect on the students' abilities to meet the learning outcomes. Some students reported very valuable and encouraging interactions with faculty, such as Melissa's indication that composition professors are among the most caring. Other students reported negative experiences, such Jessica's perception of condescending comments about her prior educational experiences, which had a lasting effect. This raises questions about whether students who were not able to be retained by the University left due to having similar negative learning experiences.

Expanding the learning time frame can identify strengths and areas for improvement to incorporate concepts such as prior knowledge and *transferring out*. The assessment of prior knowledge including content-specific knowledge, intellectual skills, epistemological beliefs, and metacognition, can help a program establish an effective learning environment (Ambrose & Lovett, 2010). Seeing student reported data on the repurposing of knowledge and skills after completing the program can give insight on the transfer of learning from the first-year composition program to future coursework.

Meaningfulness. The student learning narrative assessment model promoted in this study can provide information that may be useful in closing the assessment loop. The data from the student interviews creates a specific starting point for conducting additional education research, investigating alternative pedagogies, and implementing further

assessment projects. This model is one step to include students in the assessment process. This was a first step to see what the students would say. The value lies in issue identification beyond the narrow scope of specific assessment measurement tools used from a singular perspective. To further close the loop, the resulting information from student inclusive assessment activities can inform discussions of issues among composition faculty and inform future assessment projects. This model can show the significance of an assessment project, or the "meaningfulness" according to Lynne (2004). The model also contributes to Huot's (1996) notion of validity that focuses on the decisions being made about a program based on the assessment projects.

Future Research

More research needs to be done on the inclusion of the student voice in assessment to determine the pragmatic ways the student perspective can be included in the assessment process. A comparison of the student perspective of assessment with the findings from a product-based outcomes assessment from the faculty perspective would examine how the two approaches might complement each other in identifying program strengths and weaknesses. An added element to that research study would be identifying ways in which PSLOs that have significant overlap affect each other. Under what circumstances do PSLOs interfere with overall outcome attainment?

Additional research studies need to focus student involvement. What is the relation between student identities, attitudes, or dispositions and the attainment of student learning outcomes. How can the effects of those various traits be used for the assessment purposes of improve teaching and learning in a program? How can students be given a seat at the assessment table in the creation and analysis of an assessment project?

Finally, the culture of assessment on a college campus is one that is still met with discord. The rhetoric of crisis lends itself to Yancey and Huot's (1997b) description that the term assessment "generates fear and anxiety" (p. 7). Others see assessment as a fad, despite its long history. Identifying ways to frame assessment as valuable for all stakeholders, especially those closest to the teaching and learning, can enhance learning through the metacognition inherent in the practice of assessment.

First-Year Composition Program

For the first-year composition program, this assessment project brings up questions about learning opportunities designed to meet the learning outcomes. Where is there possible interference? Additional assessment projects may try to identify those areas. For at least one student, the in-class essay exam, a long-held tradition within the program's curriculum, has been identified as a possible source of interference. More data should be gathered to see if other students feel similarly. Discussions of the in-class essay exam's use within the program, possible alternatives, and further assessments and research will be needed to provide data as a basis for decisions to renew the program to meet the demands and needs of student writers.

A second area of concern is the attitudes of both the students and the professors. Sharing results from this assessment project and holding workshops on faculty-student interactions may help to alleviate problematic interpersonal relationships. Addressing the attitude of the students is a more difficult issue. Further discussion among the faculty and faculty development opportunities both in-house as well as from University offices such as the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning or the Student Affairs Office can uncover strategies for addressing this issue across the campus.

A strength of the program according to the students interviewed is how the program develops critical thinking skills. This is an area to focus on in future assessment projects, especially as critical thinking is an Institutional Learning Outcome at Lincoln University. Learning opportunities to meet this outcome should be continued and shared with faculty across the composition course sections.

Finally, the importance of a focus on building on students' prior writing knowledge needs to be further studied. Identifying and using pedagogies and learning theories that emphasize a prior knowledge approach may lead to more students meeting and exceeding expectations for the learning outcomes.

Cultivate the Garden

Growth in the context of education is a fundamental concept for John Dewey (1916): "Growth is *the* characteristic of life, education is all one with growing; it has no end beyond itself" (p. 44). Dewey further argues that growth is dynamic and something that people do *intrinsically*, yet is dependent on stimuli from others and learning from the experience. There is no *end* to this cycle, and so education is an *end* itself.

I often use a gardening metaphor to describe teaching basic and first-year writing. I say I am planting seeds that will develop and grow in the future. A catalyst for this study was seeing a former student experience success. His flower had blossomed, and I saw that as potential valuable assessment data. However, this metaphor should not be limited to plating seeds. Writing program administrators and faculty members in first-year composition programs are tending to an established garden. Others have planted seeds and the gardens are in various states of growth. The first-year composition program needs to be sensitive to these various states of growth. The learning opportunities, student

learner outcomes, and assessment projects of the first-year composition program need to be responsive to the student needs in order to foster continual growth.

The student learning narrative assessment model advocated by this study identifies some potential growth areas for being inclusive and responsible to the student stakeholders of the program. When questioned about the learning opportunities and outcomes for the first-year composition program, the student participants shared critical stories. They talked about people, assignments, actions, difficulties, drama, and successes. These stories showed some of what it was like to experience a first-year composition program and provide insight into the workings of that program. The stories focused on learning opportunities and the settings in which those opportunities were lived and experienced. By cultivating the garden with the students, assessment can be used to make the garden flourish.

EPILOGUE

"What do the students say they are learning in the first-year composition program?" "What is their assessment of the program?" Those were the questions with which I started this narrative about the first-year composition program at Lincoln University when I was thrust into the Writing Program Administrator position.

When I talked to the students about their learning in the program, they relayed many different experiences, both positive and negative. The students all had stories to tell. They wanted me to hear their voices. When the interviews would wind down, I would look at the recorder counter and say that 45 minutes had passed. The reaction from the students was the same every time: "Really?! That went fast."

A student's college career goes fast too. Still, students spend a lot of time in their writing courses, so the first-year composition program has an opportunity to shape each student's learning experience. The program is in a position to develop student writing abilities and knowledge that will have lasting effects. By being accountable to the students, by asking them what is happening in the program, the program can grow alongside the learning needs of the students. As a WPA I hope that this study of student views on the first-year composition program can contribute a small part to a university with a big legacy.

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Appendix A

LU First-Year Composition Program Goals and Program Student Learning Outcomes

The first-year composition program consists of the general education courses of ENG 101 English Composition I and ENG 102 English Composition II as well as the developmental writing course ENG 099 Integrated Writing and Reading. The sequence provides for specific outcomes in each course that are in support of the Institutional Learning Outcomes of effective communication, digital literacy, and critical thinking. The primary learning goals include:

1. Develop college-level writing skills
2. Reinforce basic-writing skills as learners develop a broader vocabulary of ideas and approaches to their ideas
3. Develop an understanding that writing is a mode of investigation and expression rooted in multiple-drafts and audience awareness
4. Introduce learners to college-research methods and advanced forms of scholarship

Lincoln University First-Year Composition Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs)

8. Demonstrate knowledge of rhetorical concepts through analysis and composition of texts.
9. Produce written texts that effectively communicate a writer's ideas through a variety of genres.
10. Design a written text with organizational and rhetorical structure to support and communicate the writer's ideas and the integration of the writer's ideas with those from appropriate sources.
11. Employ effective academic English in written texts that shows knowledge of linguistic structures, including grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
12. Locate and evaluate texts for rhetorical aims, credibility, sufficiency, accuracy, timeliness, and bias.
13. Write and revise in multiple drafts to create a successful text.
14. Assess prior and new writing knowledge and application to future writing situations in the pursuit of life-long learning.

First-Year Composition Course Student Learning Outcomes (CSLOs)

Integrated Writing & Reading (ENG 099)

1. Students will be able to compose well-structured paragraphs and essays that show the use of rhetorical awareness including purpose, focus, organization, and development.
2. Students will be able to distinguish main ideas and supporting details and employ active reading strategies to understand texts.
3. Students will use effective academic English in written texts to construct clear grammatically correct sentences using a variety of sentence structures and appropriate academic vocabulary.
4. Students will expand reading and writing vocabulary by using context word parts and reference sources.
5. Students will demonstrate a process to writing through the use of pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading written texts.
6. Students will demonstrate a process to reading through the use of pre-reading, reading, and post-reading skills.

English Composition I (ENG 101)

1. Formulate a clear, sophisticated thesis in an essay.
2. Demonstrate organization and rhetorical structure to support and communicate the thesis in an essay.
3. Generate developed and relevant evidence and analysis to support the thesis of an essay.
4. Deploy appropriate Academic English, grammar, usage, mechanics, and punctuation.
5. Write and revise in multiple drafts to create a successful text.
6. Differentiate between and analyze rhetorical aims and objectives in written texts.

English Composition II (ENG 102)

1. Produce a research thesis that is focused and explored with coverage that provides context, history, and/or sides of the research topic.
2. Develop a functional MLA Works Cited page.
3. Demonstrate effective MLA usage of sources, with an emphasis on using direct quotations, summarizing, and paraphrasing.
4. Maintain an effective organization of thesis-based research paper.
5. Deploy appropriate Academic English, grammar, usage, mechanics, and punctuation.
6. Produce a document with professional design/format principles.

Appendix B

Contact Form

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
www.iup.edu

Department of English
Humanities and Social Sciences Building, Room 506A
981 Grant Street
Indiana, PA 15705
www.iup.edu/english

P 724-357-2261
F 724-357-2265

Contact Information to Participate in Study

Study Title: Student Assessment of a Composition Program: A Descriptive Study of Program Outcomes from the Student Perspective

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (PHONE 724.357.7730).

Name:	
Email: This address will be used for contact including the drawing for the $25 amazon gift card.	
Phone:	
Year in School:	
Age:	
Are you currently enrolled in courses on the main campus of Lincoln University?	

I listened to the presentation by William Donohue and/or read the invitation to participate form for the study Student Assessment of a Composition Program: A Descriptive Study of Program Outcomes from the Student Perspective. I freely and voluntarily choose to be contacted as a participant. I may choose to withdraw from participation at any time.

Signature: Print Name:

Date:

Please return this form to William Donohue. You may email the document to pvwq@iup.edu or return it to University Hall in person or through campus mail.

Appendix C

Consent Form

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
www.iup.edu

Department of English
Humanities and Social Sciences Building, Room 506A
981 Grant Street
Indiana, PA 15705
www.iup.edu/english

P 724-357-2261
F 724-357-2265

Consent to Participate in Student Assessment of a composition program: A Descriptive Study of Program Outcomes from the Student Perspective

This consent form applies to: Name:_____

The following information is provided to inform you about this study that involves research regarding the student perspective of learning outcomes of a first-year composition program. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have about this study and the information given below. You will be given an opportunity to ask questions and have your questions answered. In addition, you will be given a copy of this consent form. If you need to, you may take a few days to understand this consent form and decide if you wish to participate.

1. **Purpose of the study**. This study is being conducted by William Donohue of the Department of Languages and Literature in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at Lincoln University in order to better understand student perceptions of learning from a first-year composition program. This research will help writing program administers and stakeholders at Lincoln University to better understand what learning outcomes students value from their experiences in the first-year composition program. Your responses in the interview are confidential and only available to the interviewer.

   This study is also in partial fulfillment for the award Doctor of Philosophy degree through Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The Institutional Review Boards of both Lincoln University and Indiana University of Pennsylvania have approved this study.

2. **Description of the procedures to be followed and approximate duration of the study**. The 10-15 participants in the research study will participate in an interview that will focus on the learning experiences from the first-year composition program. This interview will last approximately one hour. A 30-minute follow-up hour may be requested to verify information. The interviews will be conducted on the main

campus of Lincoln University. The interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed for later analysis and construction of your assessment narrative.

3. **Description of the discomforts, inconveniences, and/or risks that can be reasonably expected as a result of participation in this study**. No risk beyond the minimal risks of daily living will be involved.

4. **Description of how confidentiality will be assured and the limits to these assurances, if any.**

   Your information and interview answers will be kept strictly confidential, which means that only I will have access to the raw data. I will be the only person who has access to the recorded stories that you tell. I will keep them confidential and secure in password protected computer files. In the report of the study, you will be given a pseudonym, which you may choose yourself, so that no one is able to identify who you are.

5. **Eligibility Criteria:** The criteria for participation are undergraduate students at Lincoln University of PA who are at least 18-years-old, have completed the English Composition course sequence though ENG 102, have completed at least 45 earned credits (junior or senior standing), are currently enrolled in courses at the Lincoln University main campus, and are not currently enrolled in a course taught by William Donohue, the principal investigator.

6. **Anticipated benefits resulting from this study**.
   A. The potential benefits to you from participating in the study are related to interacting in an engaged learning environment. You will be asked to reflect on your learning in the first-year composition program and verbalize that learning. This meta-cognitive act allows you to recall that learning and think about its usefulness and current application.

      In addition, you will have an active role in the assessment of a first-year composition program. Your involvement may lead to improvement in the first-year composition program.

   B. The potential benefits to humanity that may result from this study are a better understanding of learning outcomes from the student perspective. This study will provide information to writing program administrators to help them design first-year composition programs and assessment methodologies.

7. **Alternative procedures**. There are no alternative procedures to participation in the interview.

8. **Contact information**. If you have any questions about this study, you can contact the person(s) below:

William Donohue
Department of Languages and Literature
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Science
Lincoln University
1570 Baltimore Pike 19352-0999
(484) 365-7522
pvwq@iup.edu

Gian Pagnucci, Ph.D.
Department of English
College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
506L
Indiana, PA 15705
(724) 357-5629
Gian.pagnucci@iup.edu

This study has been reviewed and approved by both Lincoln University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board. The IRBs have determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the **Lincoln University Institutional Review Board** at (484) 365-8000.

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (PHONE 724.357.7730).

Your responses will be confidential. When the study is finished, the results may be presented at conferences and/or published in academic journals. The information you provided in the study will only be used for academic purposes. If the results of this study were to be presented at a conference or written for publication, no identifying information will be used.

9. **Your rights as a volunteer**. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study. You can also withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or Lincoln University of Pennsylvania. You can withdraw by contacting William Donohue, (484) 365-7522 or email at pvwq@iup.edu, or Gian Pagnucci, (724) 357-5629 or gian.pagnucci@iup.edu.

10. As a participant, you are entered to win one of three $25 Amazon gift cards. The drawing will take place on April 24, 2017, the last day of classes. Winners will be notified through the e-mail address provided on the contact form.

STATEMENT BY PERSON/PARENT AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT

Please check both boxes, sign, and write in today's date.

[ ] I have read this consent form, and all of my questions have been answered. I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in the research interview, and it has been explained that I will receive a signed copy of this form.

[ ] The information contained in this consent form has been adequately explained to me. All my questions have been answered and I freely and voluntarily choose to participate. It has been explained to me that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

_____ _____

Date Signature

Consent obtained by (signature): _____

Print name and title: _____

Appendix D

Interview Question Protocol

The following guide provides structure for a responsive interview that works with the participants to elicit rich responses regarding the learning in a first-year composition program. The questions listed are main questions that may have subsequent follow-up questions and/or probes that ask for specific details, elaboration, clarification, or refer to previous answers.

Segment 1: Introductory Questions about the first-year composition program

- What writing courses did you take in the first-year composition program?
- Who were some of the people involved in the course who helped you learn to write?
- What was the most memorable event that happened to you in the first-year composition program? How did you feel about it?

Segment 2: Writing Process

- One of the learning outcomes of the program is developing writing process. Can you tell me about a time that where you had to complete a writing assignment and the steps that you took?
- Can you describe in as much detail as possible a writing assignment and the steps you took to complete that assignment?
- Can you describe how ENG 101 and ENG 102 aided in your knowledge of the writing process?
- How did you develop your writing process? How did you complete assignments in high school? What steps do you take now to complete a writing assignment?

Segment 3: Writing Conventions

- A learning outcomes of the first-year composition program is knowing how to write essays and research papers. Can you describe a writing assignment you did in ENG 101/ENG 102?
- How did this assignment compare to writing assignments you did in high school?
- Can you describe what you learned about writing conventions from this assignment?

- How did you apply the learning to another writing assignment or to writing that you do now?

Segment 4: Critical Thinking

- Writing is a task that involves thinking. Can you describe aspects of the first-year composition program where you were intellectually challenged?
- Can you tell me about a time where you had to put a lot of thought into an assignment or course activity?

Segment 5: Concluding Questions

- Can you describe how you saw yourself as a writer before and after these courses?
- Thinking about the work you had to do in the first-year composition program and the writing you have to do now, please tell me how the first-year composition program has helped you develop as a writer?
- What could the first-year composition program do differently to help you as a writer?
- How would you describe your first-year composition program experience?
- Overall, what do you think about the first-year composition program at Lincoln University?

Appendix E

Code List

First Cycle **Descriptive Code Scheme** **Pass 1** **WPA Outcomes**	
Code	**Description**
RK	Rhetorical Knowledge: "Ability to analyze contexts and audiences and then to act on that analysis in comprehending and creating texts" (Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2014 July)
CTRC	Critical Thinking, Reading, and Composing: "Ability to analyze, interpret, and evaluate ideas, information, situations, and texts" (Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2014 July)
PR	Processes: "strategies, or composing processes, to conceptualize, develop, and finalize projects" (Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2014 July)
KofC	Knowledge of Conventions: "the formal rules and informal guidelines that define genres, and in so doing, shape readers' and writers' perceptions of correctness or appropriateness" (Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2014 July)

First Cycle **Descriptive Code Scheme** **Pass 2** **first-year composition program Student Learning Outcomes**	
Code	**Description**
PSLO1	Demonstrate knowledge of rhetorical concepts through analysis and composition of texts.
PSLO2	Produce written texts that effectively communicate a writer's ideas through a variety of genres.

PSLO3	Design a written text with organizational and rhetorical structure to support and communicate the writer's ideas and the integration of the writer's ideas with those from appropriate sources.
PSLO4	Employ effective academic English in written texts that shows knowledge of linguistic structures, including grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
PSLO5	Locate and evaluate texts for rhetorical aims, credibility, sufficiency, accuracy, timeliness, and bias.
PSLO6	Write and revise in multiple drafts to create a successful text.
PSLO7	Assess prior and new writing knowledge and application to future writing situations in the pursuit of life-long learning.

First Cycle **Descriptive Code Scheme** **Pass 3** **Thinking Subcode**	
WThink	Writing Thinking: focus on writing as a subject
RThink	Reading Thinking: focus on reading comprehension/idea dialogue
Meta	Meta Cognitive: Thinking about thinking
Cross	Crossover Thinking: One type of thinking working with another (e.g. writing to understand the reading)

First Cycle **Descriptive Code Scheme** **Pass 4** **Process Subcode**	
WP	Writing Process: strategy for completing a writing task
RP	Reading Process: strategy for completing a reading task
TP	Thinking Process: strategy for developing ideas
CNWP	Counter to the Writing Process: issue that

	inhibited the writing process
CNRP	Counter to the Reading Process: issue that inhibited the reading process
CNTP	Counter to the Thinking Process: issue that inhibited the thinking process

First Cycle **Descriptive Code Scheme** **Pass 5** **Conventions Subcode**	
CITE	Citations: use of specific style
STRC	Structure: the rhetorical foundation
FORM	Format: text arraignment
PUNC	Punctuation: grammatical punctuation

First Cycle **Descriptive Code Scheme** **Pass 6** **Rhetorical Knowledge Subcode**	
Genre	
ESSAY	Essay: thesis driven writing
RSRCH	Research: incorporation of sources
LAP	Lab Report: scientific writing
RFL	Reflection: introspection
W2L	Writing-to-learn: using learning for understanding
JRL	Journaling: informal writing to capture thoughts, processes, emotions, etc.
OTHG	Other Genre: additional genre not fitting in other categories
AUD	Audience: Specific reader
PURP	Purpose: goal of writing
SIT	Writing Situation: set of circumstances surrounding a unified writing task

First Cycle **Descriptive Code Scheme** **Pass 7** **Critical Event Narrative Analysis**	
CRIT	Critical: impact and profound effect, a change experience
ADD	Additional: Adds to critical event, similar context

CONTRB	Contributing: event that happens at same time, may inform or broaden critical or additional event

First Cycle **Descriptive Code Scheme** **Pass 8** **Learning Outcomes and Environment**	
PLP	People: People present during learning opportunity that had an effect
LOC	Location: the setting of the learning
TME	Time: the use of time during learning
OTHV	Other Values: miscellaneous values
PRAC	Practicality: usefulness of learning

Second Cycle **Pattern Coding**	
PKN	Prior Knowledge: Knowledge from past experiences
NEW	New Information: Novel knowledge
TRANS	Transfer: application of knowledge in a new context
WRK	Work: learning activity
CONTRA	Contradictory: Learning opportunities and outcomes worked against each other

Second Cycle **Narrative Coding**	
PLOT	Plot: story characteristics
EVTS	Events: situation
CHTR	Character identification
ACT	Actions: character actions within plot
HAP	Happenings: spontaneous actions or events
CLMX	Climax: point of highest suspense

Post-Coding Categorization	
Critical Events/PSLO	Group the identified critical events based on the Program Student Learner Outcomes
Narrative Interactions	Identity narratives of interaction between participant and entity (person, environment, curriculum)
Situated in Time	The “when” of learning