

CONSTRUCTING A MODEL OF SUCCESS
FOR FIRST-YEAR NATIVE AMERICAN COLLEGE WRITERS

by

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January 2011

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all the Native American college students that I have worked with leading up to and as a part of this study. May what I have learned from you, guide educators in supporting future college students on their path of becoming academic writers.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore Native American students' experiences with writing in the first year of college at a public research university and two tribal colleges, exploring in particular what helped them succeed as writers. Individual interviews with students served as the main sources of data and included self-portraits of the students as writers, re-creations of their writing process through a flow-chart activity, and reflections on graded writing assignments. Interviews with faculty and academic support staff provided further insights. Findings are organized around 10 themes that shed light on students' writing experiences and the factors contributing to their success: (1) Definition of Success, (2) Preparation for College Writing, (3) Self-Concept and Identity, (4) Academic Writing Literacy, (5) Feedback and Self-Concept, (6) Effectiveness of Feedback, (7) Facilitating Revision, (8) Writing Resources, (9) Native Communities, (10) Native Culture. A theoretical model is proposed to explain the factors influencing Native American students' academic writing success in their first year of college. Recommendations for practice and future research are also provided.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Since the founding of the colonial colleges, mainstream higher education for Native Americans in the United States has taken the form of assimilationist practices with little regard for Native cultures or tribal efforts to establish and maintain educational institutions of their own (Carney, 1999; Wright, 2002). Consequently Native American participation in higher education has historically been low. Efforts to recruit, retain and graduate students from college remained largely ineffective until the 1960-70s. Changes in the participation and retention of Native American students were due in part to the enactment of federal legislation prohibiting discriminatory practices in education and a shift on the part of institutions toward providing universal education and increasing retention and graduations rates (Carney, 1999; Thelin, 2004). Another important factor was the establishment of tribal colleges, which provided students the opportunity to attend college within their tribal communities at institutions that incorporated their native language and culture. In 2006-2007, 7.5% of Native American students enrolled in college were attending a tribally controlled college or university (AIHEC, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

At the beginning of the 21st century, college attendance by Native Americans continues to rise but remains low on a national level. Enrollment has more than doubled in the last 30 years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008), but American Indian participation and graduation rates still trail behind all other ethnic groups (Carter, 2006;

Harvey & Anderson, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 2008; Waggener & Smith, 1993). State-to-state variations in enrollment are wide, but even in states with American Indian populations far exceeding the national average of 1%, such as Montana with 6.4 % (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), the percentage of Native Americans attending four-year institutions hovers around 3% (Montana State University, 2008; University of Montana, 2007). As of 1996, in Montana 62% of the American Indian students enrolled in college were attending a tribal college (AIHEC, 1999).

Helping Native Americans persist and graduate from college is equally as important as improving access and increasing their enrollment. In academic year 2001-2002, American Indian attainment of associate and baccalaureate degrees nationwide increased 70% from 10 years earlier (Harvey & Anderson, 2005). In Montana between 2000-2003, five-year graduation rates for Native students fluctuated from 17-39%, compared to 29-41% for all enrolled undergraduates (Montana State University, 2007, 2008; University of Montana, 2008).

The barriers traditionally faced by Native American students to persist and graduate from college are complex and wide-ranging. They can take the form of inadequate academic preparation, financial difficulties, lack of role models, unfamiliar institutional environments, and personal and family problems including distance from community networks (Wells, 1989; Wright, 2002). Native American students themselves identify family support, mentoring, former tribal college experiences, peer support, and professors as contributing to their success (Wenzlaff & Biewer, 1996). Both students and researchers contend that isolation from home cultures and communities is not necessary

and can even hinder college acculturation (Rendón, 1994), while the “ability to walk in both worlds”¹ contributes to their academic achievements and graduation (Wenzlaff & Biewer, 1996). Motivation and “staying focused” can also play an important role in persistence (Allen, 1999; Wenzlaff & Biewer, 1996).

While the factors contributing to Native American retention are multi-fold, students’ degree of college preparation and academic experiences are important considerations. Given the limited resources of schools on and near Indian reservations, students from these communities may lack academic preparation, but can benefit greatly from proactive and comprehensive academic and other support (Richardson, Simmons, & de los Santos, 1987). Unfortunately, students may not receive the services they need early on, or become discouraged by the time and effort needed to gain the necessary skills to take courses in their discipline of interest (Adelman, 1996). Of particular note is that most Native students who drop out before earning a degree do so in their first year (Wells, 1989). While first-time freshman retention rates between 2000-2007 fluctuated between 69-72% at the two 4-year public institutions in Montana, for Native American students it ranged from 44-65% (Montana State University, 2008; University of Montana, 2008). Students may drop out or stop out for a number of reasons, but their academic successes and failures influence this decision.

One important aspect of students’ academic experiences is the writing that students complete as part of their demonstration of learning. Faculty and students alike

¹ Henze and Vanett (1993) challenge this metaphor as it has been applied to Native education and argue that it not only masks the complexity of choices faced by Native Americans and Alaska Natives, but also dangerously reduces their options.

recognize that academic writing skills are important for success in higher education (Bernhardt, 1985; Conley, 2003; Zerger, 1997). All disciplines require writing skills and the notion of “academic achievement” implies that students possess and can demonstrate literacy skills (Kaulaity, 2007). Furthermore, there is evidence that strengthening the writing component across the curriculum can positively influence student engagement and academic success (Lardner, 2008).

Some research is available on Native Americans’ attitudes toward education and writing (Lyons, 2000; Wilson, 1998), but the bulk of the literature focuses on learning styles favored by Native students (Andera & Atwell, 1988; Macias, 1989; More, 1987; Swisher & Deyhle, 1989; Van Hamme, 1996) and recommended teaching strategies (Barwell, 1981; Frestedt & Sanchez, 1980; Sawyer, 1988; Wescott, 1997; Wilcox, 1996). Gregory (1989) argues that the inability to produce acceptable academic writing serves as one of the major stumbling blocks for academic success among Native Americans; however, little attempt has been made to identify factors contributing to Native American students’ academic writing experiences (Gray-Rosendale, Bird, & Bullock, 2003). Given that the majority (60-80%) of all faculty across disciplines require at least one writing assignment per course (Komlos, 2007; Zerger, 1997), American Indian students’ experiences with academic writing will to some degree influence their decisions to persist. First-year college students must breach the gap between high school and college writing in terms of types and frequency of tasks, attitudes of instructors toward the writing process and characteristics of instructor feedback (Acker & Halasek, 2008; Beil & Knight, 2007). The limited literature concerning the factors influencing American

Indian students' experiences with academic writing in their first year of college provides a rationale for further study.

Statement of the Problem

College faculty, tutors, and other higher education academic support personnel need to know what factors influence Native American students' writing experiences in their first year of college and specifically, which factors potentially help them to be successful writers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore Native American students' experiences with writing in the first year of college at a public research university and two tribal colleges, exploring in particular what helped them succeed as writers. Initially, I envisioned "success" as encompassing any of the following definitions: (1) passing a course requiring writing, (2) receiving a passing grade on a writing assignment, (3) improving grades received for writing assignments. However, there is evidence that for American Indian students, success is tied to family values and practicing traditional customs (Wenzlaff & Biewer, 1996). Therefore, participants' views of "success" and perceptions of how "successful" they felt in terms of writing greatly broadened this study's definition of writing success. Students' views also aided in capturing elements of their experiences that might otherwise have been overlooked and substantiated the participatory nature of the research. An inventory of factors from the

literature found to influence Native American student success helped generate the conceptual framework that guided inquiry and later analysis of participants' academic writing experiences.

Guiding Research Questions

The study was guided by the following primary question: *How do Native American students describe their academic writing experiences in their first year of college?*

These additional questions further defined the direction of the study:

1. How do students' backgrounds and attitudes toward writing influence their writing experiences in college?
2. How do their writing experiences influence their attitudes toward writing and their perceptions of themselves as writers?
3. What actions and inactions of students influence their level of success as writers?
4. What actions and inactions of faculty, tutors, and other individuals in the students' courses, at the institution, and in their extended circle contribute to students' level of success as writers?

Research Structure Methodology

Within the qualitative paradigm, I used a grounded theory research design to develop a model to understand what contributes to students' academic writing experiences and ultimately their success. I also used one-on-one interviews with students as the primary data collection method. Additionally, I triangulated data from the student

participants with one-on-one interviews with students' instructors and with Writing Center administrators, coordinators, and tutors. I also collected data in the form of a self-portrait as an academic writer, flow-chart of steps for completing writing assignments, samples of participants' graded writing assignments, course syllabi and assignment sheets, and tutor training materials.

Given the role of environment in college experiences and the fact that different types of students are more likely to attend different types of institutions, I sampled self-identified Native American students from both tribal colleges and a 4-year public research university in the Mountain West region of the United States. Although these institutions cannot represent the wide array of experiences students may have at other types of institutions, their greatly differing missions, size, and other characteristics helped capture the diversity of students and their experiences. I purposefully sampled ten Native American students at a public research institution, five students from one tribal college and four from another. All were enrolled in one writing course and at least one other course typically requiring writing.

I audiotaped interviews and transcribed them verbatim prior to inputting all data into the QSR NVivo 8 software program to aid organization, coding, and analysis. I followed the process described by Holton (2007) for classic grounded theory methodology. The recursive process of coding and analysis entailed three phases: (1) open and later selective coding of the data to allow core categories and concepts to emerge (collectively called *substantive coding*), (2) theoretical sampling and selective coding of data to achieve saturation of concepts through constant comparison of

indicators in the data to reveal each code's properties and dimensions (called *theoretical coding*), and (3) exploring how the emerging categories fit together and suggest a hypothesis about relationships between concepts that in turn potentially explain the social behavior under study. I complemented my coding by writing conceptual memos of my reflections on the characteristics of the categories and relationships that seem to be emerging. The constant comparative method was important for identifying and narrowing potential categories and moving from description to conceptualization. I first analyzed data from the public research institution. Hence, I had the possibility to adjust the research instruments to ensure that I addressed topics related to emerging themes prior to collecting data at the tribal colleges. My final product is a theoretical model describing the factors influencing Native American students' academic writing success in their first year of college.

The Researcher

I have taught college students for eight years in three different states, first in English as a Second Language (ESL) reading and writing classes, then additionally developmental writing, and finally Spanish as a foreign language courses. My ESL and developmental writing students were from diverse cultural and language backgrounds. More recently, I have worked with Native American students in a freshman seminar and a summer bridge program. I have completed extensive literature reviews on Native American student retention, writing, and Indian thinking and knowledge. My pilot studies relevant to the current research include a survey of faculty about their definitions of

writing in their discipline and perceptions of college student writing, including the writing of American Indian students, and a phenomenological study about the experiences of Native American college student writers.

Through prior research experiences and reflective memoing, I recognized prior to embarking on this study that my ontological stance toward the nature and purpose of writing might not be the same as that of the participants, who originated from cultures valuing the oral tradition (Archibald, 1990; Lyons, 2008; Scollon & Scollon, 1981). Given American Indians' history of oppression associated with literacy (Archibald, 1990; Lyons, 2008), I further acknowledged that students might not share the value I placed on writing and learning how to write well. I tried to establish a relationship with the students not only as an "expert" offering to help them with writing assignments, but also as a former student who in the first grade faced the challenges of learning English and a whole new way of life and learning. By favoring a participatory worldview, I attempted to engage the participants in the research process and elicit their feedback on my interpretations. In conducting this study, I remained open to possibilities that did not fit within my existing paradigm and frequently examined my assumptions about themes and conclusions I reached about the data.

Introduction to Literature and Conceptual Framework

I used the literature on minority college student retention and academic writing to identify areas potentially influencing students' writing experiences and develop a preliminary conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) to reflect the realms in which these

factors operate. Appendix A illustrates how factors from the literature informed this study. The literature aligned under the four realms pointed to potential interplay among factors, such as between traditional values and institutional environment or between student self-beliefs about writing and instructor feedback on assignments. Nevertheless, integration across these categories was not clear from the limited foci of previous studies. The current study aimed to better understand how these and potentially other influencing factors interrelated as well as manifested in the experiences of students. I used this framework to organize data for coding and analysis, but then allowed the findings to dictate the visual representation of the emerging theoretical model.

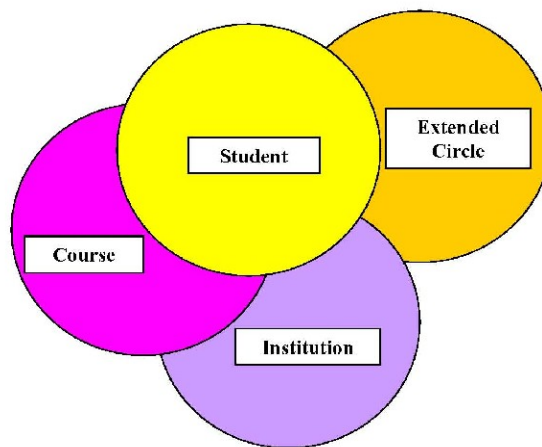


Figure 1.1. Realms of Factors Influencing Student Academic Writing Experiences

The *student* realm draws from research on characteristics of novice vs. experienced writers, metacognition and writing, and self-efficacy and writing. The realm of the *extended circle* focuses on traditional Indian philosophy and Native languages, the legacy of writing in American Indian communities, and the role of family, friends, and

community in students' academic success. The realm of the *course*, including curricular content, instruction and assessment includes literature on strategies for supporting Native American learners and the role of faculty, including instructor feedback on writing. Finally, in the *institutional* realm the role of learning environment, and institutional and writing support services are highlighted.

The Student Realm

Novice vs. Experienced Writers: Students' writing experiences and strategies are shaped by their understanding of expectations for academic writing. College students in general see writing as a skills-oriented, closed exercise in information gathering with good writing in terms of surface correctness (Harley, 1991; Schwegler & Shamoon, 1982). Experienced writers differ from novice writers in allocating more time to planning and adopting a systematic approach to revising and overall needing less time to produce relatively polished pieces of work (Taylor, 1984). Basic writers may not recognize their lack of skills, fluctuate in their degree of confidence and interest in writing, be inconsistent in their composing process, and naive about and also inattentive to the demands of academia (Eves-Bowden, 2001). Native American students have been marginalized in basic writing research and sometimes automatically tracked into remedial English based on tribal affiliation and labeled as having ESL issues (Gray-Rosendale, Bird, & Bullock, 2003). American Indian novice writers have been shown to share characteristics of all inexperienced writers (Gregory, 1989). The degree to which first-

year Native American college students are experienced as writers was one important consideration for this study.

Metacognition: Metacognitive awareness, or the ability to think about thinking, is one characteristic of an effective writer, which many first-year and less experienced writers lack (El-Hindi, 1996; Taylor, 1984). Novice writers may be limited in their ability to explain their writing process, which in itself can offer insights into writing abilities. There is some evidence that students can be successfully trained to be more aware of their writing process, which is perceived to contribute to improved writing skills (El-Hindi, 1993, 1996; Eves-Bowden, 2001; Parisi, 1994). Consequently, factors increasing students' metacognition are also of interest to this study.

Self-Efficacy: Confidence as a writer is captured in the construct of self-efficacy, defined as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments"(Bandura, 1997, p. 3). College students' confidence in their writing skills have been found to be positively correlated with writing performance (Pajares & Johnson, 1994). Furthermore, students' self-beliefs, and in particular locus of control, can serve as an important predictor of success in weak writers in first-semester courses (Jones, 2008). The research is conflicted regarding basic writers' beliefs about and degree of confidence in their skills (Eves-Bowden, 2001; Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Taylor, 1984). One study with Navajo college students also finds similar variations in self-efficacy (Kaulaity, 2007). In light of this literature, this study takes into

consideration how American Indian college freshman perceive their writing skills and ability to complete assignments.

Self-concept and Writing: Self-concept is a view of oneself formed through direct experiences and evaluations adopted from significant others, and thought to partly reflect people's personal self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). A variety of research has investigated students' perceptions of themselves as writers, including those writing in their second language (Cadman, 1997; Chen, 1994), those underprepared (DeAngelis, 1996), socially marginalized (Fisher, 2002), and in pre-service teaching programs (Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Watson & Lacina, 2002). To some degree beliefs about writing are linked to perceptions of self (Pajares & Johnson, 1994), and writing has been depicted as being tied to the writer's culture and a way to affirm or recreate one's identity (Cadman, 1997; Chen, 1994; Fisher, 2002). American Indian students' perceptions of themselves as writers could evolve in their first year and in turn influence their overall writing experiences.

The Extended Circle Realm

The Role of Family, Friends, and Community in Students' Academic Success:

There is a wealth of research supporting the primary importance of the support and encouragement from significant others for the successful college adjustment of minority students, including the commitment to remain enrolled and attain a degree (Nora, 2002). For American Indian students, the support of family is the most frequently cited reason

for their academic success, followed by that of teachers and friends (Reyhner & Dodd, 1995). An institution's proximity to students' families can additionally influence their decision to enroll and persist (Fann, 2004; Komlos, 2005). Family members can also play a supportive role in the completion of academic assignments (Komlos, 2008). Finally, there is evidence that a high degree of traditionalism, defined as links to community and culture, positively influences Native American students' self-identify and confidence in college and contributes to their college persistence (Huffman, Still, & Brokenleg, 1986). Thus, the role of students' extended circle in their academic success needs further attention.

American Indian Thinking, the Oral Tradition, and Native Languages: Donald Fixico (2003) explains how traditional Indian thinking is circular in philosophy in contrast with linear thinking much of the Western world, including the U.S. public school system. In addition, "intelligence" has frequently been defined for Native peoples through the Euro-American culture and way of thinking, which is limited in its application and understanding (Dumot, 2002). Cajete (2005) further proposes that there are as many epistemologies as there are American Indian tribes, but defines the essence of indigenous education as learning through participation and honoring of relationships among people and natural communities. The opposing Western and Native ways of thinking and viewing the world contributed to the difficulties of traditional American Indians in adjusting to learning in boarding schools and continues to be a factor in students' education today. In academia Western and Native thinking can manifest in

students struggles to write analytically or according to a linear process (Chávez, 1998; Macias, 1989).

The oral tradition of Native Americans can also impact writing experiences. Scollon & Scollon (1981) argue that for American Indian students, learning to read and write in the essayist style entails learning patterns of discourse different from those they are familiar with in the oral tradition. While many American Indian students are potentially alienated from schooling by the obvious disparities and conflicts between language usage in their communities and that required in schools, the two traditions can coexist (Dyc, 1994).

The influence of a Native language or Indian dialect can become apparent in student writing. Leap's (1993) research reveals that ancestral tribal languages influence both the grammar and use of Indian English. Students' Indian dialect could classify them as Limited English Proficient in mainstream schools (Leap, 1993) and create considerable cultural and linguistic dissonance (Fleisher, 1982). Any challenges with using standard English are compounded by the rigidity and indifference to student background characteristic of academic discourse (Kaulaity, 2007). On the other hand, simultaneous development in English and Native language skills holds positive implications for students' English writing abilities (Dyc, 2002; Kipp, 2000). Thus, Native philosophies, languages, and dialects play an important role in students' educational experiences and can manifest in their writing styles, organizational patterns, and grammar.

The Legacy of Writing in Native American Communities: Lyons (2000) argues that the faith in the written word of Native communities has been repeatedly compromised by not only the boarding school experience but also by the hundreds of treaties signed and dishonored by Whites. This might explain why writing is considered taboo in certain contexts by some American Indians (Lyons, 2008). Lyons's (2000) solution takes the form of "rhetorical sovereignty," characterized by the presence of an Indian voice speaking or writing in an ongoing context of colonization and setting at least some of the terms of debate, ideally in a Native language. In a similar vein, Dyc (1994) proposes a tribal-specific literacy fusing oral traditions and essayist literacy: "one that embraces the cultural values and language practices of the people and ultimately empowers the learner" (p. 212). These forms of writing have implications for how students experience their college courses and assignments.

The Realm of the Course

Strategies for Supporting Native American Learners: It is important to create an environment where students learn about themselves as learners and develop successful strategies (Asera, 2006). Faculty can help in this area and Hornett (1989) and Tippeconnic Fox (2005) offer recommendations to faculty for bringing about cultural awareness and contributing to retention of American Indian students.

Zolbrod (2006) blames some of the failures of education for Native Americans on the subjugation of alternative approaches to learning by the dominant culture. Luckily,

elements of student-centered learning proposed by Barr & Tagg (1995) and Chickering and Gamson's (1991) seven guidelines for improving undergraduate education also reflect learning contexts preferred by Native American students. Specific suggestions in the literature for improving writing instruction include informing students about academic "etiquette" (academic literacy) and setting out behavioral norms that will extend beyond orientation/course (Asera, 2006; Dyc, 2002; Landis, 1985), focusing students on the writing process and addressing analysis skills and conceptualization of ideas in addition to traditional writing skills (Gregory, 1989; Sawyer, 1988), providing an audience (Dyc, 1994; Miller Cleary & Peacock, 1998), allowing opportunities for engaging in meaningful tasks, including advocacy writing (Dyc, 1994; Sawyer, 1988), and incorporating a wide-range of oral, aural, and visual strategies and materials (Archibald, 1990; Dyc, 2002; Gray-Rosendale, Bird, & Bullock, 2003) without prescribing to set "Indian" learning styles (Lomawaima, 1995; More, 1987). The degree to which writing instructors prescribe to these and other learner-centered strategies and techniques shapes their courses and ultimately the experiences of their students.

The Role of Faculty and Feedback on Writing: The literature presents several areas for potential misunderstandings between faculty and students about writing. High school language arts teachers and college composition teachers have been found to differ in their feedback and evaluation on student writing (Acker & Halasek, 2008). Thus, freshmen could be surprised by how different criteria are for college writing. Students' cultural backgrounds and personalities can also contribute to the degree to which their

expectations for successful writing contrast with those of their professors (Beck, 2006; Petric, 2002).

Evaluating writing poses additional challenges. Research on the effectiveness of feedback to improve writing is mixed and depends on the type of feedback and context, including the background of students (Anderson, Benson, & Lynch, 2001; Berzsenyi, 2001). The benefits of error correction are especially hotly debated, but indirect feedback seems helpful in engaging students cognitively in revision and providing enough guidance for even English language learners to correct the majority of their errors (Ferris, 2004; Ferris & Roberts, 2001). While for many Native American students English is their first language, their oral communication style, including dialectical variation, can contribute to the nonstandard features of their writing. Thus, with guidance they should be able to correct most of their errors and simultaneously acquire a better understanding of differences between oral and written discourse.

Faculty can also choose to use writing for purposes other than evaluation. Letter writing and dialogue journals can contribute to a sense of community in the classroom and foster active learning (DeAngelis, 1996; Fields, 1992), while providing feedback to student writing can serve the purpose of developing academic literacy (Bharuthram & McKenna, 2006).

Institutional Realm

The Learning Environment and Institutional Support: In the two last decades, research has begun to shift focus from investigating mostly student characteristics to

determining to what extent the values and attitudes promoted by institutions, their environment and degree of openness to diversity, and other characteristics influence American Indian persistence and academic achievement. Wells (1989) cites inadequate adjustment to the college environment as one factor that hinders Native American achievement. In addition, campus hostility, verbal racism, and feelings of isolation in a predominantly White college can contribute to Indian students' low academic performance and desire to drop out (Huffman, 1991; Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988).

A variety of successful Native American student retention and academic support service models have been identified (Meyers, 1997). Summer bridge and other mentoring programs for American Indian students have been shown to be effective when they are comprehensive in nature (Landis, 1985; Rankin-Brown & Fitzpatrick, 2007). Support programs that continue into at least the first if not subsequent years of college and offer a range of services from mentors to childcare have been found to be the most beneficial (Rankin-Brown & Fitzpatrick, 2007; Risku, 2002).

While bridge programs, developmental courses and other support services can and do help Native American students transition to college, programs and services need to be connected to students' aspirations and cultural predispositions to help them begin to "feel at home" and want to stay enrolled (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001). The institutional environment permeates the whole campus, but students could experience support to varying degrees when seeking help with writing through different services.

Writing Support Services: The prevalent philosophy behind writing centers today is to produce better writers, not better writing, (Rossini, 2002). Tutors are expected to serve as interpreters and guides by focusing on writing as process and refraining from helping with editing or proofreading (Beaupre, 2000; Chromik, 2002). In reality, students seeking help from tutors want a better product and writing centers must find ways to meet students' expectations while staying true to their more idealistic philosophy.

Writing centers can opt to support both focus on process as well as product (Rossini, 2002), and the degree to which they blend the two is reflected in their tutor training. The most commonly adapted framework in the literature for orienting tutoring sessions is Reigstad's typology for conferencing methods: teacher-centered, collaborative (also called structured participation), and student-centered (J. Bell, 2001). Structured or collaborative participation is the preferred approach today (J. Bell, 2001; J. H. Bell, 2002), but tutors' perceived roles remain subjective (Thonus, 2001). Although "peer" tutoring seemingly implies co-learning, in reality the relationship is more hierarchical in its similarity to didactic teaching (Bokser, 2001).

Philosophies and intentions aside, of interest is whether students feel that writing tutors help them improve as writers. Carino & Enders (2001) found that frequency of visits by freshmen to a writing center significantly influences their confidence as writers and the likelihood to recommend the writing center to others. However, students' satisfaction with writing tutors and their likelihood to return can decrease after they have received a grade (Morrison & Nadeau, 2003). Regarding the effectiveness of tutoring,

there is some evidence that writing conferences are more apt to improve writers (not just papers) when the focus is on instruction rather than correction (J. H. Bell, 2002).

A literature search for writing centers working in particular with American Indian students did not produce any results. There is considerable research on writing centers and ESL students, and Thonus (2003) also includes Generation 1.5 students in the discussion. These learners are young immigrants usually proficient in speaking but not writing their second language. They potentially share characteristics of their writing and writing needs with American Indian students and general principals could be applicable for working with both. Insights are needed into the characteristics of writing center services and tutors available to Native American students, the degree to which students are accessing these resources, and how their experiences factor into their overall writing experiences.

Significance of the Study

Currently, knowledge about the college writing experiences of Native American students is limited at best, and investigating in what ways students are learning to meet academic writing expectations could benefit students, faculty and institutions as a whole. Specifically, themes generated by student participants can shed light on the factors with the greatest impact on students' skills, self-perceptions, motivations, and experiences. Equally, descriptions of writing assignments, courses and instructors can reveal misunderstandings stemming from different cultural ways of thinking. The results may be used to increase support in critical areas to bolster student success, educate faculty

regarding cultural influences on writing, and empower students in their search for their voice as writers.

Definition of Terms and Concepts

1. Native American, American Indian, Indian and Native: are used interchangeably in this study to refer to any individual or group of individuals who self identify as descendents of any of the original inhabitants of North America regardless of tribal affiliation(s). Although these terms may hold various social and/or political connotations, here they serve as a way to identify the ethnic background of the participants.
2. Academic writing: is employed as an umbrella term for all college writing assigned and evaluated for a course. Although students reflected on their writing using different graded assignments from a range of disciplines, categorization of the assignments for analysis was unnecessary given the focus on overall writing experiences.
3. Success: “success” could encompass (a) passing a course requiring writing, (b) receiving a passing grade on a writing assignment, or (c) improving grades received for writing assignments. I focused on students’ definitions of “success” and perceptions of how “successful” they felt in terms of writing
4. Tribal College/University (TCU): “unique institutions that combine personal attention with cultural relevance, in such a way as to encourage American Indians—especially those living on reservations—to overcome the barriers they

face to higher education” (Robbins, 2002). They are institutions established by one or more Indian tribe.

5. Cultural traditionalism: self-reported degree of adhering to traditional customs and valuing Native ways of thinking and living. Participants were asked to use their own criteria to define how culturally traditional they considered themselves to be. Based on their descriptions and examples, I created four categories of responses: (a) very, (b) fairly, (c) somewhat, (d) less.
6. Experienced vs. novice writer: in general terms, the degree to which a participant is knowledgeable about and able to successfully complete academic writing tasks. For the purposes of making this definition more objective, participants’ writing abilities were categorized as experienced, moderately experienced, somewhat experienced, and not experienced in college writing based on several factors: (a) placement in college composition courses, (b) self reported confidence as an academic writer, (c) amount of academic writing literacy, (d) number of effective writing strategies generally used, (e) self reported enjoyment of academic writing, and (f) engagement in non-academic/personal writing.

Delimitations and Limitations

Limitations of the Study

1. Given the wide range of individual factors that can influence students’ writing experiences, this study most likely did not capture them all. Interview questions

addressed four sources of students' experiences: (a) student, (b) extended circle (family, home, community, friends), (c) course, and (d) institution. The data were most revealing about the first three categories. The additional category of culture also emerged. Interviews with a different sample of participants could reveal additional factors not apparent in this study.

2. This study drew participants from both tribal colleges and a public university in the hope of capturing a somewhat heterogeneous set of experiences. Nevertheless, given the diversity among individual institutions, results could be somewhat limited.
3. Only eight tribal affiliations, mostly from the northwestern areas of the United States, were accounted for in this study. Considering the cultural and linguistic differences among Indian nations, the generalizability of the findings is somewhat limited.
4. The study was limited by my ability as a researcher to pose questions to elicit relevant and complete responses.
5. Responses were limited by the willingness of the participants to be forthcoming and their degree of comfort in disclosing or discussing potential negative aspects of their experiences.
6. The use of gatekeepers to contact potential student participants' provided the benefit of having an insider make the initial contact; however, it could have influenced students' decisions to participate or not in the study. Also, the faculty and staff I chose to interview at the university were for the most part guided by

suggestions from student participants. Therefore, I was able to obtain a fuller picture of students' experiences, but my sample of faculty and the courses they taught captured a narrow segment of writing across the curriculum.

Delimitations of the Study

This study has limits that I have chosen as the researcher.

1. I only included institutions from the State of Montana.
2. I only made a maximum of two visits to the tribal colleges for the purpose of data collection.
3. My first interview with student participants was not always in their first term.

Participation by Native Americans in higher education has historically been low with modest increases occurring in the second half of the twentieth century due in part to the establishment of tribal colleges. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, their persistence and graduation rates continue to hover below those for undergraduates on average. College retention is influenced by many factors, including institutional, academic, social, cultural, and affective. Academic preparedness is pinpointed in the literature as playing an important role in academic achievement and persistence in college. Writing ability is one prominent area contributing to students' academic success. Nevertheless, the writing experiences of American Indian students have only been minimally studied. The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore Native American students' experiences with writing in the first year of college at a public

research university and two tribal colleges, including what helps them succeed as writers. The conceptual framework highlighted in this chapter is used in the following chapter to present a detailed review of the literature around the realms of influence on academic writing: (1) student, (2) extended-circle (family, home, community, friends), (3) course, and (4) institution.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

A study of the academic writing experiences of American Indian college students necessitates the casting of a wide net into various areas of inquiry to capture potential influences of the phenomenon. Literature from composition studies to second language acquisition, minority college student retention to traditional Native values and thinking, and self-efficacy theory and metacognition could all contribute to an understanding of students' experiences. Locating relevant sources primarily consisted of using the electronic search engines of the university library to which the researcher had access. The main online search tool used was the Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), but WorldCat (First Search), and Dissertation Abstracts were consulted as well. The initial search terms used were "American Indian or Native American," "higher education," and "(academic) writing." Additional terms included "retention," "metacognition," "self-efficacy," "self-concept," "feedback," "institutional culture," and "writing centers." The sources explored included journal articles, books, online articles, proceedings from conference presentations, and doctoral dissertations.

The research collected from these diverse areas are organized into a preliminary conceptual framework reflecting the realms in the potential factors influencing Native American students' writing experiences operate. Through the process of data collection

and analysis, these realms are expected to evolve or true to the principles of grounded theory even give way to a new framework that more accurately represents the experiences of participants. For now they serve to arrange the numerous areas of inquiry according to whether they offer insights about characteristics pertaining to (1) students, (2) the collective influence of family, friends, and community (extended circle), (3) courses related to writing, and (4) the college or university environment and academic support services.

The *student* realm is informed by the literature on characteristics of novice vs. experienced writers, metacognition and writing, and self-efficacy and writing. The realm of the *extended circle* focuses on traditional Indian philosophy and Native languages, the legacy of writing in American Indian communities, and the role of family, friends, and community in students' academic success. The realm of the *course*, including curricular content, instruction and assessment, will include literature on strategies for supporting Native American learners and the role of faculty, including instructor feedback on writing. Finally, in the *institutional* realm the role of learning environment, and institutional and writing support services will be highlighted.

The Student Realm

Novice vs. Experienced Writers

Students' writing experiences are shaped by their understanding of expectations for academic writing, which in turn influences the strategies they use. Harley (1991) found that college students in five different introductory social science courses surveyed

regarding perceptions of their writing abilities defined good writing in terms of surface correctness, rather than organization, clarity, and choice of evidence consistently indicated as important by course faculty. No specific background is provided regarding the participants, but given the introductory nature of the courses, participants can be presumed to be first and second year students, who are also likely to be novice writers. In another look at contrasting perceptions of academic writing, Schwegler and Shamoon (1982) investigate the perceptions of college English faculty regarding the purpose and approaches to research paper writing compared to the views of freshmen and sophomores. The authors contend that the students tend to see writing as a skills-oriented, closed-ended exercise in information gathering, not the open-ended process involving critical thinking, inquiry, and discovery favored by instructors. These findings are insightful, but limited by the narrow focus of research writing and confounded by the lack of information regarding methodology in terms of the number of faculty interviewed and whether student viewpoints were generated from interviews with students or based on faculty perceptions.

In a study comparing the writing processes of high school and college students with older individuals who write extensively as part of their profession, Taylor (1984) learns that experienced writers tend to spend more time planning, which enables them to produce more words in less time. They also use a systematic approach to revising rather than looking for multiple problems simultaneously, and are not afraid to make major changes in their final product. While Taylor's research truly investigates the characteristics of experienced writers' processes, it may be unfair to compare students to

professionals given their different contexts, especially the restrictions each face in terms of audience expectations and time constraints. Even the author notes how academic writing and the need to write “on demand” can impede the integration of planning into students’ writing process. In interviews about the writing process with seven “typical basic writers” (selected for not being ESL learners) in an introductory English class at a community college, Eves-Bowden (2001) found that basic writers can be in turn insecure and overconfident, uninterested in writing, inconsistent in their composing process, naive about and also inattentive to the demands of academia (especially the uses of language, citation, and analysis), and see little room for improvement in their writing process. This study directly probes the characteristics of novice writers; however, its short five-week duration provides a limited perspective of the evolving nature of students’ perceptions and experiences with writing.

Gray-Rosendale, Bird, & Bullock (2003) point out that Native American students have been marginalized in basic writing research and sometimes automatically tracked into remedial English based on tribal affiliation. Furthermore, their writing is frequently treated as having ESL issues, even if they only speak English. In his series of case studies with six bilingual Navajo college students ranging from those completing freshman composition to those with graduate degrees, Gregory (1989) finds that the novice writers in the sample share characteristics of all inexperienced writers: writing using a linear process with no major reformulation of ideas, being principally concerned with mechanics, and showing little or no evidence of prior planning. In contrast, the experienced writers in the group are able to produce relatively polished pieces in a short

amount of time because they think about their topic beforehand and use pre-writing strategies. Despite the limitations of such a small and select sample, the study offers a glimpse into the range of students' writing experiences and how they compare with non-Native experienced and basic writers. Kaulaity's (2007) interviews with Navajo freshmen reveal that the more students wrote in high school in a variety of styles and the more procedural guidance they received from their teachers, the more prepared they were for college writing. The most experienced writer in the group can speak at length about his writing, thinks about and plans his writing while engaged in routine activities, considers the audience, and enjoys writing for both academic and personal purposes. The other students are more novice writers in lacking a "system" to help them complete an assignment, not understanding the importance and method for doing research, editing for errors rather than revising, and one even "blocking out" the assignment rather than planning for it.

Drawing on experiences with American Indian students participating in a summer bridge program classified as "basic writers," Gray-Rosendale, Bird, & Bullock (2003) illustrate that many lack a perception of themselves as writers, which can be partially explained by their shared academic writing background revealed through their mantra "I never wrote a paper in high school" (p. 83). Gray-Rosendale's "snapshots" reveal ways to build community in the classroom, the difficulties students have in transitioning from high school academic work, and frustrations from faculty across the institution that these students do not conform with standard and linear academic discourse. These fragments of student experiences from different perspectives underscore the complexity of the issue

and the futility of expecting quick and simple solutions. To this end, Gregory (1989) and Zolbrod (2006) both contend that even three to four semesters of prescribed developmental writing or English composition may be inadequate to produce the expertise needed for the American Indian students to comfortably handle the demands of academic writing and compensate for twelve years of insufficient language arts instruction. Dyc (2002) on the other hand, perceives that students dominant in their Native language typically need two or three semesters of developmental work in English to prepare them for the freshman composition sequence. None of the studies, however, focus on how students who become successful writers are able to do so. Thus, important considerations for this study were the degree to which first-year Native American college students are experienced as writers and what kinds of support they need to gain necessary skills and confidence.

Metacognition

Metacognitive awareness, or the ability to think about thinking, has been identified as a characteristic of an effective writer, one which many first-year and less experienced writers lack. Taylor (1984) observes that experienced adult writers are better able to discuss their writing process in a detached manner than less experienced high school and college writers. There have been studies focused on directly linking metacognition to reading and writing abilities. Participants in a six-week summer residential academic program for incoming freshmen from underrepresented populations demonstrated low pre-test scores for metacognitive reading and writing awareness, but

significantly improved on post-scores after direct training in macrostrategies (El-Hindi, 1996). This study, however, does not directly link greater metacognition to improved writing. In a similar study with 43 bridge program students, El-Hindi (1993) only finds evidence for metacognitive training's positive influence on reading but not for writing. Through efforts to help basic writers at a community college explore their own writing process, Parisi (1994) surmises that students who can outline their writing processes are more effective in moving through the various stages of the writing process and can achieve longer and more developed drafts.

Although the evidence for a direct link between metacognitive training is anecdotal or limited at best, among all of these authors there is a general understanding that increasing students' awareness of their writing process contributes to improved writing skills. El-Hindi (1996) suggests that training in discrete reading and writing skills may be ineffective without added metacognitive training. Eves-Bowden (2001) argues for getting basic writers to critically examine their writing process and providing them models rather than formulas to follow. Parisi (1994) supports the use of metacognitive techniques, such as questionnaires, interviews, think-aloud protocols, and diagramming to empower students to be aware of their process and skills as writers independent of a course or professors' evaluations, and, thus, potentially increase their confidence as writers. Additionally, enhancing novice writers' awareness of and ability to explain their writing process could offer insights into their writing abilities and experiences. Consequently, factors contributing to students' metacognition were also of interest to this study.

Self-efficacy

Confidence as a writer is captured in the construct of self-efficacy, defined as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Although a separate construct from metacognition, self-efficacy may be influenced by how cognizant students are of certain aspects of writing. In a study with 48 community college students enrolled in three freshman writing courses, Maimon (2002) finds a positive correlation between students’ degree of awareness of the functions of writing (i.e. uses of writing in and out of school) and their writing self-efficacy. The author uses two free-writing assignments and a self-report instrument to measure self-efficacy and writing function awareness. Results indicate that students who perceived a larger range of writing functions and uses for writing score higher in self-efficacy, as do those who engage in a greater variety of writing tasks. The author suggests that students can benefit from a heightened awareness of the various functions of writing, both in and out of an academic setting, given its positive effect on self-efficacy.

In their quantitative study of the self-confidence and writing apprehension and performance of 30 undergraduate students in a 16-week teacher education class, Pajares & Johnson (1994) break down self-efficacy into two areas: students' confidence in their ability to successfully perform certain writing skills (grammar, usage, composition, and mechanical skills, such as usage of parts of speech, spelling, punctuation, and sentence and paragraph organization) and their confidence in accomplishing various writing tasks (writing journal entries, diaries, lesson plans, children’s stories, review of children’s

books, brief articles, and critiques). This distinction is reflected in the course's focus on expanding the number of writing tasks students can accomplish, rather than explicitly teaching writing skills. Multiple regression analyses conducted on the holistic scores on two 30-minute essays and pre- and post-scores on writing self-efficacy, apprehension, and performance measures allowed the authors to identify relationships among the variables. Results indicate overall writing self-efficacy to be significantly related with writing performance and general self-confidence to be significantly related to all the variables except confidence in specific writing skills. The latter finding implies that writing skills self-efficacy accounts for the connection between writing beliefs and writing performance, rather than writing task self-efficacy. Interestingly, writing skills can improve even in the absence of attention, instruction or feedback related to specific skills, but students' confidence in their writing skills might not improve correspondingly. The authors recommend assessing students' self-efficacy to provide insights and correct inaccurate judgments students may have of themselves.

Jones (2008) also supports the idea that differing types of self-efficacy may play different roles in predicting writing achievement. In a survey of 118 students in basic writing courses the author provides evidence for students' increases over a semester in task and skill efficacy but not approach self-efficacy. In addition to self-efficacy, other variables in the study include locus of control, initial academic ability, academic achievement, importance of academic goals, the importance of reading and writing, positive/negative academic behaviors, and perceived difficulties with the course. Comparisons within the sample indicate that weaker students' writing achievement in the

course are more affected by their self-beliefs and locus of control than previous writing achievement and abilities, which are better indicators for stronger writers. Jones (2008) also highlights the issues of how locus of control and self-efficacy could change during the course of a semester with the former becoming more external and the latter becoming greater. Therefore, longitudinal investigations are essential for discovering changes in the self-perceptions and confidence of novice writers. The present qualitative study investigated issues around self-efficacy by exploring how American Indian students described their confidence as writers with respect to being able to complete writing assignments, and whether they reported any changes as a result of learning new writing strategies and skills, receiving certain types of feedback on their writing, or other factors.

While there is an established link between strong self-efficacy and writing achievement, the nature of novice writers' confidence in and beliefs about their writing remains disputed. Pajares & Johnson (1994) suggest that writers may underestimate their skills and have low self confidence; however, Eves-Bowden (2001) and Taylor (1984) perceive that basic writers may be overly confident in their writing, as well as uninterested, and inconsistent in their composing process. Taylor (1984) proposes that perhaps these students' lack of experience prevents them from anticipating problems in their work or imagining ways of improving it. Similarly, Eves-Bowden (2001) speculates that novice writers have not discovered that it is not really effort that they lack, rather skills. In a mixed methods investigation of the writing self-efficacy of Navajo college freshmen, Kaulaity (2007) also finds mixed results. Both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that students hold uncertain to positive beliefs about writing's purpose, function

and value for them. In interviews with nine community college and university freshmen, the author traces some of these perceptions back to characteristics of prior high school writing experiences and instruction. However, there is some evidence that college instructors can help to shift students' self-efficacy toward a positive direction. This study looked in general at American Indian incoming college students' degree of confidence as an academic writer.

Self-concept and Writing

Self-concept is a view of oneself formed through direct experiences and evaluations adopted from significant others, and thought to partly reflect personal self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). A variety of research has investigated students' perceptions of themselves as writers, including those writing in their second language (Cadman, 1997; Chen, 1994), those underprepared (DeAngelis, 1996), socially marginalized (Fisher, 2002), and in pre-service teaching programs (Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Watson & Lacina, 2002). To some degree, beliefs about writing are linked to perceptions of self, which explains why criticizing someone's writing is akin to criticizing the individual (Pajares & Johnson, 1994). Writing has also been depicted as being tied to the writer's culture and a way to affirm or recreate one's identity (Cadman, 1997; Chen, 1994; Fisher, 2002). For example, a former Chinese graduate student describes learning to write in English as a second language as a process of creating and defining a new identity and balancing it with the old (Cadman, 1997). While international students may view their cultural backgrounds as assets in their writing (Chen, 1994), it is not clear whether

American Indians and other historically marginalized minorities share this viewpoint. Fisher (2002) creates a space in his college Appalachian Political Economy course for students to deconstruct outside definitions and stereotypes of themselves. In telling and writing their personal stories the Appalachian college students can reinvent themselves using their own images. Similarly, the one Navajo freshman in Kaulaity's (2007) study who professes to enjoy writing both for academic and personal purposes comments on the use of writing to show "who one is." Perhaps American Indian students can engage in such acts of self-discovery through writing in Native American Studies courses, but of interest to this study was how their overall writing experiences in their first year influenced their perceptions of themselves as writers.

The Extended Circle Realm

The Role of Family, Friends, and Community in Students' Academic Success

Nora (2002) adds to the wealth of research supporting the primary importance of the support and encouragement from significant others to the successful college adjustment of minority students. The author's theoretical analysis highlights the interrelations between the stages of "rites of passage" in Tinto's (1993) Student Integration Model and support and encouragement from significant others as depicted in Nora & Cabrera's (1996) Student Adjustment Model. Specifically, such support can ease the transition from high school and influence students' commitment to remain enrolled and attain a degree. Support for this theory in the context of Native American students can be gleaned through studies based on student self-report. In a survey of American

Indian students, Reyhner & Dodd (1995) indicate the support of family as the most frequently cited reason for students' academic success, followed by that of teachers and friends. Religious faith, one's tribe, co-workers and support services are also contributing factors.

The importance of students' extended circle to their academic success can manifest in various ways. Fann's (2004) interviews with 53 junior and senior high school students reveal that an institution's proximity to students' family and community influences their decision to enroll. Kaulaity (2007) also confirms that freshmen report being encouraged by parents to attend college, but also implies that this is synonymous with leaving behind their Native culture and language. Komlos' (2005) interviews with five college freshmen reflects the continued importance of proximity of family in students' desire to be able to visit home often. Family members can also play a supportive role in academic tasks, such as brainstorming for writing assignments and reading over drafts (Kaulaity, 2007; Komlos, 2008). However, evidence of direct involvement in academics is limited and needs further investigation.

Cultural ties to family and tribal community also seem to influence American Indian students' academic achievement. In their survey of 38 Sioux and 48 non-Native college students, Huffman, Still, & Brokenleg (1986) reveal that a high degree of traditionalism positively influences the Native students' self-identify and confidence in college. Sioux college students who self-identify as more strongly "traditional" in terms of knowing their Native language, participating in ceremonies, and identifying a reservation as their permanent address are more likely to persistent in college. In contrast,

high school GPA and parents' educational aspirations are strong indicators of academic achievement for the non-Natives in the sample. More research is needed with college students of different tribal affiliations to ascertain how maintaining traditional beliefs and practices while attending college influences their academic experiences. Overall, the role of students' extended circle in their academic success needs further attention.

Influence of American Indian Thinking,
the Oral Tradition, and Native Languages on Writing

In his work on the traditional thinking patterns of American Indians, Donald Fixico (2003) explains that Indian thinking is circular in philosophy in contrast with the linear thinking of much of the Western world, including the U.S. public school system. Dumot (2002) argues that "intelligence" has been defined for Native peoples through the Euro-American way of thinking, which is limited in its application and understanding. Native people have tried to meet expectations based on measures of success that do not encompass all the aspects acknowledged by indigenous intelligence, which incorporates the body, mind, heart and spirit and includes a sense of responsibility to not disrupt the balance and harmony of the life. Cajete (2005) proposes that there are as many epistemologies as there are American Indian tribes, but defines the essence of indigenous education as learning through participation and honoring of relationships among people and natural communities.

The opposing Western and Native ways of thinking and viewing the world contributed to the difficulties of traditional American Indians in adjusting to learning in boarding schools and continues to be a factor in students' education today. In interviews

with eleven American Indian women representing nine tribes enrolled in a Master of Social Work program, Macias (1989) observes how the students' listening and thinking strategies differ from Western academic thinking: distancing oneself from an idea, objectively analyzing it, and refusing to accept it until judgment has been rendered. Instead they maintain a respect for the world outside the self and recognize the possibility for knowledge and insight to come from anywhere, which demonstrates an ability to critically analyze and evaluate an idea while still remaining receptive. This sample consists of experienced learners yet the participants still indicate that vocabulary and writing remain a source of anxiety, in particular the need to write in an impersonal and analytic style. The author does not tackle the contradiction in the students having strong analytical listening skills yet fearing analytical writing. Nor is there a reflection on how the students may be frustrated by the limitations put forth by Western academic thinking.

Chávez (1998) reflects on the personal frustrations of attempting to write a doctoral dissertation according to the prescribed standard linear process. The author realizes how her writing is shaped by her culture and that she had so far successfully negotiated public education by following her natural style and then reformatting her work to meet the requirements of the final product. Chávez conceptualizes writing as weaving a tapestry in which the relationship between weaver and the emerging patterns contributes to the creation and understanding of the end product. Consequently, the written word materializes only after the patterns become clearer in the author's inner vision. Chávez concludes by asking whether her "culturally other" voice is to be locked out for not complying with standard linear writing structures. Kaulaity (2007) also

compares writing to an art just like weaving, painting, or silver-smithing, which for the Navajo entails having a picture in one's mind to guide the creative process. This organizational preference is reflected in the author's interviews of the most experienced writer in the sample who prefers webbing to his teacher's required linear strategy of outlining. If responded to with rigidity, such subtle yet important organizational differences may produce negative writing experiences and wrongly label competent writers as deficient.

Apprehensions about writing could also be a by-product of the oral tradition. Scollon & Scollon (1981) argue that the essayist prose style used to define literacy is to a large extent determined by discourse properties, which differ for oral and literate traditions. Therefore, learning to read and write in the essayist style actually entails learning new patterns of discourse and, thus, a change in reality set. Since the authors' ethnographical research is with young Athabaskan (Alaskan Native) children, it is not clear whether students can be expected to become comfortable with essayist literacy by high school. Dyc (1994) also perceives that many American Indian students are alienated from schooling by the obvious disparities and conflicts between language usage in the oral tradition of their communities and that required in written academic discourse, but affirms that two traditions can coexist. The author supports Freire's literacy work and proposes applying the idea of re-creation/self-transformation through literacy to college students who have been disempowered by previous school experiences. While providing some suggestions for helping American Indian students transition from personal to

advocacy writing and on to critical writing, the author fails to include students' perspectives.

Students' Native language or Indian dialect can manifest even more directly in their writing. Leap's (1993) extensive exploration of the use of English of more than 15 American Indian tribes reveals that ancestral tribal languages influence both the grammar and use of Indian English, resulting in dialects unique to each tribe. Dyc (2002) proposes that some characteristics of Indian English are pan-tribal and shared by both monolingual English natives and those who possess the tribal language; nevertheless, she agrees that a description of a variety should be tribal-specific.

Although most Native Americans speak English today, students could still be considered Limited English Proficient (LEP) due to their non-standard use of English (Leap, 1993). Fleisher (1982) argues from the perspective of an educational linguist having worked with Native tribes on language revitalization that the differences between American Indian English (AIE) and Standard American English (SAE) create considerable cultural and linguistic dissonance for Indian students entering mainstream schools. Kaulaity (2007) suggests that a Navajo student struggling with standard English will face additional challenges in writing academic discourse, especially given the strict nature of this style of writing and its lack of concessions for a writer's cultural, social, or linguistic background. Native students can and need to learn the rules of academic discourse, but need to feel that the dialect they bring with them to school, which is a part of their identity, is respected. Dyc (2002) observes that even when high school teachers in a district in New Mexico accept the vernacular in writing in order to encourage fluency,

the Navajo college students remain unprepared for college-level writing. However, the author notes that as students gain a fuller control over academic writing, the features of their Navajo English begin to diminish in their writing. In addition, for students proficient in both their ancestral language and English, writing remediation seems to take less time. Kipp (2000) also provides evidence for the positive influence of students' first language on their development of academic writing. The author finds that language and writing instruction in both English composition and the Blackfeet language helps college students improve their English writing skills. Despite their optimism, it remains unclear from these articles how Native students' linguistic differences influence their writing experiences and what in addition to instruction in their Native language helps them acquire academic discourse while affirming their indigenous voices. Thus, Native philosophies, languages, and dialects play an important role in students' educational experiences and can manifest in their writing styles, organizational patterns, and grammar.

The Legacy of Writing in Native American Communities

Lyons (2000) argues that at the root of the problem of many American Indians' reluctance to embrace and excel at writing is that the faith in the written word of Native communities has been repeatedly compromised by not only the boarding school experience but also by the hundreds of treaties signed and dishonored by Whites. Wilson (1998) illustrates this use of words by the "white man" as metaphorical "bullets," which his tribal council hopes he can learn to wield in defense of Native rights by going to

college. Lyons (2008) also explains that writing is considered taboo in certain contexts by some American Indians. His solution takes the form of “rhetorical sovereignty,” which he defines as characteristic of the presence of an Indian voice, speaking or writing in an ongoing context of colonization and setting at least some of the terms of debate, ideally in a Native language. Lyons contends that rhetorical sovereignty requires of writing teachers not only a renewed commitment to listening and learning, but also a “radical rethinking of how and what we teach as the written word at all levels of schooling, from preschool to graduate curricula and beyond” (p. 450). In a similar vein, Dyc (1994) proposes a tribal-specific literacy: “one that embraces the cultural values and language practices of the people and ultimately empowers the learner” (p. 212). This model represents the fusion of oral traditions and essayist literacy through its integration of narratives and traditional knowledge, connection of different types of knowing, dialectical problem-solving, and a recognition that writing is embedded in social, historical, and cultural contexts. These forms of writing have implications for how students experience their college courses.

The Realm of the Course

Strategies for Supporting Native American Learners

Asera (2006) affirms the importance of creating an environment, especially for basic writers, in which students learn about themselves as learners and develop successful strategies. In this vein, Hornett (1989) and Tippeconnic Fox (2005) offer recommendations to faculty for bringing about cultural awareness and contributing to

retention of American Indian students. These include connecting students' success to their effort—which they may not perceive—learning about Native American students and tribes on campus, integrating more Native content into the curriculum, and dealing with racism in whatever form. The degree to which instructors prescribe to all these and other learner-centered strategies and techniques shapes their courses and ultimately the experiences of their students. How students and faculty described classroom strategies to support and engage them as learners and writers was one consideration of the present study.

Zolbrod (2006) describes the joys and frustrations of teaching at a tribal college and blames some of the failures of education for Native Americans on the subjugation of alternative approaches to learning by the dominant culture. The movement in the last two decades toward student-centered learning as proposed by Barr & Tagg (1995) has opened the door to the ways of learning preferred by many Native American students. All students, but especially Native students, can benefit from the adoption of Chickering and Gamson's (1991) seven guidelines for improving undergraduate education—student collaboration, active learning, prompt feedback and opportunities for reflection, time on task, respect for multiple learning styles, and communicating high expectations.

Specific suggestions in the literature for basic writers and specifically minority and American Indian students include informing students about academic “etiquette” (academic literacy) and setting out behavioral norms that will extend beyond orientation/course (Asera, 2006; Dyc, 2002; Landis, 1985). Focusing students on the writing process aids metacognition and addressing analysis skills and conceptualization

of ideas shifts students to thinking about more global aspects of writing (Gregory, 1989; Sawyer, 1988). Providing an audience (Dyc, 1994; Miller Cleary & Peacock, 1998) and allowing opportunities for engaging in advocacy and other authentic writing (Dyc, 1994; Sawyer, 1988) makes writing more personal and meaningful. Incorporating a wide-range of oral, aural, and visual strategies and materials (Archibald, 1990; Dyc, 2002; Gray-Rosendale, Bird, & Bullock, 2003) is beneficial but should not be equated with prescribing to set “Indian” learning styles (Lomawaima, 1995; More, 1987). Particular to writing are Dyc’s (2002) list of strategies for composition instructors that take into consideration the cultural and developmental realities of her Navajo students. These range from the honest presentation of the association between power and essayist literacy, discussion of differences between oral and literate strategies, encouraging different rhetorical styles, use of culturally relevant readings, creating a non-threatening learning environment, and making compensations for students who may not have received cultural teachings.

The Role of Faculty and Feedback on Writing

With respect to writing, the literature presents several areas for potential misunderstandings between faculty and students. High school language arts teachers and college composition teachers have been found to differ in their criteria for feedback and evaluation on student writing (Acker & Halasek, 2008). High school teachers tend to focus on “basic principles” of writing, including minimizing local errors, having a thesis, a clear introduction, paragraphs that support thesis, and a logical conclusion. College

instructors understand good writing more in terms of global features with a rhetorical focus that varies from situation to situation based on the subject, purpose, field of study, and reader's expectations. As a result, students' understanding of the criteria for effective writing could differ from the actual expectations of their instructor. Whether teachers and students share a similar understanding could extend beyond their familiarity with academic writing tasks and rhetorical backgrounds to their cultural backgrounds and personalities, such as degree of self-efficacy, and their belief in the value of aspects of academic writing (Beck, 2006; Petric, 2002). Thus, recent high school graduates in general but especially those with limited college preparatory writing or from cultures that have a historical resistance to writing are less likely to share criteria for successful writing with their college professors than those students from mainstream college preparatory backgrounds. Petric (2002) argues that without finding out about students' attitudes, teachers will have a difficult time dealing with students' responses to instruction. No research was found focusing on how high school teachers on Indian reservations or those serving large Indian student populations evaluate writing. However, Kaulaity's (2007) findings from interviews with Navajo freshmen suggest that reservation schools favor a focus on product in the teaching of writing, rather than the process approach dominant in higher education. Public high school teachers on the Navajo reservation prefer essay-type writing, especially in preparation for standardized tests, and in general "assign" writing rather than provide the needed procedural knowledge. In the current study, descriptions by first-semester freshmen of their

instructors' grading criteria could shed light on any differences between high school and college expectations for writing.

Evaluating writing poses additional challenges. Research on the effectiveness of feedback to improve writing is mixed and depends on the type of feedback and context, including student background (Anderson, Benson, & Lynch, 2001). In their study of EFL college students' attitudes toward and use of feedback, the authors find a division among the types of feedback students expect as well as how well they incorporate recommended changes. One freshman writing instructor suggests that basic writers could benefit more from specific marginal comments on their papers while more general end comments could be more helpful for advanced writers (Berzsenyi, 2001). The author also requires students to respond to her written comments and finds such "dialogues" more effective than uni-directional feedback. Although cultural implications are not included in the article, for American Indian students a conversation about their writing could uncover cultural misunderstandings and resistance to Western rhetorical styles.

Conflicts with respect to writing feedback usually arise around the issue of error correction, primarily those in the areas of grammar and mechanics. Some professors merely take off for errors and expect students to find the mistakes themselves, while others point out errors of specific concern. Instructors sometimes indicate in the margins or in the text itself that an error has been made. Writing instructors use a symbol to categorize the error for easier identification, while some choose to make the correction themselves. While the benefits of error correction are inconclusive and continue to be debated, indirect feedback is recommended for engaging students in cognitive problem-

solving through editing (Ferris, 2004). Furthermore, there is evidence that students can accurately correct their errors with indirect feedback more than 75% of the time (Ferris & Roberts, 2001). In a study with ESL learners, the authors find that students in groups receiving either simple or coded marks for errors are somewhat more successful in their corrections than those who receive no feedback at all. Although basic and Native American writers differ from ESL writers, all these groups could include students who are primarily “ear learners” (i.e. prefer oral over written forms of communication). These students could have acquired incorrect grammar, spelling or nonacademic styles because of their primarily oral acquisition of English (Reid, 1997). While for many Native American students English is their first language, their oral communication style, including dialectical variation, could have provided the foundation for their literacy and could continue to shape the content, structure, and style of their writing. Therefore, a consideration in the present study was the types of feedback on writing instructors provide and how American Indian freshmen react to and use such feedback.

Writing exchanged between students and teachers need not be limited to evaluation. DeAngelis (1996) illustrates how exchanging letters in a college developmental reading and writing course can build a sense of community and collaboration and foster active learning. Suggested activities include an audit in the form of a letter to the instructor every two weeks about progress, concerns and insights in the course and a class anthology with a sample of each student’s writing. In a study with 56 Native American and non-Native college students, Fields (1992) examines the effects of using diary or dialogue journals to facilitate communication among students and

instructor. Analysis of the journal entries based on number of words, number of disclosures, and level of intimacy reveals that overall dialogue journals in which the instructor replies to student entries produce longer entries, more disclosures, and greater intimacy than the diaries. Comparisons among the ethnic groups show no differences in number of words or disclosures, but indicate that Native American students tend to disclose less intimate information. Thus, informal writing opportunities could be one way for faculty to establish a connection with their Native students.

Bharuthram & McKenna (2006) describe the use the drafting-responding process to boost students' academic literacy. Students in a program combining English for academic purposes and a technical degree participated in a writer-respondent project in which they received feedback from an external respondent who provided an audience to draw their attention to the academic norms of writing. Despite issues related to respondents' giving grades as well as feedback, in general, students incorporated comments to improve their drafts. The results for enhancing academic literacy are vague although interpreting and structuring assignments, using discipline-specific terminology, stylistic concerns and using multiple sources, and avoiding plagiarism are included as areas of focus. Building community, fostering active learning, and enhancing an understanding of academic literacy are important for all learners, but especially novice writers.

While faculty-student interactions are essential to the success of student writers, Asera (2006) contends that leadership, extending from faculty to people campus wide is needed to bring about an environment conducive to learning.

Institutional Realm

The Learning Environment and Institutional Support

In the two last decades, research has begun to shift focus from investigating mostly student characteristics, to determining to what extent the values and attitudes promoted by institutions, their environment and degree of openness to diversity, and other characteristics influence American Indian persistence and academic achievement. Until minority enrollment reaches 20%, institutions need to recognize that a positive campus environment is a critical factor in student involvement and success (Richardson, Simmons, & de los Santos, 1987), just as negative aspects of institutional climate can have equally damaging consequences. Based on a survey of 33 colleges and universities serving the largest percentage of Native Americans in the United States, Wells (1989) cites inadequate adjustment to the college environment as one factor that hinders Native American achievement.

Other researchers have asked students about factors hindering their incorporation into the campus. Lin, LaCounte & Eder (1988) collected survey data from 632 college students at a predominantly White college to determine how four factors “present” and “experienced” by students—attitudes toward college education, attitudes toward professors, the perception of campus hostility, and feelings of isolation—affect academic performance and expected graduation. For the American Indians in the sample, the perception of campus hostility and the feeling of isolation was found to contribute significantly, though indirectly, to academic performance. Similarly, Huffman (1991)

used a mixed method study to survey 48 American Indian students and interview 22 regarding their experiences of being an Indian on a predominantly White campus. Although the students did not report any physical aggression, their perceptions of pervasive verbal racism compounded their feelings of isolation and not belonging on campus, and rendered the institution a hostile environment.

Some specific suggestions for institutions that could have positive effects on the overall environment, and thus retention, are increasing minority faculty numbers, fostering faculty cultural awareness as well as involvement and mentoring, adding diversity issues to curricula, developing campus services to meet minority students' needs, offering minority student organizations, and revising culturally biased assessments (Hornett, 1989; Krajewski & Simmons, 1987; Reyhner & Dodd, 1995; Thompson & Thurber, 1999). Meyers (1997) reports on the collective effort of 45 colleges and universities in the United States to highlight the most successful Native American student retention and academic support service models. The list of 10 areas includes social adjustment programs with personal development elements, academic support services, faculty involvement, cultural awareness and visibility on campus, support and research headed by the institution, pre-college preparatory programs, financial aid services, connections to the local community, student groups, and information services. Summer bridge and other mentoring programs for American Indian students have been shown to be effective when they are comprehensive in nature (Landis, 1985; Rankin-Brown & Fitzpatrick, 2007). Giuliano & Sullivan's (2007) summer bridge program and their strategy of "academic wholism" reflects the need to address students' cognitive, social,

and emotional learning needs through rigorous interdisciplinary work, tutoring and counseling services, and a grading contract. In a bridge program, students can become part of a cohort and community and receive additional help, but they could also come to perceive themselves as lacking the skills to do well in college (Gray-Rosendale, Bird, & Bullock, 2003). For this reason, support programs that continue into at least the first if not subsequent years of college and offer a range of services from mentors to childcare are the most beneficial (Rankin-Brown & Fitzpatrick, 2007; Risku, 2002).

While bridge programs, developmental courses and other support services can and do help Native American students transition to college, Kirkness & Barnhardt (2001) argue that programs and services need to be connected to students' aspirations and cultural predispositions to help them begin to "feel at home" and want to stay enrolled. There is some indication that students would like an Indian connection from their courses, programs, the institution, and even the greater community (Komlos, 2005). Kirkness & Barnhardt (2001) advocate for the infusion into the institutional environment of respect for Native peoples, relevance of curriculum, reciprocal relationships in knowledge creation, and responsibility through participation in contributing to the culture of the institution. The institutional environment permeates the whole campus, but students seeking out writing help could encounter a campus micro-climate.

Writing Support Services

The prevalent philosophy behind writing centers today of producing better writers, not better writing, can be traced to Stephen North, hailed the father of writing

center philosophy. In his 1984 work, *The Idea of a Writing Center*, North embraces the tenets of process theory (Rossini, 2002), exemplified by rejection of the writing center as a fix-it shop in favor of a place where students can get help for writing academic discourse while tutors serve as interpreters and guides to foster an atmosphere of validation and collaboration (Beaupre, 2000). In practice focusing on writing as a process rather than a product frequently bans editing and proofreading from tutoring sessions, although this is partly why many students choose to visit the writing center (Chromik, 2002). Ten years after publishing his seminal work, North retracted his idealistic view of writing tutors as “unobtrusive” coaches in realization that students seeking help from tutors wanted a better product. He dealt with this dilemma by contracting his center’s services only to students committed to improving their writing; however, most writing centers are responsible for serving all students and must, therefore, deal with the clash between these philosophies.

Writing centers that make their pedagogical orientations explicit can opt to support both focus on process as well as product, which tends to be met more favorably by the administration and faculty outside of English (Rossini, 2002). The degree to which they blend the two is reflected in their tutor training. The most commonly adapted framework in the literature for orienting tutoring sessions is Reigstad’s typology for conferencing methods: teacher-centered, collaborative (also called structured participation), and student-centered (J. Bell, 2001). In tutor-centered exchanges the tutor controls the content and method of the conference and does much of the work compared to student-centered conferences during which the student controls the session mainly by

asking questions of the tutor. When the focus is collaborative, the two participants work as equals toward a shared outcome. While structured participation may be the preferred approach today, tutors frequently fall back on their inherent authoritative function (J. Bell, 2001; J. H. Bell, 2002). Their perceived roles remain blurred and dependent on instructors, tutees, and tutors themselves (Thonus, 2001). Instructors sometimes expect tutors to act as surrogates or assistants, whom tutees acknowledge as experts but view as less authoritative than teachers. Tutors tend to act more as instructors than peers despite cautions in manuals against doing so, which Bokser (2001) argues is related to their urge to “play professor.” Although “peer” tutoring seemingly implies co-learning, in reality the relationship is more similar to didactic teaching, in which Bokser (2001) perceives an inherent possibility for aggression.

Philosophies and intentions aside, of interest is whether students feel that writing tutors help them improve as writers. In a qualitative study of student satisfaction with writing center services, Carino & Enders (2001) found that frequency of visits by freshmen significantly influenced their confidence as writers and the likelihood to recommend the writing center to others. However, there is evidence that students’ satisfaction with writing tutors can decrease after they have received a grade from their instructor, which potentially reduces the likelihood of students returning (Morrison & Nadeau, 2003). The effectiveness of tutoring has been probed more directly through the analysis of student drafts. There is some evidence that writing conferences are more apt to improve writers (not just papers) when the focus is on instruction rather than correction (J. H. Bell, 2002).

A search for writing centers working in particular with American Indian students did not produce any results. There is considerable literature on writing centers and ESL students, and Thonus (2003) also includes Generation 1.5 students in the discussion. These learners either immigrated at an early age or are the children of immigrants; they likely learned their home language but did not acquire literacy in that language prior to learning to read and write in their second language. They seem to share characteristics of their writing and backgrounds with American Indian students in (1) having faced different sociocultural realities, (2) having experienced marginalization in K12 education, (3) being assigned to developmental English classes in college, (4) having intuitive sense of what sounds right in writing, (5) having difficulty distinguishing between oral and written discourse, and (6) having familiarity but limited comfort with the process approach to writing and rhetorical patterns. Thonus (2003) provides some general principles for working with these learners, which could also be applicable to American Indian students, including affirming their cultural and linguistic heritage, asking students to read their papers aloud, and teaching metalanguage (language to talk about writing). Insights are needed into the characteristics of writing center services and tutors available to Native American students, the degree to which students are accessing these resources, and how their experiences factor into their overall writing experiences.

Conclusion

This review of related literature offers a summary of research of personal (cognitive, behavioral, cultural) and environmental (instructional, institutional) factors relevant to the experiences of Native American college writers. Literature on basic writers and ESL students was included to highlight similarities in needs and experiences with Native writers. I addressed indigenous philosophical, intellectual, axiological, and linguistic considerations to provide a context for the cultural backgrounds that Native students bring with them to Western education. Current best practices for supporting the learning of American Indian students in general and with respect to writing were also incorporated.

Limited literature is available describing the academic writing of American Indians and no model exists to explain the factors influencing their experiences and success. Therefore, I resolved to gather data necessary to construct a theory to explain how students' writing experiences influence their attitudes toward writing and their perceptions of themselves as writers, how their educational backgrounds and existing attitudes toward writing influence their experiences and what aspects of their experiences contribute to their success as writers. In the subsequent chapter, I present an exploration of the methodology I used to gather these data.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore Native American students' experiences with writing in the first year of college at a public research university and two tribal colleges, exploring in particular what influences their level of success as writers.

Using the literature review in Chapter 2, I created a conceptual framework based on my inventory of factors possibly contributing to students' experiences and organized them into the following categories: (a) student, (b) extended-circle (family, home, community, friends), (c) course, and (d) institution. This organization was helpful during coding and the initial phases of analysis until theme-based categories began to emerge. I focused the study to explore how Native American students described their academic writing experiences in their first year of college. Specifically, I extended my inquiry to (1) how students' educational backgrounds and existing attitudes toward writing influenced their writing experiences in college, (2) how their writing experiences influenced their attitudes toward writing and their perceptions of themselves as writers, (3) what actions and inactions of students influenced their level of success as writers, (4) and what actions and inactions of faculty, tutors and other individuals in students'

courses, at the institution, and in their extended circle contributed to students' level of success as writers.

Research Design

From the qualitative paradigm, I applied a grounded theory research design to develop a model to understand what contributes to students' overall academic writing experiences, including those that support their success. I situated the study in the natural setting of the participants with a holistic focus on their perspectives and voices, while reflecting on my assumptions as researcher that were distorting my "lens." Furthermore, I allowed the study's design to emerge through my use of multiple sources of data and rigorous and recursive analysis (Creswell, 2007). In the vein of grounded theory, I generated ideas through research in such a way as to ground analysis and results in the data collected from participants. I accomplished this by "keeping an open mind, rooting categories in the data being analyzed, seeking the underlying logic of apparently disparate events, recognizing causal inferences at work through categorizations, and checking, revising, and amplifying techniques to evaluate evidence and explore connections between categories" (Dey, 2007, p. 188). I followed the process of classical grounded theory as presented by Holton (2007), including open and selective coding, theoretical sampling, and the constant comparative method of analysis.

Context of the Study

Mainstream institutions and tribal colleges offer numerous advantages and disadvantages for serving the postsecondary education needs of American Indians. The large size of universities can be offset by special programs and services, including bridge programs, Native American Studies programs, leadership training, Indian clubs, assessment and advising, workshops, scholarships, financial aid, and off-campus learning centers (Pavel & Colby, 1992). Tribal colleges may offer fewer services and have access to limited resources in general compared to mainstream institutions, but they are the only colleges in the world to support and teach the curricula, cultures, and languages of their Indian nations (Stein, 1999). This is especially important if—as it has been argued—low achievement of Native students across all levels of education is due to externally developed and imposed curricula by members of the dominant society that do not address the educational needs of Native people (Lomawaima, 1995).

Given the role of environment in college experiences and the fact that different types of students are more likely to attend different types of institutions, I sampled self-identified Native American students from both tribal colleges and a four-year public research university in the Mountain West region of the United States. Although these institutions cannot represent the wide array of experiences students may have at other types of institutions, their greatly differing missions, size, and other characteristics helped capture the diversity of students and their experiences.

I selected the public research university for several reasons. First, the president of the institution had expressed a goal to become the university of choice in the state for Native American students and the institution attracts students with diverse cultural backgrounds and tribal affiliations. Second, several academic programs offer additional services to help American Indian students meet academic and financial challenges and find a “home-away-from home” on campus (Rankin-Brown & Fitzpatrick, 2007). Finally, I had taught at the institution for several years and had buy-in from student support personnel working with American Indian students, and thus, access to a sufficient participant base.

In order to capture the heterogeneity of the Native American student population in terms of tribal affiliation, degree of traditionalism (here limited to the number of speakers of a tribe’s Native language), and degree aspirations (in terms of whether the institution offers associate and/or baccalaureate degrees), I collected data from two tribally controlled colleges in addition to the public university. In general, the goal was to select colleges for the study that were more different than similar to the mainstream institution. For deciding the top choices from the seven tribal colleges in the state, I considered the following criteria: (1) no degrees offered higher than the associate’s degree, (2) rural location (no city larger than 10,000 within 1 hour radius), (3) small (less than 500) student body, (4) degree of tribal traditionalism (extent to which the Native language is spoken), and (5) proximity to the researcher’s hometown. Table 3.1 shows how the tribal colleges in the state meet the criteria of size and tribal traditionalism.

Table 3.1. Selection criteria for tribal colleges

Institution	< 500 student body (%NA)*	# of Speakers of Native Language(s)
A	467 (94.6% NA)	500-600
B	359 (79.4% NA)	1700
C	161 (91.9% NA)	12
D	441 (83.7% NA)	limited
E	312 (92.9% NA)	6200
F	1092 (79.3% NA)	56; 102
G	397 (93.2% NA)	limited

* (Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics, 2008)

Given the data, institution B was the first choice, followed by A and E. I had previously visited institutions B and E on a student recruitment trip and made initial contacts for inquiring about an interest in participating in this study. Thus, I pursued those leads, explaining the purpose and scope of the study and how the institution would benefit. After receiving confirmation of interest, I prepared a Memorandum of Understanding between my research institution and each of the participating tribal colleges, explaining the roles and responsibilities of each party. The President's Council at each institution agreed to participate in the study, with the institution B giving official consent in September 2009 and institution E in January 2010. Letters of support from each college were sent to the Institutional Review Board at the research institution. I refer to institution B will be referred to as TC1 (Tribal College 1) and institution E as TC2 (Tribal College 2) in the rest of this document.

Participants

I limited participants in the study to first-year college students given that the

highest rates of attrition are in the first year. Additionally, college experiences and academic success in the freshman year have been cited as important predictors of persistence for mainstream as well as Native American students (Thompson & Thurber, 1999). I targeted first-time college attendees but also considered those who had stopped or dropped out but were still in first-year academic standing.

The criterion method was used for selection of student participants (Creswell, 2007). Participants had to meet the following criteria: (a) be first-year students (either in first or second semester), (b) self-identify as Native American (American Indian or Alaska Native), (c) be enrolled in at least one English composition “course” (including developmental writing), and (d) be enrolled in at least one other course requiring writing (something other than a math course). I communicated this information to my liaison at each institution to help with the pre-selection process. For the university and TC1 students, I received enrollment data for all first-year Native American students and could, therefore, sort the students by gender, tribal affiliation, and types of courses they had taken their first semester and were taking their second semester. Based on this information, I ranked the students to come up with the most diverse group as possible. The respective liaison at each institution contacted each prospective participant by telephone, informed them of the study and inquired about their interest. This reiterative process of ranking and contacting students continued until a minimum of 10 students at the university and 8 at the tribal college had consented to participate. At TC2, I was not provided a list of students beforehand; rather, interested first-year students enrolled in a composition course were scheduled to meet me during one of the three days of my visit.

A total of ten university students participated in the study, with eight completing both interviews. Five students from TC1 participated, with two completing both interviews. Four students from TC2 participated in one interview. Eleven males and eight females participated ranging in age from 18 to +40, with 6 non-traditional-aged students. Their majors of study included General Studies, Liberal Arts, Information Systems, Business, Education, Engineering, Nursing and other biological and physical sciences. They represented eight different American Indian and Alaskan Native tribal affiliations.

For the purposes of triangulating data from the student participants, I conducted one-on-one interviews with faculty and academic support staff with knowledge of writing services for students. These included individuals at the university recommended by students as being able to provide insights into their writing experiences, as well as others I identified, such as course coordinators. Given the small number of writing faculty at the tribal colleges, I made an attempt to interview all of them as well as writing-related academic support staff. At the university, I conducted interviews with eleven faculty from five different disciplines in the sciences as well as the humanities. Their positions ranged from tenure-track faculty to graduate teaching assistants with some serving a dual role as course coordinator, Writing Center staff, academic advisor, or tutor. At both TC1 and TC2, I interviewed two faculty and one academic support person. Faculty were primarily composition instructors but also taught a variety of other classes in the communications and humanities. Because of the dual roles of some faculty and the limited number of staff, all non-student participants in the study will be referred to by the general term faculty.

Data Collection Procedures

Typically, grounded theory employs the use of in-depth interviews with participants who have experience with the phenomenon being studied and are willing to share their insights with the researcher (Creswell, 2007). As the primary data collection method, I conducted one to two semi-structured interviews with participants at different times in the academic term. I centered interview questions around three types of qualitative inquiry: influence of social context, meaning of events/activities, and the process by which these occur (Maxwell, 2005) (See Data Collection Matrix in Appendix B) and linked them to the study's research questions (See Table of Specifications in Appendix C). I employed a common interview procedure and sets of questions (See Appendices D-H), while also allowing and even encouraging respondents to speak tangentially to make connections and bring new ideas to light. I developed the questions for the second interviews from results of the analysis of data collected at the four-year institution to take into account emerging themes. In addition, I created a long form of the initial student interview to account for participants I knew I could only interview on one occasion. I also made slight modifications to the writing center administrator protocol to take into account the unique programs and positions of staff I interviewed at the tribal colleges.

I piloted the initial interview protocol with two Native American students pursuing their graduate degrees and made minor revisions based on their suggestions and ability of the questions and tasks to produce useful data. Three separate applications

requesting exemption from review were submitted to the university Institutional Review Board for the three phases of the study at the different sites. The instruments and the student and faculty/staff informed consent forms (See Appendix I) were submitted along with the applications. Phase I entailed research at the four-year institution and the exemption for review was received in February 2009. The exemptions for phase II at TC1 was received in September 2009 and for phase III at TC2 in January 2010.

Other instrumentation included a self-portrait as an academic writer, a flow-chart activity for completing writing assignments (See Appendix J), consisting of a selection of planning and writing strategies identified by students in a pilot study and in the literature on metacognition in writing (Sitko, 1998). Additionally, I asked participants for samples of their graded writing assignments, faculty for copies of their course syllabi and assignment sheets, and from tutoring service coordinators, their tutor training materials. However, I did not receive this information from all tribal college students and faculty. The graded assignments were most important in helping participants reflect on their writing experiences, but I also analyzed them for instructor feedback and evidence of the influence of oral language. The materials from the faculty provided avenues of inquiry during the interviews and contextual support afterward.

Creswell (2007) points out that gaining access to a research site can be aided through the support of a “gatekeeper” or “key informant.” This was particularly important for finding participants and collecting data at the tribal colleges. In anticipation, I consulted with American Indian academic support personnel working at the university with connections to the tribal colleges and they identified key contacts who

could help in obtaining support for the study, and potentially also serve as cultural informants to advise me on etiquette and review data collection instruments. With the goal of meeting tribal college administrators and communicating my seriousness and dedication, in the semester prior to my study I accompanied representatives from the mainstream university on organized recruiting trips to the two tribal colleges targeted for participation. I was successful at the first institution in meeting with a key administrator and being given an important contact, also conducting research there. My meeting at the second institution was brief but allowed the administrator to put a face to my name. Since I had previously collected data at the university and had buy-in for the current study from student service staff working with the Native American student body, I did not find the recruitment of participants to be as challenging as at the tribal colleges.

In addition to gaining support from student support personnel, administrators, and tribal governments as needed at the various institutions, I also gained formal consent from all participants through the use of an informed consent form (See Appendix I). Participants had the option of providing a pseudonym for me to be able to protect their anonymity or to use their real name to be acknowledged for their participation.

Once institutional gatekeepers had provided a list of names, emails, and phone numbers for the students interested in participating, I sent each one an email introducing myself and the study and included a copy of the informed consent. I also called students at TC1, so that they could hear my voice to make the initial contact more personal. Since I did not receive any preliminary list from TC2, I was not able to contact students beforehand. I coordinated the scheduling of my interviews with the university students

but the liaison at the TC1 performed this task on my behalf. A few days before the scheduled interview, I reminded participants via email and sometimes also phone of our meeting, confirming the time and location, and reminding them to bring a graded writing assignment with them. To the same end, the liaison at TC1 mailed letters to the students' homes.

I allotted 75 minutes for the first individual interviews and for the most part that allotted time was sufficient. The follow-up interview averaged around 45 minutes. For faculty and other non-student interviews I scheduled 60 minutes, but they usually lasted closer to 75 minutes.

My plan had been to distribute the in-depth interviews at the beginning and near the end of the semester with week-long visits to each campus to better capture any changes in students' experiences and perceptions. However, obtaining institutional and IRB consents and scheduling participants took longer than anticipated. Therefore, at the university, there were only five weeks between the first and second interview. At TC1, however, I interviewed students in different semesters. Regardless of when I collected the data, students were able to reflect back on their first semester of college and share any perceived changes. Second-semester interviews provided greater insight into changes in students' development and confidence as an academic writer.

To collect the data from the interviews, I used a digital recorder to record the one-on-one interviews in their entirety. I also took notes of key comments and ideas for follow-up. I began the interviews on an informal note. My goal was to build a sense of trust by reminding them of the purpose of the study, the importance of their role, and

encouraging them to ask questions. I refrained from giving advice, criticism or otherwise providing my own viewpoints unless the students directly asked. Participants read and signed the consent form and kept a copy for themselves, which also had my contact information. I followed the corresponding interview protocol for students and faculty. At the close of the interview, I thanked participants and inform them of the steps to follow. I also took time to answer any questions they had and reminded them of my offer of helping them with any writing assignments they had. Both at the university and TC1, I met with one student as per their request to give feedback or ideas on their writing.

Immediately following each interview, I completed my notes and added reflective comments regarding anything that stood out from the student's behavior or comments. I downloaded the file to my laptop as soon as possible for back-up purposes. I completed transcriptions of the interviews prior to conducting any follow-up interviews. I transcribed all the student participant interviews and those at the tribal colleges, but received the assistance of a transcriptionist on the university faculty interviews. The transcriptions were verbatim and not in summarized or abbreviated form. I kept the original audio files until the research was finished because a few times I did need to listen to an exchange when the transcription did not fully capture the tone.

As per Lincoln and Guba (1985), I adopted a naturalistic approach to establish "credibility" of data collection, analysis, and interpretation to ensure that the multiple realities that emerged from the study were adequate representations and that the means of arriving at them were also deemed credible to the participants. Triangulation through my incorporation of varied sources of data (student interviews, faculty and staff interviews,

student writing assignments, student descriptions of their writing process, etc.) served this end. Furthermore, I employed the constant comparative method and member checking to help corroborate data analysis and conclusions. Theoretical sampling of participants and exploration of potential factors and experiences also supported my efforts to achieve overall “trustworthiness” of the data. During the first phase of analysis, I gave or sent participants summary/interpretations of the main themes from our interview and requested clarification as needed and confirmation that I had not misinterpreted anything. Additionally, I was vigilant in identifying and analyzing discrepant data and reflecting on potential threats to validity.

Data Storage

Upon obtaining data, I made back-up copies of all electronic files. I also created files for printed documents, categorizing them by participant’s institution. I developed a master list of information and updated it throughout the data collection process, including when I requested and received a response to member-checking. I stored all files in a secure location to prevent unauthorized access.

Data Analysis

After transcribing verbatim audiotaped data, I input the files into the QSR NVivo 8 software program to aid organization, coding, and analysis. The realms of influence from my conceptual framework, (1) student, (2) extended circle, (3) course, and (4) institution, constituted the free nodes (open categories) in the NVivo coding structure,

and the research questions informed the initial tree nodes (hierarchical categories). Using the constant comparative method helped me identify new potential areas of inquiry, which became additional tree nodes. I followed the coding process described by Holton (2007) for classic grounded theory methodology. The recursive process of coding and analysis entailed three phases: (1) open and later selective coding of the data to allow core categories and concepts to emerge (collectively called *substantive coding*), (2) theoretical sampling and selective coding of data to achieve saturation of concepts through constant comparison of indicators in the data to reveal each code's properties and dimensions (called *theoretical coding*), and (3) exploring how the emerging categories fit together and suggest a hypothesis about relationships between concepts that in turn potentially explain the social behavior under study.

Through the process of substantive coding and applying free and tree nodes to the student transcripts, I broke the data into fragments for analysis. I attributed as many codes to the transcript sections as applicable to capture the complexity of the data and be able to analyze the fragments from different perspectives. Some areas of inquiry were quite complex, such as students' writing process, degree of cultural traditionalism, and degree of experience as a college writer. Thus, I created spreadsheets in Excel to help organize and analyze the data. These questions guided me in this phase: What are the main messages of the participants?, What are the data indicating?, and What conceptual category would best define this fragment? I complemented my coding with conceptual memoing within NVivo of my reflections on themes that seemed to be emerging or

directions to take with a certain area of inquiry, for example, how I define academic writing and how that compares with participants' definitions.

In the theoretical coding phase, I ran NVivo coding queries to filter the data and narrow my focus or group related categories to look for patterns. I analyzed some categories for the data collected at the public research institution prior to conducting follow-up interviews or collecting data at the tribal colleges. Hence, I had the possibility to adjust the research instruments to ensure that I addressed topics related to emerging themes. In continuation of this process of constant comparison, I compared new data from tribal college student participants with previously analyzed data to capture all the different ways in which participants described an aspect of their experience with writing. However, I could not be sure that incidents in the data had reached interchangeability and that no new ones would emerge had I been able to interview more students. Nevertheless, later in coding and analyzing the faculty interviews, I tested the relevance and thoroughness of the emerging themes and expanded one theme in light of strong evidence from the additional data. I searched for similarities and differences among emerging categories to discover redundancies and whether they best illustrated the concepts informed by the data (Holton, 2007). These questions guided me in this phase: Are new incidents still emerging? What additional data do I still need to collect and from what sources? What are the core conceptual categories that are emerging? Do these categories fit well with the data indicated by the various codes? Which categories could be merged or redefined?

To enable hypothesis building, I had to shift my focus from looking for results to recognizing findings. Initially my analysis was organized around the coding queries I had created to understand aspects of participants' experiences with writing, for example, how they viewed feedback or what strategies they engaged in as part of their writing process. I had to put aside the answers to such questions and identify what I had learned overall about students' experiences and factors influencing them. In this way, key findings emerged, weaving results from the previous categories into overarching themes. For example, aspects of student writing process appeared in discussions of Native culture and use of resources, and feedback was discussed separately for its effectiveness as well as influence on confidence and improvement in writing. Data that did not fit under the final ten themes were not included in the results to maintain focus on the most relevant and revealing findings. Finally, a theoretical model to explain the factors influencing Native American students' academic writing experiences was developed from the findings. This model is presented later in chapter five.

Conclusion

This study investigated the academic writing experiences of Native American students. The chosen focus was first-year students at two types of institutions—a four-year public research university and two tribally controlled colleges—as there are differences in not only these types of institutions but also the students who choose to attend them. Incoming students are of particular interest given the high rates of attrition in the first year. I developed a theory by capturing the experiences of students through in-

depth semi-structured interviews during one academic year. I worked within the processes of grounded theory delineated by Holton (2007), namely substantive and theoretical coding and conceptual memoing. In an effort to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the data and analysis, I employed peer reviews of the instruments, member checking, and reflexivity.

Greater attention is needed to determine how American Indian students experience college and perceive writing and themselves as academic writers. This study adds to the body of literature on writing experiences of Native American students in college and in particular draws attention to what influences their actions, inactions, and academic performance as well as what resources and strategies they employ to be successful writers.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore Native American students' experiences with writing in the first year of college at a public research university and two tribal colleges, investigating in particular what helped them succeed as writers. The study was guided by the following primary question: *How do Native American students describe their academic writing experiences in their first year of college?* These additional questions further defined the direction of the study:

1. How do students' educational backgrounds and existing attitudes toward writing influence their writing experiences in college?
2. How do their writing experiences influence their attitudes toward writing and their perceptions of themselves as writers?
3. What actions and inactions of students influence their level of success as writers?
4. What actions and inactions of faculty, tutors, and other individuals in the students' courses, at the institution, and in their extended circle contribute to students' level of success as writers?

Participants

A total of 19 students took part in this study. The participants were nearly evenly divided between university and tribal college students, with 10 university students and 9 tribal college students. The tribal college students attended one of two institutions, with 5 at TC1 and 4 at TC2. Eleven males and 8 females participated ranging in age from 18 to +40, with 6 non-traditional-aged students. They varied in their degree of ability to speak their Native language as well as how culturally traditional they identified themselves to be. All were interviewed in either their first, second or both semesters of their first year in college, and were enrolled in or had taken at least one composition course at the time of their interviews.

The short descriptions below of each participant include quotes from their interview that best illustrate who they are as writers. These are followed by Table 4.1, which provides an overview of some writing and cultural characteristics of the participants.

University Students

- *Autumn* does not like writing and does not think her writing has changed much her first year of college. She perceives that expectations for academic writing are subjective and depend mostly on instructors' personal preferences, "They have all the basic, their criteria, what they want and then everybody knows how to write it's just how you want to put it into academic writing with each teacher it's different."

- *Danielle* has never been strong in writing, but she uses feedback to improve one aspect and paper at a time, “I think this English course helped me in the sense to go back and look at work and stuff and analyze your own work and re-organize paragraphs and stuff like that, to know that you can do it. It takes time, but it will help out in the long run.”
- *Dawn* enjoys the challenge of academic writing, for example, not being able to use first person pronouns. She feels her writing is stronger if she uses outside sources rather than personal experience to back up her ideas. At the end of her first year she has learned what she needs to do to be successful as a writer, “For me as a writer to write a really good paper, I need time and to be able to revise things.”
- *Jane* is a strong writer and has been challenged the most in writing lab reports and learning APA style. Overall, she describes her development in writing as gradual because of limited opportunities to write given her coursework, “I probably progressed as a writer this semester but not as rapidly as I would have liked.”
- *Juan* has an easy time expressing his ideas and wants his writing to be interesting for his audience. He has learned that his ability to make connections in his writing is a strength in academic writing, “I can think crazy. I can relate stuff that probably other people don’t think it’s connected to but it really is...like I use mountain lions and jaguars in this paper about evolution. And how their coats are different colors...”

- *Kyle* finds that writing comes fairly easily. He is aware of what good college writers do and that it is an important skill, “A lot of classes revolve around writing and expressing yourself in some sort of way.” He is most challenged by writing for his business course.
- *Quincy* finds at the end of his first year that he still has “a lot to learn” about writing but he also feels more able to meet word count requirements and identifies ways to motivate himself when a topic lacks interest, “I need to quit being stubborn when it comes to writing papers and just do it I guess... I guess I can try to set a reward for myself.”
- *Robert* is not yet sure what it takes to be a successful writer in college. He enjoys writing but also realizes he has a lot to learn, “Some people who have been in school for a while and I read their paper and I’m like, “wooooph! That’s nothing compared to mine.”
- *Samuel* likes personal writing but is frustrated with academic expectations, “I just don’t enjoy that English class or writing at all, especially academic writing...I enjoy writing stories and stuff like that and poems. That’s because there’s less rules to that I guess.”
- *Will* identifies more as a math person; nevertheless, he does well on writing assignments and even enjoys them sometimes. In general though, writing does not appeal to him and he just focuses on getting the work done, “[N]o one really tells me that I am a terrible writer and nobody tells me that I am a great writer. No one

really says anything I just...push myself and the feeling that I don't like writing so I just try to get it done."

Tribal College Students

- *Albert* has written two books he would like to get published but has realized that his writing skills need work first because his ideas may not be as clear to his readers as they are to him, "the idea of what I am writing is easy to put down but to actually make it readable for somebody else is where I am lost."
- *Courtney* generally likes to write and is confident in her abilities, "English has always been one of my favorite subjects and there was a lot that I did and a lot that I went through and experienced over the years that made me a good writer." However, she had not completed any writing assignments at the time of the interview, so her experiences were limited.
- *Dieter* is fairly confident as a writer and uses writing to help him learn by summarizing his reading assignments, "[W]hen I read something, I always have to write it down because I remember it like in my own words." Second semester writing is more challenging for him, but he also sees himself as more aware of different ways of writing academically.
- *Ed* has never liked English because of the focus on grammar and now the need to type papers makes the task unpleasant. Nevertheless, his ideas flow easily and he has a good grasp of what academic writing entails, "[A]ctually doing the writing

and all that, that's fairly easy...It's doing all the ground work, the footwork, the note cards and citing your sources and making sure it's all in the correct style and everything, now that's where to me where the work is."

- *Ellsworth* does not feel confident in knowing how to complete his writing assignments and does not understand what he needs to do to revise his papers. He does not see how being a song writer is compatible with being an academic writer; he feels he can only be one or the other, "I can just try to stop writing music and try to start writing what we have to write about."
- *Jessica* starts off not seeing herself as much of a writer or knowing much about academic writing, but by the end of her first year she is the expert helping her classmates and feels more confident in being able to complete assignments, [B]efore [college]...I really didn't do any writing...[but] I learned that like if I put my mind on something I'll get it done."
- *Lionel* feels bitter and confused about writing on one hand but on the other hand seems to have no trouble writing research papers and essays, "College Writing...the stuff is not really hard to comprehend." The key to his success is his ability to connect with a topic and infuse his personal experience.
- *Shanelle* loves to write poetry and this colors her perception of all writing, "There's actually different types of writing that I like. I can't just basically pick one but I just like writing." She says she understands what academic writing entails and dropped her composition course because it was a repeat of high

school. However, most of her discussion of writing centers around creative or personal writing.

- *Victoria* is fairly confident as a writer. She has had limited experiences with college writing, but seems aware of her process and in what areas she needs to improve, like staying on topic and using punctuation, “I’ll write about something I shouldn’t even be [including] and I’ll look back and...that’s when I’ll notice, it’s like pretty much a run-on sentence.”

Table 4.1 provides an overview of the students’ writing abilities, degree to which they comprehend and/or speak their Native language, and how culturally traditional they identified. Participants’ writing abilities were categorized as experienced, moderately experienced, somewhat experienced, and not experienced in college writing based on several factors: (a) placement in college composition courses, (b) self reported confidence as an academic writer, (c) amount of academic writing literacy, (d) number of effective writing strategies generally used, (e) self reported enjoyment of academic writing, and (f) engagement in non-academic/personal writing.

Table 4.1. Participant writing and cultural profiles

Student	Degree of Experience with Academic Writing	Degree of Bilingualism	Culturally Traditional
Albert	Moderately	none	fairly
Autumn	Somewhat	comprehends some	fairly
Courtney	Somewhat	comprehends it but doesn't speak it	less
Danielle	Moderately	knows few words	fairly
Dawn	Moderately	comprehends a little	very
Dieter	Moderately	comprehends some	less
Ed	Moderately	none	very
Ellsworth	Not experienced	comprehends some	less
Jane	Experienced	knows few words	somewhat
Jessica	Moderately	fairly bilingual	less
Juan	Experienced	fairly bilingual	very
Kyle	Experienced	comprehends some	fairly
Lionel	Moderately	comprehends gist & speaks some	somewhat
Quincy	Moderately	none	somewhat
Robert	Not experienced	bilingual	very
Samuel	Somewhat	comprehends gist	fairly
Shanelle	Somewhat	fairly bilingual	somewhat
Victoria	Experienced	comprehends some	less
Will	Experienced	none	somewhat

Overall Student Experiences

The results for overall student experiences are organized along ten themes that emerged during data analysis. For each theme, the results for all participants across the three institutions are presented in aggregate form. The focus is on the shared experiences of the students, although differences among them naturally exist.

The first theme, **Definition of Success**, sets the stage for discussing a model of success by presenting the different ways in which participants defined being a successful writer. Secondly, a glimpse into participants' **Preparation for College Writing** provides

an understanding of their educational background and existing attitudes toward writing as incoming college students. Thirdly, the theme of **Self-Concept and Identity** delves into the connections between confidence, perceptions of self and becoming an academic writer. The fourth theme describes the role of **Academic Writing Literacy** in this process. The next three themes focus on experiences related to coursework, specifically the relationship between **Feedback and Self-Concept**, the **Effectiveness of Feedback**, and issues around **Facilitating Revision**. The eighth theme captures the types of **Writing Resources** students use outside of the class. Finally, the last two themes present the ways in which students' **Native Communities**, in terms of their extended circle of friends and family, and aspects of their **Native Culture** influence their writing experiences and success. An overview of each theme appears in italics under each heading. I present an analysis of the results for between-college experiences, comparing findings for tribal colleges and the university, after describing the main themes.

Theme 1: Definition of Success

Being successful as a college writer was defined in different ways and did not always reflect mainstream academic goals.

A main focus of this research was concerned with the factors influencing students' success as college writers. Thus, how student and faculty participants described goals and envisioned success was targeted as part of the analysis.

Faculty discussed student success in writing in the context of overall academic outcomes. Many recognized that the role of poverty and financial issues, family

obligations, distance of college from home (even on reservation) and other personal issues could not be discounted in discussions of student success. These influenced attendance and completion of assignments, which in turn were reflected in grades and persistence. Faculty and students alike mentioned the role of adjusting to college expectations, especially in needing to become an independent learner and managing one's time and writing assignments. Having a concrete goal or vision for attending college also influenced students' likelihood of success. Helping students be successful at a tribal college reportedly involved more hand-holding, encouragement, and understanding individual circumstances and needs of students, although this seemed also to be true for developmental writing courses at the university.

In terms of writing, an underlying goal was getting students to claim academic writing as a valuable skill to work toward acquiring. Naturally, faculty wanted students to grasp aspects of academic writing and demonstrate writing at college level regardless of discipline. In addition, success in writing for some instructors included students' discovery and ownership of their writing process and learning what conditions were necessary for them to be able to write.

The data revealed that some participants were beginning to gain an understanding of expectations for academic writing, while others preferred to view success in light of their relationships with others. Seventeen out of the nineteen students described how they envisioned a successful college writer. Seven of the participants described sometimes multiple aspects of the writing process that they felt were important to do: spending time thinking, analyzing and making connections, easily coming up with topics, clearly

expressing ideas, organizing well, following grammar and other writing conventions, having a strong voice, revising and writing multiple drafts. One of these students discerned the simple truth behind the effectiveness of drafting, “a good writer spends time with what they do” (Will). One student offered that good writers were confident in their ideas. Other ways in which students (two from the sample) thought they could become better writers was by reading more, especially challenging material from expert writers. Six faculty participants also discussed the role of reading in developing writing skills and/or ideas for writing. Five of the students mentioned the interest and enjoyment that they would expect something well written to create for the reader, which some specified would be influenced by the writer’s word choice and ability to paint a picture in the reader’s mind. One of these students included in her description of good writing, the use of a strategy she learned in her composition class, “I think it would have to have a very good hook and be very interesting. I think when they capture your attention, that’s a good writer cuz that’s what they’re supposed to do” (Dawn). This indicates how elements of academic writing can be incorporated by novice writers into their existing schema of good writing.

Some definitions of success stemmed from how people in the students’ academic or personal life responded to their writing or them as writers. Two participants in the group preferred to define their own success based on feedback from their instructors. Having their writing be noticed and receive a compliment was a greater indicator of success than just receiving a high mark, “I really want...[to hear that]...something about what I wrote grabbed a hold of them” (Albert). Another pair described ways in which

good writers use their work to help others. One reflected on how Sherman Alexie has influenced his tribe and perhaps encouraged his people to attend college and become better writers. The other hoped to work for the tribe using his writing skills after getting his degree or just to help others write their personal story. He also added that if someone helps him improve as a writer, then that person would be a successful writer as a result. Finally, one of the more confident writers added in his second interview, “you still should be wanting to learn and that’s like a definition of a successful writer” (Juan).

Five of the participants discussed to what extent they identified with their descriptions of a successful college writer. Only one student recognized in himself the same characteristics as he had attributed to a good writer. Another felt satisfied overall with her work if she allowed sufficient time and effort to complete it. A third was proud of her ability to infuse her personality and passion into her writing, especially if given a topic of interest. Finally, two participants recognized either improvement or potential in their writing in moving toward becoming a successful college writer.

Discussions with these first-year students about their writing goals also revealed how they personally defined success. Five out of seven participants mentioned earning a specific grade, from passing with a C or achieving an A for the first time in a long time. One of these students explained that she did not set high standards for herself in her composition course as she did in other courses because she did not want to disappoint herself. Nevertheless, having gained more experience by the end of the semester she felt ready to raise her standards as she approached her goal of producing a good essay, “I think I am moving toward that goal like every paper I write” (Danielle). This sentiment

may be common of first-year students who, according to one faculty member tend to have lower expectations for themselves, such as having earned a passing grade as a goal, until with positive experiences they realize they can aim higher. Another student also shared the goal of writing a good essay, which for him had less to do with writing standards than being satisfied and proud of his work. Finally, success for a tribal college student in her second semester was being able to help her friends in her writing class. Having taken the first part of the course the previous semester, she was already familiar with the assignments and became the expert to whom her classmates turned for guidance. Thus, goals and ideas of success for these participants range from concrete academic expectations, such as achieving a grade or following standards of writing, to more affective and socially-driven motivations, such as making a positive impact and helping others.

Four participants, two of whom were in their first semester, were unsure of what a successful college writer would look like. Three offered examples from the professional publishing world, such as novelists, sports writers and journalists. The fourth student, who had dropped her composition course, provided the following explanation for her uncertainty, “I can’t say cuz I really...I never knew anybody that majored in writing or was successful in it. Cuz my family never was big on writing” (Shanelle). A limited exposure to college writing at the time of their interview probably contributed to these participants’ lack of awareness. Their prior experiences in high school or elsewhere could also have influenced their associations of success and writing. Hence, some faculty participants expressed a need to provide opportunities for success for students with

histories of failure in academics and writing. This could involve refraining from making assumptions of what students should know, providing positive reinforcements and rewards, and honoring achievement by submitting culturally relevant writing for publication in local newspapers but also respecting students' preferences to receive praise in private rather than in front of their peers. Of equal importance would be having a conversation with students about their unrealistic expectations, such as wanting to succeed without any help, or misconceptions about writing, such as believing that needing to revise signifies failure. Finally, a faculty member pointed out the conflict between the institutional view of success as retention and students' openness to stopping out from their studies and returning when they gain more confidence.

Theme 2: Preparation for College Writing

While participants' prior educational backgrounds could not account for the complexity and diversity of their experiences, they influenced their initial sense of preparation for college writing.

While the focus of this study is Native American students' experiences with writing in their first year of college, how they perceived their academic preparation deserves brief mention. Four of the participants, all enrolled at one of the two tribal colleges, received GEDs. Three of these four attended high school through some of their senior year, while the fourth finished some of eighth grade. Five individuals, all enrolled at a tribal college, attended multiple high schools with one student switching schools eight times. Incidentally, two participants attended the same high school and were in

many of the same classes but demonstrated different attitudes toward writing. Thus, incoming students' prior educational backgrounds cannot account for the complexity and diversity of students' experiences, but as illustrated below they influence participants' initial sense of preparation for college writing.

In addition to attending different secondary schools, the participants were also placed in varying levels of English. Three students, all enrolled at the four-year university, had taken at least one year of honors or Advanced Placement English in high school, and another student at the same institution indicated having been placed in the lowest English course senior year. The three students in advanced English reported having extensive writing in their classes:

The main thing was that in AP English we were writing like 2-3 papers a week and so she just hammered us. And she gave us a lot of feedback. We did a lot of work in a book called the Bedford Reader which was to help our analytical....like figuring out what is going on in a story... and so we were writing an insane amount...She was very hard on us but it helped out a lot. (Will)

Nevertheless, only one of these students in honors English rated being highly prepared for college writing. Only three out of fifteen participants rated their academic preparation as low, but five were either unsure, had mixed feelings or were overall intimidated by college. However, most of these students could identify the areas of writing that were new for them in college or that they needed to practice more. The most frequently

mentioned² aspect of academic writing that participants felt they were not prepared for was using the APA or MLA style and citing sources:

I don't think [high school] prepared me at all. Cuz I came into college writing and they were just like, "oh just write this paper and read this" just like in high school and I did it and I turned in the paper and they were like, "oh now, it needs to be this style." Like we were never taught MLL or... (Dawn).

Other weak areas included grammar, punctuation, and organization. A few students at the four-year institution wished they could get help with grammar and mechanics. One such student recognized that they were expected to have learned these skills before college:

I feel like I need to learn a little more about [punctuation and grammar] conventions. It seems like something you would learn in middle school or elementary school, these basic things but we really didn't put that emphasis on all of those things...I don't know [where I would learn that now] because they don't really teach it here. I think that's something they assume that you already know from lower education (Jane).

Conversations with faculty and staff at the three institutions confirmed that students' degree of preparation for college writing was influenced by prior schooling. A faculty member at the university who has taught many Native American students over the years, explained that how prepared students were academically varied greatly among the student body and depended a great deal on whether they attended a school in a rural or

² Six of the participants described difficulty and even some frustration with learning the APA or MLA style. Four were attending the public university.

urban area or on or off a reservation. Two of the university students mentioned how their high school off the reservation was more challenging than on-reservation schools, and specifically how writing was given more importance, “I kind of found it harder to write in high school a little more just cuz I was off the reservation and they were more strict and they had all these rules and stuff” (Danielle). In addition to general writing skills, the degree of familiarity with technical or scientific writing was also attributed by a couple of faculty to high school experiences in the sciences. Nevertheless, prior schooling was only one aspect of preparation. A faculty member serving pre-university students pointed out that sometimes even students who were successful in high school needed help in transitioning to college-level work.

The issue of preparation was even more blatant at the tribal colleges where the student body tended to be largely non-traditional-aged and students were returning to education and writing after often many years of absence. Nonetheless, most of the faculty and staff in this study that were working or had worked at tribal colleges still attributed low literacy and academic skills to inadequate K12 preparation. Depending on the reservation, most entering college students’ writing skills ranged from junior high to as low as elementary school levels. Two tribal college participants remarked on the lack of rigor at reservation schools and one also described how not being challenged in elementary school had contributed to him eventually dropping out. While recognizing the weak writing preparation, the individuals working at the tribal colleges blamed the system for denying students opportunities to learn to their full potential. A tribal college faculty member, in comparing teaching prep school students to tribal college students,

remarked that despite their low academic skills, the Indian students demonstrated more intelligence and insight, “So the basic intelligence here is very sharp, it’s very good. The skill level is abominable. So I’m working with this, making the skill level live up to the intelligence.”

Regardless of their academic preparation, many students described a positive experience with writing in high school or earlier. Sometimes it had to do with achieving high scores on timed writing assessments or really enjoying an assignment:

We were reading “Romeo and Juliet” and after it was all over with...she asked what we thought about it and I actually wrote...I wanted to write more but it was just high school and try to get it done but, it was probably one of the longest papers I ever wrote like for class, it was 4, 5 pages and I write real small...But yeah, I actually wrote five pages...on Romeo and Juliet and that was fun (Dieter).

Other memorable experiences included placing in a writing contest or writing for a school club:

And then in high school I also wrote... a monologue for the education drama team and it was for this guy and... it turned into this really serious, horribly creepy piece that he did in the state competition. And he took 8th and that was pretty fun. (Samuel)

One student recounted how he discovered writing as a tool to connect to his Indian heritage, which in turn provided a lasting passion for writing:

I remember I guess in my senior year, I took an interest in writing and I think it

was kind of a second hand thing because I began to understand my culture and the heritage of my people and the history of Native Americans. I really had no idea until I came to live on the Reservation and I began to actually look into it and study and I wrote my... senior term paper on the Manifest Destiny in the US history and that really sparked something about writing because I really wanted to put down my thoughts. I guess I never really connected about...the writing part, I can look back now and see that it did. It was something that I began to grow passion in me because I began to actually learn...and it was all new to me, the history and I really wanted to put my thoughts down... (Albert).

Interestingly, participants' positive connections with writing, more than their degree of preparation, seemed to influence whether they identified as a writer in college.

Theme 3: Self-Concept and Identity

Participants' ability and willingness to embrace the role of academic writer influenced the nature of their experiences and overall attitude toward writing. Their self-concept and degree of confidence as a writer were key factors in students' attitudes.

Confidence as a writer is one aspect of self-concept, and its importance for Native American novice writers emerged in this study. Developing the confidence of student writers was cited as a main goal of English composition courses at all of the institutions. Students' degree of confidence was distributed along a continuum. One faculty member explained that she recognized when a student felt confident to take a risk when they included something "iffy" in their paper that did not conform with general expectations.

Several faculty members perceived that the biggest hindrance to Native American student success in writing apart from limited skills is lack of confidence in their abilities. In fact, sometimes low confidence gives the impression that students are weaker writers than they actually are. Either past negative experiences or the current newness of their learning environment intimidates them. Therefore, helping to foster confidence is just as important as focusing on developing skills, especially because some students believe that there is nothing that can improve their writing. Furthermore, confidence building needs to be an ongoing process, since in one writing instructor's experience even after doing shorter writing tasks and preparatory activities, students still claim they lack the confidence to write a full essay on their own. According to some faculty, the key to boosting confidence is practice with writing and scaffolding activities that help students succeed. These can include shorter assignments that provide background knowledge and preparation as well as tasks that require critical thinking, reading and discussing in order to develop own ideas and ability to express them.

Self-concept as a writer is also shaped by general perceptions of self and identity. The participants in this study illustrated that writing is a personal act; one that can help them discover or make a statement about who they are. Based on Clark and Ivanič's (1997) model of writer identity, some students demonstrated a sense of self as an author in their use of the term "having voice," while others distanced themselves from being identified as a writer. A few faculty participants touched on the subject of identity and voice in student writing. Two remarked on the personal and sensitive nature of academic writing and the resulting reluctance to share one's work, "[I]t's a risk when you put your

writing out there. It's a very intimate part of who you are; you are putting your identity, your thoughts out there to be critiqued." Another faculty member shared how she encouraged students to find their own voice by not only engaging in the act of writing, but also studying literature and other forms of expression, including beadwork and traditional Indian songs, and learning to trust their own opinions. A third shared how she was passionate in explaining to students that developing their ability to express their ideas and to find their own voice was critical to making a difference in the world.

For Native American students, identity is linked to their culture, language, and community. Some faculty participants offered perceptions of how their students' cultural identities may be influencing their decisions as writers. One theorized that cultural dissonance was at the root of students' writing difficulties and that if they lacked confidence and did not feel comfortable in their environment, they would not learn. Another echoed this sentiment in describing how effective tutors create a safe space for tutees to gain confidence by addressing yet not judging their skill level:

[A] lot of students have dealt with those issues and...self esteem is huge. If they're not feeling comfortable, and they are great at picking up on the nonverbal stuff, it could just be a sigh, that's all it takes.

A couple of faculty perceived that low confidence stemmed from not seeing their ideas or opinions as being valuable or valid. While difficulties formulating their own opinions could indicate a general need for practice, it could also relate to a cultural reluctance to voice one's opinion or stick out from the group. However, strong ties to culture were more likely to benefit than hinder students' success. Two faculty participants at one tribal

college observed that maintaining one's traditional culture and language increased the likelihood that a student was confident in writing and persisted in higher education.

Student participants in this study had more of a fear and aversion to academic writing than writing in general. In fact, over half of the students found relevance for writing in their personal life. Twelve participants discussed writing one or more of the following at some point in their life: journals, poetry, letters, stories, or song lyrics. Six of these students mentioned keeping a journal currently and/or in the past, which for some helped deal with feelings and personal issues. One of these students has counseled students for a number of years and felt that journaling could help them as it had him, "I think writing can be healing for people" (Albert). Thus, journaling can be beneficial not only in terms dealing with issues that can impact students' ability to focus on academics, but also providing practice with expressing ideas in writing. There is some research to support that enjoyment of writing is a characteristic of successful academic writers (Kaulaity, 2007). In the current study, eleven participants reported enjoying academic writing to some degree and all but two of them were fairly to very experienced as academic writers. In addition, five recognized that having strong writing skills can help them in college.

Depicting and describing themselves as academic writers proved challenging for some participants. Students' self-portraits provided the initial clue that they were aware to varying degrees of themselves as writers and what being an academic writer meant. Their illustrations were organized around themes to capture participants' present self-concept as writers: (1) seekers, (2) feelers, (3) planners, (4) travelers, (5) learners, and (6)

creators. (See Figures 4.1-4.6). These categories are not exclusive and students' descriptions of themselves could potentially fit under more than one description; however, their categorization reflects the prevailing characteristics. It is important to note that these categories are meant to reflect the degree of students' awareness of themselves as college writers, which may or may not indicate their actual writing development. While research does show that more experienced writers tend to be more aware of what they do as writers, being a good writer does not ensure the ability to describe one's writing process. Apart from metacognition, students' willingness and interest in embracing the identity of academic writer also influenced perceptions of their skills.

The Seekers (See Figure 4.1) were students who indicated that they were either unsure of what an academic writer was and/or how they themselves embodied that role. An image of a sports writer popped into Robert's head when asked to draw himself as an academic writer. When asked to make a connection with college writing, he replied that, "using own words," "telling a first hand view of what's happening," and "relaying information" were what the image symbolized. When pressed as to whether he had found these to be part of his academic writing experiences, he expressed uncertainty, "I don't know. In some ways I guess. Maybe." Robert was a first semester student, so he had not gained enough experience at the time of the interview to truly understand what writing in college entailed. In terms of Clark and Ivanič's (1997) model of writer identity, the Seekers do not have a developed authorial self and are still searching for who they are as writers. Autumn drew a picture of a classroom with a teacher up at the front. When asked where she saw herself, she replied with a laugh, "In the hall." She admittedly was not

eager to “come in,” which indicates a reluctance to enter a space in which she would not be comfortable. When asked to draw an image of himself as a college writer, Lionel offered a big question mark. Even though he described being able to “knock out” writing assignments without any problem, he could not visualize himself as a college writer. When prodded to explain how he could do so well in his composition course, he retorted that expressing his ideas in writing was not in his nature but he could do it if it was for an assignment, “It’s not in my nature to go out and write something and say, “hey” for everybody else to read. But if there’s something where I was to gain from it, like I said I’d agree and I could do it” (Lionel). This suggests that Lionel may be more of a competent academic writer than he perceived himself to be or that he wanted to admit. The complexity of this student may also stem from a misunderstanding of what academic writing encompasses, since he thought he would not be able to write anything fictional for an assignment only something based on his personal experience. Therefore, it seems that Autumn and Lionel could not draw themselves as an academic writer because they were not interested in embracing that role.

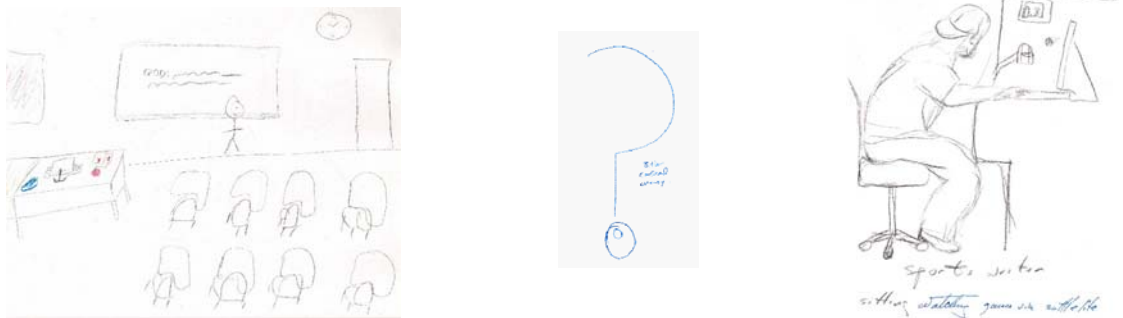


Figure 4.1. Self-portraits (Autumn, Lionel, Robert): Seekers

The Feelers (See Figure 4.2) principally identified with writing on an emotional level. Kyle expressed being happy upon completing an assignment. Samuel described his boredom, frustration, and even anger when attempting to write a paper:

I'm angry mainly because this is the night before and I am not interested in the subject whatsoever and this is me a couple minutes later after I get bored and I'm happy because I'm on Facebook wasting time and then I go back to this stage because it's like 1:00 and I just wasted two hours on Facebook.

Shanelle drew an image using the emblem of the Crow Tribe as the foundation to symbolize the important place writing had in her heart and how happy it made her feel:

And then the teepee represents our home, like where our heart is. And writing comes from my heart. And it don't just come from the top of my head; it comes from my heart. And since I know how to write all kinds of different ways, it's like how my clans are. Since there are so many. It just makes me happy. That's what the sun's for. So it's like a sunny day in my teepee. (Shanelle)

The Feelers illustrate students that want to do well on assignments but in order to do so need to represent themselves in their writing in ways in which they are not entirely comfortable. For example, Shanelle felt content writing poems for herself but was less confident and more critical of herself when she wrote for an audience:

But when I let other people read it, I feel like, "Oh my gosh, they're not going to like it." Or "I messed up." Or "It's not what they wanted." ...And they're gonna

make fun of me for doing something like a mistake, like the way I write. So, I guess you can say I write differently. (Shanelle)

Thus, in terms of Clark and Ivanič's (1997) model, these students' feelings of uncertainty, frustration or writer's block may be the results of conflicts within the discursal self and attempts to position themselves in a way that feels foreign.

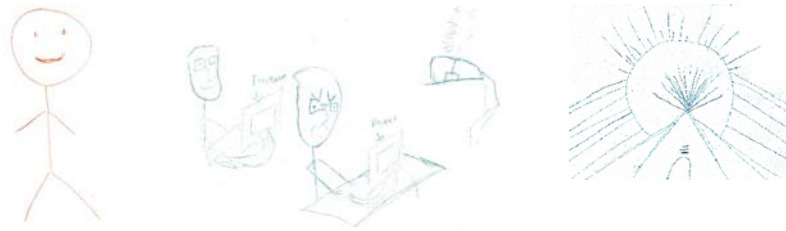


Figure 4.2. Self-portraits (Kyle, Samuel, Shanelle): Feelers

Five of the participants in the sample demonstrated metacognition with respect to academic writing in reflecting on different aspects of their writing process. These Planners (See Figure 4.3) viewed writing as a series of steps and/or reflected on one part of their overall writing process. Two students depicted the first stage of writing and the challenge of coming up with ideas. Will described himself as starting out staring at a blank computer screen with his notes and textbook open while he tried to analyze a reading to connect his ideas and arguments. Jessica focused on brainstorming different ideas for a writing assignment. Albert and Ed, both nontraditionally aged students, perceived the actual writing down of their ideas as the least daunting part of completing a writing assignment. Ed recognized the effort required to research and organize the ideas for a paper, "[T]he research part and putting it all together is the big part of making a

paper. And the actual putting it together, the writing part is, you know, I'll be honest, it's really not that hard. It's just sitting down and doing it." Albert was aware of the importance and difficulty of successfully communicating his message to his audience, "for me the dream and the idea of what I am writing is easy to put down but to actually make it readable for somebody else is where I am lost." Danielle depicted the drafting process with one peer review and a final draft that usually earned her a B grade. She was satisfied with writing papers in this way and doubted further drafts would result in a better product. Nevertheless, she understood that even good writers revise, "I don't think writers are like, 'well, I am a good writer now, I can just write one draft. It's perfect.' I don't think it's like that." These students provided snapshots of the parts of the writing process that seemed to draw their time and energies and at least partially defined what academic writing entailed.

The Planners were focused on the discorsal self and how to represent themselves through their writing. It is not clear if they were concerned more with the content of their writing or the form of their language but they were fairly confident and comfortable in their role as writers. At the end of their first year, Will shared that he had learned he could handle college writing and Danielle reflected on how she was beginning to discover her identity as a writer, "I'm just kind of getting to know who I am as a college writer but I'd definitely like to work more on trying to become a strong writer." Ed did not feel eloquent but nonetheless efficient in his writing. Compared to not having done much writing before college, by her second semester Jessica was beginning to identify as a writer. Albert recounted how in researching his high school paper on Manifest Destiny

he had wanted to speak out on the topic. Since “it wouldn’t have been very well received to speak out vocally,” he found his voice through writing:

I still have that paper and I just remember thinking, “This is the way I can shout...my voice and write it down on paper and somebody would have to listen to it, even though it was just one teacher” (Albert).

He added that furthering his skills as a writer in college “has really helped me to fan that passion cuz I think the more I learn the more confident I’ll be” (Albert).

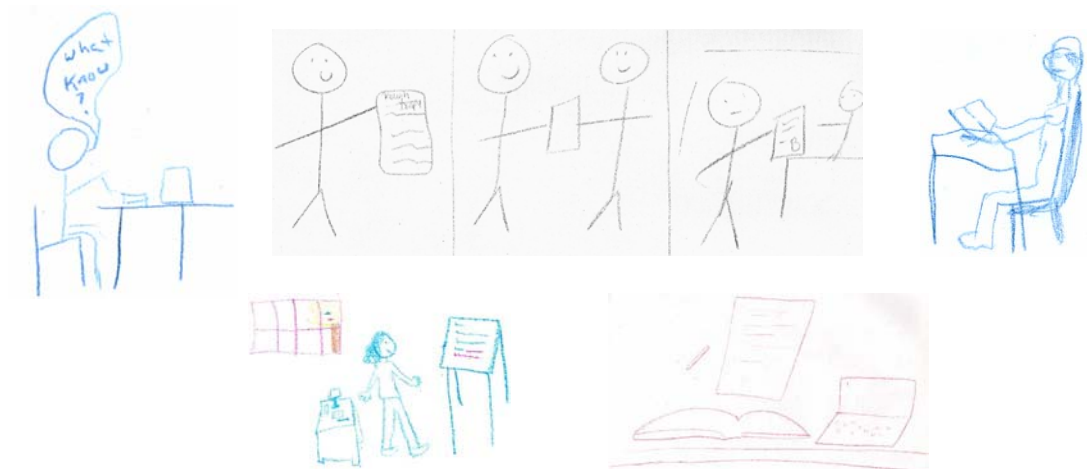


Figure 4.3. Self-portraits (Albert, Danielle, Ed, Jessica, Will): Planners

The Travelers (See Figure 4.4) are not unlike the Learners in their recognition that they are developing as writers, but they were more reflective on where they were along their path. These students’ journey of discovery also transcended the academic domain and intertwined with their overall identity. Quincy and Juan were in their second semester of college and used similar metaphors to depict the long and hilly process of both becoming a writer and completing a writing assignment. For Quincy, “a sunset...the end of I guess

whatever you are trying to do is always beautiful” because “any sunset can have its own...different kind of beauty in someone else’s mind.” Juan explained through the metaphor of a rider how he acquired different writing skills, thus becoming more colorful (beautiful, skilled, complex):

There’s me on a horse... of many colors, it kind of signifies I have a lot of traits and it’s come from where everyone else has come from and I’ve made it on top of a hill but there’s many more hills to climb and that’s kind of incorporated with the colors I guess...it brings more color than I used to have I guess.

Dieter, a first-semester tribal college student, drew the world in a large sky with rays of the sun to illustrate being “high on writing” and express the limitless possibilities he perceived in becoming a good writer:

[I]f I was a good writer, enough to be at the college level...I think that possibilities are endless because I think if you can write... you can write a story for somebody who can’t speak or something and it would be good because everybody has a story.

His use of “if I was a good writer...at the college level” suggests that he did not perceive himself as an academic writer, but he also expressed an awareness that becoming a good writer is a process and that he would become a good writer “sooner or later.” Ellsworth disclosed a lack of confidence in his ability to complete his writing assignments, but also reflected the motivations of the other Traveler in his desire to “touch the sky as a writer.”

In Juan's words, these students feel they "gonna have a lot more places to go" both in developing as writers and in terms of what they can accomplish through their writing.

Given that the Travelers all seemed to feel that they have something worth saying, they are on the road to encountering their authorial presence. Quincy explained that he wanted his writing to be judged based on its own merits and not in comparison to what others have written. Juan provided an example of having a "clear voice" in an argumentative essay on the effects of prison and showing the reader why a certain viewpoint is important. He elaborated explaining that it is not effective just to quote others to provide a convincing argument and strong voice:

If you take someone else's writing [to incorporate into your own]...you're putting your own perspective on it; it's not enough to get your voice across;...it may be *your* [emphasis in original] writing but you're reflecting on their paper and you have to have your own opinion on it and show your opinion.

Dieter and Ellsworth were at the other end of the continuum in striving to establish an authorial presence. Both perceived written discourse as a way to lend their voice to others. Dieter hoped to write people's personal stories or work for the tribe. While Ellsworth had already been composing lyrics and performing his songs in high school, recent struggles in his life were defining a new voice and themes for his lyrics.



Figure 4.4. Self-portraits (Dieter, Ellsworth, Juan, Quincy): Travelers

While all of the students were developing as writers, three of the participants focused specifically on learning how to write academically. These Learners (see Figure 4.5) saw themselves as writers in the classroom. Dawn saw herself at a desk, “taking notes on what I am supposed to be writing academically...what I am supposed to be using for my writing.” Victoria depicted herself watching the instructor write on the board, which served as an important model, “I think the only way that I can learn is if somebody shows me before I do it.” Courtney also drew herself in a classroom but surrounded by other students collaboratively learning about college writing. An interesting aspect of the classroom interaction in the image is the absence of the instructor and emphasis on the students teaching one another, “Basically you have to help each

other out because in our class you help each other out and if one has a problem we help ‘em and if we all have the same problem we help each other” (Courtney). The Learners were partially occupied with their autobiographical self as students but also attempting to uncover the practices and discourses they need to assume as college writers. Dawn expressed satisfaction with how she was able to represent herself and convey a unique presence as a writer, “I think I have my own unique way of writing. I don’t think it’s boring. I think I really have my own voice and side of things.”

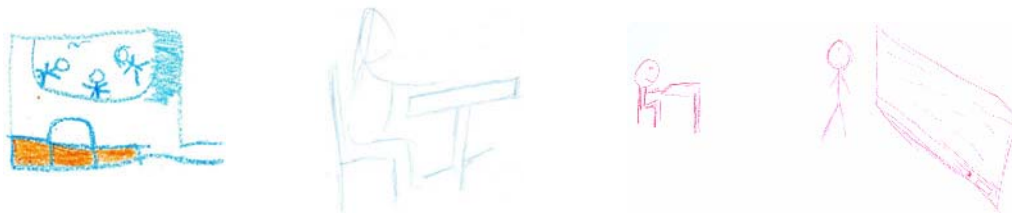


Figure 4.5. Self-portraits (Courtney, Dawn, Victoria): Learners

Just as all the students are learners, they are also creators in the sense of producing writing for their courses. However, one participant categorized as a Creator³ (See 4.6), drew a self-portrait that reflected the nature of the written product. Jane was in her second-semester of college but because of Advanced Placement credits in English had placed out of first-year writing courses. She drew herself with a paper in hand with “the story kind of jumping off the page.” The flowers and butterflies represented the creative energy of her words. When asked how the illustration would change for a chemistry lab, she reflected:

³ A pilot study with students representing all four years of college yielded additional participants categorized as Creators. These tended to be more experienced writers, which explains why more participants from this first-year sample do not fall into this category.

Maybe I'd have scientific concepts jumping out or like equations for how to find the density of something jumping out...maybe I'd have photons and atoms ...things that pertain to chemistry jumping out.

Jane clearly anticipated her written work to turn out a certain way. Although in her self-portrait she did not focus on the process leading up to the final product, her perception of the kind of writing she produces suggests a similar awareness of the writing process. As a Creator, Jane considered the degree to which her writing captured her readers' attention. She was concerned with choosing certain discourse conventions to stylize her language. Jane also remembered favorable feedback from high school that indicated a notable authorial presence in her writing, "I had a lot of teachers that said I have really good voice."



Figure 4.6. Self-portrait (Jane): Creator

There are numerous factors that influence the process of becoming a college writer. A desire and openness to make the journey is key. In addition, participants' ability to view themselves as academic writers at any given time is influenced by their current understanding of what academic writing entails.

Theme 4: Academic Writing Literacy

Participants had varying understandings of academic writing. Since many of them were novice writers, they were in the process of gaining the vocabulary to talk about college writing and their own process.

Together with their degree of confidence as writers and interest in identifying as a writer, participants' understanding of what academic writing entails was an important indicator of how positively they described their experiences. Specific terms used by students to refer to academic writing revealed the ways in which students viewed and categorized various types of college and non-academic writing. One student juxtaposed the term "professional" writing with "personal" writing. For many "academic writing" referred to a narrowly defined type of college writing and not a catch-all term. Some students only considered essays and other assignments for college writing courses as constituting "academic writing," with several students contrasting it with "artistic-type" or "creative" writing." Two of those students who had taken both developmental and general composition courses, indicated that the former was more academic in its focus on the "technical" aspects of writing.

For some, the idea of different ways of writing for different purposes was a new discovery. A couple of students realized that they could not be creative or poetic in writing a research paper or a lab report as they had wanted. Three of the students recognized varying standards or expectations for writing across the curriculum, especially between the sciences and humanities, although one student in particular was adamant that academic writing, "just depends on your teacher, how they want to see it written"

(Autumn). One faculty member described students with this sort of orientation as process vs. mastery students:

So [mastery students will] learn to be a good writer and apply that to all of their different classes. A process student is one of those students who is like, “okay, how does this teacher want their stuff done, I’m going to do it like that, and then I’m going to start over the next time.”

However, most students were aware that there were certain standards for college writing in general, which two described as “fancy” or “classy.” One student explained that some of his writing assignments seemed more “rigid” and “academic” than others because of the greater requirements for correct grammar, style, and a higher expectation for critical thinking compared to reflection and personal experience. Another participant described feeling that certain rhetorical styles, like memoirs, were less academic because of the use of first person pronouns.

Faculty participants also varied somewhat in what they considered important in academic writing. Perceptions included: clarity, focus, organization, providing support, being objective or concise, thinking critically or creatively, and developing a sense of audience or one’s voice as a writer. Although numerous faculty members described evaluating writing as subjective, there seemed to be an understanding that underlying academic writing is a core group of skills as opposed to arbitrary preferences based on the whim of the grader. Ultimately, writing boiled down to communicating; whether explaining chemistry concepts or taking a stand on an issue, the goal was for students to have something meaningful to say and to be able to express it in a way that is

understandable. Some of the faculty noted differences in academic writing across the curriculum, especially in terms of scientific or technical writing and writing in the humanities, and the use of creative language or passive voice. However, they were more specific in describing the commonalities among college writing expectations: using proper grammar, punctuation, capitalization, having good organization with topic sentences, knowing how to paraphrase and cite sources, synthesizing information and making connections among concepts. A tribal college faculty member found that her students struggled with applying what they learned in their composition course to writing in other classes and that gaps in skills or knowledge surfaced regardless of the discipline:

I see the same type of problem in the business writing and I will see in other types of writing; that's being able to use the vocabulary and writing a good sentence and writing a good paragraph and being able to develop not just one idea.

In addition, several faculty participants described the importance of incorporating academic literacy skills into their curriculum. This took the form of academic vocabulary development through the use of the dictionary, thesaurus, and discussion of unfamiliar terms in the textbook. The goal was not only to increase students' overall vocabulary but also help them recognize the difference between academic and informal language. In content courses, it involved an explanation and proper use of terms such as "statistically significant." In general, discussing how to read a syllabus and introducing common terms in writing, such as "outside sources" were seen as helpful for developing academic literacy. In addition, two faculty participants specifically defined academic writing to their students as being less personal and more objective than other types of writing.

However, making academic writing and related terms explicit was more prevalent in developmental writing and college skills classes.

In the course of the interviews, especially during discussions of their writing process, student participants revealed their familiarity or lack thereof with terminology associated with academic writing. Three tribal college students were not familiar with the terms “APA” or “MLA”; however, two of them were in their first semester of college and the third formatted her works cited with the help of a website and potentially did not recall the name of the style she was required to use. The word “brainstorm” was new for two students, one of whom also was not fully certain about the meaning of “proofread.” The other student seemed generally weak in the area of vocabulary, asking clarification on interview questions and the meaning of “oneself” in the phrase, “set high standards for oneself.” In contrast, the rest of the participants seemed familiar with terms common in descriptions of the writing process. One tribal college student in particular demonstrated a solid understanding and considerable ease in using “paraphrase” and “plagiarism” in describing his process for doing research papers:

I guess it plays the same every time. I did all those research papers. Gathering the information is easy. And time goes by real fast. It’s reading it and paraphrasing it and being able to put it down on paper and get it organized. So it’s *not* [emphasis in original] plagiarism. Give credit where credit is due. (Lionel)

(Dawn). In reflecting on learning to write academically, a participant remarked, “When you don’t understand the language it’s kind of hard but when you start understanding it and knowing what’s going on, it gets a little easier” (Ed). Thus, acquiring an

understanding of the terminology and standards for academic writing can facilitate first-year students' journey to becoming a successful college writer.

Theme 5: Feedback & Self-Concept

Feedback on writing assignments served as the main way in which participants gained an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and assessed their sense of confidence as writers.

In discussing their degree of confidence as writers, several participants reflected on the type of feedback they had received from instructors. Positive feedback was associated with the instructor liking the students' writing, which in turn instilled greater confidence. On the other hand, students reacted to an over abundance of comments negatively and felt the grader was being unfair, even when no extra points were taken off for comments unrelated to the grading rubric. One participant's response to how confident he felt as a writer illustrates this relationship between feedback and confidence:

Not very. Especially when I get papers back that are like, marked up the whazoo. And...nothing but big red inks all over it. And that's like the papers you really wrote hard on and sat up all night (laugh). You're like, "Oh God. I could have not stayed up all night and got the same score..." (Samuel)

Two faculty participants commented on how they avoided grading using red pens because of their impressions that it negatively influenced students' confidence. Four other instructors discussed the need to balance giving constructive feedback without "crushing" students. Some offered additional ways they tried to be encouraging: reading for and

providing comments first on what students have done well, drawing smiley faces, giving suggestions rather than criticizing, and adding bonus points for risk taking. Even students that begin college confident in their writing skills are likely to be challenged and benefit from a combination of constructive and positive feedback. One student participant described her journey of learning to write at the college level and how it sent her confidence on a roller coaster ride:

I was confident before when I came to college and then I wasn't confident and now I'm confident again, so I think just knowing how to write just gives me a lot of confidence. I feel more confident in my writing because I have learned so much...and from beforehand when I thought I was confident. Wow, there I was being confident and I had no idea what I was doing. Now I do... My professors *do* [emphasis in original] write a lot [of comments] so I'm grateful for that.

(Dawn)

Dawn's confidence was initially shattered when her first graded assignment indicated that she had lots to learn about academic writing. With practice and continued feedback from instructors she began to improve and her confidence to rise. While other participants did not make this connection between confidence and feedback explicit, their discussions of graded writing assignments confirmed the effect of instructors' comments on self assessments of strengths and weaknesses.

Tribal college and university students alike perceived feedback from instructors to be generally beneficial, helping them understand what aspects of academic writing they needed to work on the most and to some degree what they were doing well. Some tribal

college students had not yet received back a graded writing assignment at the time of our interview. One participant was returned an assignment with only a grade. In general, the nature of comments on graded assignments varied depending on the discipline, course and instructor. Three tribal college students specifically discussed the type of feedback they received and it ranged from needing to narrow their topic to not using poetic language in a research paper. Similarly, tribal college faculty participants reported focusing on a variety of aspects of writing from ideas and structure to vocabulary, style, and citing sources. Especially in the lower level or developmental writing courses, instructors tended to spend more time addressing grammar, mechanics and sentence-level issues. However, one faculty member described individualizing feedback based on the needs of students and where they were in their writing development. According to participants at the four-year institution, developmental writing instructors provided feedback on everything from content to standards of academic writing compared to first-year composition instructors, who focused more on the expression and support of ideas. Conversations with faculty participants confirmed this distinction. Perhaps the greatest difference in philosophies at the tribal colleges and the four-year institution was in relation to error identification and correction. At the university, regardless of the level of the writing course, marking every error in a paper was perceived as doing a disservice to students because it merely pointed out what they already knew, that they have a lot of errors. Instead, the favored strategy was marking a few errors and indicating the need to look for and correct the remaining. The idea was to also identify for them the issue behind the error, such as for fragments, pointing out the difference between a dependent

and independent clause. Tribal college faculty, on the other hand, could not expect students to be able to find and correct their errors without more direct instruction.

Apart from composition courses, students, regardless of institution, frequently did not see their final papers again after turning them in. If they did, they were not likely to get substantial if any comments. However, in one university sociology course, students could get feedback during the course of the semester if they turned in a draft of their paper ahead of time. Written comments on papers in non-writing courses tended to come in the form of corrections, indicating if something was missing or incorrect. A university student expressed surprise at how, compared to high school teachers, professors in non-English courses were more focused on surface errors, such as mechanics, and failed to comment on content:

[H]igh school teachers would...read something and they'd be like, "oh, I can relate to that" or leave comments about what I am writing about, the topic of the paper whereas it seems that college professors are just going through it and...I think the only marks I have in here are just conventions. (Jane)

Regardless of the focus of instructors' comments, they were overwhelmingly more instructive and corrective than confirmatory and supportive.

In looking at graded writing assignments with the participants, I found that frequently the instructor did not indicate what the student had done well. When asked to identify their strengths and weaknesses based on feedback from their professors, participants had a much easier time naming areas of difficulty. Only six of the participants named areas of strength while twelve of the nineteen recognized areas of

weakness. However, three students noted that feedback gradually became more detailed, helpful, positive, and encouraging over the semester congruent with grade improvements. In addition, one of these and three additional participants indicated receiving constructive comments, such as in the following example:

She really liked a lot of my sentence structure, like right here...in the analysis, like right here a couple times she says, “excellent analysis”, “excellent sentences,” and just a lot of agreeing with my ideas...exclamation point. She obviously liked and understood what I was saying. (Will)

Additionally, for some students whether the instructor “liked” their writing may or may not reflect their actual strengths. While seven participants agreed in general with their instructors’ assessment of their strengths and/or weaknesses, two found some limitations. They felt that their strengths would be different depending either on the instructor grading or the type of writing they were doing:

I believe it’s her opinion that my strengths are like this and my weaknesses are like this but in my own self, in my own writing, it’s...for this course I believe it’s like that but like in other styles of writing I believe it’s completely different. (Juan)

Perhaps the lack of focus on students’ strengths merely reinforced existing student impressions that feedback was supposed to be negative. For two participants “criticism” was synonymous with feedback in general. Another participant actually wanted more criticism in the comments on his papers. Regardless of the terms they used, students in

general welcomed information that could help them improve their papers, “Show me where I’ve gone wrong at...you know. I love criticism... I want to improve.

Improvement is your correction” (Robert). Improvement, however, was not necessarily an assured outcome of feedback.

Theme 6: Effectiveness of Feedback

Feedback was most effective in helping participants improve in writing when it was specific, given in the context of explicit and reasonable expectations, and reinforced in additional ways.

Overall, participants wanted feedback, especially on the areas they needed to work, because they hoped it would help them improve their grades and writing. There were characteristics of feedback that participants found more or less desirable and effective. Students wanted detailed feedback, even a concrete example, to understand how to change a problem area. Several faculty participants also mentioned how they pinpointed in their comments what needed work and one even included page numbers in the textbook to help with revision. Students also yearned for clear, specific, reasonable, and explicit expectations, especially in advance of the first draft. Three students used the word “nitpicky” to describe what they considered unfair expectations in their papers. Two gave examples of comments related to word choice on lab chemistry and biology reports, such as being expected to use “shows” rather than “displays” in the caption of a graph or refraining from using the word “learning.” The third referred to his dislike of being prompted to further develop his ideas:

Like the clearer stuff, I can understand that really good because there *are* [emphasis in original] parts where I write and I use vagueness or something like that. I can understand those. I understand the grammar. But some of the thought-stuff and argument-stuff, I think some of that just gets nitpicky.

[S]ometimes...that is the limit to the argument that I can get to. (Samuel)

A faculty participant in the sciences confirmed that too many comments can be counterproductive and confuse students about the most important aspects to focus on for an assignment. Perhaps some students become overwhelmed when they are asked to address too many aspects of their writing at once. One participant reflected on how helpful it was when the instructor initially restricted comments to the major issues:

I kind of just want to make sure I get those major things dealt with, I guess improve on so then she can...once I get better at those bigger things, she'd be able to show me some of the smaller details (Quincy).

Another student explained how she tried to learn from feedback on each paper but that she could only focus on a few aspects of writing at a time:

It's hard to put it all into one... like one paper I'll think about working on transitions or whatever, so I'll work on that and I'll try to incorporate something else, organization and whatever and I'll incorporate those two and I think I am progressing toward that rather than trying to do all of them in one. (Danielle)

The degree to which students reported improving in their weak areas since beginning college also depended on the writing skill in question. Four university students

found that written feedback helped them improve in grammar, mechanics, and APA style but not as much in terms of critical thinking or more global areas. However, one of these participants disagreed with becoming better at punctuation despite corrections on her papers because, for her, seeing the errors was not enough to avoid them in the future. Along those lines, two other students commented that feedback either served as a reminder or aided in doing revisions but did not influence long-term improvement.

Students seemed to gain a deeper understanding of some aspects of writing through a combination of factors of which feedback was one element. For one participant, feedback helped him the most to be successful as a writer, but the choice of topic⁴ and the time of night he completed the assignment were also influences. Written comments helped some students ascertain instructors' expectations and weight they placed on certain aspects of writing when grading:

I think the first thing was trying to get used to how she graded and the way her style was so that was an issue. But since I've gotten to know her and how she grades and stuff it's been a lot easier to write a paper for her. And still working on the organization and stuff like that, I think it's gotten better. (Danielle)

Thus, feedback coupled with an understanding of expectations helped Danielle improve her organization, which to her was dependent on professors' personal preference. In addition, she provided an example of how an in-class workshop on formatting citations was an effective resource for her. Four additional participants mentioned the benefit of

⁴ Six other participants also discussed how their degree of interest and knowledge of the topic influenced their confidence and motivation in completing an assignment. In addition, three faculty members discussed the role of interest in writing topics as influencing motivation and personal investment in assignments.

having a physical model of the writing they were expected to produce, whether it be the instructor doing an outline on the board or providing a written example to consult:

[I]n college they just tell you what the paper is going to be about and what they want. There's not a physical example that you can look at and that was really important for *me* [emphasis in original] as a writer because...being able to read through it and see how they wrote the transitions for the paper, how they wanted the flow of the paper to be. You can physically see exactly what they mean by "blocking a paragraph" when you're quoting it or something versus just like "these are the directions to do the paper." (Jane)

Faculty in the sciences confirmed that their students found sample lab reports as being beneficial. In addition to the models discussed above, concrete resources instructors could provide included a list of common mistakes to use when proofreading and an in-class group brainstorming activity to get the class thinking about expectations for an upcoming writing assignment.

In general, findings suggest that without feedback students failed to understand why they received the grade they did, what they needed to do to improve, and what they were doing well. In contrast, with feedback and concrete examples, students were more likely to revise as long as they were not overwhelmed by too many comments. When asked about the areas and specific skills in which they had noticed improvement since beginning college, the participants listed some or all of the areas that they had identified as weaknesses. These ranged from organization, grammar, providing support for ideas, citing sources, doing research, and using APA/MLA style to meeting minimum word

requirements and thinking critically. Two students mentioned the importance of revision and an awareness of the overall process of writing an academic paper.

Theme 7: Facilitating Revision

More students could experience the benefits of revising their work if they better understood the role of drafts in the writing process and their options for revising.

One of the best ways students could observe improvement in their writing was in revising their work and noting the new feedback and grade. In composition courses, students had the opportunity and sometimes the requirement to write more than one draft of the same assignment. Almost all of the composition faculty in this study expected revisions of major assignments and one used revision of a paper as the mid-term assessment. Another stressed that, “If students don’t revise in my course significantly, they certainly won’t get A’s,” while another felt that without engaging in revision, students really cannot understand what they need to improve. Thus, investigating the drafting and revising practices of first-year students is particularly important. Nine of the participants, including all of the more experienced writers, described revising or drafting to some degree as part of their process. Some were determined to rework what they had written until they were fully satisfied. One student was even willing to start over completely, “I am really picky about my writing ... like I’ll just throw away a whole essay if it’s not the way I wanted it” (Samuel).

Systematic revising rather than editing for errors has been found to be a characteristic of experienced writers (Taylor, 1984). In re-reading their work, participants

in this study considered both surface correctness and the need to reformulate or reorganize ideas. “Proofread own work” was the most commonly used strategy chosen by all but two of the participants. Based on descriptions from six participants, proofreading consisted of looking for typos, misspellings, punctuation and grammar mistakes, and for proper flow, which for one student included checking transitions. One student described his attention to word choice as part of his revision process:

I would read [the sentence] however it’s written down. If it didn’t sound right, then I would mark it off and write a different word in there. Then, when I write the actual paper, I would put the right [word]... (Dieter).

The other options from the list of strategies for revising included: read paper over with audience in mind, i.e. as if somebody else were reading it, expand relevant ideas and discard irrelevant ones, and make decisions to revise based on feedback. Six of the participants indicated that they read their written work over with the audience in mind. Three participants were likely to discard irrelevant ideas or sentences and three others would also expand on relevant ones. One participant noted he would rather expand and connect than discard ideas. Four students also reported making decisions to revise based on feedback.

Sometimes students ended up writing multiple drafts as a by-product of needing to type up a handwritten draft. In our technology-centered age, composing first drafts directly on a computer is common. However, at least seven and possibly eight participants in this study wrote out their assignments by hand before typing them up on a

computer. One student exemplified how typing up a draft turned into an opportunity to further develop or clarify ideas:

I'll do a draft and then I won't even follow it. I'll type some of it and I'll be like, "wow, this is a good idea" and I'll type that... I handed in my rough draft yesterday and so it's totally different from my typed one because I would read through that and I would be like, "No, I'm not gonna put that in there" and I'll just change some of the words around and make it like sound like it's in order pretty much (Victoria).

Others understood the expectation to revise and some even acknowledged it contributed to learning how to become a better writer, nonetheless they were reluctant to engage in revision on their own accord. Faculty also confirmed students' perplexing dislike of drafts and unwillingness to revise. One faculty member found that for many first-year students a grade of a B or a even a C did not warrant revision. Two participants confirmed the suspicions of one faculty member that revision was not something they had done before college, "Cuz you didn't have to write any drafts in high school, just a one time deal, that's it, done" (Ellsworth). Another instructor proposed that students were opposed to revising in English composition because it was not something required of them in other college courses. In addition to not being used to writing multiple drafts, three participants also expressed personal issues with acting on instructors' feedback. Two were not always convinced that making a proposed change was necessary to improve their writing, rather it was more of an imposition on the part of the instructor to force their own style on them:

I would say it and it would be fine but she'd change it to the way she [emphasis in original] wanted it to be. And I'm like "Okaay." ...I mean they're both the same. That's just the way I want to say it, you know? And she kept doing that on all of my papers. Where I would have to write it the way *she* [emphasis in original] would say it. (Autumn)

Both of these participants would have appreciated being told *why* a change was really necessary, which would have made them more amenable to revising. Other reasons why participants did not revise included: not being able to read the instructor's handwriting, disliking that aspect of the process, being frustrated with lack of improvement in grade and feedback despite previous efforts, not knowing how to revise based on the feedback from the instructor, and lacking computer or typing skills and/or disliking typing.

Some participants seemed to have been engaging in revision but not recognizing it as drafting because they were not re-writing their entire paper. In addition, there seemed to be a tendency among many participants to undervalue their drafting efforts given their perception of it as an almost never-ending practice, "a good writer...would write a draft and then revise it and then revise it again a couple more times" (Will). This considerable time commitment is the reason one student gave for her classmates' dislike of writing, "some don't even like to write at all just cuz they say it takes too long" (Shanelle). A faculty participant also shared her suspicion that students struggled to produce perfect first drafts because they felt it would mean less work for them:

And that's one thing that I find that students...have so much trouble writing because they want to make it perfect the first time out of the box so they are just

sitting there sweating, trying to come up with the right sentence, the right punctuation, and they make sure it's the perfect way to say things. So I am trying to get them to understand that it doesn't have to be right the first time. And I think what they see is that if it's not right the first time, it's more work for them.

Many of these concerns could be addressed in mini-conferences between students and instructors. A general class discussion of the role of drafts in the writing process and options for revising could also encourage more revision and improve students' experiences.

Theme 8: Writing Resources

Participants favored obtaining help with writing from people they knew well and had a certain amount of trust.

All three institutions in this study offered students writing assistance at one or more locations on campus. Services included a campus-wide Writing Center or Learning Center and/or writing tutors available through federal TRIO or Title IIIA programs. Philosophies of tutoring in writing varied across institutions, with tutors at the tribal colleges focusing more on editing and those at the four-year institution emphasizing the development of the writer over improving a draft, i.e. process over product. At the university, tutoring resources were also available at residence halls, through the student government association, and student athletics. Students enrolled in pre-university courses also had access to a tutor in their program, who could address their developmental writing needs. Discipline-specific resources were also available, such as for lab reports in

chemistry and biology. Additionally, advisors in academic programs and student support services targeting Native American students sometimes also provided help with writing. Despite the range of resources available to them, participants in the study were more likely to seek assistance from people with whom they had an established relationship and certain degree of trust, or tutors arranged by such people.

All but three of the participants described their awareness or use of tutoring services at their institution. None of the participants mentioned using tutoring services through TRIO or the Title III program. Only four of the participants reported using a tutor for writing provided by the main college tutoring center. Two of these students did not actually visit the main facility, rather consulted a writing tutor on call in their residence hall. A third student met with a tutor as a requirement for his composition course, but remarked that he felt more confused than when he had arrived. This lends support to the perception of some faculty/tutors that if students were required to go see a tutor, then they did not benefit as much because they were not invested in it. The fourth participant, a tribal college student, reported a positive experience with getting help from a tutor on proofreading. One student was not aware of tutoring services at her institution and another thought he did not have the time for a session. Only one participant outright felt he did not need any help with writing outside of his coursework.

A few participants at the university made a conscious choice not to seek help because they felt their needs could not be met at the main tutoring center. This sentiment was echoed by a few faculty, despite a general expectation that the center should be able to address all types of writing needs regardless of the discipline. Nevertheless, most of

the students had considered making a tutoring appointment but had not gotten around to it or were receiving assistance elsewhere. Interestingly, four individuals at the university remarked in their second interview that they were planning on making an appointment at the Writing Center for the first time to have a tutor proofread their final paper to increase their chances of a good grade. This suggests that many students preferred to use tutoring services for editing purposes, which conflicted with the center's holistic mission of providing feedback foremost on the ideas and structure of a paper. Instead of relying on the Writing Center, there was an expectation in English composition that students find other resources, such as friends or family members to help them proofread, especially if they had difficulties finding errors on their own. In fact, there was evidence that students were seeking help from people in their extended circle both on and off campus.

University and tribal college students differed in the people they approached for feedback on their written work. At the mainstream institution, two participants enrolled in academic support programs in nursing and engineering received guidance on their writing from their advisors. Two additional students sought the help of advisors or tutor at the American Indian student support services center and a third consulted with faculty in Native American Studies on her paper topic. At one tribal college, the librarian served as a resource for two students learning how to do research. At the two-year institutions, several of the students were comfortable asking their previous or current instructors to work on their assignments with them. One participant felt especially strongly about only asking for help from someone he knew well, "[If I really need help], I go to some other resource, someone I knew rather than...I know that tutors have good intentions of helping

but for me it's like, 'I don't know nothing about you'" (Lionel). Sometimes students turned to individuals outside of their institution. A tribal college student visited her high school teacher several times in her first year to get help with assignments. Even one of the university students during a visit home asked his AP English teacher, an inspiration for his writing, to critique a graded paper. This need for a personal connection with teachers and tutors was voiced by other participants in descriptions of their high school and college writing experiences. A faculty participant shared that the underlying theme defining the success of former writing students and graduates of a tribal college was finding a trusted resource they could turn to consistently for help.

At all three institutions, faculty and/or tutoring staff looked for ways of deepening connections between students and tutors. At one institution, a tutor and instructor worked closely together to make the tutoring accessible and supportive of course objectives, and the tutor also served as a cultural reference on essay topics on which the non-Native instructor could not provide feedback. At another site, the tutors came from the student body and also offered group help sessions for one class they were taking themselves. They were in a good position to recognize which peers were struggling and encouraged them to join a study group. There was also an effort to communicate with writing instructors for tutors to better understand their expectations. At the third institution, graduate students fulfilled the role of tutors although several faculty members suggested that undergraduates would make good tutors or could be organized into peer writing groups or study pods where students could ask each other questions, get a second opinion, or run an idea by someone. At the same time, faculty shared mixed results with

using peer review in class, with some students feeling self-conscious about their writing and not wanting to stand out in any way, not having anything to contribute, or lacking skills to give useful feedback. However, one instructor was surprised that his students reported putting more effort into their work because they knew it would be critiqued by their peers. Perhaps peer feedback on writing would be the most effective outside the classroom and in a university setting, where the students are more inclined seek out Native American peers with whom to share their writing. A relatively new resource for Native American students at the university was a writing tutor available during general study hours at the Indian student center. First-year students using this service had improved on their writing assignments from D's to A's. This resource was available to all Indian students but mainly first-year students were utilizing it at the time of this study.

Overall, faculty felt that there were lots of resources available for students and that the key was to get them comfortable and willing to use them. On all campuses, students demonstrated a reluctance to seek writing assistance on their own and for some there was a stigma associated with being in a developmental writing course or needing help in general. Students who had positive experiences with tutors were more likely to make return visits and ultimately to succeed. In addition, they influenced their friends and classmates to seek out the same resources.

Theme 9: Native Communities

Participants' extended circle of family, friends, and community members played an important part in their academic success and served as a sounding board for their writing.

While previous sections in this chapter hinted at the important role of students' social circle and home community in their academic lives, a separate discussion is necessary to give the topic its deserved attention. The majority of the participants mentioned specific people, sometimes more than one, in their extended circle who served as role models or the impetus to attend college. These individuals were not only parents, aunties, uncles and grandparents; they also included siblings, friends and even children. A non-traditional student explained how he enrolled in college partially to serve as a role model for his daughter:

I find myself in a place in my life now; I'm going to school mostly for my daughter. She's going to be going to school here in about another 4 to 5 years. She wants to go to college. And I just want to show her that her dad can do it instead of just listening to the stories of how I failed but to show her that I can succeed.

(Albert)

This student had attempted college right out of high school and did well his first semester but gave up because of his mother's lack of support. Another student recounted how his grandfather served as a stepping stone for him by first attending the institution where he was enrolled and where his younger cousins hoped to follow in his footsteps. Similarly, a Native American faculty participant reflected that without his father as a strong role

model, he probably would not have pursued a college degree or given as much importance to academics. In addition, two participants credited high school counselors with encouraging them to pursue a college degree and getting them to fill out the application.

Some of the students' role models were also writers of some kind or encouraged writing in the home. Two participants related how their parents gave them writing tasks to improve their skills:

I didn't really know what to expect going into college and stuff that in the summer...my parents would have me sit down and... make me...write letters for them or something like that just to keep my mind sharp. (Quincy)

From when I was fourteen all the way up until I was seventeen...my mom made sure [my sister and I] read articles [and] maybe like out of the newspaper and there was this one book I really liked... and she would have us write maybe about that much of what we read and to this day she still has them. (Courtney)

The students that had immediate family members or close friends who wrote regularly or who encouraged them to write on a regular basis tended to view writing in the community as more important than the other participants in the study. One of these students recalled writing for fun with her cousins and friends:

I'd say [writing] was pretty important because...me and all my cousins and some of my friends, we'd watch a movie and we'd start writing about it and then we'd kind of guess the ending and then we would watch the movie and the ending

would be like the complete opposite of it. It was pretty fun. (Jessica)

The writers in the students' lives ranged from having degrees in a writing-related field or working for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to journaling or engaging in creative writing. One participant shared how he looked up to his older brother, a school teacher, who wrote short stories and recently finished writing a book, "So I'm trying to follow in his footsteps" (Ellsworth). This was also the person he turned to in high school for help on writing assignments. Another student described her experiences job shadowing a journalist at a prominent newspaper and how it made her consider majoring in journalism, "And I really looked up to her because I never knew another Native writer that wrote as a professional. So, that was nice to see her working, she really liked her job..." (Dawn). A third participant related how one friend with a weak educational background and rough life went on to attend graduate school, and how a relative of that individual received a perfect score on the writing section of the ACT. The fact that Native Americans were achieving success in the area of writing, made an impression on these participants.

Native American authors and famous orators were also among students' influences. Inspiring words from Chief Plenty Coup and Chief Joseph made an impression on two different students. Sherman Alexie was the most cited Indian influential author, mentioned by three students, one of whom tried to emulate his style of writing, but Leslie Marmon Silko, James Welch, and Woody Kipp also made the list. Lastly, one participant depicted his elders and teachers in his self portrait as flying birds, watching over him and influencing decisions about his writing.

With respect to their own writing practices, participants frequently involved people in their extended circle in their process of planning or reviewing their assignments. The third most cited writing strategy, used by fourteen of the nineteen participants was: have friends, classmates, professors who are good writers proofread. Most of the students either asked friends or classmates to read their work, but two turned to family members. Additionally, five out of the fourteen had considered asking or had received proofreading assistance from past or current instructors or Native American program advisors. Apart from instructors, participants were most comfortable sharing their writing with people they knew well. Three students specified that they only let close friends or family members read their work. Talking to someone before beginning to write, especially to come up with an idea for an assignment, was also a popular strategy with ten out of the nineteen participants electing to do so. While the majority were likely to discuss ideas with classmates and friends, two student mentioned getting help from family members. One described how consulting her sister was a natural part of her planning process:

[I]f it's something I am interested in or I know someone else's opinion will help, I usually talk to them first, like my sister I always do that with her cuz me and her have a lot of the same ideas and if there is a good topic we can talk about it for days and we can get into pretty good discussions. (Danielle)

Similarly, a faculty participant had the impression that some students were texting or otherwise sending their written work to friends and family for feedback. Whether asking someone to help proofread or to brainstorm ideas for a paper, these students seemed to

find benefit in transforming the solitary task of writing into a more social endeavor. More importantly, they were reaching out to the people in their community, either on campus or back home, to participate in their practices as student writers. For one participant, just being at home enabled his creative juices to start flowing, “[D]uring the weekend I’ll work on [the assignment] cuz I’ll probably go home and have time to think on it and other ideas comes back from just being home; it’s like a comfort zone” (Juan).

Theme 10: Native Culture

Aspects of participants’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds dotted the landscape of their writing experiences and shaped the development of their identities and practices as writers.

Participants’ autobiographical selves emerged from the data in references to the influence of tribal culture.⁵ While interview protocols did not directly address any relationship between culture and writing, sometimes the topic arose in the course of the conversation. Naturally, a number of participants considered Native American culture-related topics for their assignments, such as aspects of reservation life, Indian mascots, or being bicultural. A faculty participant expressed concern that Native American students’ cultural value of contributing to their group would receive resistance within an individualistic education system. Nevertheless, one student expressed a conscious effort

⁵ I recognize that there is not one Indian culture and that there are considerable differences among tribal languages, religions, and traditions. For example, the Northern Cheyenne and Crow nations are close neighbors geographically; however, historically they were enemies and have conflicting religious beliefs. In addition, Cheyenne belongs to the Algonquian language family while Crow belongs to the Siouan language family. This chapter rests on the premise that despite these great differences, these and other Native American tribes share certain cultural traits, namely a collectivist orientation, an oral tradition, a circular philosophy, and transference of language characteristics between an indigenous language and English.

to write his papers from a “Native perspective...Like the community aspect I guess, like seeing things as it affects the whole instead of just one's self” (Juan).

As a reflection of collectivist cultural values, two participants mentioned using writing as a personal tool to create positive change in the world around them. Juan linked morality with writing and the “willing[ness] to do something and guarantee your best and make the world a better place to live.” Further reflecting on his self-portrait, he applied the metaphor of “color” to explain how sharing with others what he had learned was for him part of being a successful writer:

I’m colorful as a writer. I can go off about anything but...just incorporating these colors into the aspect of writing, not just doing things one way because that gets bland for me, but...just reflecting the stuff I’ve been taught, showing them to others. (Juan)

Dieter also envisioned that becoming a good writer could enable him to help others. He was more specific in identifying his tribe as the intended beneficiary of his success, and gave potential examples of how writing could translate into a profession he could practice in his community:

I think I can help anybody I think just by, like if I became real smart in English, real good at it, I think I could come back here and work for the tribe or something like that. Or, something else, psychologist or something. Let’s see. Help other people, like teach or something. Or journalism or something like that.

When further prompted about the relationship between writing and helping others, he confirmed its importance and gave a practical example of how he could give others a voice through writing:

Yes, that plays a big role in it. I mean if I am able to write, then like I said, I could be able to tell somebody else's story or talk about like struggles and stuff like that, whatever people go through.

In contrast, two participants at different tribal colleges did not recognize such inviting opportunities for the use of writing in their communities. As one explained being a good writer on the Reservation leads to an involvement in tribal politics:

Well, I don't want to say, I want to be into politics here on the Rez or anything like that but I think that, you know, if writing in a person who's eloquent and who can voice their opinions that's where they are headed. And that's not what I want. I just want to survive. (Ed)

Thus, these tribal college students shared a perception of the role of writing in their respective Indian communities that deterred them from embracing being an especially skilled writer. Two faculty participants at different tribal colleges commented on how politics in the community and fears of expressing opposing viewpoints or the cultural value of standing with one's community (i.e. crab in the bucket syndrome) deterred students from expressing their opinions or even excelling in writing. In addition, for culturally traditional students, persuasive writing and taking a stand on an issue was more of a struggle than for more assimilated students. Nevertheless, a small percentage of

students, with the help of some support system in the community, were succeeding at finding their voice and consequently were less fearful about writing.

Other students in the study described writing in their communities and culture in more positive ways. Two participants recounted gaining useful writing skills as part of their jobs in their community. One, an experienced writer, described his experiences working at the Boys and Girls Club:

I worked [there] ever since I was like a freshman in high school to a senior and there was always a lot of writing there, you know, reports and newscasts and everything. And so...my boss always did a lot of writing there. I think that's maybe where I learned a lot too. Good communication with an office or just good PR you know. (Kyle)

A tribal college student enrolled in a Native language course expressed a desire to learn to write, not just speak in his tribal language, which he saw as potentially helping his English writing skills. Additionally, a non-tribal college student named as the main influence on his writing, returning home to explore his identity to better connect with the topics of his papers. Similarly, in reflecting on the specific influences that contributed to how she viewed herself as a writer, Jessica commented, "Probably I would have to say my culture and like my background from all the stories that my grandma and my mom and everyone told me. I mean it's pretty interesting and stuff." Furthermore, she thought the stories she heard influenced her writing but she could not explain how. Juan was better able to express the role of oral tradition in his academics. He described how he learned from his grandfather how to connect the oral tradition to stories in written form.

Even after his grandfather's passing, he still continued the practice of reading a book or story and then talking about it with his mother, inspiring her to want to read it as well. Juan was also able to identify aspects of orality in his writing style, such as having an interesting angle, including humor, and focusing on the "journey" he creates for his reader:

I guess it's from oral tradition cuz they have a meaning and a point to where they are going but the tales of getting there made it more interesting and I believe a paper should be like that even if it's scientific; you have to explain what happened and tell the results and then the main point can be the conclusion of it or something. But...the journey that got there is...[just as important as the conclusion]. (Juan)

Two faculty participants at different tribal colleges confirmed that aspects of the oral tradition influence students' writing. One instructor explained how the semantics of a particular Indian language can interfere with understanding nuances of the English language and gave an example of how the way she phrased a test question resulted in almost all of her class misunderstanding it. But she also viewed oral tradition as a bridge for talking about such aspects as flow in speaking and writing. The other faculty member juxtaposed oral and written discourse as follows:

The oral tradition is very important. It's very different from the written tradition. There is a precision that's a very different kind of precision in the oral tradition and it rides more upon the personality of the person giving the teachings,

presenting the tradition; it rides upon skills and having personal techniques. But writing, by its very nature is an impersonal technique.

He also provided an example of how the traditional tribal language of the college has influenced the English dialect of students regardless of whether they speak their native language, which in turn manifests in their writing. Given the grammar of the language, speakers do not have to provide antecedents once they have established the subject. This can go on for paragraphs, which for someone outside the tribal culture creates a good deal of confusion as to what or who is the subject of discussion.

Another aspect of oral tradition and traditional Indian thinking that can manifest in the writing of some students is its circularity. Indian storytellers, or orators in general, are more concerned with the journey than the destination, so they are in no hurry to get to the point. Listening to such a speaker, an outsider unaware of the nature of Indian discourse would likely feel that the individual is bouncing around or going off on tangents. In written discourse, such circularity would come across as disorganized and unfocused. Five of the student participants mentioned aspects of their writing that could be interpreted as an inclination to think and write non-linearly. They described themselves as “skipping around,” “jumping from idea to idea,” “going off in tangents or meandering,” “shifting in tones,” and “clustering ideas that don’t belong.” In addition, another participant at the four-year institution remarked of her dislike of writing tasks, such as timed essays, that forced her to write linearly, without being able to go back and make changes. A tribal college faculty participant explained that because of the nature of oral discourse strategies, some students tend to repeat themselves when they write,

“You’ll bring back a point, embellish on it or you won’t get to the point. The journey to get to the point is equally important because it is a descriptive language.” Another faculty member at a different institution remarked that many students, especially those who come from mixed White and Indian families, were more comfortable thinking linearly than in the past. However, the more cultural traditional students did tend to write as if they were “talking in the good way.” This “writing in the Indian way” is focused on establishing a certain mood or feeling and facts are used in support of that goal, but to an outsider the train of thought seems circular and without a point. This way of thinking can work in students’ favor on assignments that ask them to share their thoughts or feelings, but such repetition and repetitiveness would usually be labeled as redundancy and incoherence in mainstream writing courses. Nevertheless, one composition faculty member at the four-year institution reflected that the organization of a paper does not have to conform perfectly with rigid academic structure if the ideas are laid out in a way that makes sense to the reader. However, there was a sense that instructors in other disciplines and first-year seminar courses expected the structure of a paper to conform to a set, easily defined standard that did not allow much creativity or account for attempts to write about complex ideas. Furthermore, a writing instructor explained that she promoted the linear thought process and the five-paragraph essay format because it was what she knew best and felt would help students be successful in their writing. While a few faculty expressed an openness to non-linear thinking, in practice they felt compelled to guide students towards more structure as this example illustrates:

I had this kid who frustrated me beyond belief because he was one of the best writers I ever had, but he refused to really, you know, follow that process and that was okay with me as long as he produced good work. But the truth is, his work really suffered because he would just... that free form kind of thing and he wouldn't really get himself together.

More research would be needed to uncover the relationship between oral tradition, students' organizational style, expectations of faculty including reactions to non-linear structure.

While finding links between the oral tradition and their writing was understandably not something readily achieved by most student participants, they had an easier time discussing oral language in relation to the written word. For some students and one Native American faculty member, talking and writing went “hand in hand” in that they were ways of communicating and required knowledge of certain vocabulary, for example. One student even compared the way he wrote essays to the way he talked on the phone:

The way I see writing a paper is just like a phone conversation... when I get on the phone and talk to somebody, I wanna say, “OK. Yeah, you gotta be here, gotta do this, gotta have that. And I'll see you later.” Quick communication, get to the point and get it done. (Ed)

In their interviews, students sometimes used words indicating oral speech, such as “tell, talk, speak” when they were referring to writing. Also, a participant reflected on how

writing was the main way of “speaking” in high school when communicating aloud with friends was not an option, “I guess [writing] was pretty important cuz it was a main way of speaking to people like in schools, like we’ll write notes and everything and pass along or text messaging...” (Juan).

This blurring of the distinction between oral and written discourse indicates that some students may be writing the way they speak, likely resulting in non-academic characteristics in their work. One participant recalled his frustration in high school with teachers finding fault with how he presented his words on paper:

It just had to be written how they taught it and how the text was presenting it.

Like this. Like I’m speaking and when I go write something down my punctuation wasn’t where it was supposed to be. My paper was like not good. (Lionel)

In total, eight participants identified weaknesses in either punctuation, knowing where to insert logical pauses, run-on sentences and/or fragments⁶. One student described the type of feedback he received on his essays with these kinds of errors:

[A]fter in this and in my other papers sometimes I have comma errors. This is one of the few papers where I didn’t have a lot of fraction [sic] sentences. Because I know that’s a big problem...Fragments, yeah. And so, I probably worked on that in this paper... because a lot of my other papers in the back it’s scribbled, “Fragment sentences! Get rid of them!” That was like on every paper, so I just tried to eliminate those. (Will)

⁶ A faculty member attributed frequent fragment errors of Native American students to grammatical interference from an indigenous language.

Luckily, this more experienced writer learned to look for and eliminate most of his errors. However, not all students could do it as easily, as in this example from a less experienced writer:

Yeah, [I proofread] but I still had problems with where stuff goes. Run-ons. I still don't really understand run-ons. Like I'll get that written on my paper and I won't know what he's talking about. I guess it's just a really long sentence. I don't know. (Samuel)

The influence of orality also surfaced in the prevalence of homophone errors in participants' work. Based on student report alone, it was difficult to gauge the frequency that participants confused words that sounded alike. They were not necessarily aware of the term "homophone" and potentially were classifying such errors under a broader category as this example illustrates, "And then I guess the main thing was grammar, like throw and through and threw and through" (Samuel). Another student shrugged off her homophone error as just a mistake, but for ear learners such errors can be difficult to avoid and catch when proofreading. A review of participants' graded assignments yielded homophone errors in three of these writing samples, with an additional one in a participant's self-portrait. A few faculty participants also mentioned that homophone confusion did surface in the work of Native American novice writers but also in that of inexperienced student writers in general. Another instructor reflected that Native American high school students tended to write the way they spoke but that in college they were perhaps developing editing strategies to proofread and correct for this. Incidentally,

an instructor at the same institution did notice the use of oral language in writing by some students.

While the types of characteristics discussed above also appear in the writing of novice writers regardless of cultural background, they may be more prevalent for some Native American and other minority writers. The early language background of students also shapes their literacy acquisition. Research shows that not learning to write in one's first language can create difficulties when acquiring literacy in one's second language. Speaking a non-standard dialect of English can also influence writing style. Two participants in this study made references to the "bad" or "broken" English they spoke growing up. Faculty also shared impressions of how speaking more than one language and/or dialect influenced student writing. An instructor shared that some students connected speaking Crow at home with spelling English words how they sounded. According to an instructor who is also a bilingual speaker of an Indian language, the in-between generation of students that are not fluent in their home language are the ones struggling because they cannot transfer aspects, such as the descriptive nature of their Indian language, to writing. There is not enough evidence to draw a correlation between the Indian dialects they spoke in their youth to their writing experiences, but the fact that participants made references to their linguistic differences suggests this area needs further attention.

In discussing their writing process, participants identified strategies and general practices that they typically engaged in to complete their writing assignments. One strategy of interest reinforces the important role of oral language. When proofreading,

seven out of the nineteen participants reported reading their paper aloud to listen for mistakes. Interestingly, one participant described asking someone to read her paper aloud so that she could listen to it better. An additional student was thinking about adopting this strategy given that she was already reading books aloud to herself. Perhaps in hearing their written work out loud, it becomes easier to determine if it “sounds right” as two more participants aimed to do when proofreading. This strategy was popular with a wide range of students, regardless of institution type, degree of confidence as a writer or being culturally traditional. While the effectiveness of proofreading out loud is not clear, it may be a useful approach for those students who favor an auditory learning style. Two tribal college faculty had students’ read their work aloud in class and another explained the usefulness of speaking her Indian language out loud before writing it down.

Another aspect of students’ writing process that emerged from the data reflects the influence of traditional Indian thinking. Eight participants reported that they imagined the whole “story” before beginning to write. This concept was adopted from Chávez (1998) who used the metaphor of a weaver to describe how as a writer she first created patterns for a whole tapestry before words even came into play. In this way, being required to organize linearly, one step at a time, would conflict with needing to allow ideas to emerge more organically. Only two of the eight students who thought out everything before writing also considered using an outline to organize their paper. Of note is that all but one of the participants who envisioned their whole message beforehand were tribal college students and the one university student described herself as fairly traditional culturally. Therefore, written assignments that allow for flexibility in

the planning and organization stages would validate approaches of Native American students who are less linear in their thinking.

Data from this study indicate that different aspects of students' Native culture and linguistic background can be contributing to their goals and identities as writers, influencing their writing strategies, and shaping characteristics of their writing. Non-standard and non-linear writing is interpreted in college as a product of weak skills. Therefore, investigating indigenous dimensions of written communication would hopefully shift attention to what Native American student writers have to offer rather than only to learn.

Comparison of Experiences between Tribal College and University Students

The previous section described the net experiences of participants across all institutions, which were reflected as an aggregate across the ten themes. However, participants' experiences differed in some ways depending on the type of institution they were attending. Below are the key findings for data compared across the university and the two tribal colleges:

Motivations/Success

There were no differences across institutions in students' writing goals and motivations. There was some indication that tribal college students defined success as being able to help others, either in the class or beyond with their writing. However, this could also hold true for culturally traditional students at a four-year institution.

Preparation for College Writing

Tribal college students were more likely to have received a GED and attended more than one high school. University students were more likely to have taken honors or AP English in high school.

College Writing in General

Tribal college students seemed to have less graded writing assignments in the course of a semester. The focus of the curriculum, especially at the lower levels of composition, was more on learning grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure than producing written work. A participant from the four-year institution visited some friends at one of the tribal colleges and her impressions of one writing class also reflected some differences between tribal college and university writing curricula:

I just remember they didn't have like a lot of homework and then...the only thing they did have, what they did in class was just, easier work it seemed like, like stuff I did in high school. (Dawn)

Dawn related working on an exercise to distinguish between active and passive voice. She did find some activities to be similar to her writing course, like reading articles and discussing them, but described the students more reluctant to participate than her classmates at the university.

Confidence/Self-Concept/Interest in Writing

University students tended to be more confident in their skills as academic writers. High self-confidence in tribal college students did not always indicate being an

experienced writer, rather a general enjoyment of writing. There was no difference in self-concept or interest in writing across institutional type.

Academic Writing Literacy

Some tribal college students were less familiar with terms used in academic writing, but overall an understanding of what academic writing entails depended on students' confidence in writing, semester of enrollment and writing courses taken and not institutional type.

Writing Process

There was no difference in number of effective writing strategies used across institutional type. Strategy-use was only one indicator of the degree of experience of the student writers. However, tribal college students were more likely to use a writing strategy associated with traditional Indian thinking and the oral tradition. There were no differences by institutional type in attitudes toward multiple drafts and approaches to revision.

Feedback

There were no differences across institutional type in how students viewed feedback on their writing. Peer review was not as common at tribal colleges than the four-year institutional, mainly because of attendance issues.

Resources

Students at tribal college did not always take writing their first semester because of the lack of instructors to teach the necessary sections. There was a problem of turn-over with instructors, which also impacted students' experiences in terms of shifts in focus of the curriculum. Nevertheless, the faculty and student support services staff directed considerable effort toward meeting the individual needs of students. All the students regardless of institution, were more likely to ask for help with writing from people they knew well and had a certain degree of trust. However, tribal college students were somewhat more likely to seek assistance from their professors and former high school teachers.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore Native American students' experiences with writing in the first year of college at two tribal colleges and a public research university, investigating in particular what helped them succeed as writers. Participants' descriptions of their writing experiences yielded ten major themes and contributed insights into the following sub-questions:

1. How do students' educational backgrounds and existing attitudes toward writing influence their writing experiences in college?

Aspects of participants' cultural and linguistic backgrounds surfaced throughout their writing experiences and shaped the development of their identities and practices as writers. While participants' prior educational backgrounds could not account for the

complexity and diversity of their experiences, they influenced their initial sense of preparation for college writing.

2. How do their writing experiences influence their attitudes toward writing and their perceptions of themselves as writers?

Participants began their first semester with varying understandings of academic writing. Since many of them were novice writers, they were in the process of gaining the vocabulary to talk about college writing and their own process. Students' self-concept and degree of confidence as a writer were key factors in attitudes toward writing. In addition, they defined being successful as a college writer in different ways that did not always reflect mainstream academic goals.

3. What actions and inactions of students influence their level of success as writers?

Participants' ability and willingness to embrace the role of academic writer influenced the nature of their experiences and overall attitude toward writing.

Participants' extended circle of family, friends, and community members played an important role in their academic success and served as a sounding board for their writing. Along similar lines, students favored obtaining help with writing from people they knew well and in whom they had a certain amount of trust, rather than unfamiliar college resources. In general, participants shared a dislike and reluctance to engage in revision despite its importance in composition courses. However, more students could experience the benefits of revising their work if they better understood the role of drafts in the writing process and their options for revising.

4. What actions and inactions of faculty, tutors, and other individuals in the students' courses, at the institution, and in their extended circle contribute to students' level of success as writers?

Faculty and tutor feedback on writing assignments served as the main way in which participants gained an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and assessed their sense of confidence as writers. Feedback was most effective in helping participants improve in writing when it was specific, provided in the context of explicit and reasonable expectations, and reinforced in additional ways.

Chapter 5 provides implications of these findings for college faculty, tutors, academic support staff, and administrators who want to support first-year Native American students in becoming successful academic writers. Included in the discussion is an emerging framework for understanding Native American student success in writing.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Similar to many American Indian stories, this dissertation has five parts. Not unlike traditional storytellers, I attempt to connect each of the parts to weave the story into wholeness. The first chapter began with an overview of past failures and present shortcomings in meeting the educational needs of these students. Chapter two addressed the gap in the literature in terms of investigating the academic writing needs and attributes of Native American first-year students, in particular. The third chapter delineated how grounded theory methodology was applied in this study to explore the writing experiences of tribal college and university participants in their first year of college. Chapter four presented findings organized around ten themes that emerged from a recursive process of data analysis. This last chapter aims to initiate a comprehensive inquiry into the academic writing experiences of Native American students with the aid of a theoretical model for understanding the factors that contribute to first-year Native American students' success as college writers. Also woven into the discussion are summaries of the study's methods and results, findings in light of the literature, suggestions for further research, and recommendations for practice.

Overview

First-year college students face many challenges in their new learning environment, both academic and social. Becoming a successful academic writer is one

aspect of their academic experiences that has not received much attention in general. In particular, there is a need to understand Native American students' experiences with writing in their first year and how these can contribute to their success as college students. The purpose of this grounded theory study was to learn from first-year Native American students at a public research university and two tribal colleges about their process of discovering what it means to be an academic writer and about the factors that help them succeed as writers. The study was guided by the following primary question: *How do Native American students describe their academic writing experiences in their first year of college?* These additional questions further defined the direction of the study:

1. How do students' backgrounds and attitudes toward writing influence their writing experiences in college?
2. How do their writing experiences influence their attitudes toward writing and their perceptions of themselves as writers.
3. What actions and inactions of students influence their level of success as writers?
4. What actions and inactions of faculty, tutors, and other individuals in the students' courses, at the institution, and in their extended circle contribute to students' level of success as writers?

Context of the Study

Given the role of environment in college experiences and the fact that different types of students are more likely to attend different types of institutions, I sampled self-identified American Indian students from both tribal colleges and a four-year public

research university in the Mountain West region of the United States. Although these institutions could not represent the wide array of experiences students have at other types of institutions, their greatly differing missions, size, and other characteristics helped to capture the diversity of students and their experiences.

I selected the public research university for several reasons. First, the president of the institution at the study's inception had expressed a goal to become the university of choice in the state for Native American students, and the institution attracts students with diverse cultural backgrounds and tribal affiliations. Second, several academic programs offer additional services to help American Indian students meet academic and financial challenges and find a "home-away-from home" on campus (Rankin-Brown & Fitzpatrick, 2007). Finally, I had taught at the institution for several years and had buy-in from student support personnel working with American Indian students, and thus, access to a sufficient participant base.

In order to capture the heterogeneity of the Native American student population in terms of tribal affiliation, degree of traditionalism (here limited to the number of speakers of a tribe's Native language), and degree aspirations (in terms of whether the institution offers associate and/or baccalaureate degrees), I collected data from two tribally controlled colleges in addition to the public university. In general, the goal was to select colleges for the study that were more different than similar to the mainstream institution. The specific criteria I used for selecting from the numerous tribal colleges in the state included: (1) no degrees offered higher than the associate's degree, (2) rural location (no city larger than 10,000 within 1 hour radius), (3) small (less than 500) student body, (4)

degree of tribal traditionalism (extent to which the Native language is spoken), and (5) proximity to my residence. Given the characteristics of the tribal colleges in the state, three institutions emerged as the top choices for inclusion. Two of these agreed to participate in the study, with TC1 (Tribal College 1) giving official consent in September 2009 and TC2 (Tribal College 2) in January 2010.

Methods

This grounded theory study utilized in-depth interviews with students, faculty, and staff to investigate the writing experiences of first-year Native American students, including perceptions of the factors that influence their success with academic writing. As the primary data collection method, I conducted from one to two semi-structured interviews with participants. Initial interviews with students at the university took place before spring break in mid March 2009 and the follow-up interview in late April before the end of the semester. Interviews with university faculty and staff occurred in May 2009 with an additional interview in June 2010. I made two trips to TC1 in October 2009 and March 2010 and interviewed students both times and faculty/staff during the second visit. Given the longer process to receive approval for the study at TC2, time only allowed for one visit in March 2010, during which I interviewed students, faculty and staff.

The criterion method was used for selection of student participants (Creswell, 2007). Criteria required that participants be: (a) first-year students (either in first or second semester, but preferably first time enrolled in college), (b) self-identified as

Native American (American Indian or Alaska Native), (c) enrolled in at least one English composition “course” (including developmental writing), and (d) enrolled in at least one other course requiring writing (something other than a math or science course). A total of 10 university students participated in the study, with 8 completing two interviews. Five students from TC1 participated, with two completing two interviews. Four students from TC2 participated in one interview.

For the purposes of triangulating data from the student participants, I conducted one-on-one interviews with faculty and academic support staff, either recommended by students or identified by me, as having knowledge of students’ writing experiences. At the university, I conducted interviews with eleven faculty/staff. At each TC1 and TC2, I interviewed two faculty and one academic support person. Other instrumentation included a flow-chart activity for completing writing assignments (See Appendix J), which consisted of a selection of planning and writing strategies identified by students in a pilot study and in the literature on metacognition in writing (Sitko, 1998).

Data Collection/Verification

I collected data using one-on-one interviews. In addition to using a semi-structured interview protocol to guide our conversation, I asked students to complete three tasks designed to provide additional insight into their experiences and beliefs about writing: drawing a self-portrait as an academic writer, constructing a flow-chart of their process as a writer, and reflecting on a graded writing assignment. I established verification and trustworthiness through two different means during the data collection

and analysis phases. These methods, member checking and triangulation, followed common practices for the qualitative paradigm. Along with verbatim transcriptions of each interview, I provided each participant with a short summary and interpretation of the main points. They also received instructions to clarify inaudible segments as well as to comment on whether their more recent perceptions or experiences had changed or reinforced what they shared in the first interview. I sent all participants their member checking files via electronic mail, but also provided those who had a follow-up interview with a printed copy of the summary and asked them to review it at the beginning of the session. Tribal college students tended not to be as responsive via electronic mail; therefore, I mailed them paper copies of their transcripts and summaries as well.

I also used triangulation to verify the trustworthiness of the primary data. Primarily, I analyzed faculty and staff interviews with a focus on corroborating the student data and providing more context for the emerging themes. This resulted in being particularly effective in underscoring the importance of certain themes that had seemed only marginal from the students' perspective. In addition, student participants' graded writing assignments served as a concrete reference during discussions of experiences with feedback on writing and their own writing process. I also consulted these during analysis of sub-themes. Students' self-portraits as writers served as a starting point for discussing confidence as a writer and factors influencing their confidence and views of themselves as academic writers. They also revealed confusion regarding what academic writing entails as well as existing conflicts between attitudes and skills. Finally, the flow-chart activity gave participants concrete strategies to consider in explaining their writing

process and provided the researcher a way to compare strategy use across students. It also indirectly brought up the topic of the types of writing resources students employ and their reasons for and against their use, thus providing additional data for this question asked directly in the course of the interview.

Data Analysis

After transcribing verbatim audiotaped data, I input the files into the QSR NVivo 8 software program to aid organization, coding, and analysis. The realms of influence from my theoretical framework, (1) student, (2) extended circle, (3) course, and (4) institution, constituted the free nodes (open categories) in the NVivo coding structure, and the research questions informed the initial tree nodes (hierarchical categories). I followed the coding process described by Holton (2007) for classic grounded theory methodology. The recursive phases of coding and analysis are: (1) substantive coding, (2) theoretical coding, and (3) hypothesis building.

In the first phase, I applied different codes to the data to capture the complexity and be able to analyze the interview fragments from different perspectives. Secondly, I ran NVivo coding queries to filter the data and narrow my focus or group related categories to look for patterns. I also compared data from different sites to capture all the ways in which participants described an aspect of their experience with writing. For hypothesis building, I considered the meaning behind the answers to my queries and the messages embedded in the results. To maintain focus on the most relevant and revealing findings, I did not include in the results data that did not fit under the final ten themes.

Finally, I used the findings to develop a theoretical framework to explain the factors influencing Native American students' academic writing experiences. This model appears later in this chapter.

Results

Participants' descriptions of their writing experiences yielded ten major themes and contributed insights into the following research sub-questions:

1. How do students' backgrounds and attitudes toward writing influence their writing experiences in college?

Participants' descriptions of their prior experiences with writing, especially in high school, provided a glimpse into their attitudes toward writing and expectations of themselves as writers. Some blamed their schools for not preparing them, others lauded their teachers for setting high standards. A few felt fairly prepared, while many were surprised or frustrated that their writing did not meet college expectations. However, their initial sense of preparation for college writing was merely the starting point. How they developed as writers depended on experiences in classes and feedback on assignments and what those conveyed in terms of their identity. Students' identity was partially defined by their tribal culture. Some participants indicated a collectivist orientation in their purposes for writing. For many, aspects of the oral tradition filtered into their written discourse. A few were even aware that their Indian dialect could have negatively influenced their earlier writing experiences. Even the ways they defined success in

writing to some extent reflected their cultural heritage rather than mainstream academic goals.

2. How do their writing experiences influence their attitudes toward writing and their perceptions of themselves as writers?

Students' self-concept and degree of confidence as a writer were key factors in attitudes toward writing. Faculty identified low confidence, more than weak skills as hindering students' growth as writers. General perceptions of self, such as believing one's ideas have value, contributed to identifying as a writer. Some participants were starting to recognize their authorial "voice," while others were still negotiating what being a college writer meant for them. Participants were also navigating the unknown waters of the hidden curriculum and academic discourse. Learning terms like syllabus and APA brought them closer into the academic community. At first many were overwhelmed by the terminology, rhetorical styles, and expectations, but by their second semester, they had a better understanding, and thus, greater confidence. They were also beginning to recognize differences and similarities of standards for writing across the curriculum, which contributed to their unique definitions of what academic writing entails.

3. What actions and inactions of students influence their level of success as writers?

The majority of participants had a favorable disposition toward writing in general and enjoyed writing for personal purposes. Nevertheless, some of these same students disliked academic writing. In addition, many shared a reluctance to engage in revision, even while acknowledging its importance in composition courses. However, more

students could experience the benefits of revising their work if they better understood the role of drafts in the writing process and their options for revising. Overall, students were aware of their writing process to varying degrees and identified as a college writer in different ways. A few were Seekers looking for how to embrace their new role. The Feelers focused on the emotions they associated with writing. More were Planners, engrossed in an aspect of the writing process. Another group consisted of Travelers, using metaphors to reflect on their path of discovery as writers. The Learners were students foremost, depicting themselves learning to be a writer in a classroom. Finally, one participant was a Creator, in the sense of focusing on the product of her writing efforts.

In terms of seeking writing assistance, participants chose to approach people they knew well and had a certain amount of trust. These included academic advisors, faculty, librarians, and even high school teachers. Students also turned to their extended circle of family, friends, and community members to brainstorm ideas and get help with proofreading drafts. While all the institutions offered tutoring services in writing, most participants were either unaware of or uninterested in using unfamiliar college resources. Experiences with using a writing center were mixed and depended on the institution and students' objectives for wanting to use a tutor. The writing center's philosophy and mission also influenced students' experiences.

4. What actions and inactions of faculty, tutors, and other individuals in the students' courses, at the institution, and in their extended circle contribute to students' level of success as writers?

Faculty and tutor feedback on writing assignments served as the main way in which participants gained an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and formed their sense of confidence as writers. The nature of comments on graded assignments varied depending on the discipline, course and instructor. There was even variability across composition courses, with developmental writing instructors providing a greater variety of feedback compared with first-year composition instructors, who focused mainly on ideas and critical thinking. Furthermore, instructors at tribal colleges tended to identify and correct students' errors, while university instructors opted for more indirect identification. While faculty described different ways they attempted to reinforce students' strengths and provide encouragement, participants had more of a sense of their weaknesses than strengths. Nevertheless, they appreciated feedback that identified areas needing improvement. Feedback was most effective in helping participants improve in writing when it was specific and given in the context of explicit and reasonable expectations. Too many comments were counterproductive; they overwhelmed and confused students. It was helpful for some students to be able to focus on a few aspects of writing at a time, working on their major issues first. The degree to which students reported improving in their weak areas since beginning college depended on the writing skill in question. In addition to feedback, instructors supported and reinforced students'

writing through in-class workshops, modeling a specific type of writing, and providing samples of expectations for an assignment.

Comparison of the Results to the Literature

As mentioned in Chapter 2, few studies have investigated the writing experiences of Native American college students, and none have focused on what contributes to students' success as academic writers. Therefore, a survey of the literature cast a wide net, encompassing characteristics of student writers, influences of their extended circle including culture, and institutional and instructional factors. Comparisons of the findings in this study to relevant literature from Chapter 2 and are presented below. "This study" refers to my investigation of first-year Native American students' experiences with academic writing.

Novice vs. Experienced Writers

The current study identified some characteristics of novice as well as experienced writers in the attitudes and writing processes of the participants. Although all the students were in their first year of college and had limited experiences with writing, they, nonetheless, varied in their awareness and skill levels. To capture their writing development, participants' writing abilities were categorized as experienced, moderately experienced, somewhat experienced, and not experienced in college writing based on several factors: (a) placement in college composition courses, (b) self-reported confidence as an academic writer, (c) amount of academic writing literacy, (d) number of

effective writing strategies generally used, (e) self-reported enjoyment of academic writing, and (f) engagement in non-academic/personal writing.

Participants in general, but especially the ones who were less skilled, worried about punctuation usage, spelling, and correct formatting of citations more than organization, argument development, or paraphrasing, for example. In addition, most of the students were reluctant to do more than one draft or disliked revising beyond editing for surface errors. This supports research that novice writers and/or students in their first to second year in college define good writing in terms of surface correctness (especially mechanics) and show little or no evidence of major reformulation of ideas (Gregory, 1989; Harley, 1991). However, there was also evidence in the present study that students were beginning to acquire some of the traits and strategies of more experienced writers. For example, many students reported using one or more pre-writing strategy, in particular, thinking a lot before starting to write, talking to someone about ideas for the assignment, imaging the whole “story” before beginning to write, and visually organizing ideas using webs, outlines or brainstorming. In addition, about one third of the participants indicated reading their papers over with the audience in mind. Finally, more than half of the participants described engaging in personal writing either at the time of the study or in the past. The same number also indicated enjoying academic writing to some degree. These characteristics also align with findings in the literature on experienced writers: they tend to spend more time planning and thinking about their topic (including while engaged in routine activities), engage in pre-writing strategies, consider

the audience, and enjoy writing for both academic and personal purposes (Gregory, 1989; Kaulaity, 2007; Taylor, 1984).

Metacognition

Metacognitive awareness, or the ability to think about thinking, has been identified as a characteristic of an effective writer, one which many first-year and less experienced writers lack. There is some research linking a writer's ability to discuss their writing process with their overall skill (Parisi, 1994; Taylor, 1984). While this study did not directly probe participants' metacognition of their writing abilities or process, conversations with the students sometimes revealed their degree of awareness of what they did and excelled at or not as writers.

All the participants were able to talk about their writing process because they participated in the flow chart activity, which helped stimulate their schema with regard to potential activities and strategies. There was no apparent relationship between the degree of experience of a participant and the number of steps or strategies they reported using. There was somewhat of a relationship in terms of skill level and the types of strategies used. For example, the two "not experienced" writers used only one or no planning strategies compared to one to four noted by the five "experienced" writers. However, such distinctions are not unequivocal as a couple experienced writers did not report using many strategies in general. Overall, students more easily recognized their weaknesses than their strengths as writers. All but one of the six participants who identified at least one area of strength were moderately experienced to experienced writers. Finally, two

tribal college students commented that prior to our interview they had never thought about or talked about their writing with others. One found reflecting on how he writes beneficial, “I never really thought about writing until now. (slight laugh) It’s actually good to know where I stand on writing and where I want to go with writing. Where I want to be with writing” (Dieter). Perhaps participating in the study and being asked to think about who they are and what they do as writers, helped some participants experience a shift in their metacognition.

Self-efficacy

Confidence as a writer is captured in the construct of self-efficacy, defined as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Although a separate construct from metacognition, self-efficacy could be influenced by how cognizant students are of certain aspects of writing, such as uses for academic writing (Maimon, 2002).

In this study, participants discussed in general their degree of confidence as an academic writer. Eight of the nineteen participants reported fairly high self-confidence as a college writer, five indicated moderate confidence, three were somewhat confident and another three had low confidence. In general, participants were referring to their ability to complete writing assignments, but sometimes they also described feeling more or less competent with specific aspects of writing, such as formatting citations, organizing or providing support for their ideas, or using correct punctuation. Although most of the participants preferred writing that allowed for use of personal experience, none of them

specified a rhetorical style or writing task that was particularly daunting. A couple of students either underestimated or overestimated their abilities, but overall participants' confidence aligned with their skill level. Research on the connection between skills and confidence is equally mixed with some findings pairing an over or underestimation of skills with low or high confidence (Eves-Bowden, 2001; Kaulaity, 2007; Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Taylor, 1984). In terms of acknowledging their degree of skill, one weaker student demonstrated a strong external locus of control but stronger writers also defined their abilities based on whether the instructor liked their work. Thus, there is not enough evidence to confirm findings in the literature that weaker students' writing achievement is more affected by their self-beliefs and locus of control than stronger writers (Jones, 2008).

A surprising finding was the degree of importance that faculty placed on building confidence for students to persist in their efforts as college writers and ultimately succeed. They perceived that past negative experiences or the current newness of their learning environment intimidated students, and that their low confidence sometimes gave a false impression that they were weaker writers than they actually were. Furthermore, one writing faculty member felt if students lacked confidence and did not feel comfortable in their environment, they would not learn.

Self-concept

Self-concept is a view of oneself formed through direct experiences and evaluations adopted from significant others, and thought to partly reflect personal self-

efficacy (Bandura, 1997). To some degree, beliefs about writing are linked to perceptions of self, which explains why criticizing someone's writing is akin to criticizing the individual (Pajares & Johnson, 1994). Findings in this study support a strong relationship between identity and writing. Two participants expressed a sort of shy embarrassment talking about their writing:

This is like my first time talking about how I really write. So it's kind of hard. I kind of feel embarrassed. But then when I think about it and also people are like me and like to write and don't have a problem with it. (Shanelle)

Both students enjoyed writing yet in some ways considered it quite intimate. Faculty also remarked on the personal and sensitive nature of academic writing and the resulting reluctance of students to open themselves up for critique by sharing their work. Other participants illustrated that writing is personal in that it could help them discover or make a statement about who they are. Based on Clark and Ivanič's (1997) model of writer identity, some students demonstrated a sense of self as an author in their use of the term "having voice." They perceived their writing as communicating to readers a part of themselves, whether it be their style or ideas. Faculty also shared how they encouraged students to find their own voice through writing. Finally, there was also evidence that for Native American students, identity is linked to their culture, language, and community. In discussing their self-portraits as academic writers, three of the participants shared how their culture and/or community influenced the image of themselves. Some faculty participants also offered perceptions of how their students' cultural identities could be influencing their decisions as writers. One blamed cultural dissonance as the source of

students' writing difficulties. Research with students of different backgrounds has also found links between writing and a writer's culture and attempts to reaffirm or recreate one's identity (Cadman, 1997; Chen, 1994; Fisher, 2002; Kaulaity, 2007). Other aspects of the relationship between writing and culture and community are discussed in following three sections.

The Role of Family, Friends, and Community in Students' Academic Success

The majority of the participants in this study mentioned specific people, sometimes more than one, in their extended circle who served as role models or the impetus to attend college. These individuals were not only parents, aunties, uncles and grandparents; they also included siblings, friends and even children. This adds confirmation to much research indicating that for American Indian students, the support of family is the number one factor for their academic success. Teachers and friends, one's religious faith and tribe also play important roles (Huffman, Still, & Brokenleg, 1986; Reyhner & Dodd, 1995). Some of the students' role models were also writers of some kind or encouraged writing in the home. The writers in the students' lives ranged from having degrees in a writing-related field or working for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to journaling or engaging in creative writing. The students who had immediate family members or close friends who wrote regularly or who encouraged them to write on a regular basis tended to view writing in the community as more important than the other participants in the study. Native American authors and famous orators, and tribal elders were also among students' influences. With respect to their own writing practices,

participants frequently involved people in their extended circle—friends, classmates, or family members—in their process of planning or reviewing their assignments. Previous studies found similar evidence (Kaulaity, 2007; Komlos, 2008).

There is also some evidence to support the idea that a high degree of traditionalism correlates with greater confidence in writing. In response to an open-ended question, participants described and defined their degree of traditionalism. Based on their descriptions and examples, students were grouped as either: (1) very, (2) fairly, (3) moderately, (4) somewhat, or (5) less culturally traditional. Three out of the four participants in the very traditional category also ranked either fairly high or moderately confident as academic writers. Nevertheless, caution is needed in drawing definitive conclusions since participants who were fairly highly confident in their writing skills ranged from less to very traditional culturally. Thus, only limited comparisons can be made with findings in the literature that stronger ties to culture result in greater confidence as a student.

Influence of American Indian Thinking, the Oral Tradition, and Native Languages on Writing

While interview protocols did not directly address any relationship between culture and writing, sometimes the topic arose in the course of the conversation. Two students and two faculty members, with representation from all three institutions in the study, discussed the influence of the oral tradition on writing. Only one student could provide specific examples of transference; these included the use of humor and focusing on the “journey” he creates for his reader. Two instructors provided different examples of

how the semantics of a particular Indian language can interfere with understanding and writing the English language. Unlike the student participants, perhaps they were able to connect the oral tradition with some aspects of students' frustrations with writing. Given that discourse properties differ for oral and literate traditions, apprehensions about writing linked to orality are possible (Scollon & Scollon, 1981). However, student participants in this study perceived their oral tradition as an advantage.

Circularity was another aspect of oral tradition and traditional Indian thinking that seemed to manifest in participants' writing. Traditional Indian thinking, which is circular in philosophy, has been found to conflict with the linear thinking of much of the Western world, including academia (Fixico, 2003). Five of the student participants mentioned aspects of their writing that could be interpreted as an inclination to think and write non-linearly. Two faculty members also confirmed that some students, especially those who were more traditional, tended to repeat themselves in their papers or write as if they were "talking in the good way," a traditional discourse pattern with the goal of establishing a certain mood or feeling. In addition, some participants also used a planning strategy associated with traditional Indian thinking: Imagining the whole "story" before beginning to write, a concept adopted from Chávez's (1998) writing metaphor of weaving a tapestry. Participants who thought out everything before writing were less likely to use an outline to organize their paper, and they were fairly culturally traditional or attending a tribal college. Other research on Native American writers has found similar connections between an emergent writing process and non-linear organizational strategies (Chávez, 1998; Kaulaity, 2007).

Participants' discussions of oral language in relation to the written word indicated a blurring of the distinction between oral and written discourse, suggesting that some students could be writing the way they spoke, likely resulting in non-academic characteristics in their work. Students themselves identified weaknesses in either punctuation, knowing where to insert logical pauses, run-on sentences and/or fragments. The influence of orality also surfaced in the prevalence of homophone errors in participants' work, and the use of aural strategies, such as reading a paper aloud when proofreading. These same characteristics in participants' writing could also be a reflection of linguistic influences, such as interference from a tribal language or Indian dialect (Dyc, 2002; Fleisher, 1982; Leap, 1993). Two students mentioned an awareness of how "bad English" influenced their early literacy, but it is not clear how much their dialects contributed to their self-efficacy as writers. However, evidence was apparent for the positive influence of students' first language on their development of academic writing. Two faculty participants experienced that knowledge of a tribal language tended to result in positive learning outcomes for students, which aligns with the research as well (Dyc, 2002; Kipp, 2000).

Data from this study indicate that different aspects of students' Native culture and linguistic background can be contributing to their goals and identities as writers, influencing their writing strategies, and shaping characteristics of their writing. While there is great diversity among Native American college writers in terms of cultural and linguistic influences, as a collective they seem to share characteristics of another previously marginalized group, Generation 1.5 immigrant college students. These

learners either immigrated at an early age or are the children of immigrants and likely learned their home language but did not acquire literacy in that language prior to learning to read and write in their second language. Both of these groups have (1) faced different sociocultural realities, (2) experienced marginalization in K12 education, (3) been frequently assigned to developmental English classes in college, (4) an intuitive sense of what sounds right in writing, (5) difficulty distinguishing between oral and written discourse, and (6) familiarity but limited comfort with the process approach to writing and rhetorical patterns (Thonus, 2003).

The Legacy of Writing in Native American Communities

Some argue that many American Indians' reluctance to embrace and excel at writing reflects Native communities' loss of faith in the written word, metaphorically "white man's bullets" (Lyons, 2000; Wilson, 1998). In addition, writing is considered taboo in certain contexts by some American Indians (Lyons, 2008). Although none of the participants mentioned taboos or resistance in their community with regard to writing, two students and a faculty member described negative associations of writing with tribal politics. The climate around tribal politics on two reservations was such that students were given negative messages about expressing their own opinions and were deterred from wanting to be a good writer because of its association with an involvement in politics.

Nevertheless, other participants described writing in their communities and culture in more positive ways. Some participants naturally chose writing topics related to

their culture and community, and one even more directly wanted to write his papers from a Native perspective. A few students shared aspirations of using their writing to contribute to their community or better the world in general. This reflects the essence of learning in indigenous epistemologies, which centers around participation and honoring of relationships among people and communities (Cajete, 2005). Only one faculty participant at a tribal college gave examples of incorporating into the curriculum aspects of tribal culture and using the oral tradition to bridge spoken and written discourse. Perhaps awareness is lacking among faculty of instructional models that fuse oral tradition and essayist literacy (Dyc, 1994; Lyons, 2008).

Strategies for Supporting Native American Learners

The most salient result in this study concerning writing support for incoming college students, was the need to provide explicit instruction in academic literacy, and specifically an introduction to academic writing. Not only did participants use varying terms to refer to the type of writing expected of them in college, but also for many “academic writing” referred to a narrowly defined type of college writing and not a catch-all term. Some perceived varying expectations for writing across the curriculum, while also recognizing some common standards regardless of discipline. Nonetheless, a few novice writers lacked such an awareness and struggled with applying concepts learned in one course to others. Discussions with student and faculty participants also revealed a need for incoming students to acquire academic vocabulary and to become familiar with terminology associated with academic writing. There are also recommendations in the

literature for providing explicit instruction in academic literacy, including the uses of language, citation, and analysis, for basic writers and minority and American Indian students (Asera, 2006; Dyc, 2002; Eves-Bowden, 2001; Landis, 1985).

The Role of Faculty and Feedback on Writing

Feedback on writing provides the most direct information students receive about their writing. Faculty varied in the types of feedback they provided on papers, but all of them responded in some way to surface errors. Perhaps the greatest difference in philosophies at the tribal colleges and the four-year institution was in relation to error identification and correction. At the university, regardless of the level of the writing course, the favored strategy was marking a few errors and indicating the need to look for and correct the remaining. On the other hand, tribal college faculty felt they could not expect students to be able to find and correct their errors and opted to identify and correct them directly. There is some evidence in the literature that English language learners can accurately correct their errors with indirect feedback more than 75% of the time (Ferris & Roberts, 2001), but it is not clear what factors influence students' ability and willingness to locate and correct errors on their own.

Overall, participants in this study wanted feedback on their writing, especially on the areas they needed to work, because they hoped it would help them improve their grades and writing. However, too many comments on a paper were usually counterproductive and not only overwhelmed students but also confused them about what was really important. There were characteristics of feedback that participants found more

or less desirable and effective. Feedback was most effective in helping participants improve in writing when it was specific and supported through other means, for example, by communicating explicit and reasonable expectations, allowing choice in topics, and providing a physical model. The degree to which students reported improving in their weak areas since beginning college also depended on the writing skill in question, with perceived improvement more likely in the area of minimizing surface errors for some but not all participants. These findings fit with some research that describes the effectiveness of feedback to improve writing mixed and dependent on the type of feedback and context, including student background (Harvey & Anderson, 2005).

Revising based on feedback was the most direct way in which students could learn and improve; however, many chose not to do so. Factors discouraging participants to revise included: not understanding why a change was necessary, not being able to read the instructor's handwriting, disliking that aspect of the process, being frustrated with lack of improvement in grade and feedback despite previous efforts, not knowing how to revise based on the feedback from the instructor, and lacking computer or typing skills and/or disliking typing.

The Learning Environment and Institutional Support

Research has shown that campus environment and adjustment to college life are critical factors in the retention of minority students (Richardson, Simmons, & de los Santos, 1987; Wells, 1989). Although participants in general did not speak a lot about their learning environment, the comments of a few made it clear that attending college

was intimidating and fraught with challenges. Lack of family support, personal insecurities, distance from home (even of a tribal college), and trying to take online courses without a laptop or internet at home were some of the difficulties participants shared at some point in their early college experiences. One participant mentioned in particular that the supportive environment of her small campus was important, and that she did not feel she could succeed at a larger institution. While in some ways tribal colleges can be more attractive and feasible higher education options for students than mainstream institutions, a tribal college faculty member pointed out that the issues of poverty and family obligations are still present and might even interfere with students' studies to a greater extent than if they attend college further away from home. In support of this, a tribal college student with whom I have kept up my communication, has written in emails about the lack of time to focus on studies alongside family obligations. On the other hand, at the university participants mentioned missing home and family. Luckily, most were either enrolled in discipline-specific academic support programs for Native Americans or frequented the American Indian student club room, where they could seek the help or company of counselors, tutors, and peers.

Writing Support Services

All three institutions in this study offered students writing assistance at one or more locations on campus. Services included a campus-wide Writing Center or Learning Center and/or writing tutors available through federal TRIO or Title IIIA programs. At the university, other program or discipline-specific tutoring was also offered.

Philosophies of tutoring in writing varied across institutions, with tutors at the tribal colleges focusing more on editing and those at the four-year institution emphasizing the development of the writer over improving a draft, i.e. process over product. Thus, the university writing center seemed to adhere to the prevalent focus of many writing centers today, in terms of its goal of producing better writers, not better writing (Rossini, 2002).

A few participants at the university made a conscious choice not to seek help because they felt their needs could not be met at the main tutoring center. Comments from some students suggested that they were planning on using the writing center for editing purposes, which conflicted with the center's holistic mission of providing feedback foremost on the ideas and structure of a paper. The literature also indicates that most students approach tutors for help with editing and proofreading, although this conflicts with the process over product approach (Chromik, 2002). Instead of using the writing center as a fix-it shop, there was an expectation in English composition that students find other resources, such as friends or family members to help them proofread, especially if they had difficulties finding errors on their own. Interestingly enough, participants in the study were more likely to seek assistance from people with whom they had an established relationship and certain degree of trust, or tutors arranged by such people. University and tribal college students differed in the people they approached for feedback on their written work. The former sought the help of student support personnel and academic advisors, including those in discipline-specific programs for Native American students, and faculty in Native American Studies. The latter were comfortable asking their previous or current college instructors, librarians, or former high school

teachers to work on their assignments with them. Overall, there were lots of resources available for students and the key was to get them comfortable and willing to use them. This was especially important because students who had positive experiences with tutors were more likely to make return visits and ultimately to succeed, while also encouraging others to seek out the same resources. This finding confirms findings in the literature that frequency of visits by first-year students significantly influences their confidence as writers and the likelihood to recommend the writing center to others (Carino & Enders, 2001).

Emerging Theoretical Model

The focus of this theoretical model is the student writer. However, learning to be a college writer is intertwined with assuming the role of a college student. In the study, a few participants reflected on ways that college had helped them become responsible for their own learning and to understand what it takes to succeed in higher education. Thus, some factors in the model apply to overall student development, but others are specific to writing.

The process of becoming a successful academic writer does not begin the first day of classes; rather, it reaches back to literacy acquisition and prior experiences with reading and writing. Given this reality, a lack of preparation on the part of Native Americans and other minority students has historically led to finger pointing at each level from college to kindergarten and ultimately down to the home. The purpose of this emerging theoretical framework is to offer an alternative to the deficit model of focusing

on minority students' lack of skills in writing. This framework has emerged through the experiences voiced by Native American students at three institutions, including what has helped them be successful academic writers in their first year of college. The underlying premise is that Native American students can succeed and that participants' collective experiences can shed light on what factors are integral to this process. Figure 5.1 depicts the Framework for Understanding Native American Student Success in Writing.

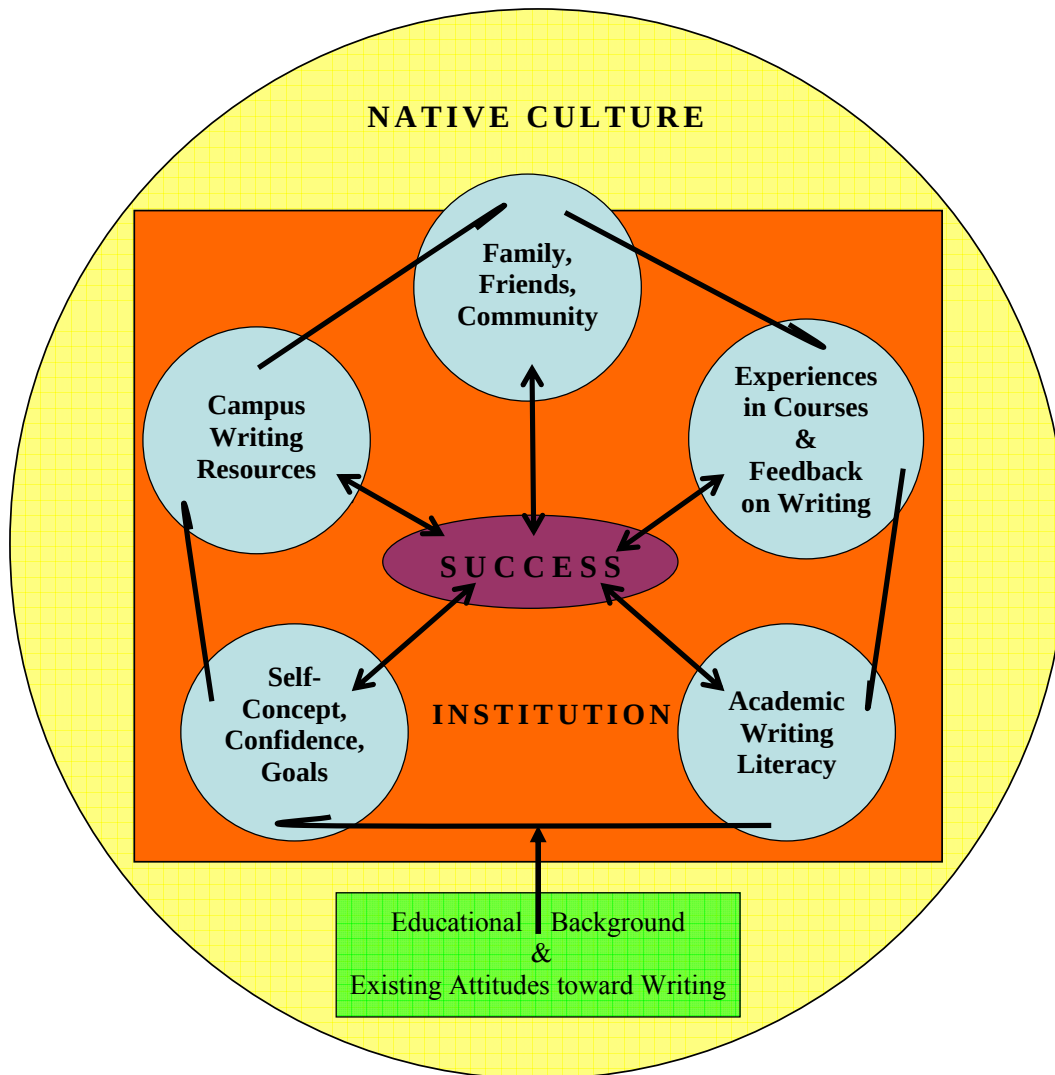


Figure 5.1. Framework for Understanding Native American Student Success in Writing

As discussed in previous sections, it is important to recognize the connection between writing and identity and in turn identity and culture. There are numerous aspects of students' tribal cultures that can contribute to the ways they write and how they perceive writing and themselves as writers. Ones that emerged from data in this study are: linguistic transference from a tribal language, Indian English dialectal influences, traditional indigenous (nonlinear) thinking, the oral tradition, collectivist orientation, and the role of writing in the community. In sum, the way Native American students think, and therefore, write is a product of their identity, which is partially defined by their tribal culture. Therefore, in the theoretical framework, all the other factors influencing their writing experiences are represented as being embedded in the Native culture, which is in the shape of a sphere to reflect the circular nature of indigenous philosophy. The collective factor of family, friends, and community bridges the sphere of cultural influence with the square-shaped institutional environment.

The institutional environment serves as the backdrop for students' academic experiences. The physical environment, campus culture, and student support services can all contribute to whether students come to feel they belong. Students arrive with certain goals or perhaps uncertainties as to why they have enrolled. Their educational backgrounds and the attitudes toward writing they bring with them to college affect how they perceive academic writing, especially at the beginning of their first term, although as students progress in their studies these seem to play less of a role. Therefore, these two factors, educational background and existing attitudes, appear as the foundation of

students' college experiences, but their influence on the factors related to student writing success is uni-directional.

The five spheres of influence on students' writing experiences and success are present within the institutional setting. They reflect the conceptual framework that guided this study by including aspects from the realm of the student, extended circle, course, and institution. Implicit in this model is the individual student's journey of becoming a successful academic writer through the recursive process of experiencing the various factors of influence. A student might begin with certain goals for courses and assignments, but these are likely to change as self-concept and confidence toward writing develop. In the first semester, a student usually knows little of writing expectations or the vocabulary of college and academic writing. But with every academic exchange, academic literacy, related both to college and writing, increases. Furthermore, through the act of writing and receiving feedback, the student begins to understand what is important in college writing and can more clearly articulate what being an academic writer means. Finally, as part of the writing process, and especially when struggling, the student turns to different resources, whether institutionalized ones or those within the extended circle of family, friends, and community members. These factors work bi-directionally, affecting each other and continually shaping the experiences and success of the student writer. For example, feedback on writing influences confidence, family members can contribute to assignments, a tutor can increase academic literacy, and so on. Further research is needed to uncover which factors have the greatest influence and are the strongest predictors of writing success.

At the center of students' academic writing experiences is success. As discussed in the findings of this study, success can be defined in a number of ways for Native American students, ranging from passing a course to helping others through writing. Understanding individual students' motivations and goals is key to providing effective support. Of important note is the bi-directionality of success with the different factors. For example, if students receive encouraging feedback on an assignment, this influences their sense of achievement, which in turn affects their confidence, and greater self-concept fosters further success. The ultimate goal is to find ways to strengthen the positive impact of these factors to support Native Americans students' path to success as college writers. This model is still emerging and is expected to evolve with further research. To this end, recommendations for practice and further research are provided below.

Recommendations for Practice

This section offers practical suggestions for faculty, staff, and administrators involved or interested in helping Native American students succeed as academic writers. These primarily emerged from the findings of this study, but also build on the existing literature discussed in Chapter 2 and revisited above. In addition, some of the ideas come directly from current practices observed or learned from faculty members participating in the study. These recommendations are organized under three focus areas: curriculum, pedagogy, and resources.

Curriculum

1. Strengthening **academic literacy**, including understanding of writing-related terminology, is a relatively easy way of helping incoming students to begin learning what academic writing entails, and could be integrated into first-year composition and/or seminar courses. What is important is making the information explicit and offering it within the context of the course. For example, in going over the syllabus, an instructor could ask students to circle all the words they are unfamiliar with and write them on a card to be collected and used to generate a discussion. Similarly, in presenting a new assignment, the instructor could ask students to provide their own definitions beforehand of an objective research source or give an example of a persuasive essay topic.
2. In choosing materials for a course, instructors should keep in mind the socio-political and cultural context of writing. The readings set the tone for the course and most of the time dictate on what topics students will need to write. **Infusing minority perspectives and contributions into curriculum** will send a message of openness to varying viewpoints, and likely enliven discussions and inspire more interesting writing.
3. The level of interest students have in **writing topics** influences their degree of motivation to complete assignments. Topics should be challenging but also appeal to students' interests. In any case, students could benefit from a discussion of how to relate to a topic and that there is no one right answer.

4. Being aware of and open to **nonlinear thinking** could help reduce more traditional students' frustrations with the writing process. Instructors could make outlines only one planning option and show students how they can brainstorm, freewrite, use webs, or other visual means to generate and organize their ideas.
5. Connecting writing to **authentic purposes** increases writers' motivation. Effective assignments could include those that respond to issues in the community or that draw on students' desires to make a difference. Instructors can find ways of honoring student writing in the community by publishing student work in local newspapers, the Tribal College Journal student edition, or in the course by compiling a class anthology.

Pedagogy

1. Some faculty have suggested that students cannot get enough **individualized attention on writing** in class. An option for increasing one-on-one interactions in a course is adding a writing lab component for an extra hour/credit. However, a less costly solution could be rethinking the instructional methodology and allowing for students to complete at least part of their assignments in class, which would free up the instructor to provide immediate feedback and assistance to those who need it.
2. Providing **visual models** of aspects of the writing process as well as samples of completed assignments can be especially helpful. First, instructors can model specific writing activities such as pre-writing strategies, paraphrasing, formatting

citations, or concluding a lab report and then ask students to complete a similar task on their own. Handouts with sample student writing from previous classes can also serve as a useful visual reference. Furthermore, most students feel comfortable writing about themselves. Thus, sample essays that demonstrate how to relate personal experiences to readings and to incorporate them into different rhetorical styles could also be helpful.

3. Helping students gain greater **metacognition** about their writing process could positively influence their development as writers. Instructors can encourage students to explore what they do as writers as well as familiarize them with what experienced writers do. Students could experiment with different **strategies**, including auditory ones, to see which ones are most effective for them.
4. Incorporating a variety of teaching techniques and activities that appeal to different **learning styles** is important for all learners. Using multi-media to bring readings to life can be especially effective. For example, arranging a video interview with an author or expert in the field can make questioning the text an authentic exercise. Students could also benefit from and enjoy completing a learning style inventory.
5. In providing **feedback**, instructors need to recognize the connection between identity and writing and act accordingly. Fostering students' confidence by pointing out what they do well and areas in which they have improved is important for counterbalancing negative feedback and critique.

6. The nature of the feedback can influence students' **decisions to revise**. Limiting comments to the issues or areas needing the greatest attention would reduce students feeling overwhelmed. Breaking down the drafting process into manageable parts and only revising a short section of a paper could also reduce apprehensions and increase their confidence and willingness to revise.

Resources

1. Incoming students may not be aware, even if they were told at orientation, what writing resources are available to them on campus. A bookmark or sticker with an **explanation of services available** could be helpful to make available at different times for students. It is also important to clarify if students need to use different resources for different types of writing help, such as mainly proofreading.
2. Given that students are more likely to seek help from people they know and have a degree of trust, instructors could look for ways of **creating a relationship between their course and specific writing tutor**. Inviting the tutor to not only introduce themselves to the students but also attend class and participate in some activities, could increase the likelihood that students approach that tutor for help outside of class. At the university, expanding the numbers of **writing tutors available in the residence halls** could also be a good option given their accessibility.
3. While peer review on writing with Native American students has produced mixed results, a more informal approach outside of class could prove more effective.

Organizing **student study pods** with at least one experienced writer and/or student who has taken a specific course can offer informal opportunities for brainstorming ideas for a paper, getting feedback on a draft, or help with formatting citations.

4. Some institutions could also explore opportunities for helping first-year students' jump-start their academic writing experiences prior to their first day of classes. A **writing component** could be added to an existing **summer bridge program or new student orientation**. Activities should be as engaging and active as possible. Possibilities could include: a library (database) scavenger hunt, charades with academic writing terms, group narrowing down of amusing topics, and paraphrasing quotes from famous people.

Recommendations for Future Research

In general, there is a dearth of research on the topic of Native American student writing. This qualitative study cast a wide net to capture as many aspects of participants' writing as possible to better understand what helps them succeed as college writers. The major findings, organized into ten themes, offer insights as well as opportunities for further research. Following are questions corresponding to each theme that interested researchers and practitioners could adopt as part of their research agendas. Some have been addressed in this study but require further investigation to gain deeper understanding.

1. Definition of Success: In what ways do Native American students define academic success? What does it mean for them to be successful academic writers? How can college faculty help to reverse some students' expectations for failure? How can an institution provide a framework for success?
2. Preparation for College Writing: How do students' prior writing experiences and attitudes influence their first-semester academic writing experiences? How do impressions about their degree of preparation for college writing influence their attitudes and experiences?
3. Self-Concept and Identity: What is the relationship between academic writing and identity development of Native American college students? How can educators help students find their voice as both Native Americans and academic writers?
4. Academic Writing Literacy: What areas of academic writing literacy do incoming students lack? What are the best ways and occasions to try to improve academic writing literacy?
5. Feedback and Self-Concept: How does instructor feedback on writing influence students' confidence and overall self-concept? What types of feedback have positive effects on confidence and self-concept?
6. Effectiveness of Feedback: What kind of feedback is the most effective for Native American students, including the frequency of comments, type of responses to errors, and ways of phrasing suggestions? In what areas of writing can students improve based on feedback? Do students respond differently to oral versus written feedback on their work?

7. Facilitating Revision: What motivates and dissuades students from engaging in revision? How does structuring an assignment and the drafting process influence the willingness to revise? What are alternatives to requiring drafts that can also bring about revision?
8. Writing Resources: What kinds of out-of-class resources do students prefer to use to help them with their writing assignments? How can students' preferences be used to change or strengthen existing writing resources, or add new ones?
9. Native Communities: In what ways do family and community members contribute to the success of Native American students' academics and writing? How can strengthening ties with students' families and communities on the part of institutions, influence students' success?
10. Native Culture: What aspects of indigenous culture influence students' writing? What are ways educators can acknowledge indigenous thinking within the Western paradigm? How can aspects of the oral tradition be used to help students bridge oral and written discourse? Are there similarities between Generation 1.5 immigrant college students and Native American college students in terms of characteristics of their writing and writing process? And if so, what efforts can be adopted from the literature on Generation 1.5 writers that would also be supportive of Native American students?

In addition to these theme-related questions, a larger area of inquiry concerns the relationship between retention and academic writing experiences. While becoming an academic writer might seem like a minor part of the overall college experience, students'

writing experiences probably influenced decisions to persist to a greater extent than generally accounted for. One tribal faculty member had observed that students lacking confidence in their ability to complete writing tasks frequently disappeared; they just stopped attending classes altogether. At the same time, academic writing can have a positive impact on students' intellectual/ethical development, an outcome associated with going to college in general. A composition faculty member commented on the progression of students from dualistic to more critical thinkers by the end of a term. A student participant also described an awareness of such a shift in this thinking:

[T]hinking about [who I am as a writer] has kind of helped me develop my own opinion...cuz I'm still a little like this, but I used to be kind of in the middle of the road on most everything." (Samuel)

Thus, learning to become an academic thinker and writer plays an important role in students' overall academic development, but further research is needed to uncover how helping students' be successful writers could influence their decisions to persist.

As educators, our gaze is fixed on the ambitious goal of graduating a greater number of Native American students. That is important; however, we may do better to keep in mind a metaphor that surfaced in this study: writing as a journey. The act of writing, telling a story, being a student, even living is more important than arriving at the destination. Focusing our efforts on supporting students in their journey as academic writers should be the ultimate goal because then, as one student noted, "a sunset...the end of I guess [of] whatever you are trying to do is always beautiful."

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX ATABLE CONNECTING FACTORS FROM THE LITERATURE
WITH THE CURRENT STUDY

Research on Retention	Research on Writing	Study on Writing Experiences
Student		
• inadequate academic preparation • financial difficulties • personal problems	• degree of experience as a writer • degree of metacognition • degree of self-efficacy • self-concept as writer	• degree of experience as a writer • degree of metacognition • degree of self-efficacy • self-concept as writer
Extended Circle		
• lack of role models • family problems • distance from community networks	• influence of traditional Indian philosophy/oral tradition • influence of Native language/Indian dialect • legacy of writing in community	• influence of traditional Indian philosophy/oral tradition • influence of Native language/Indian dialect • legacy of writing in community • role of family, friends, community in academics
Course		
• unfamiliar institutional environments	• instructional strategies for supporting minority learners • relationship with faculty in course • characteristics of feedback given on writing	• characteristics of assignments and corresponding instructions • instructional strategies for supporting minority learners • relationship with faculty/students in course • characteristics of feedback given on writing
Institution		
• lack of role models • financial difficulties • distance from community networks	• characteristics of writing support services	• characteristics of campus environment • types of writing support services • types of other academic support services

APPENDIX B

PLANNING MATRIX CONNECTING RESEARCH QUESTIONS
WITH RESEARCH METHODS

Research Questions	Outcomes	Selection	Data Collection	Data Analysis
<i>What do I need to know?</i>	<i>Why do I need to know this?</i>	<i>What data do I need?</i>	<i>How can I get the data and why is this the best way?</i>	<i>How can I analyze the data and why is this the best method?</i>
RQ: How do American Indian college students describe their academic writing experiences in their first year of college? (Qa: meaning of events/activities)	To discover how students describe their college writing experiences, both negative and positive.	<u>Self report</u> : students' descriptions of their writing experiences in terms of perceptions of the assignments, planning and completing them (their process), and reacting to grades and instructor feedback.	1. 2 Student Interviews 2. Student Flow Diagrams 3. <u>Reflection on writing assignment</u> : to gather concrete examples of students' experiences with a graded writing assignment and their perception of the grade and instructor comments.	See below.
RSQ1: How do students' educational backgrounds and existing attitudes toward writing influence their writing experiences?	To learn what prior experiences and attitudes toward writing students bring with them to college and to what extent these influence their college experiences.	<u>Self report</u> : students' descriptions of their high school (and possibly earlier) experiences with writing, including types of writing they did and their descriptions of how they did on them and felt about them	1. <u>Student interviews</u> : to obtain detailed account of perceptions and specific examples from students' life.	1. Look for similarities and differences among participants' high school experiences, in terms of types of assignments and degree of preparation and connect to their degree of confidence as a college writer.

RSQ2: How do their writing experiences influence their attitudes toward writing and their perceptions of themselves as writers? (Qa: meaning of events/activities)	To learn how perceptions of skills, aptitudes, motivations, and locus of control influence academic and writing experiences.	<u>Self report:</u> students' descriptions of their struggles and successes with writing and of themselves as writers.	2. <u>Student portraits of themselves as writers:</u> to obtain visual representation, which can provide ideas for both student and researcher. 3. <u>Student interviews:</u> to obtain detailed account of perceptions and specific examples from students' life.	1. Work together with students to analyze self portrait and pull out key words. 2. Analyze the transcripts for key words and clues as to the relationships among emerging themes.
RSQ3: What actions and inactions of students influence their level of success as writers? (Qc: process by which events/activities occur)	To learn what factors and/or influences students associate with their experiences with academic writing, especially those that help them succeed.	<u>Self report:</u> students' description of the types of resources and strategies they use to complete writing assignments, and explanations as to what has helped and what has not. <u>Reflection:</u> students reflect on a graded writing assignment and complete flow diagram to describe what they did or did not do.	1. <u>Student interviews:</u> to obtain specific examples from students' experiences. 2. <u>Writing reflection:</u> to gather concrete examples of what causes students the least and most difficulty. 3. Student Flow Diagrams	3. Analyze the transcripts from the interviews to generate tentative list of influences/factors. 4. Analyze flow diagrams and compare to results from interviews.

RSQ4: What actions and inactions of faculty, tutors, and other individuals in the students' courses, at the institution, and in their extended circle contribute to students' level of success as writers? (Qc: process by which events/activities occur)	To learn what campus services, faculty and staff, and other individuals in the students' life contribute to their experiences, and in particular their success, and the ways in which they help.	<u>Self report:</u> students' identification of key people, places, events, activities, etc. that they perceive have contributed to their experiences, and in particular their success. Other Interviews: identification by faculty and other individuals of what they do to help students improve as writers.	1. <u>Student interviews:</u> to obtain specific examples from students' experiences and reactions to feedback on their writing. 2. <u>Graded writing:</u> to determine the kinds of feedback students are receiving on their writing 3. <u>Other participant interviews:</u> to gather concrete examples of what faculty, staff and other individuals do to support students in their writing. 4. <u>Documentation:</u> Writing Center manuals, course syllabi, writing assignment sheets	1. Analyze the transcripts from the interviews to generate tentative list of influences/factors. 2. Compile and categorize the type of feedback students receive on their writing. 3. Compare results from interviews with all respondents. 4. Compare results from interviews with faculty, staff, etc. with documentation provided.
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APPENDIX C

TABLE OF SPECIFICATIONS

Research Question	Student Interview Protocol Question
RQ: describe experiences	3, 5, 6
RSQ1: prior educational background and attitudes toward writing	1a-b, 3a-e
RSQ2: perceptions as writer	4a-c, e
RSQ3: factors for success	4f-g
RSQ4: other influential individuals	4d, 7, 8
cultural influence	1a, 2a-c
family/community role	1a, 2d-f

APPENDIX D

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Prior to Interview

1-3 weeks prior to interview

- Make initial contact via informal info session of potential participants to introduce myself, inform them about the study and request participation.
- Use sign-up sheet from informal info session to set up and confirm meeting date, time, and location. Make sure the location has adequate lighting, minimal noise and distractions, and offers a space where the participant would be comfortable. For students this may be a study room at the library and for faculty their own office.
- Explain to students the commitment involved: their availability to meet three times during the semester, and willingness to share written work and ideas about their own writing process and experiences.
- Explain to faculty their willingness to share their syllabus and copies of writing assignments.

2-3 days prior to interview (or just prior to interview if traveling to site)

- Confirm time, place for the interview via phone call.
- Remind participants what they may need to bring to the interview.
- Put together participant folders with consent forms and/or other needed materials.

Day of Interview

- Check to make sure the audio recorder is working and has space. Organize files to bring.
- Have ready materials such as glue stick, cut-out strategies, and colored pencils.
- Arrive 10 minutes prior to scheduled interview.

Start of Interview

- Introduce self by name and role (graduate student doing work on dissertation) if did not meet previously and who referred him/her (for students) and for faculty/staff (someone in class if student prefers not to be identified).
- Explain purpose:
 - Describe the writing experiences of American Indian students at a public 4-year university and two tribal colleges and identify the factors contributing to these experiences and their success.
- Assure anonymity and ask participant to think of a pseudonym.
- Provide informed consent (2 copies) for the participant and research to sign and date. The participant keeps one.
- Discuss note taking, recording and anticipated length of the interview.
 - Note taking as back-up to audio tape and to jot down researcher's thoughts.
 - Recording as a way to ensure accuracy of response. Will be transcribed and the audio deleted.
 - 60 minutes for first interview and 45-60 minutes for subsequent interview.

Interview

- Provide general overview of what types of questions will be asked and tasks requested.
- Follow appropriate interview protocol but allow for participants to digress.

Close Interview

- Summarize main points and ask for correction or further clarification
- Ask if participant has any questions for researcher.
- Explain next steps (next interview, follow-up on document, etc.)
- Thank respondent for time and participation.

After Interview

- If in the first stage of analysis, send participant selected excerpts from transcript and ask to verify interpretation.
- If needed, schedule next interview.
- Thank respondent again for time and participation.

APPENDIX E

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: INITIAL INTERVIEW

1. Let's start by you telling me a little about your background.
 - a. Where did you grow up?
 - b. Where did you attend high school?
2. What is your home community like?
 - a. What language(s) did you speak at home growing up? (use as follow-up if needed)
 - b. How bilingual do you consider yourself to be? (use as follow-up if needed)
 - c. How culturally traditional or untraditional would you consider your family and yourself. Why?
 - d. How important was writing in your home and community?
 - e. Can you think of any role models in your family or community who are also writers of some kind?
 - f. What role did family/community members have in your academics, especially writing?
3. How would you describe your writing experiences in high school? (Qs below as follow-up)
 - a. What are teachers/classes that stand out in your mind in terms of writing?
 - b. What writing assignments stand out in your mind? How did you do on them?
 - c. How did you feel your h.s. writing assignments prepared you for college writing?
 - d. How prepared for college writing do/did you feel compared to other students?
 - e. Would you mind telling me your first-semester GPA? How does this compare to your h.s. GPA?
4. I would like you to see what image comes to mind for the next question. Then, I would like you to draw an illustration of what comes to mind using this paper and these colored pencils. How do you picture yourself as a writer, and specifically a college writer of academic-type assignments?
 - a. Please describe your illustration for me.
 - b. What feelings do you associate with this image? How confident do you feel as a writer?
 - c. Where do you think those feelings/degree of confidence and/or the image originate?
 - d. Are there any other specific influences or people that you think contribute to your perception of yourself as a writer?
 - e. Has this image changed from when you started college or from high school? How?
 - f. How would you describe someone who is a "successful" writer? What elements do you see in this picture that demonstrate these characteristics?

- g. Is it important for you to be a “successful” writer in college? What are your goals for this semester in terms of your writing? How are you going to achieve these?
5. Did you bring a graded assignment with you today? If yes, proceed:
 - a. Please tell me about this assignment, such as what class it was for, when you completed it, and what your experiences were like with it.
 - b. Here are some elements of planning and writing a paper. Please pick out the ones that you used for this assignment. Then, glue the paper cut-outs onto this paper to illustrate the process you used to complete the assignment. If you did something more than once than you can write it in on the paper.
 - c. Using your diagram, please describe your process for completing this writing assignment.
 - d. Do you have any questions about any of the cut-outs of the strategies that you did not use this time? Have you used any of them in the past? Would you potentially use any of them in the future? Why or why not?
 6. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your writing experiences?
 7. *I would like to interview the faculty member for whom you completed this writing assignment so that I can find out about his/her expectations, ways of grading, etc. Whatever information I receive will be used to gain a fuller picture of your experiences and in no way will it be used to negate anything you have shared with me. Your experiences are what are the most important. Would it be alright for me to contact this instructor or would you like to recommend another faculty member for me to talk to?*
 8. *Whom else besides this faculty member do you think it would be a good idea for me to interview to better understand students’ writing experiences. It can be another student, staff person, family member, etc. (If their answers is not another student): I still would also like to talk to some other students on campus, what other freshman do you recommend I talk to who would have a different experience perhaps than yours?*

APPENDIX F

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

1. Did you have a chance to read through the transcript of our first conversation? If yes,
 - a. What was your overall impression?
 - b. Do you have anything to add or clarify?
 - c. (If applicable) Can you clarify this part in the transcript that I had trouble hearing clearly?
 - d. (If applicable) I cannot locate the faculty/staff member you recommended that I talk to, can you verify his/her name for me?
2. We talked about a lot of different things last time and in reading through the transcript, I tried to pull out some of the main ideas. Here is a copy of the list.
 - a. Please read them and let me know if you think they accurately describe the information you shared.
 - b. Also, if you no longer agree with a statement because your impressions/experiences have changed, then also please let me know.
3. I also read over the graded assignment you let me borrow last time. (Return student's originals). I have some specific questions/comments about it:
 - a. Based on the feedback from the instructor, what do you think the instructor thinks are the strengths and weaknesses of your paper? To what extent do you agree/disagree that these are the strengths/weaknesses of your writing?
 - b. Have you been able to build on these strengths and improve on these weaknesses since then and if so, how?
 - c. Did the feedback from the instructor help you improve your paper? If yes, how? If not, why not?
 - d. What could the instructor have included in his/her feedback on the paper to help you improve as a writer?
 - e. (If applicable) Did the feedback from fellow students help you improve your paper?
 - f. To what extent are you satisfied with the final product of this assignment?
 - g. What did you learn about academic writing from doing this assignment?
 - h. What are you still confused about/find a challenge with regards to academic writing?
4. How has the second half of the semester been for you in terms of your writing experiences? Have you gotten back more graded writing assignments? If yes:
 - a. How would you describe your experiences with writing these more recent assignments compared to those earlier in the semester?
 - b. Have you used other/additional resources (people, tools, etc.) to complete these writing assignments?
 - c. How would you describe the overall outcome and feedback on those assignments compared to those earlier in the semester?

- d. To what extent do you feel that you have improved as a writer this semester? What about since you started college? What are the specific writing skills that you have gained/improved on?
- e. What has most influenced your improvement and overall writing?
- f. What is the most important thing you have learned about yourself as a writer in your first year of college?

APPENDIX G

FACULTY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Let's start by you telling me a little about your teaching background.
 - a. How long have you been teaching here? Any previous teaching experiences?
 - b. How would you define your teaching philosophy?
 - c. What courses do you usually teach? Which ones are your favorites and why?
2. A student participating in this study who is also in your _____ class has indicated that it would be a good idea for me to talk to you about the writing in this course. Could I have a copy of the syllabus? How would you describe the main objectives of this course? What role do you see for writing in this course?
3. If I were to visit your class on a typical day, what kinds of activities, interactions would I observe?
 - a. How would you describe the classroom environment?
4. What you think is important in academic writing?
 - a. What are the characteristics of a good essay or paper?
5. Do you spend any time in class to talk about the writing process? If yes, how much?
 - a. Do you spend class time to explain your writing expectations?
 - b. Do you provide handouts delineating your expectations? Could I have a copy for the most recent assignment completed?
6. How many out-of-class writing assignments do you assign?
 - a. Do you require multiple drafts? If yes, how many?
 - b. What is your philosophy regarding giving students feedback on their papers?
 - i. Do you comment on content, organization, citations, grammar, mechanics, style, etc.? What is your highest priority? Do you comment equally on all drafts?
 - ii. Do you indicate all, some or no errors in grammar/mechanics? What is your tolerance level for such errors?
 - iii. Where do you write your comments? How do your comments vary in length?
 - iv. Do you meet with students to discuss your comments?
 - v. Do you feel that students use your comments as intended to improve their papers?
7. Overall, do you think the students in the class are meeting the writing expectations that you set forth for them?
 - a. In what ways are students meeting your expectations?
 - b. In what ways are students not meeting your expectations?
 - c. Why do you think these expectations are not being met?

8. Would you like to share anything else about the writing, the course or this particular class?
9. May I contact you again should I need for information of a copy of another assignment sheet?

APPENDIX H

WRITING CENTER STAFF INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Let's start by you telling me about your academic background, including teaching.
 - e. What is your current position with respect to the Writing Center and what does that entail?
 - f. How long have you been in this position?
2. How would you describe the philosophy behind the Writing Center? What are its main goals?
 - g. Prompt as needed for process vs. product, etc.
 - h. Has this philosophy changed any since you have been in this position or prior to that?
3. How would you describe the role of tutors?
 - i. What kind of training and supervision do they receive? (Ask for copy of manual if available).
 - j. What is the typical background or characteristics if any of your tutors?
4. Do you collect data on the numbers and characteristics of the students who seek help at the Writing Center? If yes, do these include any of the following and can I obtain copies of reports/results?
 - k. Number of students served per semester
 - l. Course(s) in which students are enrolled
 - m. Academic year of students
 - n. Degree of satisfaction with tutoring session
 - o. Number of visits by each student to the WC, i.e. whether there are return visits
 - p. Other student characteristics, such as ethnicity, international student, etc.
5. What can you tell me about the WC's experiences with serving freshmen?
6. What can you tell me about the WC's experiences with serving Native American students?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share about the WC?
8. Could you recommend some tutors for me to interview?

APPENDIX I

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

An Investigation of the Academic Writing Experiences of Native American Freshmen

Barbara Komlos
109 Reid Hall
581-4778

Betsy Palmer (professor)
133 Reid Hall
994-7573

The research in which you will be participating explores the academic writing experiences of Native American freshmen.

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to attend three one-on-one interviews during which you will draw a picture and describe recent graded assignments. The interview will be audiotaped to allow for transcription and further analysis. The picture you will be asked to draw does not require any artistic ability, rather it is a way to put your ideas on paper without having to use words. You will be asked to bring a recent assignment that you completed for a class and have received back with a grade and preferably instructor comments.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to stop participating in the research at any time, or to decline to answer any specific questions. You may ask us about the research procedures and we will answer your questions to the best of our ability.

Your participation in this research study is confidential. You will be allowed to choose a pseudonym which will be used in the transcription of the recorded interview and on all documents you share for use in this study. In this way, I may protect your anonymity while being able to connect your drawing and writing assignments to the transcribed interview. Results from this study will be reported using aggregate data only; individual responses will not be reported. If we believe that information from this research could result in you being uniquely identifiable, we will decline to disclose this information.

Time involvement and payment. Your participation in this study will take approximately one (75) minutes for the first interview and (45) minutes for subsequent interviews. To thank you for your participation, upon request I will help you plan or revise any writing assignments of your choice.

I _____ (print name) agree to participate in an investigation of academic writing experiences. I understand the information given to me, and I have received answers to any questions I may have about the research procedures, and received a copy of this consent form. I understand and agree to the conditions of this study as described.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw from this study at any time by notifying Barbara Komlos at 581-4778. Additional questions about the rights of human subjects can be answered by the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board, Mark Quinn, (406) 994-5721.

Participant Signature

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX J

FLOW-CHART ACTIVITY

This activity attempts to investigate student participants' writing process as well as tap their degree of metacognition with respect to what they do when they write. Participants are asked to create a flow-diagram that takes into account non-linear thinking, repetition, and gaps in awareness of the writing process. The following aspects of completing a writing assignment are provided for the students to consider, choose from, adapt, and add to as needed. They will arrange and adhere the individual cut-out elements to a sheet of paper and may add lines, words or symbols to complete their diagram. Afterwards, they will describe their process orally using the diagram as a guide. They may make additions or corrections during this phase as well.

