

EXPANSIVE LEARNING IN FYC: USING LINGUISTIC DISCOURSE ANALYSIS TO
MEASURE THE EFFECTS OF THRESHOLD CONCEPTS IN FACILITATING
GENERALIZATION

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how and if threshold concepts enable expansive learning and generalization. Expansive learning and generalization are part of the highly contested conceptions of transfer, and these specific conceptions offer a more complex conception of transfer that deals with knowledge transformation (Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström, Beach). One way that we can see expansive learning and generalization transform knowledge is through the teaching of threshold concepts. In the last decade, there has been a movement toward using threshold concepts in FYC's that take up writing studies as their curricula (Wardle and Downs, Dew). Even though using threshold concepts seems to be one interesting way of specifically studying expansive learning and generalization, we have no studies examining whether or not teaching threshold concepts encourages expansive learning. The studies we do have do not seem to offer any methodologies that would enable us to study threshold concepts and generalization. Past methods, such as case studies, interviews, and surveys have included small sample sizes to collect their data from (Wardle, Dively and Nelms, Nowacek). A lot of the transfer data does not actually focus on the writing or the texts themselves or the reoccurring moves that students use in those texts. Linguistic discourse analysis offers a promising avenue for examining the generalization of threshold concepts. Using research methods like linguistic discourse analysis in marriage with the best qualitative methods of transfer, like case studies or interviews, could allow for a larger sample size of data collection and allows for us to see how students use these threshold concepts in their writing. Through linguistic discourse analysis and interviews, this study suggests that students' perceptions of writing change after being introduced to some threshold concepts from the *Writing About Writing* curriculum. The

threshold concepts that students are presented to in the *Writing About Writing* curriculum at UCF tackles misconceptions and helps students change how they view writing. Once they can change this view, they are able to generalize the knowledge they have into their own writing. If students do not use the exact terminology from the curriculum, they are able to generalize those threshold concepts through using their own language or even through analogies.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In my rather extensive time as a novice writer, I felt nothing but panic and stress over the entire writing process. My high school education did not prepare me for the strenuous work that I would face as an entering college student in my first composition class. Before college, I was an avid reader, voraciously reading anything I could get my hands on, and it only made sense that the perfect major for me was English. As a novice writer, I entered my first composition classroom with the mindset that I wanted to be an English major, but I was more than positive that I was going to fail the class.

Previously as a tutor and now as a First Year Composition (FYC) instructor, I see my previous writing self in a lot of these students. They come in for help with predisposed misconceptions, using phrases like “I’m a bad writer” or “I’ve never been taught how to do this.” They lack confidence in writing thanks to various factors in the past. It could be because they had an instructor that has told them that they were bad at writing thanks to the minor grammar errors that was present in their papers, and they carry that mindset about themselves as a writer into whatever situation they may have to use writing skills in. Sometimes, they lack confidence in their abilities so much that they can’t even get started with putting something down on paper at all. They stress themselves out to the point where writing just becomes a miserable task that they have to complete just in Composition I and II, and once they are done with that, they ultimately forget about their writing until they are required to do so for another class.

These students also rely heavily on other sources and what other scholars have said to instruct what they write. They lack confidence in their ideas, and they don't understand that their opinions put forth in their own writing is just as important as whether or not their papers are free

of grammatical errors. I was very much the same way as a novice writer. I could memorize facts, but I struggled to construct texts with my own original arguments. I was very much a “Scholarship Girl,” much like Richard Rodriguez in “The Achievement of Desire.” In this work, Rodriguez tells us about the struggles he faced as a learner. He tell us that he was “[a]lways successful, [he] was always unconfident. Exhilarated by [his] progress. Sad. [He] became the prized student - anxious and eager to learn. Too eager, to anxious - an imitative and unoriginal pupil” (240). Rodriguez would take books in, memorize them to the extreme, but he never had the critical thinking skills to start to see the writing process as one where his original ideas mattered. He simply repeated what other said. I was like Rodriguez in this way in that I spouted off memorized knowledge but never had original thoughts. When I failed at “the big picture” concepts on the material beyond the details, I was like Rodriguez, wondering what happens now if I cannot grasp what comes so easy to other people. Our students face this struggle when they enter the composition classroom, and part of what we as instructors have to do is to figure out ways to assist them to make insightful connections and construct solid writing out of what they have learned in class.

Part of what we as writing instructors do is to try to impart knowledge to students that they can use in classrooms other than our own. However, this pressure can be demanding on WPAs and composition programs. In Deborah Dew’s work on restructuring the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs composition program, we see that instructors all across various disciplines issued their complaints about their students not being able to write for those specific disciplines. Philosophy professors argued that students should be able to analyze an argument rather than write a grammatically correct academic essay. History professors argued for students

to be able to conduct actual research, meaning that should be able to find evidence and back themselves up with actual analysis and claims (Dew 91). As composition instructors, we see that professors from other disciplines look directly to us when students in their classes cannot write for that certain discipline. However, even though facing these curricular demands, we still have to help our students grow in their writing abilities and, hopefully, we all strive to help these students gain more confidence in the writing that they do. Part of this confidence building could come from students having the ability to write for these multiple contexts that they will encounter. Writing for these multiple contexts has been a major area of a focus for those who are interested in the research of the concept of transfer.

Writing-related transfer is a major focus of attention for instructors who design composition curricula and classrooms, especially for those who want to prepare their students to write for multiple contexts, including both different academic fields and professional contexts outside the classroom. Transfer enables students to carry knowledge from one context to another, allowing students to adapt to multiple contexts and situations where their knowledge will need to be used. In order to adapt to these multiple contexts, students have to understand how the skills they learn in a classroom can transfer into other contexts, even in disciplines other than writing studies, such as engineering or anthropology. This ability gives students skills that can enable them to work not only in their academic disciplines but also in their professional and personal lives outside the classroom. Enabling transfer for students is ultimately doing more than helping students make better grades; transfer is helping students respond to the different contexts they encounter with confidence. For WPAs and instructors, transfer becomes incredibly

important in answering the questions about how to structure course work to best encourage the transfer of writing-related knowledge, both within and outside the classroom.

Part of how we as instructors can encourage this transfer of writing-related knowledge is to first understand how it happens. In other words, we need to see evidence of students transferring their writing knowledge in order to see how and if it happens. This means that in some cases, we need to actually look at the writing our students actually do to see if their knowledge has transferred. As instructors and researchers, we can look for patterns or evidence in our students' actual writing. This study aims to do just that.

In this work, I will present findings from a study conducted in FYC classrooms at the University of Central Florida to demonstrate how students engage in expansive learning or generalization, the transfer framework that I am using for this analysis. In the second chapter of this thesis, I will review pertinent literature surrounding transfer studies and their limitations, the various contested conceptions of transfer, threshold concepts (one probable way of encouraging expansive learning and generalization to happen), and propose a new methodology to study if threshold concepts encourage generalization or expansive learning. In Chapter Three, I will thoroughly discuss that new methodology, linguistic discourse analysis in conjunction with interviews, along with describing the research site, participants, and the types of data collected during the study. Once I've reviewed the details of the study, I will then analyze the findings in Chapter Four. I'll be using both linguistic discourse analysis and interviews to discuss how students generalize threshold concepts in their writing. Finally, in Chapter Five, I will discuss the implications of these findings.

Through linguistic discourse analysis and interviews, this study suggests that students' perceptions of writing change after being introduced to some threshold concepts. These perceptions of writing matter, especially in the *Writing About Writing* curriculum. Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs tell students in the introduction that the book aims to give them "the language and the ideas to figure out what conception of writing [they] are experiencing and which ones might be most accurate and what to do about it" (4). This means that the perceptions of writing that students have can affect the work that they wish to accomplish with their writing, and figuring out how they will perceive writing will ultimately help them write for the new contexts that they will encounter. The threshold concepts that students are presented in the *Writing About Writing* curriculum at UCF tackles misconceptions that students may previously hold about writing and helps students change how they view writing. Once they can change this view, they are able to generalize the knowledge they have into their own writing, both for class and are able to make applications to their personal lives and their future professional careers. If students do not use the exact terminology from the curriculum, they are able to generalize those threshold concepts through using their own language or even through analogies. Ultimately, this study shows that students generalize threshold concepts and engage in expansive learning through using their own unique languages and through the use of personal analogies.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The transfer of writing-related knowledge has been studied both in theory and in practice in the field of rhetoric and composition. For this chapter, I'll be discussing some pertinent studies and theories related to the transfer of writing-related knowledge. First, I will give an overview of past transfer studies and their findings. Once I discuss those findings, I'll dive into the contested conceptions of what transfer is and how it happens. During this section, I'll introduce the transfer framework that I'll be using for this research study: generalization and expansive learning. Although many studies have been conducted exploring generalization and expansive learning, no present studies have focused on how threshold concepts can encourage generalization and expansive learning. In another section of this chapter, I'll review what threshold concepts are and how they relate to expansive learning and generalization. Since there are no studies presently done on whether or not threshold concepts enable expansive learning, I'll propose a new methodology to be used to track this as well. This new method, linguistic discourse analysis, will enable transfer theorists to expand the amount of students who can participate in the study as well as allow researchers to focus on the texts that students create themselves. Now that I've discussed an overview of this chapter, I'll review some past transfer studies and their findings.

Past Transfer Studies

There have been several studies previously that attempt to see how transfer can be encouraged both in classrooms and through designing curricula. In some transfer studies, the focus is on what tools can be used to enhance the transfer of writing-related knowledge. In a

pilot study conducted by Wardle called “Understanding Transfer,” she interviewed seven students during their first two years of college to illuminate student participation in FYC courses. In this study, students stated that they had gained learning from FYC but claimed that they did not use those skills elsewhere in their disciplines (“Understanding Transfer” 73). On another note, motivation seem to be another factor as students were unwilling to put a huge effort forward that would help them generalize their previous writing experiences into the tough writing assignments that they encounter with their disciplines. Wardle's findings, then, were that neither writing tasks nor the structures of the university fostered generalization, which prevented transfer. She notes that it is impossible for instructors to prepare students for every potential genre they may encounter in the university. However, teaching students rhetorical analysis of different genres might help cultivate an awareness of how to tackle the different writing tasks they encounter (Wardle 81-82).

Genres, then, become a major factor in enabling the transfer of writing-related knowledge. Another important transfer study also focuses on using genre to transfer writing-related knowledge. In "Selecting Genres for Transfer," Angela Rounsaville calls for instructors to analyze transfer through a genre lens in relation to what she calls “uptake.” She states that through uptake, high road transfer becomes a way to sort through previous knowledge about genres when encountering new potential genres, and one way to sort through previous knowledge in these contexts is under a Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) lens (Rounsaville 2). RGS is a way to think about writing related transfer that comes together with a mindset of relating previous knowledge to new knowledge. In relation to genre, this goes beyond recognizing conventions and formal features but instead helping writers understand genres

through understanding through lenses of "practices, ideologies, and activities" to recognize genre" (Rounsaville 4). Understanding genre this way enables students to build discipline specific connections (Rounsaville 12-13).

Even though both Wardle and Rounsaville's studies both focus on genres as the means for enabling transfer, the ultimate goal is to design courses and curricula that would enhance the transfer that is happening, and other transfer studies have focused on this particular aspect of enabling transfer. Specifically, Ronda Dively, and Gerald Nelms in their study "Perceived Roadblocks to Transferring Knowledge from First-Year Composition to Writing-Intensive Major Courses" analyze the FYC structure of the Southern University Carbondale to see if writing related transfer happened in their first year writing classrooms. Dively and Nelms conducted this study of the FYC using both surveys and a focus group to analyze if at all transfer was happening. Ultimately they had two goals: to offer insight into how similar institutions could implement similar programs to enhance the possibility of transfer and to provide researchers with a potential starting point to build the field's understanding of the concept. They found several themes based on their responses: the professors were highly interested in transfer; the composing processes that the GTAs expressed teaching with did in fact seem to be transferring for the students; there was not enough time to discuss discipline specific writing tasks in the composition classes; students' motivation was lacking, which was problematic for writing transfer; and lastly, the composition knowledge gained was still significantly constrained by the vocabulary differences in composition and other disciplinary fields of study. According to these findings, Dively and Nelms recommend for training to be done both for faculty in the writing programs and in other disciplines, specifically training that involves rhetorical knowledge for the

former and knowledge about writing transfer for the latter. Instructors of composition can also implement more reflective writing and continually develop curricula that would assist outside the composition classroom (Dively and Nelms 228–230).

This idea of developing curricula that would encourage transfer is also brought up in Rebeca Nowacek's *Agents of Integration*. In this book, Nowacek introduces integrative learning to discuss transfer, and this term encompasses the various connections that students encounter, like classes, curricular activities, and non-curricular activities. She does not look at the skills that transfer but instead looks at the factors that make transfer possible, making students what she calls "agents of integration" (3). Ultimately, she argues for an interdisciplinary approach to teaching composition rather than just teaching it through a lens of writing studies, specifically creating interdisciplinary learning communities (Nowacek 127). In this same notion, another group of researchers focuses on the curriculum as a means for enabling transfer. In *Writing Across Context*, Kathleen Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak are specifically interested in designing curricula that help students repurpose their writing skills for new writing tasks in new settings. Their version of a course that engages threshold concepts includes is called Teaching for Transfer (TFT), and it "assists students in transferring writing knowledge and practice in ways other kinds of composition courses do not" (5). Specifically, they trace two findings: a point of departure between how students see themselves and see writing and how the prior knowledge these students had frustrated efforts to take up new rhetorical tasks. The course they create allows students to integrate key terms and put into place systematic reflective practice. Because the content of this course deals with helping them read different writing contexts rather than teaching the students to write for multiple contexts, this enables students to

work under differing disciplines, gaining knowledge that can transfer from one context to the next (Yancey, Robertson, Taczak 129).

These studies all have different findings about this concept of transfer and how curricula should be designed to encourage it. In some cases, these studies encourage that certain tools or skills should be taught in order for students to best transfer knowledge. In other cases these studies find that through creating and designing curricula that helps students write toward different rhetorical contexts, then that ultimately will encourage transfer. Even though these findings from transfer studies are useful, there is still not a clear definition or conception of what transfer is and how it happens. In fact, these studies use different conceptions of transfer to frame their studies. Dively and Nelms, Nowacek, and Yancey et al all use Salmons and Perkins notion of transfer, while Wardle and Rounsaville's studies focus on King Beach's conception of "generalization" as transfer. Across all of these studies, the notion of "transfer" is quite vexed. Because notions of transfer can be contested, I'll discuss some of these contested conceptions of transfer in more explicit detail and provide the conception that I'll be using as a framework for this study in the next section of this thesis.

Mapping the Field of Transfer

Even though taking transfer into consideration when designing courses is crucially important in order to prepare students to write for multiple contexts, there are varying conceptions of transfer that are highly contested the field of composition and rhetoric and in other disciplines as well. Several scholars have mapped the current field of transfer in order to understand what transfer is. Most of these scholars tell us that it's impossible to narrow down

one definitive, agreed upon conception of transfer. Doug Brent, for example, calls transfer a “hotbed of internal controversy;” although there are intense debates on what transfer is and whether it actually happens, there is some common ground, including an emphasis on “learning fundamental principles” and helping students make connections between concepts that might be difficult for them to understand (22). Though there may be some common ground, scholars still disagree on what transfer is and how it happens. In some cases, scholars even disagree on whether or not transfer is the appropriate term for the concept. In order to see what these conceptions are and how they are named, I will now discuss some of these borrowed conceptions of transfer used in the field of composition and rhetoric.

When Jessie Moore maps out the current state of transfer theories and research, she writes that the varying conceptions of what transfer is are based on borrowed traditions from other disciplines (2). Some of those borrowed traditions include David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon’s cognitive conception which appears in “Teaching for Transfer.” One important concept that is present in Perkins and Saloman’s work is the fact that transfer and learning are in fact different concepts: transfer is deeper than ordinary learning (22). Even though they claim that learning and transfer are different, Perkins and Saloman do not draw a distinct, easily distinguishable line between the differences of transfer and learning. In their own conception, transfer is defined as carrying knowledge learned from one context to another where those contexts are similar or different (22). This conception of transfer also deals with the agency of the individual's learning, as Salomon and Perkins tell us that when transferring their knowledge to different contexts, students use hugging and bridging techniques. "Hugging" refers to techniques that would enable low road transfer, while "bridging" refers to techniques that students use to enable high road

transfer. Both of these techniques imply that individuals take an active role in their learning. (28). Salomon and Perkins discuss different versions of this transfer including near transfer, which is the idea that we use knowledge we already have in a similar context and in a similar way, and far transfer, which is the use of previous knowledge in a completely different context or used in a different way (27).

Even though these conceptions of near and far transfer are straightforward, they are limited in the fact that they are only task oriented, not taking in the other constituents that might illuminate how transfer happens. For example, Wardle tells us in “What is Transfer?” that in order to tackle a new writing task, we need to have “conscious declarative knowledge about it as well as an ability to attempt the procedural processes associated with it” (147). This means that we have to have more than just the declarative writing-related knowledge to accomplish a writing task; we have to understand how to use our knowledge in a new context. In some cases, our declarative writing knowledge may be hindering our ability to work on a new writing task, and we may need to rethink that knowledge in order for us to successfully write toward that new rhetorical context. Because we have to rethink that knowledge, transfer, then, is more complex than just carrying knowledge from one context to another; when we encounter different rhetorical contexts, we have to use tools and skills to apply our previous knowledge to those new contexts. This means that students have to behave differently when encountering new rhetorical problems, and if we want our students to do this, we have to structure our educational systems to teach students how to solve these rhetorical problems (“What is Transfer” 145-146). Thus, structuring educational systems that only take into account this cognitive carry and unload model is limiting because these conceptions of transfer cannot completely account for the how students

use their writing-related knowledge, what tools they will use to rethink their declarative knowledge, and how students will adapt their knowledge new rhetorical contexts.

Theorists, including Terttu Tuomi-Gröhn and Yrjö Engeström, talk about the complexity of transfer that goes beyond just the simple transfer of knowledge in tasks with similar and different contexts:

The problem of predicting transfer is the problem of what will be learned, thus the concept of transfer may at best serve as a general reminder of, problems of seeing connections and parallels between situations and practices. To learn is to appropriate powerful intellectual and physical tools, and to realize how they can be put to productive use in a range of continuously changing practices. The more powerful the tools, the more of boundary-crossing has to be part of the learning process ("From Transfer to Boundary Crossing" 10).

Here, these transfer theorists mention the wide use of tools that help individuals tackle different rhetorical contexts. In other words, there is more than just individuals and one context that play a role in transferring writing-related knowledge.

In order to fulfill this need to write for various contexts that students may be presented with and the tools they may have to use, an activity based conception of transfer would robust enough to describe how people learn to write across contexts. Activity theorists separate their ideas about transfer from the more cognitive and individual conceptions of transfer. In fact, these theorists go so far as to reject the term "transfer;" they use another term that better conveys conceptions of the phenomena ("What is Transfer" 149). For activity theorists Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström, schools cannot possibly equip students for everything they will have to know for the rest of their lives. What is transferrable is not simply skills but problem solving abilities that allow students to learn quickly and adapt in the new situations they may encounter ("From Transfer to Boundary-crossing"1). Their conception of transfer, which goes beyond the

cognitive notions of transfer, is “expansive learning,” which means that “learning is distributed in an object-oriented activity system, mediated by instruments, rules and division of labor” (“Conceptualizing Transfer” 30). This means that individuals take into consideration their previous writing-related knowledge and apply it to new tasks. However, this process is much more complex than the carry and unload model developed by Salamon and Perkins. In expansive learning, individuals take into consideration multiple factors that are a part of the activity systems and they use critical thinking and problem solving abilities to transform their declarative knowledge (“Conceptualizing Transfer” 30).

Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström do not focus so much on the individuals and instead the activity systems of which students are a part of. When students encounter new contexts, Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström tell us that questioning existing practices becomes crucial in expansive learning (32). Such questioning leads learners to “an escalating process of debate and collaborative analysis of contradictions in the current state of affairs, which may lead to a projective modeling of a developmentally new form of the activity...“(30-31). People learn by expansive learning through participating in multiple new activity systems, even including non-academic ones like work-based or professional activity systems. Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström call this boundary crossing between communities. This where learners enter into new activity systems and have to engage in significant cognitive retooling to engage in boundary-crossing. (“From Transfer to Boundary-crossing” 4). As students engage in expansive learning, they use cognitive tools, knowledge and skills, to be able to boundary-crossing as they encounter those activity systems.

Expansive learning is similar to King Beach's conception of transfer. Beach also argues against the carry and unload conception of transfer as proposed by Saloman and Perkins. Specifically, he states that we need to redefine transfer because the previous definitions of transfer are too narrow and isolating and that a clearer distinction between learning and transfer needs to be made. He argues that the previous conceptions do not adequately explain the ways that agency of an individual social organized units interact:

Most current accounts of learning transfer attribute cause or agency for the process to the abstraction and representation of knowledge by individual minds, and also to the similarities between routinely encountered socially organized units such as tasks, practices, and institutions. This dual attribution of agency also appears in what Salomon and Perkins (1989) distinguish as the "low and high roads of transfer." While current accounts of transfer acknowledge that both forms of agency provide impetus for the process, they are generally assumed to operate together as an interaction. The individual's psychological processes of abstraction and representation interact with the shared features of tasks to produce learning transfer. Interaction describes a relation between the two forms of agency, perhaps even a causal one. However, interaction cannot explain how the two forms of agency affect each other to produce transfer ("A Sociocultural View" 108).

The agency that Beach argues about involves the cause of the transfer of knowledge, and the previous cognitive conceptions of transfer don't take into account the multiple interrelated processes that account for how knowledge is transferred. Beach is arguing here is that a new conception of transfer should provide "a more viable account for agency" or, in other words, a new conception of transfer should account for both how individual students interact with tasks, practices, and institutions and result in expansive learning to happen ("A Sociocultural Expedition" 108).

Along with this argument for more a viable account of agency within transfer research, Beach calls for a model of transfer that interlinks tasks and the transformation of individuals' knowledge. This interlinking of tasks and the transformation of knowledge involves the learning

aspect of transfer, and this where he states that "earlier learning contexts do not inoculate the person against learning in a new contexts"; in other words, that earlier learning we have will not prevent us from learning within a new context ("A Sociocultural Expedition" 110). Like expansive learning, Beach's "generalization," or "the generalization of knowledge propagation," focuses on how knowledge is moved across different social organizations and involves multiple interrelated procedures rather than just a single procedure ("A Developmental View" 40). Moving this knowledge across these multiple procedures involves knowledge transformation. Beach tells us that generalization "involves the construction of knowledge..., or transformation, rather than the application of something that has been acquired elsewhere" ("A Sociocultural Expedition" 119). What this means is that students who generalize are engaging in knowledge transformation, transforming the knowledge they learn to work for the various tasks and situations they may encounter. This transformation also takes into account the changing social relations that students will find themselves in ("A Sociocultural Expedition" 103). Like generalization, expansive learning is also transformative, and Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström also argue that knowledge transformation is important because it helps "facilitate coping with changed situations" ("From Transfer to Boundary-crossing" 1). In order to cope with different contexts and situations, students will transform their previously held knowledge to work with that new changed situation. This knowledge transformation becomes the key to understanding how students generalize and engage in expansive learning.

Both generalization and expansive learning help us understand the transformation of writing-related knowledge that must occur in order for individuals to respond to different contexts. For example, Wardle tells us in "Understanding 'Transfer' From FYC" that "we

should attempt to account for the ways in which knowledge and skills are transformed across contexts; otherwise, we risk overlooking manifestations of skills that have been adapted to meet the needs of a new activity system” (69). This transformation across contexts is a hallmark of how students learn disciplinary concepts, and in some cases, helping students tackle different rhetorical contexts within their discipline. In this case, using Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström’s expansive learning and Beach's conception of generalization will allow us to see more than just the task based transfer as proposed by Perkins and Salomon would show and will also help us see how students engage their previously learned knowledge in multiple rhetorical contexts or activity systems. Expansive learning and generalization are important because we can be able to see whether or not the material or skills that students are learning within the composition classroom can be transformed into different assignments or multiple contexts.

For the purposes of my study, I will examine how students learn and use concepts taught in an FYC class. I will refer to "transfer" as generalization and expansive learning. These approaches seem to be linked to the understanding of learning presented in threshold concepts.

Threshold Concepts

Threshold concepts are building blocks that enable learners to advance with a particular field. In other words, threshold concepts help expand a student’s knowledge. An example is complex numbers in mathematics, where students learn about real and imaginary numbers so that they can apply that knowledge to future problem solving. Jan H.F. Meyer and Ray Land define thresholds concepts as representing “a transformed way of understanding, interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner can’t progress” (3). Likewise, Tuomi-Gröhn and

Engeström recognize that "all forms of transition involve the construction of knowledge and skills understood as *transformation* rather than mere application of use of something that has been acquired elsewhere" ("From Transfer to Boundary Crossing" 3). This transformation is so much more than applying previously learned knowledge to a skill; it involves transformation in a student's understanding as well. This transformation happens when students reject and question given wisdom, and threshold concepts do just that; they completely change the way a student thinks about a certain subject ("Conceptualizing Transfer" 32). These threshold concepts enable a student to participate in and understand disciplinary knowledge. In a forthcoming book *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle explain that threshold concepts are "concepts critical for continued learning and participation in an area or within a community of practice;" in other words, when students learn these concepts over time, they gradually participate in a disciplinary community, understanding its terminology and major concepts, without which they cannot progress. They will not learn all of the concepts needed to participate in the disciplinary community once as learning threshold concepts about a particular discipline will ultimately take time.

Threshold concepts help progress a learner's understanding within a particular discipline or community of practice (Lave and Wenger 111). Threshold concepts are transformative because completely change the student's original perception of a concept in a disciplinary subject. The transformative nature of these threshold concepts are also irreversible, in that "the acquisition of a threshold concept is unlikely to be forgotten, or will only be unlearned by considerable effort" (Meyer and Land 6-7). This transformation ties back into Beach's generalization, in that the learner's understanding transforms, and students can later apply this

transformation to other contexts. Generalization relates to another characteristic of threshold concepts. Threshold concepts are also integrative, meaning that the concept shows the “hidden interrelatedness of something” (Meyer and Land 7). By seeing how concepts are interrelated, students can then generalize their transformed knowledge into those new rhetorical contexts they will encounter. Another characteristic of threshold concepts is that they are troublesome, meaning that initially these concepts will be “alien” or counterintuitive to the student (Meyer and Land 3). Because of the transformation that happens when encountering threshold concepts, this type of learning is not easy; in fact, Adler-Kassner and Wardle argue that “this type of learning is messy, time consuming, and unpredictable. It does not lend itself to shortcuts or checklists or competency tests” (12). Even though learning them happens unpredictably, threshold concepts are necessary as students seek to join the community of practice within their disciplines, understanding major concepts that will help them progress in their learning or a particular subject.

Threshold concepts enable expansive learning and generalization because of their transformative nature in helping them reshape a students’ understanding of the concept. This transformation happens when students question the existing practice, leading to “an escalating process of debate and collaborative analysis of contradictions in the current state of affairs, which may lead to a projective modeling of a developmentally new form of the activity...” (“Conceptualizing Transfer”³¹). Students engage in expansive learning when learning threshold concepts as they question existing practices and learn how to respond to new activities they come in encounter with. These threshold concepts completely change the way they think about knowledge in a discipline, enabling them to see new ways to respond to alien contexts. Because

they are integrative, threshold concepts allow for generalization because, as Beach notes: “generalization is best understood as a set of processes that relate change from social organizations and individuals, that this will in turn help us better understand generalization between task embedded in, and constituted, by the larger set of relations” (“Consequential Transitions” 41). As a result, individuals will start to see the connections between the social organizations and tasks then will be able to generalize their previous writing-related knowledge to work for the new context they find themselves in. In some cases, learning threshold concepts will completely change their understanding of an entire discipline.

Specifically, learning the threshold concepts of the writing studies helps students break down previously held misconceptions about writing. In the past ten years, there’s been a movement in the field toward recognizing the declarative knowledge of writing studies; in other words, toward naming its threshold concepts (Wardle and Downs, Dew, and Yancey). If writing studies does have threshold concepts, instructors should teach these particular concepts in FYC courses. Writing studies threshold concepts can enable students to reconceptualize what they understand writing to be. Doing so can eventually help them learn more about the processes of writing, transferring that writing-related knowledge into other contexts. Teaching these threshold concepts, then, seems to be a promising way of encouraging generalization and expansive learning in the classroom and hopefully beyond the classroom in students' professional and personal contexts.

The Limitations of Past Transfer Studies

Because the connection between writing-related transfer (understood as generalization and expansive learning) and threshold connections are recent, there are no existing studies that explore this connection. Nor do the methodologies in previous writing transfer studies seem particularly promising for conducting this exploration. For example, in "Understanding Transfer," Wardle interviews seven students, and in this case, the study is limited because the transfer to have happens is self-reported, and the students might not recognize that transfer is happening (65). With Dively and Nelms's pilot study, the researchers surveyed GTA instructors where it seemed as if the majority of writing the 101 and 102 students were doing in the classroom focused on the process of drafting and revising, helping them to achieve competency in a "standardized base of composing knowledge" (Divley and Nelms 221). For the other part of the study, they conducted a focus group with professors in their College of Applied Sciences and Arts. In this case, Dively and Nelm's study is limiting in the fact that they do not engage the students who are actually enrolled in their FYC curriculums. For Nowacek's study she interviewed ten students and conducted classroom observations for data from an Interdisc course, which is coursework that links three humanities courses (7). This methodology is limited in the amount of focal students as well as the fact that the focus is on humanities and doesn't seem to cover generalizing writing-related knowledge into other non-humanities related course work. For Yancey, Robertson, and Taczek's study, they used a number of methods, including interviews with instructors and seven students enrolled in their FYC courses. Although they analyze student writing, they do not take a closer look at the patterns that are present and instead look at how the assignments line up with the Teaching For Transfer curriculum and how those

students transfer what they have learned into other courses they were taking that semester (48). Even though each of these studies use specific and focused methods for their research on expansive learning and generalization, different types of methods can be used to expand the field of this research

Although these studies have made a lot of progress in the field of transfer, these small scale research methods, such as case studies, interviews, and surveys, have included small sample sizes from which to collect their data. In fact, Moore tells us in her mapping of the field of transfer research that writing-related transfer researchers use a range of about only one to nine focal students within their studies (Moore 5). In addition, many transfer studies don't actually focus on writing, texts, or the reoccurring moves that students use in those texts. One method that can potentially be used that can help us see those recurring moves in the texts themselves is linguistic discourse analysis, and this method offers a promising avenue for examining the transfer of threshold concepts. In short, linguistic discourse analysis is a research method that looks for language and other features of texts in order to interpret and analyze them in various contexts (Barton 57). One promising version of linguistic discourse analysis includes rich feature analysis. When researchers use this method, they initially follow a six step process: “selecting an initial corpus that is of intrinsic interest to the audience; identifying salient patterns, usually by scanning texts holistically; determining “interestingness;” selecting a study corpus (sampling); verifying the pattern; and developing a functional rhetorical analysis” (Barton 66). This means looking for patterns, analyzing the data that is found in order to develop some sort of theory out of it. In order to see these potential patterns happening, researchers have to gather a large data sample or corpus to pull from. Using research methods like linguistic discourse

analysis in marriage with the best qualitative methods of transfer, like case studies or interviews, could allow for a larger sample size of data collection and can potentially generalize transfer research. Also, by combining linguistic discourse analysis and interviews together in a study, we can see Beach's generalization: the relationship between the rhetorical context (student writing in FYC) and the individual learner (interviews discussing the learning of threshold concepts with FYC).

With this chapter, I have reviewed some of the important previous literature on transfer, specifically selecting two conceptions of transfer, expansive learning and generalization, to be the lens of my study. Transfer is highly contested, but focusing on generalization and expansive learning can enable us to see how threshold concepts play a role in those processes. In this chapter, I have discussed previous transfer studies and their ultimate limitations. With the fact that these studies do not offer us a way to explicitly looking at whether or not threshold concepts can enable generalization or expansive learning, using this new method of linguistic discourse analysis could actually enable us to see ways in which students are generalizing and engaging in expansive learning within their classrooms. We also get an opportunity to expand the sample size of the data here, meaning that more potential students can participate in studies. In the next chapter, I'll review the methodology for my study on generalization and expansive learning and threshold concepts. I'll describe this new methodology in more detail as well as describe the larger amount of participants and the specific site of the research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Past transfer studies have not previously looked at how threshold concepts can enable generalization or expansive learning. In this study, I aim to see how and if threshold concepts enable transfer or expansive learning by providing this field of research with a new method. This new method also benefits transfer research in two other ways: it enables us to expand the amount of participants in the study, and it also enable us to look at the texts that students create themselves. In this methodology chapter, I'll review the research site (FYC at UCF) and discuss in detail the students who provided writing samples as well as those who participated in follow-up interviews. Along with the research participants, I'll discuss the two types of writing samples collected and review the specific linguistic discourse analysis method that I used to analyze these writing samples, rich feature analysis. In this chapter, I'll also discuss some of the framework I used to structure the follow-up interviews for the participants of this study.

Research Site

In order to see if threshold concepts enable expansive learning or generalization, I designed a study on writing-related generalization and expansive learning using a specific form of linguistic discourse analysis, rich feature analysis. In particular, I have collected data samples from students who are enrolled in the ENC 1101 and 1102 classes at the University of Central Florida in order to conduct a linguistic discourse analysis, looking for the learning of threshold concepts and moments of generalizing and expansive learning. UCF was chosen as a site for this study because FYC at UCF is taught using a writing studies curriculum that uses threshold concepts to facilitate expansive learning and generalization. In ENC 1101, the course goals

include having students “gain both procedural (‘how to’) and declarative (‘content’) knowledge about writing that they can use in a variety of other writing situations” (ENC 1101). That declarative knowledge includes these writing studies threshold concepts, which are agreed upon content of the courses at UCF:

- Writing is about making meaning or getting work done; it is not just used for expression and creativity.
- Readers make meanings of texts.
- Texts speak to other texts and are written in response to other texts.
- Writing and researching are processes that require planning and revision. Writing is essentially not perfectible.
- Writers write with identifiable patterns and structures that respond to contexts, audiences, and purposes.

In ENC 1102, students conduct their own research on their own chosen discourse communities, writing proposals, annotated bibliographies, and conducting focused data analysis to help them shape the research they have done into one major writing assignment. The goal for this course is that students will “learn to continually revisit earlier ideas, refine emergent findings and questions, and trace the development of ideas and arguments across multiple sources and genres” (ENC 1102). The threshold concepts that students learn in ENC 1102 include:

- Texts speak to other texts and are written in response to other texts.
- Good writing is context dependent.
- Writing and researching are processes that require planning and revision. Writing is essentially not perfectible.

- Writers write with identifiable patterns and structures that respond to contexts, audiences, and purposes.

In both of these courses, students are actively learning knowledge of writing studies and these specific threshold concepts using the *Writing About Writing* textbook. Because a lot of the threshold concepts require students to breakdown misconceptions about writing, it's possible that students' perceptions of the writing process changes once introduced to some threshold concepts from *Writing About Writing*. In order to determine how the teaching of threshold concepts in FYC helps students engage in expansive learning, I designed a study to examine the following research questions.

Research Questions

My research questions for this study included:

1. Do students' perceptions of writing change after they are introduced to some threshold concepts from writing studies?
2. If so, how do these perceptions change?
3. Is there evidence of generalizing or expansive learning as students engage threshold concepts?

Research Subjects and Participants

In order to see how and if these threshold concepts enable expansive learning, I collected writing samples in the Spring semester of 2015 from 8 UCF instructors of ENC 1101 and 1102, two of whom teach ENC 1101 and six of whom instructors teach ENC 1102. Instructors were recruited via e-mail to participate in the study. These instructors were required to assign a

prompt during the first week of classes, and because of this requirement, some instructors were not able to participate because they were unable to fit the prompt into their class schedule. This requirement is why there was only two instructors of ENC 1101 who participated compared to the six instructors of ENC 1102. These instructors recruited students within their classrooms by informing them of the study in the first week of class. After they learned about the study, students gave their verbal consent to the teachers to participate in the study. 215 students who were enrolled in ENC 1101 or 1102 courses agreed to participate: 52 from ENC 1101 and 163 students from ENC 1102. Out of the 163 students who were taking ENC 1102, 95 students had previously taken ENC 1101 at the University of Central Florida.

From among these students that agreed to participate, I selected one ENC 1101 student and one ENC 1102 student to be interviewed. The ENC 1101 student, Peter, is a freshman aerospace engineering major. His previous experience in writing seemed to be the typical high school experience of studying literature over composition and rhetoric topics. When he was in high school, he was very much in the mindset of waiting until the last minute. The composing process to him was one that really did have not a lot of structure. He also did not feel prepared to do the work that his ENC 1101 course would require him to do.

The other student that I interviewed from ENC 1102, Pässean, had a very similar background to that of Peter. Pässean is a sophomore/junior engineering student here at the University of Central Florida. In her high school, she had taken AP literature and also had the opportunity to take both Composition I and Composition II during her high school education. With Composition I, she passed, but she had very little interest in the subject. The topics that were discussed and written on in class were mainly focused on literature and themes that one

may find when analyzing that literature. Although she was partially interested in this, when she attempted to take Composition II during her high school years, she failed the course because it was not structured and did not teach on writing and rhetoric. Upon her becoming a student at UCF, she again tried to take the course, this time as the ENC 1102 course as structured here. When she took the course then, she had to choose something that related to her major, and she wasn't quite sure what she wanted to do yet. She asked for help too late, and she failed the class again. This is currently her second attempt in the course, and this time she is finding more success in the course thus far.

Data Collected

To answer my research questions, I collected two types of data from ENC 1101 and 1102 students. In the first week of classes, I had the instructors assign an Initial Response Paper prompt that asked questions based on the specific threshold concepts laid out previously in the description of ENC 1101 and 1102 courses (See Appendix A and B). Next, I collected Reflection Response Papers written by the students after reading the introduction to the *Writing About Writing* textbook, which gives an introduction to threshold concepts and writing studies for students (See Appendix C and D) (Wardle and Downs 1-10). I requested the Initial Response Papers in order to gauge what previous knowledge students had about writing studies, and the Reflection Response Papers were done in order to see if students' perceptions of writing changed once they were introduced to some of the concepts of writing studies through reading the introduction section from *Writing About Writing* and engaging in threshold concepts within the course. When I received these samples from instructors, I replaced the students' names on

the digital copy with a number, each student receiving a number from 1 to 215. I kept a list of the names matching the numbers in order to see who I could potentially contact for follow up interviews. I kept the students' data samples locked up, and I password protected my digital files, including the student samples.

Because of the large number of students participating in this study, it was most feasible to run linguistic discourse analysis on just two different artifacts of student writing. In most cases, some of the data samples involved were handwritten, and to conduct the linguistic discourse analysis I will describe later, I had to type up all of these handwritten samples, which involved a lot of time but also enabled me to start seeing some of the patterns in the student writing samples. A more important reason for using only these two prompts deals with what was asked. Asking these students about these threshold concepts will help enable us to directly see how and if students' perceptions of writing change by giving us what their perceptions of writing were before starting the course and if they changed after being in the course.

Rich Feature Analysis

As mentioned in the literature review, I will conduct a quantitative and qualitative analysis. For the quantitative methods, I followed Ellen Barton's basic methodological procedures of rich feature analysis as mentioned in Chapter 2. In order to see how these procedures worked in my study, I will discuss what each of the procedures and then describe my own study in comparison to those procedures.

Barton lists the first procedure as "selecting an initial corpus that is of intrinsic interest to the audience" (65). The researcher starts with a broad corpus of texts that might prove interesting

in future research. For this study, I initially became interested in studying samples of student writing from ENC 1101 and 1102; this group can be broad considering that each student at the university is required to take ENC 1101 or 1102 or test out of those classes based on previous AP or other college credits during their high school education. When I first selected this corpus, I had already begun to see interesting patterns in the research, which is Barton's next procedure.

The next step following a rich feature analysis involves "identifying salient patterns usually by scanning texts holistically" (Barton 65). A researcher who follows procedure looks at the corpus and tries to get a surface view of the patterns that are involved. Once a researcher has identified salient patterns, they can start determining interestingness; in other words, this interestingness allows researchers to answer the question "how would these patterns, specifically the patterns that have been noticed, help us to assess writing as composition instructors?" (66). For the purposes of this study, finding the pattern of how students talk about threshold concepts is definitely interesting because this could help us as instructors gauge how well our students understand the threshold concepts that are presented to them.

After determining the interestingness of the patterns, the corpus has to be narrowed down. Barton calls this sampling, or selecting a specific initial study corpus. For this study, I narrowed down the field of ENC 1101 and 1102 instructors to 8 instructors and ended up with a total of 215 students participating. Once I was able to narrow down the field, I was able to use Barton's next step procedure. This step involves verifying the pattern and then developing a functional-rhetorical analysis out of that pattern (66). When a researcher verifies the pattern, she will start analyzing texts using coding or counting. In order to do this in my own research, I have used the Ant Conc software to help me see word counts and other interesting patterns of texts. The

Ant Conc software was developed by Laurence Antony for the purpose of conducting corpus linguistic research in order analyze data driven learning (Antony 1). The software allows users to analyze multiple patterns of text through different tools including:

1. Word List Tool: allows users to see the most frequent words used in an organized text.
2. Concordance Tool: allows users to see how words or phrases are commonly used in the text.
3. Keyness Tool: allows users to locate unusually frequent or unusually infrequent words in a corpus of text through the comparison of another corpus of text.

In analyzing my data, I have used all of these tools to better see how students are using threshold concepts within their writing conducted in class. With the Word List tool, I was able to see what words were used frequently by the students in response to the prompt that was given to them about threshold concepts. The Concordance Tool allows me to take this analysis a step further to see how students phrase different concepts together and also see how often certain phrases occur within the data samples.

The Keyness Feature proves to be useful when analyzing the results from the Initial Paper Responses and Reflection Response Papers I collected from the students. Using the Keyness feature allowed me to see the words that students use to describe the writing process that aren't necessarily mentioned in writing studies research or as a relevant topic within their courses. In order to see the Keyness Feature in action, I decided to compare the responses I received in the ENC 1101 and ENC 1102 papers to the introduction section of *Writing About Writing*, which all of the students participating in this study read after responding to the Initial Paper Response prompt.

In the introduction to *Writing About Writing*, Wardle and Downs discuss the layout of the textbook as well as begin to describe some of the threshold concepts that are present in the text and that the students will be learning in the course. To introduce them to these concepts, they discuss the previously held misconceptions these students might have about writing, including "the rules of writing (including grammar) are universal and do not change based on the situation" and "writing is about getting the grammar right, so what makes writing good is largely just simple and basic rules of English syntax" (Wardle and Downs 4-5). Another way they introduce these concepts to students who use this textbooks is thoroughly discussing what threshold concepts are and which ones they will learn in different chapters of the book (Wardle and Downs 6-7). Because this is the initial reading that students conduct for the course, they will read this introduction and wrestle with these concepts and their own perceptions of writing. By using this text in comparison to the Initial Paper Responses and the Reflection Response Papers that students do at the beginning of the semester, I hoped to see how students use writing studies terminology both before and after they read the introduction to *Writing About Writing*.

In order to understand these Keyness Percentages, we need to understand how the software actually calculates the percentages of unique words used in comparison with another text, in this case, the introduction to *Writing About Writing*. The Ant Conc concordance software uses the Log Likelihood formula. In "Comparing Corpora Using Frequency Profiling," Paul Rayson and Roger Garside describe the results of these formulas in these terms:

The word frequency list is then sorted by the resulting LL values. This gives the effect of placing the largest LL value at the top of the list representing the word which has the most significant relative frequency difference between the two corpora. In this way, we can see the words most indicative (or characteristic) of one corpus, as compared to the

other corpus, at the top of the list. The words which appear with roughly similar relative frequencies in the two corpora appear lower down the list (3).¹

In other words, what this means is that the lower the Keyness Percentages, the more similar it is compared to the other corpora that has been chosen. Conversely, the higher the percentage, the more “key,” or unique, the word used by the student is in comparison to the chosen corpora, which in this case is the introduction to *Writing About Writing*.

Using the Ant Conc concordance software allowed me to verify patterns within their student writing by using the tools made available by the software. Once I was able to verify those patterns, I starting developing a functional rhetorical analysis of data. When a researcher develops a rhetorical analysis, they explain the pattern within the context, which is what I will ultimately do in the next chapter (Barton 66).

Interviews

Along with linguistic discourse analysis, I also selected two students to be interviewed to learn about their processes and thoughts regarding the threshold concepts they engaged with in ENC 1101 and ENC 1102. Interviews were done in order to further illuminate the results found in the rich feature analysis, and it also provided me with another opportunity to gauge the students' understanding of the threshold concepts I looked for in the rich feature analysis. For these interviews, I selected one student from ENC 1101 (Peter) and another student from ENC 1102 (Passean) and conducted one interview with each of these students. Because of time constraints and the sheer amount of students participating in this study, it was easier and more

¹ A fuller description of this formula can be found in Appendix E.

manageable to select only two of these students based on what was written in their Initial Paper Responses and Reflection Response Papers. The single interview that I did with both of these students provided a lot of information that was helpful in understanding some of the patterns that I saw in my rich feature analysis of student writing.

Ultimately, I selected both of these students because of how they were answering these prompts based on the threshold concepts of the course. In both cases, I wanted them to explain some of the exact phrases they used to describe a particular concept, and I also wanted to see if their responses could further illuminate the results I was seeing in the rich feature analysis I conducted of their student samples and others. These interviews were conducted after the students turned in their Reflection Response Papers after the first half of the semester was completed. Interviews lasted for about 45 minutes each asking them about their class projects and their perceptions of writing from what they have learned as a class. Some of the questions included:

1. What was your previous writing experience like before taking this course?
2. What was your high school experience with writing like?
3. Has your understanding of writing changed?
4. How would you define writing now?
5. Why do you think you are more confident with your writing?
6. What do you think prepared you for being able to do this kind of work?
7. What discourse community did you pick?
8. What has your composing process been like?
9. What was the most difficult or challenging assignment you've done so far?
10. How do you think what you have learned in this class will help you with your major course work?

Now that I have reviewed this new methodology and the design of this study, we can see that a larger amount of students were able to participate as well as we now have a method that focuses on the texts that students actually create within their classes. In the next chapter, I will

describe the results of my rich feature analysis and interview data to show how students are able to engage in expansive learning and generalize threshold concepts within their student writing.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Using a marriage of two different research methods, linguistic discourse analysis and interviews, will provide us with a new way of seeing whether or not threshold concepts enable generalization and expansive learning in FYC courses. This will also enable us to see whether or not students' perceptions of writing have changed once introduced to writing studies threshold concepts. In this chapter, I'll review some of the analysis and results from conducting a linguistic discourse analysis using the Ant Conc concordance software. I have split off this analysis into three major categories based on the tools from the concordance software: Word Counts, Concordance, and Keyness. Using these different tools, I analyzed the two writing samples I gathered from the ENC 1101 and 1102 students (the Initial Response Papers and the Reflection Response Papers). After I discuss the findings of these results, I will connect these results to the interview data I collected as well. First, I will discuss some of the interesting patterns found using the Word Count feature of the Ant Conc software.

Evidence of Expansive Learning as Illustrated Through Word Count

As mentioned before, the word counts of the Ant Conc software measures the amount of times a student mentions a certain word within their responses. Word counts can enable us to see the frequency and usage of individual words that a student uses in each of these writing prompts. How students use individual words to describe writing can show us how students' perceptions of writing are changing as well as show us how students use the threshold concepts learned from their FYC course in their own writing. This means that through the students' responses in Initial Response Papers and the Reflections Response Papers, we can potentially see if students

generalize what they learn from the threshold concepts presented in *Writing About Writing*. To measure the counts, I first used the writing samples from the Initial Response Prompts and counted the frequency of the occurrences through the words used in the Initial Response Prompts. After running these prompts through Ant Conc software, I had significant word lists to compare against the Reflection Response Papers. If I found any interesting words in the Reflection Response Papers, I went back and analyzed the data found in the Initial Response Papers to see if the words I found in the Reflection Responses were present at all in the Initial Responses. Table 1 below demonstrates some of used words found in the Word Count analysis. Table 1 has all of the results, which I include to give a fuller representation of how often students use words in both of the response papers. Although many aspects of the results can be discussed, here I will focus on three patterns that is present in the Initial Response Papers and the Reflection Response Papers: the discussion of grammar, the use of expressionistic terms to describe writing, and how students correctly and incorrectly use of the word “texts.” I chose to focus on these specific patterns because they are all connected to the threshold concepts from ENC 1101 and ENC 1102 that I look for in this study. The patterns that I specifically discuss below are located at the beginning of Table 1.

Table 1: Word Counts

Concordance Word Counts	ENC 1101: Initial Response Prompts	ENC: 1101: Reflection Response Prompts	ENC 1102: Initial Response Prompts	ENC 1102: Reflection Response Prompts
Grammar	11	6	35	128
Express/Expression	27	4	21	17
Emotions(s)/Feelings	18	6	31	10
Literary/Literature	1	5	10	3
Creative/Imagination	7	0	9	5
Texts	50	24	163	46
Text (Correctly)	13	14	119	118
Text (Incorrectly)	24	7	36	9
Meaning	55	21	171	77
Research	66	29	125	60
Author(s)	73	29	274	76
Concise	2	0	2	2
Process	38	26	123	54
Reader	49	15	118	52
Reading	39	29	94	213
Writer(s)	101	32	78	116
Paper(s)	44	38	87	112
Create(s)	40	21	96	32
Idea(s)	70	29	108	148
Information	23	14	71	32

Concordance Word Counts	ENC 1101: Initial Response Prompts	ENC: 1101: Reflection Response Prompts	ENC 1102: Initial Response Prompts	ENC 1102: Reflection Response Prompts
Audience(s)	20	29	80	91
Topic(s)	31	14	66	40
Form(s)	34	15	90	54
Context	8	4	9	7
Character(s)	2	0	3	1
Structure(s)/Structured	8	2	21	21
Message	16	16	39	25
Words	12	7	54	56
Language	7	6	8	15
Communicate(s)	8	9	19	7
Perspective(s)	6	14	8	16
Skill(s)	1	5	8	14
Concept(s)	4	20	8	128
Descriptive/Description	1	0	5	1
Transfer	2	0	3	2
Fact(s)	9	5	13	30
Proper	4	0	11	22
Voice	0	0	4	12
Vocabulary	3	0	6	3
Transitions	1	0	4	1

In Table 1, we can see that students use different words to describe writing-related knowledge, specifically words that deal with the threshold concepts asked about in the Initial Responses Papers and the Reflection Response Papers. Their definitions of what writing is range from descriptions of writing as a way to express thoughts and feelings to writing as a way to get a message across to a specific audience. The analysis below will focus on the changes in perception that students have based on the threshold concepts they were asked about in the prompts I gave them. These word counts suggest that students are able to engage in expansive learning in order to describe writing under the new definitions brought forth from the *Writing About Writing* curriculum.

Students' Perceptions of Grammar Changes

The data suggests that student's perceptions of writing as indicated by how they talk about writing appear to change over the course of the semester as indicated by their use of particular words. One example is how "grammar" is discussed in both of the responses. In the Initial Response Papers, some of the students write that "grammar" is an important part of the writing process, and some write that having correct grammar is what constitutes writing. In one Initial Response Paper example, an ENC 1102 student describes writing in this way: "Good writing is also based on grammar, if there is too many grammatical errors, the reader will begin losing interest in the work and may forfeit continuing reading the work all together." In another case, another ENC 1102 student stated that "I believe good writing consists of good grammar, being able to communicate clear concepts or thoughts, descriptive words, and a variety of vocabulary."

While this idea that correct grammar is the definition of good writing is present in the Initial Response, there appears to be a major change in the word counts in how grammar is discussed in the Reflection Response Papers. In ENC 1101, the mentions of grammar decrease from 11 mentions to 6 mentions. In ENC 1102, the mentions of grammar in fact increase from 35 in the Initial Paper Responses to 128 to the Reflection Response Papers. However, the context of how students use the word “grammar” is important as nearly all of these ENC 1102 students mention that while grammar an important piece of clarity, it is not what defines writing nor is it the most important part of writing.

Along with these results, some key pieces of interview data from Peter can also help see how students are engaging in expansive learning to understanding the threshold concept that “good writing is context dependent” rather than merely just a grammatically correct written document. In Peter’s Initial Paper Response Paper, he wrote that “[o]rganization is necessary because it shows that effort was put into the work, and it helps the reader follow the place easier, proper grammar, correct spelling, and claims also show the piece is professional and credible.” He also engages in expansive learning here by applying this to his writing in the Reflection Response Paper. He writes that “I learned that writing is about the content of your message and how the rhetor relates to it.” We can see here that he was able to generalize the information he learned from his ENC 1101 course by directly applying it to the writing he does here. He explicitly mentions this threshold concept, and this allows us to see both that his perception of writing has changed and that he can directly use that threshold concept that changes his perception into his own writing. His response and his change in perception here can be compared the changes that see we see in the ENC 1101 and 1102 data in their response papers.

In order to describe this change, Peter first describes the writing strategies he went through to compose his papers both in high school and then for his ENC 1101 class. Because of this change in perception, this interview excerpt suggests that Peter engaged in expansive learning when he applied this threshold concept about writing being context dependent to the writing that he does in his ENC 1102 course now. In the interview excerpt below, I first asked him about his confidence in the writing process, and then, Peter told me how his change in confidence has helped him compose with a different mindset:

Allison: So do you think that being in this course and learning these new writing strategies has given you more confidence in your writing abilities?

Peter: Yes

Allison: So how do you think that it's done that?

Peter: I used to think my writing was okay. I usually like stay up the night and night and write an essay like in high school and just pull like an all-nighter. But now the class forces you not to wait until the last minute. So you write ahead of time. And as I'm writing I'm like oh I can change this or oh I can change this too. So I get all of these really good ideas in my head. So I put them in paper. And then we do peer reviews, so other people in your class are reading your paper. Oh this is a really good paper. So it kind of makes me feel better in my writing skills.

Allison: So do you feel more proud of the work that you do now?

Peter: Yes from high school, it was more grammar oriented, like you have good grammar. But now it's like content, like the message of the paper.

Peter describes the writing process as something as being intimidating, especially if everything has to be perfect before it is turned in. We can see here that Peter now recognizes the process as one where the focus should on the content of what's going to be turned in rather than having the paper be grammatically correct. He is more confident in the fact that he can change his work as

he goes rather than focusing on it being perfect as he composes it the first time on paper. At the end of this interview text is where we see Peter mention that his perception of grammar has changed. He compares his high school experience with his experience now in ENC 1101. In high school, his focus was more on composing grammatically correct papers. Now, he focuses more on the content of the paper, making sure that his message is communicated clearly. He understands now that writing involves paying more attention to the context and the message of the assignment rather than whether or not all of the elements that surround it are grammatically perfect. We can also see this directly happen in his Response Papers. In his Initial Response Paper, Peter used a numbered list to make sure he was answering every single question.² This list seems to be focused on making sure that the answer to each question is as academically grammatically correct as possible. However, his Reflection Response Paper seems less structured, and his focus is more on communicating his message to the appropriate audience rather than making sure it is grammatically correct. We see here that he generalizes the threshold concept that "writing is context dependent" by transforming his knowledge he learned from ENC 1101 into the paper writing he does for the course. This data suggests that his perception of grammar's role in the writing process has changed.

This change in perception of the role of grammar in the writing samples present in both the writing samples and from Peter is mentioned in the introduction to *Writing About Writing*, Wardle and Downs claim that one of the stories that students learn before coming into the ENC 1101 and ENC 1102 classrooms is that:

² See Appendix H for Peter's list.

'writing' is a basic grammatical skill of transcribing speech to print, a skill that can "transfer" (be used again) unaltered from the situation in which you learn it (high school and college English classes, usually) to any other writing situation (2).

In this view of writing, good writing is merely error avoidance. In the *Writing About Writing* curriculum, students then are learning that writing involves more than just writing in a correctly structured manner; they are seeing that writing responds to contexts and audiences, a major threshold concept from the *Writing About Writing* curriculum. They are seeing that writing is a process that involves more than just how something is said but also involves what is being said (Wardle and Downs 3). Students can move from this misconception that writing is merely grammatically correct to getting to focus on the ideas that they want to communicate instead. This change in perception suggests that students are generalizing the threshold concept that "good writing is context dependent" rather than error avoidance.

This change in perceptions of the role of grammar both in the word counts and the interview data suggests that students are engaging in expansive learning. Students read about the threshold concept that "good writing is context dependent" in the *Writing About Writing* textbook, which in some cases can be in opposition to the previous conceptions that students may hold. Students generalize this information, and they are able to apply this knowledge to the writing that they do for the course. These students engage in expansive learning by further transforming this writing-related knowledge into the Reflection Response Papers. The words that they use suggest that students are generalizing this information, especially when we can see that even though ENC 1102 students mention grammar more times in the Reflection Response Papers, they are using the term to ultimately explain to their audience that grammar is not the most important factor in the writing process; context is more important. They generalize that

context should be their focus when they are composing for this course. This suggests that they are engaging in multiple contexts here, moving the knowledge learned in the course from the textbook to the papers that they will compose for this class. Along with the word counts data, the interview with Peter also suggests that he was able to engage in expansive learning by applying the writing-related knowledge he had learned in his ENC 1101 class to the paper writing that he does for these classes. The word counts, then, suggests that students generalize their new knowledge of the role of grammar into the writing that they do for their course work.

Students' Perceptions of the Purpose of Writing Changes

A second example of how student's language use seemed to demonstrate generalization or expansive learning as they grappled with threshold concepts is how the students define writing using expressionistic terms at first. The data suggests that once students engage with the threshold concept that "writing is about making meaning or getting work done; it is not just used for expression and creativity," they start to understand writing as less of an expressive activity and more of a meaning making process. In the Initial Response Papers, students specifically mention literature or novel writing as what defines "good" writing. In fact, a lot of how these students describe writing centers around narratives, One ENC 1102 student writes in her Initial Response Paper that "[i]f you were to read a series then you would know that the author did a lot of planning before s/he wrote the first book so that they would have a strong knowledge of character development and plot." In the same way that literature, novels, or stories are mentioned, expression is also discussed as an important factor to describing writing. However, in the ENC 1101 responses, we see a decrease in defining writing as expression, going from 27

occurrences to only 4 in the Reflection Response Prompts. This idea that writing is expressive or has to be done in the work of great novels doesn't account for the multiple contexts that will call for different types of writing. These reductions in the expressive occurrences suggest that these novice writers are starting to engage in expansive learning in order to see the multiple contexts that they will have to write for or in response to. They are also generalizing that texts respond to multiple contexts, purposes, and audiences.

The interview that I conducted with Peter also suggested that students were generalizing the threshold concept that writing will respond to multiple contexts and have different purposes and audiences. In my interview with Peter, he also makes this shift from writing as just being a narrative means to actually a meaning making process. In the interview text below, we see Peter talking about the paper he wrote actually analyzing a piece of literature. Even though his paper focused on discussing Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven," he actually shifts his focus to a more rhetorical analysis rather than a literary analysis:

Allison: So in the first paper that you wrote, what were some of the kind of things you wrote about in it?

Peter: About Edgar Allen Poe? We had to do pick one major piece that he did. I did "The Raven." And I wrote about his message in that. Like, how his life directly was correlated to the message. How is... he had a sad life. So how his sad life like reflected on the paper. So if you read "The Raven," you got an idea about Edgar Allen Poe. Oh this guy's gotta be a miserable person.

Allison: Have y'all done rhetorical situation yet?

Peter: Yes. We've talked about it a little bit.

Allison: So what do you think about the rhetorical situation?

Peter: We've learned that like the person...the author... the author has a lot to do with it. It's like if you have an old man talking about Barbie's, no one's going to care. Like if you have a little girl playing with Barbie's then it's going to show a lot more to the audience.

So the author, does, like the author of the message definitely relates to like the audience. So, they just have to kind of to relate to each another. They can't be completely different things.

Instead of focusing in on the literary themes of Edgar Allan Poe's work, he actually uses his work to make a rhetorical analysis about Poe's life. Even though he is talking about a literary subject, the interview suggests that Peter understands the threshold concept "that writing is about making meaning or getting work done. It's not just used for expression and creativity." Here, we can see that is his wrestling with the concept that readers make meaning of texts. He has constructed for his audience that Poe must have been a miserable person thanks to the work that he has created, and by writing his paper, he has moved from talking about "The Raven" as a literary analysis into making a connection to the rhetor and how the rhetor may actually construct meaning from the text. Another way we can see Peter making this connection is when he discusses the rhetorical situation using Barbie's as an example to explain the concept. It suggests that his understanding of this threshold concept that readers create meanings, and rhetors can play a role in how a reader will construct the meaning from the text that is written.

Wardle and Downs break down this misconception that texts inherently mean something on their own also in the *Writing About Writing* textbook. They explain that:

A more accurate conception is that there is no way to directly transmit information; when we write something, we bring our own ideas, experiences, and biases to it, and when you read something, you do the same. Thus writers and readers construct meaning together (4).

Students in this course learn that unlike what they have learned about literature that readers and writers both construct meaning out of texts. By the fact that the data suggests students are moving from a more literature frame of mind to more or less understanding that writing is a

meaning making process, we can see that students are generalizing the information that they learn in the *Writing About Writing* curriculum.

In these words counts and this interview data samples, we can see another way that students' perceptions of writing are changing based on how they describe writing in their Initial Paper Responses and their Reflection Responses. The students in these classes learn the threshold concept that "writing is about meaning making or getting work done" rather than solely just a creative function. Once they are exposed to this threshold concept, the data suggests that they are engaging in expansive learning by the fact that they are able to apply this newly learned writing-related knowledge to a different context. In this case, the next rhetorical context that they are writing for is the responses papers they have written for the course. The interview data from Peter also suggests that they are generalizing this threshold concepts into more than just the papers that they will write for this course. Peter applied the knowledge of readers constructing meaning out of texts into an analogy that made sense to him, which was the example of an old man playing with Barbie's. This shows a transformation of knowledge into a personal context, suggesting that Peter has been able to generalize his writing-related knowledge. Along with the word counts in the changes for how students discuss writing in expressionistic terms and Peter's interview, the data suggests that their perceptions of what writing is are changing, and they are able to transform that knowledge into other rhetorical contexts they will encounter, like the response papers that they have written.

Students' Perceptions of Multiple "Texts" Change

Another pattern in the word counts suggests that students generalize their understanding of the threshold concept that "writers write with identifiable patterns and structures that respond to contexts, audiences, and purposes." The data suggests that students generalize this knowledge by the ways they use the word "texts" in their Initial Paper Response and Reflection Response Papers. This specific threshold concept also appears in another part of the data. One interesting pattern that is present in the word count analysis of the concordance software is the fact that some students use the word "text" even if the plural form "texts" is appropriate to the sentence. One example of this incorrect usage comes from an Initial Response Paper from an ENC 1101 student: "Writers/authors create text either through their own thoughts or through something that they have read and researched and want to express through writing." This data suggests that this student still thinks of writing as one form with universal properties, and this is consistent with other students. In ENC 1101, students incorrectly use "text" 13 out of 37 times, while ENC 1102 students incorrectly use "text" 36 out of 155 times. This incorrect usage of the word is even more surprising due to the fact that the prompt does include the plural form of "texts" in the questions, and even if the students responded with the same wording and phrasing as the prompt, they would still sometimes use the incorrect form of "text." This suggests that students are transferring their knowledge learned from the course that writing is not universal with one set of identifiable patterns. There will be different types of texts they will need to use to respond to a myriad of situations.

In the same way here that students start to generalize the concept that there is not one universal method of writing, Passean also made this connection during our interview. When I

asked her about how composition would help her with her engineering work, she described the different texts she would have to create as an engineer:

Allison: So how do you think what you've learned in comp will help you ultimately in your engineering major?

Passean: Despite contrary belief, we do a lot of writing. There's a lot of writing involved. If we have reports, reports that have to be delivered. Contracts that need to be written. Like a lot of writing is involved before any like hands on things come about. You have to report your findings. Like if you do anything on an engine or a machine of any sort, you have to tell people what you've done because they have to reciprocate it if you aren't there. Like you can't be the only one who knows what's going on. Engineering is a team effort. So you can't know the only thing. Research is literally going and finding out stuff, reporting it to the world, and seeing how somebody else can take that up and use it for something else to possibly find like a cure or something else that will help us in the world. So people just don't realize that there's a lot of writing involved. So I just use everything that I've learned. I've become a lot more comfortable with writing. So it's helping me through like even these lab reports where it's mostly just like reporting, I'm able to put a bit more of myself in it. So it's like oh okay, you can actually put life into this 10 page report.

Passean here has engaged in expansive learning by understanding the threshold concept that writing involves engaging in multiple contexts and audiences. Here, she is telling us how she applies her learning to a new context. She now knows that her writing will respond to multiple situations, and that she will have to change her writing based off of those situations. She tell us that she now knows that when she writes a report after building an engine, she knows she has to be detailed enough to communicate to other people what she has done. She understands that this is done so that other people can potentially repeat her research or to use it to design an engine or a building. For her engineering major, she describes the different type of texts that she will have to create, and she also specifically describes here what she has to actually write in the reports based on the audiences that reads them. This threshold concept that writing responds to multiple contexts and audiences is another one that is mention in the *Writing About Writing* textbook. At

first, Wardle and Downs bring up the misconception that there is one universal way to write a texts that stays consistent at all times. They then break down this misconception by arguing that:

A more accurate conception is that rules of writing depend on the situation – audience (potential readers), purpose (what you are trying to accomplish), exigency (what caused you to write in the first place), and context (the situation in which the writing is taking place (4).

This description of writing ties into the rhetorical situation, which is one of the concepts that is taught within the course and that students engage with.

With the last set of word count analysis, we can still see some evidence that students are able to generalize the knowledge they learn from the threshold concepts of the course. In this case, the threshold concept that they learn here about there being multiple contexts, situations, and audiences that they will have to write to is evident in the fact they start to use the word "texts" correctly. This change in how students are using this word suggests that students are generalizing this threshold concepts because they are starting to see texts are more than just a singular type of essay they will have to write for class. They engage in expansive learning by seeing multiple forms of texts that they will read and write for both their classroom environments as well their professional contexts. In my interview with her, Passean generalizes this information into the professional context she will eventually be working in. She made the connection that there will be multiple types of reports she will have to write as an engineer, and she also made it a point to say that she will have to be aware that multiple audiences will be reading her results, not just her. Overall, the word counts suggest that can see that the threshold concepts learned in ENC 1101 and 1102 are potentially transferred into the work that is being done in the course, but this also is shown when using the concordance feature of the concordance software as well.

Evidence of Expansive Learning in Concordance Results

The concordance feature of the Ant Conc software enables users to see how phrases are used within writing. In the case of these samples, I looked for phrases that were similar to the ones that were present in the prompts, both in the Initial Responses and the Reflection Responses. I coded this data by looking for the number of the occurrences of the phrases used. The phrases used show to us how novice writers first compose a response to a prompt, and there are definitely some distinguishing patterns in those responses. The students provide what I will call a “pageant answer” in the Initial Response Papers. Pageant contestants are on the spot to and are required to answer a question in a short amount of time. Interview coaches advise that in order to have more time to think about specific answer to the questions, contestants begin their responses by using the exact phrasing of the question. These ENC 1101 and 1102 students definitely use this same strategy in their Initial Response Papers. The data shows that numerous times, students use the exact phrases from the questions in their prompts. Students’ use of those direct phrases are reduced in their Reflection Response Papers. In Table 2, the decreases in the phrases used from the Initial Response Papers and the Reflection Response Papers can be observed, and they seem to decrease almost across the board from the first prompt to the last. In order to narrow the focus of the analysis, I will only discuss how the phrases “we can recognize the ways,” “writing is perfectible,” and “writing interact(s)” to show how students’ language use suggests generalizing or expansive learning. These results are located at the top of Table 2.

Table 2: Concordance Results

Concordance Phrases	ENC 1101: Initial Response Papers	ENC 1101: Reflection Response Papers	ENC 1102: Initial Response Papers	ENC 1102: Reflection Response Papers
Variations of “we can recognize the way writers construct texts”	11	5	32	3
Writing is perfectible	13	4	18	0
Writing could be perfectible	2	0	1	0
Writing is not perfectible (variations)	17	8	19	10
Writing interact(s)	12	5	35	10
Good writing	43	35	117	19
Perception of writing	0	19	0	2
Threshold concepts	0	7	1	61
Writing accomplishes	17	8	0	0
Meaning is created	21	10	49	10
Writing and research process	20	5	50	4
Authors create	18	13	43	8
Authors write	2	1	18	0
Authors create and write	9	4	22	3

Concordance Phrases	ENC 1101: Initial Response Papers	ENC 1101: Reflection Response Papers	ENC 1102: Initial Response Papers	ENC 1102: Reflection Response Papers
Writers construct	15	6	15	1
Authors construct	1	1	39	6
After reading	1	11	0	68

Table 2 allows us to see the Concordance results of the ENC 1101 and ENC 1102 Initial and Reflection Response Prompts. These results show us how often a student engages in a "pageant answer" to respond to the questions that were given in the prompt. Looking at the phrasing allows us to see how students are using language to engage with the threshold concepts that are presented in class. These kind of results ultimately allows us to see the exact ways students use phrases to be able to communicate their meaning, and it also allows us to see if they are using unique language in some cases. The use of that language could possibly indicate that they are generalizing the knowledge that they are learning by putting those terms into their own language. The next set of analysis will focus on some of the most prevalent uses of the phrases and the decreases that go with those phrases.

Students Understand How Authors Construct Texts

One of the most prevalent “pageant answers” was the use of the phrase “we can recognize the ways in which texts,” and this shows that students are engaging in expansive learning to recognize the multiple ways that texts are constructed. When responding to the Initial Response Paper, students exactly copied question of the prompt, which was “[h]ow can we

recognize the ways in which writers construct texts?” In the Initial Response Papers, ENC 1101 students copy this phrase 11 times, and ENC 1102 students used it 32 times in their Initial Response Papers. An example of student using this exact phrasing comes from an ENC 1101 student in his Initial Response Paper: “[w]e can recognize the way in which writers construct texts by the formatting of his/her writing, their ideas they are getting across. Also by the sources that he/she uses. Writing is writing.” Here, we see the student thinks that good writing deals with having the document properly formatted rather than writing being able to accomplish tasks or getting work done.

While students were directly using this phrase and describing themselves in ways that don’t align with the *Writing About Writing* curriculum in the Initial Response Papers, there is a change in how students use this phrase in the Reflection Response Papers. In the Reflection Response Papers, the students respond to the prompts in less rigid ways; they use their own language to express their thoughts on what writing is and the threshold concepts they are working with. The use of exact prompt phrases decreases in both the ENC 1101 and 1102 Reflection Responses, with ENC 1101 reduced to 5 responses and ENC 1102 reduced to 3 uses of this exact phrase.

This phrasing deals with how students engage in threshold concepts that describes that authors construct texts with identifiable patterns and also that writers go through a significant composing process before getting to the final product. In the same way, Peter also wrestles with this concept in his interview. During his interview, Peter described his composing process and how it has changed significantly. By doing a paper describing his composing process, he was

able to learn more about how he personally constructs texts. In the interview, he describes his process of composing then revising then composing again;

Peter: Okay so we had to take two pieces. One extensive. Which I did my resume, because I was pushing that off for a long time. So I finally got that done. And my reflexive, So something that I enjoy doing. Which I did playing the guitar and wrote a song. And we had to see how the composing process relates to both of them. So I saw, I noticed that like for my resume, I would compose a little bit then revise, and then compose and revise. And with playing the guitar, I would do the same exact thing. I'd write some lines, and be like oh I don't like that, and change it. And be like okay that's better. And I would just keep doing that. I noticed that they are a lot similar. So they do like kind of connect with each another.

Allison: So what do you think you've gained from doing this type of analysis?

Peter: I've noticed that the composing process is everywhere. Like everything you do. Driving a car can be a composing process.

We see here that Peter is learning a lot about his own personal composing processes. His ability to describe this process of “composing, then revising, then composing, and revising again” as a processes to moves beyond just transcribing ideas down on paper. He's engaging with the threshold concept that “writing and researching are processes that require planning and revision. Writing is essentially not perfectible.” By mentioning that the composing process is like driving a car, he is showing that the writing process is one that has to be learned and perfected over time. Just like in writing, none of us can consider ourselves perfect drivers, and we definitely have to consciously work at driving in order for to stay safe to avoid speeding tickets and potential wrecks. With our writing, we constantly have to learn new information for us to be able to write to our audiences in the most accessible way. Like driving, we are conscious of the moves we make, and we constantly revise and shift them to work toward our ends, whether it is to get our location safely or to communicate a message to our audience through writing. Peter's writing process works in the same ways as he has learned he has to go through multiple levels of revision

that can involve him both revising and composing his writing in this way. Peter later goes on to say that having this knowledge helps him see how he composes not only for this class but also for the multiple contexts he might find himself in, especially for his aerospace engineering degree, so he is engaging in expansive learning here.

With these word counts and the interview data, we see that students engage in expansive learning to understand how real writers go about composing documents. They take this threshold concept of learning how authors construct texts in recognizable ways and are able to generalize it into their own composing processes. The fact that the use of the "pageant answer" phrase decreases in this set of data shows that students understand that writers can potentially construct their texts in different ways, depending on what works best for the situation and the individual writer. We see Peter generalize this information in his description of his composing process paper. This ultimately changes how he views the composing process, and now he can construct texts in ways that are more appropriate to his writing as well as for the context he is writing for. This data suggests that students' perceptions about the composing process are changing, and they are able to engage in expansive learning by applying this to their own composing process by responding to the prompt in unique ways rather than by the exact phrases they are given.

Students Learn That Writing is Not Perfectible

A second example of students reducing their use of "pageant" phrases is in the way they describe whether or not writing is perfectible. The data suggests that these students generalize the threshold concept that "writing and researching are processes that require planning and

revision. Writing is essentially not perfectible” through both how they answering the question “Is writing perfectible?” and how they explain the composing process in their responses and interviews. In this example from and ENC 1102 Initial Response Paper, we can see that sometimes, they may say that it is perfectible but actually mean something different:

Writing is perfectible, but only depending on each individual person. Nothing is perfect until you fall in love, and someone can fall in love with writing just as easy as falling in love with an actual person. And there are some who will never love a writing and never find anything perfect

This writer uses flowery language to describe if writing is perfectible, but there are definite changes in their perceptions of this concept. In ENC 1101, we see students who say that “writing is perfectible” drop from 13 to 4, and in ENC 1102, we see a drop from 18 to 0 mentions. In both courses, the phrase “writing is not perfectible” also drops down, but this could be because students are more comfortable with responding to the prompt and don’t feel the need to answer the prompt using the exact language from the question. We can see this happen in a Reflection Response Paper from an ENC 1102 student:

In my own opinion writing itself is not perfectible, as there is no thing we can define as "perfect" writing. Writing must abide by the established standards within a discourse, but there is no actual way of creating a perfect piece, as each piece can be improved in some way or another.

This student moves away from the exact phrases in this response and gives themselves more room to describe the concept more fully. This is written in response to the threshold concept that “Writing and researching are processes that require planning and revision. Writing is essentially not perfectible.” This data suggests that through the changing in the use of exact phrases, students are transferring their knowledge about the writing process into constructing this prompt.

The concordance analysis here suggests that students are generalizing what they have learned about the composing process in their response papers, but Peter also talks about this concept within his interview. In my interview with Peter, we again see that his conception of the composing process is changing. Revision was not a part of his mindset: in fact, having to go back and change something caused a lot of stress for Peter. In my interview with him, Peter told me that:

Peter: Usually I like, when I was writing back in high school, I had to write something. And then I'd go back, and I'd change a little bit. And I'd get scared. I'd be like okay If I change a little bit, I'm gonna be doing this forever. And I'd just kind of rush through it. And now I realize it's okay to go back and change a little bit at a time. Work your way through it. You can write down all your ideas. I used a sort-of flow chart or something in high school, and I hated doing that. But now like I've learned that you can just like write down anywhere. I've learned that J.K. Rowling just wrote down her ideas on a napkin. So I can...it doesn't have to be in a flow chart. I can just write down the idea. Something that will help me remember the idea that I have in my head.

For Peter, he saw the writing process as something that caused much stress, and that if the writing he did was not correct the first time he wrote it, it would ultimately take him longer than he wanted to complete his writing tasks. Instead of sticking with it and creating something worthwhile, he instead panicked and rushed through his project just to get it done. However, throughout the interview, Peter did seem to make connections that the writing process is fluid and is constantly being reshaped in order to create a final product. A lot of what Peter and I talked about in his interview was his change in perception of how writing involves a major composing process. Part of his composing process was just getting over the invention part of writing, while other parts dealt with learning how he himself constructed texts in multiple types of contexts and situations.

In the same way that is mentioned earlier, this still ties into what Wardle and Downs say about this composing process in the *Writing About Writing* textbook by discussing the misconception that “what makes writing good is largely just simple and basic rules of English syntax” (5). Following this misconception would ultimately lead to a student thinking that writing is perfectible when in fact it takes time for a writer to actually the process, and all writers are constantly learning, and in most cases, these students are engaging in expansive learning to change their perception in order to make their writing process better, much like Peter has done over the course of the semester. We see that students generalize this threshold concept of that writing is not perfectible by how they are using different phrases to express this concept. Peter demonstrates that he has engaged in expansive learning by the fact that he demonstrates that he is more comfortable with going back and changing items even as he composes. This suggests that he has generalized this information by applying it to his composing process. He understands that it does not have to be perfect when he puts it down on paper. Both these concordance results of how students describe whether or not writing is perfectible and how Peter has described his more fluid writing process suggests that students have generalized that writing is not perfectible by answering the questions in more individual ways and writing in ways that work best for both them as an individual writer and the context they are writing for.

Students See How Writing Interacts With Other Forms of Writing

Another interesting “pageant answer” involves the use of the phrase “writing interact/interacts.” Students are engaging here with expansive learning in through wrestling with the threshold concept that “texts speak to other texts and are written in responds to other texts.”

As with the other phrases, students use the “pageant answer” to help them answer the question prompt, just like in this example from an ENC 1101 student in his Initial Response Paper:

Our writing interacts with other forms of writing by how it changes as we continue to read other works, those works have an impact in how we choose to write in our own works.

It seems as if the student does get the concept, but they are limited in the explanation they give by using the exact phrasing of the question. In the Initial Response Papers and the Reflection Responses, we see a reduction in occurrences in both ENC 1101 and ENC 1102. In ENC 1101, the occurrences go down from 12 to 5, while in ENC 1102, the occurrences of the phrases go down from 35 to 10. Not only are the use of the phrases reduced, but we also see that students are feeling more comfortable with expressing the threshold concepts in their own terminology. One ENC 1101 changes up the phrasing by putting the answer to this question in her own words: “Furthermore, I now see that no writing is original but that each piece of text is actually built on some other form of writing be it a language or previous study.” Even though she is not using the exact terminology or phrases from the text, this quote suggests that she has learned the threshold concepts and is able to generalize this into her writing for class.

It seems that Pässean also engages in expansive learning when engaging this threshold concept that "texts speak to other texts and are written in response to other texts" when she talks about her own discourse community project. Pässean became an engineering student and is a member of the National Society of Black Engineers, which is actually the organization that she is doing her research on for her discourse community project. Below, we can see Pässean talking about a threshold concept while comparing it to her experience with her discourse community project:

Allison: So what do you think about some of the concepts you've been learning in class? How do you think that's helped you with your writing?

Passean: Usually in classes, I'll tend to try to really apply things outwardly. And when it's like everything is technically borrowed, I was like, okay, let's see, intertextuality and stuff like that. I was like okay let's see how it really applies because the discourse community I'm writing about, the National Society of Black Engineers, they have a constitution, and they kind of model theirs off of the United States Constitution. I was like that's true. And the way that we conduct our business is kind of modeled off of others. I can't remember but one person was talking about how oh nothing's really original. It's just new perspectives on the same thing. And I'm like oh that's actually really... Like it really resonated with me. And I was like okay. Yeah I like learning about new ways to look about our world. That's cool to me.

Here, we can see that Passean is able to talk about the threshold concept that “texts speak to other texts and are written in response to other texts” through the way that she gives us an example. For her, she sees the connection between the National Society of Black Engineers and the United States Constitution. Here, the data suggests that Passean understands that writers borrow ideas from other writers and texts. In *Writing About Writing*, Wardle and Downs describe the misconception that “it is easy to distinguish which ideas are a writer's ‘own’ and which they ‘borrowed’ by telling the students that writers all borrow language ideas indirectly or directly (5). We can see that this is transformation in Passean's understanding because she tells us that this concept of how nothing is really originally resonated with her. Because of this, Passean makes a connection here between the work she does in ENC 1102 and her own personal life and career interest, transferring what she has learned from this ENC 1102 into another context. What Passean is saying here suggests that her knowledge carries from different contexts and rhetorical situations.

What the data suggests is that when beginning a writing class, students use whatever previous strategy they have to be able to answer any prompt. They also might use the exact

phrasing from the prompt simply to answer the question in order to get credit for their response. However, after they are introduced to the threshold concepts from the course, they begin to generalize that knowledge. They understand that writers do in fact write using identifiable patterns, but they can respond to different contexts with different strategies as they see fit for the situation. This generalization that students engage in with this threshold concept is shown in their ability to move away here from the exact phrase, and it's also shown in Passean's ability to generalize that information into research that she is now conducting as well as connecting it to something that she will be engaging with in her future professional contexts. The data suggests that students use their unique language and experiences to generalize the threshold concepts that they are learning. This uniqueness of language and the ability and opportunity to put what they have learned shows us that are making novel connections to the text rather than merely regurgitating information from the course to get a good grade for the class. We also see this unique phrasing appear in the results from the Keyness Tool in the Ant Conc concordance software.

Evidence of Generalization in Keyness Results

Another way to see how students are uniquely generalizing their understanding of threshold concepts or their writing perceptions is by using the Keyness Tool in the Ant Conc concordance software. As a reminder, the Keyness percentages deals with high unique words in comparison to another corpora of text. In order to see how students were using words uniquely, I compared their responses against the introduction to *Writing About Writing*. The higher percentage numbers, the more key, or unique words, and the lower the percentages means that

the words listed more closely match what's being seen in *Writing About Writing*. Table 3 shows the Keyness percentages for the top 50 words used both in the Initial Response Papers and the Reflection Response Papers. In order to discuss the Keyness of the words, here I focus on three different sections: author/writer, meaning/message/topic, and audience/reader. I focus on these three to narrow down the analysis and to also focus on segments on the data that illuminates students using expansive learning. They Keyness results I focus on here are highlighted in light gray.

Table 3: Keyness Results

Keyness	Word	Keyness	Word
34.717	Author	8.994	Opinion
31.912	Good	8.840	Essay
29.734	Changed	7.554	Support
25.571	Audience	6.434	Information
25.234	Perfect	6.108	Determines
25.076	Authors	6.108	Interact
20.251	Topic	6.108	Proper
20.093	Meaning	5.947	Perspective
19.287	Forms	5.947	Professor
19.010	Paper	5.947	Structure
18.370	Process	5.947	Type
18.001	Thought	5.786	Points
15.590	Perception	5.625	Mind
15.362	Create	5.465	Looking
15.246	Writing	5.450	Text

Keyness	Word	Keyness	Word
14.787	Message	5.322	Feel
14.602	Reader	5.247	Believe
13.662	Thoughts	5.143	Five
13.548	Perfectible	5.143	Format
10.608	Determined	5.113	Introduction
10.411	Created	4.982	Drafts
10.126	Style	4.982	Paragraph
9.804	Interacts	4.976	Purpose
9.804	Response	4.900	Writer
9.804	Writings	4.500	Accomplishes

Table 3 allows us to see the exact words that students are using in comparison to the language that is using in *Writing About Writing*. Seeing these words in comparison allows us to see the unique language that students are using to engage with the threshold concept they are learning in class. Overall, it seems that students use their own language in favor of words that are directly used in *Writing About Writing* textbook. Even though they are using their own language to describe these threshold concepts, they are still able to generalize them through their own unique languages and, in some cases, their own analogies that show that these students are engaging in expansive learning. The next set of analysis will show how students uniquely use language and analogies to generalize the threshold concepts that they learn in ENC 1101 and ENC 1102.

Students See Themselves as Authors or Writers

Through one example of the Keyness percentages, we can start to see that regardless of what term is used that the students start to see themselves as an author or a writer. The very first word that tops the list in the Keyness percentages is “author,” with a 34.717 Keyness factor. “Writer” has less of a Keyness, having a percentage of 4.900. Several factors can explain these results. First, both “author” and “writer” are used in the questions of the prompt, so that means how they use each of these terms depends on how the student decides to describe writing. In comparing these Keyness results with the Word Counts results in Table 1, we can see that ENC 1101 and ENC 1102 students use the term “author” 347 times in the Initial Response Papers, while “author” is used only 105 times. In the same way, we see students in ENC 1101 decrease their mentions of writer, going from 101 to 32 mentions, while ENC 1102 writers increase their mentions, from 78 to 116. Regardless of how they use the term writer/author, students can demonstrate that each one of these terms means that someone is creating an original texts putting their own thoughts and opinions into it. Even though “author” is not used as much as “writer” in comparison to introduction to *Writing About Writing*, these results shows that students are using vocabulary that is familiar to them to explain what a writer and does and the work they accomplish. By the increases in the words used to in the ENC 1102 group, the data suggests that these students are beginning to see themselves as writers, actively engaging in the conversation of writing studies.

In the interviews that I collected, I also began to see that Peter thought of himself as a writer thanks to how he had explain himself both in his Reflection Response Paper and by what he communicated in his interview. the first week of classes, Peter wrote an Initial Response

Paper that was more of a list as an answer to the questions than an actual paper, but his Reflection Response Paper showed less of a structure and more of a freedom to express his ideas in his own language (See Appendix F for Peter's Initial Response and Reflection Response Papers. In the Reflection Response Paper, he starts using analogies to explain himself. Peter tells us this about the writing process "I've learned that the composing process does not just affect our writing, but also tasks in our everyday life, such as cooking breakfast." This idea of the writing process being like cooking intrigued me seemed related to how students start to see themselves as writers engaging in their own original writing. In our interview, I questioned him about this further in order to see how he would elaborate on his response.

Allison: So how do you see the composing happen when you're cooking breakfast?

Peter: When you're cooking, you need to come up with what you are going to make, which is the idea. And then the drafting, you actually have to make it. Then if you burn it, like if you burn like an egg, like okay next time I've got to remember that you can't put it in for that long. It's kind of revision. Yeah and you kind of just perfect over it time, which is kind of like the composing process.

In this interview, we can see how Peter is coming to understand the composing process as something that takes to develop. His cooking analogy is quite smart. In particular, his description of "burning the egg" becomes very important in the writing process. We as writers constantly have to adjust our learning, and even if we are more experienced, we are still learning how we shape our own writing. As writers, we don't just learn this writing-related knowledge and it stays permanently "locked in;" we transform and transfer that knowledge across the various rhetorical situations we may encounter. In the same way, if Peter works on the same project, "cooking the eggs" again, he learns from that experiences and revises what he had done

previously. Peter's ability to showcase his knowledge here by using a cooking analogy suggests that he is in fact learning a lot about the composing process.

The *Writing About Writing* textbook tells students that “doing research on writing will give you the opportunity to contribute new knowledge about your subject, not simply gather and repeat what lots of other people have already said” (Wardle and Downs 2). What this means for students is that they get to learn that their opinions and ideas matter, and they will inherently put themselves into it. They also tells readers that “we bring our own ideas, experiences, and biases to it; and when you read something, you do the same” (Wardle and Downs 4). If this is the case, our students then can use their previous experiences to be able to engage with expansive learning. With the Keynes results, the data suggests that even though they are using different terms other than what *Writing About Writing* textbook uses, they are still able to see themselves as writers who have original and worthwhile comments to make about the writing process. They generalize this knowledge, and they are able to engage with this in their Reflection Response Papers. With Peter, we see that he has engaged in expansive learning by comparing his writing process to cooking, something that is not necessarily classroom related but a context that Peter has to “write” in whenever the situation arises. This means that he has generalized the information that he has learned here into a familiar context. If Peter can describe himself as a writer when he is cooking, then the data suggests that he can more easily seem himself as a writer when he engages with other contexts outside of the ENC 1101 and 1102 classroom.

Students Understand How to Construct Meaning in a Text

In another Keyness result, the data suggests that students start to use other words other than the general “message” or “topic” to describe how they ultimately construct meaning when they create texts. These student writers use a variety of different ways to describe what is being written about, through uses of terms like meaning, message, and topic. Each of these words have a similar Keyness percentage in relation to the introduction to *Writing About Writing*. Topic has a 20.251 Keyness, meaning has a 20.093 Keyness, and message has a 14.787 Keyness. These percentages seem to be in the middle of the top 50 words, indicating in many ways that they are somewhat unique and somewhat similar to what we see in the introduction. Even though students use each of these words to describe what writers write about, each of these words goes down from the Initial Responses to the Reflection Responses: meaning from 226 to 92; message from 55 to 41; and topic from 97 to 54. What this could potentially indicate is that students do not feel locked in into using these exact words to describe what they are talking. They are using different phrases, analogies, and definitions to describe this concept rather than just narrow down this concept into one term. In this way, we can see the generalizing the concepts because they are apply to apply the knowledge they learned, they transform their knowledge to work based on the context and situation they find themselves in.

In the same way that the students are generalize the threshold concepts about meaning making, Passean discusses another threshold concept that also shows her moving her understanding of threshold concepts into other realms both inside the classroom and outside this. Below is Passean talking about the threshold concept that “Writers write with identifiable patterns and structures that respond to contexts, audiences, and purposes:”

Allison: What did you think about the rhetorical situation?

Passean: Rhetorical Situation? I tend to relate like a lot of the written to speech. Like how I interact with people. A lot of times my friends, because I'm learning a lot in how like people work from my friends. You've got to understand where they are coming from. Understand your audience, understand who you are talking to or who you are writing for. And so I've always taken it like back to speech. And I was like oh okay this make sense. Like you've got to understand where they are coming from because if you honestly want a message to come across, you can't talk to someone like with closed ears. At that point, there's no point in talking or no point in writing. If you know that you are delivering a message. Like if you actively know that oh I'm giving this message to this person, I don't know if they are going receive it. It doesn't make you feel confident in like giving it to them. You don't want to give it to them if there is a high probability they are going to reject it. So I take that like also with my like friends and stuff. It's like oh I do that with my friends. Like if they're in a bad mood, I'm not going you know to tell them something else that's bad. I'll wait. No. And so, it just puts like academic terms to what I kind of learn outside with like people.

Allison: So, how do you think that, so it's great that you can see how that connects to like your outside environment, how do you think learning how to write for those specific audiences helps you be able to write for the class you are in now?

Passean: Sometimes it's kind of like nerve wracking. Because it's like oh you are writing to join this, to join in the discussion of rhetoric and composition, and I'm just like I'm new to this. Y'all been there a long time. Y' all have been studying this for years. And we're just like I guess we'll put our paper in. I guess we'll join the conversation. So sometimes it can be kind of nerve wracking. But it's like I possibly have new ideas to contribute. If I don't participate, I won't know. So I like learning about those kind of things.

Allison: So, how do you feel your language changes when you are writing towards an academic audience?

Passean: A lot more formal because when you are friends you don't have to be as eloquent with your words. But overall, I mean it's improved my vocabulary in general and how I just interact with people.

Passean here makes a move here to describe responding to different contexts and situations and applies it to how she interacts with her friends. For example, she tells us here that if her friend is in a bad mood, she usually won't tell them anymore bad information to make their mood worse.

This is showing yet another application from the class into her personal life. This suggests that

Passean is able to generalize her knowledge of these threshold concepts from this course to situations beyond the course, both in her professional and personal life.

The Keynes results and the interview data about how students construct meaning in a text still suggests that students generalize the threshold concepts they learn in uniquely personal ways. In the Keynes results, students are able to use multiple words and analogies to generalize the threshold concepts that they learn in class. At the same time, Passean engages in expansive learning by connecting the meaning that is constructed when she writes to her friendships. This also suggests that she generalize this information into other contexts as well, even if it means that she uses her own unique language to be able to do so.

Students Understand How to Write Towards Multiple Audiences and Contexts

When students start talking about who and what their writing is being written for, we can see in the data yet again that students are starting to understand that the texts they write will be written for multiple contexts and situations. In Table 3 above, we can see that audience as a Keynes percentage of 25.751 while a similar term, “reader,” has a smaller Keynes percentage of 14.602. Students use “audience” a lot to be able to describe how writers should respond to different contexts. It’s interesting here that even though “reader” has less Keynes in comparison with the introduction to *Writing About Writing*, these students still use “audience” to describe what they mean in their responses. In fact, the word counts for “reader” goes down in both instances, in ENC 1101 from 39-29, and in ENC 1101, from 118-52. Conversely, the Word Counts of audience actually go up from the Initial Responses to the Reflection Responses, with a change from 20-29 in ENC 1101 and a change from 80-91 in ENC 1102. What these Keynes

results suggests is that even if students aren't using the exact vocabulary from the *Writing About Writing* curriculum, they are still able to describe the threshold concepts. In this way, they are making novel interpretations of what they learn in class, and are able to generalize those interpretations into the writing that they do.

This ability to be able to use analogies or her own examples to explain the threshold concepts is ultimately what caught my attention in Passean's Reflection Response Paper. One of the ways she caught my attention was how described writing like a foreign language. She tells us that:

Writing has become more of an alive subject to study, like foreign language. In the beginning, I knew there were a lot of different genres of writing, but it seemed as if there were two major separations: formal academic writing and informal non academic writing.

We study foreign languages, and with writing, one needs to study the culture (rhetorical situation) in order to truly understand the purpose of methods of writing. Also like foreign languages, the standards always change. Because writing is dynamic, there isn't one way to write, just like there may be more than one way to say a phrase or demonstrate meaning.

This is intriguing considering that one of the goals of the *Writing About Writing* curriculum is to make writing studies its of discipline worthy of academic study. In fact, the textbook says that "Until that point, there wasn't a clearly identifiable "field" or "discipline" of writing as such. But in the early 1960s, a number of events and the publication of some major research helped the study of writing become distinct from the study of literature, the study of speech communication, and the study of language (linguistics)" (Wardle and Downs 9). This introduction is orienting students to understand writing as its own field worthy of academic study. So, Passean described writing as like a foreign language, I was intrigued by this analogy because learning a foreign

language is learning a discipline in and of it. When I asked Passean about this, she elaborated more fully, connecting this to her experience in the Spanish classroom:

Allison: So, when you say that writing is like learning a foreign language, can you describe that a little bit more for me?

Passean: Yeah so I took about 5 semesters of Spanish. Man I wish I could retain it but I took a lot of Spanish. And the way you are taught foreign language and the way I learned Spanish, you not only learn like the language, the vocabulary, you learn how to use it, we practiced it in class. And we also took the time, and we learned about the culture because everyone's culture is different, like how they may use a certain phrase is different than how Americans use Spanish. It's just different in that regard. So you have to learn about the culture and the way people use those phrases in order to structure your words properly. And then I realized when we talked about rhetorical situation, it's like oh you need to understand where they're coming from which in the same terms of foreign language. You need to understand where they're coming from. How like certain references they may not know. You have to explain those. You've got to do also for writing. If your audience doesn't know, you have to educate them. And so that's how I correlated with my past. I was like oh that makes sense. That's why we learn culture in foreign language. In order for us to be on the same page as the um fluent speakers.

With how Passean has spoken here, we can see clearly that she understands the concept completely. Her connection to writing as her Spanish class was to me incredibly smart. She recognized the fact that a learner does not just learn the words to speak like a foreign speaker; they have to learn how phrase are used by native speakers, the context behind how those phrases are used, and even the culture of the speakers to fully understand how to use that language. In the same way she has mentioned here, the *Writing About Writing* curriculum teaches students that more goes into writing than perfect grammar or form. Contexts, situations, and audiences have to be taken in order to fully speak the language, or more to the point, how to write the most effectively for the exigency that is required. This connection suggests that Passean has transformed her knowledge and is able to engage in expansive learning, moving her writing related knowledge outside the composition classroom.

Both these Keynes results and Passean's analogy of writing a as a foreign language suggests that students have engaged in expansive learning. The Keynes results suggest that students are able to generalize that there will be multiple contexts, audiences, and situations that they will have to respond to when they write, and they express that using the unique language that is appropriate to them. With Passean, she generalized this information using her foreign language background as a jumping off point. Her analogy suggests that she has engaged in expansive learning here. She is able to apply her knowledge that writing respond to multiple situations in a context that is familiar to her, and now that she has learned this knowledge, she can now generalize it to the multiple contexts that she may find herself in, even her professional ones. All of this data suggests that allowing students to use their own unique language, experiences and analogies to express threshold concepts enables them to engage in expansive learning of those threshold concepts.

With all of the data samples and the interview texts here, we can see that students use their own language to describe and define the threshold concepts they learn in the *Writing About Writing* curriculum. In some cases, this might be something as simple as a word choice, or something bigger like a complete analogy to describe the process. These patterns suggest that the students' perceptions of writing are changing, and they change in comparison to the story of writing that is being presented in the introduction to *Writing About Writing*. While this data does not suggest mastery of the concept, this type of analysis can show evidence that students are generalizing and engaging in expansive learning.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Through this study on expansive learning and generalization, we can see that students do have interesting patterns in the way they express the threshold concepts they learn under the *Writing About Writing* curriculum, and these data samples and their results after the analysis suggest evidence of learning and that student's perceptions of writing are changing. Once exposed to the curriculum, FYC students are able to actually put those threshold concepts in their own language, transforming their knowledge. Because of their transformative nature, threshold concepts encourage expansive learning and generalization. The threshold concepts that students are presented in the *Writing About Writing* curriculum helps students change how they view writing. Once they can change this view, they are able to generalize the knowledge they have into their own writing for this course, and they are potentially able to make applications to their personal lives and their future professional careers.

As discussed in the literature review chapter, this concept of transfer, specifically expansive learning and generalization, comes out of an already existing and contested conversation. This conversation that this idea of transfer should have more complexity than the simpler carry and unload models of transfer as brought forth by Salmons and Perkins has already been in place. What this study does is continue the conversation. It shows us that learning is not merely carrying knowledge from one location to another. Expansive learning involves actively transforming their information based on the contexts and situations that learners might find themselves in. This study suggest that that are some signs of this learning happening within FYC courses at the University of Central Florida.

The data that I've collected in this study, both from the rich feature analysis and the interviews, suggests that students are starting to learn some of the threshold concepts they engage within the *Writing About Writing* curriculum. The patterns from the data of students using personal analogies and writing tasks in their own language suggests that these are signs of learning for these students. These signs could be indicators to us that our students are understanding the material and can also potentially generalize the information they learn. We see that students start to generalize that the writing process is not perfectible and is not one that is merely done for expression; writing is about creating meaning or accomplishing some sort of goal. The data also suggests that students engage in expansive learning when they no longer see writing as merely writing one type of text: the academic essay. Instead, students engage with the threshold concept that there are multiple types of texts, and each of these texts will be written differently for different contexts and audiences. Also, these students start to see that their opinion matters, and they also start to see themselves as writers joining a community of practice.

Ultimately, this study makes three important contributions to expansive learning and generalization research. It provides a larger sample size to transfer studies, introduces a new method to expansive learning studies that focuses on texts, and explicitly looks at whether threshold concepts facilitate the generalization of writing-related knowledge. This first contribution is extremely important in that this study uses more students than every previously used in a transfer study. By having more students present in this study, we as researchers have a greater understanding of how students use threshold concepts in their writing. This means that instructors can have a better of understanding of the signs of learning from their students and can better teach writing-related knowledge so that students can potentially generalize that

information in the future. In this case, using the threshold concepts of writing studies could be one potential avenue for enabling the expansive learning. Once students' perceptions of writing change, their knowledge is transformed, and they are able to apply that knowledge, potentially transforming it to fit the response needed for a particular subject.

We are also able to use more students in this study thanks to the new method of expansive learning research, linguistic discourse analysis. Introducing this method to transfer research opens up new possibilities of discoveries within transfer research. With the way I used the method now, at the beginning of the course, we are able to see the first evidences of learning from our students. Using this method, we get the opportunity to actually see the recurring moves students make within their texts, which most transfer studies do not do, favoring more qualitative methods. With linguistic discourse analysis, we actually get to see textual evidence of expansive learning. At the same time, checking in with students qualitatively through interviews allows us to have a richer analysis, allowing us to gauge how and if expansive learning occurred within students' writing. We get to hear about the students' writing process and actually see the final product, giving us a unique opportunity to see evidence of generalizations and early signs of expansive learning within a course. Using this method for a longitudinal study, for example, following students throughout their entire undergraduate careers, could also allow us to see students engage in expansive learning within their other disciplines, allowing us to see more solid evidence. Researchers wanting to continue using this method could potentially start there to continue using this invaluable method to transfer research.

Using a specific rich feature analysis enables us to also develop a functional rhetorical analysis out of salient patterns in student writing. We start to see exactly what students are

writing rather than just having them say what they have learned from small scale methods like interviews or case studies. Running student writing through a concordance software enables us to be able to take a close look at the writing that our students do for their FYC classes. We can have a better understanding of how these threshold concepts are learned and, more specifically, how students use and discuss these threshold concepts. In this study, the results suggest that students express the threshold concepts they learn about writing using their own language. Students put these concepts into their own words, and they also use analogies that relate to their own personal lives to fully grasp the concept. Whether it's in the comparison of learning writing as if it is a foreign language or in comparing the composing process to cooking breakfast, students can grasp new knowledge and feel confident in the way they respond. Their writing no longer becomes rigid and uses strategies that just suggests regurgitation or following strict rules; students create and restructure their knowledge, transforming it in ways they see fit to both understand it and potentially fitting it into those contexts that they might find themselves in.

Another benefit to using this type of method is that we can use these patterns that appear in student writing to help us as researchers and instructors further assess if expansive learning is happening. Seeing these patterns will help us understand how teaching threshold concepts in FYC impacts the generalization of writing-related knowledge, helping us shape classrooms and curricula that encourage expansive learning and generalization. Once we recognize those patterns, we can start assessing our papers in ways that better fits how our students learn rather than following strict formal assessment standards.

One way to continue this type of research is to expand the type and the amount of writing samples that are looked at. For this study, a limitation is that I only looked at two different

writing artifacts from these students. What other researchers can do is create a larger study involving major writing assignments students compose in their FYC courses. However, this may involve more than just looking at data samples and the textbooks students use to learn these threshold concepts. This may also involve researchers looking at the exact language from the instructor's prompt to see how well students actually complete the assignment. This type of study would require extensive time considering the length of the papers and the amount of students as well as knowledge on how to use concordance software to best analyze the results that are found.

Also, the key to doing this type of analysis is to make sure that it is used in conjunction with another method. Although it may not be feasible to interview 215 students, an effort can still be made to talk with the students to see if what they say can illuminate what is actually written on paper. It also gives us a chance to see their composing process, and from there we can see if they have learned to see writing as a process rather than just a transcription of ideas on paper. Using linguistic discourse analysis and interviews together helps us to see both how students are writing those concepts directly on paper as well as helps to see how well students can apply that knowledge outside of the class as well. In some cases, students can also see this writing-related knowledge as helpful to them outside the class, making connections between writing and their future majors, even including something like engineering.

This study also holds interest for students as well for several reasons. Students can start feeling confident in their writing, meaning the process is no longer something that will ultimately cause much stress and worry. Instead, the writing process becomes a learning process, one that will take time and effort to develop. They can move themselves out of the

realm of thinking of themselves as “bad” writers and move into re-thinking themselves as novice writers with room to grow and learn. Giving them this confidence can make a world of difference in these students' writing lives. As an instructor, I can see this happen, especially when the focus is taken off of grammar. Once students see that their ideas are looked at rather than just the structure of their writing, they can begin to become more excited about what they put together for their classes. They start to see a personal side to their writing that they can engage with and become more excited about.

These students will also start to feel more confident in their opinions and beliefs, and they will also feel confident in applying those opinions to their own writing. Once they learn these threshold concepts, they can start to see how their writing matters. The *Writing About Writing* textbook states immediately that “your ideas matter.” Once they are able to see that their ideas matter, they start to see writing as more than just a process of repeating what other people have said about a topic; they actually see writing as something deeply personal that they can connect with. One of the threshold concepts studied was that “writers construct meaning of texts,” and this is exactly what we are giving students practice at doing when we teach students under a writing studies curriculum. Adding this ability to create meaning with the ability for students to be able to put these concepts into their own language, we can see that they are able to generalize what they know into their own contexts. If we as instructors can get students to see and really understand these threshold concepts of writing studies, we can ultimately help them succeed in being able to write in whatever context they may find themselves in.

APPENDIX A: ENC 1101 INITIAL RESPONSE PAPER PROMPT

Write a one-page response engaging with these question:

What determines "good" writing? What kinds of work does writing accomplish? How does our writing interact with other forms of writing? How is meaning created when both writing and reading texts? What does the writing and research process look like? Is writing perfectible? How and why do authors create and write texts? How can we recognize the ways in which writers construct texts?

APPENDIX B: ENC 1102 INITIAL RESPONSE PAPER PROMPT

Write a one page response answering these questions:

What determines "good" writing? How does our writing interact with other forms of writing? How is meaning created when both writing and reading texts? What does the writing and research process look like? Is writing perfectible? How and why do authors create and write texts? How can we recognize the ways in which authors construct texts?

APPENDIX C: ENC 1101 REFLECTION RESPONSE PAPER PROMPT

Write a one-page response engaging with these questions:

After reading the introduction to *Writing About Writing* and engaging with threshold concepts, has your perception of writing changed? If so, how has it changed? If not, why is your understanding still the same? As a reminder, here were the questions you initially responded to: *What determines "good" writing? What kinds of work does writing accomplish? How does our writing interact with other forms of writing? How is meaning created when both writing and reading texts? What does the writing and research process look like? Is writing perfectible? How and why do authors create and write texts? How can we recognize the ways in which writers construct texts?*

APPENDIX D: ENC 1102 REFLECTION RESPONSE PAPER PROMPT

Write a one-page response engaging with these questions:

After reading the introduction to *Writing About Writing* and engaging with threshold concepts, has your perception of writing changed? If so, how has it changed? If not, why is your understanding still the same? As a reminder, here were the questions you initially responded to: *What determines "good" writing? How does our writing interact with other forms of writing? How is meaning created when both writing and reading texts? What does the writing and research process look like? Is writing perfectible? How and why do authors create and write texts? How can we recognize the ways in which authors construct texts?*

APPENDIX E: LOG-LIKELIHOOD FORMULA EXPLANTION

“The method is fairly simple and straightforward to apply. Given two corpora we wish to compare, we produce a frequency list for each corpus. Normally, this would be a word frequency list, but as described above and as with examples in the following application section, it can be a part-of-speech (POS) or semantic tag frequency list. However, let us assume for now that we are performing a comparison at the word level¹. For each word in the two frequency lists we calculate the loglikelihood (henceforth LL) statistic...Note that the value ‘c’ corresponds to the number of words in corpus one, and ‘d’ corresponds to the number of words in corpus two (N values). The values ‘a’ and ‘b’ are called the observed values (O). We need to calculate the expected values (E) according to the following formula: In our case $N_1 = c$, and $N_2 = d$. So, for this word, $E_1 = c*(a+b) / (c+d)$ and $E_2 = d*(a+b) / (c+d)$. The calculation for the expected values takes account of the size of the two corpora, so we do not need to normalise the figures before applying the formula. We can then calculate the log-likelihood value according to this formula: This equates to calculating LL as follows: $LL = 2*((a*\log (a/E_1)) + (b*\log (b/E_2)))$ The word frequency list is then sorted by the resulting LL values. This gives the effect of placing the largest LL value at the top of the list representing the word which has the most significant relative frequency difference between the two corpora. In this way, we can see the words most indicative (or characteristic) of one corpus, as compared to the other corpus, at the top of the list. The words which appear with roughly similar relative frequencies in the two corpora appear lower down the list” (Rayson and Garside 2-3).

APPENDIX F: PETER'S WRITING SAMPLES (ENC 1102)

Initial Paper Response

1. The most important aspect that determines what “good” writing is organization.

Organization is necessary because it shows that effort was put into the work, and it helps the reader follow the piece easier, proper grammar, correct spelling, and claims also show the piece is professional and credible.

2. Writing helps transfer knowledge from one person to another, and can be used as entertainment.

3. We can use our writing to respond to another’s writing to express our opinion on a matter.

4. Meaning is created when both writing and reading text when the text is trying to say something and the reader is able to comprehend. This can be done through writing devices as well, such as a metaphor

5. The writing and research process results in a well organized piece of work that uses thought through carefully and is capable of proving its point.

6. Writing is not perfectible because there is no sure way to write perfectly. Everyone has their own writing style that differs from the next. Also, the rules are always constantly changing, so a piece of work quickly became outdated and appear to be “wrong.”

7. Authors create and write text to either inform, persuade, or to entertain

8. Some ways we can recognize the ways in which writers construct texts is to examine the writing method applied, the style of writing used, and how it is organized.

Reflection Response Paper

I don't remember what I defined writing as when I started this class, but I do know that there is a lot more to it than I did a few weeks ago. I learned that writing is not about the content of your message and how the rhetor relates to it. I've learned that the composing process does not just affect our writing, but also tasks in our everyday life, such as cooking breakfast. From taking this class, I am a lot more confident in my skill as a writer because it shows in my work that my writing is improving with practice, and I've learned a lot about myself and how I write, which helps me find ways to improve on both.

APPENDIX G: PASSEAN'S WRITING SAMPLES (ENC 1102)

Initial Response Paper

“Good writing is relative to the context of the conversation. If you are in the academic, good writing can be determined by sources, the depth of the topic, critical acclaim, personal context, good writing can simply mean what spoke to the individual person and the reaction given.

The writing and research process is merely a large amount of questions being asked and searching for the answer while recording the data. It can be a long process depending on how many questions asked or whether you find the answer you are looking for. I don't believe writing is perfectible because one can always ask more questions and go deeper into a subject. For example, many researchers can spend their lives on one project because research begets questions.

Authors want to communicate the idea and viewpoint of what is important to them.

Reflection Response Paper

Just being in this course. The anxiety that comes from writing has diminished greatly. Writing has become more of an alive subject to study, like foreign language. In the beginning, I knew there were a lot of different genres of writing, but it seemed as if there were two major separations: formal academic writing and informal non academic writing.

We study foreign languages, with writing, one needs to study the culture (rhetorical situation) in order to truly understand the purpose of methods of writing. Also like foreign languages, the standards always change. Because writing is dynamic, there isn't one way to write, just like there may be more than one way to say a phrase or demonstrate meaning.

“Good” writing seems more attainable now. It also just makes it realistic. Writing is a way to deliver a message.

APPENDIX H: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Allison M. Morrow**

Date: **January 09, 2015**

Dear Researcher:

On 01/09/2015, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination
Project Title: Transfer in First Year Composition: Using Linguistic Discourse
Analysis to Measure the Effects of Threshold Concepts in
Facilitating Writing-Related Transfer
Investigator: Allison M Morrow
IRB Number: SBE-14-10834
Funding Agency:
Grant Title:
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne Muratori".

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 01/09/2015 02:05:34 PM EST

IRB Coordinator

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