A Case Study of
LEARNING WRITING ASSIGNMENTS
IN THE UNDERGRADUATE NURSING CURRICULUM

Findings from one doctoral research study

Collaborative Faculty Development Conference
Edmonton, Alberta
28 April 2014

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BACKGROUND

Writing Assignment Research:

What do students write in their major area of study?

Graves et al. 2009

www.artsrn.ualberta.ca/WAC/Default.aspx

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My PhD Study

How do undergraduate nursing students learn the genres they are asked to write across the nursing curriculum?

Chaudoir (2014; 2011; 2010)

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Why This Study?

Disciplinary writing instruction across all four years of students' major study

(Beaufort, 2007, p. 15; Carroll, 2002, p. 89; Cooper & Bikowski, 2009, p. 219)

Social processes of learning *before* the assignment was turned in for a grade

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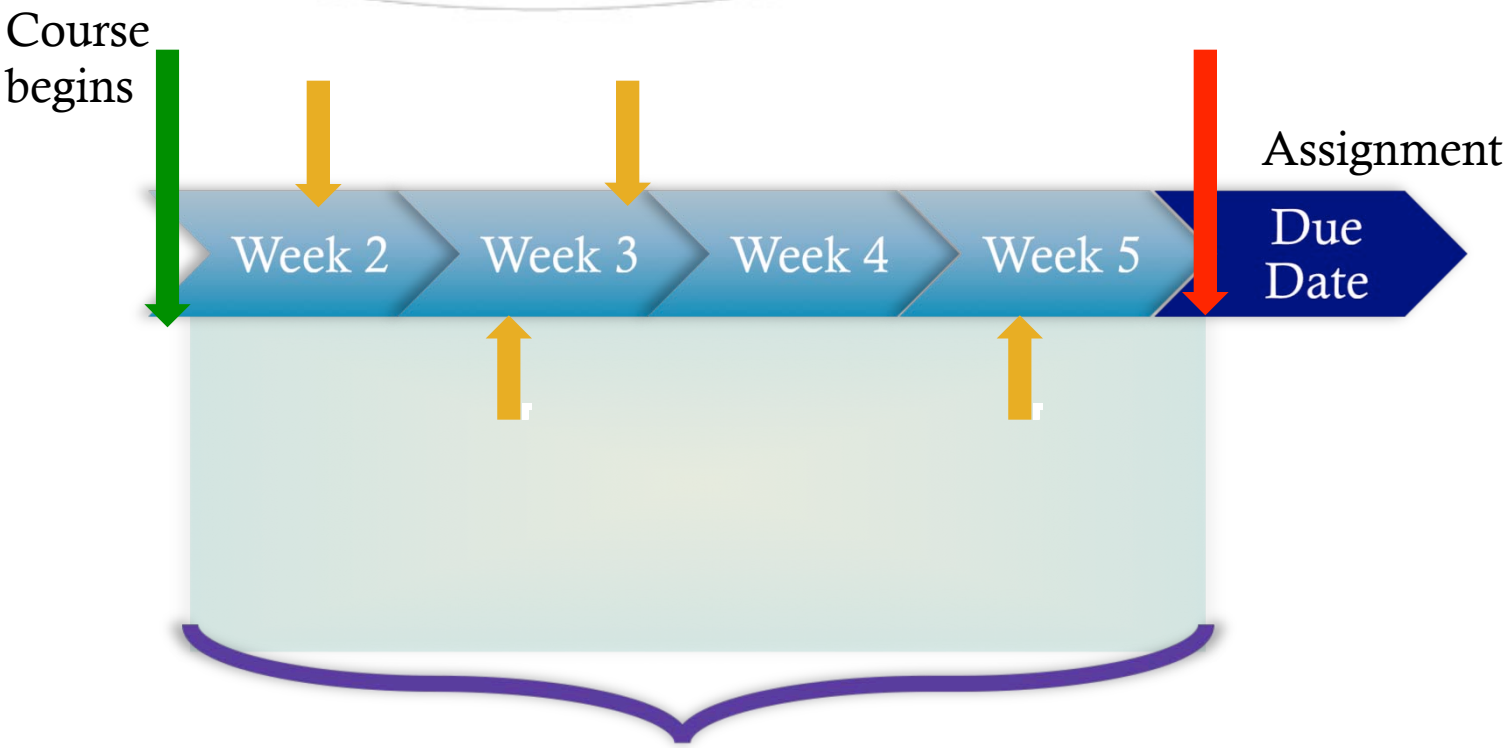
What Did I Study?



Social process of teaching and learning to write

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Methodology

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS:

Rhetorical genre (Miller, 1984)

Situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991)

37 PARTICIPANTS: **31 students and 6 tutors**

3 GENRES: **Scholarly Paper, Reflective Journal, Community Practice Project (clinical assignment)**

METHOD: **Institutional Ethnography**

observation (classroom, peer-writing sessions)

interviews (semi-structured; focus groups)

textual analysis (assignment &classroom documents)

ANALYSIS: **Content analysis**

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Findings

We thought students & instructors would talk about the assignment

Instead...

We discovered...

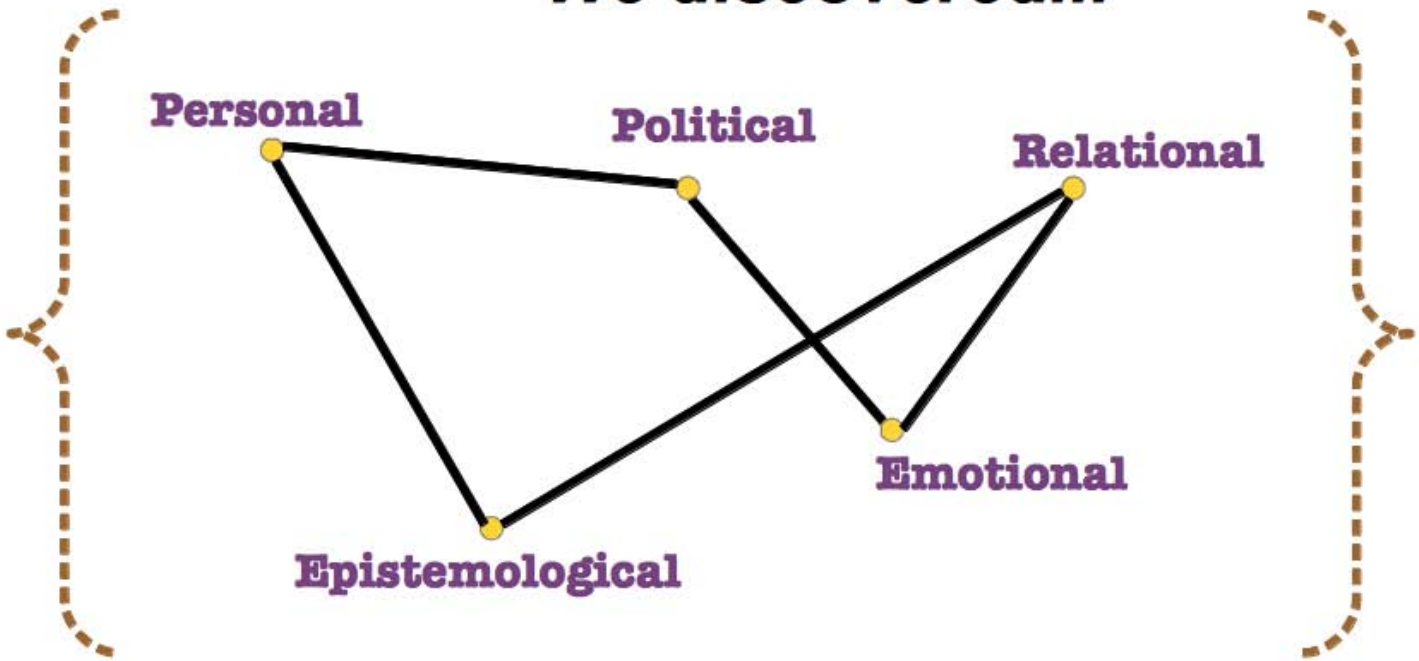

Illustration by: Anita Liao, nursing student

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Shared Concern

#1 Communication

Opening the Conversation

Perspectives of Writing in Nursing

Learning to swim [students]

Writing is like swimming, and it's hard to start swimming if you don't have water or know what liquids you're going to be swimming through . . . . We need solid ground so that you can step on something to start with. ~Katie

Teaching a new culture [instructors]

Learning to write is really like learning a new culture. As a teacher, I am introducing them to the culture of nursing. The terminology & the way terms are used are different. There is going to be a little culture shock, but they assimilate, and by the time they graduate it is second nature. ~Sandra

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Year 1

Giving/Getting Feedback (specific, timely, discussed orally)

It's really annoying when I get my first comments back and my tutor says 'good reflection.' What do you mean by 'good'? ~Alyssa

I find one-on-one conversation works better than written comments. [instructor]

Defining genre

Not so straightforward. *Defining the reflective journal can be mindboggling. It's called a reflective journal in one place, a practice journal in another. Are these the same?*

~Lea

Differentiating key terms / assumptions of key terms

- Identify — analyze — describe — report

Not expecting:

- Contradictory "tutor preferences"
- Instructions "open to interpretation"
- Evaluation differences

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Year 2

Personal disappointment

I should get it by now: *It's my responsibility to find a way to put things into full sentences and paragraphs where tutors will understand what I'm getting at. And that's rather difficult . . . Just because I'm aware of it, doesn't mean it's easy . . . or that I can do it.* ~Katie

Disciplinary distinctions

We write differently here: *I am beginning to understand that writing in nursing is different and challenging. But it is a good different and a good challenge, because it is contributing to my professional development.* ~Tonya

Self-recognized growth

Professional: *I'm better at concentrating on nursing interventions.* ~Amy

Academic: *I no longer take on writing the whole thing. Instead, I have to look at my writing in stages, and set mini-goals, so that I can find a thinking point.* ~Katie

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Year 3

Trusted networks & "building rapport"

Librarians: *Librarians can be your best friend.* ~Amber

Trusted person: *I like talking with another person about my paper, but not just any person; I already know who I can trust in this context and talk on the level of how it will be conducive to competencies.* ~Anita

Practitioners: *I talk about the assignment at work . . . I like getting input from a nurse who has experience with the topic.* ~Tina

Academic politics

Culture of competitiveness: *Writing brings out a lot of frustration and competition. We are trying to learn from each other but yet beat each other out with grades; we are trying to keep from but also share with each other, well, that gets frustrating when trying to write a paper.* ~Edward

Reading challenges

I have trouble reading: *Reading an academic nursing research article is almost too advanced for me. I don't get the wording that they use, so, I just go to the abstract. That's it. I don't have the time to read all of it, and I often don't understand any of it.* ~Carmen

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Year 4

Hidden meanings

Behind the instructions: *[Our tutor] says to 'be creative.' They're looking for certain things, not creativity* ~Brian

I found, over all these years, [that] learning to write is about 'what do I think the tutor wants me to say.' ~Leslie

Behind the grade: *Students believe that they are scholars if they are A-students . . . Some tutors are so stuck on APA that they give a big weighing to it . . . And by 4th year, students believe they are scholarly if they get an A-mark or have perfect APA. But that is not scholarly writing. Writing is a search for knowledge and involves leaving them to make clinical decisions for professional practice.* [instructor]

Teaching younger nursing students

Mentoring program: *I really learned how to write in nursing when I had to teach it to my mentoring first-year students who were struggling with it.* ~Andrew

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4 Years of Learning to Write

Problems

- INSTRUCTIONS
- READING
- MARK VALUE
- GENERAL SCORING GUIDE
- GROUP WRITING
- FEEDBACK

Strengths

- MENTORING
- TRUSTED NETWORKS
- "TALKING"
- WRITING SUPPORTS
- FEEDBACK

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Students Writing Across this Nursing Curriculum

	Teaching Culture	Learning to Swim
Year 1:	most open	confusion
Year 2:	most vulnerable	competition
Year 3:	most integrated	connection
Year 4:	most cooperative	completion

How Do Students Learn to Write?

- *"Our relationship with [the tutor] is central to our learning."* ~Anita
- *We look to [the tutor] to help us write clearly about the content."* ~Andy

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Opening the Conversation: IMPLICATIONS

STUDENTS LEARNING TO WRITE IN NURSING EDUCATION

1. Students enabled to write when trust is at the center of learning.
2. Assessment cultivates strategic writers.

Opening the Conversation: IMPLICATIONS

STUDENTS LEARNING TO WRITE IN NURSING EDUCATION

Feedback

Reading

Expectations / motivations

Opening the Conversation: FUTURE RESEARCH

STUDENTS LEARNING TO WRITE IN NURSING EDUCATION

Polydimensional Principles: Chaudoir (2014)

Pedagogical Memory: Jarratt et al. (2009)

Emotional Side of Learning: Brookfield (2006)

Affective Complexities: Bazerman (2011); McCraty (2005)

Belonging/Politics of Belonging: Antonsich (2010)

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