“The First [Draft] was a lot of Me . . . but the Second One is What
They Want”: A Multiple-Case Study of Four Indigenous Students’
Experiences With Academic Writing

by

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Abstract

This multiple case study explores the experiences that four Indigenous students have with academic writing as an important step toward addressing the pervasive gap in postsecondary achievement rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Canada. This study draws on an Indigenous-based research approach, as well as critical and social approaches to academic writing, to explore students' experiences with academic writing. Interview questions, sketches, and samples of students' writing were used to elicit accounts of experiences. These experiences point to a perceived distance between the writing the students produce and the writing they feel they ought to produce. Students' accounts suggest that in spite of their location in a Eurocentric and predominately White institution, Indigenous students can appropriate academic writing for their own purposes and use it as a form of resistance. Implications for pedagogy include the need to create transformative spaces for the negotiation of, and talk about, academic writing.

Gratitude List

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Preface

To those of you who desire to engage, or are in the process of engaging, in research and writing that makes you uncomfortable: Good. It is unlikely that you will ever find complete comfort in writing. This is okay. Be brave; do the research. Write with fear, gnawing self-honesty, and deep self-reflection at your side. But at the same time, be kind to yourself.

In retrospect, engaging in the research for, and writing of, this thesis has reminded me of an infamous saying often attributed to Kerouac¹: “in the end, you won’t remember the time you spent working in the office or mowing your lawn. Climb that damn mountain.”

– Though I remember the office quite well, I will remember much more. I will remember that there are those among us, myself included, who find themselves made vulnerable through their writing; made vulnerable through an entwinement of perfectionism, and a fear of failure. I will remember that all of this (and more) are invisibly written into academic writing pieces. I will remember that the culture of academia is, in part, one of negotiated knowledge claims; like negotiated land claims – or claims that are not negotiated at all, but imposed, dictated, reinforced, and assimilated through the digestion and regurgitation of material that has been

¹ I was unfortunately unable to locate the original source, but grew up with this quote on my walls and felt it apropos.

deemed academic, and therefore appropriate, by someone, somewhere, who has a proclivity for power. And I will remember to “climb that damn mountain” anyway.

I. Opening

In 2015 – around the same time that I proposed the study that would eventually become this thesis – Patrick Stewart defended his PhD dissertation at the University of British Columbia (Hutchinson, 2015). Stewart, an architect from the Nisga’a Nation in British Columbia, wrote the first draft of his dissertation in the Nisga’a language, but was told it was unacceptable – in fact, he says, he was told to “hire an editor as it appeared that” he “did not know the english [sic] language” (as quoted in Hutchinson, 2015). So, he wrote a 52, 438 word dissertation with little to no punctuation, standard paragraphing, or capital letters. Why? Stewart “wanted to make a point” about “aboriginal culture, colonialism, and ‘the blind acceptance of English language conventions in academia’” (as quoted in Hutchinson, 2015). His dissertation bent conventional understandings of academic writing, and he was “asked to be a little more sympathetic to the reader” but, besides from writing a short abstract to accompany each chapter, he “refused to fiddle with the rest” (as quoted in Hutchinson, 2015). He successfully defended and, as I will come to suggest in this thesis, negotiated his dissertation.

Stewart’s case is unique, and not only because of his point, but because there is a pervasive and systemic divide between the postsecondary graduation rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Statistics Canada, 2011a; 2011b), which means that few Indigenous students make it to the dissertation defence stage. This gap in achievement is related to a complex history of colonial violence and the legacy of the residential school system (Stonechild, 2006). However, this is changing – slowly. Indigenous students are increasingly overcoming

systemic historical, social, geographical, and economic barriers to arrive in postsecondary classrooms (Restoule et al., 2013), and this thesis is arriving on the heels of the recently released Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015) "Calls to Action," which include improving the educational attainment of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

But in spite of all this forward momentum, research has lagged behind. More specifically, research that explores the ways in which the educational attainment of Indigenous peoples in Canada might be improved, particularly with regards to postsecondary education, remains limited. Of the research that has been completed, few studies, if any, privilege the voices of Indigenous students or maintain a sustained focus on their experiences while attending postsecondary education. Timmons (2013) reminds us that, "in looking for initiatives that contribute to Aboriginal students' postsecondary success, it is crucial to listen to the very students that we are trying to support" (p. 236), and Restoule et al. (2013) second this by noting that much work remains to be done in this respect. This thesis responds to this call for a focus and consideration of Indigenous students' postsecondary experience.

At the same time, research (e.g., Hyland, 2009) suggests that academic writing is central to postsecondary education and crucial to students' success (Lillis & Scott, 2007). As such, academic writing is not only likely to occupy a large part of students' postsecondary experience, but also likely something that they are invested in. And while some researchers have explored the experiences that underrepresented students, such as L2 and mature students, have with academic writing experiences in postsecondary education (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000; Casanave, 2002; Ivanic, 1998; Sohn, 2003), few if any studies have explored the experiences that Indigenous students in Canada might have. This gap is surprising given that these experiences may be a source of insight for better understanding why the difference in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous continues to be pervasive, as well as how to best

support Indigenous students in achieving their postsecondary goals. This study fills this gap, and responds to the call for more research that explores the ways in which the educational attainment of Indigenous students might be improved. This study utilises a multiple case study design, informed by an Indigenous-based approach to research, to listen to four Indigenous students as they share their experiences with academic writing in an attempt to explore one guiding research question:

What experiences do Indigenous students have with academic writing in an Eastern Canadian university setting?

In order to be successful in postsecondary studies, students are often required to adopt new approaches to writing (Casanave & Li, 2008; Lea & Street, 1998; Marker, 2004). However, standards and expectations for writing are rarely explicitly communicated in academia and when they are, they tend to be communicated in a manner that is initially unnatural for most students (Scanlon, Rowling & Weber, 2007). Underrepresented students who do not share the same ways of knowing, writing, and doing held in esteem by universities may experience even greater difficulty navigating these implicit expectations and standards successfully (Ivanic, 1998; Marker, 2004). Additionally, it may be the case that, like the mature students described by Ivanic (1998), Indigenous students are interested in skillfully navigating privileged academic practices, but at the same time are resistant to them in some way. For Indigenous students this resistance may be specifically tied to “past and present experiences of colonialization and imperialism” (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002, p. 87).

In this thesis, I draw on a social and critical perspective of academic writing to situate Indigenous students’ experiences with academic writing within a broader social and institutional context that is predominately White and Eurocentric. Scholars who take a critical orientation to academic writing (Canagarajah, 2002a; LaRocque, 2015; Lillis & Scott, 2007) suggest that there

have been a number of studies that place problems with writing at the feet of students. However, these same scholars suggest that there is more to it, and problematize this treatment of student writing.

For the purposes of this research, academic writing is considered to be the kind of writing that is required of students to participate fully in their programs (e.g., classroom essays, dissertations, and so on). However, in keeping with a broader, social and critical orientation to academic writing, I also conceptualize academic writing in its relationship to two related constructs: academic discourses and academic literacies. That is, I consider writing to be a subset of discourse, which can be understood as the “ways of thinking and using language” (Hyland, 2009, p. 1), and academic writing to be a subset of academic discourses, which I broadly define here as the reading, writing, and talk that academics are expected to do in order to participate in the academy (Hyland, 2009²). Furthermore, I also view academic writing as a part of literacy. Although this isn’t a study of literacy *per se*, it is in the sense that my understanding of writing, and everything that is involved with it, is informed by my perspective of a socially situated view of literacy (e.g., New Literacy Studies). In this way, I see academic writing as interrelated with literacy. Both New Literacy Studies and the academic literacies approach consider literacy and academic writing to be positioned within and dependent upon a broader social context (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; 2000; Lea & Street, 1998). In this view, literacy and academic writing is not seen as a transparent, apolitical skill that one need simply acquire,

² Hyland (2009) draws on Gee’s (1996) understanding of Discourse. Due to the scope of this study, and my emphasis on the experiences that students have with academic writing, I have chosen to refrain from engaging with this vast area of research. Though, as I will note later, I think a stronger consideration of this area could enrich future research.

but contested in definition (Barton & Hamilton 2000; Lea & Street, 1998; Perry & Homan, 2015). More particularly, academic literacies pays attention to academic writing in relation to struggles over/for power, identity, and meaning making (Lillis, 2001; Lea & Street, 1998).

Wording Note

In this thesis, I move frequently between several nouns to refer to the several groups of First Nations, Inuit and Métis (métis³) people that reside in North America, with particular attention to Canada. Naming is problematic and there is no single solution, since individuals often have their own personal preferences. Some prefer to be referred to by their community name, others by their nation. Some prefer the term Indigenous, others Aboriginal. Native is still used by some, although often more informally and within a community setting. Personally, I grew up being told that my father was Native, so I still use that term when talking about this with others in person.

I generally refrain from using the noun “Indian” to refer to Indigenous people because it is incorrect and confusing, but some First Nations people may use it as a way to reclaim the word (i.e., NDN⁴). I am not going to suggest that there is one correct noun that can be used to refer to all First Peoples of North America, because there is not. I appreciate how Chelsea Vowel (2012) reminds us in her blog that “names are linked to identity,” that “notions of identity are fluid,” and that identity is a sensitive issue for many Aboriginal people. However, since the people in this particular study self-identify as Aboriginal, First Nations, and Indigenous, I tend to

³ I acknowledge, but cannot unpack the “big M” (i.e., Métis) and “small m” (i.e., métis) discussion here. I refer interested readers to take a look at Anderson (2014) or Vowel (2011).

⁴ This is more frequent in popular culture. I refer interested readers to Ian Campeau’s discussion of this in an interview with Trevor Risk (2013).

favour those terms. Even still, words like Aboriginal or Indigenous can contribute to creating and perpetuating “pan-Aboriginalism.” This in turn may further marginalise the distinct voices and cultures of already marginalised groups such as Métis (and métis) and Inuit people in North America. Ultimately, I recognize all these nouns as imperfect rhetorical devices or “approximate designations” (Coburn, 2015), each problematic in its way, that still help me to refer to some people in broad strokes so that the reader can follow. The politics and inherent challenges associated with naming practices may bring discomfort for academics, especially those unassociated with an Indigenous community, who become “so fearful of making a mistake . . . that they disengage entirely” (Coburn, 2015, p. 43). Although somewhat associated with an Indigenous community, I nonetheless identify with Coburn’s statement. However, Kovach (2013, as quoted in Coburn, 2015) suggests that disengagement, although understandable, is not responsible because “it perpetuates ignorance and the ongoing marginalization of diverse Indigenous perspectives” (p. 43). I take heart in Kovach’s (2013, as quoted in Coburn, 2015) suggestion that in these cases, and arguably in all, scholars should remain “‘open to conversation, which means accepting the importance of ongoing, accepting, caring dialogue’ with those who hold Indigenous knowledges” (p. 43).

Chapter Roadmap

Here is the roadmap for this thesis:

- In Chapter II, I provide some sociocultural and historical context.
- In Chapter III, I discuss the main, theoretical concepts I draw on to support my inquiry.
- In Chapter IV, I situate myself within this research, as well as within an Indigenous-based approach to research.
- In Chapter V, I introduce readers to my research design, which is tied to the Indigenous-based research approach I introduced in Chapter IV
- In Chapter VI, I present within-case findings

- In Chapter VII, I present across-case findings, discuss the findings overall, and consider some implications.
- In Chapter VII, I conclude and reflect on the study.

II. Background

This chapter serves two purposes. The first is to provide some sociocultural and historical context so that readers may have an understanding of some of the challenges and obstacles that Indigenous peoples have faced and are facing when it comes to pursuing education. The second is that it serves to set up the sociocultural and historical background needed for a grounded and situated exploration of the participants' experiences with academic writing. This background feels inadequate, but given the restraints on space in this thesis, I hope it will serve to (a) acknowledge the broader issues at play, and the pain that often accompanies them; (b) situate the reader enough to entice them to continue to learn more on their own or at least have enough understanding to sensitize them to the importance of supporting Indigenous students; and (c) illustrate, in part, some of the barriers that many Indigenous students have or need to overcome simply to arrive in the classroom.

Reflections on Writing This Section

Indigenous peoples have . . . mounted a critique of the way history is told from the perspective of the colonizers. At the same time, however, indigenous groups have argued that history is important for understanding the present and that reclaiming history is a critical and essential aspect of decolonization. (Smith, 2012, p. 31)

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge some discomfort I have experienced with writing this particular section, and how this discomfort has served as a teaching for me.

Desiring to provide a reader who is unfamiliar with the colonial legacy of Canada with a bit of a primer, I opted to share a sort of tentative history that sketches out, very broadly, a bit of the landscape. In doing so, I feared I might be perpetuating this idea that Indigenous peoples can be lumped together with a single word, phrase, history, and culture. I found it problematic

to talk about a backdrop, to provide “an” Indigenous context, as though there is one, as though there are not several communities with their own stories and backdrops. I often felt caught between a rock and a hard place because I knew I could not adequately share all stories, and instead ended up writing more of a pan-Aboriginal history. I found it frustrating, and yet unavoidable at the time.

It served me to remember that sometimes I need to sit with the discomfort because Canada’s colonial legacy *is uncomfortable* and any intention to dispel the discomfort or “make it better” or otherwise scrub it over would be to miss an opportunity to bear witness (again), to grieve (again), and to listen (again). Fortunately, I came across Linda Smith’s (2012) seminal work on Indigenous methodologies. In her opening chapters, she challenges some of the assumptions that often feed most notions of history, including my own. In particular Smith (2012) draws attention to the tendency of storying history through a patriarchal lens, as well as the tendency to try to create one coherent narrative that is chronological, universal, and singular. Upon some critical reflection, I became aware of how, through my writing, I still put the colonizer in the centre of the story even though this strongly contradicts with my intention. I became worried that my storying of the/a backdrop could be used by others who do not comprehend fully the complexity of the situation to further “oversimplify and form new stereotypes” of Indigenous peoples, and that my work could be used to “reinscribe or recenter colonialism” (LaRocque, 2015, p. 15). In spite of this, I do attempt to continue to resist and contest the tendency to assemble or rearrange a narrative that facilitates the “heroification of the European” or the “supertheory” of civilization overcoming savagery (LaRocque, 2015, p. 9). I do attempt to explore other ways of seeing what has happened as a means of continuing to explore what is happening today for Indigenous students pursuing postsecondary education. Since, as Stonechild (2006) notes, many educators are unaware or know little about how the

Canadian educational system has reinforced ideas about Indigenous heritage, identity, culture, and thought as inferior, I felt emboldened to continue but knew that, in order to continue in a way that felt authentic, I needed situate the following writing from within this standpoint and its teachings.

Promises Were Made

Since time immemorial, Canada – or rather the land that makes up Canada – has held several Indigenous first nations replete with their own complex set of laws, traditions, social and governance structures, as well as languages, traditions, cultures, and histories. First contact between Indigenous North Americans and Europeans began around the 10th century, and rapidly increased in frequency by the 16th and 17th century (Burnett & Read, 2012). By the 20th century, two and a half million people immigrated to North America from the British Isles (TRC, 2015a). Conversely, the numbers of Indigenous peoples rapidly declined (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015a).

Prior to Confederacy, settlers were required to negotiate with First Nations peoples over the settlement of their land by the Royal Proclamation of 1763 (Milloy, 1999; TRC, 2015a). The Royal Proclamation recognized First Nations as “self-governing entities within the Empire” (Milloy, 1999, p. 12) and promised a relationship of mutual respect based on relationships that had been developed during the Seven Years War (TRC, 2015a). Under the Proclamation, settlement without permission was prohibited and the conditions under which land was sold were limited (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996; TRC, 2015a). The Royal Proclamation stipulated that “any future transfer of ‘Indian’ land would take the form of a Treaty between sovereigns” (TRC, 2015a, p. 53). By 1830, however, Sir George Murray, the Secretary of State for the Colonies in the British Imperial government, decided that a new “policy of civilization” (Milloy, 1999, p. 11) was needed— one that spoke more to the current

and changing needs of settlement, instead of former times. The mutual relationship, as originally imagined by the Proclamation, was re-envisioned in a way that “altered the balance between the original partners in Confederation” (RCAP, 1996, p. 242).

The concept of mutuality became increasingly undermined as more political and social discourse emerged surrounding the “civilized state” of Indigenous people, or lack thereof, suggesting that “any hope of raising the Indians as a body to the social and political level of their white neighbours, is yet a glimmering and distant spark” (Milloy, 1999, p. 12). In this view, it was Indigenous people who were expected to adapt the culturally “superior” ways of the European settlers and, since considered unable to, were in need of intervention (Milloy, 1999; Stonechild, 2006; TRC, 2015a). By the time settler Canada got around to creating the paternalistic *Constitution Act* in 1867, assimilation was already deeply engrained into the agenda.

The Discursive Construction of “Indian” and Settler Ethnocentrism

The *Constitution Act* inscribed and bestowed the settler federal government with total responsibility and jurisdiction over Indigenous peoples as well as their lands (Furi & Wherrett, 2003). Using this new self-proclaimed authority, the federal government established the *Indian Act* in 1876, which consolidated all legislation pertaining to Indigenous peoples and treaties into one Act (Furi & Wherrett, 2003; RCAP, 1996). The Act invented a definition for “Indian” that constructed the terms, conditions, and definition of who could be identified as “Indians,” how they qualified (e.g., blood quantum), as well as “what” they were (e.g., a less civilized sort, with primitive practices) (RCAP, 1996; Retzlaff, 2005). Indians, defined by the Act, were people of “Indian blood” or “non-Indian [women] who married Indian [men]” but not, it was decided, “Indian women who married non-Indian men” (RCAP, 1996, p. 256).

The Act also inscribed and discursively constructed Indigenous peoples as children of the state and the state as the protective parent simultaneously:

Our Indian legislation generally rests on the principle that the aborigines are to be kept in a condition of tutelage and treated as wards or children of the State. [It is] our wisdom and our duty, through education and every other means, to prepare him for a higher civilization by encouraging him to assume the privileges and responsibilities of full citizenship. (RCAP, 1996, p. 255)

The discursive construction of Indigenous peoples as children and minors of the state was rooted in ethnocentrism, the delusion that one's ethnic group, culture, and way of life is superior to another (Herskovits, 1948), and an emerging trend called Social Darwinism, which in essence is the application of commonly understood Darwinist concepts (e.g., "survival of the fittest") to social groups (Hodgson, 2004; Stonechild, 2006). As RCAP notes in its report on the *Indian Act*, "Indian" policy was built upon a "national foundation based unashamedly on the notion that Indian cultures and societies were clearly inferior to settler society" (p. 255). Both ethnocentrism and Social Darwinism converged to reinforce the narrative that Europeans, along with their culture and ways, were the dominant group while Indigenous peoples, if left to their own "primitive" or "savage" devices, would be unable to survive in the changing world.

With the advent of the *Indian Act* came new and increasing governmental responsibility which included, but was not limited to, the education of Indigenous peoples (Stonechild, 2006; Milloy, 1999). The federal government now had more strength to govern and control Indigenous peoples, which was met with resistance by several Indigenous communities who continued to express their frustration with the settlers' failure to address and fulfill the promises of the treaties drawn in the era of the Proclamation (Coates, 2008; Stonechild, 2006; Milloy, 1999).

Around the same time, Davin (1879) wrote that the "Indian man is a man with traditions of his own, which make civilization a puzzle of despair" (p. 10) and that one of the easiest ways to civilize Indigenous people was to take away their "simple Indian mythology" (p. 14).

Christianity eventually became discursively tied to settlers' conceptualizations of civilization, and the growth of Christianity in Indigenous communities was seen as a "sign of progress" (TRC, 2015a, p. 165). As such, settlers saw the education of Indigenous peoples as a moral and "sacred duty" (Davin, 1879, p. 11), and, in order to survive, Indigenous peoples needed to be brought into the "circle of civilization" (Haque & Patrick, 2015; Stonechild, 2006).

Never mind the fact that Indigenous people already had their own system of education and higher learning, or that the number one threat to Indigenous peoples' survival was colonialism, Social Darwinism told a hegemonic story that conveniently placed Caucasians as superior over all other races and legitimated intervention (Stonechild, 2006; TRC, 2015a). Jules Harmand, quoted in TRC (2015a, p. 19) underscores this in a piece he wrote in 1910:

The basic legitimation of conquest over native peoples is the conviction of our superiority, not merely our mechanical, economic, and military superiority, but our moral superiority. Our dignity rests on that quality, and it underlies our right to direct the rest of humanity. (Harmand, as quoted in TRC, 2015a, p. 19)

It is as if the federal government engaged in a complex smear campaign to iteratively construct Indigenous peoples as insufficiently developed so as to avoid the mutual relationships promised by the Royal Proclamation, justifying instead its possession of land and displacement of people. Perhaps David Laird, commenting on a draft of the *Indian Act, 1876*, captures this well with his now infamous quote, "Indians must either be treated as minors or as white men" (as quoted in RCAP, 1996, p. 256). Residential schools became a "living expression of these ideas" (TRC, 2015a, p. 19).

Promises Were Broken

When it seemed that Indigenous peoples were not willing to simply go along with the federal government's plans, the government looked for a new solution. The Macdonald

government commissioned Davin to report on the efficacy of industrial schools for “Indians and Half-Breed” under operation in the U.S, a report commonly referred to as simply the “Davin Report” (Davin, 1879; TRC, 2015a). In this report, Davin (1879) suggested that “if there is anything to be done with the Indian, we must catch him very young” and keep him “constantly within the circle of civilized conditions,” which captured and reinforced the ethnocentric and social Darwinian sentiment that was becoming increasingly popular at the time amongst settlers. Davin (1879) recommended directing attention to children through the use of boarding school and promised success “not after five or ten years, but after a generation or two” (p. 10). Success, in this context, was tied to the ability to create good, productive Christian civilians that were of upstanding moral character and could contribute to the important business of building a new nation (Stonechild, 2006).

To meet this goal, Davin (1879) suggested partnering with existing religious missionaries to establish residential schools, which he termed industrial schools. Although Davin’s report is often credited with the advent of the residential school system, he is more accurately responsible for moving the agenda forward since, as Milloy (1999) notes, there were already four residential schools systems in existence at the time.

By 1941, close to eighty residential schools were operating in Canada (Stonechild, 2006; TRC, 2015b). Most teachers did not have professional training, other than religious piety, but this did not impact zealous attempts to civilise Indigenous children in the ways of the Christian European (Stonechild, 2006; Milloy, 1999). Many residential schools were cold, sterile, hurtful environments designed to purposefully separate Indigenous children from their culture and traditions, and strategically target and fragment identities (Milloy, 1999). The schools were designed to culturally reprogram Indigenous children so that they could acquire, according to Sir John A. Macdonald, the “habits and modes of thought of white men” (Stonechild, 2006, p. 9).

Students were prohibited from speaking their languages, from practicing their cultural traditions, and, oftentimes, from seeing their parents (TRC, 2015a). Punishment for failure to adhere to these conditions was often severe, which reinforced a sense of shame that attached itself to culture and identity. Commenting on the strictness of the de facto language laws in place in residential schools, Oblate Superior General Théodore Labouré wrote:

The ban on children speaking Indian, even during recreation, was so strict in some of our schools that any failure would be severely punished—to the point that children were led to consider the speaking of their native tongue to be a serious offense, and when they returned home they were ashamed to speak it with their parents. (Labouré, quoted in TRC, 2015a, p. 619)

In the 126 or so years that residential schools were in operation, more than 150,000 Inuit, Métis and First Nations children were placed in schools that were often notorious sites of most forms of abuse, as well as illness and poor living conditions (TRC 2015a). The federal government began the process of closing down residential schools toward the mid-1960s. By the time the last school was officially closed in 1996, close to 130 schools had been in operation in all provinces and territories (TRC, 2015b). Closing the schools meant transferring the control of federally run schools to provincial hands, and the integration of Indigenous students into public schools, a move that resembled desegregation initiatives in the United States. But many Indigenous students felt that, in the new schools, their presence was unwelcome, misunderstood, and unsupported. High school graduation rates remained very low and post-secondary participation rates even lower, a trend that still continues today (Statistics Canada, 2011a; 2011b).

Students who, in spite of the odds, managed to excel in residential schools and wanted to attend university, were offered the opportunity to “enfranchise,” which is to say that they were forced to “give up” their Indian Status (Furi & Wherrett, 2003). Enfranchisement was

another political tool used to force the assimilation of Indigenous peoples by gaining “full status” as Canadian citizens, and was promoted as a privilege, yet was a loss for many Indigenous peoples (Nichols, 2014). Enfranchisement meant losing recognition of Indian status, which in turn implied losing treaty rights, aspects of identity, and the right to live with one’s family on reserve, or in one’s culture (Nichols, 2014). Indigenous people were automatically enfranchised if they became a doctor, lawyer, or earned a university degree and this practice continued until 1969 (Furi &Wherrett 2003; Stonechild, 2006).

The federal government had hoped that the residential school systems would eventually lead to reducing the distance between settler and Indigenous cultures, and inevitably culminate in the enfranchisement and absorption of Indigenous peoples into the body politic, which in turn would unsurprisingly spell the end of Indigenous peoples’ claims to protected lands, statuses, or rights (RCAP, 1996; Nichols, 2014; Stonechild, 2006; TRC, 2015a). However, the residential school systems came to be seen as a failure insofar as they did not successfully create citizens of undiminished value and faith, offered sub-par education, hemorrhaged funding, and, although the government was slower to see or agree on this point, violated several basic human rights and the trust of many people. The legacy of the residential schools has been so severe that it continues to haunt many survivors, as well as their families. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada confirmed what many Indigenous peoples have known for generations: the federal government, via its residential school systems, committed cultural genocide (TRC, 2015a).

Although residential schools did not meet their original mandate of total assimilation, they nonetheless created tears in the fabric of many Indigenous communities that are in the process of being healed today. The legacy of residential schooling is seen today in the disproportionate attainment of education between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians,

as well as in disparities in health and income. Students who experienced abuse sometimes went on to abuse others. Students who were treated as prisoners sometimes went on to become prisoners, reflected in the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in prisons (TRC, 2015b). Many Indigenous languages are on the verge of extinction although now, more than ever, work is being done in the area of language revitalisation. Inadequate curriculum and teachers who “mocked and suppressed their families’ cultures and traditions” inflicted students with a sense of shame, low self-worth, as well as a feeling of failure (TRC, 2015b, p. 3).

Residential schools have left many First Nations, Inuit, and Metis communities and individuals with an unforgettable imprint, but while this imprint is enduring, it is neither static, nor fixed. In fact, to write in a way that suggests that such things are “fixed” or “frozen” is to place “Indigenous peoples yet again in an absolutely no-win situation...[to create] a modern version for the Vanishing Indian” (LaRocque, 2015, p. 17). As LaRocque writes, “We reinvent ourselves, much as our ancestors from many roads have always done” (as quoted in Coburn, 2015, p. 40), and Indigenous cultures are “expansive and adaptive, growing and innovative” and have always done more than simply “staving off a colonial tidal wave” (Sinclair, 2010, as quoted in LaRocque, 2015, pp. 14-15).

Yet resistance to the “colonial tidal wave” has been, and continues to be, an important thread. Indigenous peoples have always sought to have a “voice in determining the future of their homelands. They resisted the unilateral assertion of Canadian sovereignty, negotiated Treaties, and took up arms when compelled” (TRC, 2015a, pp. 112-113). Many Indigenous parents resisted residential schools by hiding their identities, their children, or by refusing to send their children to the schools altogether (TRC, 2015b). Many Indigenous children ran away from residential schools, frequently returning home to parents with stories of abuse,

malnourishment, as well as neglect (TRC, 2015b). Other forms of resistance involved circumventing rules, or, in one case, working together to fight against a teacher's abuse:

A teacher would raise his yardstick to strike a student. The student would grab the stick from the teacher's hand and the rest of the class was instantly on top of the man. It was a crude and juvenile way of returning the violence to its source. But it was not submission. (TRC 2015a, p.191)

Although resistance may include violence, such as in the example above, it is important to note that there are many other forms that resistance can take (Coburn, 2015). Resistance can be understood as "any refusal to accept any given aspect of colonialization in its multiple, shape-shifting forms," and for many First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals, survival has been the foremost shape that resistance has taken (Coburn, 2015, p. 32). In fact, considering that colonialism has been founded upon the death and destruction of Indigenous peoples and cultures, "Indigenous survival constitutes the baseline of resistance" and should not be overlooked or underplayed (Coburn, 2015, p. 32).

Barriers to Postsecondary Education

Decades of forced assimilation and cultural genocide, paired with inadequate curriculum, have purposely left generations of Indigenous families behind non-Indigenous counterparts when it comes to participation in postsecondary education. In spite of this, the number of Indigenous students attending postsecondary education is slowly rising but several obstacles still remain in the way of equal access to the postsecondary classroom (Stonechild, 2006; Statistics Canada, 2011a; Statistics Canada, 2011b). These obstacles include geographical, financial, and social barriers.

The dispossession of people from their lands, paired with the reservation system, has left several Indigenous communities without access to basic necessities, such as water or

adequate housing (Canadian Council on Learning [CCL], 2008). In addition, several communities are remote, small, and often isolated, making transportation from communities to city centre campuses costly and difficult. Transitioning away from communities may feel daunting and harrowing, especially when combined with recent memories of a time when forced enfranchisement accompanied a university education, or when it was simply illegal for Indigenous peoples to leave reserves (Stonechild, 2006; Timmons, 2013).

Financial barriers also impede access for Indigenous students. The cost of postsecondary education is too much for most students, let alone Indigenous students who often face the added obstacle of being among the poorest in the country and the most marginalised geographically⁵ (CCL, 2008). While it is true that funding was established to support Indigenous students pursuing postsecondary education via the Post-Secondary Education Assistance Program (PSEAP) in 1977, the funding eventually came under question by the Mulroney government in the late 80s, and students began to find their funding capped or denied (Stonechild, 2006). After the severe mismanagement of funding was uncovered, it was decided that more local control was needed to administer the funding (Stonechild, 2006). Around the same time, Bill C-31 widened the definition of Status Indians, which consequently reinstated the status of some Indigenous people, therefore making them eligible for postsecondary funding (Stonechild, 2006). As a result of growing numbers and growing expenditures, further funding caps was placed on the program (Stonechild, 2006). In spite of common (misinformed) perceptions, overall postsecondary funding seems to be decreasing (CCL, 2008; Timmons, 2013).

⁵ Though it should also be noted that close to half of those who self-identify as First Nations, Inuit, and Metis live in Canada's urban centres. See Statistics Canada (2016) for more information, including the breakdown of population per city.

Further, Indigenous postsecondary students tend to be older (Restoule et al., 2013) and more likely to have dependents, thus placing an additional financial burden on individuals who have to contend with rising child-care and housing costs (CCL, 2008).

In addition to geographical and economical barriers, Indigenous people face persistent and pervasive social barriers. Indigenous students often experience institutionalized forms of racism, made manifest in the policies that continue to perpetuate the underrepresentation of Indigenous faculty members and academic support workers in universities (Kovach, 2009a), curricula that continues to privilege and center European/colonizer knowledges and experiences (LaRocque, 2015), and the lack of culturally appropriate student supports (Timmons, 2013). Furthermore, students often experience racism, whether intended or not, from classmates or teachers who are perhaps misinformed, unaware, or unequipped to respectfully handle classroom conversations that reinforce hurtful tropes (Cote-Meek, 2014; Kovach, 2009a). Students are also confronted with scholarly canons or scholars that challenge notions of Indigenous identity, insinuating in some way, shape, or form that Indigenous peoples must remain “traditional” to be Indigenous, which is to say that they are to remain culturally “fixed and frozen in time” and when or if they change, are “‘charged with ‘assimilation’ (even when assimilation is forced)” relegating Indigenous peoples back to an irrelevant role, a role exemplifying a “a modern version [of] the Vanishing Indian” (LaRocque, 2015, p. 17). Finally, students also experience the assimilative pressure to perform and conform to non-Indigenous ways of knowing that simultaneously displace Indigenous ways of sharing knowledge and re-establish the legitimacy of Western knowledge (Coburn, 2015; LaRocque, 2015; Kovach, 2009a; Timmons, 2013).

In Closing

Despite these barriers, Indigenous students are attending postsecondary education in higher numbers. Part of this may be because higher education is increasingly being seen as one way to ensure the continuity and survival of Indigenous cultures (Stonechild, 2006), but it may also be because, as LaRocque (2015) notes, Indigenous peoples simply *want* a higher education. LaRocque (2015) challenges the idea that everything originates from or because of colonialism, while at the same time acknowledges the impacts colonialism has had and continues to have on communities. She goes on with this question:

Is it that every time we Indigenous scholars and artists employ so-called Western tools or concepts, we are no longer who we are? Or that we recolonize or enslave ourselves just by using certain terms, languages, or schools of thought? That we have none of our own? . . . That all we can do is borrow from the 'master's tools'! Intellectually speaking, there is no master here – unless we give it that power . . . There is another perhaps more important point here – we not only have dynamic cultural heritages but we also have a birthright to this contemporary world . . . I am not minimizing the challenges that confront us However we cannot keep giving power away by acquiescing to the popular but mistaken notion that all things belong to the Europeans. (LaRocque, 2015, pp. 15-16)

III. Key Concepts

This chapter outlines the key theoretical concepts I draw on to frame my understanding, as well as my approach to academic writing. In this research, I draw on the notion of writing as “situated” and as “practices.” I begin with briefly introducing Fairclough’s (1992; 2003) three dimensional conception of discourse, before moving on to consider how this framework has taken root in conceptions of writing via New Literacy Studies, a school of thought that views literacy as a socially situated practice (Street, 2013). Although this is not a study of literacy *per se*, it is in the sense that writing, and everything that writing involves, is informed by my understanding of a social situated view of literacy.

Fairclough’s three-dimensional framework considers the (1) social and institutional contexts within which discourse is situated, as well as (2) the practices which influence the production, circulation, and consumption of (3) texts. I use this three-dimensional framework as a way to ground my overall understanding of academic writing. The remainder of the chapter is organized to follow the structure introduced by the three-dimensional framework. That is, I move from a consideration of the institutional context that this research is situated within, drawing on a theory of cognitive imperialism and research into predominately White institutions (PWIs) to make connections between practices, and what I call predominately White or Eurocentric practices. Next, we move to considering the text itself, which involves defining academic writing for the purposes of this study. From there, I open the conversation up again to include the approaches to academic writing that I use to frame my study. I adopt a mostly social and critical, rather than textual, approach to academic writing.

Extending Fairclough's Model of Discourse to Writing and Experiences With Writing

Fairclough's (1992; 2003) three-dimensional framework can be envisioned as three boxes, nested within each other. If viewing a piece of writing in light of Fairclough's (2003) framework, one would move from taking account of the outermost box, which is the **social context**, then to the social **practices** that surround the writing, then to the innermost box which is the actual text itself (which Fairclough would call the **event**). Fairclough's notion of situatedness suggests that writing is dependent on the social, historical and cultural contexts in which it is situated, and mediated by social practices (Janks, 1997). Although this description implies that there is a unidirectional relationship between the social context and event in my discussion (i.e., moving from the outer to innermost box), Fairclough (2003) emphasises that it is not a one-way relationship. An example of the possibility for a text not only to be shaped by past practice but also to help challenge established practices could be Patrick Stewart, introduced in the opening chapter of this thesis, who wrote his PhD dissertation as one, long, run-on sentence. Stewart challenged the practices of his discipline, but at the same time, negotiated the shape of his dissertation with his committee (who are representative of those practices). In the end his dissertation was one run-on sentence, but he added abstracts to each chapter at the request of committee members.

Let us now consider how scholars in New Literacy Studies (see Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic's edited volume from 2000) extend Fairclough's notions of contexts, practices, and events onto a framework of literacy (New Literacy Studies framework, hereafter referred to as the "NLS framework" after Taylor, 2000). Similar to Fairclough (1995; 2003), Barton and Hamilton (1998; 2000) also emphasize the social and historical context, albeit with an added emphasis on a social view of literacy. In this connotation, literacy takes on a broad range of communicative

actions that may involve, but are not limited to, written texts (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). A corollary of this view is that literacy is less something that one *has* (e.g., a functional literacy) and more something that one *does* (Perry & Homan, 2015). Here, the written text plays a role in what Barton (et al., 2000) call a **literacy event**, which is any activity in which literacy plays a role. The concept of literacy events can be traced to Heath (1982), who suggests literacy events include talk that “revolves around a piece of writing,” and talk that is regulated by “social interactional rules” which define the ways in which “*oral language* reinforces, denies, extends, or sets aside the written material” (Heath, 1982, as cited in Heath, 1983, p. 396, italics in original). Literacy events highlight the negotiation of written texts through discussion and social interaction, within a context mediated by particular practices and settings (Maybin, 2000). The NLS framework extends its consideration beyond literacy events to consider how such events might link to and are patterned by literacy practices, which are shaped by domains (Maybin, 2000). I find it helpful to consider what is meant by “domain” before unpacking literacy practices, which is a fuzzier concept.

Domains are “structured, patterned contexts within which literacy is used and learned,” which privilege and highlight different types of literacy practices while suppressing others (Barton & Hamilton, p. 11). Literacy events are influenced and shaped by the **domain** (socio-cultural and institutional context) in which the literacy event takes place. For example, the way you might write an academic paper in English at a Canadian graduate school may differ from the way in which you write a white paper in French for a company in Paris. There may be overlapping features, but there are also likely distinct differences, differences that are governed by the context and practices of that particular domain. Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanic (2000) write that domains privilege “configurations” – activities that are neither “accidental” nor “randomly

varying” – which govern the ways in which people act in literacy events within “particular contexts” (p. 11).

Barton and Hamilton (2000) suggest that **literacy practices** link literacy events to the literacy domains in which they are “embedded” and “which they help shape” (p. 7). Literacy practices can be considered to be “what people *do* with literacy” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998 p. 6, emphasis added). Although this definition overlaps with an understanding of literacy events, unlike literacy events, practices are not always observable or measurable, and often involve attitudes, feelings, values, and social relationships, as well as ideologies and shared ways of thinking (Barton, 1994; Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

Returning to the example of writing an academic paper in English at Canadian graduate school for a moment, the way in which one might write a paper in Engineering may differ from the way in which one might write a paper for Canadian Studies. The broader practices of the engineering department likely will reflect in the practices of the classroom, which dictate conventions for writing, formatting, and knowledge-sharing (i.e. Which sorts of knowledges are privileged, and which are suppressed). The Engineering department also will have certain attitudes and beliefs toward what writing is and what it does, and this is tied to literacy practices.

Bearing in mind that literacy practices are knotted to literacy events and domains, the boundaries between literacy events, practice, and domains are not as distinct as they may appear in discussion. I find it helpful to think of literacy practices as the general “cultural ways of utilising written language” which influence our awareness, understanding, construction, and forms of literacy, as well as our conversations about literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 6). Also helpful and central to the NLS framework is the idea that literacy practices are embedded within domains. In other words, literacy practices help shape and are shaped by the domains in

which they appear, and share a permeable boundary with both literacy events and literacy domains.

An understanding of the NLS framework allows me to tease out the often hidden ways in which power becomes submerged in our writing, as well as the ways in which students may experience academic writing in a postsecondary setting (Barton, 1994; Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Lillis & Scott, 2007).

Context and Practices: Predominately White and Eurocentric?

As you may recall, the notion of situated practices required the outermost box in Fairclough's model (i.e., the social context) to be considered. I have already dedicated a fair amount of space to establishing the social context in Chapter II, but I would like to revisit aspects of this description of social context in light of the NLS framework to specifically consider the institutional context within which my research is situated. Although there are few studies that focus explicitly on the academic writing experiences of Indigenous students in a postsecondary setting in a Canadian context, there are, nonetheless, some concepts from the literature that I feel inform my approach to understanding the experiences that Indigenous students have with academic writing. In particular, I draw on the notion of postsecondary institutions as Eurocentric and sites of cognitive imperialism, informed by Indigenous scholarly perspectives (e.g., Battiste, 1998; Battiste, Bell & Findlay, 2002). I then expand and connect these notions to conceptualisations of predominately White institutions (PWIs), Whiteness, and White Privilege, drawing on research that explores the experiences of underrepresented racial/ethnic minority students studying in postsecondary institutions in the U.S. I use these concepts to critically frame the institutional context.

Eurocentrism and cognitive imperialism

As it relates to academic writing, considerations of diversity, power, privileging, and stratification are not sufficiently theorized (Hyland, 2009; Robinson-Pant & Street, 2012), nor are they considered from the standpoint of being Indigenous in a Canadian context. It is no secret that many Indigenous scholars see postsecondary institutions and education as highly assimilative and far from benign. For example, Battiste, Bell, and Findlay (2002) are widely known for their criticism of postsecondary settings and curriculum as tending toward being chiefly Eurocentric. They argue, like LaRocque (2015), that academic discourses privilege and draw primarily on Eurocentric thought, culture, and canons that persuasively and pervasively shape, as well as limit, possibilities for participation. However neither Battiste, Bell, and Findlay (2002) nor LaRocque (2015) explicitly define what they mean by Eurocentrism, though this may be because there does not seem to be one single, agreed upon definition or conceptualisation of Eurocentrism in the literature (Amini, 2010; Burak-Tansel, 2014; Pokhrel, 2011). This may also be because Battiste, Bell, Findlay, and LaRocque, perhaps like many Indigenous peoples, do not need to define Eurocentrism – they already *know* what it is from lived and felt experience.

In spite of this, I think it is helpful – even necessary – to bring a sort of working definition into the grist, since I draw so often on the concept. However, I emphasise *working* here to suggest that this definition is open to being stretched, challenged, shifted, and bettered. In the Encyclopedia of Global Justice, Pokhrel (2011) suggests that Eurocentrism can be defined as a

cultural phenomenon that views the histories and cultures of non-Western societies from a European or Western perspective. Europe, more specifically Western Europe or ‘the West,’ functions as a universal signifier in that it assumes the superiority of European cultural values over those of non-European societies. (p. 321)

Similarly, Fals-Borda and Mora-Osejo (2003) suggest that Eurocentrism insinuates that the “western mode of life, economy and culture” is a model that should be “adopted by the rest of the world” as the “only solution to the challenges of our times” (p. 32). Amini (2010) suggests that Eurocentrism is profoundly connected to globalisation which is “shepherding us towards homogenization and an effacement of difference that would ultimately lead to the cultural annihilation of the other: that is, the end of cultures and traditions” (p. 30); though other scholars (e.g., Burak-Tansel, 2014; Mazama, 1995) suggest that Eurocentrism is deeply and perhaps inextricably connected to colonialism, which is, “foremost, a process of cultural domination and intellectual indoctrination through the imposition of the European worldview” (Mazama, 1995, p. 763).

Although Eurocentrism is not a social theory *per se*, it can nonetheless be seen as an attitude or, more accurately, a bias, which Pokhrel (2011) calls a “systemic distortion” that pervades and invades “most Western social theories and ideologies” (p. 321). Eurocentrism can manifest in a number of ways including the emphasis on regurgitating and re-centering Eurocentric thought which, Mazama (1995) suggests, is evocative of Whiteness and White Privilege, which we discuss later. This regurgitation and re-centering of Eurocentric thought, and the subsequent closed-loop of knowledge production that this implies, is what Battiste, Bell, and Findlay (2002) argue is tantamount to “cognitive imperialism.”

Imperialism has at its root the drive to sustain itself and continually “develop itself more deeply to be reborn” (Barker, 2009, p. 332), and though imperialism may no longer be restricted to one particular geographic centre (e.g., the British Empire), some would argue that this centre nonetheless still exists and is exercised through hegemonic knowledge production and academic publishing (e.g., Canagarajah, 2002a; 2002b). Cognitive imperialism refers to the tendency to privilege and empower certain forms of knowledge (typically Eurocentric) which become

normative, while suppressing, marginalising, and discrediting other forms of knowledge. It is, as Battiste (1998) says, a process that “not only tries to perpetuate but enacts the kinds of thinking it welcomes, [and] discards and/or discredits the kind it fears” (p. 21). Put in a less abstract way, cognitive imperialism disconnects underrepresented people from their knowledge and voices and impedes access to alternative discourses that may run counter to the established hegemony (Battiste, 1998). Cognitive imperialism then, in effect, acts as a form of silencing. It would therefore stand to reason that if students report a sense of isolation or of being cut off from their voices, culture, or identity, it is likely because, as Battiste (1998) would argue, they simply are, and it is the institutional context –reminiscent of the broader social context– that allows this.

PWIs, Whiteness, and White Privilege

Bourke (2010) defines a predominately White institution (PWI hereafter) as more or less what it sounds like: an institution, in our case the university, whose population is chiefly composed of White people⁶. Although the institution in which this research takes place does not release data that directly indicates it is a PWI, it has noted that Indigenous students make up roughly 9% of the university population⁷. At any rate, Charleston, George, Jackson, Berham, and Amechi (2014) argue that predominately White institutional culture has a significant impact on underrepresented populations, and all too often the onus is put on students to adapt and adopt predominately White norms that seem to require students to “divorce their cultures and

⁶ In Bourke’s specific case, this meant that White students comprised about 83% of the postsecondary population.

⁷ And in light of the experiences that participants shared with me during the course of this study, whether or not the university is objectively a PWI matters little, for it is experienced as such.

identities from the learning process” (Quaye, Tambascia, & Talesh, 2009, p. 158). This need not be explicit either; Black students have reported that racism is often “frequently embedded in the culture of the university” and the classroom (Gusa, 2010, p. 466).

PWIs are often unexamined places of implicit and overt forms of racism that are ideologically homogenizing (Gusa, 2010, p. 465), and as such, are often experienced as hostile and alienating places for racial and ethnic minorities. Much like Eurocentrism in the university, which takes for granted the preponderance of Eurocentric thought, culture, and canons (as well as the seeming normalcy of it all), PWIs are similarly fueled by the concept of Whiteness and White privilege (Bourke, 2010; Gusa, 2010). For instance, Alicia, a Black third-year student participating in Bourke’s (2010) study, describes an interaction with a White student in class during a lecture on affirmative action:

I don’t think people hear what they say [in classes]. We got onto affirmative action in class one day, and they [White students] were all just reciting what their White republican dads say. A lot of people kind of left that day feeling uncomfortable. (p. 129)

Bourke (2010) reasons that Alicia’s experiences are suggestive of Whiteness and White privilege, functioning at the macro level of the society, as well as the micro-level of the university. Bourke (2010) goes on further to suggest that “White students find that the campus culture is theirs to use, and that it reflects their experiences. The normalcy of Whiteness produces the privilege upon which Whites draw” (p. 133). The concept of Whiteness is, as Hooley (2009) puts it, “difficult to describe,” often “unnamed” and “silent” (p. 35). Though there are scholars who suggest that Whiteness carries with it a prerequisite of race (e.g., Hartmann, Gerteis, & Kroll, 2009; Hooley, 2009), MacMullan (2015) suggests considering White privilege and Whiteness through the “lens of habit, rather than conscious intention” (p. 656).

Whiteness and White Privilege are interrelated concepts. Whiteness is seen to be at a higher level of abstraction than White Privilege, which serves to blind “whites to the status and advantage” that go along with Whiteness (Hartmann, et al., 2009, p. 407). White Privilege acts as a sort of solipsism that allows Whites to “ignore the ways white racial identity has benefited them” ” (Alcoff 1998, as quoted in MacMullan, 2015, p. 651). Whiteness can be associated with a constellation of attitudes, behaviours, values, and approaches – an ontological, ideological, axiological, and epistemological orientation – that favour and promote the practised forgetting of one’s race, or myth of *racelessness*, which is this sense that one’s perspective on issues of race are not themselves *raced* (Gusa, 2010; MacMullan, 2015). Hooley (2009) suggests that Whiteness constitutes a set of “ideas, feelings, knowledge, social practices, cultural formations and systems of intelligibility that are identified with or attributed to white people and that are invested in by white people as ‘white’” (p. 35). Finally, Whiteness and White Privilege are similar to Eurocentrism in conceptualisation, and all play a key role in maintaining the hegemony of the dominant group (Burak-Tansel, 2014; Hartmann et al., 2009; MacMullan, 2015; Mazama, 1995).

Putting it together: Predominately White Practices

If we reconsider literacy practices in light of what we now know about PWIs – practices which involve attitudes, feelings, and values (Barton, 1994; Barton & Hamilton, 1998), and can be seen as “cultural ways of utilising written language” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p.6) – it stands to reason that the conventions or approaches to academic writing that students encounter in the university are predominately White practices, which is to say that they are likely predominately Eurocentric practices. And if the practices are predominately White or Eurocentric practices, one might theorize that these then become practices that effectively silence and divorce students from their selves, voices, and culture, thus signalling the need for a critical perspective to the ways in which student writing is approached in the academy.

Approaches to Academic Writing

There are many approaches one can take to studying and understanding academic writing, and Hyland (2009) divides these into three broader groups: textual, contextual, and critical approaches. Academic literacies is one of the critical approaches I draw on. I will now turn to discussing the critical approach that I take toward framing Indigenous students' experiences with academic writing.

Academic Literacies Model

Academic literacies evolved out of New Literacy Studies (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Scott, 2008). In their article on academic literacies in higher education, Lea and Street (1998) criticised what were at the time, and arguably still are, previously implicit approaches to academic writing for failing to take into account the impact that the social and institutional context might have on academic writing. They theorised these implicit approaches were the skills-based and the socialisation approach to academic writing; wherein the skills approach refers to the view that academic writing is a set of atomized, individual and cognitive skills that need to be acquired, and the socialisation approach refers to the view that students simply need to be enculturated/aculturated into perceived dominant disciplinary cultures (Jones, Turner & Street, 1999; Lea & Street, 1998; Lea & Street, 2006).

Lea and Street (1998) ultimately found that the skills-based approach and the socialisation approach were insufficient and proposed the academic literacies model, which re-establishes academic writing within a broader institutional and social context. This model, they reasoned, allowed for more attention to be paid to addressing patterns of institutional practices, identities, power relationships, and foregrounds the “institutional nature of what counts as knowledge in any particular academic context” as well as the experiences that students have with writing (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 369).

Unlike the study skills approach or academic socialisation, academic literacies keeps at its centre an emphasis on institutional practices, struggles over/for meaning-making, power relations, and identity (Russell & Cortes, 2012). The academic literacies approach moves away from writing as a decontextualized process of encoding and decoding, and towards viewing writing as a space for the negotiation of meaning-making (Lillis, 2001). Therefore, the focus is shifted from the text to other, often invisible, dimensions of student writing (Jones et al., 1999; Lillis, Harrington, Lea, & Mitchell, 2015). An academic literacies approach sees writing as ideologically inscribed, in which the academy reinscribes seemingly routine or traditional ways of knowledge making (Lillis, 2001).

Academic literacies also signals a shift towards a critical orientation to and social perspective of reading and writing practices in universities that attempts challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about what it means to write in the academy. Lillis et al. (2015) suggest that researchers, writers, and teachers may often uncritically adopt conventions and assumptions because they have become routine, rather than because the conventions are actually best practices or meaningful ways to participate in knowledge production. Academic literacies also question what may be tacit writing expectations and assumptions about what counts as legitimate knowledge, as well as by whom (and for what purposes), and considers these questions in light of the socio-political and institutional context. Finally, academic literacies contests what seems to be a prevailing ideology of deficiency in student writing – which I discuss shortly – thereby shifting the focus to opening up, rather than closing down crucial conversations about the ways in which we fashion or shape ideas about writing in the university (Lillis et al., 2015; Lillis & Scott, 2007).

Aligning Academic Literacies with Other Critical Approaches

The academic literacies approach is broad enough to accommodate other critical theories to academic writing. Indeed, Canagarajah's (2002a) discussion of the three attitudes and approaches that instructors can take to the treatment of difference in student writing is one such approach. Figure 1 shows the three approaches to academic writing as described by Lea and Street (1998) mapped onto Canagarajah's (2002a) discussion of the treatment of difference in student writing. At the same time, I locate these approaches on a continuum of "dominant" (Lillis, 2001) to "resistance" (LaRocque, 2015) perspectives to signal the recognition that approaches and attitudes are neither static, nor fixed, but constantly changing.

Figure 1. Approaches to the treatment of academic writing

In the same vein, I draw the boundaries between such approaches (or attitudes) as a mix of dash and dot lines to show that they too are permeable and not fixed. I reason that instructors, researchers, and students can— and do— move between approaches depending on

the social context and the needs of the student. Since Canagarajah's (2002a) discussion of the treatment of difference in student writing is a useful supplement to what we now know about academic literacies, we will turn to it now.

Canagarajah (2002a) describes three attitudes and three corresponding approaches to the treatment of differences in student writing. Though he does not distinguish much between the difference between attitude and approach, one might infer that, based on his discussion, the attitudes inform the approaches to the treatment of difference in writing. The three approaches, noted in the middle layer of Figure 1, are conversion, crossing, and negotiation. The three attitudes, noted in the bottom layer of Figure 1, are difference-as-deficit, difference-as-estrangement, and difference-as-resource.

The difference-as-deficit attitude treats students as deficient, and the cultural and discursive differences in their writing as a problem (Canagarajah, 2002a). Instructors may even go so far as to stigmatize certain writers or groups of writers and their writing (Canagarajah, 2002a). The difference-as-deficit attitude aligns with and is informed by what Canagarajah calls the "conversion approach," which expects that students will put aside their "indigenous discourses" so that they may adopt the more superior discourses of the academy (Canagarajah, 2002a, p. 15). Both the difference-as-deficit attitude and the conversion approach connect well with the skills-based model, which views problems with student writing at the level of individual and cognitive skill, as well as the socialisation model, which treats problems with student writing at the level of enculturation/acculturation (Lea and Street, 1998; 2006). Both of these models emphasise the deficiencies of student writing.

The second attitude toward difference in academic writing, difference-as-estrangement, treats problems in student writing as a result of a failure to adopt the dominant ways of writing in the academy. Bearing in mind that this is set on a continuum in Figure 1, the socialisation

model and difference-as-estrangement attitude can be rooted in a normative or resistance-based perspective. Toward the more normative perspective, some may view the cultural background of students as “preventing them from becoming successful writers in English, trapping them into their respective cultural/linguistic worlds” (Canagarajah, 2002a, p. 13). Toward the resistance perspective, some might attempt to consider differences in writing through the cultural lens and literacy practices of students who are situated in their own respective backgrounds.

The crossing approach, which Canagarajah (2002a) sees as corresponding with difference-as-estrangement and socialisation, expects that teachers will build bridges to help students shuttle across, but not between, their “indigenous discourses” and the discourses of the academy (Canagarajah, 2002a, p. 15). The difference-as-estrangement attitude and its corresponding crossing approach seem to make space for students to keep their “indigenous discourses,” unlike the conversion approach which implies an expectation of assimilation. Though more egalitarian, the crossing approach continues emphasise keeping “indigenous discourses” separate from academic discourses (Canagarajah, 2002a).

Unlike the first two attitudes toward difference, the difference-as-resource attitude sees diversity and potential, not problems, in difference. In this way, differences are neither suppressed nor marginalised, but instead are explored, questioned, and utilised to creatively modify academic texts according to students’ strengths (Canagarajah, 2002a, p. 14). The negotiation approach, which corresponds with difference-as-resource, implies bi-lateral participation, in which students are able to bring their preferred ideologies and “styles of writing into English literacy” (Canagarajah, 2002a, p. 5). Students wrangle and re-appropriate academic discourses and conventions in order to better represent their interests and values (Canagarajah, 2002a). I appreciate Canagarajah’s (2002a) assertion that while students should be aided in

learning to appreciate the beauty and intricacy of academic writing, perhaps instructors should also be made to accommodate alternative forms of academic writing.

The academic literacies model is interested in critically engaging with taken-for-granted practices and assumptions about what it means to write in the academy. It is informed by an emphasis on students' experiences with writing, as well as a critical consideration of the social and institutional contexts in which these experiences are situated. However, researchers, after acknowledging areas for growth through a critical lens, are urged to move toward a transformative approach to academic literacies (Lillis & Scott, 2007; Lillis et al., 2015). The transformative approach aims to move beyond criticism toward implications for changing the status quo. The transformative approach to academic literacies is rooted in transformative education, which challenges the "ways of thinking and doing" that become "dominant and normalised over time" (Badenhorst, Moloney, Dyer, Rosales, & Murray, 2015, p. 97). Badenhorst et al. (2015) suggest that a transformative approach creates spaces and opportunities for students to (1) "learn new ways of seeing the world, and to act upon" them, and (2) voice experiences with trying to live both within and outside of the "system" (p. 98).

Complementary to this notion of transformative approaches to academic literacies is Canagarajah's (2002a) negotiation approach and difference-as-resource attitude, as well as LaRocque's (2015) notion of resistance scholarship. The negotiation approach is situated on the resistance end of Figure 1, which connects with LaRocque's (2015) notion of resistance scholarship. LaRocque (2015) describes this type of scholarship as the sort that appreciates the "Aboriginal 'voice,' rooted in Indigenous and colonial experience, without compromising either that voice or scholarly protocols" and entails "ethical and critical study, engaged research and intellectual freedom" (p. 13). Like the academic literacies model, also located on this end of the spectrum, the resistance slant views academic discourses as diverse, with room for creating

alternative forms of discourse and challenging dominant conceptualisation of academic discourse (or what it means to write).

In Closing

This chapter covers the key concepts that I draw on in this research. These key concepts include the New Literacy Studies (NLS) framework, which evolved from Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework of discourse. The NLS framework enfolds the notion of literacy domains, literacy practices, and literacy events within it. I then turn to discussing the institutional context and related practices that this research is situating within, using concepts of Eurocentrism, cognitive imperialism, predominately white institutions (PWIs), Whiteness and White Privilege to suggest the existence of what I call "predominately White practices." Next, I signal the need for a critical orientation to academic writing, which I elaborate with reference to academic literacies. Finally, I attempt to extend the concept of academic literacies a little further by aligning academic literacies with other critical orientations to academic writing (e.g. Canagarajah, 2002), and map this alignment onto Figure 1. In the next chapter, I shift gears to situating myself in this research by starting with a conversation I had with one of the participants in the study, Elby.

IV. Situating Myself

When listeners know where the storyteller is coming from and how the story first came into the storyteller's life, it makes the absorption of the knowledge that much easier.

Wilson, 2008
(p. 32)

This chapter will move through a narrative, or story, that is intended to give readers a sense of who I am, where I am coming from and how this has influenced my approach to the research, and how this research story first came into being. But this chapter also serves another function: it sets up a parallel storyline, one that runs with and throughout my time while living out the research. Emboldened by Archibald's (2008) reminder that "sharing what one has learned is an important Indigenous tradition" (p. 2), I share with you a story about self, of someone searching for understanding, connection, and community. This is a story of what I have learned – my personal journey with reconciliation through academic writing, which happened alongside the stories and experiences shared by others in the study.

Situating Myself in This Research

Elby (student): I'm curious as to why you're interested in writing so much, but we could always talk about that later.

Britt: Well, if it's ok we could talk about it now

Elby: Yeah

Okay. I remember first noticing the Aboriginal Lounge. I walked past it and I was like, "whoa." Something stopped me. There was this voice that flashed into my mind that was like "do you remember your dad saying this thing?" And I went in. Immediately I felt like I needed permission to be there, because I am still learning about my background. So it started there. I

knew then that I wanted to tentatively explore this part of my history. I wanted to explore, be, and see. I knew this would be a personal process: gradual and continual.

At that point, I was not interested in doing any research with an Indigenous community. This was because I did not feel comfortable. No one had asked me directly to engage in this research – the call for the research did not come from a community member that I knew directly. It came from a mixture of what Indigenous researchers were saying, and what I felt in my heart to be important. I spent this long, excruciating time, going back and forth between myself, my soul, with elders, and with members of the community. I knew there was a pretty pervasive gap in the postsecondary participation and attainment rates of Indigenous peoples. I also knew that the gap was narrowing, but it still seemed that not all Indigenous students made it to graduation (Stonechild, 2006). It also seems that there are few supports available for these students (Pidgeon, Archibald, & Hawkey, 2014; Timmons, 2013), and even less research around this area. So this framed the beginning of the research puzzle for me. Plus, I am an educator at heart, and there is a gap in my own awareness too. I am not sure how to support Indigenous students. This gap conflicts with my hope to be a teacher who is sensitive, aware, honest and authentic to my values (integrity, humour, compassion, authenticity, and community).

So, I felt that having an understanding of how to best support Indigenous students would be helpful. At first I became drawn to what was broadly the area of Indigenous students' experiences within postsecondary education. However, I needed to fit within my academic field, which is not education, but writing/discourse studies. So looking at experiences with writing became a door, especially since – I think – university is so often Eurocentric in its traditions, and because academic writing plays an important role in postsecondary education. It is at the heart of everything we do. The extent to which we are able to successfully write often marks us for

future success in our academic programs, and for potentially continuing. Academic writing also seems to function as a gatekeeper for many academics. These are some things I noticed.

Coincidentally, I suppose, I also found myself in intensive writing tutorial roles. I started working in a writing centre with students who were negotiating their writing tasks and were struggling. Then, I started working in an engineering support centre supporting engineering students with their academic writing, and they were struggling. During the summer, I worked with students from various linguistic backgrounds who were taking English for Academic Purposes (courses). They were struggling with academic writing beyond the brass tacks of vocabulary and grammar. So struggling with academic writing was a common theme for most students it seemed, regardless of background. These students also helped make me aware of how academic writing seemed to play a role in some way in the definition and redefinition of self (or selves). I kept hearing stories about challenges with self and identity hanging in the background of our conversations around their writing, how they wrote, or the impact that writing had on them, and the negotiations they had to make with their academic tasks. I also noticed that I used the skills, and holistic frameworks, I gained in my training as a social worker and executive coach to help students. After some time, I knew I needed to get into the literature. I wanted to read about what others had to say on the matter because I guess it became clear that there was a group of students that seemed to benefit from my holistic approach to writing support, and because I also noticed that I did not have much opportunity to work with Indigenous students. So this is where this thesis started.

Situating Myself Within an Indigenous Approach to Research

Indigenous people have had a long relationship with research. For some, the word 'research' carries a negative connotation. Many Indigenous communities have been, and still continue to be, studied by non-Indigenous researchers who pursue "Western research" with a

Western agenda (Kovach, 2009b, p. 28). This is one of the reasons that Kovach (2009b) and Wilson (2008) both advocate strongly for an Indigenous-based approach to research.

There are many ways to frame Indigenous approaches to research, but for the purposes of this study, I chose to limit mine to the work of Kovach (2009b) and Wilson (2008). In this thesis, I refer to 'an Indigenous approach' in the singular sense because grammar is tricky, and not because I think there is only one interpretation (mine). My interpretation of an Indigenous approach to research highlights the importance of stories and storytelling (Archibald, 2008, Kovach, 2009b) and emphasizes a holistic approach that keeps participants, meaning, and experiences both central and contextualised. My interpretation of this approach also foregrounds the ethical importance of considering and building relationships, and the relational impact and meaning that the research may have (if any) for all participating directly in the study (e.g., participants, the inquirer) as well as indirectly (e.g., the community, our relations, our ancestors, the legacy that the research leaves) (Kovach, 2009b; Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008). In addition, my interpretation of an Indigenous research approach emphasizes the importance of examining one's motives for undertaking such research, as well as preparing for the research in a good way. Both my motives and preparation appear later in this chapter.

When writing and speaking about the people who participated in this study, I try as much as possible to write in a way that highlights the relationship and respect between us, as well as the impact that they have had on me. Hospitality and gift-giving are important practices within many Indigenous cultures; to honour this tradition, I gave small, personally meaningful gifts to participants. These small gifts ranged from spiritually significant items gathered on my quests outdoors, meaningful books, and/or gift cards loaded for coffee. Ultimately though, I honour and continue to honour my guests (the participants) through my words and deeds, as

well as how I continue to conduct myself in the community throughout the duration of the study and long after.

In an Indigenous approach to research, Wilson (2008) suggests that researchers are accountable to their relationships, and calls this relational accountability. It is worthwhile reiterating that, in this view, relationships extend past individuals to the broader overall universe we live in. For instance, in an Indigenous paradigm, research is framed as beginning “in relationship,” and this emphasis on relationships continues throughout. Knowledge generated during the research process is interpreted with respect for the person and used for the intention of building the relationship further. Further, the researcher has a grounded interest in the integrity and respectfulness of the research approach used, and whether results are useful to the community. The emphasis on respect, reciprocity and responsibility acts as guides for consideration throughout research relationships, and are embedded in an Indigenous research paradigm (Bishop, 2011; Wilson, 2008). Among the many principles that Wilson (2008) suggests should guide an Indigenous-based research approach is the principle of the “good heart.” The wisdom of the good heart is as important as the wisdom of the good mind. When we seek to know and understand our heart, and thereby our intentions, we seek to ensure that we are intending no harm. To work with the wisdom of a “good heart,” Wilson (2008) reminds researchers that they need to check in with their motives, stay grounded, and consider their impact. For many Indigenous peoples, practicing the wisdom of the good heart speaks more than an ethics approval can.

Preparing to inquire

The notion that a researcher must prepare themselves for the research encompasses a perspective that research brings forward an important experiential element (Kovach, 2009b). This is an important aspect of the research approach I took in this study. However, the word

preparation instills a sense of something that is complete, or finished. In this way, the word is misleading, for the preparation for this study is continual and living. This preparation is grounded by our “inward knowing” which arises from both “personal experience” and the journey going to the centre of ourselves to find our “own belonging” (p. 49). Kovach (2009b) uses the Cree word of *miskâsowin* to describe this deep process. I knew I needed to approach this study in a good way, so I began preparing for the practice of research and writing long before I started any research for this thesis. Part of this process also included examining my motives, which I outline in the next section.

Reflecting on this preparation, I can now see that I prepared mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and physically. I journaled these critical self-reflections and used these reflections as a way to come into my understanding and engage in the kind of imaginative thinking recommended for narrative inquirers (Clandinin, Pushor, Murray Orr, 2007). I used my imagination to visualise aspects of the study, such as who would participate, what sorts of data I would hope to collect, and what sort of questions I would ask.

Examining my motives and stakes

While imagining the direction the study would take, I critically examined my motives for pursuing research with Indigenous peoples. I knew that I felt called to this research and had good intentions, but at first had a particularly difficult time with moving forward because I had not been asked directly by an Indigenous community to engage in this research, had I been directed as to what topic or focus was most salient for community members. This in itself is problematic since research conducted by Western academics with or on Aboriginal people often reinforces neo-colonial domination (Bishop, 2011) because researchers often set the agenda without recognizing or respecting Indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination.

Prior to proposing the study, I met with several instructors (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) who primarily taught or mentored Indigenous students in postsecondary education. Over coffee, I discussed the research ideas I had, and asked whether such research would be beneficial to them as instructors. Through these conversations, I gained a better understanding of what could be useful and, as a result, narrowed my focus to academic writing.

Absolon and Willet (2005) also suggest identifying our stake in our research because it helps readers to make assumptions about the investment of the researcher in their research and the community they are researching in. I suppose on a professional level, I am passionate about coaching writing and curious about students' experiences with writing that are extra-textual, that is, those experiences that go beyond the text. I am sensitized to the fact that universities are contested sites of power imbalances, and generally am the sort of person who is curious about the subtle ways or practices through which power becomes imbalanced. I also find that I naturally tend to question "established views about what counts as meaning, knowledge, and truth" (Kovach, 2005, p. 21). On a personal level, I suppose I sought out this research in part because it gave me a chance to connect with other Indigenous students who were experiencing academic writing, which simultaneously allowed me to explore my own mixed background (Anishinaabe-Settler) as well as contextualise and understand my own experiences with academic writing. So, ultimately, I suppose I chose this research (or it chose me) because I needed a way to make sense of the world, and I needed to preferably do some good for others at the same time.

Putting forward my interpretative framework

All research approaches, whether Indigenous or otherwise, stem from one or more particular philosophical orientation(s). This interpretative framework guides decisions researchers make about methods and data analysis (Kovach, 2010). Kovach (2009b) brings

forward the importance of revealing the epistemological choices of the researcher, while also acknowledging the often “political nature of knowledge construction in marginalized communities” (p. 75). Kovach (2010) further suggests that, whatever the interpretative framework, researchers should clearly articulate and define the philosophical underpinnings of their research. To do this, I began with Creswell’s (2013) description of the five major philosophical research orientations. I chose the two (constructivist and critical) that seemed to resonate with my understanding of how I wanted to approach my research, and then I broadened and supplemented my understanding of these two perspectives by drawing on other literature and another perspective (Indigenous). I created a table to help me capture the main touchpoints (i.e. the axiology, ontology, and epistemology) for each of these three perspectives, constructivist, critical, and Indigenous, thus crafting my interpretative framework. Though this framework is not explicitly mentioned anywhere else, it nonetheless guided my approach to this research, even if only initially. As such, I have included this table in Appendix A, “Interpretative Framework.”

V. Research Approach

Every thesis is written laden with the author's own interests that are often submerged in the text, yet researchers continue to make arguments that they are objective and neutral and therefore carry out this pretence that their interests have not tainted their work— It's a load of bull, of course. (Graham Hingangaroa Smith, as told to Maggie Kovach, 2009b, p. 90)

In this chapter, I sketch out the research design that I used to bolster my exploration of the sorts of experiences that Indigenous students have with academic writing in a postsecondary setting. I begin by discussing blending case study and narrative methods to support an Indigenous-based research approach, and acknowledge some challenges I encountered in doing so. I then turn to discussing the type of case study method I draw on, as well as reasons for doing so, and establish the bounds of the case in the "Case Study" section. I outline the understanding of a "Narrative Approach" that I drew upon to inform my design, as well as justification for doing so. I then turn to sharing how I gathered students' experiences, from data collection to transcription to "Coding Coyote," where I openly acknowledge the difficulty I had with portraying participants using the traditional method of coding in qualitative research. In this section, I discuss what led me to adopt the use of "found poetry" in some cases, or different approaches in others. Finally, I share that each participant read their section and provided commentary, which helped me to gain confidence in my interpretations of their experiences.

Choosing Methods to Support an Indigenous-Based Approach to Research

While my understanding of an Indigenous research paradigm (Kovach, 2009b; Wilson, 2008) provided me with the means through which I could discuss and undertake ethical research, as well as a much needed broader philosophical gaze for the study, ultimately multiple

case study and narrative inquiry provided me with the structure, or the vehicle through which I was able to carry out my study as a novice researcher. Nonetheless, I chose these methods carefully, weighing and calibrating each against my understanding of an Indigenous-based approach to research. In the next sections, I turn to briefly outlining how I drew on case study and narrative approach in my research design.

Case study

Yin (2013) suggests that case studies are suited to research questions that are interested in understand the 'how' or 'why' of a certain phenomenon. In addition, a case study approach may be a fruitful approach to researching areas that are new or burgeoning (Yin, 2013). Since there are little to no known research studies that explore experiences of academic writing from Indigenous students' perspectives, the case study offers one way to gather rich and detailed accounts of academic writing that may serve to open up further venues of research into academic writing.

I choose case study as a method because of its emphasis on paying attention to the importance of the context in which the case is situated (Duff, 2008), which aligns well with an academic literacies orientation that sees academic writing as situated within a broader social context. In addition, the multiple case study method allows researchers to emphasize the particulars of each participant while also paying attention to broader patterns that are repeated across participants, a process that Stake (2005) refers to as attending to "both the pieces and the whole" (p. 7). Case studies provide other advantages too. They allow researchers to maintain a holistic yet contextualised perspective on a case, taking into account the broader factors that set the scene for the case. I appreciate this, as it gives me the space to consider the multi-faceted sociohistorical and cultural circumstances that serve as an important backdrop for the study, which I explore in Chapter Two. It allows me to share and present stories in multiple

dimensions, where other methods may have left them flat. I found that my understanding of an Indigenous approach to research (Kovach, 2009b; Wilson, 2008) when paired with the newness of my researcher role, required me to create some additional structure. I think this is provided through the requirements of case study.

Bounds of the case

A defining feature of a case study is that the bounds (boundaries) of the case are clearly articulated, although it is acknowledged that researchers often must arbitrarily draw hard lines that, in reality, are actually blurred (Pearson Casanave, 2015). This is an accepted challenge within case study research. The boundaries of this study are the experiences that each individual student has with encountering academic discourse at an Eastern Ontario University. I consider student's experiences holistically as individual cases first before moving across (cases) to explore potential themes and storylines that emerge. Together, these students provide a multifaceted perspective, aided by their shared institutional context and similar cultural backgrounds. Although the students bring with them different stories, they share some similarities in their experiences with academic writing. These four individuals could therefore constitute a case study of Indigenous students at an Eastern Canadian university.

Narrative approach

Much like Indigenous approaches to research, narrative inquiry views meaning and research as co-constructed, as well as situated, and foregrounds the lived experiences of those participating in the study (also referred to as narrators), including the experiences of the researcher (Barkhuizen, 2015; Creswell, 2013). Epistemologically, narrative research seems to align well with an Indigenous approach to research with its emphasis on coming to understand the world through story and self-in-relation to others through conversation (Archibald, 2008;

Barkhuizen, 2015; Kovach, 2009b; Kovach, 2010). As Barkhuizen (2015) aptly states, “experiences become narratives when we tell them to an audiences and the narratives become part of narrative inquiry when they are investigated for research purposes” (p. 169-170). In seeking to understand the experiences of Indigenous students, I was in effect seeking to understand their stories. Finally, narrative inquiry often includes a discussion of the researcher’s positionality or identity, which I find connects well with an Indigenous-based approach to research.

Tricky tricks

There is a tendency for the academy, dominated by a Western or Eurocentric view, to try to explain things from a Western perspective (Kovach, 2009b; LaRocque, 2015). European ideas and philosophies, especially in the academy, are often held as universal truths or the ‘standard’ against which all other ideas and philosophies are measured and deemed to be legitimate (Kovach, 2005; LaRocque, 2015). As LaRocque (2015) notes, Eurocentric perspectives have “tendencies to absorb counterknowledges and reframe them within their own perspectives and for their own purposes” (p. 16). In doing so, the West “reaffirms [its] view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge, [and as] the arbiter of what counts as knowledge” (LaRocque, 2015, p. 16).

I have returned to contemplate this tricky situation throughout my research and writing of this thesis. As someone who is uncomfortable with identifying themselves as either Indigenous or European, but in negotiation with both, I wonder what space I can occupy without simultaneously displacing someone ‘more Indigenous’ than me, or perpetuating the tendency to reframe or absorb counterknowledges as noted above. This leads me to wonder if Indigenous approaches to research can be paired with qualitative approaches as harmoniously as I imply through this chapter, or if in doing so, I undo and nullify an Indigenous approach to research

altogether. As a novice researcher, the only thing that I can be certain of is that I began by situating myself within my understanding of an Indigenous-based research approach and I will end situating myself within this understanding. Nonetheless, I reckon that my understanding will change as I do, and I commit to continually negotiating and challenging this understanding in light of conversations with community members and Elders.

Gathering Experiences: Method

In this section, I outline the more traditional features of a qualitative study, for example the setting of the study, parameters for participation, naming practices, data (collection, analysis, and representation) as well as representative checks.

Setting

All research for this study took place on unceded Anishinaabe territory located on North Turtle Island, or Eastern Ontario, Canada. Ontario University (OU) is a recognized public university that grants undergraduate and graduate degrees. The university currently serves 25,000 students, approximately 700-800 of which self-identify as Aboriginal, First Nations, Inuit, Metis, or Indigenous. At the time of writing, OU has identified the need to support Indigenous communities and students, and has set out a strategic plan specifically tailored to meet this goal. There is a vibrant Aboriginal Lounge on campus that flourishes with cultural programming and visiting Elders. Many Indigenous people and allies feel comfortable studying and socialising in this lounge, and so it is a place for vivacious discussion, learning, and self-discovery.

Most meetings were scheduled on campus, but some were conducted via telephone when travel to the campus was not possible.

Participation parameters & recruitment

For this study, individuals who both self-identified as First Nations, Inuit and/or Metis, as well as students at the university, were encouraged to participate in the study. Parameters around academic standing (e.g., “second year”), or discipline were purposely left out. Drawing on the importance of relationships in an Indigenous approach to research, I first reached out to administrators that I had met and formed relationships with through the Aboriginal Lounge on campus. I requested permission to post flyers that mentioned details of the study outside OU’s Aboriginal lounge. In addition, because of the relationship I had already formed with the Lounge, Lounge administrators were willing to include my request for participants in a weekly newsletter that circulated to members of the Lounge. Members of the Lounge typically, but not always, self-identify as being Indigenous. The request for participants was included in the newsletter for three consecutive weeks during the beginning of the semester. This method led to three volunteers who were previously unknown to me. In addition to recruiting through the newsletter, I emailed individuals who had, over the course of the year leading up to proposing my research, indicated their interest in being involved in the study or of knowing others who may be interested in being involved. This method led to the recruitment of one individual (Elby) who I recognized through my involvement with the Lounge, but had not had any further substantial contact with. I approached Elby because I knew that he was a PhD student who was working toward completing his dissertation and thus was uniquely positioned to share insight and feedback based on rich experiences with academic writing.

I allowed the responses from interested participants to determine the sample, which is typically referred to as a convenience and/or opportunistic sampling method in the literature; however criterion sampling was employed insofar as participants needed to self-identify as Indigenous and as someone who had some lived experiences with, and some interest in,

academic writing in a university setting (Creswell, 2013). The sample eventually evolved into a maximum variation sample (Creswell, 2013, p. 158), due to the sizable distance in academic standing amongst students (e.g., the 'youngest' in the study are two mature students, both in their first semester of undergraduate studies; whereas the 'oldest' in the study is in the last stages of his doctoral studies). Table 1 outlines some basic information about each individual participating in the study.

Table 1. Participants

	Mae	Em	Kaybe	Elby
Identifies as	Female Algonquin	Female Cree	Female Haudenosaunee	Male First Nations
Languages spoken	English Some heritage	Cree French English	French English Some Mohawk	English Anishinaabemowin
Previous PSE	Some college	None	CEGEP	Undergraduate & Masters
Discipline	Undeclared Arts	Criminology & Criminal Justice	English & Philosophy	Business
Academic Standing	First year Undergraduate student	First year Undergraduate student	Third year Has attended for one previous year	PhD student Has attended for 4 or more years
Age	36-45	26-35	18-25	46-55
# years between previous ED and current degree	20 or more years	6 or more years	Less than 2 years	10 or more years

Naming practices

I did not feel comfortable assigning pseudonyms or numbers to the individuals who volunteered for my study. Instead, I asked participants if they had a preferred pseudonym for the study. While participants appreciated the gesture, most did not have a preference. As a result, I suggested that we take a combination of our initials to form a pseudonym. To me these two letters are a symbol of the collaborative relationships formed during this research. Table 1 details these pseudonyms.

Data collection: In-depth interviews, writing samples, and narrative sketches

A minimum of two in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant over the span of 6 month (August 2015 to February 2016). Table 2 shows the data collection timeline, type, and method.

Table 2. Data Collection: Timeline, Type, Method

Interview	Timeline	Data Type Collected	Data Collection Method
First Interview (Semi-structured)	Conducted around the beginning of the semester (September)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transcripts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digitally recorded
Second Interview (Semi-structured)	Conducted near or around the midpoint of the semester (November)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transcripts• Writing sample• Current academic writing task• Drawings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digitally recorded interview• Drawing was hand-drawn on provided template• Photocopies or digital copies of Writing samples

Although the first interviews were semi-structured and guided primarily by questions I had prepared in advance, we often lapsed into conversations in which we co-constructed narratives of our experiences. Ultimately, I tried to embrace and respond to the conversational

feel of each interview, allowing myself to be pulled along by the currents of the conversation. It was through these conversational spaces that I also embarked in research of myself, responding to participants' questions about me, my background, and my interests or reasons for pursuing the inquiry. I memoed extensively throughout the whole study, using these memos as a strategy to work through my thinking, as well as an inquiry space to engage in self-reflection.

For the second round of interviews, I asked participants to bring a sample of their academic writing that they were proud of. I used this writing sample to elicit talk-around-writing and their writing process. I also asked participants to sketch out a drawing that represented their experiences with academic writing, and then to describe these drawings to me. I found this to be a particularly rich experience as it allowed students to communicate their experiences in a language that is not otherwise available through talk, that is, it allowed me to see what is often left unseen and it gave participants the opportunity to become visually aware of their experiences. In the interests of time and scope, I chose not to engage in an analysis of the academic writing samples that students share with me, although these writing pieces could be a fruitful space for inquiry in the future.

As an incentive for participating in the study, I offered one free 60 minute writing tutorial session, drawing on my skills and experience as a writing coach. In some cases (always with permission), I recorded these sessions and wrote extensive field notes afterward. Although these sessions did not serve as primary data sources, they were nonetheless helpful in solidifying or challenging my understanding of some of the emerging patterns or themes. In one instance (e.g., Em's), the writing session happened to be our third meeting and proved to be very helpful. Em was initially shy in our earlier meetings, so meeting again gave her the space and time she needed to open up. Students were encouraged to set the agenda for each session,

much like they would in an ordinary tutorial session with me. The sessions were very positive and extremely helpful for me to rethink how I approach the teaching and tutoring of writing.

All interviews were digitally recorded using a digital voice recorder. Each interview was transferred immediately to a password protected USB and promptly deleted from the recorder.

Transcripts

Only the first interviews were transcribed in full. After transcription, the interviews were shared with members who modified wording or redacted parts. I developed a transcription protocol to help with making decisions about what to transcribe and how. This protocol was put into place for the second round of interviews. I did not transcribe false starts, and after a few participants indicated feelings that they did not like how “ungrammatical” they felt they sounded in the interview, edited minor grammar errors. Elby, in our second interview, said that he didn’t want to sound “stupid.”

To help with keeping track of interview excerpts, I used “INT#” where “INT” refers to interview and “#” refers to the interview number (1, 2, or 3). I used “...” to represent pauses in the interview. Otherwise I followed APA protocol, in which “. . .” refers to words I have omitted from quotes and “. . . .” refers to words and sentences omitted. I use *italics* to signal the transition into a vignette or narrative style piece, with the exception of Elby’s section, which I explain in his section.

Coding coyote: Data analysis

Kovach (2009b) suggests that it is possible to employ qualitative methods of analysis alongside an Indigenous-based research approach, provided researchers transparently acknowledge that they are not utilizing an Indigenous epistemological approach to analysis. That said, I feel that paying attention to narratives, looking holistically at interview data, and

relegating my role to that of a collaborator rather than an authority, helped me to stay fundamentally in line with an Indigenous approach to research. I attempted, as much as possible, to carefully consider the words I used during analysis and their potential impact on others.

I analysed the transcripts in two ways. First, I read through each interview several times in order to get a broader sense of overall stories and experiences. From there I noted 'critical incidents,' which I came to understand as primary threads of experience that repeated over the course of the interviews, or those the participant identified as important (e.g., in some cases participants used words like 'Aha moments' or the conversation shifted suddenly to make a link to a previously repeated phrase). These allowed me to establish some primary narratives within each case.

I also engaged in thematic analysis, in which I moved from codes to categories to themes, and then looked across themes and cases for patterns (Barkhuizen, 2015). I worked to understand one participant at a time, spending extended time with their transcripts and writing memos/reflections, allowing these broader themes to emerge individually without worry about how they fit in with possible themes that might have arisen within other transcripts. It was these broader themes or patterns that I shared with participants, who were able to shed some insight and, in some cases, negotiate meaning. After moving through multiple rounds with individual interviews, I then compiled emerging patterns into one document, and tried to look for commonalities or shared experiences across participants (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2011; 2013). I worked carefully during this stage, often leaving the data and patterns aside weeks at a time. During these breaks, I often recorded my impressions of what had emerged using written memos and voice recordings, and when I returned to the data, I tested

these impressions against what I had previously recorded. This was an iterative process with several renditions.

I wonder if I make it sound like coming to understand the data was clear-cut and straightforward. It was anything but. Often I was left with an elusive, intuitive, impression of what was going on in the data, but the minute I tried to reduce things into codes, categories, and themes, I felt a sense of loss and of being tricked (“I knew I had seen something just a minute ago!”). It would often be the case that one very obvious theme would arise, and I discuss these when I move in the across-case discussion in Chapter VII, but I could not seem to get the full picture relying on the traditional approach to coding data. Instead, I used the process I describe in the previous paragraphs to inform how I chose to represent each individual on the page.

Ultimately, I chose to (re)present each participant individually in full and as authentically as I could. I draw on a number of approaches to help me with this. I structure Mae’s section around a single quote that I feel is representative of her experiences. I recast the quote into a poem and use the sections to represent some “themes.” For Em, it seemed impossible to begin with themes, so instead I opted to recast large selection of our interviews into a poem so that one could “get the picture” before “the parts.” I later learned, much to my relief, that I was engaging in a form of poetic inquiry, in particular something called “found poetry” (Saldaña, 2011, pp. 13-14). Poetic inquiry is, in brief, the transformation or expression of qualitative data into poetic structures, and found poetry happens when researchers extract and arrange phrases or words into a poetic structure that is intended to “render an essentialized account of the participant’s perceptions” (Saldaña, 2011, p. 14). Coincidentally, Kaybe sent me a poem out of the blue one day, so I integrated parts of it into her write-up as well. I did not find that poetry represented Elby very well. I found I lost a lot of meaning and richness if I tried to recast his

words. This may be because Elby often spoke in these long, slow, rich narratives, so I chose to let Elby do most of the talking in his section, with minimal interpretation and interruption from me. Saldaña (2011) suggests that one of the best ways to ensure that our interpretations of participants' perceptions is authentic is to do a minimum of three things: (1) step away from the data often, (2) challenge your conceptions and memo, memo, memo, (3) ask the participants themselves, "is this representative of your experiences?" I did all three, and I strongly believe that my representation of the data is as authentic as it can be at the time of writing this.

Representative checks

After patterns began to emerge, I wrote to or met with participants to share my interpretations and hear their perspectives. In keeping with my research approach, I tried to maintain an open dialogue with participants about what I saw in the data as it emerged. Their perspectives were extremely valuable, as they allowed me to calibrate and refine my understanding of the data. In addition to sharing emerging patterns, I also submitted drafts of the 'writing up' to them for their approval. This provided them with the opportunity to edit how they, as well as their stories, were portrayed by me in the final product. They added and modified as they saw fit. This practice reiterated the view I hold that participants are the experts on their understanding of their experiences, which I believe to be an important aspect of a respectful research design.

Limitations and Constraints

I would like to acknowledge some important limitations and constraints of this study before moving on. I outline these briefly below:

- The missing voices of instructors: I originally intended to meet with instructors as part of this research study, but ran out of time, and space.

- The primary focus on Indigenous students and their experiences: While I attempted to triangulate students' experiences by collecting different data types, the focus remains on their perceptions of their experiences. However, I wanted to privilege Indigenous student's voices because there is currently little research that does.
- Small-scale study with big dreams: This project was ambitious in its scope. Undertaking a detailed within-case study, as well as a cross-case study proved difficult in terms of length. Though, for a number of reasons, I found it difficult to choose focal participants, hindsight suggests it might have been helpful.
- Unsettling settlers: There is much that I need to unlearn. I realised early on that I would likely perpetuate settler-colonial consciousness (Regan, 2010), in spite of my best attempts. I realise I still have a lot of work to do, many conversations to have, and I remain open to this work.

In Closing

In this chapter, I sketched my research approach. I discussed blending case study and narrative methods to support an Indigenous-based research approach, as well as acknowledging some challenges inherent to doing this. I established the bounds of the case in the "Case Study" section, and the understanding of a "Narrative Approach" that I drew upon to inform my design and analysis. I shared how I gathered experiences, from data collection to transcription to "Coding Coyote," and openly acknowledge the difficulty I had with portraying participants using the traditional method of coding in qualitative research. This led me to adopt the use of "found poetry" in some cases. In Elby's case, I drew more on his narratives to represent his experiences with academic writing. Finally, I share that each participant read their section and provided commentary, which helped me to gain confidence in my interpretations of their experiences. In the next chapter, I turn to portraying each participant's experiences with academic writing.

VI. Findings: Individual Experiences with Academic Writing

I (re)present within-case findings in this section. Since my interaction and experiences with each participant are unique, I have chosen to structure the section in a way that allows me to focus on (re)presenting each individual fully. I begin by introducing the person, before sharing the experiences that each individual has had with academic reading and writing practices in a postsecondary setting. I include narrative and poetic pieces cultivated from interview data, as well as visual pieces sketched by participants.

Mae

When it comes to my academic writing, I wish my instructors/TAs knew how hard I work to get the grades I get. The struggle is real!

Introduction

The first thing I noticed about Mae when we met was the energy that seemed to emanate from her, like a steady thrum of vitality. It energized me; I felt immediately comfortable. As we walked to the space where we were to meet, Mae's phone spoke at us in the only way that a computer can.

"Two. Kil-om-Metres." It said.

I looked at Mae quizzically. "I'm tracking how many kilometres I walk," she said by way of explanation.

"Hmmm..." I thought, "Good idea."

If I had to describe Mae in one word, *purposeful* springs to mind. If I had to choose a second word, it would be hard to choose between *funny* and *determined*. Mae is in her late thirties or early forties, and is working towards completing her first year in university. She is hoping to major in Social Work and has begun taking steps toward realising this goal. Mid-way

through the term, Mae applied to transfer into majoring in Social Work. She does not live on campus or in the city, instead chooses to commute from her community to campus a few days a week. In addition to taking a full course load and working full time, she is a mother and wife, and remains active in community service:

If you ask me who I am, I would say that I am an Algonquin mother of two.
That's who I am. Before anything, that's who I am. Before I can be a student, I
am a mother. Before I can be a mother, I am Algonquin . . . I root myself there.
(INT1)

While attending university, Mae became aware that she has an undiagnosed learning disability and this, in addition to her experiences with writing, is adding challenge to managing the considerable workload that being a full-time student, employee, wife, and mother entails. Toward the end of our time together, Mae suggested that something will need to be shifted in order to stay balanced. Given Mae's ordering of priorities, this something will likely be school. She may consider dropping down to a part-time course load.

Mae spent the earlier years of her life in a First Nations community in the U.S. where she experienced discrimination because she was not from that community. She had to attend school outside the community (off-reserve) because of a complicated relationship between her mother and her stepfather's mother:

We weren't allowed to go the school that was on that community because we weren't from that community . . . my stepfather's mother was a clan mother and had the right to say whether we went to school on the reserve or not- she didn't like my mother . . . As a kid you don't understand why things are this way . . . [I just wanted] to play with my neighbour, but I [couldn't] play with my neighbour because I was bussed off the community to another school that was about 45 minutes away. (INT1)

As a teenager, Mae left the U.S. community with her mother and returned to her mother's First Nations' community in Canada. Although this community eventually came to be the place where Mae now feels rooted, it was not always this way. Initially the family was met with resistance. In Mae's words (INT1):

Even coming back into my own community, I felt that same discrimination from my own people because I didn't grow up there My mother is a Bill C-31. Bill C-31 was when women, before 1983, married outside of the country, even if she married a native in the US, the woman lost her status because [it was] considered marrying non-native. [But] When we came back to the community, she regained her status. So . . . there is still this discrimination from people who have always had their status but all of a sudden there are Bill C-31 people and they are taking what is rightfully ours When I moved back to my community, I felt that discrimination again . . . [This was] one of the reasons I chose not to send my children to the school within the community because I feel [community members] decide from the time you are small, who is going to succeed and who will not. (INT1)

Mae returns often to the thread of "being a mother" throughout our time together. It is a central aspect of her identity and one of her motivations for pursuing postsecondary education. She seems to relate to the world as a mother, and 'being a mother' also plays a significant role in how she relates to learning and writing. She has two school aged children.

Prior to entering university, Mae attended hairdressing school and received a certificate for completing a recreational leisure program. The latter was a travelling program that came to her community and provided her with the opportunity to learn a new skill while remaining in the community at a time when her kids were still small. Neither programs required her to write extensively. Although she writes frequently for her current position, she shares that the writing she does for her work is different from the writing she is expected to do in university.

Mae's experiences with academic writing

Technology can be a wonderful thing. For our second interview, I am meeting with Mae via an internet application that allows users to meet remotely. We have chosen this option because neither of us is interested in leaving our houses today. I am charmed by the familial sounds of Mae's home, and feel the warmth that I imagine must exist there. Mae yells at her dogs to get down a few times throughout our e-meeting, and I smile at the ease and comfort in both of our voices as we settle into conversation about writing. It seems like Mae has been ready for our conversation- she has a lot to say on this topic, perhaps fueled by a semester of writing. I take copious notes, later returning to the recorded conversation, comparing my notes with her hand-drawn sketch and the previous conversations we have had. Mae mentions that she has chosen to share a writing sample with me that she is not proud of, in spite of my encouragement to do the opposite. This, I later realise, is a strategy and embodiment of her experiences with academic writing.

In our talk around her writing sample, Mae also shared that she was proud that she had used the paper to challenge herself to write about a non-Aboriginal issue. Since she often incorporates an Aboriginal perspective into her writing, this was new for her. Though she didn't do as well as she would have liked (she received a C- on the paper), she felt satisfied with the writing experience, and satisfied with the new knowledge she had gained about the topic of the paper – the rapid advancement of technology – as well as about herself. As we spoke more in-depth, Mae surprised me by saying, “I am okay with the fact that I am not an A . . . this 60 [C-] to me is like an A because I had to overcome this, this, and this, to be able to produce this [piece of writing],” (INT2). This sparked some discussion about an insight she had into the need to create an alternative, personalised definition of academic success and successful academic writing. Discussing this, Mae says:

I think that's just where I am with it. I think that I can respect that, in order to get my degree, I need to go through these steps. I need to go through this judgement, and this experience of getting their feedback, this experience of not being heard. (INT2)

I draw your attention to the above phrase because I feel it succinctly encapsulates Mae's foremost experiences with academic writing, and I would like to spend some time unpacking it. When I look at this phrase, I see six parts. I have recast the quote in a poem format below to try and capture the power and emotion of Mae's words. I've numbered the phrases, and will turn to discussing each phrase in succession:

- (1) I think that's where I am with it
I think
I can respect that
- (2) In order to get my degree,
- (3) I need to go
through these steps.
- (4) I need to go
through this judgement, and
- (5) This experience
of getting their feedback,
- (6) This experience
of not being heard.

I think that the first part, "I think that's where I am with it. I think that I can respect that," refers to the need to re-story her experiences with writing and grading – to create an alternative success story. Mae sets high standards for herself, and as a busy mom, she mentions several times that failure is not an option. She has needed to come up with an alternative way to explain why her grades are not as high as she expects them to be because she puts a lot of time and work into her writing. In doing so, she manages the strain caused by any distance between the grades she feels she deserves, and the grades she receives, but she also manages her own expectations about her work at the same time:

I think with the grades- they don't know everything that I am dealing with to get that grade. Like, I have kids. I have to travel. I'm doing my paper, and the time it is taking me even to do a paper that is a C, it might be 4 times what it takes a person who has an A paper. (INT2)

Crafted in reaction to her recent experiences with academic writing, this re-storying of success may also serve as a coping strategy. As Mae says in our second interview, the writing “experience is not stress-free . . . I’ve had to do that, because if I am not, I am losing my hair.” She uses phrases like ‘coming to terms’ and ‘in order to measure up’ to describe the process of letting go of the idea that “maybe [she] will not be an A according to the university's standards” (Mae, INT2). Although this new decision to set her own standards seemed to empower her, and to help her acknowledge and honour her priorities as an Algonquin and mother, as we chatted more toward the end of the term, it became apparent that the stress of writing and managing an undiagnosed learning disability was beginning to take its toll. Mae had mentioned in our second interview that if she were to “put it based on the grade[s],” she would “probably drop out.” Toward the end of the semester, we again discussed (via email) the impact that the grades were having on her. She tentatively suggested that she might need to “take a break before [she] emotionally break[s]. These assignments are major setbacks . . . emotionally.”

The second phrase, “in order to get my degree,” is partly an effort to distance herself from her experience with education and academic writing, while at the same time repositioning and highlighting her goal and main motivation for pursuing higher education, e.g., the Social Work degree. Mae feels called to Social Work as a field, and has returned to school so that she can get the degree and move on to one of her greater purposes— serving her community. Toward the end of the term, Mae feels uncertain as to whether she will be accepted into the Social Work program and decided that, if not, she will drop down to a part-time course load in order to manage the extreme stress associated with her experiences with writing.

The third phrase, “I need to go through these steps,” refers to the steps in the writing process as well as the actual textual academic writing conventions (e.g., citing, formatting, and academic vocabulary) that Mae has learned are expectations she must follow:

Maybe there are steps in the process, but maybe there are just too many steps . . . For example, when you are writing a paper, it's APA and MLA and you have this stuff and this stuff and the citations are done this way and the references are done this way . . . Why are there so many formats? (INT2)

I don't even think that the pros know all the citations themselves! . . . It's implied that we just know. Well if we 'just know,' then where do we [go to] 'just know'? (INT2)

Mae is of two minds about these ‘steps’. On one hand, she wants to know what the purpose of the writing assignment is, what sorts of ideas are allowed, what the instructors’ expectations of her are, and how the final written product should look. It’s frustrating for Mae when “no one is straightforward. No one just tells you what you need to do. It's like 'it's up to you to go and...’” At the same time, Mae is discouraged by the limited amount of depth, creativity, and original thinking permitted by her instructors. Academic writing often seems to play a norming and conforming role in Mae’s stories about her experiences with academic writing:

If you don't want to learn anything in university, then stick to what is safe. If you don't want to educate yourself, stick to what is safe. If you want to get an A, do not think outside the box. (INT2)

This ambivalence may be partly due to the difficulty of dealing with a learning disability, which may make the lack of clear expectations more difficult to manage, and explicit instructions more preferred.

The phrase “I need to go through these steps,” paired with the fourth and fifth phrases, “I need to go through this judgement, and this experience of getting their feedback,” also

captures our conversations surrounding Mae's experiences with academic writing as a performance, and the difficulties that arise as a result of the evaluation or 'judgement' signalled in the fourth and fifth phrases. Figure 1 shows a sketch that Mae drew during our second interview of her experiences with academic writing. The words 'judged' and 'frustrated' stand out in larger writing, while the alphabet swirls around them, perhaps as a metaphor for the need to make sense of language and new words. Beneath 'frustrated' and 'judged' is a road Mae drew to represent the journey she undertakes every day to get to class, as well as in her learning and writing. The word 'frustrated' is surrounded by mazes, indicating the puzzle of writing and of needing to 'puzzle out' academic writing, while at the same time feeling lost at how to get 'from here to there'. The swirls on the page represent her mind, and feeling like she 'can't keep up', and finally, overlaying everything is a clock because Mae often feels like she is working against the clock. She describes this in her own words:

It's frustrated, in a box, and then around and around and around. And there's these letters and words that have to make it to a paper somehow. And there is a clock because I feel like I am constantly against deadlines. And the swirls are my mind. I feel like I can't keep up. And the road is the road that I go through every day and I think 'Ok, is this frustration worth it?' (INT2)

Figure 2. Mae's sketch of her experiences with academic writing

I asked Mae if she ever felt like she was performing, and if the expectations of the audience were often implied. She exclaimed, “YES!” as if this was something she had known internally for a while but had yet to voice. In our second interview, we discussed the impact of writing as a performance and, as we did, we continually returned to “feeling judged” which feeds into feeling frustrated and also, I think, hurt:

They want me to perform. I'm like, 'I did the first trick, and I'm not doing anymore today. I already twirled!' . . . They're like you need to do this and you need to do that, and I'm like 'where does it say I need to do that?' (INT2)

I don't like feeling judged. Being graded on papers – I feel like I am being judged. It's definitely something that I haven't done okay with as far as going back to university, like, that's the hardest part . . . getting those papers back. (INT2)

When I get back a paper that I think have done fairly well on, but then all of a sudden I get this [feedback], I am like, 'what the hell?'" . . . [The TA's] comments were one way, but the grading the other . . . I have started to be

like 'you know what, I don't even want to read their review, I am just going to be okay with the fact that that is what they gave me. (INT2)

One of Mae's greatest fears "is getting a really failing mark," (INT2) so although she says that she is okay with whatever feedback or grade she has been given, there is still a part of her that strives to do better. I think it is important to capture and honour the ambiguity in Mae's statements, because although she wants to learn the 'performance' and, like all students, to succeed, she resists them at the same time. She also wonders if her struggles are related to the impact that the residential school system has had on her family:

My mother, you know, when she grew up she didn't go to school. She didn't go to residential school because she grandfather hid her so that she wouldn't have to go to residential school. Although she didn't go to residential school, we still feel the impact of it because she never had an education. So I notice the difference. (INT2)

There is perhaps also a part of her that feels like she needs to learn the discourse of an 'other'. In our first interview, this discourse of an 'other' came through once I started to look more closely at how Mae used the word 'way'. For instance:

There are ways that we learn and we develop these ways. It's really hard to undo these ways because we are now adults So it's learning a new way in the university . . . learning the whole other way . . . [but] I will find a way. (INT1)

This sense of learning a 'new way in the university' connects well with, I feel, the sixth and final phrase, which is "This experience of not being heard." It is almost as if the 'way' Mae writes or speaks in university is perhaps neither accepted nor aligns with the dominant 'way' things are written or spoken about:

How would they feel if, I asked them to come and sit around a fire or a sharing circle and their vocabulary is so advanced and their words are so advanced, and

what if I don't understand them and every time I didn't understand them, I interrupt them and say 'Okay, please use a different word.' Or, 'Okay, I don't understand, please take it down a notch.' (INT2)

I could use some extra support, some extra cultural understanding . . . It's being aware . . . [that] I am in a non-native environment. I need to act like the non-natives. (INT2)

In spite of her experiences, Mae remains active in accessing resources to help her with her writing. She meets regularly with a tutor to help her with her writing, asks her friends to look over her writing, and edits their papers in exchange. She has also used this research as a way to discuss and come to understand writing, as well as her experiences with writing, and we frequently email back and forth about how the semester is going. When she shares her writing with me, I see a first-year student who seems to have the same (or similar) writing struggles that other first-year students I work with have. I see someone who is doing all the right things, albeit with less than desired results. I don't see what she sees until we discuss it later, and I hear how certain comments and feedback items impact her negatively. When I read her work, I don't feel the impending personal crisis that is happening on the other side until she tells me about it.

Em

When it comes to my academic writing, I wish my instructors/TAs knew That English is my second language. Where can I get a name tag like that?

Introduction

Em is a fiercely, quietly, determined Northern Cree woman who recently moved into the city with her family to attend university. It is difficult for me to create a portrait of Em that adequately captures her light. She moves with a gentle grace, chooses her words carefully, speaks quietly, and feels deeply. She is quietly funny, determined, nurturing and supportive. She prefers to listen, rather than talk. Describing herself, she says, "I am always quiet. It's in my

nature. I am comfortable in the background . . ." (INT1). She also loves coffee. I know this because when we first met, I asked her if I could bring her a coffee, to which she laughingly replied something like, "I am a Mom – Always room for coffee!"

In addition to being a full-time student majoring in Criminal Justice Studies, Em is between 26 and 35 years old, and has four children. Although this is her first year at the university, she is currently in second-year standing. Prior to attending post-secondary education, Em worked full-time supporting youth who were previously involved with the criminal justice system to transition and re-integrate into the community. Em describes herself as a "workaholic." Her job required her to frequently write memos, emails, and reports. She also speaks three languages: Cree, French, and English. After graduating with her degree, she hopes to return to her community to work in a higher-paid position in a similar field.

Em is from a community that she describes as small, rural and relatively isolated. The nearest town is between two and four hours away (INT1). To give you some perspective, her community is about the size of the university she is attending ("It's the first time I've been walking so much in my life!!!" she says with a laugh). Moving to the city was a shocking change from the relative safety and shelter of her community. In many ways the move broadened her perspective. In her words,

[At home] I didn't really focus on Aboriginal issues in Canada, I didn't really care. I was just in my own zone, own area. But now that I am in here, I see all why they were talking about it, why they were giving the awareness, or why they were fighting for their rights" (INT1).

Em also grew up attending school in her community and was taught in Cree and French. She feels that elementary and secondary school underprepared her to successfully write in English at a post-secondary level.

When I asked Em what made her decide to attend post-secondary education, she responded that she wanted “more power and more knowledge” (INT1). The initial transition into university, paired with transitioning into an urban setting, was challenging for Em. In addition to managing the change in a physical landscape, Em found herself managing new “events and feelings” (INT1) that she had not felt before, but also “another world” (INT2) that impacted her emotional landscape. She feels confused and hurt by the way some of her professors would portray and discuss Indigenous people. Some professors seemed to care more, whereas others seemed to make fun of important topics, for example:

The remarks [that professor] made about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women . . . she made it sound like she was making fun of the event [held on campus to honour the women]. I felt bad. That's when I cried. I was in the parking lot. I felt really mad. (INT1)

As a result of these experiences, and others, Em’s relationship to education is a bit mixed. While Em enjoys and looks forward to learning, she also says, “I like learning, but I don't like what it does to you . . . I am afraid of education . . . afraid of having knowledge because I don't want to become angry” (INT1).

After a rough start to the first semester, Em knew she wanted to change the way she does things:

When I came back, I felt excited to start again. I always loved language. I always loved criticism, always wanted to do better . . . I want to change this semester. I want to start when I get the assignment. Do it right away. Start working, start reading. (INT1)

She told me this in a voice that I recognized as determined, adding after, “I'll see how it goes. See how I feel. Because I know the ropes now” (INT2).

In our second and third session together, Em and I spent some time deconstructing what students are expected and allowed to do. In this way, I suppose we were discussing the 'role' of the student. As she puts it ". . . before, I didn't know why there were so many students in the library! I know now! They research, they read, that's what I am supposed to do too" (INT2). Toward the end of the term, Em emailed me to tell me that she is travelling to Washington with a group of people she does not know. It is a first for Em, who shares that she feels nervous and shy, but ready for the challenge. It reminded me of our second interview in which Em shared that she wanted to focus on moving toward "embracing my writing" and trying to ". . . accept it, to become better, and to improve. Same with [in] my life! But let's just put my life away for the moment and focus on the writing!" I am excited for her, but not surprised that she has taken this leap. She is, as I have said, fiercely, quietly, determined.

The storyteller

Halfway between our first and second interview, I find a quote that reminds me of Em and I email it to her. She responds to me with a story about coming to embrace her way of writing and speaking, and makes a link between being a storyteller and her cultural identity. I'll retell the story to you, as it was told to me:

Over Christmas break, Em attended a banquet that she had put together with her band. The banquet was held in a beautiful space that was meticulously decorated, and the food was phenomenal. After a short while, the Chief took the podium and the crowd hushed to a silence. "Let me tell you a story," he began.

As he spoke, Em saw images of hunters appear before her eyes. As she listened, she understood what it was like to live through unsuccessful hunts, and starvation. She saw the Chief through his mother's eyes, as a baby, hungry and crying, soothed only by a small piece of chocolate.

“And look at us now,” he said, spreading his arms out to indicate the beautiful venue and delicious meal that was in front of them.

And Em came to see how starvation was hard, and how privileged we are today.

“It was beautiful storytelling, the kind that gets you to think and move with it,” Em told me later,

“Listening to him speak . . . I understand more now about storytelling. It’s me, it’s in my identity.

If others don’t understand, it’s their loss.”

I remember cheering when I read the email that recounted the experiences shared above. I knew through our previous conversations that Em had been struggling with coming to terms with her storytelling way of writing and the phrase, “if others don’t understand, it’s their loss,” stood out like a landmark win for Em. However, as we continued to meet throughout the rest of the semester, I also started to notice that although Em was clear on her storyteller identity, a counter narrative emerged that highlighted a tension with reconciling this storyteller way of writing with the academic writing expected of her from her professors and teaching assistants. The friction caused by the rub between this storyteller way and the academic writing way continued to be negotiated by Em in our meetings. It seems she feels she needs to make a decision between the two.

I found that Em frequently returned to this pull between honouring her storyteller identity and honouring what was asked of her in her university writing, which I came to dub as the ‘Tick vs. Talk’ challenge. To authentically represent this tension on the page without losing any of its dynamism required the use of a different medium, in this case a poem. Presenting in poetry format not only allows me to stay true to the holistic and embedded nature of the narratives (which at this time seem to refuse to be wrangled), but also provides me with the means through which I can create a portrait of Em’s experiences with academic writing, which then lends shape to a guided consideration of some notable or prominent patterns. I curated

the lines for the poem from our many conversations. For ease, I will tell you now that the forthcoming poem falls into three columns. The words that are left justified and bolded represent Em's storytelling narrative, which you may recall being introduced to already. In the centre of the poem are variations on time ('tick', 'tock', etc.). Em mentions time frequently throughout all three of our interviews, though she does not say 'tick' or 'tock'. You will also find that there are lines right justified as well. These lines have been cultivated mostly from our second interview, with the only exception being the phrase "essay writing...no conversation" which was lifted out of our first interview. I arranged the presentation of the lines to recreate some of the tension we uncovered during our time together. The last noteworthy item is the use of square brackets, which I use sparingly to indicate that I have added a phrase to clarify or add something to the poem that did not occur in the original setting. Perhaps it is worth mentioning again that Em reviewed and approved this section, poem included, prior to publication. Let us turn to the poem in its wholeness before moving to considering some prominent patterns.

The poem: Tick vs. talk

Tick, tock, tick, tock.

The first draft was a lot of me.

**Seeing, hearing,
The Elders' ways,
My way
of writing and speaking,**

But the second draft is what they want

Tick, tock.

The comments from the TAs
....deleted, deleted, deleted.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.
Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

**[Storytelling]
It is in my identity
as
a Cree.**

Essay writing...
no conversation.

Tick,

**I don't
Feel ashamed
like I did before**

Can't make mistakes.
Can't be yourself.

Tock.

**As he spoke
I learned
– The storytelling type.
It's me.**

**It's in
My Identity.**

The comments from the TAs
....deleted, deleted, deleted.
Should I express myself?
Or follow the rules?

Tick or Tock?
[Should I tick or should I talk?]

Tick-tock clocks

Em's dance with writing often runs against the clock. As a resource, time "is hard" for Em to come by because she needs to manage her "time as a mother and a wife" (INT2). Perhaps if she was alone, she laughs, she "might have all the time in the world," but with "six courses . . . five classes . . . four kids . . . and one discussion group" she does not "really have time to read" or focus (INT2). She is also sensitive to the reality that English is neither her first language nor her second, and feels that the language barrier imposes an additional demand on her time. She says:

With the language filters, with the translations, sometimes you want to say in Cree and translate it into English, it does not really sound the way [it should]...So that's why sometimes I have to think. It takes a while to read too, I have to think and then write . . . (INT1)

The way I want to write it, the other does not understand it. With my second language, that's a difficulty that I have. [With] the language filters, I can't express how I want to express . . . (INT1)

Finding the right words to express her ideas, understanding course content and readings well enough to write about them – these things take time that Em often feels she does not have. For the most part, Em does her schoolwork at school because

When I get home, I have to change and be a mom, and a wife . . . I have to help my three school kids with their homework. By the time we are done it is 8 or 9 p.m. and I have no time . . . (INT2)

Managing multiple roles impacts the amount of time she is able to spend on her writing, which impacts the experiences she has with writing. If you refer to her drawing (Figure 2), you'll notice the presence of clocks hanging over her like weights. Em explains her sketch in our second interview:

This is - I always question, I always wonder how. [Points at thought bubble]

This is time again [Points at clock]

I have to read, research [Points at book, computer]

This is running out of time [Points at second clock]

I get mad, I get frustrated [Points at person with steam coming from ears]

Then I get sad [Points at sad face].

Figure 3. Em's sketch of her experiences with academic writing

In her sketch, the clock face turns from 12:15, to 12:20, to a frowning face. It is interesting to note that the clock changes by five minutes. Em does not elaborate on this, but mentions that the experience of “always running out of time,” paired with being a self-described perfectionist, often leads her to feeling frustrated, sad, and wondering “what am I doing here?” Often Em wants to do better on her assignments, but finds that managing writing in her third language, in a direct “to the point” academic way, paired with the constraints she has on her time makes it difficult to do well. Everything seems to feel more like an endurance test for Em, who shares, “I’m still waiting to get out of the tough [time?] – I just wanna be myself . . . But this is where I wanted to be. This is where I am. And this is what I am enduring” (INT2).

Tick? Or talk?

Academic writing can be a series of checkmarks, or ticks for following instructions. Or, for someone who has storytelling as a key aspect of their identity, it can be a negotiation between writing like how you want to say it and writing it in the way the academy (instructors, TAs, tutors) seems to want to hear it. We will explore this a little more, but first I want I draw your attention to how Em defines academic writing, for I believe that how she defines academic writing echoes how she experiences it, and vice versa. Here is an excerpt from our second interview:

Britt: What's the story behind academic writing? If you had to tell someone from your community or family about what it is like to write academically in university, what would you tell them?

Em: It's almost like you can't make mistakes. You have to follow the directions. You can't be yourself. But it's also the first time I saw APA style, in-text citations. It is fun learning. It is fun learning new things, but at the same it was hard for me. Now I am really ready to focus on my papers and spend more time on them, because this [referring to a paper] was maybe a one-day thing that I did, and this one was two weeks, and this was two days.

Citations, style guides, formatting, and following directions could easily describe academic writing, as can the phrases “can’t make mistakes” and “can’t be yourself.” Em shares frequently about feeling like the university is a scary place at times because not only can it be an unsafe place to learn (“can’t make mistakes”) but “It’s like you have to be perfect when you come here” (INT2). This makes for a tense atmosphere to learn in, and with the “status [of] a minority . . . it is even tougher in this environment” (INT1). The phrase, “It is fun learning new things, but at the same time . . . hard,” reminds us that Em is sensitive and wants to do well, but sometimes does not have the time, safety, opportunity, or guidance to nurture her writing.

Not mentioned in this particular passage are the experiences that Em has with feedback she has received on her papers from her TAs, instructors, and tutor. I think it is possible that Em uses the feedback she is given to alter or adapt her definition of academic writing, but her experience with the feedback, or rather the impact the feedback has on her, also mediates how she defines academic writing. In our first interview, Em describes learning about how her storytelling style of writing does not quite fit within the bounds of academic writing (yet):

Em: The first essay, I spent a lot of time on it. I started two weeks before. I got a tutor to help me with the structure. He told me I was the storyteller kind, I was too long and not? to the point. Then my essay got shorter and shorter. I was focusing on having, my storyteller kind. But the tutor took out too much so it was a small essay. Then I didn't spend enough time to bring it to an English Level.

Britt: When your tutor told you that there was too much storyteller kind, and to cut that out or down, what was that like for you?

Em: I was disappointed because I had to change how I think. I had to change... like it's boring just going straight to the topic. It's no conversation. Just straight to the topic. That's how I find essay writing.

Em mentions that academic writing requires her to 'change how she thinks', which also may relate to identifying as a storyteller type and to how she defines as well as experiences academic writing. I think that Em wants to resist this change in thinking, at least in some way, and we catch that towards the end of the opening vignette when she declares "it's me. It's in my identity. If others don't understand, it's their loss" (INT2). At the same time, I do not think Em is certain that she wants to resist this change entirely, because she notes that she wants to learn, and she also feels that following the rules will help her to achieve her goals:

Should I express myself? Or follow the rules? Again, though, following the rules will help me be the director I want to be in the future. (INT1)

Returning to the experience she had with writing the essay and having to cut down on the storytelling, she shares, “The first [draft essay] was a lot of me. But the second one [the submitted copy, with comments] is what they want. That's how I see it. So I will just do what they want and not care” (INT2). Consequently, while at first it seemed like Em came to a conclusion in the opening vignette (e.g., “It’s me...if others don’t understand...their loss”), it is important to acknowledge that there still remains a tension. I asked her if she thought there might be a way to do both, to be both, and she responded that this was something she would like to know as well. Maybe there is a way to tick AND tock.

“But how,” she says.

“Good question,” I reply, “How indeed.”

Kaybe

When it comes to my academic writing, I wish my teachers/TAs knew my true identity. By that I mean who I am at my core, it would explain why my writing of certain papers is rather disengaged in comparison to others. Academic writing like any form of writing should reflect some aspect of the person who wrote it, but sometimes that complicates things and I am not ready to reveal myself, or there is no room to do it (such as the text or the prof does not allow for a personal account in writing).

Introduction

I received an email from Kaybe halfway through the term, asking to meet with me. I quickly agreed, excited to share some of the developing ideas I had about what was coming up for me, based on our conversations. When we met, I tentatively shared my perspective with her for her approval. I told her how I almost wanted to dub her ‘Two Feet’ because she strikes me as someone who strives to stay balanced, strives to keep both feet on the ground. She heartily agreed and we both laughed. She pulled out a brightly coloured scarf from her bag and

mentioned that she wanted to honour me with a gift because she appreciated how the study had revealed some important insights for her. I was humbled, overwhelmed and deeply touched. The scarf is a circle (infinity) scarf. I wear it frequently as a sign of respect and as a reminder of the reciprocal relationship that has evolved between us.

Kaybe is not someone who is afraid to stand up for what she believes in. Like other Mohawks I know, Kaybe exudes practicality and no-nonsense, as well as independence and resistance to following conventions that don't work for her. But make no mistake about it; she is sensitive to the environment and those who are in it. Nothing seems to pass by this woman without notice. She is fierce, while nurturing, and supportive, while challenging.

Kaybe is between 18 and 25, and currently in her third year. She is majoring in English Literature and minoring in Philosophy. She hails from a rural community in Quebec, and recently moved into the city to cut down on commuting times. Kaybe is actively involved in the Indigenous community both at the university and in the city. She frequently volunteers at events and ceremonies, and works part-time as a guide for a walking tour that offers an Indigenous perspective on the cityscape.

Like many Indigenous people in Canada who have had their identity intermediated and assigned by the government, Kaybe grew up knowing that she was First Nations but was not "officially" recognized as Indigenous by the government until 2011 when she gained status. She often mentioned having to live a "dual life where you go to school and whatever, but you do your practices at home so no one knows about it" (INT1). This "dual life" was something we returned to often in our discussion around her experiences with writing and school. School was often a sensitive subject in Kaybe's family, since some members of the family had traumatic memories associated with school. However, in spite of this, Kaybe always remembers being pushed and motivated to attend school and identifies with being a strong writer who turned to

reading as an escape. Her writing, she feels, “excelled from there, because if you can read it, you can write it. You know how to handle it” (INT1).

Prior to attending postsecondary school, Kaybe spent two years in CEGEP, a pre-university preparatory program specific to residents of Quebec. Most of her experience with writing has been cultivated through high-school and CEGEP, though she strongly disliked having to follow the “weird formula” (INT1) writing she felt she was expected to do there. Kaybe decided to pursue postsecondary education because of her passion for Indigenous literature. She actively participates in the discourse surrounding emerging Indigenous literature and authors, and hopes to further contribute through a graduate degree. Kaybe sees graduate school as a door into challenging and influencing how her academic community (English Literature) approaches and teaches Indigenous and Canadian Literature.

Dual life

It’s a late autumn day and the sun is starting to slant through the windows and trees. Kaybe and I are meeting for a second time, and we have just finished discussing the writing sample she brought. We turn to the drawing task I have brought with me. I have a few coloured pens, newspapers, scissors and tape, as well as a sheet of paper that is mostly blank, excluding the phrase prompting participants to create a visual of their experiences with academic writing. I explain the drawing task to Kaybe, and she remains silent for a while afterward. Then, half to herself and half to me, she says “I’m thinking about my room, if I drew my room it would make sense, but my experience with academic writing is that I have to leave the Aboriginal self out of it...”

“Huh,” she continues, “weird.”

“Weird?” I asked her; unsure I comprehended her correctly. In our previous interview, we had discussed the “dual life” (INT1) in great detail. This “dual life,” where traditional spiritual

practices are done at home so that no one at school or outside of the community knows about them, seemed to be something that Kaybe was aware of in our previous discussion, so I was surprised that it caught Kaybe unawares.

Figure 4. Kaybe's sketch of bringing together her Aboriginal self and her academic identity

In our second interview, Kaybe describes this separation further and elaborates on the distance between her academic and Indigenous identity:

Kaybe: If you saw my room, my desk is set up facing the window, but [all the pieces, my traditional warrior things] are behind me. They are not there when I am writing . . . It's weird that I set up my room that way . . . There is not an Aboriginal thing that's on my desk or facing my desk . . . There's no medicine on my desk, no evidence of my culture anywhere near my desk.

Britt: So now that you are coming to this awareness, what's coming up for you?

Kaybe: I'm confused. I thought I was so sure of my identity. But apparently it isn't a part of my academic identity at all. It's separated. I mean it is only a few feet, but it's not a part of it at all.

Although Kaybe had previously described a separation between her Indigenous identity and academic self, and related this separation back to living a 'dual life', I think it surprised her that this separation was pervasive enough to find its way into her home. Kaybe chooses to reveal her identity as an Indigenous person only when she feels safe, inspired, or required to, and this is, in part, a strategy that allows Kaybe to continue with her studies and to adopt the distance she feels she is expected to assume as an academic writer. When I asked her what she thought I meant when I said 'academic writing', she responded:

Essays [that are] more Eurocentric in nature. This idea that – especially in English – It's kind of impersonal. Like, it's your feeling, you wrote it, but it's impersonal. It bugs me. English tells you that you can't write with 'I', they hate it. You're so drawn away from the paper at that point that you could be anybody . . . (INT1)

And when I asked her why she thought she might be keeping her academic and Indigenous selves separated, she replied:

I can only think that [doing this] gives me the ability to put that self away and stop resisting whatever I am trying to do, like....fighting this notion that this society is British and whatever, and just focus on whatever I need to do to get my grade. (INT2)

But it also seems to be a response to Kaybe's sense that there is little space or place for an identity and worldview that differs from the dominant culture of the university, or more specifically, the canon of her discipline:

It comes [down] to the dual life. I understand that in an academic setting, it's Eurocentric. I have to do it 'this way' for it to work . . . it's hard to incorporate yourself into [academic writing], especially in an academic writing way that's so Eurocentric. (INT1)

In such a Eurocentric field, it's hard to reconcile. I can't talk about British Literature and [being Aboriginal]. (INT2)

As we spoke more about the drawing task, Kaybe said, "I am just thinking that it might help me if I put some medicines near my desk, if there was a piece of me there. So if I am struggling, maybe it would help" (INT2). We decided to change the drawing prompt to reflect this emerging insight to "how might I reconcile the academic self and Indigenous identity?" Figure 3 is the answer to this question, and shows Kaybe's desk with signs that represent her identity, such as medicine like cedar and sage, and a picture of a wolf to represent her clan, in addition to a computer, books, and papers ringed with coffee stains.

Nexus of academic writing, power, and knowledge

While writing this chapter, Kaybe surprised me with an email sharing that she was struggling to write a paper for her British Literature class and her struggle got her

Thinking about why I was having trouble writing the paper. It came back to the conversation I had when I first met you about having to abstract yourself from your writing.

Attached to the email was a poem Kaybe wrote to capture her writing experience. I have her permission to share the following three stanzas from the poem:

Failure, plagues
the relational perspectives
in my academic
world.

Doctoral theses
on our people
trumps my personal
knowledge.

I am
stuck in the
colonial mind.

Together, these stanzas convey a sense of Kaybe's academic world, which she accesses in part through her academic writing, and the frustration with navigating the academic nexus of academic writing, power and knowledge in her discipline. Through our conversations, I came to understand the nexus of academic writing, power and knowledge as the reinforcement and enactment, through academic writing, of what is authorized to 'be known,' by whom, and who is (or is not) conferred with the power to claim this 'knowing'. I began to get a sense, through Kaybe's eyes, of how these practices legitimize and stratify some ways of being, knowing, and doing (e.g., 'colonial mind', 'doctoral theses on my people') over others (e.g., 'relational perspectives', 'trumps my personal knowledge'). I also was reminded that Kaybe resists these practices and the 'colonial mind' as well. In addition, 'colonial mind' also circles back to the sense of having to put aside or abstract her indigeneity from her writing, as discussed earlier.

There are two crucial experiences that correspond well with these stanzas. The first experience, 'Beowulf', occurred in the first semester of her first year in her program.

The writing task was an essay-style exam.

Kaybe recalls the instructions, "We had to write on Beowulf, which I hated, and I kinda didn't agree with where [the professor] was coming from. He told me not to use outside sources, other than the introduction of this one [source]" (INT1).

Kaybe used parts of the introduction, as requested, but used them to counter what she was trying to say. She remembers being confused and frustrated with the experience. "In English there is that boundary that you can rub up against, like you can disagree with your source."

"But the professor said to me, 'that's not what I asked you to do.'"

"I said, 'that's not fair, your guideline didn't say I couldn't disagree with this person, you just said to use him'"

But I followed the instructions! So "I had to go to the Academic Dean and fight it because the professor failed me. I didn't think that was fair."

The Dean agreed with Kaybe, who had her grade raised, but this experience had its consequences. Kaybe sacrificed her relationship with the professor, and even though she was successful in challenging her grade, she stopped "pushing up against the boundary" without permission because her grades cannot "take [the] hit".

Now, if Kaybe wants to take her writing in a way that differs from the professor and the views expressed in class, she feels she needs to ask permission by running it past the professor first to "ask if it [is] okay".

In the second experience, called 'Kid's Lit,' Kaybe had to write a final paper for her Children's Literature class and thought she "had done well" and felt strongly that she had met the requirements for the essay. However, Kaybe was dismayed to find that the professor did not accept the paper as satisfactory. I will tell the story now, as it was told to me.

The professor suggested that Kaybe had missed incorporating important concepts that were discussed in class into her paper, and that she was not "listening . . . in class". Kaybe was surprised and frustrated. She thought, 'What! You are an English professor!' because, as she explains, "In English they lecture to spark something. So you didn't necessarily see that in the novel but it gets you thinking and then you realise something else."

She kept thinking about it, and the more she thought about the situation, the more irritated she became.

"[You know]," she says, "I am not just here to regurgitate what you say. I'll do that in class because I know that is what [professors] want but the whole point of English is to be able to

absorb what [professors] are telling you and then to figure out something on your own. You can either argue something similar or argue something completely different. [Professors] have to be willing to accept that someone is going to counter [their] idea and not just regurgitate what [was] said in class!"

The nexus of academic writing, power and knowledge include the convention of citing other scholarly works:

It's almost like your argument isn't valid. You need something else to back it up, especially in your undergraduate. You need somebody who has been established in a scholarly journal to back you up. You can't just make this point because you are untrustworthy.

It is hard to write because you have to do your research first to make sure it fits. If you're writing on a book that hasn't been studied a lot, then you get stuck.

For Kaybe, who takes a lot of pride in the knowledge she has established through self-study of Indigenous literature, as well as through her community, this need to back everything up implies that she is not trustworthy and her personal knowledge is unacceptable is offensive and hurtful. But it also takes a nuanced twist into being stuck in the 'colonial mind' as Kaybe described in her poem. Kaybe often seeks to represent alternative perspectives on literature, in spite of feeling that she has to leave her 'Aboriginal self' out of her writing. Seeking to represent alternative knowledges or perspectives in her writing becomes difficult when paired with the nexus of academic writing, power and knowledge, and the practice of having to 'back up' your ideas. I ask, "what if there are few sources available, in a predominately Western discipline, to support your ideas?"

"I just switch it," Kaybe answers (INT1). I wonder what she loses in doing so.

Elby

When it comes to my academic writing, I wish my supervisors knew that I come from a diverse background of experiences and writing styles. To create academic writing takes time and drafts for me to be satisfied that it is acceptable. I also tend to think I am writing logically but realize that even logic is subjective and in the eyes of the beholder.

Introduction

If you are not already laughing before you meet Elby, you will be by the time you get past the niceties of greeting someone new. Elby has such a way of combining the delivery of wisdom with a liberal helping of gentle humour that there may be times that you are not aware that you have learned something until well after the encounter. But this is Elby. Elby is a teacher and a wisdom-sharer in the traditional and contemporary sense. Life is a classroom, and the greatest lessons we learn are not only textbook material but life-book material. Now between 46 and 55 years old, Elby continues to follow this philosophy as a life-long learner. I say life-long because he will always be a learner, as well as because he has been in his PhD for the entirety of his children's lives! It is a bit of a joke. He has been working away at completing his dissertation for the last nine or so years, as a result of some confidence-shaking writing experiences, which is not a joke.

Elby grew up travelling and dancing the North West Pow Wow Trail, and feels at home in several communities across Canada, which includes the University community. When he isn't teaching at a local college, or tutoring at a high school, he can be found serving as a volunteer and mentor to Indigenous high school and university students. Although he does not make an effort to obscure his identity as an Indigenous person, not everyone on campus is aware of his identity either. This stems partly from choice and partly from growing up in a time when it was

considered political to share your identity as an Indigenous person attending university. Make no mistake about though, Elby is proud to be Indigenous.

His experience with working toward his PhD in Business serves as the main fodder for our discussions around academic writing. Elby has plenty of experience with writing, both academically and professionally. Prior to his PhD, Elby worked as a senior researcher and writer for a firm, and has extensive experience working in several Indigenous communities in Canada. Elby came to be known as well-respected in the communities he works in. He obtained both his Masters and Baccalaureate (Anthropology), in addition to several certifications and professional designations (“trying to build the alphabet,” he laughs). As a research consultant, Elby was frequently required to write research reports and grant applications. Writing for the firm was “totally humbling,” he says, adding after that “they really taught me how to let go of my writing” (INT1). The drafting process often included multiple edits and rewrites, so many that by the end, the piece was “sorta” your writing still but really became something else (INT1).

Coming into his PhD program with an immense amount of first-hand experience, Elby looked forward to rolling up his sleeves and connecting his first-hand knowledge with the broader, more abstract theories that the academy is known for. However, Elby encountered a culture in which he felt “devalued” and “dehumanized” (INT1) as a person and student, recognized in the community but not in his classrooms. He says, “You know, I am recognized in the communities as someone who has knowledge to give. But you come in here and all of a sudden you are nothing” (INT1). In addition, the writing he engaged in was neither acknowledged nor respected in the academy, which had an impact on his writing process and confidence:

I came back to university after a pretty successful career out in the corporate world, and I came with a lot experience and background, and to be dehumanized as a student was a real shocker for me. (INT1)

I was a senior manager. They are expected to write all the time. But you go through a massive editing process there. In here, all that work was considered right-wing political bullshit that does not matter. It's not academic, so it's devalued. (INT1)

That affected my writing, and that affected my writing process more than anything else, I think. (INT1)

Students are not respected, in Elby's view, for the knowledge they bring to the academy unless they have a "ticket" (e.g., the PhD) prompting access and authority into meaning-making territory. Knowledge, as well as writing, is fractured into academic and non-academic streams, but this fracturing is deepened and maintained by those with 'the tickets'. In his words, he says, "We have here some very elitist people who feel like if you are not a certain kind of writer you are not even allowed to be at the university" (INT1).

Elby comments further on the tendency the academy has to arbitrarily ascribe power and authority to some people, while at the same time strip it from others:

Students are so devalued here in terms of their knowledge base and the legitimacy of their knowledge if they don't have that golden PhD.

As soon as they get that all of a sudden you get legitimized, and what you say is important. (INT1)

In spite of what knowledge or experience you might bring to the table as a student, you "do not get by the gatekeepers without being a superb writer" (INT1). Elby continues

As much as I want to say that it does not matter, it's the ones with the good writing skills are going to make it far. The ones who don't have them, I say get them. They aren't going to make it. (INT1)

In spite of this, writing in the academy has its positive points, and Elby will be the first to share them with you:

Academic writing to me, on a grander scale (because I do love academics), is highbrow and intellectual in many ways. You get that labeling. I love it.

Academic writing is thoughtful. It has deep, philosophical meaning, and really gets at issues. It is critical thinking. As much as it has bad labels it has good labels. (INT1)

I think there is a bit of a mystery to it too. On the good side, there is a mystery to the writing process, where it is going to lead you and the story, and how much you can push yourself into it. Whether it be research or whatever you are doing in your writing process, it is kind of amazing. I love it. I wish I was better at it. (INT1)

Elby also loves what he describes as the "oral tradition" of the university (INT1). Although we often might not think that a Westernized institution like the university as having an oral culture, Elby cautions otherwise. He suggests that the lectures, discussions, and side conversations are all an integral part of academic culture. The difference is that the oral tradition is not what is valued or privileged at the end of term – writing is. Writing is what is measured and emphasized through readings, essays, and tests, but it is only a fraction of the academic learning tradition:

There is a huge oral tradition here. It's just that we don't measure that oral tradition. We would rather measure it in books, or how it's been written or

logged. Somehow if it isn't written down over the years, it isn't legitimate. Or it is legitimate if it is written down, but it still isn't legitimizing oral history. (INT1)

Writing is not something that Elby feels he is good at, but listening is. Listening is an important part of Elby's background, in which history and wisdom (and humour!) is often transmitted orally. Listening and discussing – two major yet undervalued aspects of academic learning – have helped Elby to be successful in his academic career:

A lot of learning happens through lectures and through oratory learning. So we are listening, and this is one thing that I think maybe got me through university. Because I could sit and listen to lectures and just love it. Then I could go off and talk to other people about what happened. (INT1)

Listening also helped Elby to make it through high school English, where many of his fears about writing were "solidified" (INT1). Elby does not recall learning much about grammar or writing before grade 9, when he attended a "standardised white school":

I didn't know what a subject or verb was in grade 9, so when I came into English, I failed miserably . . . For me that was probably the key point of stripping my confidence in writing. It started there. (INT1)

I put my head down and really just tried to engage with the readings. I did like the readings and I loved the oral components, of course – that is my strongest point. (INT1)

English was a disaster for me all throughout high school, so I think it solidified my fears about writing. (INT1)

In spite of these fears, Elby perseveres. As I write this, Elby is preparing to defend his dissertation.

Preparing the narratives

It is our second interview, and I have given Elby a copy of a narrative I pieced together from our first interview. The narrative is about his comprehensive exams, and he has just finished reading the copy I gave him.

Britt: So what did you think of it?

Elby: Wow. Pretty damn accurate. A self-reflexive piece that I wrote myself basically! It's funny because it really depends on the day and what you are experiencing when you have these interviews, which is why it is always good to have multiple interviews. I might have been in a really frustrated mind frame [at the time]. But a lot of this [narrative you pieced together] is still fairly accurate. There are a lot of positives too, those are important.

Britt: Yeah, you seem to have a passion for writing and knowledge making/sharing in the academy but at the same time, you seem to have a –

Elby: – Love/hate relationship with it.

Britt: Yeah, and maybe I can identify it so easily because I have it as well. And the writing process, all of it, it is sometimes such a pain in the ass but it is also sometimes the best feeling in the world because you get to create and find out things that you didn't even realise you were capable of.

Elby: Yeah true. Hmm. Love/hate relationship. It's maybe more of a love/fear relationship.

[both of us start laughing]

Elby: I think that it is love/fear with a bit of hate when you are in the moment. I don't know if I hate it. I think it is fear. Sitting down to write, the fear comes in. You think "What am I going to write on?"

Britt: Yeah, I agree. For me it is a mixed relationship at best.

Elby: But there is definitely detestation.

Britt: That much we can be clear on.

[laughing]

In the sections that follow, I foreground Elby's stories with minimal interruption from me. You will encounter Elby's stories, as well as some conversations we had between us. I chose to break with the format I have used in my previous chapters so as to allow for a minimally interrupted reading experience. The source for the excerpts will be indicated in the title, with either INT1 or INT2 in brackets.

Academic writing narratives

The PhD comprehensive exam: "Labels that stick" (INT1)

My PhD comps were another throw-me-back to being a six-year-old boy being beaten down by an educator. Literally beaten, unfortunately; I was beaten with boards across my back and backside every day for months. I had no idea why. All I knew was I acted out one day, and that this continued for months. It was my father who threatened the principal that if he beat me again he would kill him. It stopped, but the damage was done. Unfortunately this is an all too common experience for many, and is only really rearing its ugly head today in terms of how it affected me academically.

[The PhD comprehensive exams are] where you just [...] dump and write. I am dyslexic. I throw things on, and I know I have to go back and read it [...] So [this person] read [my comps] and said that it was 'really terrible writing.'

I said, "It's supposed to be a mind dump, not a writing piece."

I knew enough to say that

Here I am thinking I am doing a three hour mind dump, you're considering me to be a bad writer, and now that's a label that [has] stuck with me.

“It shook me up, it devastated me. [It] added four years to the [PhD]” (INT1)

[This experience] added four years to the entire [PhD] process . . . I just didn’t realise how much . . . it shook me up, it devastated me. It scared the shit out of me. I was wondering ‘should I even be here?’ but I knew I should be . . . I knew I am damn good at my job. Writing I struggle with, sure. I am fine in that I have my confidence on the one side of me, but that writing [experience] prevented me from moving forward. It paralysed me.

I can’t believe that, at my age, these individuals could destroy me. But then it shows you how fragile our identities are, our confidence in what we are doing here is.

We wonder why people aren’t getting through their programs. People are on year 9, year 10 and are getting threatening letters from the institution saying [that] you can’t register, and ‘why are you missing your milestones?’ I can’t say that it is because I’ve got several elitists that have tried to bar my way by trying to destroy my confidence!

There was [someone who] got me through this. I was in the elevator with this person, and I looked at them and said, “That was brutal.”

They said, “It is better coming from someone you trust because in the academic world they’re going to destroy you. You have to get used to that.”

I said “not in my world.”

“Not in my world” (INT1)

In Indigenous studies and the people I work with, if we want to indigenize the institution – that attitude does not, can’t exist. It is not our traditional way. And in a lot of ways, going back to the Indigenous identity, this is such a hostile environment when it comes to that, to triggering us as far as our past history. We don’t even realise it when it’s even happening to us half the time. It’s like all of a sudden you’re a stupid Indian again, that stereotype. It can trigger our old belief systems. I mean, you hid. Back in the 90’s in university? You hid. Here I am in an

institution and I hid my identity. I absolutely did it for a reason. This was at a time when you hid your identity in shame. Even your parents told you to hide your identity in shame, or they didn't admit to their identities because of shame. That's what you did. You were told to always do that.

"One way I overcame this" (INT1)

You know, one way I overcame this was to situate myself in the research. I specifically started off with my life narrative. I was struggling to start writing, struggling to get into it. So I started writing by writing my life narrative. I told myself that it was a positionality piece. I told myself, 'I have to situate myself in the research. It's who we are as indigenous people.' Much of what I wrote was stuff that I had been doing for a long time, e.g., working in communities, but I had to legitimize it through the system here. So that's how I got started.

"We are all fragile" (INT2)

We are all fragile. It does not matter. Even if you are older, it does not go away. It's the truth, and coming from a fairly distinguished background, coming back as a student you are put through this ringer. That stuck with me. How much of that are we bringing away from the system? How many students are leaving the system because they feeling devalued and dehumanized? Also, are we turning out students who feel that they aren't good enough? I mean maybe something miraculous happens between third and fourth year, and students leave the university with this supra-intellect; Kudos to the system for making you aware of everything and training you to be such an enlightened human being.

I am absolutely okay writing for business journals out there, but academic writing? There is a fear still. I don't want to put myself out there because academics are brutal. They just shut you down. For me, that's not very Indigenous. I've talked to at least one Elder who has a

PhD, and says how it is a horrible system that seems like everyone is always looking to put someone else down. It is not an Anishinaabe way. We would never try to put someone else down, or attack them on purpose.

“Using down-to-earth language” (INT2)

The narrative section of my dissertation is something I am really proud of, because it is the foundation for everything that I am in academia today. It tells about where I come from, how I constructed my identity, where my fears come from. I laid out a good portion of what has influenced me to where I am right now, and influenced my writing. So it is a very personal statement. My writing is always based on being practical, applied, and community focused so that others can use it. The expectation might be that you are supposed to write maybe flowery, fancy, this unattainable language that is academic and then try to make it so it has meaning, but if someone can’t understand you, it means less.

I had an experience with a teacher who I will never forget. He told me to put away the thesaurus and just write. Sometimes someone can say something that will totally change your writing. That totally changed my writing. So I started writing using down-to-earth, more accessible language. For me, working with communities- I serve the communities, I don’t serve the university. I don’t want people to have to decipher my writing.

“I see academic writing like...” (INT2)

I remember a time when I was in a core seminar for my Master’s degree. We had a visiting Rhodes Scholar. We were in class, and he put the textbook down on the table and said, “This is what we are reading.” We said, “Good,” and all ran off like good students to do the readings.

In class, we start talking. The Scholar asks us, "Okay, what do you know about the author?"

We answer, "They attend this university, study and write on such and such, live in such and such a place."

The Scholar asks next, "Okay, and what did you think about the reading?"

We answer, "Oh it was terrible," and go full academic. We went right for the heart and just destroyed the article.

He turns around and says, "You don't even know anything about the author. You don't know the time that the author took to write, the life of the author and why he wrote this, the perspective, anything. If you sat in front of this author right now, would you tell him the same thing?"

We said, "We never thought of that."

I see academic writing like putting yourself into a car and driving down the highway. Other people are going to yell at you, honk, give you the finger, and basically treat you like you are not human in that car. That is your academic writing. It is the same thing. You are the same thing. Your academic writing goes out there- it's not you. It goes out there and gets destroyed. What people don't realise is that there is a human being behind that wheel that is taking all of that in. So, in essence, we are destroying some great minds by the criticisms that they get.

Britt: You know how in academic writing, well in some disciplines, we are told to get the writer out of it? Third person, objectivity? As I am listening to you, I wonder if that process of getting the writer out, abstracting the writer out, allows or gives permission for academics to interact with the text in such a way that they forget about the human element of it. Because the human isn't there on the page. Because they wrote themselves out.

Elby: For sure. That's why I wrote the Pre-Face for my dissertation, because it is my face, before my academic writing. This is who I am, so you get to know me. You get to learn about me. But we also love to blame the "other." A lot of it is the internal systems we have too; you are your worst enemy and your worst critic. We have to remember that too. So it is a tough process. So we add on our identity, insecurities, all that, to the system that alienates and dehumanizes us, and we pretty much have a recipe.

Academic writing: "Serves a purpose" (INT2)

Britt: Academic writing often seems like other academics having conversations with each other. What does that conversation serve?

Elby: It does serve a purpose, I have come to realise. Imagine lot of intellectual minds sitting around at a barbeque, eating these large words and concepts, rather than hot dogs, and they are discussing things at a philosophical level. The ideas and concepts they come up with, the understanding of human nature, culture, identities, and what not, there is an intellectual focus that is going on that can't always happen when you are on the ground working, because you (a) don't have the time to think, and (b) don't have all the information. Academic writing affords the time to do this.

Figure 5. Elby's sketch of his experiences with academic writing

Britt: Wow! This is your experience with academic writing? Can you explain it to me?

Elby: You explain it to me!

Britt: This looks ideal to me

Elby: There is only one problem.

Britt: The door is boarded shut.

Elby: Yep.

Britt: It's so subtle too. If you look at the big picture and not at the details too closely...

Elby: And the windows are barred shut.

Britt: And there is someone in the house, looking out the window, with their hands on the bars!

Elby: There's someone inside

Britt: Oh so you're trapped?

Elby: That's right, trapped inside. And the cabin roof is a book. So you have a beautiful ideal world that you think is out there, but you are trapped inside. It's also the allure of the world that is out there. You can look at as, 'I want to be out there but I am stuck in here writing,' or you can look at it as a little bit more than that. Like we have this idea of a world that we are creating or that we would like to create, or be a part of, but really we are confined into a small and tight little box that constricts us. I'm also facing away from the mountains. You are locked into looking in one direction. But it's also this dissertation too. You know? It's almost done, I've just got to get it out, but I feel like I am still trapped inside it and can't let it go.

Britt: Do you think you'll ever get out of the cabin.

Elby: Sure. I'll probably burn it down.

[laughing]

If you look, there is a chair that is waiting for me near the lake. It has a good view.

Britt: I hope you get to it. It has nice armrests.

Reflecting on this drawing now, I also notice how Elby has situated tipis behind the cabin, out of view. From our previous conversations, I know that tipis are associated with good memories, culture, and healing. This seems interesting when considered in light of Elby's comments about being "locked into looking in one direction". This direction does not appear to include tipis, or perhaps what the tipis represent.

Britt: Resurfacing Academic Writing Experiences

I want to take you back to 1993. Nirvana has released *In Utero*. I know this because we – my brother, mother and me – live next to a Junior High School and the music is everywhere. I am eight years old and in grade three. I remember this year not because of Nirvana, but because of writing. In particular, I remember an experience that I had with writing, one that had enough power to sway me away from creative writing. I remember writing a lot during this year. My mother, when she was around, would leave sheaves of poetry stranded on tables, floors, and chairs. I read everything because I was curious and because I needed to – any scrap of information might prove to be useful for my survival. In this way, my mother inspired me to write my first poem about transformation and metamorphosis.

You should know a few things about eight-year-old me. I went to a Catholic school and was one of the poorest kids in the classroom. I was also one of the dirtiest kids. My mother battled an addiction that stole her spirit and sapped her energy. There was no room left for parenting, no room left for nurturing. I had to find a way to survive on my own. But no one in the classroom knew this. The teacher detested me, or at least this is how my eight year old brain interpreted the relationship. I walked into the classroom every day with a palpable feeling that it would be better if I disappeared. And, as I walked home each afternoon, I returned to a house in which I was already invisible and unseen. These were challenging times.

In class, we were asked to write a creative story and I chose to write one about a strong, brave, and valiant knight who was renowned for slaying particularly difficult dragons. The King, so impressed, invited the knight to a feast meant to honour the knight for his accomplishments. Except – the plot twists – he was not a *he* but a *she*. Of course the whole kingdom was turned upside down because women were not capable or allowed to be knights, and here was one that proved them wrong.

In hindsight, this story must have been a lot for one grade three Catholic teacher to take in. It must have been because the day after I turned it in, I was pulled aside and punished. The teacher yelled at me, and told me that I did not write the story, that there was no way I could have. My story was rejected and I was accused of plagiarism. When I protested that I really had written it, I was called a liar. Although I can't exactly remember the look of contempt and scorn I received, I remember how I felt under that teacher's gaze.

"I can't write. I am not allowed to tell my stories. I am a liar," I internalised.

I stopped writing creative fiction, and blocked any desire with a metaphorical drain plug. I moved onto poetry and journal writing, then essay writing, and now, thesis writing.

This memory, and many others similar to it, resurfaced during the course of my research experience. At first I didn't make any connections between these memories and the research I was engaged in. Through careful reflection, I became aware of the interconnections between myself, my academic writing experiences, and the experiences shared by those participating in the study.

I connected with Elby's story of a traumatic writing experience in a pivotal way, realising that although the details were different, I too had felt the powerful impact that writing can have. When Em shared her fear with me about encountering a new world in the academy, one in which she was not sure she belonged, one in which she sometimes felt invisible and isolated, I felt I had been there too. When Mae shared her experiences about being judged, frustrated, and told she 'can't', I found myself nodding. And when Kaybe shared with me that she felt that she had to leave an important part of herself out of her writing, it finally clicked that maybe I was not alone. Perhaps, as a result of many things, the least of which is education, there are more stories like mine, like Mae's, Em's, Kaybe's, and Elby's, just waiting to be shared, understood, and learned from.

VII. Across-Case Analysis and Discussion

At this point in the thesis, before moving ahead with an analysis looking across cases and a discussion, I feel it would be useful to revisit what has been accomplished thus far. First, a primary aim of my research is to explore the experiences that Indigenous students have with academic writing in a postsecondary setting. We began with a background chapter (II) that served to situate this research in its current context. Next, I set up some key concepts (III) which included framing writing as a socially situated practice. In this three-dimensional framework, writing is situated within broader social and institutional domains – which interact and are influenced by each other – and both mediates and is mediated by practices. To help situate the research in the institutional context, I began by introducing cognitive imperialism and then expanded the discussion by drawing on research conducted on predominately White institutions (PWIs) and minority students' experiences. Next, I moved to defining what I mean by “academic writing” and underscored my use of a critical orientation using academic literacies and other critical theorists. Academic literacies is interested in foregrounding students' experiences with academic writing, and highlighting the often invisible struggles with/for power, meaning-making, and identity (Lillis & Scott, 2007).

In this chapter I engage in an across-case analysis and discussion, which I centre on three primary themes: Academic writing as cracking and resisting tacit codes, academic writing as estrangement, and academic writing and the tactical negotiation of text. To illuminate and discuss these cross-case findings, I return back to key concepts established in Chapter 3. In particular, I revisit critical and transformative approaches to academic writing (e.g., Canagarajah, 2002a; LaRocque, 2015; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Scott, 2007), Eurocentrism, predominately white institutions and practices, and resistance scholarship. Drawing on these themes, as well as the individual case studies presented in Chapter 6, I include some suggestions

for instructors who are interested in supporting Indigenous student-writers. I then transition into the conclusion for the thesis. I discuss some new areas of inquiry that this research has edged me toward, some of the limitations of this current research, and some final concluding remarks.

Academic Writing as Cracking and Resisting Tacit Codes

Cracking

Mae's, Em's, Kaybe's, and Elby's experiences highlight a feature of academic writing in which writing seems to be more of a mysterious, tacit code to crack, instead of an open opportunity for growth. This may be related in part to the assumptions that Instructors have of academic writing, as we will discuss, but it could also be related to the participants' motivations and investment in their writing. Students like Em, who feels constantly limited by time, or like Mae, who feels a strong desire to "get the degree," may not be able to invest in every piece of writing as a space for fulfillment and growth because it is not realistic – or desirable – for them. That being said, students seem to want a balance between having both growth opportunities and grade opportunities, and the two are not always mutually exclusive.

Kaybe's experience of feeling she "had done well" (INT1) on an assignment, only to find out that she in fact had not, and Mae's confusion and frustration with "That's not what it said in the instructions" (INT2), are both reminiscent of the experiences mentioned by students in Lea and Street (1998). These students shared that, in spite of having received assignment guidelines, they often felt "unsure," "confused," or "constrained" when it came to their writing (Lea & Street, 1998 pp. 164-165). But Mae and Kaybe's experiences are also evocative of the confusion that also accompanies non-traditional and minority students' experiences with academic writing (Lillis, 1999; Lillis, 2001). Students are often expected to intuit conventions that are otherwise taken-for-granted – conventions that may be crucial to successful academic writing, but because

of their implicit nature may also serve to work against students who may have had little practice and exposure to them (Lillis, 1999; Street, 1984; White & Lowenthal, 2011).

Mae, Kaybe, and to some extent Elby, reveal an impression that there is “a way” to write in then university (e.g., “it’s learning a new way in the university. . . “I will find a way,” Mae, INT1), and it seems that they do not feel that it is their “way.” Perhaps “the way” they describe is the steamrolling that characterises the homogenizing way of Whiteness and Eurocentrism (Gusa, 2010; Mazama, 1995). This “way” can also characterise a more normative approach to academic writing, which gears students toward reproducing and matching Instructor’s views about what academic writing is and what it does (Lillis, 2001), views which LaRocque (2015) argue are often Eurocentric “notions of what constitutes ‘knowledge’ or ‘literature’” (p. 7). In a similar vein, Lea and Street (1998) suggest that underlying assumptions about what constitutes successful writing are “issues of epistemology” (p. 162), which are affected and shaped by disciplinary assumptions about the nature of knowledge. Though the staff participating in Lea and Street’s study were able to describe what successful writing was, “difficulties arose when they attempted to make explicit what [these expectations] looked like in a written assignment” (Lea & Street, p. 163). Street (1999) later suggested that this gap between instructors’ expectations and students’ interpretations of what is involved with writing may be related to instructors’ embedded assumptions that students will simply learn how to narrow the distance in their writing via more time and immersion in the university. Keeping the focus and onus on students, and their ability or inability to navigate and learn what it means to write “successfully” in university, allows instructors to continue to participate in unexamined positions of power, bestowed on them by their ability to grant grades (Street, 1999, p. 194). As students who are interested in being successful, Mae, Em, Kaybe, and Elby are likely very aware of what is at stake for them in their writing, and therefore are invested in trying to unravel expectations of their

writing, implied or otherwise. Perhaps as a result, these experiences of mismatched expectations, or of missing the target, can be very frustrating, demotivating, and potentially demoralising for students. For example, Mae shares:

Being graded on papers – I feel like I am being judged. It's definitely something that I haven't done okay with as far as going back to university, like, that's the hardest part . . . getting those papers back. . . .When I get back a paper that I think have done fairly well on, but then all of a sudden I get this [feedback], I am like, 'what the hell?' . . . I have started to be like 'you know what, I don't even want to read their review, I am just going to be okay with the fact that that is what they gave me.' (INT2)

Students feel that they are often left to their own devices and expected to, put colloquially, “figure it out.” Differences, distances, or gaps between what Elby, Kaybe, and Mae produce, and what they perceive that they are expected to produce, seem to circle back to deficits in their writing skills and ability to accurately interpret writing expectations (e.g., “[The PhD comprehensive exams are] where you just . . . dump and write. . . . So [this person] read [my comps] and said that it was ‘really terrible writing.’ I said, ‘It’s supposed to be a mind dump, not a writing piece.’” Elby, INT1).

These experiences correspond with the conventional skills-based model of academic writing, elucidated by Lea and Street (1998), as well as the “differences-as-deficit” and “conversion” approach developed in Canagarajah (2002a). To recap, the skills model primarily views issues with writing at the level of text, and assumes that writing is a transparent medium that is comprised of atomised sets of skills that students must learn and transfer to other contexts in order to be successful (Lea & Street, 1998; Lea & Street, 2006; Lillis, 2003; Robinson-Pant & Street, 2012). The “differences-as-deficit” attitude and “conversion” approach (Canagarajah, 2002a) both treat cultural and discursive differences in writing as a problem and

are most normative in their expectations about student writing (Lillis, 2001), recalling that in the conversion approach, students are expected to put aside their “indigenous discourses” in favour of “superior English-based discourses” (Canagarajah, 2002a, p. 15). In this view, differences are marginalised, suppressed, and seen as problems, which seem to correspond to some of the experiences and challenges shared by the participants in this study.

Resisting

These expectations, or tacit codes, are also resisted at the same time. While Em’s seems to accept the need to follow the directions in some cases (e.g., “You have to follow the directions,” Em’s, INT2), the internal struggle over honouring her storytelling identity indicates that there is some resistance there as well (e.g., “I understand more now about storytelling. It’s me, it’s in my identity. If others don’t understand, it’s their loss,” Em, INT2). Other participants also appear to resist these tacit codes. For example, in his experience with his PhD comprehensive exams, Elby comes into contact with committee members who are in a position of power (he also calls these particular types “elitists” elsewhere) who reinforce this sense there are embedded assumptions and tacit rules involved with how Elby is expected to perform in his comprehensive examinations. However, Elby also resists the distance between his writing and these expectations (e.g., he asserts his understanding that comprehensive examinations are “supposed to be a mind dump, not a writing piece,” INT1). Perhaps it may be that Elby is more comfortable with challenging the dominant academic perception of his writing because of his status of a PhD student, as someone who is respected in the broader community, and because of his age. Similarly, Kaybe resists what she feels is an expectation to do “little more than [reformulate] received academic knowledge with little real engagement” (Lea, 1999, p. 122). In Kaybe’s words:

The way she spoke about her expectations was different from what she actually created. I thought I had done well, but she was like, ‘You weren’t listening to me in class,’ and I was like ‘I am not just here to regurgitate what you say, I’ll do that in class because I know that is what you want.’ The whole point of English is to be able to absorb what they are telling you and then figure out something on your own. You can either argue something similar or argue something completely different. (INT1)

Kaybe may also be resistant to a particular pedagogic approach that Freire (1970/2015) refers to as “banking education,” which treats students as empty vessels, arriving to the classroom *tabula rasa*, ready to receive knowledge deposits from a careful and all-knowing instructor. This approach fails to recognize and devalues the knowledge and experiences that students may bring with them into the classroom. The banking approach, and corresponding expectation of “regurgitation,” also conflicts with many Indigenous approaches to learning and literacy, which often have at their heart an emphasis on relationships, reciprocity, and the reinterpretation of experiences (Antone, 2003; Gamlin, 2003).

Perhaps also highlighted in Elby’s, Mae’s, and Kaybe’s excerpts are the “vertical patterns” that tend to accompany banking education (Freire, 1970/2015, p. 80). Vertical patterns highlight a power dynamic between students and teachers, in which teachers are the-ones-who-teach and students are the-ones-who-learn, as well as a vertical one-way relationship (that could hardly be characterised as a relationship) that originates with the teacher and terminates with the student (Freire, 1970/2015, pp. 78-81). Again, there is this experience that students are neither in dialogue, nor (reciprocal) relationship, with their instructors or the texts through their writing, but instead are expected to regurgitate, reproduce, and replicate material without significant or authentic engagement (Lea, 1999; Freire, 1970/2015).

Academic Writing as Estrangement

The estrangement and devaluing described in Elby's, Mae's, Kaybe's, and Em's excerpts may have to do with the continued prevalence of the socialisation approach to academic writing in higher education. When the focus is on inculcating students into the culture of the academic community, and on orienting students to learn the ways and practices that are valued in the particular community, it can be said that the approach to academic writing is taking the form of socialisation (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001; Lillis & Scott, 2007). In this approach, differences may be seen as a result of a failure to adopt and (re)produce the dominant discourses of the academy (for more, refer to "difference-as-estrangement" in Chapter III).

Canagarajah (2002a) theorises that this approach to differences in student writing, and its corresponding "crossing" attitude, tends to expect students to keep their local cultural practices out of their academic writing. Teachers are viewed as bridge-builders, helping students to make the cross over from their "local literacy practices and cultural frames" toward fulfilling dominant conceptions of academic writing (Canagarajah, 2002a, p. 14). Although "crossing" may seem to imply a bi-directional movement, in the context of academic writing, it is in fact still unidirectional. Students are expected to move away from what may be their personal or cultural practices and toward embodying, in their writing, what they may feel are the dominant practices of their discipline. An example of this may be Em's experience with storytelling. Although she tried to honour her storytelling identity (e.g., "The first [draft] was a lot of me," INT2), after working with tutors and TAs, she found that her second draft contained less of her personal and cultural practice of storytelling and more of the dominant practices (e.g., "The second [draft] is what they want," INT2). When considered in light of the crossing approach, Em's comment that she "will just do what they want and not care" (INT2) may be seen as indicative of having crossed the bridge without being able to blend both sides. Perhaps this is

one of the reasons that Em feels she is unable to be herself in her writing, and in the university setting. We are reminded again here of the direct and indirect social effects that texts can have on individuals (Fairclough, 2003). Texts, Fairclough suggests, can bring about changes in our beliefs, values, knowledge, attitudes, identities, as well as our social and material worlds.

Fairclough (2003) also reminds us that text can act as a form of social control, if we consider that the social effects of text may also include the inculcation and preservation of dominant ideologies, and that these are largely influenced by the pervasive social structures and practices privileged in the social context within which the text is situated. Recall that Elby, Mae, Em, and Kaybe, as well as their texts, are situated in an institution within a Canadian social context replete with social structures, ideologies, and dominant practices that have systematically targeted Indigenous people for estrangement and alienation from their identities and cultures. Thus, considering these narratives in light of the reality that Canada remains largely a settler (or *resettler*, if you consider what LaRocque [2015] has to say on this) society, we might conclude that Elby, Mae, and Kaybe's feelings of estrangement are reflective of persistent social patterns or habits that have sought to systemically, and often forcibly, detach Indigenous people from their cultures and identity. This is echoed in the passages below:

"It's being aware. . . [that] I am in a non-Native environment. I need to act like the non-Natives." Mae (INT1).

"It's hard to incorporate yourself, especially in an academic writing way that's so Eurocentric." Kaybe (INT2).

"It's almost like you can't make mistakes. You have to follow the directions. You can't be yourself." Em (INT2).

These experiences of estrangement echo research that explores the experiences of underrepresented racial/ethnic minority students studying at predominately white institutions (PWIs) in the U.S. (Bourke, 2010; Charleston, George, Jackson, Berham, & Amechi, 2014; Gusa,

2010; White & Lowenthal, 2011; Quaye, Tambascia, & Talesh, 2009). For instance, Quaye, Tambascia, and Talesh suggest that, not unlike Mae, Elby, Em, and Kaybe, African American students who study in PWIs often experience a sense of alienation and isolation as a result of being “one of few” (p. 160) in the classroom. In addition, the tendency of course instructors to rely on predominately White or Eurocentric scholarship for course reading material, which students are often expected to draw on in their classroom discussions and papers, may further serve to isolate underrepresented students whose views, values, and experiences may run counter to dominant opinion. As a result, students may resist required course readings that are reflective of dominant, hegemonic knowledge, and that represent mainly the “experiences and contributions of White people” to academic canons (Quaye et al., 2009, p. 159). From an Indigenous perspective, it has been this “European-based scholarship” (LaRocque, 2015, p. 16) that has traditionally scrutinised Indigenous cultures and knowledges against so-called “civilized” European norms and previously found them to be deficient and “primitive” (LaRocque, 2015, p. 11), all while reinforcing and maintaining the illusion of the superiority of European thought and culture. Consequently, it may be that this overreliance on primarily European scholarship impedes or discourages access to Indigenous scholarship, voice, and therefore perspective, which may also further contribute to Em, Mae, Kaybe, and Elby’s feelings of estrangement that came through in our interviews.

To stop here, however, would only leave us with a partial picture. Elby’s suggestion in the quote below that writers carry with them “internal systems” that include “insecurities” and being one’s own “worst enemy” and “critic” reminds us that these are students with their own agency and motivation for attending postsecondary education:

A lot of it has to do with the internal system we have, too – you are your worst enemy, and your worst critic. We have to remember that. [Writing] is a tough

process. We add on our identity, insecurities, and all that goes with that, to a system that alienates and dehumanises us, and we pretty much have a recipe.

Elby (INT2)

Furthermore, if a critical perspective reminds us to be aware of and question the familiar or the “taken for granted conventions that (students) are expected to write within” (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p. 11), then a transformative approach reminds us to build and move beyond it. Therefore, while it is important to consider and draw awareness to the implication that the overarching social habits and patterns might have for Em, Mae, Kaybe, and Elby in terms of their experiences with feeling estranged in their academic writing, it also seems crucial to challenge the perspective that they are powerless, agentless, victims of their writing experiences. In fact, I would argue that what, ultimately, Kaybe, Em, Mae, and Elby’s stories highlight is the need to create space for negotiation and talk about text. For example, although Em, Kaybe, and Elby did not meet each other, there were points in which their conversations overlapped with each other, and one (or two) would ask a question that the other seemed to answer. The passage below is an example, curated from different interviews:

Em: “The first [draft] was a lot of me. But the second [final copy] is what they want. That’s how I see it. So I will just do what they want and not care.” (INT2)

Kaybe: “[Yeah] my experience with academic writing is that I have to leave the Aboriginal self out of it. . .” (INT2)

Britt: “Do you think there will be a way to do both? [To be both?]” (Em, INT2)

Em: “Yeah, well that’s what I want to know. How?” (INT2)

Elby: “Well, one way I overcame this was to situate myself in the research. I specifically started off with my life narrative. I was struggling to start writing, struggling to get into it. So I started writing by writing my life narrative. I told myself that it was a positionality piece. I told myself, ‘I have to situate myself in the research. It’s who we are as indigenous people.’” (INT1)

It is interesting how Em, Kaybe, and Elby share similar experiences, and how Elby also shares how he has overcome it. He points out that he was able to bend or negotiate the genre of his dissertation in order to suit his needs and purposes. This tactic is an example of the need for the space to negotiate texts, which is discussed in the next section a little further.

Academic Writing and the Tactical Negotiation of Text

Similar to Kaybe's account of having to lead a "dual life," Canagarajah (2002a) likewise shares that in his community in Sri Lanka, members adopted the appearance of Christians outside their community while maintaining active Hindu practices within their homes and community. This sort of behaviour, he proposes, is indicative of the ways that oppressed and colonized communities collectively establish "sites of community underlife" in which they can celebrate "suppressed identities" as well as "develop subversive discourses and identities that inspire resistance against domination" (p. 182). Larson and Gatto (2004) similarly refer to this underlife as a "tactical underlife," where the appendage of "tactical" draws on de Certeau's (1984, as cited in Larson & Gatto, 2004) notion of "tactics" as the ways in which "people who live within institutionalized spaces use, manipulate, and divert the space to which they are assigned.

Tactics, de Certeau (1984, as cited in Larson & Gatto, 2004) argues, are not "random or accidental acts, but are calculated actions that . . . take advantage of opportunities" (p. 14). The tactical underlife is a response to entering a place in which there is little space for one, perceived or otherwise, and as a result, one is expected to "make do with what they have" (de Certeau, as quoted in Larson & Gatto, 2004, p. 15). In such places, individuals must do what they can do to create space, whether by overt acts of resistance and subversion, or through passive, more safer ways of resisting "the power of the master" such as through discussions among peers, marking up of textbooks, or leaving graffiti (Canagarajah, 2002a, p. 183). Furthermore,

these acts are opportunities through which oppressed peoples can express and retain dignity, develop “hidden ideologies,” and forms of resistance, as well as work out “spiritual alternatives that give them hope [while building a] shared understanding of their oppression and ways of coping within the hostile environment” (Canagarajah, 2002a, p. 183).

So although Kaybe’s experience of having to lead a “dual life” is, on the one hand, an unfortunate consequence of living in a settler-colonial society and attending a settler-colonial institution, it can also be seen as a resistance tactic that is simultaneously protective and resourceful. Since this “dual life” is a characteristic of an underlife, and the underlife is present in classrooms (Canagarajah, 2002a; Larson & Gatto, 2004), in a situated view of academic writing, it follows that this underlife likely impacts and is reflected in Kaybe, Em’s, Mae, and Elby’s academic writing, and academic writing experiences.

Em’s, Kaybe, and Elby’s excerpts indicate a motivation to write and learn to write in an academic context, but they also indicate the desire for space to creatively negotiate alternative discourses that better represent them (Canagarajah, 2002a). For example, Kaybe shares that, in English:

there is that boundary that you can rub up against, like you can disagree with your source. But the professor said, ‘that’s not what I asked you to do,’ and I was like, ‘that’s not fair, your guideline didn’t say I couldn’t disagree with this person, you just said to use him.’ (Kaybe, INT1)

While on the surface, Kaybe’s professor seems to be testing for content and understanding, he may also be assessing the adoption of dominant ideologies and epistemologies (Hyland, 2016). At the same time, he may also be discouraging opinions that counter to the established hegemony (Hyland, 2016). Canagarajah (2002a) reminds us that for students like Kaybe, adopting the views of dominant academic discourse may signal adopting the ideological

commitments of that particular discourse. If these ideological commitments do not serve the student's emancipatory interests, which in Kaybe's experience, they do not, then "these writers are going to give life to the oppressive ideologies of the dominant groups" (Canagarajah, 2002a, p. 15).

Leave it to Elby to remind us of "who we are as Indigenous people." Elby's negotiation of space in his dissertation to include his personal narrative, and his reminder of Indigenous scholarship that often begins with this aspect of situating oneself in one's writing, brings to mind the importance of not only recognizing alternative forms of discourse in their own right, but as potential signals of belonging to or seeking membership in alternative communities of discourse. The inclusion of self – of 'I' – is in many ways an active response to traditional Western notions of objective writing and disengaged, "aloof" voices (LaRocque, 2015, p. 20). On a related note, some feminist scholars have made similar arguments (e.g. Belcher, 1997; Hesse-Biber, 2014) for the engagement of the researcher via the inclusion of the researcher's voice, standpoint, and reflexivity in writing. Yet, the experience of the students in this study seems to suggest that the practice of inculcating and perhaps even forcing students to conform to instructors' dominant understanding of what constitutes academic writing is very much alive and well.

Suggestions for Instructors Interested in Supporting Indigenous Student-Writers

Create transformative spaces for negotiation

In a transformative approach to teaching, differences are no longer seen as deficits but as resources, and are embraced as a starting point for both students and teachers to learn from (Canagarajah, 2002a; Freire, 1970/2015). This approach marks the difference between "cultural synthesis" and "cultural invasion," where the latter is characterised by learning material that is

drawn primarily from teacher's views, values, and ideology, and the former sees students and teachers in more of a dialogue with differences contributing to learning on both sides (Freire, 1970/2015, p. 180). So while there should still remain a focus on helping students to engage with, and appreciate, academic discourses, the academic community should accommodate alternative forms of discourse as well (Canagarajah, 2002a, p. 14). In this way, students do not need to be expected to become "fully native" (or "non-Native" as Mae describes it) in order to participate in the academic domain, but can retain their diverse backgrounds, experiences, and interests to help inform a sort of "critical detachment" that can lead to different responses and inventive constructions of text (Canagarajah, 2002a, p. 174). Creating space for students to negotiate and appropriate academic discourses "in their own terms would enable students to reconstruct established textual practices and infuse them with oppositional values and meanings" (Canagarajah, 2002a, p. 15), which may then afford them the opportunity to embrace and embody resistance to Eurocentric beliefs, approaches, and theories which have, until recently, enjoyed relatively uncontested dominance in Western scholarship (LaRocque, 2015).

A caveat – LaRocque (2015) reminds us that not all Indigenous academics are going to, or will want to, write in the ways and traditions of "Indigenous academics." Thus, Indigenous scholars who want to adopt the conventions, norms, theories, and tools of Western-based scholarship are not automatically at risk of losing aspects of their Indigeneity. Otherwise, Indigenous scholarship may fall into the same sort of normative pressure system that I have discussed for much of this thesis. In fact, it could be argued that without this caveat, I am re-centering colonizers and Western-based scholarship, in effect suggesting that "everything that belongs to the colonizer is not appropriate for the colonized" (LaRocque, 2015, p. 16). Instead, like LaRocque (2015), I suggest that it should be a choice and that to "limit ourselves and our use

of theory or terminology is to fall into the colonizer's model of the world, which is exactly where neo-imperialist thinkers would contain us" (p. 16).

Some practical ways instructors might create transformative spaces for negotiation in their classrooms might be to consider trying the following suggestions, which would be useful for all students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous:

- Draw on multiple modes of writing (e.g. blogging, journaling, weekly commentaries on readings, in-class freewriting activities).
- Work with students to see themselves as writers, and to engage with academic reading from a writerly standpoint.
- Engage in critical self-reflection and examine your assumptions about students' writing: What is it that you expect students should be able to do in their writing? Why? Who benefits?
- Co-create assignment guidelines with the class: Certainly, as an instructor you will have a very keen idea, but you may be surprised at students' ideas.
- Consider opening up writing tasks in class to include the sorts of "pre-writing" that goes along with writing (e.g. brainstorming, visual diagramming, building ideas, discussing them with others).

Create space for talk about writing

It's really nice to have a place where we can ground ourselves, to be reminded that there are other people that are going through the same things that we are going through. (Mae, INT2).

I've established a pretty good group of friends and we exchange our papers back and forth. (Kaybe, INT1).

Kaybe, Mae, Em, and Elby shared that they benefited from having people and a place to talk about their texts and their experiences that their texts evoked, suggesting that it might be helpful to incorporate these kinds of interactions into a classroom context. It was through our conversations that many of our ideas and challenges about writing were hashed out and worked through. Interestingly, there is increasing research that supports this, particularly with regards to writing groups (Highberg, Moss, & Nicolas, 2004; Maher et al., 2008). The interaction between writers often creates a shared space that gives voice to experience – a shared space in which writers have an opportunity to find commonalities in experience, and perhaps strategies to deal with the challenges that writing brings with it. Creating space to share writing may also help students to experience how others interact with their work, and it may help them with understanding how to give, as well as receive, feedback.

Some ways to consider putting this into practice:

- Try inkshedding. Inkshedding refers to an activity in which students are first asked to either bring in writing (perhaps writing you have assigned) or to freewrite (perhaps on a shared experience). Once students have had an opportunity to freewrite, the freewritten texts are passed around the classroom for reading. Readers are asked to “mark with a vertical line in the margin passages in which the writer said something ‘striking,’ something that seemed to them interesting or new or outrageous” (Hunt, n.d.). When everyone has had a chance to comment, or the allotted time has run out, arrange the texts on a wall for readers to take a look at.
- Peer conferencing: Instructors can use peer conferencing as a way to scaffold students toward a final project. Students meet in small groups to discuss their work. You can have students meet several times throughout the course, and use the groups as a way

to support students anywhere along the writing arc (e.g. from conceptualising ideas, drafts, to peer reviewing/ink shedding).

In Closing

The creation of spaces and places for negotiation and talk builds both on a transformative approach to education, as well as a transformative approach to academic literacies. Both seek to draw a critical awareness to the hidden and often taken-for-granted conventions that students are expected to learn and write within. But both also seek to create opportunities for students to explore different and meaningful ways of seeing and interacting with the world and to act upon those “new ways of seeing” (Badenhorst, Moloney, Dyer, Rosales, & Murray, 2015, p. 98). In addition, both seek to create space to voice experiences with attempting to live from within and outside of the “system” (Badenhorst, Moloney, Dyer, Rosales, & Murray, 2015, p. 98).

In this chapter I engaged in an across-case analysis and discussion, which I centre on three primary themes: Academic writing as cracking and resisting tacit codes, academic writing as estrangement, and academic writing and the tactical negotiation of text. To illuminate and discuss these cross-case findings, I returned back to key concepts established in Chapter III. In particular, I returned to “Approaches to the treatment of academic writing” (Figure 1), Eurocentrism, predominately white institutions and practices, and resistance scholarship. Drawing on these themes, as well as the individual case studies presented in Chapter VI, I included some suggestions for instructors who are interested in supporting Indigenous student-writers. In the next chapter, I transition into closing the thesis by summarizing the thesis thus far. I then offer a final reflection that includes a consideration of new areas of inquiry that this research has edged me toward.

VII. Closing

This study aimed to explore the experiences that Indigenous students have with academic writing in an Eastern Canadian postsecondary setting. This line of questioning began with the knowledge that there is currently a pervasive and systemic gap in the postsecondary achievement rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Statistics Canada, 2011a; 2011b), and the understanding that this gap is related to a history of colonial violence and the legacy of the residential school system (Stonechild, 2006). At the same time, research (Hyland, 2009; Lillis & Scott, 2007) suggests that academic writing is not only central to postsecondary education, but that students are likely to fail if there are major problems with their writing. Scholars who take a critical orientation to academic writing (Canagarajah, 2002a; LaRocque, 2015; Lillis & Scott, 2007) suggest that there have been a number of studies that place such problems with writing at the feet of students. However, these same scholars suggest that there is more to it, and problematize this treatment of student writing.

In this thesis, I drew from social and critical perspectives of academic writing to situate Indigenous students' experiences with academic writing within a broader social and institutional context that is predominately White and Eurocentric. I drew on a social situated notion of academic writing (i.e., New Literacy Studies), as well as concepts of Eurocentrism, cognitive imperialism and predominately White institutions, to understand and situate students' experiences with academic writing.

My research found that students' experiences revealed hidden forms of cognitive imperialism and Eurocentrism, and echoed similar stories found in research on predominately White institutions. My research also underscored that writing experiences are powerful and have very real, direct, and important implications for students. Building on this knowledge, I

suggested that instructors who are interested in supporting Indigenous students consider creating transformative spaces for negotiation and talk about writing.

Reflection on This Academic Writing Experience, and Future Research Directions

“Man, you [referring to Britt] are like a therapist! [laughter]” Elby (INT1).

While I am not a therapist, there is something quite therapeutic about engaging in research about academic writing, while undertaking my own academic writing. What was I thinking?! Navigating the writing up of a thesis has been a challenging and rewarding experience. Emboldened by the literature I read, I endeavoured to negotiate this piece of academic writing to suit my own purposes, values, and needs. Was this research just a strategy to deal with the research and thesis? Maybe, in part perhaps. But I want to think that it was more than that. This research really began in multiple places: One, with my own internal, shifting narratives, as I began to learn how to make space for both my settler and Anishinaabe identities; Two, with my intuition that there is more to academic writing than meets the eye; Three, my hunch that our experiences with academic writing, often camouflaged, both impact our writing and matter, perhaps even as much as the final product itself; and Four, from the top-secret-whisper-quiet-voice and gut feeling that if we are interested in supporting Indigenous student-scholars, we need to start by listening to the experiences that Indigenous students have with navigating one of the core elements that characterises postsecondary education – writing. My experience as a writing coach, and now as a researcher, confirms my belief that we do not *talk* about writing enough. But this research has taught me that we also need to *listen* to talk about experiences with writing, especially to Indigenous students talk about their experiences with writing because these experiences reveal the embedded and hidden ways in which colonialism, Eurocentrism, and Whiteness become embroiled and implicated in our academic writing.

Halfway through writing this thesis, I ran into LaRocque's (2015) work which fundamentally shifted the way I viewed writing, and caused me to challenge my own implicit assumptions about what it means to write as an Indigenous scholar. She highlighted the need for choice but also the potentially transformative power of academic texts. It was after LaRocque that I started to wonder how academic writing could become transformative, and the ways in which I can support others toward writing their own transformative texts. This is something I am still puzzling through on my own. I am also inspired by Canagarajah's (2002a) discussion of the negotiation of academic texts, and am starting to see possibilities for future research that considers whether there is a way to support Indigenous students toward negotiating and harnessing the transformative power of academic writing, and what, if anything, might be said about academic writing as third spaces and places. I would also like to see more analysis of the sketches that participants created to represent their experiences with academic writing, and I think that discourse analysis may be one way to do this. Finally, I think that research into alternative forms of academic writing should be accompanied by broader questions surrounding the assessment of these forms, questions that get at the heart and nature of writing in the academy.

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Appendix A: Interpretative Framework

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Interpretative Framework</i>		
	<i>Constructivist</i>	<i>Critical</i>	<i>Indigenous</i>
Axiology (role of values)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values are honoured and negotiated among Individuals (Creswell, 2013) • The researcher is a part of the research, cannot be separated from it fully, and should state their motives for the inquiry (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The diversity of values is acknowledged and discussed within the context of the community (or communities) (Creswell, 2013) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values are built upon respect, reciprocity, and relational accountability • Interpretations must be respectful of relationships • Researcher has a vested interest in the integrity and usefulness of the research
Ontology (the nature of reality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our lived experiences construct our realities, and are shaped by our interactions with others (Creswell, 2013) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reality is constructed through power struggles over/for identity, race, culture, gender, dis/ability (Creswell, 2013) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar to constructivist • Emphasis placed on the <i>relationship</i> one has with the truth.
Epistemology (how reality is known)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reality is known through socially co-constructed experiences that are also shaped through and by the individual (Creswell, 2013; Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reality can be known through the careful consideration of social structures, power, oppression and freedom • Reality may change through research (Creswell, 2013). • Truth is situated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very similar to Indigenous ontology: Relationships are emphasized • Inward knowing is highly valued, and should play a role in research

Appendix B: Ethics Clearance

Carleton University
Research Ethics Office
Research Ethics Board
511 Tory, 1125 Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6 Canada
Tel: 613-520-2517, ethics@carleton.ca

Ethics Clearance Form – New Clearance

This is to certify that the Carleton University Research Ethics Board has examined the application for ethical clearance. The REB found the research project to meet appropriate ethical standards as outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Human*, 2nd edition, and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research*.

Date of Clearance: August 04, 2015

Researcher: Guillaume Gentil (Primary Investigator)

Brittany Amell (Student Research: Master's Student)

Graham Smart (Research Support)

Department: Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences/Linguistics and Applied Language Studies (School of)

University: Carleton University

Research Supervisor (if applicable): Prof. Guillaume Gentil

Project Number: 103149

Alternate File Number (if applicable): N/A

Project Title: There's more to it: The journey of five Canadian Indigenous students and their challenges and successes with academic writing

Funder (if applicable): N/A

Clearance Expires: May 31, 2016

All researchers are governed by the following conditions:

Annual Status Report: You are required to submit an Annual Status Report to either renew clearance or close the file. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the immediate suspension of the project. Funded projects will have accounts suspended until the report is submitted and approved.

Changes to the project: Any changes to the project must be submitted to the Carleton University Research Ethics Board for approval. All changes must be approved prior to the continuance of the research.

Adverse events: Should a participant suffer adversely from their participation in the project you are required to report the matter to the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. You must submit a written record of the event and indicate what steps you have taken to resolve the situation.

Suspension or termination of clearance: Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, 2nd edition and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research* may result in the suspension or termination of the research project.

Louise Heslop

Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board

Andy Adler

Vice-Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board