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Toward a Theory of Boundariness: The Co-Construction of Agency in the First-Year Writing Classroom

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**TOWARD A THEORY OF BOUNDARINESS:
THE CO-CONSTRUCTION OF AGENCY IN THE FIRST-YEAR WRITING
CLASSROOM**

By

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B.A. The College of Saint Rose, 2016

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A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

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(in English)

The Graduate School

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May 2018

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Thesis Advisor: Dr. Ryan Dippre

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
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Research in composition and rhetoric has not investigated the potential congruence between writing prompts used in the first-year writing classroom and the ways that students understand themselves able to act in relation to such prompts. This thesis therefore examines the link between student's perception of agency and assignments prompts used in the first-year writing classroom by employing a grounded theory analysis of a first-year writing classroom, where data was collected using ethnographic tools such as student interviews, document collection, and classroom observations. Based on collected data and analysis, I articulate what I call a theory of "boundariness," which directs our attention to the ways that teachers and students co-construct and co-negotiate authorized classroom space in relation to course documents. As a conceptual metaphor, boundariness, furthermore, illustrates the ways in which individuals act in relation to this co-constructed official space. Results of this study also point out that assessment procedures influenced how students went about their work in the classroom. This thesis closes by noting the limitation of the study,

particularly with scope and institutional context, and calls for a critical framework for assignment design, accounting for the co-constructive nature of agency.

DEDICATION

To my hilarious, quirky, and brilliant parents—Colleen and Ed. Your support through not only this thesis, but also this MA degree has meant the world to me. Thanks for teaching me to work extremely hard, laugh, and, probably most of all, to take the work seriously, but not myself too seriously. I love you both.

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CHAPTER ONE:

ASSIGNMENT PROMPTS AND STUDENT AGENCY IN FIRST-YEAR WRITING

"I'm handing out the next homework assignment," Ana Jenkins¹ said, as she passed out Assignment #9. "Please take the next few minutes to read and annotate it." Looking down at the page, most of the class wrote notes, questions, and ideas about their next writing task that would, like clockwork, be due early Sunday evening.

Though it was early in the semester and even earlier in the morning, Ana's class was more talkative than usual. In the ten minutes she gave her class to read the assignment, I noticed Sam reach across the table to tap Kylie. "What's that," she said, pointing to the page. Kylie shrugged.

Minutes later, at the table adjacent to mine, Jaime slammed her left hand down, and said, "this is so frustrating!"

Gradually, the noise in the class hushed out to silence, as everyone completed the task at hand. Interrupting the silence, Ana then asked, "what questions do we have?"

Calvin answered, "why does the PAR keep showing up?" referencing the semester-end evaluation criteria cited in Assignment #9.

"That's a good question," she replied. "Why are mentions to the PAR showing up on assignment prompts?" throwing the question out for the class to answer. As would become the norm in Ana's class, her questions solicited more questions from her students—questions seemed to bounce, and perhaps even tread, back and forth between Ana and her class.

It was the second week of the fall semester, and Ana's students were coming to understand how the class would work and what they would be expected to do. They were learning that Ana's class, similar to other English 101 classes at Icetown U., would involve reading and annotating

¹ All names of places and people are pseudonyms to protect participants' identities.

assignments, asking questions based on the assignments, and completing in-class reading and writing activities. As Elizabeth jokingly told me in an interview a few weeks later, “I go in. We ask questions. We don’t get answers” (Interview #1 with Elizabeth).

The scene sketched above illustrates the nuanced and complex sets of coordinated activities at play in Ana's class at any given moment. Such coordination involved the negotiation of various materials, texts, bodies, perceptions, and literate histories. As Doug Downs (2013) notes, first-year writing (FYW) is "a space, a moment, and an experience" (p. 50), often unevenly awarding entrance to the discourses of higher education (see Bartholomae 1982, 1985, 1993; Lu 1991). It's precisely because of FYW's liminality that research in the writing classroom is so important to study, theorize, and advocate for.² Since the social turn in composition studies, however, discussions around classroom life have focused specifically on the nuanced ideological complexities of reading and writing practices. As Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton (2002) trace, the social turn reacted to claims of the “Great Divide” and the “autonomous model” of literacy, which positioned reading and

² As such, first-year writing has often been considered the central activity in the fields of composition and rhetoric and Writing Studies. Since the nativity of *Conference on College Composition* and its affiliate journal *College Composition and Communication*, the field has focused on the teaching of college writing as its disciplinary core. As John Gerber (1950) mentions in the inaugural publication of *CCC*, “nine-thousand of us teaching college courses in composition” and we are “faced with many of the same problems” (p. 12). *CCCC* and *CCC* laid claim to the first-year composition classroom and, in doing so, advanced a unified field and discipline that, as Gerber says, attempted “exchange views and information quickly” (p. 12).

writing as “decontextualized” (p. 337). The social practice paradigm, they note, situates reading and writing as “highly contextualized, interwoven into local ways of life, sustained by talk, various in form and consequences, and sensitive to ideological complexities of time and place” (p. 338). The ideological complexities that Brandt & Clinton indicate here establish literate activity (and history) as webbed to the individual and also to institutional values, views, and assumptions. Taking this conceptualization towards first-year writing, we often witness an ideological and potentially an epistemological struggle when individuals come into a space that hails a particular (and sometimes foreign) ideology.

While implications of the social turn are certainly present in the scene above, it above tells a nuanced story: one about students, one about perception and interpretation, and one about classroom life. We see students communicating with each other (Kylie and Sam) and their teacher (Ana), asking questions (Calvin), and expressing frustrations (Jaime). But, in the context of this scene, these actions and interactions might be perceived discretely, linked perhaps only chronotopically, in time and space. Kylie and Sam's interaction, an outsider might observe, shouldn't have any, or at least enough, influence on other actors in the room like Calvin or Jaime. But, the social turn in composition studies would encourage us view this classroom, and all others, as ecological (Cooper 1984; Dorbin, 2001), where processes and interactions are linked to other processes in the classroom, undeniably influencing, affecting, and affecting other interactions in the space while also being influenced, effected, and affected by those other interactions. In this spirit, Margret Syverson's *The Wealth of Reality* (1999), explicates the co-evolution of individuals and their actions within “our environments, which include other people as well as social and *physical structures and processes*. Although composed of many individuals acting independently, the dynamics of processes occurring in these ecosocial environments is irreducible to discrete individuals” (p. xiv-xv, emphasis added). The co-evolutionary model is “inherently dynamic” (Cooper 1984, p. 368)

performed through “dynamic interlocking systems” (Cooper 1984, p. 368), including both the social and physical attributes and affordances featured through these systems. Following Syverson’s delineation, such an ecological view might point to the *physical* texts that circulate in Ana’s classroom—namely the Assignment #9 prompt. Keeping with the eco-metaphors featured in the social turn in composition studies, assignments, particularly as illustrated in the above scene, might be likened to the energy source of the classroom ecology. As an impetus for classroom action and interaction, assignments radiate through the classroom, soliciting, intentionally or not, a wide range of interpretations (e.g., Calvin’s question), individual responses (e.g., Jamie’s visceral reply), interactions (Sam and Kylie aside), and activities (e.g., reading and annotating that class collectively takes part in). If only for this reason, assignment prompts warrant further investigation in rhetoric and composition. What’s more, because assignments radiate a variety of thoughts and feelings, an investigation of the social and political dimensions of assignment prompts might enable the field to theorize the uses of assignment prompts that attend to their social potentialities.

In this vein, this thesis attempts to explore how assignment prompts contribute to student agency in the writing classroom. As I mentioned briefly above, an assignment does more than issue a work order. Instead, it invariably produces various responses and actions—both written and verbal. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, research on and theories of assignment design in composition studies tend not to attend to the intersection between assignments and agency. The study reported here addresses this gap in research on assignment design to account for agency in explicit ways. In this way, I’m interested in exploring the ways assignment prompts, might foster or hinder student agency³ in the first-year classroom. As David Bartholomae (1985) and Min-zhan Lu and Bruce

³ By student agency, I mean the degree to which students can negotiate the social world without restriction. See chapter two for a more detailed delineation of “agency.”

Horner (2013) among others have shown, student agency is an essential goal in the first-year classroom since part of our jobs in the writing classroom is to enable students to see themselves as members of the university.

During the fall 2017 semester, I conducted observations of Ana's ENG 101 class. During class meetings, I took field notes in addition to audio and video recordings of class meetings. I also conducted individual student interviews throughout the term. Then, I transcribed my notes, interviews, and video-audio data, and then analyzed observations, interviews, student writing, and assignment prompts through a grounded theory coding process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006), starting with open-coding, moving to focused-coding, and eventually moving to recurrent themes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Findings reveal that assignment prompts are central texts in Ana's classroom, along with the semester-end evaluation and the course syllabus. More than this, however, each of these documents was points where Ana and her class would work together to construct the reality of these documents and also the boundaries of classroom activity itself, influencing how students would go about their work in first-year writing. However, even as official space is co-constructed, this co-construction underscores the miscommunication that inevitably occurs through this construction. Ultimately, this thesis calls for a critical framework for assignment design that acknowledges the nature of co-construction and the possibility for agency in the writing class. I use "critical" here to mean that teachers of writing and writing program administrators should develop understandings of assignment prompts that consider how students perceive and act in relation to them and also that the communication between student and prompt is always miscommunication.

To establish the context for the study, this chapter offers a review of literature that situates historical discussions around assignment design oriented around contact zone scholarship. I draw on contemporary discussions of the teaching of writing and research on assignment design, along with

discussions on contact zones. Ultimately, I indicate a gap in the literature that assignment design scholarship has not attended to the concept of student agency adequately.

A Historical Look at Assignment Design

In her 1986 *Journal of Basic Writing* article, Andrea Lunsford indicates that our understanding of how to craft a practical writing assignment has garnered "no more consensus over parts of this vexing question than our nineteenth-century ancestors" (p. 88). Lunsford situates her article by citing nineteenth-century composition teachers, including Alexander Bain, William Aytoun, and Adam Sherman Hill. As she reports, Bain ridiculed the "futile exercises" of theme writing. He was the exception since his contemporaries were not interested in crafting effective writing assignments. Hill's *The Foundation of Rhetoric* (1892), for instance, makes no mention of the design of effective assignments. Lunsford, writing a little less than a century after these late nineteenth-century teacher-scholars, positions composition as not developing coherent understandings for "effective" writing assignments, particularly for basic writers. Lunsford references Lorriane Higgins-Hahey's unpublished essay about students interpreting core writing assignments at Carnegie-Mellon. Higgins-Hahey indicates that assignments are interpreted by students and that problems of assignment interpretation are core problems in the writing of papers. Richard Larson's 1967 essay "Teaching Before We Judge: Planning Assignments in Composition" calls our attention to the pedagogical purposes of assignment writing. As Larson says, it is "to help the student think a little more incisively, reason a little more sound, and write a little more effectively" (pp. 94-95). Lunsford provides an executive summary for designing effective assignments that Larson advocates for, including, "consider[ing] what the student will need to know in order to do well," "determin[ing] your standards of evaluation," and "ask[ing] students to revise" (p. 95). Through Lunsford's words, Larson interestingly places the assignment as a mode of learning and development, which would be taken up by various teacher-scholars in the coming years (Jordan 1963; Jenkins, 1980; Lunsford,

1979). The point Lunsford advances here, however, is that there has been a wavering sense of how to compose an effective writing assignment. She notes that the field hasn't spent consistent attention to the activity that, for many of us, is at the very core of our classrooms. She provides six suggestions (pp. 96- 97) including collaborative learning through a sequencing writing tasks, encouraging risks and meaning-making in ways that writers can "learn to see themselves as writers, as part of the academy. To do so, they must become authors, to gain authority over their writing" (p. 97, emphasis in original).

Lunsford's gesture to articulate a set of principles about assignment design attempts to provide answers, or at the very least, directions to answer to "the vexing question" she opens her article addressing. This question, however, is one the field has engaged pretty consistently with since the eighties. Lunsford's *JBW* article is situated historically at a point where the number of composition PhDs was increasing for the first time, and the field was still responding to several essays that would go on to shape its identity in the decades to come, including Carolyn Miller's "Genre as Social Action" (1984) and David Bartholomae's "Inventing the University" (1985). The field was, in other words, coming to terms of what it knew about its students, its place in the university, and its disciplinary knowledge. Composition studies we, in this way, rethinking what it meant to teach writing because what writing "was" started to be fundamentally problematized by emerging theories of genre, new rhetorics, and the societal function of composition.

The edited collection *Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition* (1980), edited by Timothy Donovan and Ben McClelland, explores the paradigm shift in composition "from analyzing surface features of composition to demythologizing the composing (or writing) process itself" (p. x). To demythologize the assumption between grammatical correctness and "good writing," *Eight Approaches* calls for "a more realistic conception of writing" (p. xi). Following in the footsteps of several progenitors of modern composition studies including Janet Emig (1971), Charles Cooper &

Lee Odell (1978), Donald Murray (1968), and James Britton (1975), the collection calls for “a more fluid model, composition as a creative art, rhetorical versatility, and language development” (p. x) that is “sound in theory and... succeeds in practice” (p. xi).

In other words, what becomes evident in the eighties, which I’ve begun to touch on here, is the paradigm shift in composition from error to episteme. Kenneth Dowst’s chapter in *Eight Approaches*, “The Epistemic Approach: Writing, Knowing, and Learning” illustrates the paradigm shift to social-epistemic rhetoric in the early eighties, with a specific focus on the first-year classroom. Dowst positions learning as a central activity in the writing class and, in doing so, proposes an epistemic approach to the teaching of writing. He cites Richard Ohmann’s (1964) description of why, still after English composition, Johnny can’t write. “The trouble with composition courses,” Ohmann starts, “is less often in the substance of what is taught than in the intellectual framework provided for that substance, and in the motivation offered for mastering it” (qtd. in Dowst, pp. 73-74). This sentiment here reflects an understanding that, possibly, it’s not necessarily *what* teachers of writing teach (that is, writing), but might be *how* teachers go about this work and how they earn student buy-in, which inhibits student “learning.” It is, in other words, a question of praxis. He positions his approach against formalistic, referential, expressive, and rhetorical modes of writing instruction to situate an epistemic framework for teaching writing predicated on the belief that when people write, they make sense of their self and their world. Instead of viewing language as primarily a representational system, the epistemic approach conceives “language [as] com[ing] between the writer’s self and objective reality, modifying the former as it gives shape to the latter” (p. 67). Writers use language to manipulate those re-constructed realities and “represent the world to” themselves. Such a writing class, suggests Dowst, is recursive and recurrent, where students engage in frequent writing and teacher-feedback to generate new understandings about existing in the intricate, messy social world.

Dowst points out that assignments are central heuristics in the writing class. In exploring the socio-pedagogical implication for writing assignments, he writes,

a writing assignment is not just a work order. It does not order students to produce a composition for the purpose of demonstrating what they have manage to learn about writing. It is designed not to test but to teach... if language shapes what we know, and if writing is the most considered and manipulable form of language-using, then a well-constructed writing assignment can lead to new knowledge in a very direct way.

It can be a heuristic device of impressive power (pp. 74-75).

Dowst's contention that students ought to learn in a writing class seems to converge with Lunsford's take up of Larson's 1967 piece to illustrate that learning in the writing classroom should be a central. However, Dowst certainly diverts from Larson's understanding what "learning" ought to mean. By invoking the social epistemic tradition, "learning," for Dowst, means to position the self in the world and is not concerned so much with the mythological "good writing." Aligning with the pedagogy of Jerome Bruner and the educational philosophy of John Dewey, he describes an assignment model that is recursive and illustrates "language to connect one datum with another" (p. 75). Dowst also borrows from William Coles' *The Plural I* (1978) in describing an assignment sequence, a, as Dowst puts it, the progression of writing tasks from "relative simplicity to relative complexity of thought and expression" (p. 78). "Later assignments," he goes on to say, "introduce new data, new questions, new perspectives. At increasingly sophisticated levels the students' expand their ideas, refine them, and make new connections between one idea or experience and another." (p. 78). It's through an iterative assignment sequence, where what students know is refined and developed that teachers can demonstrate to students that "writing [has] a real connection to their knowledge, their freedom, and their selves" (p. 85).

Two years later, David Bartholomae's (1982) keynote address at the Delaware Valley Writer's Conference amplified and deepened Dowst's vision of social-epistemic rhetoric, with specific focus on assignment design. In "Writing Assignments: Where Writing Begins," Bartholomae advocates for the use of an assignment sequence. As he writes, "If assignments invite students to enter into a discourse which is not their own, and if their representations will only approximate that discourse, then assignments must lead students through successive approximations" (p. 36). Bartholomae explains that first-year writing is an entrance to access and social progress. Perhaps due to his work and advocacy for basic writers (see Bartholomae, 1994), Bartholomae amplifies Dowst's motivation for an assignment sequence, locating first-year composition as a liminal space where student's identities are stabilized (or, perhaps, destabilized). Bartholomae's assignment sequence moves beyond Dowst's anti-product model motivation for the assignment sequence, where students learn how to write and exist in the complex social world. Instead, as Bartholomae would have it, students do not write, but are rather written, "composed by systems he did not invent, and he cannot escape" (p. 185). The assignment sequence becomes not so much as a semi rhetorical process (as Dowst says) for learning and being, but, instead, a way to survive these systems. Bartholomae's advice in all this is for students to "approximate the conventional methods of" an academic discipline as a way to "begin to learn what a subject is—how it is constituted, how it is defended, how it finds its examples and champions, how it changes and preserves itself" (p. 38). To survive in systems that we did not create and cannot escape, our students ought to write in approximations to disciplines as a way of seeing the world in that discipline. Assignment design, he says, positions learning as a way to socially construct knowledge in the discipline. By placing stake in teaching the assignment sequence, he hopes to persuade teachers of writing that teaching writing is much more than learning to write. Instead, how we teach involves questions of how we enable students to see themselves—as agents, as scholars, and as humans.

Collectively, Dowst's social epistemic approach, Bartholomae's notion of an assignment sequence, and Lunsford's survey of problems embedded in basic writing assignment design reveal, perhaps more than anything else, how "effective" assignment design is often filtered through beliefs of what writing ought to do. The 1980s saw a paradigm shift in the teaching of writing: *from* viewing good writing as correct writing *to* the social approaches to writing as a meaningful knowledge-making activity. Such a paradigm shift underscores the movement from "testing" writing to considering writing as a way for students to write themselves into existence in the space of university culture. More than this, however, we see the assignment sequence as a pedagogical tool that facilitates the entry into academe, since, as Bartholomae puts it, students don't move linearly from one level mastery to another. Even so, the impulse for an assignment sequence, at this particular historical moment, was liberating for students. The move from theme writing to an assignment sequence was rationalized as a mechanism for student agency—that is, the understanding that students, too, are decision-making humans capable of creating knowledge, with their own complicated histories that inform their present interactions. Even if these scholars didn't call it such, the assignment sequence was constructed as a device of student agency, as a way to legitimize student's existence in the culture of academe.

Students' Rights, Critical Pedagogy and Contact Zones

Interestingly, the assignment sequence, as a tool for effective writing instruction, was popularized in the late-twentieth century—just as *CCCC* signaled its movement to a more democratic and just center for student learning. Perhaps, the agentic bend on the rationale for an assignment sequence responded to, at least implicitly, the period of open admission and the publication of *Students' Right to Their Own Language* during the 1970s. By situating *Student's Right* in conversation with critical pedagogies of Ira Shor and Paulo Freire, I hope to illustrate the emerging values in the field of composition that advances social justice and social mobility through a college

education. I suggest, through this historical work, that discussions of crafting effective assignments during the 1980s were, in large part, a response to activist work in the 1970s. Only a few years after City University of New York (CUNY) declared its campuses one of open admission, the *Students' Right* published in CCC. The position affirms “students’ right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their identity and style” (CCCC, 1974). In her *College Composition and Communication* article, Geneva Smitherman (1999) emphasized the *kairotic* currents bringing about *Students' Right*—being spearheaded by the Black Liberation Movement and contemporary discussions that “bi-dialecticism” did more harm than good, particularly for marginalized language users. “CCC was not merely being trendy,” writes Smitherman, “nor politically correct, in passing the *Students' Right* resolution” (p. 359). Instead, this was CCC's way of responding to the crisis sweeping across American academia, “caused by cultural and linguistic mismatch between higher education and the traditional (by virtue of color and class) students who were making an imprint upon the academic landscape for the first time in history” (p. 359). Contemporary language scholars (Canagarajah, 2006; Young, 2009; Baker-Bell, 2013) have extended the legacy promised by this 1974 resolution by theorizing and translating language diversity theories into praxis. At its very core, *Students' Right to Their Own Language*, and the work of subsequent language activist-scholars sought to reaffirm the promise of linguistic justice for students whose linguistic varieties diverted from Standard Written English, enabling marginalized groups to see themselves as contributing agents in the university and American culture more generally.

The articulation of *Students' Right* underscores a popular position for teacher-scholars to consider the composition classroom as a site for social justice. Several pedagogical models, including Mina Shaughnessy's and Ira Shor's, operate within social-epistemic models of writing instruction. The CUNY system's decision to increase minority enrollment parallels the rationale outlined by Smitherman. In *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* (1980), Shor explains, “Open Admissions emerged

as a progressive policy needed by both the state and the protestors. From the officials' point of view, non-white poverty could be blamed on lack of education, instead of on a racist social system" (p. xvi). Shor's delineation foregrounds political motivations (or maybe even political forfeits) surrounding the implementation of an Open Admission system. Following suit, his pedagogy, developed from the theory-activism of Paulo Freire, positions the classroom as a democratic space where students practice "freedom through the study of oppression" (p. 95). The development of a critical pedagogy "is a democratic model of social relations, used to problematize the undemocratic quality of social life" (p. 95). Similarly, in his analysis of Shor, James Berlin (1988) explains that social-epistemic rhetoric

attempts to place the question of ideology at the center of the teaching of writing... offer[ing] ... a detailed analysis of dehumanizing social experience and a self-critical and overtly historicized alternative based on democratic practices in the economic, social, political, and cultural spheres." (p. 492)

Social-epistemic instructional models developed by Shor brought student attention to how power and control have been systematically denied to them. For Shor, it's through recognition of this false consciousness that students can begin to engage in democratic discourse. In this way, the educational landscape was advocating for change in the 1970s, and, as a by-product, composition, too, was responding.

Social-epistemic rhetoric and *Students' Right to Their Own Language* converge, I think, at the concept of social justice in writing instruction, fostering student agency as a central component to our classes. The processes, practices, and pedagogies that propel this kind of social justice point to a bricolage of socio-political forces present in civic life in the 1960s and 1970s. A by-product of this historical moment, situated, again, in the kairotic period of Open Admissions at CUNY, is Mina Shaughnessy's basic writing pedagogy. Basic writing sought to respond to the influx of

underprepared college students that Open Admissions ushered into university life. As Bill Bolin (1996) observes, “The tenor of Shaughnessy’s [1974] essay is sympathetic to the students who, through open admissions, have been given an opportunity to experience higher education” (p. 26). In experiencing higher education, as Min-zhan Lu (1991) indicates in her critique of *Errors and Expectations*, Shaughnessy’s pedagogy “articulates her dissatisfaction with and reaction to the unequal social power and prestige of diverse discourses [while demonstrating] her belief that education can and should attempt to change these prevailing unequal conditions” (p. 37). Although Lu argues that Shaughnessy’s pedagogy conceives of language as “politically innocent,” neglecting the ideologically-charged nature of language and writing, Lu, among others, admire Shaughnessy’s legacy as moving writing education toward a more socially just and equitable future.

Pratt’s idea of contact zones productively translates the theoretical work of critical pedagogy to pedagogical practice. Critical pedagogies placed the student as an active agent in her own learning and of her own language. As these pedagogical values permeated the landscape of writing instruction, “the contact zone” evolved as a lens for teacher-scholars to understand the diverse bed of perspectives prone to the composition classroom, offering a lens in thinking about power and privilege in the writing classroom. Contact zones, first cataloged by Mary Louise Pratt (1991), are “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (p. 34). Pratt’s definition positions contact zones within proximate localities, where individuals from various cultures interact with complex systems of power and privilege. Yet, these spaces, as Cynthia Fields (2015) has pointed out, “improve students’ reflection and critical consciousness” (p. 39). The analogs between Pratt’s theorization of the contact zone and Shor’s view of a critical pedagogy reveals, if nothing else, the inherent “meeting, clashing, and grappling” that occurs when students “experience freedom while examining the forces which impede” it (Shor, 1980, p. 69). Shor’s development of Freire, who has argued that literacy is a

"vehicle by which the oppressed are equipped with the necessary tools to reappropriate their history, culture, and language practices" (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 157), resonates deeply with contemporary conceptualizations of contact zones—both as a phenomena and pedagogy. Central to this view of contact zones, Pratt believed that it teaches "exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom" (1991, p. 39). These exhilarating moments, as Phyllis Dallas and Mary Marwitz (2003) have demonstrated, reflect the epistemic grappling of "a space where the culture of authority differ[s] from what [students] have been given as the truth about themselves and the world" (p. 439).

Several composition scholars, including Richard Miller (1994), Min-zhan Lu (1994), Jan Cooper (2004), and Jeffery Maxson (2005), have articulated sets of pedagogical principles for composition instructors teaching in contact zones.⁴ In critiquing the ghettoization of composition studies, Lu (1994) discusses assignments in which students "read deviations from the official codes of academic discourses not only in relation to the writer's knowledge of these codes but also in terms of her efforts negotiate and modify them" (p. 448). Lu (1994) invites her students to struggle with language and meaning-making, which, as she says, illuminates how "the unequal sociopolitical power of diverse discourses exerts real pressures on students' stylistic choices" (p. 457). Richard Miller (1994) affirms that the central goal of a contact zone classroom is to investigate "the range of literate practices available to those within asymmetrical power relations" (p. 399). Miller explores "Queers, Bums, and Magic," a student text that floated from conference to conference in the early

⁴ Arguably, each English studies classroom (e.g., composition, literature, critical theory, and creative writing classes) might be best conceived as a contact zone. This would reflect "grappling" between challenging ideas and not just the "clashing" of diverse bodies. See Bizzell (1994) and Munn (1995) for their examination of English and English studies as a contact zone.

90s because of its unsettling subject matter. Composed in a pre-college level writing class at a community college, the student text, which responded to an observational assignment printed in the *Bedford Guide to Writing*, illustrates the narrator approaching a homeless man on the street, telling him that he was doing a survey and needed to know if he was a "fag," and then, in a frenzy, beat the man almost to death. Miller points our attention to the different ways in which this "gay-bashing" paper was evaluated—some said look at the qualities of the essay and some said to use the text as a way to talk about hate speech. Though he gives no advice about the irresolvable question that "Queers, Bums, and Magic" presents, Miller does suggest that a contact zone pedagogy is an effective way for students to explore differences that define and limit experience, as long as teachers "resist[] the temptation either to silence or to celebrate the voices that seek to oppose critique and/or parody the work of constructing knowledge in the classroom" (407). Similarly, Jeffery Maxson (2005) reifies Miller's call and challenges the assumption that "teaching on current social issues will eventually bring students around to their instructor's point of view." He "hold[s] out the promise that in the contact zone, a teacher is just as likely to be moved and changed as the student" (p. 24).

Taken together, the work outlined by these teacher-scholars reveals the range of literate actions and interactions that are bound to sites of cultural, linguistic, and epistemic difference. As a pedagogical art, contact zones are dangerous: no one is safe, and no one is excluded. However, contact zone pedagogy invites an investigation of power and privilege to theorize how students might, through grappling with linguistic and cultural difference, wander through "exhilarating moments" of epistemological development. And, it's through wandering through these moments, that an agency is enacted and positioned to be enacted. In other words, contact zones allow our students to experience stories of others but also claim their own stories to recognize the compendium of difference that the civic world continuously produces.

Contemporary Discussions of Assignment Design

Student agency presented in contact zones might be said to be represented, as I'm suggesting in this chapter, in a residual form from the activism of the 1970s. The teacher-activism of the 70s, I'd suggest, informed, even if tacitly, the paradigm shift in composition during the 1980s to the assignment sequence, particularly regarding rationalizing the student as a learner in the social-epistemic conception of writing and the teaching of writing. Student agency as a central component of the writing classroom seems to be featured heavily in contact zone pedagogies in the 1990s. The link that seems to be missing, however, is how these theoretical and pedagogical views of agency in contact zones and critical pedagogy are working in contemporary discussions of assignment design. Contemporary discussions around assignment design tend to neglect student agency as a central component of the teaching of writing. This is, I'd say, partly due to the theoretical frameworks that situate assignments as parts of complex social actions and bound to complicated networks of activity. Two books, both published in 2011, help illustrate the gap in agency in assignment design. Aligning with genre theory, Mary Soliday's book *Everyday Genres* (2011), contends that assignment prompts are part of everyday social practice and are made/constructed/constituted interactively between readers and writers. "Because a prompt embodies a social practice," she notes, "we would not *give* assignments as much as we would try to *enact* them in our classes." Across the disciplines, in other words, we ought to redirect our attention to the social nature of writing and lead students to understand that writing in genres is a social action that is all genres are residues of social action. Similarly, Jody Shipka's *Towards a Composition Made Whole* (2011) calls for writing researchers and teachers to develop "more comprehensive maps of literate activity" (131) that illustrates the "ways that semiotic performances are re-presented or re-mediated through the combination and transformation of available resources" (p. 131). Shipka recommends we do some re-conceptualizing of words like "writing," "reading," and "composing," so our students can benefit from a wider-

range of composing practices. What underpins both Shipka and Soliday's contributions back in 2011, is the view that what we do in the writing classroom is what Wendy Bishop (2002) calls the "backbone of program work: essay writing as usual" (p. 206). Both books attempt to broaden our understanding of "writing" and the possibility that writing assignments have and can have outside the walls of the classroom.

Considerations of activity theory (Shipka, 2011) and genre theory (Soliday, 2011) in assignment design focus on transferability—mobilizing writing knowledge from first-year writing to other professional and civic writing contexts. The rise of Writing In the Disciplines (WID) and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) across American academe has brought about several assignment databases and banks that focus on writing and transfer. Notably, the interdisciplinary journal *Prompt* publishes academic writing assignments for a large range of readers across the disciplines. As the editors, Susanne Hall and Jonathan Dueck (2017), note in their introduction to their inaugural issue, “prompts” go by many names in different fields, but the word “prompt” embodies a tension between “assisting someone” and “inciting them to action” (p. 4). Such a bounded tension of the word "prompt" reveals the complex social action that assignments inevitably contribute. As Hall & Dueck suggest, when we assign essays, portfolios, and lab reports, we (maybe without ever really be conscious of it) perform a duality as pedagogues: we offer a starting spot and, as they put it, "*throw* students forward, asking them to grapple with new ideas, methods, and materials” (p. 4). When considered in dialogue with *Everyday Genres* and *Toward a Composition Made Whole*, it appears that Hall & Dueck's introduction calls for writing assignments that are "effective," "innovative," and of high "quality" across the disciplines. These words are revealing, I think, especially as we consider who these words are in service for and why. From a cursory view, it seems that such descriptors characterize "effective" writing assignments as soliciting the production of "good writing"—a dangerous construct, as we know, because of its construction, mything, and

reifying. But, whether we want to admit it or not, “we” (individually or institutionally) want/desire/need/would like “good writing.”

The implicit goal it seems here is to have an “effective” writing assignment produce good student writing. As an illustrative example, Traci Gardener’s (2008) book *Designing Writing Assignments* opens its first chapter with the following statement: “I know that good writing assignments result in good writing. I’ve seen the ways that writers-me, my colleagues, my classmates, the students whom I’ve taught-write stronger, more sophisticated papers when they are asked to respond to well-developed writing assignments” (p. 1). While, of course, there is nothing wrong with the idea of getting better writing, what assignment design scholarship contributes is a way to improve writing, while considering how students might transfer and learn from these experiences. What’s more, student writing that does this and makes this work meaningful for our students in, says, transferring skills from the classroom to new domains makes assignments “effective,” if not inspired or innovated.

The point here is this: Words such as “effective,” “innovative,” and “quality,” I’d say, reflect research frames that operate around the researcher’s positionality as teacher who, either implicitly or explicitly, want/desire/need/would like “good,” or at the very least, better writing. All this is to say, contemporary research about assignment design appears to be tailored for teachers of writing with the intention to produce “good” quality writing and has precluded voices of students and notions of agency.

Research Question

What this illustrates, I think, is how assignment design and agency hasn’t been consistently examined in recent years. Though we still certainly see specters from the 70s and 80s, the field really has not developed understandings of assignment writing that attend to the social, political, and ideological nature assignments directly. Specifically, studies have neglected the relationship between

agency and assignments. This thesis therefore addresses this gap and ultimately calls for a critical framework for assignment design that places the possibility of agency as a central component to crafting "effective" assignments. To address this gap, I ask:

1. In what ways do assignments used in Ana's English 101 classroom shape how students act and perceive themselves able to act in the writing classroom?

To frame this research, chapter two serves as a theoretical framework, where I pull from different conceptualizations of power, agency, and the social world, including theories in sociology (Robert Merton and Harold Garfinkel), phenomenology (Alfred Schutz), new materialism (Micciche) and writing studies (James Paul Gee, Deborah Brandt, and Charles Bazerman). I explore how social order becomes created, how agency is enacted, and the intersubjective nature of self.

In chapter three, I outline the methods I used in addressing the research questions for this study. In drawing on ethnography and grounded theory, I develop a set of methods that emphasizes abductive logic-in-use and attempts to represent reality in the classroom through the eyes of my participants. In this chapter, I also overview my use of an iterative field guide, interviews, and audio and visual recording. I also explain my coding process and give examples of how I developed my category of boundariness.

In chapter four, I present the findings from the data collected. I present my grounded theory of boundariness that explains that individuals in the classroom co-construct the space of authorized classroom action in relation to assignment prompts and the end-of-semester evaluation criteria. I give examples of the theory of boundariness.

Chapter five provides a discussion of the results detailed in chapter four. I situate my findings within the larger trends in writing and rhetoric, including antiracist writing assessment. I locate limitations of the study and point to the pedagogical and administrative implications for this study.

CHAPTER TWO: INTERSUBJECTIVITY, SOCIAL ORDER, AND AGENCY: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To discover or to learn, the student must, by writing, become like us—English teachers, adults, intellectuals, academics. He must become someone he is not. He must know what we know, talk like we talk, he must locate himself convincingly in a language that is not his own. He must invent the university when he sits down to write.

— David Bartholomae, “Where Writing Begins”

As David Bartholomae (1982) expresses above, first-year writing is a dangerous place. In first-year writing, writers come to understand what it means to exist in the messy, politicized social world and contribute to this existence through writing. As Bartholomae points out, students enter and invent the university when they write in their writing classes. Through writing, our students hail the institutional ideology of academe, and, in doing so, write their way into existence. In this way, first-year writing might, as M. M. Bakhtin (1981) theorizes, serve as a site of “ideological becoming,” or, as he explains it, “the process of selectively assimilating the words of others” (p. 341). By interpolating a language ideology such as Standard Written English—a code, as A. Suresh Canagarajah (2006) writes, that is “not native to any community” (p. 595)—students, are *determined* by “the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behavior” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342). Academic writing gives us, to borrow from the linguist James Paul Gee (1989), a set of Discourses, “ways of being in the world... forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities” (pp. 6-7). When we hail the Discourse of academic writing, a code that is indigenous to no one, we become someone quite different: who we are, how we act, and how we speak, for better or for worse, have been altered. In less abstract terms, the first-year composition classroom is a site of becoming. In FYW, students must hail a Discourse that is not their own. How we act, identify ourselves, and perceive the world is tightly connected to the

discursive constraints and affordances of these, sometimes multiple, spaces. We become because we participate—whether we want to or not. But, through these Discourses (and the ideological becomings of these Discourses), we might actually transform into something new, something inward, something vague.

The theoretical meditation that opens this chapter is my attempt to briefly sketch the complexities of the first-year writing classroom within more expansive, more abstract and philosophical questions about selfhood, becoming, and existing. Notably, teachers of writing are tasked with the enormous, and sometimes somewhat unsettling, errand of teaching writing, which is inextricably linked to agency, identity, and ideology. These broader questions about the self, existence, agency, and ideology while present in every writing, rhetoric, and literacy classroom are paramount to my research question involving how first-year writers come to understand and act in relation to the demands of their assignment prompts. This theoretical framework attempts to map the complex social institution of the writing classroom by drawing on a transdisciplinary framework from writing studies, sociology, and critical theory. My purpose is to outline that the world is perceived by individuals intersubjectively, social order is continuously recreated, agency is unstable and that the writing classroom exists within the social world, and as such is bound to questions of authority, power, and ideology. I hope to articulate several explicit assumptions about the social world, ideology, selfhood, and agency.

The World, Perceived: A Phenomenological View of Reality

The first assumption that this thesis operates under is that reality is not a constant, objective presentation of the real. Instead, reality is continually constructed and reconstructed through social interaction. To develop this assumption, I draw on the sociology of Robert Merton, the social philosophy of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz, and the theories of writing by Charles Bazerman.

Reality as a Social Construction

In *The Social Construction of Reality*, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) propose that reality, "a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition" (1), is socially constructed. "Reality" is considered as the taken for granted of the everyday day social interaction; similarly, knowledge, "the certainty that phenomena are real," is "developed, transmitted, and maintained in social situations" (p. 1). In this case, knowledge does not signify "information" but "understanding." Understandings via knowledge are often congealed to social spaces and inform how social action be completed within these spaces. Knowledge, then, guides the participation in everyday life and, thus, steers our subjective sense of reality. As Berger and Luckmann point out, the tight connection between reality and knowledge are more philosophical and less important to the common everyday person, but, as they argue, reality is concretized through subjective perceptions of the world. We *perceive* reality as ordered through our consciousness. They write, "[Reality's] phenomena are pre-arranged in patterns that seem to be independent of my apprehension of them and that impose themselves upon the later" (21). It's through understanding and participating in these patterns that give us, as subjective beings, the perception that the social world is ordered coherently. Furthermore, reality is temporally-situated, as "I experience everyday life in terms of differing degrees of closeness and remoteness" (22).

Reality is a social construction in that it involves an invisible, imaginary construct of what is real. The construction of reality of everyday life affects "common sense" knowledge, which, to borrow from the sociological tradition, include social facts. Charles Bazerman (2013) explains social facts "are those things people believe to be true, and therefore bear on how they define a situation and act within it" (156). Taken with Berger and Luckmann, Bazerman's definition of social facts helps guide how we act in specific social contexts. For Berger and Luckmann, such things as intersubjectivity (i.e., we are subjective being interacting with other subjective beings) and interactional proximity

(i.e., we interact with other human and non-human bodies) are actions which construct the sense of reality.

Particularly for a project involving individual perceptions, Berger and Luckmann's concept that reality is socially constructed illuminates how individuals and their interactions are a guiding force for the construction and perception of reality. We can take the first-year composition classroom as a "reality" that is constructed through the "common-sense knowledge," involving perception, proximities, and social facts, by different subjective beings. Students who engage in the classroom are participating in, interacting, and perceiving "patterns" fueled by their own intersubjective and proximate perceptions of these patterns.

Intersubjective Life, Being-with-others, and Social Typification

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann give us a way to understand that reality is constructed through intersubjective interpretations of the everyday. Such interpretations are guided through "common sense" knowledge, such as social facts. These machinations are mostly invisible to actors since they take their what they know and what is real for granted. In developing their framework, they draw on Alfred Schutz's phenomenology; the world is constructed through a shared stock of typifications. Schutz (1967) considers the social world as never not perceived, experienced, and interpreted: "Once the existence of the Thou is assumed, we have already entered the realm of intersubjectivity. The world is now *experienced* by the individuals as shared by his fellow creatures, in short, as a *social world*." (p. 139). In consciously recognizing that bodies separate from "me" exist, the "I" (the that is me) enters into the "intersubjective realm" with the Thou, "shar[ing with] his fellow creatures" (p. 139). From this Schutzian standpoint, intersubjectivity can be thought of how the world and reality is received and experienced through the eyes of an individual in relation to other individuals.

Schutz, further, makes the case of “understanding” others’ within the spaces that we inhabit and live in. He writes,

Your body, for instance, is spatial not merely in the sense of being a physical object or even a physiological one, but in the sense of being a psychophysical object, that is, a field for the expression of your subjective experiences. And, following the general thesis of the other self, I not only consciously experience you, but I live with you and grow old with you. I can attend to your stream of consciousness, just as I can attend to my own, and I can, therefore, become aware of what is going on in your mind. In the living intentionality of this experience, I understand you without necessarily paying any attention to the acts of understanding themselves. This is because, since I live in the same world as you, I live *in* the acts of understanding you. You and your subjective experiences are not only ‘accessible’ to me, that is, open to interpretation, but are taken for granted by me together with your existence and personal characteristics (p. 140).

Schutz, here, describes his understanding of the social world as both phenomenological and epistemic, both bound to one another. Individuals move through the social world consistently in contact with other psychophysical objects, and, through this contact, individuals experience the actions, words, and movements between those objects with the self. Which are then interpreted to be understood. Yet, through this act of interpreting the actions of others, individuals are, for the most part, unaware of the epistemic process for “understanding” or gaining “access” to their reality-making. To “become aware of what is going on in your mind,” the individual, interpreting the actions of the Thou, calls on her own self-consciousness to understand the other’s “stream of consciousness.” It’s through this thought-processes that individuals construct their notions of reality and consider that other conscious bodies are a part of their world. Schutz refers to this idea of

“other-orientation”: “It postulates that a Thou lives, endures, and has consciously lived experiences; just which experience these are and what implications they have remains undetermined” (p. 146).

Thus, the social world, as Schutz takes it here, is consistently negotiating perceptions of the individual as interacting in complex social networks. As experienced by the conscious “I,” the social world is “indirectly experienced by me in fragments as I live from moment to moment” (p. 142).

Although perceived as coherent reality, the lived experience is momentary-- considered through perceptions and interpretations from intersubjective bodies. Thus, this framework operationalizes Schutz’s conceptualization of the social world as entirely intersubjective; there is no objective, non-individuated rendering of reality. Only through the eyes of the “I” their subjective experiences and interpretations of other psychosocial objects is social reality concretized.

Furthermore, Bazerman (2013) develops Schutz’s *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (1967) to discuss social typification—ways sociologists and humans organize their knowledge of the social world. Bazerman explains that Schutz saw humans creating ideal types for individuals to make "sense of their social world, develop[] guidelines for their own choices and behavior, and [...] attribute meaning to their own actions and the actions of others" (p. 67). These types enable humans to organize and order experience in a way that is meaningful to them and use such types, as Bazerman points out, "to guide their own behavior and to make their behavior meaningful and intelligible to other participants" (p. 68). In other words, social typification gives humans the ability to group and thus understand their social engagements in ways that are meaningful to them.

I draw on Schutz's phenomenology alongside Berger and Luckmann's view that reality is a social construction to show the importance of thinking about reality, not in a singular, unitary sense, but conceptualizing it through the actions and interactions and perceptions of individual actors and their interactions with other actors within particular contexts. Schutz’s *Phenomenology of the Social World* shows us that the individual self is central to understanding the social world. Her perceptions

and interpretations within the social world are the only basis for her view of reality: she experiences while understanding her world, though in ways that are not explicit and apparent to her. In this way, Schutz guides us to conceptualize phenomenology—the experienced and perceived world—as linked to epistemology—the world understood. The epistemology of experiencing involves social typification that humans group their experiences in. Thus, experience is a way of understanding; knowing and experiencing are, then, difficult to separate.

Macro Social Order, Micro Social Interaction, and Literate Practices

Based on social interactions, social typifications, and degrees of interactional closeness, individuals experience and understand reality. When thought of as isolated units of sociality, these interactions neglect the larger questions of social order—the interactions between the individuals, individual interaction, and social order. In this way, the second assumption that this thesis operates under is two-part. First, drawing on Merton's sociology, I view the individuals as choice-making agents. Secondly, this framework aligns with Merton's view of social order as created and recreated in social interaction by drawing primarily on Charles Bazerman's (2013) synthesis of Robert Merton's sociology. Furthermore, I develop Merton's point that macro social order is created and recreated through micro-social interaction through scholars of writing (Gee, 1989, 2006; Brandt, 1999, 2001; Lindquist, 2015).

The Recreated Social World

Even as these views of reality are subjective, intersubjective, and oriented in proximities, reality is an individual representation and perception of social order. In *A Theory of Literate Action*, Bazerman (2013) explains that social order is not an abstract imperative but rather is enacted through individual participation: "social order does not exist in an abstract space above ... the actual sites of social relations, but rather must be constantly remade ... build on patterns, and relations played out at the concrete level of individuals and individual events" (p. 121). In this way, Bazerman

elaborates on the sociology of Robert Merton to illuminate that social order is continually created and re-created in social action and interaction. Bazerman explains Mertonian sociology nests on the premise that individuals make choices in the social world. "The social facts people perceive provide the field upon which they conceive, shape, and choose actions" (p. 108). In this way, individuals are situated in the center of social order. Following Merton's sociology, this framework conceives of the individual as choice-making agents. These choices, however, are, as Bazerman puts it, "constantly reproduced through the actions of agents, through their individual perceptions shaped by prior experience, affiliations, and choices" (p. 112). In other words, the individual makes choices based on social facts and past experiences, and through this decision-making, social order is enacted, created, and recreated.

Merton suggests that the study of social order must first emerge at the "meso-sociological" level, a middle range "by which the micro occurs with respect to macro and the macro emerges from and is realized in the micro" (p. 109). Merton (1968) describes a "guide to empirical inquiry" (p. 39) that is "intermediate to general theories of social systems which are too remote from particular classes of social behavior, organization, and change to account for what is observed and to those detailed orderly descriptions of particulars that are not generalized at all" (pp. 40). By studying the micro-social interaction, we can come to understand the macro view of social order. Merton's theory of social order gives us a helpful lens to understand social order as enacted through everyday participation in the social world.

I place Merton's understanding of social order as enacted through individual choice making in dialogue with the sociological tradition of ethnomethodology to illustrate the reconstructed nature of the everyday. In the seminal text, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967), the sociologist Harold Garfinkel explains ethnomethodology as "the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful

practices of everyday life” (p. 11). For Garfinkel, ethnomethodology works to unveil the *naturalized* phenomena that organize social life. These phenomena, ordering social life, is *naturalized*-- or perceived to be part of the natural order. This points to the phenomena as invisible to the subjects of the study. Garfinkel calls the “practical actions” that “organize artful practices of everyday life” “ongoing *accomplishments*.” Because these interactions *accomplish* action and interaction, these everyday and mundane acts give shape to the organization and meaning of social life. However mundane and invisible these *accomplished* interactions may appear for actors within a system, they are relied upon for the ongoing operation and organization of social life in a setting.

As this thesis comes to understand how individuals come to act in relation to assignment prompts, it is important to note about that macro social order is created and recreated through micro-social interaction. By examining such social interactions at the micro level, mainly as these interactions accomplish the mundane of the everyday social life, we can come to understand just how these things such as power are circulated in everyday interaction. However, in understanding that the choices individual make reconstructs social order, it is important to keep in mind that the participants and the researcher are always experiencing and making sense of this social order.

Literacy as Social Order

This thesis views the micro-interactions of social life creating and constructing the macro operations of social order. Literacy, then, becomes a helpful tool to view these interactions fueling, shaping, and changing the social world. Before the "Great Divide" in literacy studies, historians and anthropologists (Goody, 1986; Goody and Watt, 1963; Ong, 1982) viewed literacy (reading and writing) in contrast to orality (speaking). In *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World*, Walter Ong (1982) devotes an entire chapter to suggesting that “writing restructures consciousness.” However, as Julie Lindquist (2015) explains, these pre-Great Divide perspectives were difficult to sustain because literacy researchers, such as Scribner & Cole (1981) and Heath (1983), concluded

that “reading and writing were culturally situated and deeply inter-related practices, leading to a now common understanding that the effects of writing can not be named or predicated without reference to contexts of use” (p. 100). These views shift the meaning of “literacy” from a decontextualized set of “skills” and “abilities” toward a “highly context-dependent assemblage of social practices” (Lindquist, 2015, p. 100).

Furthermore, in response to David Olsen’s *Research in the Teaching of Writing* article (2006), James Paul Gee (2006) suggests

it is often better to study social practices that include both writing and speech, as well as various values, ways of thinking, believing, acting, and interacting, and using various objects, tools, and technologies (e.g., practices in courtrooms, secondary science classrooms, graffiti-writing urban street gangs, or urban tagging groups) than it is to look only at writing or speech per se. This is, in my view, the main point behind the so-called "New Literacy Studies." (p. 155)

Gee’s (2006) work alerts us to consider “literacy” as a *social practice*. In his previous work (1989), Gee explains that literacy is always multiple, linked to the Discourses that individuals accumulate throughout their lives. For Gee, Discourses “are ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes” (pp. 6-7). Gee marks a distinction between textual *discourse*, that is the discourse found in language, and socio-cultural *Discourse*, the “forms of life.” He conceives of literacy as “the mastery of or fluent control over a secondary Discourse” (p. 9). The proposal positions cultural ways of being as embedded in the social practices of every day of life.

One way to study these social practices is through everyday literate practices and events. In *Literacy in American Lives* (2001), Deborah Brandt develops this contextual perspective for literacy research further. She articulates that literacy “exists only as part of larger material systems” (p. 1). As

she argues in her well-regarded *College Composition and Communication* essay (1998), literacy "has always required permission, sanction, assistance, coercion" (p. 167). "Sponsors of Literacy" shows that literacy learning is always oriented to materials for literacy learning: books, schools, computers, tuition money. Sponsors, the agents that "enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy-and gain advantage by it in some way" (p. 166), relegate literacy often based on access. Brandt's concept of literacy sponsors illuminates that while individuals can make choices, these choices are oriented to individual accesses based on class, race, and gender. Furthermore, Brandt (2001) aligns with Gee's (1989, 2006) view that literacy is context-dependent social dependent, "sustained by larger social and cultural activity" (p. 3). She writes, "Reading and writing occur instrumentally as part of broader activities... giv[ing] reading and writing [activities] their purpose and point" (p. 3). Literate activities and events give meaning to the lives of individuals while helping to "sustain[] ... larger social and cultural activity" (Brandt, 2001, p. 3). Moreover, as Brandt points out, these practices "emphasize the grounded, routinized, multiple, and socially sanctioned ways in which reading and writing occurs" (p. 3).

In this way, literacy practices function as micro interactions sustaining cultural life, enabling literacy researchers to locate and study the "ongoing accomplishment of the concerted activities of daily life, with the ordinary, artful ways of that accomplishment being by members known, used, and taken for granted" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. vii). These very "basic" and "mundane" actions and interactions are the very core to see how the macro of social order is created and recreated in the micro of social interaction (c.f., Merton).

New Materialism, New Agency

The theoretical understandings presented in the previous sections of this chapter places the individual as a choice-making agent: she is the center of the social world and is considered a building block of social action and order. However, as Brandt (1998, 2001) illuminates, individuals can make

decisions yielding consequences *but only within their degree of accesses*. In other words, individuals are not free agents who can easily make change within the social world; instead, her decisions are sanctioned, by virtue of her race and her class, to the material affordances within particular localities.

Steven Acardi (2015) illuminates the multiple uses of "agency": humanist (i.e., the breathing human subject), post-humanist (i.e., the dead subject), and within rhetorical performance (i.e., in transit). The humanist-orientation of agency "reflects an ability, power, or authority that can be used by a subject" (p. 2). We can classify Merton's view that individuals are choice-makers as part of this framework. As a product of post-modernism, post-humanist agency views the subject as acted upon by the social world. Agency, in this way, is outside of the subject. Christian Lundberg and Joshua Gunn's "'Ouija Board, Are There Any Communications?': Agency, Ontotheology, and the Death of the Humanist Subject" (2005) explain, "the subject is an effect of structures ... that might proceed or produce it. This reversal of the agent's relation to agency directs attention to ... the power of concealing exercises of techne under the veil of the natural" (p. 97). These views condense agency into a western binary: agent/non-agent. Min-zhan Lu and Bruce Horner (2013) suggest, "All students are thereby put in the unenviable position of seeming to have to choose between either submitting to demands for conformity to dominant conventions to survive academically and economically" (p. 584). Instead of viewing agency as either entirely humanist or post-humanist, this thesis views the individual to see the individual as able to make choices in specific interactional contexts, but only to the degree that the environment might permit those choices to occur.

I align with Laura Micciche's "Writing Material" (2014), where she explains that New Materialism "reconfigures agency in relation to individuals, things, and publics by delinking assumed relations between action and causality, generating instead diffuse, unstable configurations of blame and responsibility that make for less clear targets but for more robust accounting of the qualities of any single problem." Further, she Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* and her understanding of

agency is dispersed and relational. She writes, agency is "lived through a series of dilemmas: that action is always a reaction; that the potential to act always includes the potential to be acted on, or to submit; that the move to gather a self to act is also a move to lose the self; that one choice precludes others; that actions can have unintended and disastrous consequences; and that all agency is frustrated and unstable and attracted to the potential in things" (p. 86). In this way, agency is affective, decision-oriented, and relational.

Moving from Theory to Method

This theoretical framework has made several explicit assumptions about the social world and classroom life. The assumptions articulated here guide me to employ a specific set of methods that account that different people make sense of reality differently but also that individual actions recreate social order. This is an important understanding for both the participants in the study—students making sense of what happens through social typification—and also the fact the researcher is also always perceiving the operations of everyday life. Further, by focusing on specific micro-social interactions, we can see the larger, macro social order being accomplished, as Garfinkel calls for in *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Literate events in the writing classroom count both as a way to understand how social order is accomplished and a way to examine how power is circulated.

In the next chapter, I present the methods for the current study. Because I conceptualize reality as multiple, I employ ethnography as a way to study what counts as "true" in the eyes of the participants. I collect data in multiple ways, including site observation, interviews, audio and video recordings. I also use a coding approach that enables different perspectives and notions of reality to emerge from the data.

Table 2.1: Theoretical Assumptions

Theoretical Assumptions	
1.	Social reality is constructed through individual perception and experience
2.	Experience is understood through social typification
3.	Experiencing and understanding are bound to one another in constructing social reality
4.	Social order is created and sustained through social participation
5.	Understanding the micro level interactions illuminates macro social order
6.	Literacy and literacy events are mundane operations that accomplish everyday social life
7.	Agency is unstable, dependent, and diffuse.

CHAPTER THREE:

THE USES OF ETHNOGRAPHY AND GROUNDED THEORY

This chapter builds on the theoretical assumptions articulated in the previous chapter to explain how I went about collecting and analyzing the data for this study. I open this chapter with a brief explanation of how the theoretical work in chapter two led me to the tools for data collection and analysis. Further, I explain the context of the investigation,⁵ noting specific contextually relevant information about the research site. Following the advice of Smagorinski (2008), I treat this chapter as the “epicenter” of this thesis, which seeks to align my theoretical framework with the processes of data collection, reduction, and analysis. I detail the method of data collection, data reduction, and data analysis for the current study, pointing out specific examples from my fieldwork and data coding. Additionally, I make a case for employing a grounded theory analysis of data collected using ethnographic tools because of the *abductive* nature of both these methods. In this way, I note, I could study the perceptions of individuals, understand the on-going accomplishment of social order, and locate how agency becomes bound to these processes.

Leading Edge: From Theory to Method

The method used in this study follows a grounded theory analysis of data collected using ethnographic tools, such as observations, interviews, and collected documents. The decision to employ grounded theory as a central means of analysis converges from the theoretical framework in various ways.

⁵ Smagorinski (2008) explains the context of the investigation involves detailing “the social and cultural experiences of the participants; the physical, social, and political setting of the research; assumptions at work in the environment; the researcher’s relationships and interactions with the participants” (p. 392).

First, in my theoretical framework, I outline that social reality is constructed through individual perception and experience and that humans group their experiences in typifications. Together, these theoretical understandings backlight how experience, and therefore an individual's understanding of "reality," is constructed through intersubjective perceptions of lived, everyday life. These corollaries point to ethnography as a tool for data collection since ethnography focuses on the ways that an individual's sense of reality, also, is constructed. The tools I draw on—observations, interviews, and documents— all are constructions of reality. For example, when I observed classes, I would compose a narrative of what I observed that day in class. The act of narrative construction converges specifically with the individual and intersubjective perception of reality: I constructed a sense of reality based on my intersubjective perceptions of what I saw, recorded, and heard in a specific class meeting. Furthermore, in interviews, students were also always constructing a narrative of what they had experienced and perceived in the space of the classroom.⁶

Second, the decisions I made regarding my method operationalizes Schutz's idea of social typification: we experience and order experience through repetitions and types. I used grounded

⁶ It is also important to note and acknowledge that in both interviews and classroom observations research participants choose to share and not to share specific knowledge and information. While these decisions to share or not share might be unconscious and possibly even tacit, these decisions are motivated in ways that promote the self-interest of Ana's students and Ana herself. For example, Ana may have put forth certain pedagogical decisions in class that was motivated by her knowledge of who would eventually read this thesis (that is people involved in hiring decisions in the Writing Program). Similarly, Ana's students would do the same kind of decision-making: they could perceive me as Ana's colleague and also a portfolio reviewer, so their answers and actions in class were motivated, even unconsciously, by being presented in a specific and desirable way.

theory for data analysis because grounded theory seeks to place data into typifications. By using grounded theory, social typifications are identified through each round of coding. Through these identified typifications, I could look for patterns about the social world that I investigated. These identified types that grounded theory relies on also operationalizes Garfinkel's work with ethnomethodology showcasing the degree to which actions in the classroom are both contingent upon and accomplished by actions in the classroom.

Ultimately, using grounded theory allowed me to ground experiences and perceptions from several sources that were collected using ethnographic tools. These ethnographic tools allowed me to acknowledge the intersubjective, typified, contingent, and accomplished nature of social life in the writing classroom. As I will demonstrate later on in this chapter, these methods were appropriate to capture and typify the individual perceptions of how students saw themselves to act, which therefore helped address my research questions.

The Context of the Investigation

The research took place at a university in the northeastern United States. According to Ictown's Office of Institutional Research, the rural campus has about 9,000 undergraduate students enrolled. Of these 9,000 students, approximately 2,000 are first-year. The campus is located in a rural community in central Maine. In the following sections, I overview the first-year writing requirement at Ictown U., provide context for the University Writing Program, including teacher training, assignment sequence rationale. Then, I pivot to describing Ana's English 101 writing classroom.

University Writing Program

Ictown University is classified as a public sea, land, and space grant, flagship research university. Ictown has a notable reputation in several scientific fields, including advanced materials, marine sciences, climate change, environmental studies, forestry, precision manufacturing, and

aquaculture. As per the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, Iqeen University is considered an “R2,” doctoral university with higher research activity.

The University Writing Program, “College Composition,” is recognized by *Conference on College Composition and Communication* as a recipient of the Program of Excellence award. In the department of English, the program is housed under the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS). The department of English grants undergraduate (BA) and graduate (MA) degrees in English. Additionally, the department has devoted faculty in literary studies and critical theory, creative writing, and writing studies and professional and technical writing. Also, despite the national recognition of faculty in composition studies and placement of composition MA students to prestigious Ph.D. programs, Iqeen U. observes a split between composition and literature, aligning an overwhelming view in literature seeing the teaching of composition as marginalized in English departments (see Johnson, 2017). Still, College Composition (English 101) is the only course required of all students, regardless of major. College Composition, also, has a higher than usual passing grade cut-off (that is, “C” rather than “D”). The first-year writing program consists of part-time adjunct faculty, graduate teaching assistants, and full-time professors of English. The program is managed by a Writing Program Administrative team of approximately five members, including the director of college composition, the director of assessment, a seasoned member of the teaching corps, and between one and two mentors, who are often graduates of the MA program. The first-year composition (FYC) requirement at Iqeen can be satisfied by (a) transferring in credit, (b) passing an exam that asked for evidence of college-level writing and reflection of such writing, (c) taking and passing English 101 with a “C” in one semester before graduation, or (d) taking and passing a stretched-out version of the class, English 100/106 “College Composition Stretch,” over the course of two consecutive semesters.

Each College Composition student must pass the first-year writing portfolio assessment at the end of the semester. Students are evaluated by two other English 101 or English 100/106 instructors rather than the student's instructor of record. Portfolios contain three texts: two critical essays and one critical reflection. Together, instructors evaluate course learning outcomes based on the *Portfolio Assessment Rubric* (see Appendix B): the demonstration of reflective awareness, the demonstration of academic discourse conventions, and the ability to critically interpret texts. All current instructors of the program attend two one-hour calibration meetings during the fifth and tenth week of the semester, where they develop an attunement for the criteria of the assessment often demarcating “passing” and “failing” portfolios. These are most typically facilitated by the assessment director, though all members of the WPA team and the first-year writing teaching corps are required to attend.

While instructors of records are invited to generate an assignment sequence, there are a few pedagogical practices that all instructors tend to follow. First, all instructors and classes of ENG 101 build up to Portfolio Review during the fourteenth week of the semester. Second, all instructors design assignment sequences that seek to prepare students for this assessment. These assignments are writing tasks that build on one another so that students can think, rethink, develop, redevelop, and revise their texts. Throughout these assignments, students engage in reading, writing, and revision and also make sense of the assessment rubric and its demands. Third, all instructors must follow the attendance policy set forth by the department. For students to be eligible to submit a portfolio, they could not miss more than four (for classes meeting twice a week) or six (for classes meeting three times a week) class meetings. I position these program-delineated roles and responsibilities to showcase the multiple levels of authority that are present in the first-year classroom, even if unseen to writers enrolled in these classes. It is also important to note that during the first-semester teaching, graduate teaching assistants take an advanced practicum in composition

studies, theory, and practice and design their own reading and writing sequences based on theoretical understandings gained in the seminar. Majority of the sections offered utilize a writing about writing (Downs & Wardle, 2017) approach to teaching first-year writing. In this approach, students read and respond to peer-reviewed published articles in writing studies and rhetoric to develop sophisticated understanding of writing in rhetorical, social, ideological, economic, and cognitive ways.

Ana's English 101 Classroom

In the Fall 2016 semester, I observed Ana Jenkins' English 101, "College Composition." She is a second-year graduate teaching assistant at Ictown with a research focus in creative writing. Graduate teaching assistants hold sole responsibility for one section of ENG 101 per semester. Of the about 40 sections of the required general education ENG 101, about 15 of these sections are taught by master's candidates in the English program. As a graduate teaching assistant in the Department of English at State University, Ana holds sole teaching responsibility of one section of English 101, "College Composition," for the two-years of her coursework leading to an MA in English. The semester I observed Ana teach was her third semester in the department. Typically, second-year MA-candidates teach twice-per-week (instead of three times per week as first-year graduate teaching assistants typically do). Ana's class met on Tuesday and Thursday mornings in a mid-sized classroom during the fall 2017 semester. She had 22 students enrolled at the beginning of the semester. Of those 22 students, ten students provided their consent to partake in my research project. Of the ten who provided their consent, only six agreed to meet me for interviews and grant me occasional access to their writing.

Ana's ENG 101 class employed a *Writing About Writing* approach to the teaching of composition. As Ana's course description makes clear, "Learning *how to learn to* write, especially when based in what Writing Studies specialists know about the cognitive, social, and linguistic

dimensions of composed knowledge, is the best way we have to help you “construct your own knowledge about writing, which [you] can repurpose for each situation in which writing is produced, particularly in challenging or new writing situations” (Downs & Robertson 2015: 109).” Ana’s curriculum, then, includes readings from Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle’s second edition textbook (2014), *Writing About Writing* in addition to a few excerpts from Linda Alder-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle’s edited collection *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts in Writing Studies*. Since Writing Studies was the subject that Ana’s class navigated around, her reading and writing sequence involved peer-reviewed articles including Grant-Davie, Wardle, Brandt, and Porter with additional texts from Hart-Davidson, Roozen, and Bazerman. Ana’s class focused on the socially constructed nature of reading and writing in society, with particular attention to keywords such as “rhetorical situations,” “genre,” “identity,” “sponsorship,” and “intertextuality.”

Method for Data Collection and Analysis

To examine the ways that agency and assignment prompts enmesh in Ana’s classroom, I collected data from several sources over the course of the semester. During the first day of the semester, I visited Ana’s class, gave a short five-minute overview of my research and then distributed consent forms (see Appendix A). Based on feedback from the Institutional Review Board, these consent forms were composed in such a way that students could select which degree they would like to participate in the study (i.e., sharing writing, agreeing to be audio and video recorded, meeting for interviews, etc.). I used multiple sources to collect data, including classroom observations, classroom audio recordings, classroom video recordings, student interviews, student writing, and collected assignments. The table below describes the number of sources for each type of data collected.

Table 3.1: Types of Data Collected and Number of Sources

Type of Data Collected	Number of Sources
Course Description & Portfolio Assessment Rubric	1
Audio Recorded Class Discussions	6
Classroom Observations	14
Interviews	8
Assignments	22
Student Writing Samples	9

Together, these data sources gave me a variety of ways to explore how individual perceptions of the classroom were unfolding in exciting ways. Because I was working with multiple perceptions of the class, such a range of data collection enabled me to triangulate my position with two other data points (that is: locate my observations in relation to two sources of data). Most frequently, I navigated between interviews and classroom observation narratives (and audio and video data when applicable) to corroborate claims about boundary-building and play, which will be discussed later. This data collection, then, falls under the purview of ethnography because I took a position "in the midst of the key sites and scenes of others' lives in order to observe and understand them" (Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, 2011, p. 3).

In this way, I align with Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (2011) approach to ethnography, which points to intersections of the social construction of reality and ethnomethodology (both of which are discussed in chapter two). In conceptualizing their approach in *Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research*, Emerson et al. draw from theoretical traditions of symbolic interaction and ethnomethodology. In fact, social worlds, they note,

are created and sustained in and through interaction with others when interpretations of meanings are central processes. Symbolic interaction, insisting ‘that human action takes place always in a situation that confronts the actor and that the actor acts on the basis of *defining this situation* that confronts him’ (Blumer 1997:4), focuses on ‘the activities of people in face-to-face relations’ as they effect and relate to definitions of the situation (Rock 2001:26).

(Emerson et al., p. 2).

Emerson and his colleagues thread the focus of ethnography around interaction and interpretation in ways that, aligning with Schutz and Garfinkel, enable researchers to understand the taken-for-granted aspects that help accomplish everyday life. Ethnography, in this vein, enabled me to focus specifically on moments of interpretation and interaction—between actors, classroom materials, and each other. In *Research Methods and Methodologies in Education* (2017), Ghazala Bhatti describes ethnographic research as locating the familiar, taken for granted, along with the unfamiliar, unseen machinations of a particular community (p. 86). This kind of methodology works to uncover "how individuals and groups behave in various communities and organisations; how they make sense of their everyday lived realities, what choices they make and how they present themselves" (p. 86). It attempts to create and recreate an account for reality that participants might believe to be true. Furthermore, I am drawing on Judith Green, Audra Skukauskaite, and W. Baker's chapter, "Ethnography as Epistemology," in the first edition of *Research Methods and Methodologies* (2012). Following in the footsteps of Anderson-Levitt (2006), Green et al. argue that ethnography is not a method but instead a research philosophy that gives way to particular way(s) of knowing.

Ethnography serves as a way of knowing about a particular setting's beliefs, values, and realities.

Likewise, Green et al. position Agar's (2006) view that ethnography is abductive and *logic-in-use*. Green et al. writes, “ethnography [is] a non-linear system, guided by an iterative, recursive, and abductive logic” (p. 309). Further, “Ethnographers construct systems of to learn what members of

particular groups need to know, understand, produce, and predict as they participate in events of everyday life” (pp. 309-10). In this way, educational ethnography reflects much of the same centralizing questions that Bhatti (2017) emphasizes: to understand and represent the realities of members of a group in a way they would believe to be true. Through abductive logic-in-use, ethnographers map what counts as common knowledge and "make principled decisions about records to collect and pathways to follow to explore...a particular meaning" (p. 310). In other words, guiding questions, such as *what counts as cultural knowledge in this particular community*, informs method-based decisions as abductive, recursive, and logic-in-use. Green et al. develop four principles of operation that guide the actions of ethnographers:

1. Ethnography as a non-linear system
2. Leaving aside ethnocentrism
3. Identifying boundaries of what is happening
4. Building connections

These guiding principles for ethnography reveal the interconnection between ethnography’s aim and the very messy, multidimensional nature of everyday life. Cultural immersion becomes an important component in conducting ethnographic research. My position as a research-teacher, however, makes complete immersion impossible since I was still a teacher, an assessor, and a member of the English department at large. However, my continual presence in the class allowed me to, I think, “be[] with other people to see how they respond to events as they happen and experiencing for [my]self these events and the circumstances that give rise to them” (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 3).

In exploring individual interpretation and interaction via ethnography, I employed grounded theory as a way to make sense of what I have collected and also indicate what data I needed to collect in the future. Kathy Charmaz’s *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2014), explains that grounded theory’s emphasis on iterative logic (the moving back and forth between analysis and data collection)

overcomes typical ethnographic problems. Charmaz explains that ethnographic studies tend to see data concurrently everywhere and nowhere, relying on thick descriptions recorded from observations. Ethnographic examinations also tend to generate “mountains of unconnected data” (p. 41). Ethnographic inquiry that relies solely on immersion and low-level descriptions does not, as Charmaz points out, digest the data in a way that produces new insights. Grounded theory, then, mobilizes and operationalizes the descriptions found in ethnography to make connections between analysis and data collection from the beginning of the study. Furthermore, Charmaz’s indicates, “[t]he iterative logic of grounded theory aids in overcoming several ethnographic problems: accusations of uncritically adopting research participants views, lengthy unfocused forays into the field setting; superficial random data collection; and reliance on stock disciplinary categories” (p. 42). In this way, grounded theory enables the data collected in ethnography to be conceptualized in productive ways. This pairing, here, is helpful for the current study since I hope to conceptualize agency and assignment prompts.

A key part of my study was using grounded theory’s idea of theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling, as Charmaz (2014), puts it “guides you where to go” (p. 197). It is, in other words, abductive⁷, a logic-in-use, that helps “elaborate and refine your theoretical categories” (p. 199). Theoretical sampling is the process that “prompts you to *predict* where and how you can find needed data to fill such gaps and to saturate categories” (p. 199). For example, during the first-few weeks of the semester, I continually came to the idea of “questioning” that circled discussions of assignment

⁷ As Reichertz (2010) notes, abduction in grounded theory is key in discovery because of its indefinite nature. “Abduction,” he notes, “is sensible and scientific as a form of inference. However it reaches to the sphere of deep insight and new knowledge. [It] is intended to help social research...to be able to make new discovers in a logically and methodologically ordered way” (n.p).

prompts in Ana's class. To more fully flesh out the category of questioning, I began to audio-record discussions about assignments. In many ways, the abduction of theoretical sampling enabled me to follow the emergence of categories (such as "questioning," which, with the help of subsequent interviews and audio recordings, led to the category of "boundary-building"). Because of its abductive nature, theoretical sampling converges nicely with Green et al.'s discussion of the ethnography as a logic-in-use methodology. In this way, abduction bridges ethnography and grounded theory. As others have argued (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006), grounded theory is a productive means of understanding and typifying the lived life explored in ethnography. For example, Ryan Dippre (2015) points out the powerful echoes that grounded theory has with ethnomethodology, sociology, and phenomenology. Grounded theory (GT) continues to respect the everyday lived reality of individuals within a system and precluded a universal view of truth and reality. Thus, a grounded theory approach enabled me to understand how members of Ana's English classroom perceive themselves able to act in relation to their interpretation of course documents.

Because data collection and analysis happen in tandem, grounded theory allowed me to attend to the multitudinous nature of "truth" in this way. Robert Thornberg (2012) defines grounded theory as "a qualitative and inductive research approach which is designed to explore, analyse and generate concepts about individual and collective actions and social processes" (p. 85). Instead of attempting to understand and theorize the entire structure of the social universe, grounded theory makes it possible to understand the individuated experiences of research subjects. This is an important link with ethnomethodology which seeks to represent the lived and experienced realities that research subjects would believe to be true. While grounded theory is a way in which data is understood, interpreted, and analyzed, it differs from other analytical and interpretive approaches where data analysis occurs *after* all data is collection.

GT, on the other hand, employs data collection and data analysis in tandem. In *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Glaser and Strauss (1967) coin this process as theoretical sampling. They define theoretical sampling as “the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them” (p. 86). Put differently, through coding, memo writing, and data collection in synchrony; grounded theorists can respond to their analysis through future data collection. Thornburg explains that it is within this process that new means of data collection might emerge. Powerfully, this echoes with Green et al.'s viewpoint that ethnography, as a form of epistemology, employs a non-linear, abductive, logic-in-use.

Grounded theory approaches, as with other research and theoretical traditions, have complex histories with varying orientations and underlying assumptions anchored to those orientations. Kathy Charmaz (2008) traces GT through objectivism, with its roots in mid-20th-century positivism. Within these views, through a stretch of the late 20th century, GT was not considered an objective qualitative measure but mere storytelling, at a time where empirical research favored objective, generalizable truth from scientific inquiry. In critiquing this objectivist-positivist view, Charmaz points to the impulse to “generalize through abstractions that separate the completed grounded theory from the conditions and contingencies of its data collection and analysis” (p. 402). She proposes a constructionist grounded theory where researchers “aim for an interpretive understanding of the studied phenomena that accounts for context. As opposed to giving priority to the researcher's views, constructionists see participants' views and voices as integral to the analysis—and its presentation” (p. 402). Because this project “seeks to analyze how... research participants construct their lives” (p. 403), I will employ a constructionist grounded theory approach in the coding of transcribed interviews and observations. In this way, I affirm the parameter that individuals construct their realities through their lived experience, a hallmark in both

phenomenology and ethnography. Grounded theory allows an individual's sense of reality and understanding of reality to emerge from the data set. In other words, while ethnography enables me to see what's going on in the site of the classroom, GT provides me with a way to order these complex experiences in ways that are meaningful to me. Charmaz (2008) outlines four assumptions and four principles in enacting a constructionist grounded theory (See Figure 3.2). These assumptions and principles, taken with ethnography as logic-in-process and theoretical sampling cornerstone in classic grounded theory, reifies my central assumptions within the social world outlined in my theoretical framework and my methodological considerations in this chapter.

Table 3.1: Constructionist Grounded Theory-- Assumptions and Principles

Constructionist Grounded Theory-- Assumptions and Principles (Charmaz 2008)
<p style="text-align: center;">Assumptions</p> <p><u>Assumption #1.</u> Reality is multiple, processual, and constructed—but constructed under particular conditions.</p> <p><u>Assumption #2.</u> The research process emerges from interaction.</p> <p><u>Assumption #3.</u> It takes into account the researcher’s positionality, as well as that of the researcher participants.</p> <p><u>Assumption #4.</u> The researcher and researched coconstruct the data—data are a product of the research process, not simply observed objects of it.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Charmaz, 2008, p. 402)</i></p>

Table 3.1: Continued

Principles
<u>Principle #1.</u> Treat the research process itself as a social construction.
<u>Principle #2.</u> Scrutinize research decisions and directions.
<u>Principle #3.</u> Improvise methodological and analytic strategies throughout research process.
<u>Principle #4.</u> Collect sufficient data to discern and document how research participants construct their lives and worlds.
<i>(Charmaz, 2008, p. 403)</i>

In this way, I utilized a grounded theory approach to coding the data I collect throughout the term. Importantly, the process of data coding occurs in tandem with data collection, transcription, and analytic memo writing. In the following pages, I outline my coding approach: open coding, focused coding, and concretized concepts and themes. This study, in using the constructionist take on classic grounded theory demonstrates the relatively flexible nature of coding these results. During the process of open coding, and coding in general, I relied on Johnny Saldaña's *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (2009). Saldaña defines a code as a mode qualitative inquiry represented through "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute of language-based or visual data." Coding happens through two rounds: open coding and focused coding. While these two coding rounds occur after one another, there is a good deal of movement between open coding and focused coding to construct more salient focused codes and categories.

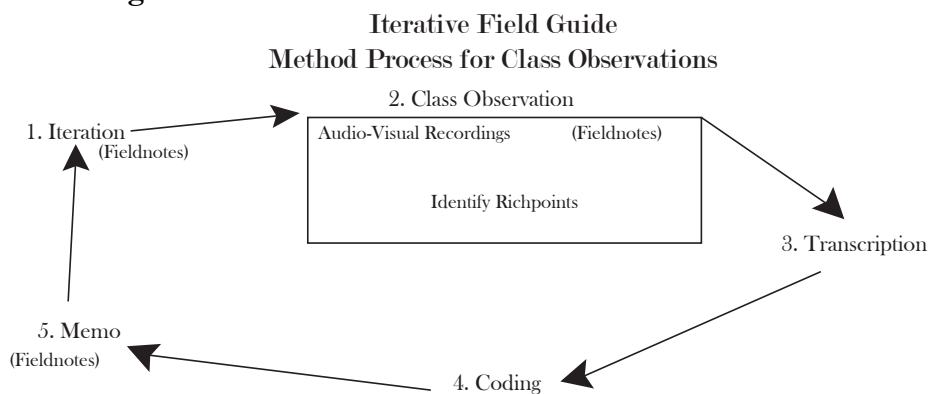
In the next sections, I overview how I went about enacting my methods of grounded theory and ethnography, by explaining the iterative process for data collection and analysis, including conducting classroom observations, interviews, and document collection, in tandem with open and focused coding.

Iterative Field Guide (IFG)

Throughout the study, I employed Green et al.'s logic-in-use conceptualization of ethnography that helped orient the focus of my observations. During the process of classroom observations, I used an iterative field guide (IFG) utilizing *logic-in-use* as a highly recursive process of data collection and interpretation (See Figure 3.2). The iterative field guide is a cycle of five steps completed for each observation: (1) iteration, (2) observation and notetaking, (3) transcription, (4) coding, (5) memo-writing. While all these steps are sequenced to facilitate *logic-in-use*, most steps are not completed within the physical field guide but are used in coordination with the notes collected through word processed observation narratives, coded documents, and memos. A field guide enables researchers to trace what was observed, reflect on the observation, develop tentative understandings of what was happening, and forecast the additional measures for data collection that may be necessary. Utilizing the IFG attends to the ethnographic viewpoint by consistently providing space for reflection in a “non-linear system, guided by an iterative, recursive and abductive logic” (Green et al., p. 309).

Before each class meeting, I composed an iteration: a one-page document outlining what I was observing for during that particular class meeting. In this space, I work out the guiding questions that I hoped to attend to within my observation. I anchor these questions and accompanying sub-questions from previous observations.

During the class meetings I attended, I took notes on what I observed in class based on the questions, observations, and questions I posed in my initial iteration. I often focused the scope of my observation on two sets of students, one on the left-hand side of the room and the other on the opposite side.

Figure 3.1: Iterative Field Guide for Class Observations

Classroom Observations

During each observation, I took notes in my field guide, a small 5 inch by 8.25-inch black notebook, based on the composed iteration. The observation and notetaking techniques I use in this study were tested in a series of classroom visits during the Spring 2017 semester. When taking notes in class, I focused primarily on two tables of students: one right in front of me and another to my right. Depending on memo writing, I would move my position in the class to get a fuller view of the front of the class. I would also pay specific attention to one to two specific students in a given class. The students I observed served to present a micro-frame of the accomplished interactions of everyday life, reflecting the larger picture interactions within the class. In selecting these participants at a considerable distance from my positioning in the classroom, I could take note of the interaction between these students. I could also consider if these students are representative of what others in the class are doing. If something different and interesting seems to appear in a group on the periphery, I can make a note of what others are doing. In this way, I can triangulate the interactions observed in these two places with other interactions on the periphery to reconstruct the activity of the entire room.

The notes that I took in class in my field guide were tested out in the previous semester in a series of trail runs observing a first-year writing classroom. Because I wanted to keep note of any

interpretive and analytical thinking that I had separate from the "thick description" of my observations, I separated observations from interpretations in my guide by keeping notes on my observation on the right page of the notebook and observations on the left page (See Figure 3.3). On the right page, I draw three-columns to separate the three-points of observation: the teacher, table #1, and table #2. I also note the time on the far-right side of the right page.

Figure 3.2: Field Guide Set Up

Left Page	Right Page		
Time	Teacher	Table #1	Table #2

Emerson et al. (1995) advise that ethnographic notes should describe the setting in three ways: first, in initial impressions (p. 26), second, in focusing on key events and incidents (p. 27), and, third, "mov[ing] beyond...personal reactions to an open sensitivity to what those in the setting experience and react to as 'significant' or 'important'" (p. 28). In my jottings, I used some shorthand markings to represent the students I observe—the first letter of their assigned pseudonym, for instance. I also attempt to describe through strong adjectives the movement, engagement, and activity of the students within the class. Immediately after observing a class, I would compose a narrative from what I observed in class. If I could not immediately devote the time to writing a narrative, I would in an audio-recording walk through the notes I collected and talk about the other things that I observed that were not represented in the jottings. As I composed my observation narrative, I followed Emerson et al.'s discretion of writing detailed field notes.⁸ In doing so, I construct coherent

⁸ See Emerson et al. on writing detailed field notes in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, particularly in chapter three and four (pp. 39-141).

narratives with thick descriptions of what was happening in the classroom. I also indicate tangential interpretive and reactionary personal remarks about what I was observing.

Semi-structured Interviews and Document Collection

I employed *logic-in-use* to schedule short interviews with students. That is, I tended to solicit interview requests when I needed to move beyond observations and the coding from class meetings. The scheduling of interviews occurred in tandem with memo writing. For instance, mid-way through the term, I became interested in exploring how students in the class came to understand how the question-segments of class, where Ana would ask her class "what questions do you have." In addition to these abductive questions, I asked students to recreate the event and ask them to talk about how they saw those events unfolding and why they thought the event unfold the way that it did. These interviews, as with other interviews, were audio-recorded and transcribed. In addition to rich point-based interviews, I conducted interviews with students in the class and had them talk about their writing, assignment prompts, and the connection between the two. Interviews lasted approximately one-hour and typically attended to both rich point-based and writing-based questions. There was no set interview number per participant, though I did end up meeting with most about twice. Figure 3.4 below outlines interview questions used in the first interviews. In addition to this, I asked students to bring a text they produced recently so we could talk about it.

Figure 3.3: Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Basic Information and Literate History

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself—like where you're from, what's your major, what, if any, kinds of extracurricular activities do you participate in?
2. Could you talk a little bit about the kinds of writing you do in and outside of school? What did your previous schooling look like?

2. About English 101 and the Portfolio Process

1. Can you say a little about English 101 this semester? What is the focus of the class?
2. Could you walk me through how the class works on a daily basis?
3. Can you say a little about the Portfolio process? How do you feel about it?

Figure 3.4: Continued

3. Assignment Prompts and Power

1. What comes to mind when I say the word “prompt”?
2. What roles do you see assignment prompts operating in the class? What kind of “powers” do you see it having?
3. What kind of connections do you see between the Portfolio, the prompts, and your instructor?

Can you walk me through how you use the prompts when you compose your assignments?

After each interview, I transcribed using the transcription software F5. For interviews, I used the audio-file to generate a verbatim transcript in a screenplay format with minor action-oriented directions. As with all data collected, identifying names were removed. In the case of interviews, students received transcripts that they signed off on for accuracy’s sake.

Video and Audio Recorded Class Meetings

In addition to observations and notes, I video and audio recorded consenting participants as they completed tasks within the classroom. These were selected in coordination with Ana's lesson planning and attended to memos and other questions that I posed. I often audio recorded discussions of assignment prompts. These recordings helped me multi-task in class, as I could pay attention to what was happening in class rather than solely what was being said. Audio and video recordings were transcribed and indexed so that I could code them in a way that way meaningful to me. The notes I took when audio recording focused on individual movements. In this way, my notes and audio allowed me to see classroom life more fully.

Grounded Theory Data Analysis- First Cycle Coding: Initial, Process Coding

As aforementioned, data collection and data analysis happened in tandem. This was particularly useful when employing abductive data collection via theoretical sampling. Grounded theory allowed me to attend to abductive nature of this study. According to Thornberg’s, initial coding or open coding refers to the process by which grounded theorists stay close to the data and

capture with descriptions of what is happening in the data. Importantly, this process does not impose and prescribe a set of preexisting codes onto the text. Rather, it notes where codes might emerge from the data, and, as Charmaz (2008) puts it, "encourages innovation" (p. 398). Coding, in this way, does not attempt to reduce data but summarizes and condenses it (Saldaña, 2009, p. 4). Utilizing initial coding enabled me to explicate emerging codes from the data in an open-ended, exploratory manner. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), initial coding breaks data into parts, scrutinizes them, and then compares them for similarities and differences (p. 102). After each transcription, I coded each interview and observation narrative through an initial coding approach. Charmaz (2006) advises for a line-by-line initial coding, which I followed.

During the round of initial coding, I printed out the transcript or narrative that I would code. I formatted the document with larger margins (1.5-inch margins) and double-spaced the text. This way, I could have ample room to code. As I manually coded these texts, I often involved other coding processes that were outlined by Saldaña: in vivo coding and process coding. These two coding approaches, taken with the open-ended initial coding paradigm, enabled me to code with attention to questions of agency. In vivo codes are codes that refer to "a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record" (Saldaña, p. 74). Process codes are action-based words, employing a gerund to symbolically represent human action. Human action, for Corbin and Strauss (2008), involves actions that are "strategic, routine, random, novel, automatic, and/or thought" (p. 247). By using initial coding within in vivo and process level coding, I could more apparently attend to questions of agency in my coding process. Through my manual initial coding process, I made additions, corrections, and changes in pencil. Once I was done coding with pencil, I used the comment function on Microsoft word to create an electronic copy of each narrative's initial coding (See Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.4: Manually Coded Example

<p>Observation Narrative</p> <p>September 5th</p> <p>Anna and I entered LH 220 about ten minutes before class begun. She placed sticky-notes with students names on it to indicate assigned seating. Most of the class was doing normal before class activities: working on their work for other classes, using their cell phones, and engaging in small talk. Some students voiced their aversion to sitting at assigned seats. Mary, for instance, entered the room and said "assigned seats, is that how this is working?"</p>	<p>Comment [NS1]: Entering</p> <p>Comment [NS2]: Instructing (preparing) Commanding</p> <p>Comment [NS3]: Before class writing</p> <p>Comment [NS4]: Talking</p> <p>Comment [NS5]: Pushing back</p> <p>Comment [NS6]: Direct questioning</p>
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As I coded these documents, I kept a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with specific definitions, examples, and codes that I was working with. Once I completed manually coding, with my revisions, deletions, and changes, I transcribed these codes as comments in Microsoft Word document and printed the document for my files. I also printed and saved the spreadsheet with definitions and examples. I saved a PDF version of each coded document and a plain text file of the transcribed file without codes for future consultation. As I completed initial coding, my codes were highly descriptive and observed the interactions that were occurring in class. The table below identifies some of the codes with examples I used during open coding.

Table 3.2: Initial Coding Examples

Code	Description
Prompting	Done on the part of the teacher. Refers to verbal, bodily, or literate (reading<-- --> writing) that attempts to order and give meaning to classroom life. Perhaps the most obvious iteration of this code is the instructor "prompting" her students to answering questions. Thus, questioning is tightly connected to prompting; however, prompting invokes connotations of hierarchical power more than questioning might. Though, of course, questions might invoke qualities, depending on context, intent, &ct, of resistance.
Pushing Back	This code refers to students who exhibit something verbal that voices their discontent about the task, text, or class in general.
Questioning	A broad verbal interaction action in the classroom, where students or the teacher asks something based on the phenomena of the classroom's life-world.
Reading	Students engaging in literate action that might involve the complex meaning-making process of reading and annotating (making notes on a text).
Refocusing	Students move discussion back to the assigned task after some time of not engaging in the teacher-sanctioned activity.

Memo Writing

Once I completed this process, I would compose a reflective, analytic memo that sought to reflect on the coding process as well as the codes that I had come up with. Religiously, I composed reflective memos that moved beyond coded observation narratives, interview transcript, student writing, and assignment prompts to work across this data in interesting and productive ways. I used these memos to trace my thinking and to think about my process, data, and interpretation more fully. During the early stages of the project, I would use these memos to come up with more focused codes. In these memos, I attempted to theme the data or identify what a unit of data is about and/or what it means (Saldña p. 139). I also used this space to sketch out theoretical—phenomenological

and epistemological—constructs that were reflective of my data collection and analytic coding. While the first few weeks of memo writing was more brief thoughts and tenuous connections, I started to delve deeper into the understandings that I was coming to know.

Focused Coding and Categories

After collected data from the fall semester, I began to focus the open-ended codes into more focused ones. This process of focused coding attempts "to develop 'the most salient categories' in the data corpus and 'requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense' (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 46-57)" (qtd. in Saldaña, p. 155). I attempted to work out these codes within the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. During the process of more focused codes, I often found myself splitting initial codes and adding additional codes. Through memo-writing, I noticed that the codes that dominated my open coding round were inherently descriptive—I employed words like "texting," "questioning," and "instructing" that merely captured movement from my observation narratives. With this, I decided to locate these descriptive codes about texts used in Ana's classroom. What I noticed was that "questioning" and "instructing" seemed to occur dialogically. However, it was through aligning these codes about the texts (assignments, rubrics, the syllabus) in the class that I developed two codes: play and boundary-building, which taken together develop my category of boundariness, which I detail further in the next chapter.

As I moved between initial coding and focused coding, I began to conceptualize the connections between the observed codes in the initial rounds of coding. Through memo writing, I came to develop understandings. As I tinkered with the open codes and wrote memos about them, I started to see a structure emerging. After subsequent coding and memo writing, I printed my observation narratives and interview transcripts. I then located moments of "play" and "boundary-building." Together, I found these codes to express boundariness, which I discuss in detail in chapter four.

Grounded theory and ethnography were productive tools to capture both thick descriptions of the phenomena I was observing in Ana's class and also allowed me to operationalize these descriptions in insightful ways. The process of coding, in particular, was useful, as I reduced large amounts of data into locating "play" and "boundary-building." As I discuss in chapter four, these codes together reveal the co-constructive nature of classroom activity.

CHAPTER FOUR:

ACTION, AGENCY, AND ASSIGNMENT: A GROUNDED THEORY OF BOUNDARINESS

They're rigorous. They're very in-depth. Okay—I don't want to say in depth because they're very vague once you first read it. And it's a lot of... the students have to dig deeper into it. Which is really interesting. I've had it before because I've took a couple of honors English classes. But, I've never had it to this extend when you're basically just given the bare minimum. It's like a puzzle piece, and you're like given all ends, and you have to find the middle. And it's like a big rigmarole, and you're like 'oh my god I need that like one piece where I need to stick it in there, and I can't find it.' As you're like working—you have to work through all these different issues and problems that you're faced with in just one prompt. So, it's like... that's what it is for me. I feel like it's literally a puzzle. I'm just sitting in my dorm room just trying to figure out where this goes.

– Interview with Jaime

In chapter one, my research question sought to examine how students in Ana's writing class perceive themselves able to act in relation to assignment prompts. In chapter two, I offered a theoretical framework that foregrounded ethnomethodology as key frames of reference in studying the interaction of agency through assignment prompts. Chapter three elaborates the New Materialist and Ethnomethodological frameworks toward a grounded theory analysis employing ethnographic data collection that included classroom observations, open-ended interviews, and document collection. My schema for data analysis employed grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), including theoretical sampling, analytic memos, and ultimately developing the core codes "play" and "boundary-building."

This chapter illustrates a grounded theory of boundariness, which accounts for co-construction of authorized classroom space in each interaction. I will explicate the interaction

between the codes *boundary-building* and *play* to convey the analytic category “*boundariness*.” In this chapter, I draw on specific examples that most clearly articulate boundariness. Before outlining *boundariness* as a theoretical and pedagogical construct, I will (a) articulate what I mean by grounded theory (as opposed to grounded theory method) (b) describe Anna’s classroom as a textual nexus, (where the portfolio process at State University and the assignment sequence were tightly bound together), (c) outline the grounded theory of *boundariness* by pulling specific examples from my observation narratives and interviews, (d) close out the chapter by using boundariness to answer the research question posed in chapter one.

Before moving into the presentation of a grounded theory of boundariness, it’s useful to distinguish grounded theory as a *method* from grounded theory as a *theory*. Kathy Charmaz (2014) explains the “theory” of grounded theory has been as a site of contention for grounded theorists. Grounded theorists invariably must consider what theory is and what the use of theory is. Charmaz explains that such uses differ from theoretical orientation: positivist definition, emphasizing on the degree that a theory explains and predicts, and interpretive definition, stressing interpretation and giving “abstract understanding greater priority than explanation” (p. 230). In this thesis, I align with the positivist tradition and see the following grounded theory of boundariness as both explanatory and predictive. That is, boundariness, helps explain classroom action and at the same time predict in. Charmaz cites Abend’s (2008) delineation of the six definitions of theory. “Theory,” in this case, “means ‘a general proposition or logically-connected system of general propositions, which establishes the relationship between two or more variables’ (p. 177)” (p. 229).

Throughout my initial coding process of classroom observations and student interviews, I noticed, though in the *in vivo* coding scheme, the codes I used attempted to describe an action that happened by specific people based on particular instances (e.g., “questioning,” “instructing,” “talking”). As I further examined how these “happenings” occurred, I attempted to locate these

observed codes in relation to recurrent texts employed in the class. In coordinating texts with classroom action, I came to realize that certain texts were the center of this action. These texts included the *Portfolio Assessment Rubric*, Ana's assignment sequence, and Ana's course description. Understandings about these texts, as I noticed, were constructed by both Ana and her class at each moment of classroom interaction. In other words, how both Ana and her class came to understand what that text *seemed* to permit/not permit was constituted through the collaborative labor between Ana and her students. In this way, classroom life was accomplished by Ana and her students' perceptions of and interaction with three texts. It is through axiological and focused coding, the two focused codes I eventually discovered were *boundary-building* and *play*. Together, they constitute the category of boundariness. These categories provide ways of seeing classroom life, action, and consequence as tied to the process of inter-active and intersubjective reality construction that accompanying the interpretation of course texts.

A Nexus of Texts: Assignment Sequence, Course Description, and the Portfolio Rubric

Like all classes, Ana's English 101 classroom is a complex web of texts, which invariably mediated the activities (see Bazerman 2004) of actors in the class. Because the texts in Ana's class often alluded to each other, often bringing them to (further) existence, the course description, assignment sequence, and the semester-end evaluation rubric are, in many ways, inseparable. These texts are, of course, different texts and serve different functions in the context of Ana's class. Together, however, they constitute a textual nexus, wherein each contributes to the existence of others. Since Ana's sequence of assignments references the assignment sequence, which also cites the course description, and both documents refer to the semester-end evaluation, these texts are the center of classroom life, concurrently authorizing each other.

For instance, Ana's course description makes several references to the "assignment sequence." The course description explains that "class discussions will *usually* focus on samples of

writing that you and your colleagues have produced in response to the assignment sequence” (Ana’s Course Description, p. 4, my emphasis). In her course description, Ana sets the expectations for how her class will normally operate. As I observed, I noticed that the writing produced in response to the assignment sequence was a central in-class activity and was oriented specifically toward course outcomes. To illustrate the embeddedness of the assignments, Amber’s interview with in mid-November explains how she saw classroom action unfolding. I asked her to overview the basic day-to-day operation of English 101, and she responded:

She'll [Ana] give us new assignments, sometimes it's stuff in the book and other times stuff in class, maybe writing an extended example or something, just an assignment. We'll usually work in our groups sometimes; sometimes we work to figure out maybe terms, defining terms and stuff. She gives us maybe a half hour to do that, then we'll discuss it as a class, and she'll want to know our views and stuff. (Interview with Amber)

Amber points out how assignments are provided on a regular basis, both for in-class activities and for homework. They function both as a material and an activity. Students expect to spend some time reading, annotating, and discussing assignment prompts in class. Assignment prompts are provided for in-class activities such as "defining terms" in groups and provide open-ended instructions for homework. "Defining terms" is an interesting phrase for Amber to use in her response here since it enables us to see, even in her speech act, an invocation of the semester-end semester rubric. This moment, I think, elucidates the textual nexus that Ana's class operates in. By invoking the rubric when discussing the assignment sequence, we can see the webbed nature of Ana's classroom.

As Amber directs our attention here, the assessment procedure at the close of the semester becomes a focal point in this textual nexus. In many ways the course hinges on the double-blind assessment procedure to assess writing at Icetown U. Ana describes the Portfolio Process in her course description:

To help ensure that you are prepared to write effectively outside of the particular context of your class, during the last week of class, other ENG 101 faculty evaluate your portfolio, using the course outcomes described in the *Rubric* to decide whether your portfolio should “pass” (i.e., rate a “C” or higher) or “fail” (i.e., rate a “C-” or below). At least two other instructors of English 101 must agree that your portfolio meets the requirements of the *Rubric*; these instructors meet routinely during the term to evaluate sample portfolios and agree on common standards for this decision...When portfolios are returned to your instructor, s/he will assign a grade within the range established by the portfolio review. A student whose portfolio is rated a “pass” can receive a grade between a C and an A; a student whose portfolio is rated “fail” can receive a grade between a C- and an F. (Course Description, p. 7)

It’s important to note that the double-blind portfolio process is not one invented by Ana nor is it one where she has control over its outcomes. The decisions of a passing portfolio or a failing portfolio are based upon the *Portfolio Assessment Rubric (4.0)* (see Appendix A). Portfolios that are scored as “pass” earn a passing grade for the course and those who do not, earn a failing grade.

A Grounded Theory of Boundariness: Symbiotically Constructing Classroom Life

Action in Ana’s class involves actors’ interaction and participation with three important texts: the PAR, her assignment sequence, and her course description. Previously, I mentioned that Ana’s class is inherently (inter)textual, and classroom action is completed in relation to classroom texts. The results focus on how individual actors collaboratively perceive and interpret documents in the classroom and then act in relation to this collaborative construction. Furthermore, boundariness, as a grounded theory, illuminates the multitude of perceptions, interpretations, and actions of classroom life that contribute to its on-going accomplishment. The term “boundariness” illustrates how classroom members co-constructed an official space of which they are authorized to act.

"Official" space of classroom life is created not solely based on individual interpretation of the course texts but through the collaborative negotiation between Ana and her class. By "official," I follow in the line of Dyson (2013) and Manyak (2001) and mean spaces that are "monolithically serious" and "subjected to hierarchical order" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 129). In other words, "official space" can be thought as places that "particular kinds of social order (i.e., expectations for social participation) [occur] and are mediated by varied forms of composing—of deliberate manipulation of symbolic material" (Dyson, 2013, p. 404). The official "kind of social order" reinforces institutional ideas, beliefs, identities, values, and behaviors. Furthermore, drawing on my theoretical framework's emphasis on Schutz's phenomenology, "official space" is solely able to be perceived by individual actors at each lived moment. As I will show, official space is created through intersubjective construction—by way of the collaborative interpreting assignments/syllabi/rubrics. It's through processes of interpretation that the official space in the classroom is constructed, which invariably influences and sponsors ways of acting within this space (e.g., performing institutionally-authorized behaviors and displays of identity).

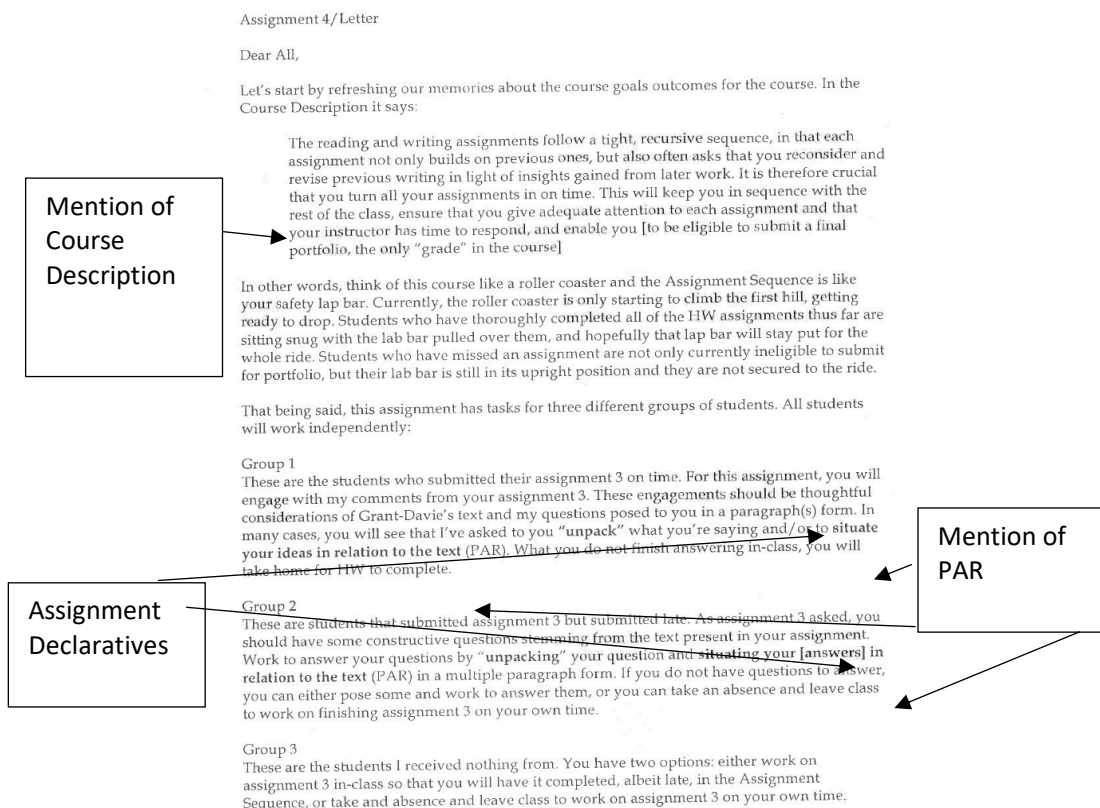
To illuminate this grounded theory, I will recount an example from the second week of the semester. In the meeting before, Ana's class had been assigned Keith Grant-Davie's "Rhetorical Situations and their Constituents" (1997), originally published in *Rhetoric Review*, with some writing. On my observation narrative for this class meeting, I observed the following:

Ana began class at 9:30 exactly and expressed that she hoped that everyone's break was restful and relaxing. She reminded students of ineligibility and also voiced her concern about some students in the class passing in the portfolio. Her address to the class was done as she stood, moving at the front of the room on occasion. Calvin, a student at the table I was sitting, entered late. She reaffirmed her policy of lateness.

Ana's housekeeping announcements for this class meeting directs our attention to how the boundary of the course description, which articulates lateness and portfolio eligibility policies, is articulated in class meetings. Ana's course description refers to portfolio eligibility as consisting of three musts: (1) handing in all assignments, (2) attending both one-on-one conferences, and (3) not missing more than four classes. As Ana's course description indicates, "If you follow these policies, you will be allowed to bring a final, primary copy to me during the last class, which I will submit your portfolio for assessment" (CD, p. 8). In this way, we see this particular class meeting centering around the policy articulated on the course description. This reveals that Ana's course description offers a reality of the classroom. This reality, of course, is only offered, and only enacted when Ana and her class labors with and around these texts. It's through, in other words, the "shared meaning" (Bazerman 2013) that is created co-constructed here that the official order of the room is established and also perpetuated. In this example, of course, Ana does wield her institutionally-ascribed power to ensure that the policy from the course description is brought to life here. However, it's the class's subsequent action—that is, being on-time—which elucidates how this policy was continually enacted by members of Ana's classroom community.

However, the teetering in this example with Calvin illustrates the regimented maintenance of classroom life, where Ana does more of the constructing than the rest of the class. This instance reveals that Ana's institutionally-ascribed authority awards more capital to Ana to establish official space. Yet, I think it is worthwhile to mention that members of the class, including Ana, concurrently perceive, interpret, and act in relation to texts (in this instance the course description). We can see this, even in glimmers, with the housekeeping announcements referenced above. What also becomes very interesting here are the ways in which "ineligibility" further, brings the semester-end evaluation into frame. Ana, even if she was not conscious of it, links the semester end evaluation—or (perhaps more accurately) her students' ability to participate in the evaluation.

Figure 4.1: Assignment #4



When Ana's class was discussing Assignment #4 (Figure 4.1 above), she "called the class's attention to the words from the PAR" (e.g., "situate"). In my narrative, I wrote, "After asking where on the *PAR* the word "situating" appears, Ana said 'Why doesn't everyone take out their *PAR*.'" From my view, the entire class took out their *PAR* and several students engaged with Ana's question." Assignment #4, an in-class activity, seems to triangulate the mentions of the other two texts. As Figure 4.1 illustrates, Assignment #4 takes the form of a letter, citing the course description, providing assignment instructions, and making mention to the *PAR*. What this example illuminates, perhaps more than anything else, is the way in which boundaries are sketched through engaging with and around the classroom documents. In this way, we see Assignment #4 as informing the other boundaries, but at the same reifying their realities. So, it's through Ana and her

students' interaction with and around the boundary that creates an instance of official classroom life co-construction. Ana with her students creates the boundary by talking about it. In this way, the class is always operating with, on, or near the boundary of authorized classroom activity.

For instance, on my September 5th observation, I noticed Ana place sticky notes on desks to indicate where students should sit. I observed: “Brittany, for instance, enter[ing] the room and sa[ying], ‘assigned seats, is that how this is working.’” Brittany’s visible frustration with seating seems to counterbalance (or at the very least *attempt* to counterbalance) the pedagogical decision of assigned seats. Though, of course, she probably knows her verbalized discomfort won’t shift the operation of that particular class. Ana’s pedagogical decision to assign seats creates, partly, a space of official life of the classroom. Still, Brittany sits and verbalizes a dissatisfaction with assigned seating. In doing so, she co-creates and concretizes a part of the official space of Ana’s classroom. However, instead of just sitting, Brittany submits to and acts within the official space, resists fully accepting her participation in the official space.

Garfinkel leads us to see points like this one happening in each lived moment. Ana’s act of placing the sticky note paired with Brittany’s decision to both sit and express her frustration shows the ways that even mundane actions of classroom life are continuously accomplished in extraordinary ways. Just because these actions are organized in meaningful ways (that is, for class to proceed “normally”), does not assume that each actor in the class participates in the recreation of social order in expected ways. As we see with Brittany’s performance as student here, the on-going recreation of social order via accomplished “indexical expressions” involves her being in class—both ontologically and spatially—but also resisting, albeit only verbally, her spatial ordering by Ana. This example with Brittany, importantly, illustrates the co-construction of the official space of the classroom through a *teetering* between Ana and Brittany, even if Ana was not physically in the interaction. These moments of co-constructing, which (as I will explain later) does not happen

between those in equal positions of power, illuminate how the *teetering* and *negotiating* are integral to classroom life. Specifically, this showcases how co-construction contribute to, as Garfinkel notes in *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, “the temporal concerting of activities” (p. 12).

With roots in intersubjectivity, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology, the conceptual metaphor of boundariness reflects the complicated intersubjective co-interpretive processes by which official space is mapped. The object of the previous sentence is deliberate: boundariness in many ways is a map. Maps, if we take the word’s etymology (“a napkin of the world”), are symbolic representations of something that cannot be adequately and “truly” presented. Because we are intersubjective beings, we cannot, at any point, objectively represent what we see. **It is, in other words, impossible to map accurately, but we still do it anyway.** And, even if maps are impossible to “truly” present or even (re)present, they are still useful—we get to where we need to go—most of the time. But, let’s take the word “boundariness” further. The *OED* tells us that “boundaries” involves a limit of the space and “iness” elicits mention to condition(s) of being. Taken together, boundariness maps the conditions of limitations (limit here marks the edge of something and also has an ontological quality)—and in this case, the limit of official space. In impossibly mapping the limits of official space, boundariness draws our attention to the imaginary structures in the classroom that are constructed symbiotically between teacher, students, and classroom materiality. Boundariness compounds “lines” connecting “marker” (texts, in our case) to map the limits of the official space. Boundaries are a fitting term for developing an understanding the establishing of a classroom community because such lines don't exist naturally or biologically. Such lines are sketched as collaboratively and symbiotically between citizens within particularly geographical locations. By "symbiotically constructed," I mean a construction that involves both parties, who are in asymmetrical positions of power. Generally, individuals abide by such geographical demarcations—though of course, they can, and do, question, push, and/or disregard

these limits. As this extended reading of Brittany illustrates, the "limit" or "boundary" of official is being partly sketched by Ana but further constructed (and actually reified in this example) by Brittany sitting. Still, though, Brittany questions, and thereby teeters the limit.

Play: An Approach to Agency

Merton would refer to this above example as a “naturally microscopic moment.” It only represents one class meeting—one that reacted against a higher than usual late/non-submission rate for homework assignments. What this does reveal, however, is the degree to which collaborative perception and interpretation of boundaries establish and sustains social life. However, individuals (both teachers and students) must interact with these boundaries and in doing so bring them to life. It’s through this interaction, or what I’m calling “play,” that official space of classroom life forms. Jacques Derrida’s (1966) notion of “play” in his lecture, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences” provides a helpful framework to consider the interaction with boundaries. For Derrida, “[t]he function of this center [that of a fixed origin] was not only to orient; balance, and organize the structure... but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *freeplay* of the structure” (p. 1). Play, for Derrida, refers to the substitutions of the center for the center—which he maddeningly tells us is both a center and not a center. When those substitutions exceed and the “fundamental immobility and reassuring certitude” of the center, an “event will have the exterior form of a *rupture* and a *redoubling*” (p. 1). All this is to say that the structure, for Derrida, consists of endless substitutions of the center, and this process of ceaseless substitution of the center is fine as long as the “reassuring certitude” does not rupture.

I do not mean to posit that Derrida's notion of play/center is what we see happening in Ana's first-year classroom. I do mean to suggest that "play," more broadly, refers to the interactions, perceptions, and interpretations *of, with, and around* such boundaries (e.g., PAR, Course Description, and the assignment sequence). But, like Derrida, this type of play is fine as long as the certitude of

the boundary is in place. We can consider the idea of “play” as mapping the boundary as well as creating and sustaining it. Play, in this way, is an intersubjective-epistemic activity, where students and teachers in the class come to establish official space.

As I am conceiving it, *play* has two subcategories. The first, *official play*, in that the interaction is authorized in the official space (e.g., the interaction yields no consequence). *Unofficial play*, the second, transcends the official space. One consequence, could be correction (e.g., let's return to the task), or could be moving the boundary (e.g., changing a due date; getting out of homework). We can see both kinds of play occurring very close to another when Ana assigned the second peer-reviewed article by Elizabeth Wardle:

She handed out the assignment. Jaime said, "did you take the BIO test? I'm so interested in BIO; I just hate doing the work for BIO" She then looked at the prompt, which invites students to read Elizabeth Wardle's *Enculturation* text. "I'm so happy," she responded. "This lady only has one name. I'm so glad I don't have to read a whole article and write paragraphs by 8 p.m., tomorrow."

Much like Brittany's annoyance in assigned seating a week earlier, Jaime "plays" with the language of the assignment prompt, joking at how many names the author has. This emerges after the first two reading assignment of the semester featured Grant-Davie and Hart-Davidson. Here, Jane's play doesn't yield any consequences in the social world of Ana's classroom. Moments later, I observed:

Ana facilitated a discussion, explained her reasons for an assignment that asks for constructive questions. Jane placed her hands in a praying-emoji (🙏) like fashion when learning this news. The class began to pack up their things, and Ana reminded them class was not yet over.

What's important here is how Ana reacts to and thus constructs alongside her students the operations of everyday life. The unofficial play here balances the world of the classroom. In other

words, as the class begins to pack up, Ana teeters the class as a way to reorient them that there is still class time left. Play, in this way, features a give and take between the students and the instructor. In this way, the social order of Ana's classroom begins to be established and through the play between the boundaries.

Alternatively, Arthur, who had failed the portfolio previously, would often “play” with the boundaries that the class had already established as a way to voice his contempt for the class activities and prompts. For instance, gearing up for the first essay, Ana had the class construct concept maps that would funnel into their essay over the weekend. I noticed during class observation:

Anna then ushered a discussion of PAR techniques already covered by previous assignments and asked about how many terms would be needed for a dialectic. Arthur replied saying that all 12 terms of the assignment prompt were needed. Anna asked how long that would be. Arthur said it would be 12 sentences if you're good, but, because he didn't see everyone's writing, maybe 12 paragraphs if not 12 pages. Anna said that 12 terms in a dialectic relationship sounds about 12 pages. She said, "I'm not looking for a 12-page paper. So, how many terms should we use?"

The back and forth between Ana and Arthur illustrate another dimension to play. Because play solicits a consequence in classroom life, Arthur's speculation about composing a dialectic with twelve terms in twelve sentences underscores the fact that while students and teachers co-construct the boundary together, some may disregard—or even perceive the boundary in divergent ways—that construction, as Arthur does in this exchange.

The Portfolio signals a very clear sense of consequence for students. What became evident in my classroom observations, interviews with students, and analysis of student writing, was the degree to which the PAR seemed to collapse tensions about the unknowability of the assessment

outcome. As I saw students perceiving the Portfolio, it became somewhat of a “floating sign,” where different students would attribute different meanings to the document. For instance, when I met with Calvin, a sophomore in Ana’s class, he explained the process:

We are going to submit two articles of our writing, and then we have to pretty much prove what we've learned in the class and how we exemplify by **citing ourselves or citing the authors, expanding, extending, situating, unpacking**. All those fancy terms. (Interview #1 with Calvin, my emphasis).

Calvin’s paraphrase of the *Portfolio Assessment Rubric* points to how the document has found its way beyond classroom life and into civic discourse. The “fancy terms” that Calvin lists off illustrates Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of “symbolic domination.” Janet Giltrow (2003) puts Bourdieu’s idea nicely: symbolic domination is “linguistic consciousness steeped in the schemes of the center: Indentured by *habitus* to their styles of speech, language users, absorb the means of interpreting distinction in the ‘unified linguistic marketplace’” (p. 365). The absorption of the “unified linguistic marketplace” that Giltrow demonstrates is managed by centripetal forces of language standardization, where the self is “positioned in negotiations with the words of others” (p. 368). Calvin’s “position in negotiation with” the words of the *Portfolio Assessment Rubric* here situates his *habitus*⁹ as *indentured*. That is: *bounded*. Meaning, the ways in which Calvin perceives and reacts to the social world is bounded by “negotiations involving contacts, citations, world-views, intentions” (p. 368). In other words, the presence of the Portfolio—as a source of linguistic and verbal absorption for Calvin, forecasts the ways in which the PAR’s is at work both in and out of classroom discourses and influences the ways in which students act in the class.

⁹ The “set of schema that develop through relationships as people adjust, adapt, and negotiate within and across multiple contexts” (Compton-Lilly, 2014).

Through both my observations and interviews, the PAR, more than an artifact for students' ongoing "ideological becoming" (Bakhtin, 1981) into the discourse of academe, was a site of disdain. In the same interview with Calvin, I asked him how he felt about the Portfolio process. He replied,

Calvin: I actually FaceTimed my English teacher last week about it from high school. I never heard of this process before. It seems pretty interesting. I think the most concerning thing to me is **having unbiased readers** look at it because I don't know I feel like with English is one of those things where a little bias should be nothing because you've been working with someone all semester and they've seen you grow and improve and I think that's one of the biggest parts of the class— to show your growth and improve. Having someone look at it, you being the judge of it.

Calvin's concern about the assessment is rooted in "having unbiased readers" evaluate his and his classmates' semester-long work. For Calvin, reading, and writing, and more specifically reading and writing that involves individual assessment, carries individuated values. It doesn't seem the process "makes sense" to Calvin since he feels "like with English is one of those things where a little bias should be nothing." More deeply, however, "unbiased readers," or "two ENG 101 instructors other than the writer's instructor" as the PAR defines it, illuminates the unknowability factor of the portfolio assessment process, that students tended to calculate about the assessment document.

Another dimension to "play" in Ana's classroom is the looming presence of the Portfolio. Play, both official and unofficial, is subject to the various perceptions students have about the assessment procedure. Early in the term, Ana had the class answer generative questions based on the reading in small groups. I observed Calvin, Sam, John, and Arthur working together. Ana was roaming the room, stopping to talk with individual groups. Once Ana left Calvin's group, I recorded the following conversation in my field notes:

Calvin: My high school English teacher doesn't agree with the way they do things here. Like the whole portfolio process.

Sam: I know someone who tutors the athletes. He said that we are supposed to push two essays together.

John: That makes no sense.

Arthur pulls out his filled out PAR.

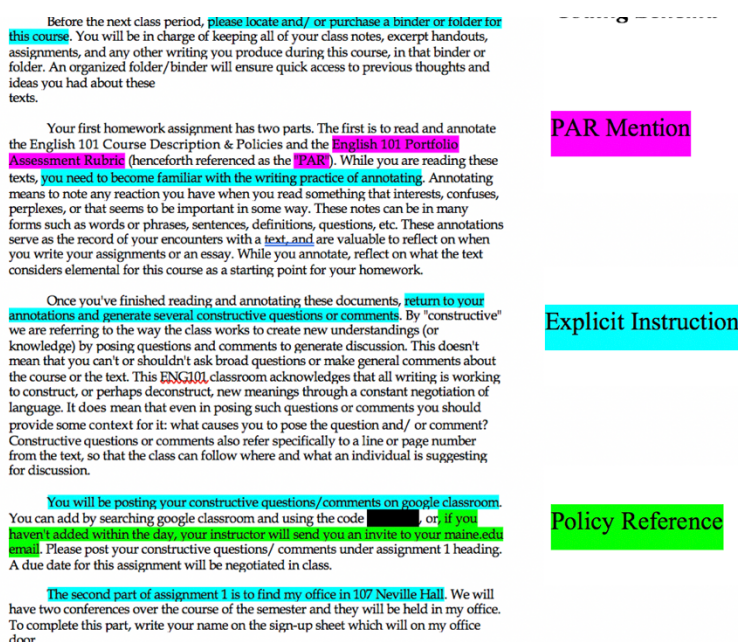
This snippet of conversation here underscores the force that boundary of the Portfolio Assessment Rubric in everyday classroom life. As a boundary, the PAR is different than the course description and assignment sequence because of its stakes (e.g., passing/failing the class). Calvin, on another occasion, told his group that the smartest person he knew failed the PAR. In the conversation cited above, Sam talks about "how" the portfolio is put together. In both instances, we see that the boundary of the PAR is constructed partly in play with the PAR, but also through bits and pieces of the assessment. The boundary of the PAR is difficult for students to locate, precisely, and it's for this reason we see the boundary of the PAR being often perceived times through myth. For instance, when I met with Andrea, I asked her about the portfolio process, and she explained that in class she typically asks questions "like what she wants... The only grade is the portfolio. If I do what she recommends to do, then it would be easier." Similarly, when I met with Alex later in the semester, she explained, "The portfolio scares me. Because it's one assignment, and I'm putting all of my effort into it."

The Coding of Ana's Assignment Sequence

Ana's course description makes clear that the classroom navigates around different assignment prompts that help facilitate and accomplish classroom action. Such prompts solicit a textual production that is due before the next class meeting. Her assignments typically are no more than one page single-spaced and included framing and orienting material, items to consider while

reading and writing, references to the *Portfolio Assessment Rubric*, and specific “action items” that emphasize what should be done when completing the assignment. As I coded Ana’s assignment sequence, three codes became apparent: *PAR Mention*, *Explicit Instruction*, and *Policy Reference*. Collectively, these codes illuminated the types of composing decisions evident throughout her sequence. The figure below (4.2) illustrates an example of the coding schema I used to categorize the information that was most present in Ana's assignment sequence.

Figure 4. 2: Example of Focused Coding on Assignment Sequence



The code “PAR Mention” refers to explicit references to the *Portfolio Assessment Rubric* or a specific passage on the Rubric. For example, Assignment 1 notes, “The first is to read and annotate the *English 101 Course Description & Policies* and the *English 101 Portfolio Assessment Rubric*” (emphasis added). The reference to the “PAR” counts as a mention. In this vein, any direct quotation from the PAR (4.0) was also coded as a mention (e.g., "write about the writer's 'interpretation extends and/or complicates the original uses of the texts' (PAR)"). In-text citations (e.g., (PAR)) were also

considered mentions of the rubric. Additionally, certain words such as "situate," "reflect," "analyze" and "extend and complicate" (among many others) were also considered mentions of the PAR.

The code "Explicit Instructions," however, are mentions that sought to articulate what was to be completed in the assignment. As opposed to more expository prose perhaps framing the assignment or providing questions to consider, these mentions focus on words and phrases that indicated a "to do" (e.g., "we will" or "you will"), declaratives (e.g., "recall," "reflect,"), and task sequences (e.g., "start," "first," "then").

Finally, the last code "Instructor Policy" are references to policies outside the realm of PAR or Assignment Instructions. These often refer to consequences for not completing work on time or coming to class unprepared. There were only nine mentions across the 18 documents I coded. For example, Assignment #1 notes, "if you haven't added [Google Classroom] within the day, your instructor will send you an invite to your maine.edu account." This was coded as policy since it reveals and ordering of the social world.

As I coded assignments collected from Anna's assignment sequence including both in class and homework, I coded for these three specific categories. As I coded mentions of the PAR, explicit instruction, and policy references, I tallied each code, per documents. I then added all mentions and calculated the percent breakdown. The table below illustrates the total tally of each with an accompanying percent of total tallies for all codes.

Table 4.1: Total and Percentage of Assignment Sequence Coding

	Total	Percent
PAR Mentions	180	74.07%
Explicit Instructions	54	22.22%
Policy Reference	9	3.70%

Revealing, here, is the overwhelming dominance of PAR mentions in Ana's assignment sequence as opposed to assignment directives or allusions to course policies. Collectively, two-thirds of the codes made explicit reference to the semester-end assessment procedure. This becomes an important part of boundariness, because, these codes reflect a dominance of the portfolio assessment through Ana's sequences. In this way, the assessment rubric becomes positioned at the center of classroom life, but more than this, the positioning of the assessment as the central activity in the class is reflected in the assignments used. Thus, as students come to co-construct the boundary, that construction was informed by the assessment document's presence in the class.

As I have come to understand "agency" in the classroom with particular attention to assignment prompts, *boundariness* proves to be a lens to visualize the co-construction of agency in the first-year writing classroom, where agency emerges between and in relation to the co-interpretation of course texts. In this framework, classroom life is co-constructed through interaction with, around, and in reference to core texts used in classroom operation. Play happens in relation to boundaries to illuminate the broad range of possibilities student action and interaction has in the social world of the classroom. It's through play that the boundary of the writing classroom becomes established, sustained, and potentially transformed. Noticeably, playing in, around, and with the boundary tends to be met with consequences (positive, negative, and neutral). The boundary and play within the

boundary, functions with the portfolio process as co-constructed through mentions of the PAR in class, in assignment prompts, and through students' account for the process.

In what ways do the assignments used in Ana's English 101 classroom shape how students act and perceive themselves able to act in the classroom?

The theorizing I've done in the previous pages indicate the ways in which "agency," when conceived as interactional, dispersed, and co-constructed, is constantly created and recreated in the writing classroom with and around boundaries. To visualize agency in interlocking terms, the concept of *boundariness* proves useful. In the writing classroom, there is an on-going processes of concurrent perceiving, acting, and interacting in relation to texts that order and provide meaning to the classroom's lifeworld. Importantly, *boundariness* offers a lens to consider the ways in which assignment prompts, along with other boundaries in the writing classroom, are enacted and recreated through every day (socio)interaction in the classroom. These texts, as I have mentioned, don't have agency in that they in themselves, contribute to what occurs in the writing classroom. Instead, intersubjective actors, through citing, alluding to, engaging with and around the classroom texts, construct a sense of the document and therefore act in relation to that construction.

In other words, assignment prompts in themselves do not establish agency in the writing classroom. As we and our students work to reach a shared understanding of classroom life (including course learning outcomes, specific policies, etc.), we are always acting in and around classroom boundaries. *Boundariness*, as a theoretical and pedagogical framework, illuminates how social order is created through interaction through interpretation. What *boundariness* also accounts for is the ways in which students and teachers, while working to reach a shared understanding of classroom life, perceive and act in relation to these boundaries. "Play," as I'm conceiving it, illuminates the broad range of possibilities that actors have when acting in and around these boundaries. The ways in which students act within their classroom environment are not reduced into

simple boundaries of resistance and acquiescence. Instead, students work to calculate what they perceive themselves able to do and either act with-in or with-out those parameters.

Assignments and Agency: Back to Contact Zone Classrooms

Agency and the possibility of movement are bound to the co-construction of the official space via classroom boundaries, such as assignment prompts, syllabi, and departmental rubrics. As I will discuss in chapter 5, considering the notion of *boundariness* in the writing classroom can focus writing program administrators, assessment specialists, and instructors towards continual investment in social justice within the writing classroom. Specifically, boundariness draws our attention to how actors in the classroom work symbiotically to establish the order of the classroom's lifeworld. What becomes apparent here is the importance of *praxis* in enacting decolonial pedagogy that sees students as writers (not students who happen to write).

In the next chapter, I will extend and complicate my theory of boundariness in relation to the decolonial classroom and contact zones, drawing specific attention to pedagogical implications involving praxis with assignments in the writing classroom.

CHAPTER FIVE: RE-CONCEPTUALIZING ASSIGNMENT DESIGN THROUGH BOUNDARINESS

*A map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory,
which accounts for its usefulness.*

— Alfred Korzybski, *Science, and Sanity* (1933, p. 58)

As I report in the previous chapter, *boundariness* illuminates the complex, intersubjective, co-constructive, and epistemic processes by which classroom action is continually accomplished and re-accomplished by participants in lived moments. More than this, however, boundariness draws attention to the ways that official space of the classroom is co-constructed by both teachers and students. Further, play, the field of negotiated inter-active movements, motivations, and consequences, solidifies and gives meaning to classroom action *in relation to* course documents (e.g., assignments, evaluation rubrics, and the course syllabus). As a grounded theory, boundariness offers teacher-scholars a way of seeing the interaction (and play) between intersubjective beings, course documents, projected and perceived realities, and on-going social accomplishment. On both the macro-scale of class operation and the micro-scale of individual action and interaction, we can see through this model ways in which classroom life becomes established, perpetuated, and reified through granular and individuated action based on perceptions of course documents as well as perceived consequences for such acting. Students' action and interaction revolve around these various perceptions in the classroom's life-world. In other words, the possibility for student agency is constructed in relation to classroom boundaries, as assignment prompts. Assignments, it seems, have become naturalized in our classrooms that we have not devoted time, both in our methods for teaching first-year writing and in the body of scholarship to consider how assignments are sites where miscommunication lives. Likewise, agency is inextricably linked to the perceived demands of

assignments, which therefore influences how students can see themselves acting within the classroom ecology. This interaction, however, is never perfect.

To problematize the theory of boundariness, this chapter has three aims: first, I overview the limitations of this study; then, I analyze my grounded theory of boundariness in relation to the review of literature I conducted in chapter one. Lastly, I discuss pedagogical and administrative implications.

Limitations

First, because of constraints to my time and resources, the size of this study (e.g., a single class with only a handful of students willing to meet for interviews) could be enlarged by following multiple different classes or having a higher sample size of students. In this case, I could have examined to what degree boundariness are created across multiple classes. Additionally, I could investigate if boundariness might be apparent with different classes and different instructors. Future research can also attempt to corroborate these findings in relation to other institutions: how might a multi-institutional study of first-year writing illuminate how boundariness operates in more global contexts?

Likewise, the local context for this study is also a limitation. It was suspect to a very specific assessment protocol for a very specific institutional context, which is evident by the findings of this particular study. Assignments, for instance, were frequent and not graded, building up to the semester-end evaluation. Other models of first-year writing, which may use three or four projects, may find boundariness constructed in ways that are oriented to perceptions of grades. Institutions that don't use this version of an assignment sequence or large-scale assessment practices may find different results regarding how boundariness constructs and coordinates classroom life. Future studies can examine how non-standardized assessment procedures alter this conception of the boundariness.

Also, the instructor's position also might have some bearing on the results. Ana and I were trained in the same TA cohort with the same mentor during our first-year in the program. Future studies can investigate the way boundaries are constructed by different instructors, of different preparation, of different levels of experience, and of different genders, races, and sexualities.

Lastly, my positionality as a researcher could also be a limit. On the first day, I introduced myself as Ana's colleague and a graduate student. Ana and I often referred to myself as a portfolio reader, and when interacting with students, I referred to my own ENG 101 class as a potential scheduling conflict. Once or twice, students asked me questions about the PAR, Review, and, once, their essay. This reveals the ways the class perceived me as an instructor and an assessor, who had, like Ana, institutionally ascribed authority. These mentions of my position in the English department could have some bearing on the kinds of answers I received in individual interviews. In future studies, the researchers ought to take no pedagogical role in the classroom and not align with the instructor as I did intentionally on the first day (see Dyson, 2013).

Mapping Official Space in the Writing Classroom

In many ways, boundariness is a map. As Alfred Korzybski (1993) demonstrates, maps are conceptual, imaginary and theoretical; they are never full presentations of space and place. Maps are only ever (re)presentations of localities and only ever "useful" to the degree that they guide travelers to where they want to go. Thinking along these lines in the writing classroom, boundariness conceptualized as a map— but not as a territory— illustrates how classroom life, and the action of students in that life-world, is accomplished and perpetuated complex epistemic, inter-active, intersubjective, and symbiotic modes. Furthermore, such a "map" indicates that agency is established and perpetuated *in relation to* continual processes of perceiving, acting, and interacting with and around textual boundaries. Put differently, boundariness conveys how agency is enacted

through everyday interaction in the writing classroom and is enacted *in relation* to central course documents.

For instance, questioning was a way everyday classroom action was co-constructed in relation to course documents. Almost every class, Ana built in time to read and annotate assignments, and she also provided time for students to ask questions about the assignment prompts. In my second interview with Calvin, I asked him how he sees the purpose of these questioning sessions in class. He answered,

I think it's to get our brains moving clearly because at least from my standpoint, I understand things more. When I don't know anything, and we start walking through the problem. She could just tell it to us and it wouldn't make sense, but I feel like I understand an assignment better when she's like, "Okay, what does this mean? Blah, blah, blah." We're able to work through because it obviously goes to show even by just reading that one page we usually do, it's not enough and we still have questions on it. We have to keep asking questions, you guys ask questions, and vice versa.

The dialectical progression of classroom discussion that Calvin points out illustrates boundariness as co-constructive. The conversation's movement between the instructor, the assignment prompt, and the student's interpretation of the prompt build off each other. As Calvin says, by building off of one another, he, and presumably the class as a whole, can understand assignments better when engaged in such a dialectical conversation—that is, 'when she's like, "Okay, what does this mean? Blah, blah, blah."' Calvin's final sentence in his answer here demonstrates the how both the teacher ("you guys"¹⁰) and students ("we") co-constitute the boundary by questioning. Throughout the

¹⁰ "You guys" here also seems to signal that Calvin sees me as a teacher. See limits of the study for a discussion of my positionality as a researcher.

semester, dialectic discussions between Ana and her class occur *with and around* course documents. This became evident as a way of boundary building—that is reaching an understanding of what was expected to be completed. In the following snippet, we can see how the class as a whole built understanding of Assignment #24:

Calvin: How's it going to be structured?

Ana: How do you think this should be structured? Right, we have three things going into our portfolio: two essays and a critical reflection. Now, what should this look like?

Mark: An essay?

Ana: Mark is suggesting an essay. It's a little different than an academic essay

Mark: But it's not bullet points.

Ana: It's definitely not bullet points

The above represents a typical exchange that illuminates the dialectical problem solving with and around assignment prompts that was featured in each class meeting. We see, aligning with Foucault's theory of power, that power is not exacted from the powerful (i.e., Ana) onto and over the powerless (i.e., the students). Instead, through this back and forth, the conditions of classroom life were established. Ana and Mark co-interpret the boundaries of the assignment prompt, and in reaching “shared understandings” of the assignment, the limit of official space has been established. In this case, composing bullet points would transgress the official space constructed here. In this example, both teachers and students contribute to the understanding that this assignment was essay-like—that is, not bullet points (as some other examples). The perception of agency then is constructed through the laboring with and around assignment prompts.

Calvin, in the same interview cited above, discusses what underpins the questions he tends to ask in class:

I'm usually confused about the type of media that we're going to be doing. Is it going to be an essay? Is it going to be a bullet? What does she want? Obviously, I want to give what she wants to make sense to her and for me. That's my biggest thing because most of the time it doesn't really clearly say and then I feel like I have to ask. Everybody else usually has the same question too.

Noticeably, Calvin's answer positions Ana in a position of power, even though, as I discuss above, classroom life is co-constructed, and power resides through this. Calvin's phrase, "what does she want," show us that power asymmetry is still a presence in the decision-making processes for Calvin. Boundariness focuses our attention to the ways in which "power dynamics" and "power asymmetry" emerges not so much from singular sites (e.g., the power-full preying on the power-less), but on the on-going processes of meaning-making and action and interaction made in relation to course documents.

Boundariness as (Mis)Communication

As I note in chapter one, rhetoric and composition has spent limited attention to assignments and agency. Boundariness fills this gap by making visible the processes by which meaning is made, and how through the fraught construction of that meaning classroom life becomes enacted. Boundariness provides depth to discussions of contact zones. As Cynthia Fields (2016) notes, the term "contact zone," particularly in compositions studies, "has frequently been associated with efforts to improve students' reflection and critical consciousness" (p. 39). Field's points to "student's reflection and critical consciousness" as needing "improvement." However, what contact zones, as a heuristic (West, 1996, p. 145), focus on the possibilities of students to be agents, "investigating the range of literature practices available to those within asymmetrical power relationships" (Miller, 1994, p. 399). McCook (2016), too, points to contact zones as a framework invested in students negotiating power, and more specifically issues of language difference (Lu, 1994;

Canagarajah, 2006) and languaging (Inoue, 2017). What boundariness shows us, particularly from a contact zone framework, is the ways in which power isn't a coherent, unified "thing." That is, power doesn't reside in one site or one thing. However, power occurs and is enacted through all members in the life-world through these processes of meaning-making and acting in relation to made meaning. Future research involving contact zone research can consider conceptualizing power as a process of everyday life and the kinds of "meet[ing], clash[ing], and grappl[ing happen] with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt, 1991, p. 34).

Furthermore, student agency in the classroom is influenced (if not impacted) by the interpretation of classroom boundaries (which are always co-constructed). By constructing an understanding of what assignments, to paraphrase Calvin, "want," students try to perform in ways that converge with those perceived expectations. Students enact their agency in understanding and responding to the demands of their assignments, syllabi, and assessment rubrics. As Ana's class demonstrates quite well, students who read and ask questions about their task at hand are clear ways student's agentic potential comes to light. In other words, within the teacher-determined space of asking questions, as I described above, students "play" to come to understand the complexities of what they perceive to be asked of them. Such play reveals the epistemic dimension of agentic movement in the writing classroom. This study would agree with Lu & Horner (2013) claim that writers don't

seem[] to have to choose between exercising writer agency through recognizable breaks with ostensibly stable language practices and conventions-and thereby putting one's academic and economic survival at risk-and purchasing such survival by submitting to demands for conformity. (p. 592)

Converging with Lu & Horner, boundariness emplaces the potential for agency in the classroom around the interpretation of course documents, which indeed would be a language act. Classroom

boundaries, while co-constructed by both teachers and students, delineate “accepted” (and “accepted” here might translate to passing the semester-end review) or “unaccepted” action in the space of the official world. This illuminates that is agency always possible, but always also contingent upon systems of interactions that can, and often do, limit choice-making. In the classroom, such documents, often authored by instructors and program administrators, are inextricably linked to what students do and feel they do in the classroom.

Even so, boundariness explains, rather robustly, the ways that communication is always imperfect, approximate, and opaque. As Calvin and his peers illustrate, interpretation of the semester-end evaluation rubric diverged quite a bit from the intended uses of the rubric. The divergence between the intended communicative power of the text and the actual communicated knowledge that the students gather convey that communication can’t be said to be perfect. As a concept, boundariness does not attempt to dilute miscommunication, but rather acknowledge that meaning-making is always fraught with misunderstandings. Such misunderstanding, furthermore, shows that communication is humanistic and intersubjective. We live with others and *try to* understand their being, but we cannot totally and transparently understand what individuals mean. In other words, as a theory boundariness does not presume to reduce miscommunication between intersubjective bodies. Instead, it points out that all communication is approximate.

For instance, April’s interview indicated her understanding about the assessment and how to pass it:

We need to put effort in to get good grades, if we fail that would be bad, that would be bad for the professor too. At the end of the day is about how much do you care about your grade, and you want to pass. You have to put effort in.

April interrelates effort and labor to pass the course, and later she goes on to express Ana's role in the portfolio: "She'll help us, she doesn't want us to fail, obviously." Calvin, on the other hand, states

that he “never heard of this process before” and notes that “the most concerning thing to me is having unbiased readers look at it.” Further, Sam, during an in-class activity, noted “I know someone who tutors the athletes. He said that we are supposed to push two essays together.” Together, these snippets of student attitudes around the assessment represent a myriad of stitched together, incomplete understandings of the assessment rubric. These attitudes stem from what looks like previous interactions with assessments and schooling: April's work-hard and get rewarded axiom and Calvin's unfamiliarity with double-blind assessment criteria point to the multiple, fragmented ways the assessment rubric is understood. Because the understanding of the document was engulfed in the unknown, students acted in relation to this unknowability. Ashley, who had failed the previous semester reflected on her why she failed:

I feel like last year I didn't write a lot for like the homework assignments. So, I'm trying to like write more than I did last year, but. I think [Ana] is better than my professor last year.

In juxtaposition with Calvin, Ashley also noted that “portfolio reviewers are not bias against, so they can give like their honest opinion about your writing.” Collectively, these mentions point to the opaque and approximate co-construction of classroom boundaries. As these understandings of classroom actions are approximate, that approximation anchors how students act in the writing classroom. In the example provided above, Ashley's approximation of her own communicative failure in the previous semester's assessment is *further approximated* by “writing more” in her subsequent interactions in the class. In rather explicit ways, this example showcases how miscommunication is simply part of intersubjectivity.

Pedagogical and Administrative Implications

As a grounded theory, boundariness has implications for teachers of writing, particularly how teachers go about composing and engaging with their assignments in class. Boundariness, as a conceptual lens, provides way of seeing the possibility of agency as tied to the co-interpretation of

assignments in the writing classroom, while acknowledging the certainty of miscommunication around assignments and their demands. Likewise, classroom life, as several genre theorists have pointed out, is bound to genre participation. For instance, in Bazerman's (2004) analysis of the genre sets employed in an elementary school classroom, he points to the amalgamation of student-participation in teacher-directed genres, which sustain learning in the classroom. As Bazerman explains, "genres are strongly shaped by the teacher's decisions of what should be written and how" (p. 332). Bazerman is helpful as we think of how assignments are imbued with certain authorities and how these authorities may limit the potential of agency. Assignments are, after all, composed of teachers of writing and are uptake genres (Dryer, 2016). The take up of assignments, however, is relegated to how the teacher authorizes that uptake. What ought to be taken up, as Bazerman points out, is aligned with what the teacher desires. This, I think, is an important consideration as we shift focus to student agency in terms of genre participation. Boundariness, then, tells us to pay attention to the ways in which teachers might eclipse their student's desire with "what [they think] should be written and how" (Bazerman 2004, p. 332), which is also aligned with local and national learning outcomes. In this way, assignments ought to be composed in ways that emphasize authentic rhetorical situations, with authentic audiences, purposes, and contexts for composing. However, boundariness alters us to consider the multiple ways our assignments might be interpreted by our students. This, I think, converges with genre theory's treatment of composing effective assignments that employ authentic rhetorical situations. Teachers of writing, however, must consider the multitude of ways the interpretation of assignments might potentially influence the degree to which students write and respond to assignments. Furthermore, because individual assignments were not graded in Ana's class, the stakes of interpreting these assignments were momentarily lessened. Thus, teachers of writing ought to engage in reflexive writing practices when composing writing assignments, considering specifically the range of interpretations that students may come to.

Teachers ought to also be cautious of composing assignments with too strict of requirements that might have too much of an inhibiting effect of individual classroom action. For instance, declaratives, while helpful when asking students to compose a particular kind of text, could be used sparingly. Teachers should also follow the conventions of the discipline (e.g., defining key terms).

Because the theory of boundariness illustrates classroom action as bound to the co-interpretation of classroom boundaries, which are inevitably miscommunicated and misinterpreted. Boundariness, then, guides us to learn from Ana's pedagogical practices, which built in time for the meaning to be stabilized, even if only temporarily. Because Ana would invite questions about the assignments, the class would stabilize meanings of the text dialectically. Bazerman (2013), likewise, reminds us that the written word is fragile, but this fragility is often rendered invisible. In this way, teacher statements that divulge blame to his students (e.g., "they didn't do the assignments") reflects the brutal fact that, as Erving Goffman (1983) puts it, situations must be read and therefore readable. Boundariness, too, complicates Goffman's sentiment to add that these situations, once read, are invariably misread. Assignments are no exception. Building time to labor around these texts is integral for actors in the classroom ecology to make informed decisions how to act and understand the consequences of that perceived action.

But, it's perhaps not enough, or even possible, in the first-year writing classroom to write what we mean. Instead, we should take a page from Ana, building in time for meaning to be stabilized. Ann Berthoff's famous "Learning the Uses of Chaos" (1979) also directs our attention to making spaces in the writing classroom to stabilize meaning. She explains, "meanings change as we think about them; statements and events and interpretations can mean different things to different people at different times. Meanings are not pre-baked or set for all time; they are created, found, formed, and reformed" (p. 649). Berthoff goes on to explain that "meanings are hypothesized, identified, developed, modified, stabilized" (p. 650). Dialectically, the time built into Ana's class to

compose shared understandings enabled students to come to understand the assignments in ways they could make informed decisions of how to interact in or out of the official space. In other words, teachers of writing ought to be strategic when planning daily class meetings to make build in room for boundariness to occur. Furthermore, such processes could be employed in the teaching of college writing method and methodology course. Writing Program Administrators can teach new teachers of the concept of boundariness, asking teachers to reflect on how assignments and were being co-construction in class. However, even as Writing Program Administrators focus graduate students' attention to making their pedagogical texts legible, they also ought to also advocate pedagogies that acknowledge explicitly that communication is miscommunication. In other words, writing program might begin to play around with the idea that opacity is a communicative norm to develop assignments, activities, and readings that acknowledge the labor of communication. Of course, reading and interpretation are always approximate since texts are always reconstructed by intersubjective readers. However, what boundariness does is accentuate this point further, advancing communication as miscommunication as a central trope in the writing classroom.

A final implication of this study is one concerning large-scale, double-blind assessments used in first-year writing. First and foremost, I do not mean to suggest that assessments of these nature are invalid in the least—they are valid, reliable, and socially just. However, as this study revealed, the students in this particular class, could not adequately construct an understanding about the assessment in profitably agentic ways. This study revealed that the assessment rubric was a site of anxiety and inhibited classroom action due to these incomplete and fragmented narratives.

Interestingly, in the recent collection *Writing Assessment, Social Justice, and the Advancement of Opportunity*, Michael Sterling Burns, Randall Cream, and Timothy R. Dougherty (2018), in developing the work of Guba and Lincoln (1989), note,

assessment unconsciously reinforces attitudes that render students passive, inert, and disengaged from the lesson. As learning is constructed by humans and between humans, and for the benefit of improving human relations and conditions, Guba and Lincoln articulate a framework for evaluation that works to empower all individuals (p. 265)

Burns et al.'s development of Guba and Lincoln's *Fourth Generation Evaluation* illuminates that assessments unconsciously enforce those who are assessed as powerless, docile, and passive. This, I think, would adequately dovetail with my analysis of Icetown U. I'm not suggesting that the university replaces or retools the assessment procedure at Icetown U.; instead, I recommend that both pedagogically and administratively changes attempt to dilute the unconscious passivity of students produced by the assessment. Revision of the semester-end rubric that positions more explicitly the students being assessed as active learners and participants, rather than passive and docile. Administrators and teachers can also work to make shared knowledge of the assessment in ways that counters the myths that proliferate around the assessment.

Conclusion: A Need for a Critical Framework for Assignment Design

This thesis addressed a gap in scholarship around assignments and student agency used in the first-year writing classroom. Results illuminate that classroom life is continuously accomplished based on interpretations of assignments, syllabi, and rubrics employed in the first-year classroom. But these Individuals in the class acted in relation to the co-interpretation of such documents. Results show that assignments are inextricably linked to the possibility for agency in the first-year classroom, and, as such, warrant further attention of scholars of critical pedagogy and literacy. The results of this thesis, then, call for future research on the intersections between agency and assignments. However, more than this, it is what composition studies needs is to develop a What is needed in composition studies further, then, is a critical framework for assignment design: one that acknowledges the possibility of agency in relation to the interpretation of assignment prompts. Such

a framework would attend to the theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical components to assignment design, uptake, and agency.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Like many of the writing theorists and scholars you will read this semester, I'm interested in understanding how the different elements of the social world interact with the kinds of writing people do in different contexts. In this study, I'm examining the different ways first-year writing students come to understand and respond to power in their writing assignment prompts and how that interacts with the kind of writing they produce throughout the term.

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Nicholas Sanders, a graduate student in the Department of English at the University of Maine. Dr. Ryan Dippre is the faculty sponsor for this study, and he is an Assistant Professor in the English Department and the Director of College Composition. The purpose of the research is to understand how students in first-year composition interact with power in their writing classes. You must be 18 years or older to participate in this study.

What Will You Be Asked to Do?

During each class meeting, Mr. Sanders will observe your class and take field notes of what he observes happening in the classroom. Your permission is being requested for Mr. Sanders to take audio and video recordings *on occasion* throughout the semester. These sessions will be announced beforehand. During video recorded sessions, the camera will be positioned at the back of the room, in a long-shot format. At other points, Mr. Sanders may ask if he may record you completing a task, such as annotating a prompt, engaging in a classroom activity or discussion. The camera will be positioned closer to you during these instances. You may always feel free to say no if you are not comfortable being recorded at any point.

You may also be asked to participate in an interview with Mr. Sanders based on his observations in class. There are not set number of interviews for this study. In each interview, the researcher will ask you questions about how you see power working in the classroom, and how you respond to that power in class and in your writing. This interview will be audio recorded. It will run under an one hour, and it will be held in a place that is convenient for you. Some interview questions may include questions about your past experiences with reading and writing, how you understood something happening class, questions about the assignment prompts, and questions about your writing. You will be asked to review transcripts of these interviews for accuracy. You will receive a copy of an interview transcript one week after in hard copy. You will read through and mark any changes you'd like and return them within a week to me. Mr. Sanders will provide you revisions and will ask you to sign off on finalized transcripts.

The study is also asking for you to grant access to the assignments you complete over the course of the semester. If Mr. Sanders requests to interview you, he may ask to talk to you the recent writing you've done in class. He will not ask if you did something wrong in your writing. Instead, he will prompt you to talk about how an assignment prompt may have influenced what you wrote and why.

Risks

The risks of this study involve your time and attention. To allay this risk, the time that you give is up to you: schedules for interviews will be set up with your needs in mind.

You are free to refuse to answer any question or to participate in any aspect of this study, so if any part of the study makes you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to participate in it. You will also have the chance to review interviews before their publication, and any portions you would rather not have published will be deleted.

Benefits

This will be an opportunity for you to reflect on the ways in which power works in your learning and writing. This may benefit the ways in which you take up writing across your academic career. You will also get to see in action the kinds of research you will read about in English 101, which will help you to better understand the nuances and subtleties of university research.

The results of this research can inform policy makers, teachers, and researchers involved with the teaching of writing at the college level. Knowing how power is constructed, reproduced, and responded to might allow program administrators to develop and implement new instructional methods, responding to the findings of this study. The results of this finding can transform curricular, assessment, and assignment design for college instructors of writing.

Confidentiality

Your name will not be on any of the data. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity. A key linking your name to the pseudonym will be kept in a safe in the investigator's locked office. Data will also be kept in the investigator's locked office. No one other than Mr. Sanders and his faculty mentor, Dr. Dippre, will have access to the records collected. Your name or other

identifying information will not be reported in any publications. The key linking your name to the data will be destroyed after your participation in the study ends, December 15th 2017, and all data, with identifiers removed, will be kept indefinitely. Should you choose to end your participation in the study before it is completed, your name will be removed from the key. Audio recorded for interviews will be kept on a separate hard drive in a locked safe at the investigator's office, and will be kept indefinitely.

Voluntary

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to take part in this study, you may stop at any time and still benefit from the reflective activity and additional discussions you have taken part in. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer during any interview, and you may always turn down a request for documents.

In addition to this study being voluntary, each aspect detailed in "What Will You Be Asked to Do?" section is voluntary. Perhaps you would like to be interviewed but do not want to share your writing; perhaps you want to share your writing but do not want to be interviewed. This is entirely up to you. Feel free to participate in whatever aspects of the study interest you. At the bottom of this form you can select which aspects you are willing to participate in.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at 111 Neville Hall, University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469, by phone at (207) 581-3817, or by email at nicholas.sanders@maine.edu.

You may also contact Dr. Ryan Dippre, this study's faculty mentor, at 311 Neville Hall, University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469, by phone at (207) 581-3836, or by email at ryan.dippre@maine.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Gayle Jones, Assistant to the University of Maine's Protection of Human Subjects Review Board, at 581-1498 (or e-mail gayle.jones@umit.maine.edu).

Participant Information and Consent

Participant Name: _____

Email Address: _____

Mr. Sanders will contact you through this email address to schedule interviews if you agree to be contacted for interviews.

Overall Participation (check one):

I _____ agree or _____ do not agree to take part in this research study.

If you selected “agree” above:

_____ I would like to fully participate in this study. I agree to be video and audio recorded during class meetings, be contacted for interviews, and share my writing with Mr. Sanders.

OR

_____ I would like to partially participate in this study and only in the aspects I select below.

_____ I agree to be video and audio recorded during class meetings.

_____ I agree to be contacted for interviews.

_____ I agree to share my writing with Mr. Sanders.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B: PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

English 101 Final Portfolio Assessment Rubric (version 4.0)
University of Maine, Department of English

Writer Name _____
 Section Number _____

An ENG 101 Final Portfolio consists of one critical reflection and two substantially redeveloped and revised academic essays that exhibit the academic writing abilities the writer has developed during the term.

Writers satisfy the University of Maine's ENG 101 requirement by submitting a portfolio for assessment. During ENG 101 portfolio assessment, each portfolio is read by at least two ENG 101 instructors other than the writer's instructor; they must independently agree that it demonstrates the ability to meet course outcomes. These readers will comment on the portfolio's demonstration of each of the traits outlined below. *After* writing comments, using the back of this form if necessary, readers will make an overall judgment.

A critical reflection should demonstrate a reflective awareness of the writer's negotiations of academic discourse conventions. In order to engage reflectively with their own work, the writer should cite and analyze passages from the two accompanying essays to situate their work (create a critical context for it) in conversation with course texts (whether previously published or produced by colleagues), concepts, and/or outcomes. The writer can situate their work by analyzing the contexts, audiences, and/or purposes that occasioned the composition decisions evident in the portfolio.

How would you describe the critical reflection's demonstration of reflective awareness?

All portfolio essays should demonstrate conventions of academic discourse:

Are the writer's ideas adequately situated in relation to sources? Are important names and terms adequately defined? Are lines of inquiry adequately revealed and followed by such strategies as pursuing lines of reasoning, substantiating arguments, extending examples, providing quotations, paraphrasing, synthesizing, and summarizing? Are documentable claims supporting these inquiries adequately and consistently cited in-text and accompanied by appropriate reference page(s)?

Are controlling purposes apparent?

Do portfolio texts holistically suggest the ability to sufficiently negotiate conventional mechanics and usage to avoid misleading or confusing readers and/or to further the writer's purposes?

How would you describe this portfolio's demonstration of academic discourse conventions?

Further, the portfolio should demonstrate the ability to critically interpret texts:

Does this interpretation extend and/or complicate the original uses of the texts in order to adequately establish and convey the writer's purposes?

Does the portfolio provide analysis of passages from works read within the contexts of the controlling purposes?

Does the portfolio provide critical contexts through which at least a few passages are examined; is one text used to provide a context for understanding another?

How would you describe the portfolio's demonstration of the ability to critically interpret texts?

Does this portfolio demonstrate the ability to meet course outcomes and thus pass review?

_____ Yes

_____ No

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Nicholas Sanders is a second-year M.A. candidate in the department of English at the University of Maine. He completed his B.A. in English at the College of Saint Rose in Albany, New York, and an A.A. in general studies at SUNY Fulton-Montgomery Community College. His research interest includes anti-racist writing program administration and assessment, first-year writing, and critical pedagogy. Nicholas is a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in English from the University of Maine in May 2018.