

Lingering in the Threshold:  
A Faculty Development Initiative to Support Writing Instruction

Major Research Paper

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## Abstract

While academic writing is a ubiquitous university requirement, writing is seldom explicitly taught due to structural, attitudinal, and pragmatic constraints. In this paper, I propose a means of supporting writing instruction through faculty development, drawing on threshold concept theory, the strategies that have evolved to support Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing in the Disciplines initiatives, and adult learning theory. Taken together, this scholarship suggests that both faculty development offerings and writing instruction are most successful when a balance is achieved between linear progression toward conceptual understanding and cyclical, recursive thinking, allowing learners to linger in troublesome and incomplete understanding. On this theoretical foundation, I propose a model for a writing workshop series to support faculty in writing instruction. I conclude by suggesting ways in which this model could be modified for different institutions and discuss the implications for research and practice as well as the limitations of my work.

**Keywords:** writing pedagogy, writing instruction, threshold concepts, faculty development, adult learning

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## **Lingering in the Threshold: A Faculty Development Initiative to Support Writing Instruction**

Within the university, writing is the foundation of academic practice. Faculty use it both to disseminate and legitimize knowledge in their fields and to evaluate and legitimize students as apprentices within this system (Cameron et al., 2009; Mason & Atkin, 2020). Regardless of discipline, most forms of student assessment require some form of written communication that adheres to academic standards. Outside of first-year composition courses, however, which are rare in the Canadian context (MacDonald et al., 2016), writing is seldom explicitly taught (Cameron et al., 2009) even though it is almost universally expected of students in some capacity.

This lack of explicit writing instruction creates several difficulties for students. For example, the language used to describe writing is typically treated as though it were obvious and self-explanatory, what Lillis and Turner (2010) refer to as a “discourse of transparency” (p. 58). In reality, the language used to communicate with students about writing in instructions and feedback is anything but transparent. Words like structure, argument, organization, and clarity are ill-defined and slippery, their uses and meanings varying considerably by discipline, by instructor, and by assignment type (Bohr & Rhoades, 2014; Brannon & Pradl, 1984; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Turner, 2010; Wingate, 2018). Students are forced to engage in a kind of ad hoc “linguistic code switching” (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 161) to navigate the expectations of different instructors and courses. Adding to these problems, not only is the transfer of writing skills from one context to another notoriously difficult (Bohr & Rhoades, 2014; Downs & Wardle, 2007; Moore, 2012; Moore & Felten, 2020) but writing also produces some of

the strongest affective struggles for students including anxiety and imposter syndrome (Cafferella & Barnet, 2000; Cameron et al., 2009; Mason & Atkin, 2020). In short, writing is both one of the most important and one of the most difficult university-level skills to master and yet students typically receive less guidance from their instructors in this area than in discipline-specific skills and content.

### **Scope of the Project**

My purpose in this paper is to explore one possible remedy to address the discrepancy between the near-ubiquitous importance of writing in the university and the rarity of explicit writing instruction. In this endeavour, my emphasis is on professional development for writing instructors, not pedagogical approaches to writing instruction. That is, rather than exploring instructional methods, I foreground faculty development, seeking ways to provide instructors with the tools to teach writing in their own disciplinary contexts.

I first share the results of my literature review, including an overview of the methods that guided my search, offering answers to four over-arching research questions:

1. What barriers prevent faculty from offering writing instruction?
2. What theoretical model could guide the creation of a workshop series to support faculty in offering writing instruction?
3. What are the design features of an effective faculty writing workshop series?
4. How can theory and practice be combined in a professional development initiative that supports faculty in writing instruction?

Building on this research, I then propose a faculty development initiative, mapping out the structure of a workshop series and including sample workshop materials in the

appendices. Drawing on both theory and empirical research on similar professional development initiatives, I suggest a workshop framework that could be adapted for implementation at any post-secondary institution.

### **Methods**

I started my literature review with a broad, open-ended exploration of the faculty writing workshop using Google Scholar. I surveyed the search results at a high level to discern appropriate topics and key words to use in a more focused literature search. This initial survey suggested that I needed to include three categories: (a) genre, (b) content, and (c) context. In the first category, I narrowed my search to three possibilities: faculty workshop, faculty development, and educational development. In the second, I searched for writing instruction and writing pedagogy. In the third, I used the terms university and college. These variations were intended to account for differences in the terminology used across North America, where most of the research on writing instruction is published. For example, Canadian publications tend to use “educational development” and “university” to refer to the same thing American publications call “faculty development” and “college.”

In consultation with the Brock University Education Research Librarian, Jennifer Thiessen, I identified three scholarly databases to use in addition to Google Scholar in searching for literature on the faculty writing workshop: ERIC, Education Source, and the Canadian Business and Current Affairs Database. Using all possible combinations of my search terms, I completed twelve separate searches in each of the three databases to add to the resources I had already found through Google Scholar. Only the first two databases yielded useful results.

To further focus and expand my search, I looked for additional literature connected to the articles and book chapters I found that offered the clearest guidance for faculty writing workshops. To look backward, I simply consulted the notes and references of especially helpful sources. To look forward, I used ERIC and Google Scholar (the latter was a much more effective tool for this purpose) to browse later publications that had cited the original source.

The faculty writing workshop is not as commonly discussed in the literature as writing pedagogy. There is a great deal of research reporting on strategies for teaching writing or on first year composition initiatives and the impact of these interventions on student writing; much of this work is collated through the WAC Clearinghouse (n.d.-a). I chose to focus instead on research reporting on professional development offerings and the impact of these interventions on faculty teaching, a subtle but important distinction. While they are not extensively represented in my reference list, I did include some sources focusing on professional development for TAs or graduate students since in many cases these sources propose strategies that apply to faculty too. I also note that there is a great deal of research about training for those preparing to teach writing in the K-12 context. Since my emphasis is faculty development in higher education – and the K-12 context is quite different – I skimmed but did not delve deeply into this scholarship.

In the following sections, I lay out the results of my literature review in the form of answers to my four over-arching research questions.

### **What Barriers Prevent Faculty from Offering Writing Instruction?**

If writing is such an important skill for university students and if faculty so regularly assign writing of various kinds in their classes, why do they not devote more

time to writing instruction? Without discounting individual differences among faculty, the literature suggests several explanations that apply broadly across the landscape of higher education.

Perhaps the most important reason that many faculty do not teach writing is a lack of training. The process of obtaining a doctorate, which signals entry into academia, positions future faculty as subject experts in their own discipline but does little, if anything, to train them to teach this material (Engin & Atkinson, 2015). While co-curricular professional development offerings to help graduate students cultivate teaching skills are increasingly common, such opportunities were only just emerging when many of today's faculty were in academic training (Austin & Wulff, 2004; Boman, 2013). Even when workshops and courses on pedagogical topics are available, they are usually optional and are certainly not evaluated as part of the dissertation defence, the gate-keeping step to qualify to teach in higher education in most cases (Rose, 2012). Explicit training in writing instruction for aspiring academics, both historically and today, is even rarer than more general pedagogical training (Fulwiler, 1981; Perrow, 2018; Werner, 2013).

This lack of explicit training in writing pedagogy persists once students and graduates land in formal teaching roles, tenure-track or otherwise. Faculty members often lack the time and schools the funding for professional development in writing instruction (Barnhisel et al., 2012; Basgier & Simpson, 2020; Chang et al., 2016). Moreover, universities tend to value academic research over teaching effectiveness (Glowacki-Dudka & Brown, 2007; Schimanski & Alperin, 2018). Most schools do not prioritize good teaching, let alone good writing instruction, in tenure and promotion decisions;

instead, faculty are pressured to demonstrate research productivity in the form of grants, conference presentations, and publications (Basgier & Simpson 2020; Engin & Atkinson, 2015). In brief, proactive investment in teaching, especially the teaching of writing, is often unsupported at the institutional level. When professional development opportunities are available and faculty do take them up, instructors are more likely to seek stopgap measures to solve an immediate problem, which allows the broader structural problems around writing instruction to persist (Glowacki-Dudka & Brown, 2007). The upshot of all this is that many faculty feel unqualified to offer writing instruction (Good & Shumack, 2013). Reflecting on a decade of working with faculty to improve writing instruction, Flash (2016) comments that, “beneath these core assumptions may reside the most influential—and the most cloaked—assumption of all, namely that these faculty members suspect that they don’t know how to go about teaching writing” (p. 237).

The literature also shows that faculty face attitudinal barriers to implementing writing instruction in their courses. One of the most common concerns among faculty is that devoting time to writing instruction means sacrificing time spent teaching vital disciplinary content (Brammer et al., 2008; Flash, 2016; Gallagher et al., 2020; Parrish et al., 2016; Wingate et al., 2011). This problem is compounded by the way in which the term- or semester-based structure of the school year encourages modular thinking among faculty and an emphasis on short-term assessment (Moore & Felten, 2020; Shopkow & Middendorf, 2020). In other words, on the assumption that they will only have 10 to 15 weeks with any given student, faculty feel the pressure to maximize short-term content-driven goals rather than transferable skills like writing that only develop over time.

Many faculty also share problematic assumptions about student writing itself, for example, that writing is a universal skill (rather than a discipline-inflected one) that students should have mastered in high school or that writing is a one-time activity rather than a recursive process that requires regular practice and feedback (Barnhisel et al., 2012; Basgier & Simpson, 2020; Wingate, 2018). Another common problem is the misalignment of expectation and reality. For example, Flash (2016) describes how she helped faculty to recognize through reflection and conversation that they were unconsciously expecting graduate-level writing of their undergraduates. Finally, an attitude of resistance to writing instruction may also stem from the widespread conviction that teaching is a private, independent endeavour (Burgoyne & Chuppa-Cornell, 2018; Cox, 2004; Engin & Atkinson, 2015; Glowacki-Dudka & Brown, 2007). In other words, in contrast with research, where collaboration is generally both common and encouraged, postsecondary teaching culture promotes muddling through alone rather than seeking support. This discourages faculty from attempting to teach in ways that diverge from their own experiences as students, which typically did not include explicit writing instruction.

There is also a great deal of research suggesting that faculty do not teach writing, in part, because they have difficulty articulating what they want from students. Most are comfortable pointing out “bad writing” when they encounter it, but struggle to define “good writing” in ways that can be conveyed to students (Lea & Street, 1998). Part of this problem stems from the fact that there is little agreement about what constitutes effective writing, especially across disciplines (Barnhisel et al., 2012). Moreover, faculty often implement the conventions of their own discipline, learned gradually over many years, unconsciously. As such, they do not perceive the complexity of the thinking they ask of

their students in a much shorter time frame and are unable to articulate the constituent components of any given task they assign (Middendorf & Pace, 2004; Shopkow, 2009). Faculty mistakenly assume that students will pick up disciplinary writing conventions implicitly without explaining the features of good writing or the cognitive processes involved in producing it (Anson, 2015; Lea & Street, 1998; Weiss & Peich, 1980). This problem extends to different assignment types, as faculty do not think to specify purpose and audience even though they usually have tacit expectations about both (Parrish et al., 2016). Whether intentionally or subconsciously, many instructors do not devote time to writing instruction because they are unable to explain what it is that they want students to do and/or assume that students already know what is expected of them.

Adding to these problems, writing instruction is costly in both time and resources, which disincentivizes its implementation. Large class sizes and insufficient grading support make it difficult to offer the coaching and feedback students need to progress as writers (Basgier & Simpson, 2020; Gallagher et al., 2020; Hughes, 2020). These problems are compounded by the considerable variation in writing preparation of the students entering university, which creates the need for even more resource-intensive differentiated instruction (Hughes, 2020). All these factors, together, help to explain why faculty across disciplines do not devote time to writing instruction.

### **What Theoretical Model Could Guide the Creation of a Workshop Series to Support Faculty in Offering Writing Instruction?**

In the twentieth century, the notion of crossing a threshold as a metaphor for significant and usually permanent transformation gained currency across disciplines. The idea originated with the work of anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1960/1909) on the

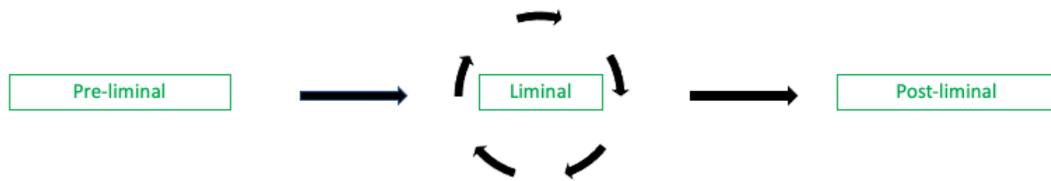
rite of passage, the tripartite ritual process (separation, transformation, reintegration) that accompanies the formal transition from adolescence to adulthood. It was Victor Turner (1969, 1982) who more fully defined the middle transformative step of this three-part process and showed its application beyond tribal ritual, including in literary contexts. Turner explains that societies oscillate between fixed, hierarchical structure and what he calls *communitas*, a liminal state where structure is temporarily relaxed, facilitating individual movement across conceptual thresholds and, so, social change. The motifs of crossing a threshold, muddling through a state of liminality, and thereby achieving new status was made accessible for a popular audience by Joseph Campbell (1949) and is illustrated in popular fiction in works as diverse as *Star Wars*, *The Hobbit*, and *Harry Potter*.

Relatively late to adopt this critical lens, the discipline of education was not formally introduced to the idea of thresholds or liminality until the early twenty-first century when Meyer and Land (2003) first discussed the threshold concept as an educational term. While Meyer and Land (2005) acknowledge the anthropological and literary lineage of their work, their educational focus diverges slightly from the canonical understanding of thresholds and liminality. In the context of education, the term threshold concept describes an idea that, once mastered, facilitates a significant and usually permanent shift in understanding in the learner (Meyer & Land, 2006a, 2006b). Thus, the most important difference between, on one hand, crossing a ritual or literary threshold and, on the other, crossing an educational one is that the obstacle traversed is not social but epistemological. That is, the transformation is not one of status – becoming an adult, a hero, or a wizard – but rather one of understanding.

In education, the liminal state of those who seek to cross a conceptual threshold is characterized by troubled or limited understanding, mimicry of expertise (without understanding) and, above all, learner variability; no two students are likely to master a threshold concept in the same way (Kent, 2016; Meyer & Land, 2005). Once they succeed, however, the resulting learning has several consistent characteristics (Kent, 2016; Meyer & Land, 2003, 2005, 2006a, 2006b). It entails a significant shift in perception or understanding. It is typically irreversible or takes conscious effort to unlearn. It exposes previously hidden relationships between ideas, particularly in the context of a specific academic discipline. Finally, it is troublesome, often defying common sense and intuitive thinking.

One of the richest features of threshold concept theory is the way in which it combines both linear and cyclical conceptions of learning. As in van Genep's (1960/1909) rite of passage, the process of mastering a threshold concept proceeds in three stages, which Meyer & Land (2006a) call pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal. And as in tribal initiation ritual, the process of mastering a threshold concept entails a linear progression effecting a significant and permanent change. At the same time, mastering threshold concepts is also an inherently recursive and iterative process (Kent, 2016), which, as Cousin (2006) describes, "involves messy journeys back, forth and across conceptual terrain" (p. 5). As in Turner's description of the liminal and unstructured *communitas*, learners attempting to cross a conceptual threshold may inhabit a state of confusion or uncertainty for an extended period, oscillating between different states of understanding and often temporarily regressing (Meyer & Land, 2006b). Threshold concept theory is so useful as a guiding principle in the sphere of education

precisely because it combines linear and cyclical processes in this way (as shown in Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Linear and cyclical processes in mastering threshold concepts.

### **Threshold Concepts, Faculty Development, and Writing Instruction**

Specifically, the threshold concept model can support faculty development in two important ways. First, the idea of threshold concepts is itself a threshold concept that can powerfully change the way faculty think about teaching and learning. It has been shown that structuring a class around threshold concepts instead of, for example, learning outcomes, improves student learning (Adler-Kassner & Majewski, 2015; Estrem, 2015; King & Felten, 2012). The exercise of identifying the threshold concepts in their discipline helps faculty to acknowledge the core disciplinary practices and modes of thinking they favour, often unconsciously, in their classes (Bain & Bass, 2011; Meyer, 2012). This awareness can help the faculty member to create better sequenced and scaffolded assignments and offers a powerful and flexible framework for course or curricular design (Adler-Kassner & Majewski, 2015). Teachers who teach from a threshold-informed lens are also better able to tolerate learner confusion because they understand this to be a productive part of the liminal phase, not simply a failure to learn (Cousin, 2006). They can also appreciate the variety of obstacles and sources of resistance that keep students stuck in the pre-liminal phase and take deliberate action to help students overcome these (Meyer & Land, 2006b).

In addition to its application in teaching and learning in the classroom, the threshold concept framework also applies to the way faculty themselves learn through professional development. Too often, faculty workshops take a teleological approach, foregrounding goal-oriented strategies and techniques that, once adopted, will supposedly transform student learning (Laughlin, 1997; Perrow, 2018). As Meyer and Land (2005) discuss, however, this teleological approach precludes the more open-ended and liminal

quality of the learning that leads to expert thinking (the comparison they draw is between rote undergraduate learning and post-graduate research). In other words, their work suggests that threshold concepts can provide not only the *content* for a workshop but also an ideal *structure* for such an initiative. Workshops should strive to create a space where faculty can both progress in a linear way toward a transformed understanding of teaching and learning and, at the same time, linger in the recursive, liminal, and troublesome modes of thought that make transformative learning possible (Adler-Kassner & Majewski, 2015). Basgier and Simpson (2020) address this idea explicitly and show that faculty thinking about writing instruction in the context of a faculty development initiative can be mapped onto the three phases of mastering a threshold concept (pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal). By helping faculty to navigate these stages of thinking in relation to writing instruction – an area where faculty are less likely to perceive themselves as experts – faculty development initiatives can help instructors to appreciate better the experiences of non-expert students in their own classes (Bain & Bass, 2011; Meyer, 2012).

Finally, in addition to providing a helpful lens through which to understand classroom teaching and learning as well as faculty development, threshold concepts are especially useful for understanding the process of learning how to write and, by extension, teaching others how to write. In the canonical volume on threshold concepts for writing, Adler-Kassner and Wardle (2015a) lay out 37 foundational statements about writing that cover everything from awareness of audience to the importance of revision to writing as a mode of thinking. Many of the ideas expressed in this volume seem obvious once articulated. However, these ideas are likely to be latent rather than conscious

knowledge for most instructors (Anson, 2015), which can lead them to omit these important ideas in assignment instructions.

In sum, threshold concepts have great potential to facilitate faculty development in support of writing instruction. The tripartite structure of pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal is a useful shorthand for effective curricular and workshop design, while the threshold concepts themselves suggest valuable content for both contexts. This theoretical framework underpins my faculty workshop design to support university instructors in teaching writing.

### **What Are the Design Features of an Effective Faculty Writing Workshop Series?**

The importance of writing instruction in the context of university education and the barriers that often prevent faculty from providing it have long been recognized. The most successful attempt to address these issues has been the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement, which evolved in the US in the 1960s and 1970s (Anderson & Felten, 2021). While WAC programs can vary hugely in scope and in specific practices, “a WAC Program in its simplest term is any organized, recognized, and sustained effort--no matter how modest in people, resources, and funding--to help faculty in any and every course use writing more deliberately and more often” (WAC Clearinghouse, n.d.-b). A corollary to these efforts, often paired with WAC programs, is Writing in the Disciplines (WID), which supports faculty in designing informal writing activities and formal written assignments that help students to develop skills and competencies specific to a particular academic discipline (WAC Clearinghouse, n.d.-c). Some of the core assumptions of the WAC/WID model include the idea that writing is a form of thinking, that good writing requires learning disciplinary conventions, that all

faculty should teach writing, not just English departments, and that students learn to write best through active and collaborative engagement (McLeod & Soven, 2000).

My research into effective faculty writing workshop design draws heavily on this WAC/WID framework because of its track record of success. WAC/WID workshops are often better attended and more effective at inspiring institutional change than other faculty development initiatives, in part because the core principles of WAC/WID are so easily transferred to other contexts (Artze-Vega et al., 2013; Caldwell & Sorcinelli, 1997). Given the origins of WAC in the 1960s and 70s, there is an enormous body of research to draw on and I can touch on only a fraction of it here. I note that, as some of the most important WAC/WID scholarship emerged in the 1980s (work reflecting on the lessons that emerged from the first decade of WAC/WID programming), I have included older literature in my overview, which is still relevant despite its age. Here I survey the most important themes that emerge from a broad survey of the WAC/WID literature on faculty writing workshops.

### **Authentic Learning Experiences**

Perhaps the most common advice for those seeking to design an effective writing workshop is that they must provide faculty with authentic experiences. In other words, they must give faculty opportunities to apply what they are learning in realistic situations. This can be accomplished by having faculty bring an actual assignment from one of their classes to revise (Brannon & Pradl, 1984; Geller, 2011; Perrow, 2018; Werner, 2013) or identify a specific course to focus on throughout the workshop experience (Cox, 2004; Laughlin, 1997). It is also helpful to ask faculty to work with actual students, either by engaging with their written work or by interacting in person. By asking faculty to assess

actual samples of student writing rather than discussing assessment and feedback in the abstract, teachers improve their ability to provide formative feedback (especially through the acquisition of a meta-language for providing feedback), gain confidence in their assessments, clarify their goals and assumptions, and learn from the diversity of experience and perspectives among the faculty in the workshop (Faery, 1993; Fulwiler, 1981; Limbick & Knight, 2005; Parrish et al., 2016).

Even more widespread than the advice to give faculty authentic experiences as teachers is to give them authentic experiences as students. In part, this is because it is crucial to help instructors remember the awkwardness and anxiety that can accompany both the writing process itself and the experience of sharing that writing with others (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Chang et al., 2016; Faery, 1993; Fulwiler, 1981; Geller, 2011; McLeod & Soven, 2000; Perrow et al., 2018; Weiss & Peich, 1980). Workshop facilitators can ask faculty to share writing done during the workshop itself, taking faculty out of their disciplinary comfort zone, or to share work in progress from their own research program, asking them to allow others to see work that is not yet ready for publication (Geller, 2011). Both kinds of sharing make faculty vulnerable. As Perrow (2018) explains, the main benefit of asking faculty to write, not just critique others' writing, is that it helps faculty recognize that writing is not just a cognitive activity but also a psychosocial one. Instructors who understand this from authentic experience can better empathize with the affective experiences of their students.

It is also important to help instructors understand (or remember) what it feels like to follow instructions and receive feedback (Brannon & Pradl, 1984; McLeod & Soven, 2000; Perrow, 2018). This helps faculty to reflect on their own writing process (Perrow,

2018), to experience different genres of writing and understand how important it is to give clear parameters regarding purpose and audience (McLeod & Soven, 2000), and to identify the points of confusion they experience, allowing them to better predict where students may be confused (Brannon & Pradl, 1984). It is also important for instructors to experience the confusion that students often feel when confronted with an unclear or ambiguous comment from a reader. Through these kinds of experiences, instructors will often discover that their struggles as teachers are parallel to their students' struggles as learners, which better positions faculty to support students through difficulties (Perrow, 2018).

Authentic experiences of writing can help faculty appreciate the benefits of assigning authentic writing in their own classes. Rather than focusing on the fake work of exams and essays, where the implied audience is the instructor alone, writing workshop exercises can expose faculty to a broader range of writing situations and audiences (Anson, 2015; Downs & Robertson, 2015; Freisinger, 1980; Herrington, 1981). This is not to say that faculty should be encouraged to take a "careerist" approach, one in which authentic writing is construed as a kind of job training (Parrish et al., 2016). Rather, if workshops give faculty the experience of writing for different kinds of audiences, they are more likely to see the potential benefits of using this approach in their own classes.

Similarly, when workshops include ample opportunity for informal writing exercises, faculty are more likely include informal writing in their own classes (Chang et al., 2016; Faery, 1993; Freisinger, 1980; Fulwiler, 1981). By experiencing the benefits of so-called writing-to-learn (Emig, 1977; Rubin, 1988), faculty become more willing to sacrifice content to make space for reflective and exploratory writing. Authentic

experiences that help faculty to understand the student perspective better need not be restricted to writing exercises. Peer observation (Good & Shumack, 2013) and partner work founded on the old chestnut that “[students] do not fully understand something until they have succeeded in explaining it to someone else” (Middendorf & Pace, 2004, p. 10), are also useful faculty exercises. In short, as Meyer (2012) suggests, if faculty have experienced something as a student, they are more likely to recreate that experience for their own students.

### **Community Formation**

Another pervasive theme in the literature about effective faculty writing workshops is the benefit of bringing groups of faculty together. Much of the literature on such workshops emphasizes the importance of building community (Faery, 1993; Geller, 2011; Glowacki-Dudka & Brown 2007; Lawler, 2003; Perrow, 2018). Since teaching is itself a highly social activity, professional development for teachers should also be social (Engin & Atkinson, 2015; Geller, 2011). The benefits of bringing faculty together for a workshop – by contrast with other models such as mentoring or one-on-one peer observation – are many. A group of people brings together a diversity of talent and expertise that a facilitator can encourage participants to share, for example, through narratives of personal experience or brainstorming activities (Caldwell & Sorcinelli, 1997; Fulwiler, 1981). Collective reflection (Flash, 2016) and consensus-building (Fulwiler, 1981) also contribute to group formation. It is especially valuable to bring together participants at different career stages. More experienced teachers can share examples of success and failure while less experienced teachers can help to re-energize their senior colleagues who may feel somewhat stagnant in their teaching practice (Engin

& Atkinson, 2015). Group writing workshops also often have an afterlife where faculty are available to each other for less formal interaction and sustained support after the end of formal programming (Good & Shumack, 2013; Laughlin, 1997).

One powerful model for community formation in the context of faculty development is the Faculty Learning Community (FLC), which brings a collegial community of faculty together at regular intervals to discuss, reflect, build relationships, and set goals around shared professional issues in a structured way (Chang et al. 2016; Cox, 2004; Engin & Atkinson, 2015; Glowacki-Dudka & Brown, 2007). These communities work best when the group is based around either a cohort (for example, a new group of incoming faculty) or shared topic of interest (Cox, 2004; Ward & Selvester, 2012). Such groups allow faculty to co-construct knowledge (Engin & Atkinson, 2015), particularly in recognition of the fact that, while faculty are separated by discipline, they are all equally participants in the campus teaching culture (Glowacki-Dudka & Brown, 2007). A successful FLC emphasizes community-building. Participants must commit to openness, trust, and respect, must be willing to offer and accept feedback, and must share a commitment to teaching and learning (Chang et al., 2016; Cox, 2004; Ward & Selvester, 2012).

### **Individual Reflection**

As important as it is to encourage the formation of a lasting, supportive group, it is equally important to ensure that attendees have the chance to reflect as individuals as part of their participation in a writing workshop. Including specific exercises for private reflection is a common suggestion for these types of faculty development initiatives (Burgoyne & Chuppa-Cornell, 2018; Chang et al., 2016; Perrow, 2018; Taczak &

Robertson, 2016) and, for Basgier and Simpson (2020), a crucial part of cementing post-liminal understanding when mastering a threshold concept. These reflections can take various forms including journaling (Fulwiler, 1981) and freewriting (Freisinger, 1980). The act of writing is tied to a sense of identity (Cameron et al., 2009) and self-worth (Caffarelli & Barnet, 2000), and writing instruction, especially when one feels apprehensive about it, can tap into these same psychosocial domains. Reflection allows instructors to work through affective responses to sharing work and having their pedagogical assumptions challenged (Brannon & Pradl, 1984), not to mention recognizing those assumptions in the first place (Flash, 2016).

While academic discipline marks the faculty member as part of a group, in the context of a faculty writing workshop their discipline can also situate them as an individual distinct from participants in other disciplines. In fact, interdepartmental workshops can be the only place where a faculty member comes to appreciate the differences between their own disciplinary writing conventions and those of others and, by extension, the situated and context-dependent nature of writing (Adler-Kassner & Majewski, 2015; Brammer et al., 2008; Downs & Robertson, 2015; Downs & Wardle, 2007; Faery, 1993). Willard-Traub (2008) connects this to Bourdieu's notion of self-reflexivity, whereby juxtaposing one's own ideas with those of others enables better self-understanding. Reflecting on the design of their 12-week WAC faculty development program, Zemliansky and Berry (2017) note that an emphasis on disciplinary differences (rather than shared writing struggles) allowed faculty to take ownership of the workshop content and individualize it for their respective classes. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the recognition of individual disciplinary differences also makes

commonalities that transcend discipline more visible (Brammer et al., 2008; Caldwell & Sorcinelli, 1997; Geller, 2011). In this sense, individual reflection empowers instructors to move beyond narrowly conceived genre-based writing to support student transfer of learning between classes (Barnhisel et al., 2012; Bohr & Rhoades, 2014; Moore, 2012; Perrow, 2018; Taczak & Robertson, 2016).

In the end, a balance between community and individualism is ideal. Instructors need to feel they are not alone and that others share the same struggles and anxieties. At the same time, instructors need opportunities to reflect on their own discipline-inflected beliefs about writing instruction and to understand that their students are likely to encounter different writing expectations in other colleagues' classes.

### **Workshop Pragmatics**

Unsurprisingly, there is a great deal of variation in the format of faculty writing workshops and little consensus around the specifics. Ultimately, each institution must take stock of its own needs and resources and make the best decision for its own circumstances. There are, however, some general principles that may offer helpful guidance across contexts.

### **Participants**

The recommended number of participants ranges from as small as five or six (Glowacki-Dudka & Brown, 2007; Ward & Selvester, 2012) to as large as twenty-five or thirty (Fulwiler, 1989; Laughlin, 1997). The FLC model recommends six to fifteen (Cox, 2004). Smaller groups facilitate relationship building and allow for all participants to contribute to group conversations (Brannon & Pradl, 1984; Fulwiler, 1989) while larger groups include a diversity of disciplinary backgrounds and a broader range of opinions

and experiences (Fulwiler, 1989). A hybrid model is also possible, interspersing plenary sessions with smaller discipline-specific sessions (Zemliansky & Berry, 2017).

Participants in faculty writing workshops are generally self-selected volunteers, a form of autonomy McLeod and Soven (2000) argue is important for adult learners. Some, however, advocate for extending invitations to those who already have a relationship with the writing centre (Zemliansky & Berry, 2017) or even restricting participation to those recommended by colleagues, chairs, administrators, or former participants (Shea et al., 2006).

### **Timing**

While an individual workshop session might range from sixty or seventy-five minutes (Fulwiler, 1989; Gallagher et al., 2020) to two or three hours (Good & Shumack, 2013; McLeod & Soven, 2000, Perrow, 2018), there is general agreement across the literature that these individual workshops only have sustained impact if they are themselves sustained over time (Laughlin, 1997; Paskevicius & Bortolin, 2016; McLeod & Soven, 2000; Perrow, 2018; Stes et al. 2010; Zemliansky & Berry, 2017). This could be in the form of an intensive retreat lasting a few days to a few weeks (Geller, 2011; Laughlin, 1997) or in the form of recurring meetings over the course of a semester or academic year (Cox, 2004; Gallagher et al., 2020; Glowacki-Dudka & Brown, 2007; Vaughan & Garrison, 2006; Ward & Selvester, 2012). Some programs combine both approaches with an initial intensive introductory session followed by a series of shorter meetings (Good & Shumack 2013; Herrington, 1981; Perrow, 2018). There is agreement across the literature that the most successful programs last long enough to facilitate both community-building and sustained individual reflection (Paskevicius & Bortolin, 2016;

Stes et al. 2010; Garrison & Vaughan, 2006). The best timing for an intensive retreat is typically just before or just after the semester (McLeod & Soven, 2000; Perrow, 2018). If a school opts for shorter, recurring meetings, it is important to avoid too many workshops in the same semester (McLeod & Soven, 2000) since scheduling is a perennial problem for oversubscribed faculty members (Engin & Atkinson, 2015; Paskevicius & Bortolin, 2016; Perrow, 2018; Vaughan & Garrison, 2006; Zemliansky & Berry, 2017).

### **Face-to-face, Online, or Blended?**

Given our unprecedented ability to engage remotely in university activities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to consider whether and to what degree a faculty development initiative should incorporate online components. Some aspects of the face-to-face experience are certainly difficult to replicate online, for example, the immediacy of social connection and a greater sense of openness between participants (Vaughan & Garrison, 2006). There are also lower rates of attrition when recurring meetings are face-to-face (Engin & Atkinson, 2015). However, face-to-face meetings, especially for extended initiatives, can cause other problems. Scheduling is challenging considering heavy faculty workloads, and it can be more difficult to get participants to commit to attend in the first place (Engin & Atkinson, 2015; Vaughan & Garrison, 2006). A fully online program has the opposite drawbacks and benefits: a weaker sense of social connection (especially at first), greater ease of scheduling, and stronger recruitment. Online teaching allows instructors to respond more immediately to learner ideas and questions as compared to spaced-out in-person sessions (Brooks, 2010). It has also been noted that an online venue is more inclusive, making attendance easier

and increasing the participation of those who might otherwise be excluded for reasons of introversion, disability, or anxiety (Brooks, 2010; Engin & Atkinson, 2015).

There is general agreement in the literature that a blended model, with some in-person components and some asynchronous online components, offers the best of both worlds. Blended workshops create a stronger sense of community than either fully in-person or fully online options, allowing both the immediacy of face-to-face interaction and, at the same time, the ability to sustain momentum between meetings (Brooks, 2010; Engin & Atkinson, 2015; Good & Shumack, 2013; Shea et al., 2006; Vaughan & Garrison, 2006). For example, in one case study, faculty reported that the blended model facilitated greater communication than other modes of engagement and empowered them to take responsibility for co-constructing their learning experience (Paskevicius & Bortolin, 2016). In another, the participants reported that blended learning led to a greater sense of intimacy and trust within the group, in part, because the face-to-face session facilitated the formation of strong social bonds while the online environment gave participants the space to reflect on the lessons of their in-person sessions in a more leisurely way (Vaughan & Garrison, 2006). In terms of participation, blended learning may increase initial enrolment (Hanna, 2014) but still risks attrition over time, particularly in online elements (Engin & Atkinson, 2015). A fringe benefit of blended learning is the way in which it helps faculty to understand the online learning experience from the student perspective, which can improve online teaching in general (Hanna, 2014; Paskevicius & Bortolin, 2016).

## **Facilitation**

Most of the other practical advice for faculty writing workshops can be loosely collected under the heading of “advice to the facilitator.” On this topic, Fulwiler (1989) offers an especially helpful set of guidelines, including the need to listen carefully and be responsive to participants, to create structure and be predictable, and to be flexible enough to spend more or less time on planned activities and modify them spontaneously as necessary. Facilitators are advised to show, not tell (including doing all the writing exercises alongside participants), amass a repertoire of effective examples, and draw on faculty experience and expertise to illuminate and supplement workshop content (Artze-Vega et al., 2013; Fulwiler, 1981; Hughes, 2020). They should avoid the impulse to downplay or ignore faculty resistance, instead, teasing out the assumptions behind the resistance so they can be examined (Artze-Vega et al., 2013; Flash, 2016; Laughlin, 1997). Just as faculty should do in their classes, facilitators should sequence learning opportunities and encourage faculty to return recursively to earlier topics with new understanding (Perrow, 2018). Finally, Weiss and Peich (1980) suggest planning a formal mechanism to provide closure at the end of the experience, for example a shared meal or drink.

### **How Can Theory and Practice be Combined in a Professional Development Initiative to Support Faculty in Writing Instruction?**

As I have discussed, the idea of threshold concepts is a helpful theoretical model for thinking about many aspects of supporting faculty in teaching writing. It can be used to conceptualize the process of learning to write, to identify ways to teach either writing or disciplinary content, and to structure faculty development opportunities. In all these

applications of threshold concepts, learners must move both in a linear fashion from pre-liminal to liminal to post-liminal understanding and in a cyclical fashion, returning to the same ideas recursively. The question must now be answered: How does this abstract theoretical model align with the more pragmatic suggestions for faculty writing workshops reviewed above?

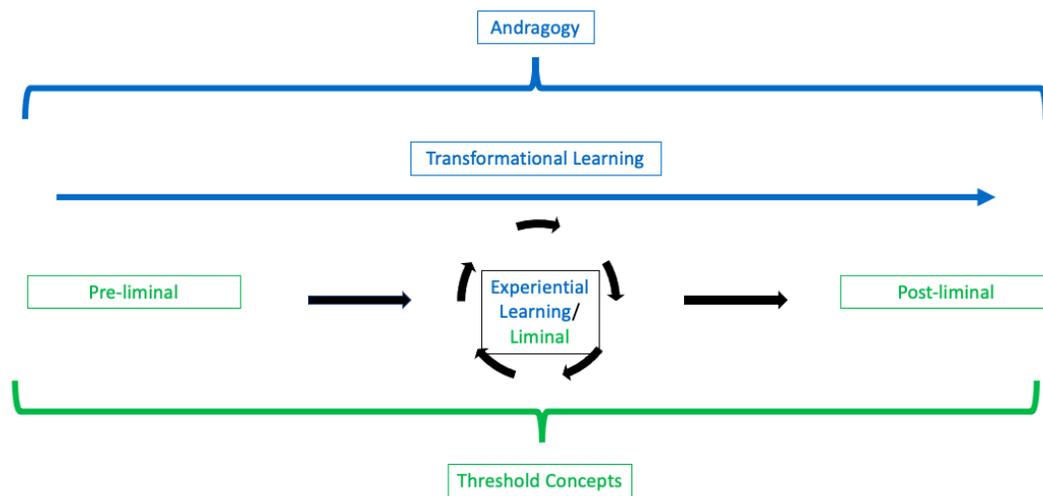
The bridge linking these two spheres is *adult learning theory*, which aligns closely with much of the advice on designing effective faculty writing workshops. The characteristics of adult learners are defined by the theory of *andragogy*, first articulated by Knowles in the 1970s. As Knowles (1970) describes, adult learners are more likely to be intrinsically motivated, need to understand the practical applications of what they are learning, filter new knowledge through previous experiences and need opportunities for reflection to do so, are self-directed, benefit from opportunities for dialogue and collaboration, and learn best by doing (see also Gutierrez, 2021; Thompson & Deis, 2004). These principles overlap extensively with the advice about effective faculty workshop design. Indeed, much of the literature on faculty development explicitly advocates using Knowles' principles in designing professional development initiatives (see, for example, Glowacki-Dudka & Brown, 2007; Henning, 2012; Lawler, 2003; Perrish et al., 2018).

At the same time, adult learning theory also illuminates the ways in which the principles of faculty writing workshop design align with threshold concepts for writing (both in themselves and as organizing principles for class and workshop design). Here, two theorists are especially relevant. The first is Mezirow, who pioneered *transformational learning theory*. This theory posits that learning occurs when new meaning is given to

existing experience (Gutierrez, 2021; Mezirow, 2018). Transformative learning proceeds through three stages: recognizing that one's existing understanding is inadequate, establishing the personal relevance of resolving the problem, and reflecting to re-examine and ultimately revise existing beliefs and attitudes. Mezirow (2018) suggests that this is best done in a collaborative community of learners. This tripartite and linear progression bears some similarities to the process of mastering a threshold concept.

By contrast, the cyclical nature of threshold concept mastery is reflected in the work of a second adult learning theorist, Kolb (1984) and his *experiential learning cycle*. Kolb construes adult learning as a repeating process that proceeds from concrete experience to reflective observation to abstract conceptualization to active experimentation and back to concrete experience again (Gutierrez, 2021; Kolb, 1984). For Kolb, it is by continually engaging in authentic experiences and reflecting on them that adults can learn and evolve in their understanding. Adults require authentic learning experiences that they can reflect on and accommodate in their existing cognitive models, rather than passive learning or rote memorization.

In sum, both adult learning theory and threshold concept theory embrace the same paradox, which is that learning is simultaneously a linear and a cyclical process, as shown in Figure 2. The theoretical underpinning of my workshop design is to seek a balance between the linear and the cyclical, both in individual exercises and activities and in the structure of the workshop series as a whole.



*Figure 2.* Linear and cyclical processes in threshold concepts and adult learning theory.

### **Threshold Concepts and Instructional Bottlenecks: Decoding the Disciplines**

I am certainly not the first to ask how the threshold concept model can be translated into pragmatic advice for practice. At the same time that Meyer and Land were exploring the application of threshold concepts in education, Middendorf and Pace (2004) separately introduced the idea of *decoding the disciplines*. One of the fundamental challenges of university teaching, they posit, is that different disciplines have vastly different ways of thinking. These modes of thought are seldom explicitly taught to students and students rarely have the opportunity to practice and get feedback on discipline-specific skills. While Middendorf and Pace do not discuss academic writing directly, the lack of explicit writing instruction in the university that I discuss above is a good example of the type of challenge they describe. Middendorf and Pace propose a process of “decoding” that faculty can follow to help students learn and master these discipline-specific ideas and skills: identifying points of challenge (which they call *instructional bottlenecks*), modelling the ways in which experts overcome these challenges, helping students to practice necessary skills, offering them generous feedback, and monitoring student progress and motivation.

Decoding the disciplines has been an influential model in faculty development circles in general. It is especially relevant to my project because, in the wake of the introduction of both threshold concepts and instructional bottlenecks, many have seen the two as intrinsically linked (Bain & Bass, 2011; Shopkow, 2009; Shopkow & Middendorf, 2020). In essence, decoding the disciplines translates the abstraction of threshold concepts into something actionable. As Shopkow and Middendorf (2020) explain, threshold concepts offer a theory of difficulty, while decoding the disciplines provides a

pedagogical model for supporting students in navigating that difficulty. The former identifies a complex and typically hidden problem in the disciplinary content that helps to explain where and why students get stuck; the latter translates that problem into one of communication, not content, so that instructors know what to do to help students get unstuck. Decoding the disciplines makes it easier to apply the lessons of the threshold concept model, revealing tacit knowledge, clarifying student learning objectives, and helping the instructor to articulate their own disciplinary goals more clearly (Shopkow, 2009). All of this, of course, applies to academic writing as much as it does to anthropology or economics.

It is important to note that a threshold and a bottleneck are not necessarily the same thing. While a threshold concept is always integral to disciplinary understanding and transformative once mastered, a bottleneck could be as big and as troublesome as a threshold concept or as small and mundane as inefficiency or lack of engagement (Bain & Bass, 2011). For my purposes, it is simply important to note that decoding the disciplines and the accompanying strategies for getting past instructional bottlenecks can be applied to threshold concepts. In designing my workshop, some of the suggested methods for decoding – extensive reflection (Bain & Bass, 2011), explaining one's discipline to somebody outside of it (Shopkow, 2009; Shopkow & Middendorf, 2020), and generally anything that renders the expert more self-conscious (Shopkow, 2009) – offer helpful guidance in making the theoretical underpinnings of threshold concepts more concrete and easier to implement for the participants in my workshop.

### **Overview of Workshop Design**

The workshops series is comprised of several events that unfold over approximately eight months. Instructors choose a course they are teaching in the fall to focus on throughout the program and receive support in preparing for the class and as they are teaching it. Given the many time pressures instructors face, the group does not meet consistently over the eight months. The program's more intensive elements are scheduled out of term time with just two less intensive sessions during the teaching term. In between these synchronous components, the group keeps in contact through asynchronous online engagement. The program proceeds as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Timing and Format of Workshop Series Elements*

| Workshop Element                             | Timing   | Format    |
|--|--|-----------|
| Orientation Conference (two days)            | Late April or Early May                                    | In-person |
| August Bootcamp (three hours)                | Mid-August   | Virtual   |
| In-Term Maintenance (two one-hour workshops) | 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> Full Weeks of the Term | In-person |
| Final Reflection (two hours)                 | After Classes End  | In-person |
| Online Engagement                            | Between Events   | Virtual   |

## **Workshop Structure**

The overall structure of the program is intended to recreate the linear pathway involved in mastering a threshold concept. In line with threshold concept theory, it is assumed that most participants will spend most their time in the liminal phase with its recursive, cyclical processes. As described in further detail below, participants start by participating in a two-day orientation conference. The first day of the conference is devoted to troubling the concept of writing instruction, situating the participants in the pre-liminal phase in which the challenges of teaching writing come into focus but their solutions are not yet clear.

Most of the other elements of the workshop series are designed to give participants theoretical models and practical tools to use in articulating potential solutions to the challenges of writing instruction. This includes (a) the second day of the orientation conference where participants are introduced to the idea of threshold concepts and the tools of decoding the disciplines, (b) an August “bootcamp” where participants receive feedback on a draft of a scaffolded writing plan for their upcoming course, and (c) two maintenance workshops during the semester focusing on two specific aspects of writing instruction (scaffolded instruction and formative feedback). In line with Kolb’s theory of experiential learning, these aspects of the program give participants ample opportunity to experiment and reflect on authentic experiences.

The final component of the workshop series is a culminating meeting devoted to reflection on the entire program. While not every participant will necessarily have experienced the kind of grand epiphany sometimes associated with crossing a conceptual threshold, the intention of this final session is to help each participant consolidate the

ideas they will carry forward from the program, in line with Mezirow's theory of transformative learning. The program's macro-progression is depicted graphically in Figure 3. The colour gradient is intentionally fuzzy since each participant will experience the workshop's tripartite progression differently. The pre-liminal phase is shown in red, liminal in purple, and post-liminal blue.



*Figure 3.* Linear progression across the threshold over the course of the program.

## **Timing**

The timing of each program element is deliberately chosen. The initial two-day conference takes place once the distractions of the winter term have ended. They are scheduled for April or May, rather than August or September, so that faculty have the summer to work on changes to their curricular plans for the fall (Perrow, 2018). The intensive quality of this introduction to the program is important for initial community-building, allowing sufficient time to introduce participants to each other, build rapport, motivate continued investment in the workshop, and collectively establish objectives for the remainder of the program (Engin & Atkinson, 2015; Paskevicius & Bortolin, 2016). By contrast, the August bootcamp and the in-term workshops are designed to help participants sustain momentum through the fall term when the participants are simultaneously teaching (Perrow, 2018; Vaughan & Garrison, 2006).

The orientation conference is held in person (COVID permitting) when most instructors have just finished winter teaching. By contrast, the mid-August check in, timed to coincide with the preparation of syllabi, is held remotely given that some participants are likely to be away from campus doing research or on holiday. The two in-term workshops, in person, are scheduled early in the semester for two reasons. First, despite the flurry of activity that always accompanies the start of a new term, instructors and students alike tend to have the most energy at the beginning of the term. Second, these workshops take place early enough to allow participants to make small changes in their classes in response to the workshop content, especially since major writing assignments are not likely to be due until later in the term.

Finally, the culminating reflection is intentionally separated from the teaching term. While participants are likely to be tired, they will have the opportunity to reflect on their courses in their entirety, ideally once the pressures of class preparation and grading have lessened.

### **Balance**

Just as threshold concept theory upholds the importance of balancing linear progress with cyclical experience and reflection, adult learning theory and the research on faculty workshop design that draws on it advocates for balance in other aspects of faculty development. For example, the ideal group of faculty – six to fifteen members in accordance with the guidelines for the FLC (Cox, 2004) – should balance the number of new and experienced instructors (Engin & Atkinson, 2015) as well as the distribution of different faculties and departments (Bain & Bass, 2011; Brammer et al., 2008). These studies suggest that faculty benefit the most given the opportunity to interact with colleagues with different experiences and perspectives from their own. While building a strong sense of community is one of the most common recommendations for this kind of faculty development experience (Engin & Atkinson, 2015; Geller, 2011; Good & Shumack, 2013; Faery, 1993; Lawler, 2003; Perrow, 2018) balance is important here, too. As Henning (2012) points out, peer interaction in the context of faculty development can raise issues of power imbalance, mistrust, and resentment if some participants invest more in the group experience than others. The more detailed description of many of the workshop elements below includes some options for individual rather than group engagement.

### **Detailed Workshop Design**

Prospective participants are invited to apply to take part in this initiative, since learning communities tend to be more successful when participation is voluntary, not compulsory (Cox, 2004). To solicit a broad range of participants, the workshop is open to anybody teaching in the fall: tenured, tenure-track, and contingent instructors. Each individual institution must decide whether to include graduate student instructors given the considerable power differential between those who have already been admitted into the academy via dissertation defence and those who have yet to cross that threshold. Institutions might also choose to run a separate graduate student iteration of the program.

Applicants must identify a single fall term course with a significant writing component that will serve as their focus throughout the program (Cox, 2004; Shopkow, 2009). It is important to stress to prospective participants that “writing courses” are not limited to those classes that assign formal research or literary analysis papers; writing as defined in this workshop embraces a wide variety of assignment types from lab reports to public-facing scholarship (e.g., blog) to patient histories, and includes all disciplines. Anybody who wishes to participate must commit to attend all synchronous components of the workshop series, participate fully in the online components of the program, and complete all assigned pre-reading. Given the complex scheduling challenges many instructors face, all components are arranged by group consensus except for the two-day orientation conference, whose timing is determined in advance of the initial invitation to faculty.

### **Orientation Conference: Day One**

Threshold concepts are defined by their troublesome quality and, so, the first day of the orientation conference is designed to foreground the troublesome nature of writing instruction. Prior to the first day of attendance, participants are assigned a short writing task that will receive peer and facilitator feedback. Modelled on the composition assignment Fulwiler (1981) describes in his own writing workshops, participants are asked to free-write for ten to twenty minutes and then revise this draft for submission. Fulwiler suggests asking faculty to write about a formative writing experience, a topic that comes easily for most instructors. In this workshop participants are assigned an intentionally more challenging task, namely, to define one term from a circulated list of common writing assignment terminology (the opaque vocabulary of words like “argument,” “clarity,” “structure,” and “well-supported”). The exercise, which must be submitted a day before the workshop begins, is deliberately chosen to wrong-foot instructors. They know they will be critiqued by peers and by the facilitator (and, so, they know their notional audience) but they are given no specific instructions about format, length, register, or any other aspect of the assignment. As Chang et al. note (2016), this kind of ill-defined exercise can help faculty empathize with the uncertainty and anxiety their own students may experience on the first day of class with an unfamiliar instructor. After the first day of the orientation conference, Appalachian State University’s online “WAC Glossary Project” (Bohr & Rhoades, 2014), which offers a helpful starting point for defining much of this writing terminology, is shared in the group’s wiki-style online resource centre (see Appendix B).

The first day of the conference is divided into four sessions with morning and afternoon coffee breaks and a generous lunch. The first session, again drawing on Fulwiler (1981), asks faculty to brainstorm the difficulties of teaching writing, first free-writing individually, then sharing and expanding on these ideas in small-group conversations, then condensing and categorizing these ideas as a full group. The facilitator can interject questions as necessary to broaden the conversation: for example, what do students consistently do poorly, what is the most time-consuming aspect of writing instruction, or what kind of training or support are you not getting to help you teach writing? As Flash (2016) notes, faculty typically need the most support not with instructional methods but with adjusting their (mis)conceptions about student writing; this exercise exposes these faculty attitudes early in the program so that they can be examined and re-evaluated.

This exercise has the immediate practical benefit of demonstrating an activity that could be repurposed for use in the instructor's own teaching. Its primary intention, however, in line with both experiential learning theory and transformational learning theory, is to start the workshop by calling to mind the instructors' existing experiences of writing instruction. These experiences provide a baseline against which the workshop participants can track their evolving understanding as the workshop progresses. It also starts to organize and give structure to the problem to be solved, which may already help some participants to start progressing from pre-liminary to liminal thinking on the issue of writing instruction.

After a break, the second session changes the tenor of the workshop considerably. In the first session, participants were treated as experts with valuable experience-based

knowledge. In the second, they are treated like students to be evaluated and corrected. The facilitator informs the group that they have provided audio or video feedback (depending on the capabilities of the institutional learning management system [LMS]) on each written submission but, before it is returned, participants will offer each other written comments in the form of suggested areas for improvement and a grade. No further instructions are provided. In groups of two or three, participants exchange assignments, generate feedback, and return comments and grades to each other. Up to this point, the session is designed to generate mild anxiety in participants, as described by Faery (1993) and Caffarella and Barnett (2000). Anticipating feedback on writing tends to generate anxiety in any circumstances, given that writing is so strongly tied to identity and sense of self (Cameron et al., 2009; Chang et al., 2016; Geller, 2011). In this session, that anxiety is heightened through lack of clear instructions, unclear evaluation criteria, and, likely, a desire to save face in front of peers.

At this point in the workshop, the facilitator distributes their own audio/video feedback (approximately two minutes for each participant) prepared on the day before the conference begins. Rather than criticism and a grade, it offers two things: (a) a brief description of things they liked and (b) a question or two about something they would like to know more about (see Faery, 1993; Fulwiler, 1981). Participants review this feedback individually then, in their groups of two or three, have an informal conversation about each other's work using the same framework, namely, highlighting aspects of each other's work that they enjoyed and asking follow-up questions. With fifteen minutes left before lunch, participants free-write about the experience of receiving different kinds of feedback (written/ audio/video /conversational, graded/ungraded, emphasis on areas for

improvement/emphasis on strengths and questions). To allow space for private, individual reflection, this writing is not shared with the facilitator or any other participants.

One purpose of this session is to give instructors an authentic student experience that might help them empathize with their students' confusion and anxiety around academic writing (Perrow, 2018). It is also meant to invite open-ended reflection on different modes of feedback, some of which participants may not have encountered or considered before. Again, as in the first session, this exercise might help some participants start to envision solutions to the challenges of writing instructions, moving incrementally from pre-liminary toward liminal thinking. Participants are directed to resources on providing feedback (Nicol, 2010; Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006) and on the effects of grading on student performance and motivation (Blum, 2020) included in the online resource centre but these are not discussed at this point.

After lunch, the third session introduces the idea of threshold concepts as a model that may help instructors better understand student learning and help them write better. In the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) it is recognized that reconceptualizing the act of writing through the lens of threshold concepts is challenging for most instructors. This is because it takes an activity they typically do intuitively after years of practice and makes it feel alien (Basgier & Simpson, 2020; King & Felton, 2012). This defamiliarization of writing is yet another way in which the first day of the orientation conference seeks to situate participants in the pre-liminary phase, foregrounding problems to which there are, as yet, no clear solutions.

The facilitator offers a brief overview of the definition and history of threshold concepts and leads the group in a collective exploration of their application in a university setting. Providing some examples and soliciting additional examples from the group, the facilitator helps the participants to name threshold concepts for writing (for example, that all writing implies an audience even when nobody will read it or that writing is itself a mode of thinking, not something we do when we have already finished thinking), drawing on the thirty-seven threshold concepts for writing named in the work of Adler-Kassner and Wardle (2015a). Toward the end of this collective brainstorming exercise, the facilitator should anticipate the overnight assignment by raising the idea that each individual discipline and course will have its own threshold concepts as well (for example, in economics, supply and demand, or in classics, that it is just as important to evaluate what has been lost as it is to evaluate what has been preserved). Kent (2016) offers an excellent list of resources on the threshold concepts specific to different disciplines that the facilitator can use to prepare for the session and post in the group's online resource centre.

Without yet introducing the concept of decoding the disciplines, the next phase of the workshop employs a strategy drawn from decoding the disciplines to help instructors translate abstract threshold concepts into concrete pedagogical strategies: the interview. The questions, adapted from those proposed by Middendorf and Pace (2004), are provided in Appendix A. Participants are paired – if there is an odd number the facilitator partners with the final instructor – and told to find a private place on campus to conduct two interviews. It is important to avoid pairings of participants from the same or similar disciplines, if possible, so that interviewees cannot get away with incomplete answers

that rely on insider knowledge. Each interviewer takes notes on behalf of the interviewee and shares them after the fact. Participants are asked to return half an hour before the scheduled end of day one and to take break time either between or after the two interviews. In line with the first-day goal of problematizing the familiar to encourage preliminary thinking, the interview is designed to help reveal instructors' tacit knowledge and make the things participants think they know feel strange (Flash, 2016; Shopkow, 2009).

The final thirty minutes of the day are an opportunity to take stock and prepare for day two of the orientation conference. The facilitator should acknowledge the fact that day one has intentionally posed problems with very little discussion of possible solutions. They should foreshadow the fact that day two will strive to support participants in liminal thinking and the articulation of potential solutions. Next, participants briefly review the results of the first session's brainstorming exercise on the challenges of teaching writing in anticipation of the evening's assigned writing tasks. Participants are asked to write one paragraph on one of these challenges that they are now thinking about differently after the first day of the workshop. They are also asked to revisit the notes from their interview and use this as a starting point to articulate two or three threshold concepts for the course they will teach in the fall. Neither assignment is shared with the facilitator or the other participants, interjecting another individual activity into what has otherwise been a heavily collaborative day. The facilitator ends the session by introducing participants to the online home of the workshop, housed in the university's LMS. While the discussion board and video conferencing elements will not be used until later in the program, participants may wish to consult the documents and websites posted in the online

resource centre and should be encouraged to contribute any helpful resources they encounter over the course of the workshop. Finally, the facilitator reminds each participant to bring two copies of an anonymized sample of student work (one to two pages, of average quality) for day two.

### **Orientation Conference: Day Two**

The second day of the conference similarly unfolds over four sessions. In the first, the facilitator gives an overview of the two central ideas that instructors will use to guide their preparations for fall teaching: (a) scaffolding and (b) feedback. These topics are chosen, in part, because they have been identified as common concerns among writing instructors (Hughes, 2020) and, in part, because they are broad enough to give each institution the flexibility to approach this presentation in ways that reflect the needs of its constituents and institutional constraints (for example, the presence of a writing centre or the availability of graduate student TAs). In general, the facilitator should introduce the principle of backward design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). This approach encourages instructors to start their course planning at the end (in the context of this workshop, a significant piece of writing) and then create a series of lessons, activities, instructions, and assignments that guide and support students in acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary to complete the course's culminating task. Alongside scaffolded writing, the facilitator should explain the importance of formative feedback (Winstone & Boud, 2020), which not only helps students to understand the strengths and areas for improvement in their existing work but also provides clear strategies for revision and for future work. The facilitator should offer participants a sense of the strategies they might

use to integrate scaffolding and feedback into their course design and solicit examples from instructors in the workshop who likely already use both strategies to some extent.

Participants use the final part of the first session to prepare for the second, a Q&A panel with a group of campus writing instruction experts (see Paskevicius & Bortolin, 2016). The configuration of this group will vary by institution but should include, if possible, a student writing tutor, a staff member from the campus writing centre or academic services centre, and an instructor with significant writing instruction experience (going forward, this could be a participant from a previous iteration of the program). Before taking the morning break, workshop participants brainstorm questions for the panel in small groups. When the group reconvenes, each panel member is given at most five minutes to introduce their role on campus, their experience with writing instruction, and a word or two of advice about typical student struggles and strategies to support student writing. It is important that these not turn into lengthy presentations that position workshop participants as a passive audience. At this point, participants should be moving toward liminal thinking, active participants in seeking solutions rather than passively acknowledging the problem or relying on received wisdom. The open-ended Q&A period creates an opportunity for the participants to explore those strategies that, at this point, seem most feasible to them, putting them firmly in control of their own learning as adult learning theory recommends.

Over the lunch break, participants are asked to read a short list of feedback recommendations excerpted from the appendix of Underwood and Tregido's (2006) "Improving student writing through effective feedback: Best practices and recommendations." The reading is assigned now rather than the night before so that its

recommendations are fresh in preparation for the third session. The subsequent session proceeds in several steps:

1. Keeping in mind the suggestions in Underwood and Tregido (2006), each participant looks individually at the writing sample they brought, identifies two or three aspects of the writing that need improvement, and offers feedback (in the form of comments, instructions, or brief re-written excerpts) that guide a notional student through the revision process.
2. Each participant repeats this process with a partner's writing sample; ideally their partner is from a different discipline.
3. The partners then review their feedback together. Participants are instructed to pay attention to aspects of feedback that are not clear to the second reader and places where the two instructors have diverged in their feedback. The goal is to give each instructor a clearer sense of their own assumptions and expectations about student writing (Parrish et al., 2016) as well as the discipline-specific features of the writing they ask of their students.
4. Participants then individually free-write to consolidate the thinking they have done so far. The facilitator informs them that they will use these notes when preparing their scaffolded writing plan for the August bootcamp.

In line with the strategies of decoding the disciplines, just as with the interviews conducted on day one, this exercise leverages the diversity of the group to help bring each instructor's tacit, often discipline-inflected beliefs about writing to the surface. The facilitator stresses that these beliefs must be made explicit to students when instructors are teaching in the fall. One way to do this is to formalize the annotation of the writing

example instructors have just evaluated (as suggested by Wingate, 2012), creating an exemplar with commentary and suggested revisions that can be distributed to students to clarify writing expectations.

The third session has provided the participants with both an experience and a brief opportunity to reflect on it, one cycle in a series of experiential cycles that will continue over the remainder of the workshop series. The fourth and final session, after a break, organizes the participants for the elements of the program still to come. Participants must agree on the timing of the remote August bootcamp and set provisional dates for the two in-term workshops. The facilitator also leads the participants in a conversation about how and how often they would like to be in contact over the summer. Examples include assigned readings with more focused discussion questions, open-ended discussion prompts, collaboratively building the online resource centre, and group or individual check-ins with the facilitator about course planning progress. In line with adult learning theory, it is important that participants choose the options that work best for them and that both group and individual options are provided. While no participant should be compelled to participate in any specific online activity, everybody must commit to contribute to the online conversation in some way as determined by group consensus. This is important to sustain the sense of community that has developed over the course of the orientation conference.

The facilitator also explains what participants are required to do in preparation for the August bootcamp. As outlined in greater detail in Appendix C, participants are asked to create a scaffolded writing plan for their fall course. While this plan could take many shapes, it should include both a first-day handout for students, explaining the instructor's

writing expectations and the sequence of assignments leading to the culminating task, and an approximate plan for the instructor to follow in administering this sequence of assignments. To make the two in-term workshops as productive as possible, participants must incorporate a diagnostic writing activity or assignment within the first two weeks and a short writing assignment (graded or ungraded) to be handed in before the fourth week of the term. Once the workshop has been run once, the facilitator may choose to post example writing plans on the LMS for participants to review.

### **August Bootcamp**

Over the course of the summer, the facilitator ensures that the participants stay in contact and keeps the workshop's two central ideas – scaffolding and feedback – clearly in focus through assigned readings, discussion prompts, or some combination of the two. The facilitator also encourages participants to work on their scaffolded writing plan gradually, reminding them as the August deadline approaches and directing them to relevant articles and websites in the online resource centre. Since the bootcamp consists entirely of peer feedback on each participant's writing plan, it is crucial that everybody have a complete, thoughtful draft to share.

The scaffolded writing plan is due one week before the bootcamp to provide sufficient time for peer review. Using the template provided in Appendix D, participants review two plans, generating comments and suggestions to bring to the virtual meeting. On the day of the bootcamp, most of the session is given to breakout room conversations in groups of three. Participants are encouraged to manage their own time, taking breaks as needed and giving approximately forty-five minutes of discussion to each plan. Aside from the peer review template, no specific guidance is given for the structure of these

conversations in line with the importance accorded to learner autonomy in adult learning theory. The facilitator moves between breakout rooms to help mediate the conversation and make suggestions. Time permitting, the facilitator may also wish to offer brief written, audio, or video commentary on each writing plan that the participant can review either before or after the bootcamp takes place. The session should end with a brief plenary conversation to confirm the timing of the two in-term workshops and set a provisional time for the final reflection. As at the orientation conference, participants should reach a consensus about the degree to which they wish to remain in contact in the LMS during the term. The facilitator leads a discussion on the group's preferences for online preparation for each workshop (see below) and asks the group to choose among several options (with varying degrees of structure) for ongoing conversation in the online space.

### **In-Term Maintenance**

There is considerable evidence that faculty development initiatives like this one are the most successful when contact between participants is sustained over time. Ongoing discussion helps faculty to recognize and contend with the challenges of writing instruction and creates ample opportunity for faculty to reflect on their teaching experiences (Brannon & Pradl, 1984; Chang et al., 2016; Flash, 2016), which are both important factors in helping faculty to cross conceptual thresholds. It is for this reason that, even though instructors will be juggling many obligations during the term, it is important to continue to foster communication through online engagement and in-person meetings.

In the two weeks leading up to each of the two in-term workshops, faculty are asked to prepare collaboratively in the LMS. This preparation will vary by group but should entail at least one pre-read that serves as a starting point for in-person discussion. The facilitator reminds participants of the expectations they agreed to at the August bootcamp regarding the nature of participation and its timing (for example, whether contributions the night before a workshop are acceptable or should be posted early enough to allow for peer responses). There are many options for online engagement between meetings. In a blended initiative similar to this one (Paskevicius & Bortolin, 2016), some of these activities included full-group and small-group forum discussion, collaborative Google Doc exercises, co-authoring article summaries, recording short video diaries, and researching and sharing additional resources. The facilitator should help participants select a manageable subset of these.

### ***First In-Term Workshop: Scaffolding***

In line with threshold concept theory, the in-term workshops give participants an opportunity to revisit a concept they have already considered over the summer in light of their initial in-class experiences. The first – one hour in the second week of the term – focuses on scaffolding since the workshop is held early enough in the term that there is still time for instructors to course correct. While they should not change their writing plan radically at this stage, they can add a class session or an activity that responds to whatever has emerged from the diagnostic assignment or activity they administered (see Appendix C). The workshop unfolds in two sections. The first involves small-group conversations in which participants report on their courses to date. They compare their actual classroom experiences to those described in the pre-reading material and identify

one challenge or deviation from their writing plan. The second half-hour involves planning a small change or addition to their class using the pre-reading as an initial source of ideas. Participants have the option of working individually on this portion of the workshop or continuing as a group.

The facilitator should choose a pre-read that reflects the themes emerging in the online discussion so far. One good option is Barnhisel et al. (2012), “Incorporating process-based writing pedagogy into first-year learning communities: Strategies and outcomes.” This article offers practical advice that instructors can implement immediately and, at the same time, considers writing instruction beyond individual classes within student learning communities (similar to FLCs). This broader perspective complicates the subject of writing instruction and ensures that its troublesome nature remains visible even as instructors may be gaining confidence.

### ***Second In-Term Workshop: Feedback***

The second in-term workshop is similar to the first. Participants engage online in the ways they have agreed to over the summer in the two weeks leading up to the workshop. By contrast with the first workshop, rather than reviewing a single pre-read, the instructors are directed to browse a collection of online resources drawn from campus teaching and learning centres on providing helpful student feedback. These resources may be drawn from the list in Appendix B, or the facilitator may choose others (including resources from the institution’s own writing centre or teaching and learning centre). The facilitator uses the collaborative space provided by the LMS to draw attention to ideas (one might also say threshold concepts) that are likely to be helpful to participants. These could include, for example, thinking of feedback as describing, not criticizing (Cameron

et al., 2009) or helping students to understand that meaning depends on the reader's (grader's) interpretation, not just the writer's intentions (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015b).

The first half hour of the session is devoted to small-group conversations about the websites participants have reviewed. In the second half hour, participants use the advice from those websites to offer constructive, formative feedback on one or two examples of student writing they have collected per their writing plan (see Appendix C). Instructors, again, have the option of working on this second task collaboratively or individually. A few minutes are reserved at the end of this session to discuss plans going forward. The date of the final reflection is confirmed and participants decide how much they would like to engage in-person and online over the next eight or nine weeks. While it is likely to be difficult for faculty to sustain engagement as the term progresses (Engin & Atkinson, 2015; Paskevicius & Bortolin, 2016), participants may opt to remain in contact via discussion forum (with regular email nudges from the facilitator, which Paskevicius and Bortolin suggest most faculty appreciate) or to establish an optional coffee hour for drop-in conversation once or twice a month.

### **Final Reflection**

However the participants have remained in contact in the latter part of the term, two weeks before the scheduled final reflection the facilitator prompts them to reconnect in the LMS. Online engagement – which should not be demanding at this point in the term, whatever form it takes – focuses on a pre-read that encourages participants to reflect on their experiences not as instructors but as learners in the program. This shift in emphasis from facilitating student learning to assessing the instructors' learning is an

important precursor to the post-liminal stage of threshold concept mastery that, hopefully, participants will enter in the final session. At this stage in the program, participants need to assess their own understanding, not their students'.

While the facilitator can choose any relevant article as a pre-read, one good option is Chang et al. (2016): "Towards contextual experimentation: Creating a faculty learning community to cultivate writing-to-learn practices." This piece describes a faculty development initiative which bears many similarities to the one the instructors have just undergone but, at the same time, is both more focused and more intensive. This example presents a scenario that is at once familiar and alien, ideally destabilizing the conclusions and takeaways that may already be starting to crystallize for the participants. The facilitator creates one final liminal experience by defamiliarizing the program in retrospect. Somewhat paradoxically, by insisting that participants recognize the limits of their own knowledge and experience in anticipation of the final session, the facilitator can help instructors to feel more confident in declaring what they have learned. By reminding instructors how big the topics of faculty development and writing are, the facilitator invites them to make modest claims about their own learning. These claims are, as a result, more accurate and more believable to the participants themselves.

At the final meeting, participants are encouraged for the first time to think in post-liminal terms, that is, to attempt to articulate the conceptual thresholds they have crossed over the course of the program. This kind of summative thinking should not be asked of participants any earlier than this. Research shows that threshold learning takes time and any attempt to force it may result in frustration and superficial learning in the form of mimicry, that is, going through the motions without real understanding (Kent, 2016;

Meyer & Land, 2005). Since the final meeting coincides with so many endings – the end of the program, the end of the term, the end of the course each participant has taught – it presents a good opportunity to break free from the ongoing cycle of experience and reflection the program has cultivated and a good moment for participants to take stock of linear progress.

As discussed above, both threshold concept theory and adult learning theory stress the importance of deliberate reflection to consolidate learning. The literature on faculty development specifically recommends in-person, collaborative reflection as a culminating activity for any given initiative to promote transfer (Burgoyne & Chuppa-Cornell, 2018; Chang et al., 2016). Since transfer is, in essence, another way of describing a threshold concept one has mastered, the final component of the program is an in-person meeting. To help participants compare their conceptual understanding before and after the program, the facilitator asks them to free-write in response to the list of difficulties entailed in teaching writing they generated on the first day of the orientation conference, as suggested by Fulwiler (1981). As before, free-writing serves as a precursor to small-group and then plenary conversation about these problems. By recreating their initial workshop experience in the context of their last, the facilitator encourages the participants to juxtapose the two. This hopefully makes the contrast between them, particularly the participant's perception of those teaching challenges, that much starker. In full-group discussion, the facilitator should encourage participants to identify writing instruction problems from the orientation conference that they now feel better equipped to handle, a first step toward identifying the thresholds that participants

have crossed in the intervening months. This part of the final session takes approximately an hour.

The second hour of the workshop seeks to help participants formalize the ideas raised informally in the first. The facilitator explains that each participant will be asked to share one conceptual threshold they believe they have crossed over the course of the workshop and one aspect of writing instruction where they feel they are still in the liminal phase. The facilitator may wish to offer a brief reminder of the features of threshold concept theory at this stage. Participants are then given twenty minutes to decide what to share with the group. The facilitator gives the participants suggestions about ways they might inspire insight about their workshop experiences, citing research about the spaces and activities that lead to “aha! moments” (Ovington et al., 2018). While many of these will not be possible in context (for example, a shower or a run), participants can be encouraged to walk around campus, engage with nature, or choose a quiet spot to meditate. The program comes to an end with each participant sharing their personal conclusions in turn. Since the facilitator is trying to encourage post-liminal rather than liminal thinking, this is the only point in the workshop where questions and follow-up discussions are discouraged. The opportunity to articulate the ways in which their perspective of teaching has changed over the past several months is meant to create a fixed moment of teaching identity for the instructor that they can think back on even as they continue to reflect on and adapt their teaching.

### **Options for Expansion**

My goal has been to present a flexible workshop model that could be implemented at any institution regardless of size, budget, and resources. While my model

does require sustained commitment from participants, it is a modest program by comparison with many FLC or WAC/WIC initiatives more broadly. I here offer a brief overview of ways in which an institution could expand on the basic model I have presented if desired.

The program I have presented could be enriched by asking for a greater time commitment from the facilitator and/or from participants. For example, faculty development initiatives on writing instruction benefit when instructors participate in a parallel faculty writing group where they are supported in working on their own writing projects (Faery, 1993). Participants could be asked to participate in peer observation of teaching (Good & Shumack, 2013) or to attend individual mentorship meetings with the facilitator, a writing centre staff member, or a previous participant in the program (Gallagher, 2020; Shea et al., 2006). The program could also be extended over an entire year, a common length for initiatives of this nature (Cox, 2004; Glowacki-Dudka & Brown, 2007; Perrow, 2018), and support instructors in teaching two courses. It is also common, particularly in the FLC model, to have the cohort collaborate on a final project, for example, a conference presentation, internal workshop, publication (Chang et al., 2016; Cox, 2004; Glowacki-Dudka & Brown) or other similarly formal commitments beyond the end of the workshop.

A wealthier institution could also invest more money in this kind of faculty development initiative. Given the time commitment involved, faculty may be more likely to participate if a modest stipend were offered (Barnhisel et al., 2012; Glowacki-Dudka & Brown, 2007; Huntzinger et al., 2011). Many similar programs offer faculty a \$1000-\$2000 stipend for a year-long commitment (Parrish et al., 2016; Perrow, 2018; Shea et

al., 2006; Zemliansky & Berry, 2017). If cash incentives are not feasible, institutions could consider compensating participants in time through release from committee service or a course release. Overnight or even extended retreats funded by the institution used to be more common in the early days of WAC/WID (Fulwiler, 2018). A more realistic equivalent for today's budget-strained institutions would be to leverage existing satellite campuses or study abroad facilities as sites for the orientation conference (Geller, 2011). The institution could also choose to fund catered breaks and meals at in-person meetings, a relatively small financial commitment. In the longer term, the institution could invest in supplementary programs to support writing instruction. For example, workshop participants could be required to work with student writing fellows over the course of the program to support the implementation of their writing plan (Hall & Hughes, 2012). For many institutions such expenses are likely to be out of reach but could be considered as part of longer-term financial planning.

As McLeod and Soven (2000) suggest, those who wish to create institutional change “must become ethnographers of their home campuses” (p. viii). Each institution must carefully assess the financial and human resources at their disposal, acknowledge any fiscal or practical constraints, and evaluate the appetite among instructors and support staff for an intensive faculty development initiative before deciding how best to implement a program like this one.

### **Implications for Research and Practice**

This paper has explored the reasons why faculty may be reluctant or even unable to teach writing in their courses and suggested a hypothetical faculty development initiative to address this problem. I have shown that the research on effective faculty

development, especially adult learning theory, aligns closely with the idea of threshold concepts. This theoretical exploration yielded a foundational principle to use in the design of my writing workshop, namely the importance of balancing linear progression with recursive, cyclical reflection for both instructors and the students they teach.

Drawing on the best practices emerging from half a century of WAC/WID research, I crafted a faculty workshop series that both introduced its participants to threshold concept theory and used the combined linear/cyclical process of threshold concept mastery to structure the series of events included in the program.

Further research into this topic would be valuable. As discussed above, instructional bottlenecks and the processes involved in decoding the disciplines offer a pragmatic translation of threshold concepts for implementation in actual pedagogical practice. My research suggests that similar work needs to be done on the connections between threshold concepts and adult learning theory. I have argued that they are analogous in the way they seek to balance both linear progression and cyclical recursion. More work is needed to affirm that assertion, especially empirical research. Other points of contact between the two theories – beyond linear and cyclical thinking – need to be articulated and more fully explored.

My work also invites further exploration of the institutional differences that might impact a faculty writing instruction initiative such as the one I describe here. While I have tried to build flexibility into my model and encouraged anybody implementing this model to consider their own institutional context, more work is needed to tease out what exactly that might entail. For example, how might this workshop be implemented differently at a school with a writing centre versus one without? How might this

workshop be altered to suit the needs of a small institution versus a large one? What kind of individual – a faculty member, an educational developer, a writing centre staff member – is the ideal facilitator for different institutional contexts and on what basis should that decision be made? Some of the WAC/WID literature, as discussed above, begins to broach these questions. My research suggests that further investigation along these lines has the potential to maximize the benefit of these kinds of faculty development offerings.

My paper also suggests several implications for practice. It strongly supports the idea that faculty development initiatives need to be sustained over time. One-off workshops, even intensive ones, rarely have lasting impact without the opportunity to foster ongoing community among participants. These ideas are already well supported in the SoTL literature, particularly in the sphere of adult learning theory. My paper adds to this work by introducing the threshold concept as a model for faculty development. In the context of education, threshold concepts cannot be mastered without significant time and effort. That is as true for faculty learning how to teach writing as it is for students learning how to interpret statistical models or understand the standards of nursing practice. This paper, therefore, affirms the importance of planning for long-term faculty development initiatives, reinforcing the existing consensus with further theoretical justification.

Along the same lines, my work reinforces the importance of reflection in any kind of faculty development. In recent decades, the concept of metacognition – loosely defined, the practice of thinking about one's thinking – has gained currency in conversations about teaching and learning in higher education (see, for example, McGuire, 2015). Reflection as an integral part of adult learning has also long been

recognized (Gutierrez, 2021; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 2018). Threshold concept theory provides further support for the importance of sustained reflection in fostering lasting learning. Time spent in the recursive, liminal stage will only bear fruit if the learner has the self-awareness necessary to consolidate their learning. By tying adult learning theory and SoTL to threshold concept theory in the context of faculty development, my research underlines the fact that reflection is a crucial part of any faculty development initiative.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

The greatest challenge in conducting this research has been the sheer volume of scholarship on the topic of WAC/WID initiatives and faculty writing workshops. Even limiting the scope of my exploration in the ways I describe above, I have been unable to fully explore the literature in a paper of this length. The hypothetical workshop I present is, of necessity, selective and does not reflect every aspect of the research on initiatives to support faculty in teaching writing. Given that a workshop that tries to do too much is unlikely to succeed, I have had to privilege some strategies over others, passing over promising approaches to keep the final version of this workshop series manageable.

The fact that my workshop is hypothetical, designed to be implementable at any institution, imposes additional challenges and limitations. My approach presumes no WAC/WID infrastructure but, beyond this, aims to be adaptable for the specific circumstances of any university, accommodating varying levels of administrator support, faculty buy-in, financial resources, and writing support infrastructure. In creating such a flexible workshop, I have had to sacrifice specificity. The lack of a specific institutional focus also means that my work cannot be tested empirically as a component of this

research paper. Though backed by others' empirical research, my suggestions must remain somewhat speculative.

Finally, it is also important to recognize that my project does not attempt to challenge the primacy of the written word in academic communication. It must be acknowledged that the research I present here does not include the oral pedagogies and epistemologies that are found, for example, in many Indigenous traditions. Along similar lines, I have not explored the relationship between oral and written communication or the ways in which combining these forms of expression, rather than focusing on writing in isolation, might support more effective writing instruction. This is a promising avenue for future research.

### **Final Thoughts**

Writing, especially for an audience, can be a vulnerable experience and teaching writing conjures feelings of inadequacy and impostership. At the same time, writing is an indispensable skill in higher education, necessary for almost every course that students will take in their academic career. Students need to learn how to write for different disciplinary contexts and faculty have an obligation to support them in this endeavour. This being the case, it follows that universities also have an obligation to support faculty in the teaching of writing, especially given that this kind of training is relatively rare despite the centrality of writing in all forms of university teaching. This paper has suggested one model that universities could adopt to better support their teachers in offering writing instruction. Whether they adopt this model, a modified version of it, or something else entirely, each institution must find a way to provide ongoing support for writing instruction to ensure the success of faculty, students, and higher education itself.

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## Appendix A

### Peer Interview Questions Modelled on Middendorf and Pace (2004)

Ask your partner the following questions and keep an informal record of their responses (point form notes) to share with them after the interview. Ask clarification questions when your partner has not answered clearly or fully but, otherwise, try to stick to this script as much as possible and allow your partner space to reflect without interruption.

1. What discipline do you teach?
2. Tell me a little about the class you are teaching in the fall.
3. What kind of writing is expected in your discipline?
  - a. What are two or three things that students typically struggle with in writing for your class?
4. How can you explicitly model the kind of writing you are looking for in your class?
  - a. How can larger writing tasks in your class be broken down into steps?
5. How can students practice and get feedback on writing for your class?
6. What motivates your students to work on improving their writing skills for your class?
7. How can you know if students are mastering these writing skills?
8. How can they transfer these skills to future classes in your discipline/in other disciplines?

## Appendix B

### Online Resource Centre

#### Threshold Concepts

Kent, S. (2016). Threshold concepts. *Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning*.

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Meyer, J. H. F., & Land, R. (2006a). Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge: An Introduction. In J. H. F. Meyer & R. Land (Eds.), *Overcoming barriers to student understanding: Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge* (pp. 3–18).

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#### Scaffolding

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Teaching. Retrieved July 3, 2021 from <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/understanding-by-design>

McTighe, J. (n.d.). *Resources*. Retrieved July 3, 2021 from

<https://jaymctighe.com/resources/>

Skene, A., & Fedko, S. (n.d.). *Assignment scaffolding*. University of Toronto Scarborough Centre for Teaching and Learning. Retrieved July 3, 2021 from <https://www.utoronto.ca/technology/assignment-scaffolding>

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## **Feedback**

Blum, S. E. (2020). Why ungrade? Why grade? In S. D. Blum & A. Kohn (Eds.), *Ungrading: Why rating students undermines learning (and what to do instead)* (pp. 1–22). Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press.

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### **In-Term Workshop Resources**

#### ***First In-Term Workshop: Scaffolding***

- Barnhisel, G., Stoddard, E., & Gorman, J. (2012). Incorporating process-based writing pedagogy into first-year learning communities: Strategies and outcomes. *Journal of General Education*, 61(4), 461–487.

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#### ***Second In-Term Workshop: Feedback***

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### **Final Reflection**

Chang, M. K., Rao, K, Steward, M. L., Farley, C. A., & Li, K. (2016). Towards contextual experimentation: Creating a faculty learning community to cultivate writing-to-learn practices. *Studying Teaching Education*, 12(1), 20–36.

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### **Other**

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## Appendix C

### Scaffolded Writing Plan Instructions

Your major task between now and our “bootcamp” in August is to create a plan to help students gradually acquire and practice the component skills needed to complete the culminating writing task in your course. This plan could take many forms – don’t feel constrained to a particular format – but should include (a) a handout that you will distribute to students on the first day of class that previews the writing they will do in the course and (b) informal notes to yourself about how you will scaffold their writing experience and offer formative feedback throughout the term. Please use the following questions to help you design your writing plan:

- What is the culminating writing assignment students will hand in closer to the end of the term?
- How would you describe a successful student version of this assignment? How will you know whether students understand what you mean by that description?
- What individual skills do students need to complete this assignment successfully?
- How will students practice these skills gradually over the term? How much of this work will count toward the final grade? How much of this work will receive formative feedback (from you? from peers?)? How much of this work will be informal in-class activities or homework that receive neither a grade nor formative feedback?
- How will you space out any writing preparation activities/assignments over the term? How will you balance writing instruction with your other goals for the course?

- How will you ensure your plan isn't too ambitious (i.e., is manageable for both you and your students)?

Note: your plan must include two components that you will need to participate in our two in-term workshops:

1. A diagnostic writing activity or assignment completed within the first two weeks of class.
2. A short writing assignment, to be handed in by the end of the third week of the term, on which you will provide formative feedback.

These could be the same assignment if you choose, perhaps a draft and a revision.

Upload your plan as a single .pdf to our LMS no later than one week prior to the August bootcamp. At that point I will send you the plans of two peers and some guidelines to follow in reviewing them. You'll discuss your plan with two peers at bootcamp and receive additional [written/audio/video] feedback from me.

## Appendix D

### Peer Review Guidelines

A week before our three-hour virtual meeting in August, you will submit your writing plan online and, in return, receive two plans to review ahead of time. As you read both plans, please prepare a few comments on the following three themes:

1. Clarity
  - a. How clearly is the sequence of assignments explained?
  - b. How clearly are the writing expectations explained?
  - c. What questions might students have?
2. Support and feedback
  - a. How will students practice a variety of writing skills?
  - b. How will students know what they are doing well and what they need to improve?
  - c. Where might students feel they need more guidance?
3. Time commitment
  - a. Is this a reasonable amount of time for students to commit (given a full-time load of five classes)?
  - b. Is this a reasonable amount of grading time for the instructor (given a full-time teaching load of two or three classes)?
  - c. Do you see any places where the plan could be shortened or simplified?

When we meet, you will gather in a breakout room with your colleagues. Spending approximately 45 minutes per plan, you'll discuss your observations and collectively

brainstorm ways to improve the plan for students and instructor alike. Before we meet, consider jotting down a few questions you would like to ask your peer reviewers about your own plan.