



GRADUATE SCHOOL
EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

East Tennessee State University
Digital Commons @ East
Tennessee State University

Electronic Theses and Dissertations


Student Works

5-2019

When Process Becomes Processing: Managing Instructor Response to Student Disclosure of Trauma in the Composition Classroom

Kelci Barton
East Tennessee State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [Other Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#), [Psychiatric and Mental Health Commons](#), [Rhetoric Commons](#), and the [Student Counseling and Personnel Services Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Barton, Kelci, "When Process Becomes Processing: Managing Instructor Response to Student Disclosure of Trauma in the Composition Classroom" (2019). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 3569. <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/3569>

This Thesis - unrestricted is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Works at Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. For more information, please contact digilib@etsu.edu.

When Process Becomes Processing: Managing Instructor Response to Student Disclosure of
Trauma in the Composition Classroom

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Literature and Language
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in English

by
Kelci Barton
May 2019

Dr. Anna V. Knutson, Chair
Dr. Sharon James McGee
Dr. Phyllis Thompson

Keywords: disclosure, trauma, composition, rhetoric, instructor feedback, emotional labor,
mental health

ABSTRACT

When Process Becomes Processing: Managing Instructor Response to Student Disclosure of Trauma in the Composition Classroom

by

Kelci Barton

In first-year composition courses, there are three aspects of teaching that are researched well so far: disclosure of trauma in student writing, instructor feedback, and emotional labor. The disclosure of trauma is almost completely unavoidable in first-year composition. We encounter an issue with instructor feedback; how do we provide feedback to student writing, like grammar and mechanics, when the student has disclosed trauma in the writing? Additionally, we can build off this with emotional labor, which already occurs consistently in teaching but is heightened in this instance. When providing feedback to a student who has disclosed trauma, this can be emotionally taxing on the instructor, as they may have to hide emotions regarding feedback to disclosure. How can the instructor manage their emotional labor in this instance – or how can instructors provide feedback to student disclosure of trauma in a manner that both prioritizes the student’s and instructor’s mental health?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	2
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. TRAUMA	9
Defining Trauma.....	9
Healing from Trauma with Writing	12
Using Writing to Heal	15
Disclosure of Trauma in the Classroom	19
3. INSTRUCTOR FEEDBACK	25
4. EMOTIONAL LABOR	33
5. PILOT STUDY	40
Participants and Procedure	40
Results	42
Discussion	46
6. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION	47
WORKS CITED	50
APPENDIX: First-Year Composition Classes and Trauma	53
VITA	67

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the pages that follow, I will be assessing how first-year composition instructors can respond to students who disclose trauma more attentively while preserving their own mental state. There is existing research on a variety of aspects of this area, but this specific intersection of disclosure of trauma, instructor feedback, and emotional labor remains relatively untouched. These aspects of teaching, which rely and build off each other, must start being addressed. Students in first-year composition courses may allow trauma to influence their writing in these courses, whether through disclosing the trauma itself or allowing it to influence their choice of subject that they write on. When they disclose this trauma, a variety of responses from the instructor are called for: a response as feedback to the trauma in the content of the writing, a response as feedback to the writing itself aside from the content, and a response within the instructor to the disclosure of trauma, which can fluctuate in severity. These responses require emotional labor on the part of the instructor, where they must manage and manipulate their own emotions and potentially those of the student. On top of this occurring with disclosure of trauma, emotional labor has likely already been performed multiple times by the instructor through teaching; for example, the instructor may have already “faked” enthusiasm or repressed negative emotions while teaching. These acts of emotional labor may even influence students to be comfortable enough with the instructor to disclose said trauma in their writing.

Clearly, these aspects of teaching composition build upon each other – so much so that their relationship can even be cyclical in some cases. Thus, while the research already being performed on the individual areas or where two may overlap is absolutely beneficial, research needs to start being done on the crucial intersection of all three aspects to aid in our

understanding of them. We can think of these individual aspects and their relationships to one another as a Venn diagram, where all aspects have varying levels of research done on them already and the center is untouched (see fig. 1).

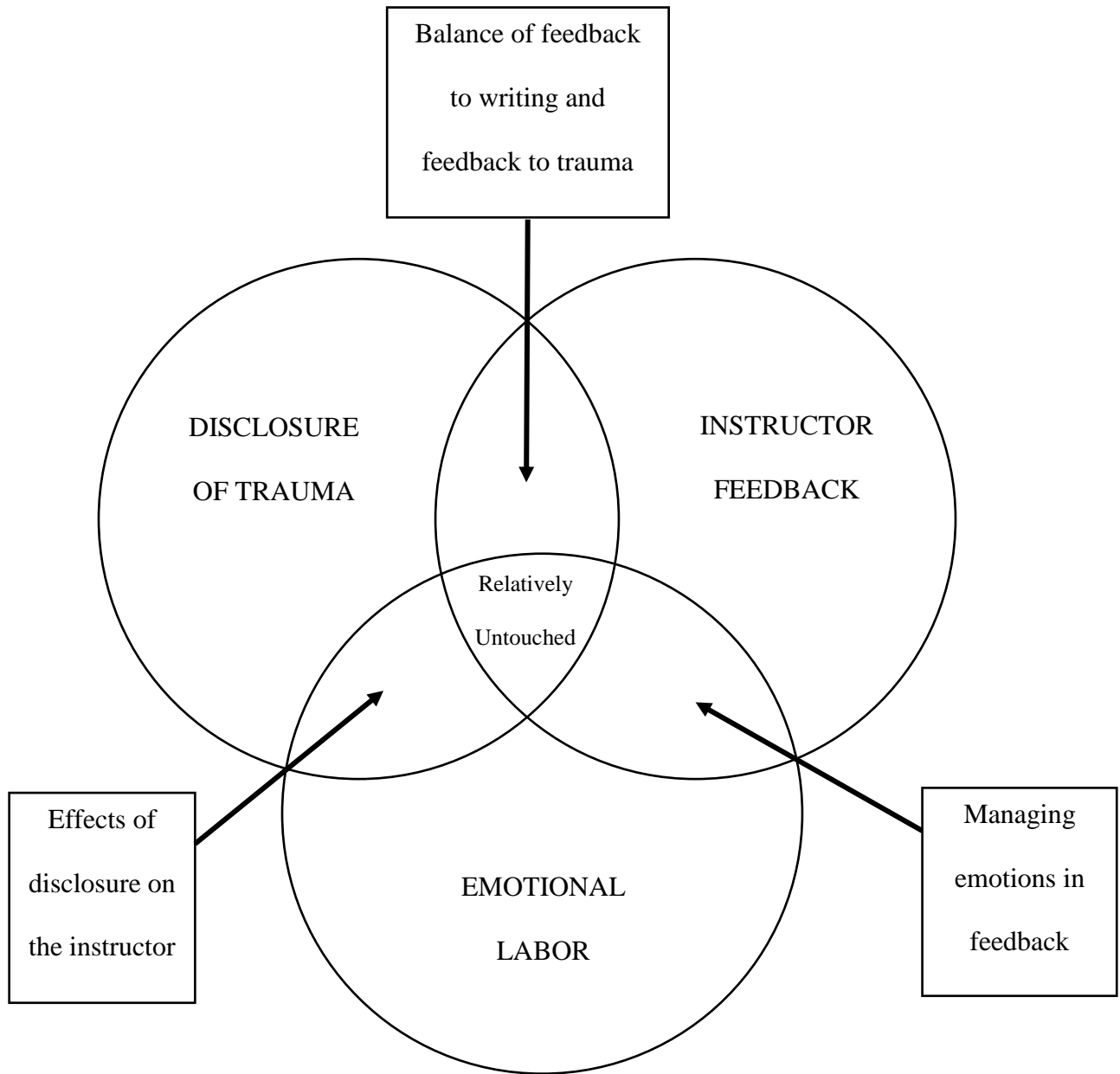


Fig. 1: Illustration of Research Gap

My thesis maps the intersection between these three aspects: how do we, as instructors, respond to a disclosure of trauma in student writing in an appropriate and respectful manner, while also responding to the student's writing itself and maintaining our and the student's mental health as a priority in the process? This study does serve as a pilot or as preliminary mapping of terrain for this area of research and is by no means the definitive word on this matter. Since there has not been much research done on this topic, specifically looking at college-level students, this thesis is really meant to probe what is out there, as well as pave the way for future research that is much needed, especially in this region. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which are "stressful or traumatic experiences that disrupt the safe, nurturing environments that children need to thrive," are higher than the national average. In 2012, 14% of the statewide population had four or more ACEs, and there are multiple counties across the state where 42% of the population has experienced two or more ACE scores (Department of Health, 3). With statistics like these, we have more students entering college already having experienced trauma, and with first-year composition as one of the only classes required for every student on campus, we, as instructors, can expect to interact with these students. If they are to disclose trauma, instructors must be prepared so they can respond effectively.

Chapter two focuses on covering trauma. A brief overview of what is considered trauma is given and I explain how trauma really affects the survivor. This progresses into discussing writing can be used in coping with trauma and how this applies to composition courses. My thesis does not make any claims about whether or not to assign highly personal assignments such as narratives or even whether or not instructors should encourage disclosure of trauma – this decision is left to each instructor's discretion. Rather, my thesis simply argues that instructors should be aware that disclosure of trauma in writing is a possibility and they should be mindful

of potential disclosure. On top of this, if disclosure does occur, instructors can choose to take on the role of a respectful audience, so they do not discredit or invalidate the student and their experience.

In chapter three, I focus on instructor feedback. Undoubtedly, the most important part of this chapter addresses how to balance giving feedback to the disclosure of trauma and giving feedback to the student's writing itself. I present what I have found to be the most successful method for this – responding to the writing and trauma separately – and how instructors can apply this method in their own courses. In chapter four, I discuss emotional labor. One of the most important points in this chapter is what kinds of instructors are most at-risk to take part in higher levels of emotional labor and the affects that this emotional labor can have on those instructors. I also build upon previous chapters and address how disclosure of trauma and instructor feedback both play into the effects of emotional labor. Ultimately, I discuss what can be done to prioritize instructors as much as possible when it comes to emotional labor. As with every aspect of humans, each person differs in the amount of emotional labor that they can handle; thus, it is important that instructors are mindful of how much they can take on and I suggest that they should be allowed to take on as much or as little as they feel they can handle. Additionally, mental health resources need to be far more prioritized for first-year composition instructors, both in availability for the instructors and education for the instructors so that they can refer students to proper resources if needed.

Finally, in chapter five, I cover an original study that I conducted as a part of this thesis. This study, a survey distributed to writing instructors at East Tennessee State University, assessed how student disclosure of trauma in first-year writing is approached by instructors and the potential impact that it has on instructors. This study serves as a pilot study for this area that

may assess where more in-depth research can be performed in the future in this area. The results of this study solidify my claims and suggestions of each previous section and point to the need for expanded research, such as assessing how teaching training impacts understanding of trauma and feedback to trauma.

CHAPTER 2

TRAUMA

Defining Trauma

While I will be discussing trauma in the context of disclosure of trauma through writing and how this could occur in the first-year composition classroom, it is important to begin by defining trauma. The term “trauma” can initially be quite confusing in its meaning, due to it often being oversimplified and thought of as a rigid concept, as well as there being differences between practitioners and approaches to trauma itself. When the term “trauma” is used, it is often associated with soldiers and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). While this is a correct association to make – soldiers experiencing trauma in war, then continuing to experience it through PTSD – it is important to note that this is not the only way to define trauma and that trauma can manifest itself in a variety of ways. Trauma is no longer restricted to those who experience war or death in front of them, and PTSD is not the only way the effects of trauma manifest in the survivor. The definition of trauma grows increasingly complex as time passes and with it grows the amount of people who are affected by it.

For instance, in Judith Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery*, she explains that “at the moment of trauma, the survivor is rendered helpless by overwhelming force” and that traumatic events “overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning . . . confronting [us] with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evok[ing] the responses of catastrophe” (33). She goes on to describe some of the lasting psychological effects of trauma, such as hyperarousal, where the survivor is constantly in a state of fear over the return of danger (35). Another effect she identifies is intrusion, where the survivor relives their trauma within their own mind; this leads to a physical reaction of the sympathetic nervous system

staying in a constant state of arousal, which can then lead to constriction, or a state of surrender where the body shuts down (37-39; 42). On the other hand, Marian MacCurdy defines trauma as the lasting adverse emotional effects of a traumatic event, which produce emotional “images [that] are hard to verbalize because they are locked into a part of the brain that is preverbal” (162). While Herman’s definition explicitly focuses on the event itself as trauma, MacCurdy’s definition focuses on trauma being “the process of a painful event continuing to impinge on our lives through the images it has imprinted in the brain” (Batzer). Both stress the importance of the lasting effects – how the event continues to affect the survivor past the occurrence of the event itself. Benjamin Batzer explains how trauma manages to have such a lasting effect on the survivor, which is mainly through how the brain processes it, “locking [it] in the nonverbal hippocampus and amygdala of the brain’s deep limbic system. Here [it is] frequently stored as images, linked to sense perceptions, and detached from the emotional responses [it produces. This trauma remains] in our experiences and identities but not in our dialogues, forever touching us while nevertheless remaining beyond simple articulation” (Batzer). By the trauma being held in a part of the brain that is not linked to language, the survivor is restricted when it comes to understanding their trauma and being able to convey it.

The definition of trauma that I will be using for this thesis is the one outlined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), as it follows and combines many aspects of the previous definitions, such as Herman’s focus on the traumatic event as well as MacCurdy’s and Batzer’s focus on the lasting effects of the event. SAMHSA’s definition of trauma explains that “individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental,

physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being” (7). It is especially important to remember that there is not only one way to experience trauma or feel the effects of trauma; rather, it manifests itself in a variety of different. For instance, differences in traumatic events themselves can change how individuals experience the trauma. There are three major categories of trauma: abuses (sexual assault, rape, domestic abuse, etc.), chronic stressors (poverty, hunger, etc.), and loss (death, war, terrorism, etc.). Each of these may affect individual differently – and not only because the traumas themselves are different, but because trauma may be realized differently in the body depending on the person. Trauma can be realized physically, such as experiencing sleep disturbances, flashbacks, and health disparities. Additionally, it can be realized cognitively, possibly through dissociation and/or a lack of focus or comprehension. Emotional realization is also a possibility, such as having feelings of anger, fear, or shame, or even not feeling any emotions and going “numb”. Lastly, trauma can be realized behaviorally through self-destructive behaviors, such as self-harming and substance abuse. Behavioral realizations are particularly misunderstood because while they are generally perceived as self-destructive, these are usually actually performed by survivors as a way of regaining control, which is something they may feel they lost through the trauma.

With this capacious definition of trauma, most people will end up interacting with more people who have been traumatized than they really expect. Charles Barber has declared that “we live in the Age of Trauma,” and when one gives focused thought to this statement, it becomes undeniable that this is the case: “An age when events like the terror attacks of 9/11, the nearly normalized shootings in public places, and cataclysmic natural disasters occur with a regularity and a closeness-to-home that means those of us unscathed by trauma are few and far between” (qtd. in DeBacher and Harris-Moore). Often, we find that these examples lead to claims of

Americans as a whole being desensitized to traumatic events, when, in reality, this is not the case. While we may no longer have such an intensely visceral and conscious reaction to such events occurring regularly, they may still be affecting us on a more subconscious level. When they occur repeatedly, this subconscious reaction builds – so while we may not realize consciously that we are being traumatized, we can very well be experiencing trauma or a form of trauma internally. For example, public shootings have reached a point of being nearly normalized; thus, on the surface, many of us do not react as strongly as we would if they were occurring less frequently. However, this normalization does not mean that we are not, on a more subconscious level, being traumatized through hearing of these occurrences. What used to be a worst-case scenario or the most extreme of worst possibilities has now become a scarily regular reality – no longer an “if it happens,” but a “*when* it happens.” Further, because these traumatic events are occurring on an increasingly regular basis, more people are being personally affected by them, which increases our likelihood of interacting with those who have been traumatized.

Healing from Trauma with Writing

Some of the language surrounding trauma, specifically healing from trauma, sounds like it is completely interchangeable when it, in fact, is not. For instance, the terms “coping,” “healing,” and “recovering” all sound like they mean the same thing; while they are heavily related, some do differ in critical ways, especially with how they are used in this thesis. For our purposes, “coping” refers to the how the survivor manifests the effects of trauma, recalling the emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physical effects as defined previously. Depending on how these effects manifest in each individual, survivors will “cope” in different manners. This can often be a subconscious reaction, but regardless, it is the survivor’s reaction to the trauma. As for “recovery,” it is defined by Herman as the survivor regaining empowerment and the ability to

make connections with others, as she notes that relationships are crucial for recovery and that one cannot recover in isolation (133). For this thesis, “healing” will be taken to its roots and understood as a process working towards healthy or healthier. Thus, we can see that “recovery” and “healing” are relatively interchangeable, just that “recovery” has more specific criteria. “Healing” also has more of a physical connotation behind it, as it is typically tied to physical health, so it can also be understood as the process of the trauma having increasingly fewer lasting effects on the survivor. Since we have such a strong connection between “recovery” and “healing,” both will be understood as processes rather than specific end goals.

A variety of research does support understanding coping as the survivor’s expression of feelings or thoughts about the traumatic event in a process that is beneficial and supported for physical and psychological health (Esterling et al.; Smyth; Pennebaker and Graybeal; Pennebaker and Chung). Batzer mentions that “therapeutic coping, which allows us to regain power and escape the isolation of suffering, facilitates recovery” and that this process of recovery reminds us “that healing is never ending, that certain wounds will always be with us in some lasting way, even if we can learn to live with them.” With our definition, I do challenge that coping is beneficial and supported, as certain acts that fall under our definition, such as self-destructive behaviors, are seen as coping in the context of this thesis, but are not supported and are seen as “bad” coping mechanisms¹. Rather than focusing on the final “product” of being completely healed from one’s trauma, we may focus on the process of coping, recovering, and healing. In many ways, we can liken this to Donald Murray’s famous “teaching writing as a process” theory – it is not about the product itself, but more about the journey to that product.

¹ As explained previously, these can actually provide benefits to the survivor, such as regaining control that they lost in the trauma. However, I cannot condone acts such as self-harm and substance abuse as “beneficial and supported for physical and psychological health.”

This comparison applies further when we look to using writing to facilitate this process of healing. MacCurdy even suggests that the writing process “mirrors the therapeutic methodology for trauma survivors outlined in Judith Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery*” (qtd. in DeBacher and Harris-Moore). Thus, it makes sense that the two processes go hand in hand – a process of healing through the process of writing.

There are some researchers, like Herman and Batzer, who see healing from trauma as essentially impossible, and that one never truly heals from it. However, I differ from these researchers here. In my definition, the traumatic event itself – the actual “trauma” – has a beginning and an end; the effects are what can linger and continue to haunt the survivor. Thus, survivors can heal from trauma, they just have to stop and/or reverse the effects (if it is possible); the damage has to be identified initially, but it can, potentially, be treated and reversed. That being said, not every effect that lingers with the survivor can be reversed, so on this aspect, I agree that there is possibility for healing to not be fully possible. For example, memories cannot safely be erased and some diagnoses, like PTSD, do not have cures yet. Instead, these diagnoses are carefully managed and often involve a long and potentially intense healing process.

A major factor in healing is how one approaches their healing. The focus on “talking therapy” and relationships/connections in the process of healing can be considered a top-down approach to healing, as we focus mostly on processing memories. However, we can also take a bottom-up approach to healing, which has more of a bodily focus; in this approach, the body may have experiences that contradict what the mind is feeling, which may be some of those emotional manifestations of trauma. Similar to how individuals may experience trauma differently, individuals will likely experience healing differently as well; thus, both approaches are valid and can be utilized depending on the survivor’s needs and what would be most beneficial for them.

Returning to the idea of trauma sticking with the survivor, it is important for the survivor to explore what is quite literally haunting them in order to allow the survivor to begin recovering from it. As David L. Eng and David Kazanjian mention, loss is “inseparable from what remains, for what is lost is known only by what remains of it, by how these remains are produced, read, and sustained” (qtd. in Milner 32). Thus, while loss itself is considered a form of trauma, various forms of loss can also take place when trauma occurs, such as the loss of material items or experience, a physical loss with injury, losing others to death, or losing a life that is untraumatized (Premo, qtd. in Milner 32). However, as Eng and Kazanjian mention, what is lost is not completely gone; rather, much of it can remain as a metaphorical ghost, haunting the survivor endlessly. What is important is for the survivor to explore this loss so they can begin coping with it, or exorcising that metaphorical ghost – and a potentially beneficial way to do that is through writing.

Using Writing to Heal

Psychological research since the late 1970s – especially that of psychologist James Pennebaker – has shown that many people benefit from speaking or writing about their experience, even if the person being spoken or written to is not a trained therapist or psychologist (Anderson and MacCurdy 197). Pennebaker’s research found that repressing traumatic narratives could be a constant stressor which works against the body’s defenses. In his studies on trauma survivors – specifically childhood sexual abuse survivors – those who did not vocalize about their trauma tended to develop more major illnesses than those who did vocalize their experiences (DeSalvo 22). Similarly, Shelly Harrell also notes journaling aiding emotional healing for many sexual abuse victims (qtd. in Batzer). When it comes to using writing for recovery, Pennebaker mentions one observed benefit being “self-dosing,” where the writer stops

writing if and when the pain becomes too much; he also claims that, even if they feel upset momentarily while writing, there are undeniable long-term benefits (qtd. in Milner 37). Some of these benefits may include decreases in thinking of the trauma and in emotional intensity of thoughts relating to the trauma, fewer visits to doctors and health centers, positive changes on PTSD symptoms, reduction of trauma symptoms, reduction of psychological distress, decreased negative mood, decreased depressive symptoms, as well as positive behavioral outcomes such as increased GPAs, improved GRE/MCAT/LSAT scores, and higher test scores (Acar and Dirik 67). However, it is important to remember that these benefits only occur through a relationship and that in order to cope, survivors must be sharing their writing in a safe space with an attentive audience that listens and is empathetic.

On the other hand, there are also definitely potential issues that may arise with doing writing therapy. Since this top-down approach focuses more on the processing of memories, it requires some level of emotional and mental disconnect on behalf of the survivor, as the writing must be mindful and thoughtful as the survivor confronts their trauma head-on. There is a very real possibility that the survivor cannot partake in this disconnect and thus cannot just dissect and analyze their trauma. If the survivor is unable to do this, they may not be able to fully confront their trauma and the writing therapy could then be less effective. Additionally, writing therapy can also be dangerous, as the survivor could potentially be re-traumatized in the process. Thus, while writing therapy can be very beneficial for some individuals, it is also very complicated and delicate, so it may not be a good idea for every survivor to try it. If the survivor is going to attempt it, they must have a guide to help them through the process, especially one that is trained, like a therapist. The survivor must have a safety net, as well as structures of assessment, which would be implemented by that guide.

When writing about traumatic experiences, Laura Milner describes an approach that she calls compos(t)ing. Compos(t)ing combines “composing” (defined by Ann Berthoff as “making meaning of the chaos of life”) and “composting” (the loss and trauma, or “contain[ing] and transform[ing] them into food for ... survival”) (Milner 33). When one is given the ability to write about the traumas that they have experienced, they may be able to more fully articulate and comprehend the traumas, which would facilitate the healing process. In an anecdote about the experiences with writing about trauma of one of her previous students, Chanda, Milner quoted her student as saying:

Writing through a trauma is always beneficial. Many people cannot express themselves orally, and writing is their only sense of relief. Writing helps you think about every aspect of the trauma, breaking your feelings down bit by bit, and that is the only true way to get over things. First we must recognize how we feel, then it is up to us to discover why and deal with it. (34)

The process of writing about one’s traumatic experiences can be therapeutic for the writer and, as Milner suggests, can be compared to an act of meditation. She quotes Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh as saying, “In the way that a gardener knows how to transform compost into flowers, we can learn the art of transforming anger, depression, and racial discrimination into love and understanding” (qtd in Milner 35). He defines this act of meditation as “the act of stopping and looking deeply” and Milner goes on to clarify that this is exactly what writers and writing teachers practice as they “attempt to compose/compost [their] experiences” (35).

In fact, Milner mentions that “most spiritual traditions agree that suffering is essential to human growth,” just as decay is often necessary for rebirth (35). In this belief, loss is not the opposite of gain, as many others believe; instead of running away from loss and trauma, these

Buddhist writers suggest that we must “befriend it as natural and inevitable” (35). Obviously, approaching the trauma in this sense is not meant to devalue it in any way – it is still a very serious and valid event in the survivor’s life and may be approached as such, with respect and some delicacy. However, by approaching trauma with this mindset, one can better understand that what they have experienced is, in fact, valid and natural; that it is okay to still feel the repercussions of the traumatic event. Milner argues that “whether they’re writing about loss, betrayal, abuse, or the joy of growing up in a safe, caring environment, many student writers seem to benefit from naming and revising their experiences and having them legitimized by a witness” (41). With trauma, it is suggested that it is important that the survivor understands that their experiences are valid and legitimate; it is okay if they are still haunted by the traumatic event, because once the survivor is able to fully accept the pain and emotions that come with the trauma, they can more deeply heal and recover.

Returning to the ability to fully heal from trauma, Milner argues that this is extremely rare to do and even if this were to take place, the trauma will never fully go away. As Nhat Hanh wrote, “once we have experienced something deeply it is always there for us to touch again” (qtd. in Milner 35). We can understand this as even through the process of recovering and healing, the effects of the trauma will never fully go away; instead, the survivor will have healed as much as they could and come to terms with it, rather than denying, repressing, or burying it. Through this, the survivor can transform, or compost, their experience into something that they accept and have coped with, as well as a catalyst for self-exploration and understanding:

Separation from loved ones, disappointments, impatience with unpleasant things – all these are also constructive and wonderful. Who we are is, in part, a result of our unpleasant experiences. Deep looking allows us to see the wondrous elements contained

in the weakness of others and ourselves, and these flowers of insight will never wilt.

(Nhat Hanh, qtd. in Milner 35).

By looking deeply to explore their trauma, survivors can also look deeper into more aspects of themselves; this not only allows them to understand themselves better, but to understand and accept their trauma better, as well as to better appreciate where they have had strengths and overcomings in their journey.

Still, writing is one potentially beneficial method of meditating upon trauma and loss, as well as learning to recover and heal from it. Milner suggests that “using language to compose, decompose, and re-compose images and ideas provides avenues for composting loss: by naming, knowing, and reframing our sorrows, we have a better chance of transforming them into something useful rather than being defined, reduced, or embittered by them” (35). This may be especially successful in the writing classroom with students, as Milner also suggests that composting best happens “when we add new ideas and experiences to the mix of what we already know” (35). In an academic setting, students can apply what they learn about writing to convey their emotions and experiences, which can help in facilitating the recovery process. Recalling Batzer’s explanation of the brain’s processing of trauma, this application of learning can help survivors overcome their trauma being difficult to verbally articulate by providing them with the tools to articulate it.

Disclosure of Trauma in the Classroom

Chanda, one of the students Milner recalled who experienced trauma in her grandfather’s death, supports this beneficial addition of rhetoric anecdotally: “I learned to use rhetoric to express pain, grief, and love at the same time. This changed my attitude toward writing because I have never had to use writing to ‘get over’ an experience. I realized when my friends and family

are too busy, my pen and pad will always be available. I now see writing as a road to recovery” (Milner 34). Learning writing and how to compose one’s experiences in writing provides students with a voice that can reflect the process of recovery. While one may begin with not being able to communicate their experiences in a very cohesive or clear manner, through learning writing tools in class, the survivor can begin to express their experience and their emotions more cohesively. Not only is this the case, but as the students gain confidence in their writing – even with the subject matter – the student’s voice can become stronger and more confident as well, reflecting their recovery through this process. Milner quotes another past student, Jane, who expressed similar findings:

I love the thoroughly exhausting act of giving voice to my deepest fears and most capricious dreams ... This was no ordinary writing course. I was forced not only to think, but also to feel. I was required to confront anger I didn’t know I possessed, and to discover joy I didn’t know I was capable of feeling ... Through the act of composition, I’ve learned that I am a work in progress, and that I can revise my story as many times as needed. (40)

By giving the students these writing tools, not only can they begin coping with the main trauma they have experienced, but they can also cope with effects that are underlying this trauma as well, such as the anger that Jane mentions. Again, if this process takes place, the student is not only able to confront and explore their trauma, but is also able to look deeper into themselves and analyze other aspects that may potentially have sprouted from the trauma as well.

It is possible that these traumatic experiences can hinder students’ learning and that, by giving them the chance to write about these experiences, the student may benefit even more past recovering from the trauma. Mary Rose O’Reilley posits that stories or experiences of trauma

can be “caught in our throats” and that “if left untold, tend to block one’s ability to learn” (qtd. in Milner 34). She goes on to explain that “if we can’t ‘pull the weight of these stories off people, it is very hard for them to learn. Such stories linger on the soul like the hungry ghosts of Buddhist legend ... We have to lift the weight before the student can learn anything” (qtd. in Milner 38). Thus, while instructors should not require students to disclose trauma in their writing, Peter Goggin and Maureen Daley Goggin suggest that instructors be open to students doing so (qtd. in DeBacher and Harris-Moore). Not only can the student begin recovering and healing individually, but being able to express their experiences can also free them up mentally, and can benefit them academically. Another of Milner’s students, Donnie, expresses this sense of mental freedom, claiming that writing the paper was “very therapeutic” for him and “now my mind feels so clear and open. Sometimes sharing your problems through writing or discussion can help relieve pain and sadness” (40). Writing about their experiences can be physically relieving for these students, so instructors may consider not hindering them in doing so.

There are two very key aspects to using writing as a tool for recovery: quality and audience. When writing about traumatic experiences, it is found to be most beneficial if one links and describes the feelings associated with the events – both current feelings and feelings from the occurrence of the event. By writing mindfully, the writer may be able to truly confront their experience, rather than just “writing to vent,” which may not be as beneficial (Milner 37). Just as it does not help to “run away from” the loss and trauma in their entirety, it is suggested that it is also not beneficial for survivors to shy away from aspects of their traumatic experiences. As Pennebaker suggested, survivors will self-dose their treatment of writing and they will stop writing if it becomes too painful for them; however, if something about the experience is that painful for the survivor to address, it clearly still has an effect on them and contributes to the

trauma that continues to haunt them. As for audience, it is important that the survivor shares their writing “with readers in a safe, hospitable space” (Milner 37). This is not saying that the survivor is required to share their experience in writing; rather, it is saying that if they choose to do so, it is crucial that they have an attentive audience who will listen and respect the survivor and their experience. These sentiments are echoed by trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub, who “agree that the role of a reader or listener is crucial in the survivor’s recovery process, just as truth-telling is essential to personal and cultural recovery from trauma” (Milner 37). If a survivor is going to confront and attempt to begin recovering from their trauma, these two aspects are completely essential to the recovery process being as beneficial as it can be.

When bringing this recovery process into the classroom, this creates a very vulnerable, yet trusting relationship between the student and the instructor. Elisabeth Chiseri-Strater mentions that in this process, “our relationship [between instructor and student] also [gives students] an additional interested audience for overhearing their decisions about changing both their texts and their actual lives.” Additionally, this connection between instructor and student can “[affect] how students [see] their own writing and revision processes” (qtd. in Milner 39). Milner describes this connection as “a process of transformation for both writer and witness” (35). Not only is the student transforming themselves and their writing in a variety of ways, but that this special connection can also potentially have a transformative impact on the instructor.

I am not suggesting that instructors should be assigning students to write about their trauma, though: requiring a student to take part in this process could do more harm than good. However, as mentioned previously, instructors may consider not completely disallowing this trauma-informed writing from their students; rather, they may allow for it to take place and work

with the student. As MacCurdy has explained, “[t]eachers are not therapists ... we listen to students, we actively participate in the process of the construction of a therapeutic narrative, we ... care about them as people” (qtd. in DeBacher and Harris-Moore). While teachers are not therapists, there is no denying that, at times, their work can look fairly similar to a therapist’s. And when this benefits the students – especially when there is a personal and trusting connection, like the relationship between instructor and student – why completely deny that opportunity? To deny the student any trauma-informed writing may hinder that relationship between the instructor and student, as well as the student’s relationship with writing. As previously stated, these traumatic experiences can weigh tremendously heavily on students’ mind, which can hinder their academic performance; denying them an opportunity to alleviate this hinderance, even a little, could cause students to become disconnected with their writing and the course in general.

That being said, instructors absolutely do not get paid enough and are not trained enough to pursue this fully – an aspect which will be addressed later in this thesis with ideas such as emotional labor. Unless instructors receive proper training and are paid more, they are not equipped to everything that comes with student disclosure of trauma, which is why instructors must know what appropriate resources they can refer their students to. By educating instructors on these resources, instructors can pass off responsibility to a more equipped channel that can provide better assistance to the student while preserving their own workload and mental health in doing so. Thus, when it comes to these aspects that call for a disclosure of trauma (narrative assignments, expressivist approaches, etc.), it is up to each instructor whether or not they want to tackle these challenges. What this thesis does suggest is that if a disclosure of trauma does

happen in any writing for the class – even writing that may not call for it – the instructor may consider responding in an empathetic manner.

However, if instructors want to decrease the likelihood of this disclosure of trauma, they can be more selective with the types of assignments that they assign in their classes. While preventing this trauma-informed writing is virtually impossible, by being selective with assignments, instructors can avoid outwardly inviting students to write about these traumas. Certain types of assignments are undoubtedly more likely to invoke a trauma-informed response from students than others. One of the most notable types of assignments to garner this response are narrative writing assignments, especially when presented as what Anderson et al. describes as “meaning-making writing tasks.” These tasks “require students to engage in some form of integrative, critical, or original thinking,” which can include aspects like drawing on past experiences or performing a type of learning transfer by applying knowledge from another class (Anderson et al. 2007). Narrative assignments, while potentially combining expressivist and cultural studies approaches, can be particularly helpful to students who need this outlet to explore and reflect on their trauma. Students can use these assignments “as a way to articulate differences in individual experiences, values, and identity without necessarily challenging collective or group values” (Schiavone and Knutson 22). Narrative assignments allow students to explore their experiences individually under a sense of privacy and security, as what is written on the paper is meant solely for the student and the instructor. While this does allow for the student to explore and potentially cope with their trauma, this does invite emotional labor on the part of the instructor – especially in the feedback they give the student.

CHAPTER 3

INSTRUCTOR FEEDBACK

Feedback can undoubtedly be one of the most time-consuming and mentally straining parts of the job of being a writing instructor. There is a desire to find a balance when it comes to the amount of feedback an instructor gives on assignments; generally speaking, there must be enough that both the instructor and students feel that it is adequate, but there should not be so much that it is unmanageable for the instructor and students, both short-term and long-term. However, one major benefit of feedback is that instructors can find what method, or combination of methods, works best for them. For instance, while Instructor A may be able to handle rubrics as well as both marginal and end comments, Instructor B may only be able to consistently handle rubrics and occasional conferencing. Thus, through developing one's personal teaching philosophy, instructors should experiment with different feedback techniques and find what is the most effective for them.

However, this thesis will not be suggesting that a particular type of feedback is the absolute best and that every instructor should adhere to this single type. Rather, it is proposing how to specifically approach disclosure of trauma in student's writing. This approach can then be applied to instructors' preferred feedback methods. Say that an instructor already uses rubrics as their main form of feedback for students; the proposed approach has no stance on rubrics, thus it cannot imply whether or not the instructor should continue using them. Instead, the proposed approach is meant to really be added on top of the established, preferred feedback methods or, in some cases, to potentially alter them slightly if they are already aligned with this proposed approach. Again, this is only meant for the instance of disclosure of trauma; instructors could

potentially alter their feedback methods for a more regular basis based off of this approach, but it really is meant for the specific instance of disclosure of trauma.

Even without disclosure of trauma, giving feedback to student writing can be a tricky task for instructors. The goal of this feedback should not be to discourage students, but rather to encourage them to make revisions and learn – which is easier said than done. If one strictly points out where errors have been made in the writing, the student can perceive this negatively. From a student’s perspective, there is a stigma against feedback in academia; students can have a preconceived notion that feedback is automatically negative, which may have been perpetuated by instructors. Erika Lindemann mentions that “no matter how students may have viewed their academic achievements in the past, they seem to have learned that school-sponsored writing always ‘fails.’ It’s always returned with at least one defeating comment” (31). This can be especially difficult in transitional periods, like when students come to college for the first time. Some students may have been constantly praised by their high school instructors and never received critique because it was not needed at the time, or because there was no time for them to be given critique. However, when students enter a first-year composition course, they may be challenged write new genres of assignments that they have never been introduced to before. In instances like these, their writing will likely not be perfect immediately and they will have to face critique for the first time. This student can feel defeated, even with minimal critique, and this could be in spite of previous achievements as a writer.

When it comes to students who have had bad previous experiences with feedback in English classes, they may be more likely to feel this sense of failure from feedback since they already have bad previous experiences. Thus, it is extremely important that instructors value their feedback and are careful with it. For feedback to be as beneficial and effective as it can be,

it cannot be purely negative or purely perceived as negative. Instructors may sometimes not realize that their comments can be perceived as negative by their students, especially when the comments only focus on errors and what changes need to be made. Lindemann argues that feedback like this tends to ignore the student themselves, who is reading the feedback, internalizing it, and making revisions based off of it (233). This negative perception of comments can also occur when comments are short and cryptic, as they often have to be through the feedback process – while the instructor may know what they mean, the student may not, and this ambiguity can lead to communication issues. In a study conducted by Vicki Spandel and Rick J. Stiggins, this was precisely what was found:

Negative comments, however well intentioned they are, tend to make students feel bewildered, hurt, or angry. They stifle further attempts at writing. It would seem on the fact of it that one good way to help a budding writer would be to point out what he or she is doing wrong, but, in fact, it usually doesn't help; it hurts. Sometimes it hurts a lot. (qtd. in Bean 319)

Thus, positive feedback must be interspersed with this corrective feedback to keep the student in mind and to ensure that the feedback is beneficial to them. Spandel and Stiggins were able to find evidence of this in their research as well: “What does help, however, is to point out what the writer is doing well. Positive comments build confidence and make the writer want to try again. However, there's a trick to writing good positive comments. They must be truthful, and they must be very specific” (qtd. in Bean 319). Writing general, non-specific positive comments may still be interpreted poorly by the student, with them maybe thinking that the instructor did not care enough to be more detailed or that they may not have done well enough to get better, more detailed comments. For example, just leaving a general comment of “great job” or “nice writing”

is not nearly as beneficial as saying what was great/nice – the student can latch on to that specific detail, knowing the instructor really paid attention to what they wrote, and may be more motivated to put further work into the assignment.

Lindemann distinguishes “comments to teach/enhance learning” or “formative comments” from the comments and feedback that hunt out errors. These comments to teach and enhance learning point out what the student does well and the strengths in their writing. These comments do not necessarily just praise the student, though – they can explain why something else in the writing is not effective or does not work, how these errors can undermine what the student is trying to communicate, and how the student can improve their paper further or try new strategies (Lindemann 226, 233). Not only can this mixture of praise and criticism ensure that students are reading the feedback and getting the most out of it that they can, but it also leaves the evaluation open-ended enough that it alone can guide students through revision or following assignments, or the student can approach the instructor freely regarding the feedback (Lindemann 226, 238). John Bean also mentions these “formative comments,” referring to them as “mitigated criticism” – or criticism that mixes positive and negative elements, using the positive to frame the perceived negative to help the student process the criticism in a more neutral way (320). Lois J. Smith found that students overwhelmingly preferred this mitigated criticism over the direct criticism with no mitigation, noting that it gave them a more positive outlook on the feedback itself (qtd. in Bean 320). Thus, positive feedback does not mean just praising students on what they did well, though that is still important to include; instead, positive feedback includes critiquing students’ writing in a way that is not abrasive and that encourages the students to continue writing rather than scaring them away from it.

While balanced feedback is important, it is also important to not overwhelm students by having too much feedback (Lindemann; Jago). This is not in reference to the number of methods an instructor uses with feedback, but rather the act of marking the assignment itself or, as it is colloquially known, “making the paper bleed.” One of the most effective techniques of feedback is to make the work and feedback tangible for the student by emphasizing a small amount of errors for each assignment (Lindemann 230). This can be done by prioritizing what the student needs to work on the most and giving the student these as clear guidelines for where they should be focusing on their work (Bean 313). This prioritization can occur throughout the paper as marginal comments or markings specifically focusing on these aspects, but one of the best and clearest ways to do this is through end comments. These comments can be personalized to the individual student and can expand upon markings made throughout the paper.

Additionally, this technique can allow the instructor to mark the paper relatively freely and then reflectively, at the end of marking, assess what needs the most focus. This idea of focusing on a more manageable amount of feedback especially relates back to Mina Shaughnessy’s techniques with feedback, which emphasize finding patterns of error rather than small instances of errors line by line (Lindemann 237). The instructor can mark a portion of these instances so students are aware of what the instructor is focusing on, then relay the responsibility for the finding the remaining errors that follow this same pattern. By assessing this process at the end of feedback through end comments, the instructor ensures that they are truly identifying patterns of error and not singular occurrences, and that they are able to properly prioritize what the student needs feedback on. End comments can also have the mixture of praise and criticism, as Carol Jago suggests beginning with positive praise, then suggesting ways for improvement – which can be the patterns of errors – and finishing with a final positive note (10).

By sandwiching end comments like this, students start and end the feedback positively, which should decrease the likelihood of them taking the overall feedback negatively.

In fact, comments that are personalized are typically received quite strongly by students. Joe Belanger and Philip V. Allingham found that “comments which were personalized seemed to give students the impression that their teachers cared about them and what they had to say” (qtd. in Jago 90). Jago clarifies this, mentioning that the research suggests “the most effective teacher comments relate the composition at hand with past writing, shared the teacher’s beliefs and experiences, and validated the ideas and hypotheses of the students” (90). This approach can easily be applied to disclosure of trauma, as well: comments that acknowledge disclosure and give validation to the student, which is much needed in trauma survivors, are not only effective but show the student that instructor cares about them and what happened to them. William Zinsser has said that “the writing teacher’s ministry is not just to the words but to the person who wrote the words” (qtd. in Bean 317). It is important for instructors to remember that they are giving feedback to humans and small acts like personalizing comments can have a large impact on how the feedback affects the student. Bean actually mentions that “the best kind of commentary enhances the writer’s feeling of dignity. The worst kind can be experienced as dehumanizing and insulting” (317). Instructors must remember that feedback is a very personal aspect of the classroom and should be treated as such.

James E. Zull mentions that positive emotions enhance cognition, while negative emotions do the opposite (qtd. in Bean 319). When it comes to teaching students, instructors should keep in mind that the student “will be quickly and subconsciously monitoring [the feedback] through her amygdala [the primitive ‘fear center’ or ‘danger center’ of the brain” (qtd. in Bean 320). Recall that Batzer mentions that the amygdala is actually one of the places in the

brain where traumatic experiences are kept as images, which is what keeps them from being verbalized easily. Bean explains that “fear, anxiety, or anger blocks meaningful learning, which is associated with pleasure” (320). Likewise, O’Reilley suggests that feelings are also often associated with traumatic events for survivors and can inhibit the survivor’s learning, which is why allowing students to write about traumatic experiences is suggested.

In addition to feedback, grading criteria can play a role in a student’s reaction. Even when an instructor is providing feedback on a draft, the criteria that the assignment will eventually be graded on should be kept in mind. Bean suggests determining this grading criteria early – perhaps even before officially assigning the assignment – so that these criteria are clear to the students throughout the writing process and that the instructor’s feedback can be more efficient and effective (267). Having clear and unwavering grading criteria from the start can also assist instructors when it comes to responding to disclosure of trauma in student writing. Often, instructors are not sure how to respond to the writing itself when the content is sensitive: obviously, it cannot be completely ignored, as it is the instructor’s job to teach students about writing. However, how can one be expected to tell the student they must improve their paper in various areas – or worse, give them a failing grade – when the student has disclosed a traumatic experience? Does giving the student feedback like this on their writing show disrespect for the student’s experience? Could it potentially harm the student?

We can take steps towards an answer, beginning with grading criteria. By having clear grading criteria for the entirety of an assignment, students are aware of how the instructor is grading the entire writing process. This clarity provides the instructor a guideline of the very least that they should provide for the student in feedback. In theory, instructors will encounter this disclosure before the final grade is given, as they should be giving feedback on drafts, not

the final product. However, they should still have the eventual grading criteria in mind as they provide feedback for the student, and the student should be able to revise the assignment after receiving the feedback. Thus, the instructor can, at the very least, focus purely on that criteria they have set out for themselves, knowing that the student has been aware of this criteria even as they have written the assignment. The instructor can separately acknowledge the content of the assignment, or the disclosure, on its own. By separating these two aspects of the assignment – the writing and the disclosure – the instructor can approach them separately and differently. While the instructor may take a very cut-and-dry approach with the writing, they may choose to take a more in-depth approach with the disclosure. Likewise, this allows instructors to approach them in different formats. For instance, an instructor may prefer only rubrics for giving feedback to students, as the guidelines are clearly labelled on them. However, they can approach the disclosure in a different format – say, a comment – to ensure that they give the disclosure the proper feedback that it deserves. Even if they are to use comments for feedback on the writing, instructors should still separate the feedback for the writing from the feedback for the disclosure to ensure that they stay separate. If they are kept together, the student could potentially perceive the feedback on the disclosure as negative when the writing feedback was negative. In short, it could lead to a variety of messy situations and miscommunications.

CHAPTER 4

EMOTIONAL LABOR

Emotional labor was originally defined by Arlie Hochschild as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and body display ... [which] is sold for a wage and therefore has ‘exchange value’” (7). She went on to explain that this sort of labor requires a manipulation of emotion to “sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others . . . [It] calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality” (7). Hochschild uses this as an applicable term to any job, but specifically uses a factory worker and flight attendant as the examples to show the connection between physical, mental and emotional labor. Any portrayal of emotion by the worker is closely monitored and becomes part of the job; a simple smile becomes part of the uniform, while disguising fatigue and irritation are essential for preserving customer satisfaction. If a worker does not participate in this, they can be seen in a negative light – as “mean” or “scary” – and for female workers in particular, they can be deemed as having what is colloquially known as “resting bitch face.”

However, the modern definition has developed to further highlight human-to-human interaction. Ronnie Steinberg and Deborah Figart explain that emotional labor “emphasizes the relational rather than task-based aspect but not exclusively in the service economy. It is labor-intensive work; it is skilled, effort-intensive, and productive labor” (qtd. in Larson 47). Emotional labor is fairly important in most workplaces, but when it comes to teaching, it is completely integral and is just as important as content and pedagogy. According to Holly Ann Larson, emotional labor is what “keeps institutions of higher education accessible to everyone . . . it builds a connection between instructor and student, creating a relationship that is mutually

rewarding and fulfilling” (47). In response to their instructors performing emotional labor, students stay engaged in classes and college in general. This could have an effect on retention and graduation rates, as well as participation and grades for individual classes – all things that matter to universities themselves, but also to individual students on some level. Thus, in order to teach a class the most successfully that you can, emotional labor is not optional.

When it comes to emotional labor in the classroom setting, instructors may often find that they have to fulfill multiple roles in order to properly prepare their students – anything from “mentor, advisor, teacher, and entertainer,” all of which take a great deal of energy (Larson 46). On top of this, these roles that instructors take on are not necessarily going to be the same for each student, as Julie Lindquist suggests that instructors “can listen to students to know not only how, but who to be with them” (200). In order to know what performance must be put on, instructors must be receptive to what their students’ needs are. Moreover, this performance has to come across as relatively genuine, so much so that “the price of successfully persuading students of their (the teachers’) emotional commitments may very well . . . succeed in persuading *themselves* of these commitments as well. Teachers must listen even when they are not interested, must appear to care about things that bore or annoy them, in the expectation that such attentiveness will become genuine concern” (Lindquist 201). This performance is not just a mask or at a surface level; rather, it embeds its roots deep within the instructor and calls for genuine emotion, similar to method acting in entertainment. The energy required for this performance can become unsustainable for long periods of time, due to the emotional labor taxing on the instructor. This performance of emotional labor is especially prevalent with female instructors over male instructors; while male instructors are able to “choose when and how to nurture, assure, and entertain their students,” low-ranked instructors, who are typically female, are

required to take part in this emotional labor more consistently (Larson 50). What is viewed as an option for males is necessary for females, especially due to it being deemed as instinctive. Much of emotional labor is centered around nurturance, which is seen as inherently maternal, and thus, feminine.

Part of this genderization may come from the fact that teaching is, and has been, a career predominantly held by women. Nancy Folbre mentioned “that by 1888, 63% of American teachers at the primary and secondary level were women and schools had shifted their focus from discipline and independence to the ‘ethos of nurturance’” (qtd. in Larson 49). Even at the level of community college and technical college, teachers are still primarily female. Larson suggests, however, that four-year universities are where teaching switches to a mainly male-held job, due to scholarship and research being the primary focuses rather than the teaching itself (49). Women have been able to increasingly balance gender representation in academia in the last thirty or so years; however, Larson points out, based on Alice Kemp’s research, that women are still treated “lower” than men:

. . . Female instructors teach more courses, deal with more students, and have less time to invest in scholarly work. In many ways, they are seen as teachers first, then scholars, which means they are expected to do the emotional labor – that is, to nurture and engage students – while their male colleagues have more time away from students and from dealing with the complexities of their lives to think and write. (50)

This is especially problematic when institutions reward instructors based off of publications and research and lack recognition for teaching accomplishments. By female instructors generally being held to a standard where they must prioritize teaching over research, they are inherently

kept at a lower level than their male counterparts – more is expected of the females, but they receive less in return for this extra labor.

Further, there is also the issue of gender in relation to discipline. Michelle M. Tokarczyk and Elizabeth A. Fay suggest that “teaching in the field of humanities is ‘a service-oriented profession’” (qtd. in Larson 51). Looking back to the origins and Hochschild, there is no wonder as to why the humanities generally require more emotional labor on the behalf of instructors than other fields, such as STEM. Emotional labor started off being defined for mostly service economies, which is exactly how Tokarczyk and Fay suggest teaching in the humanities is like. Dominick La Capra also supports this gendered structure for humanities by referring to universities as “patriarchal families.” In these, administration plays the father, natural sciences play the eldest son, humanities play the mother, and the students are the children. La Capra elaborates that “the role of the humanists is to stay at home and take care of the kids, usually in and through a teaching schedule that is significantly heavier than that of the natural, or even the social scientists. . .” (qtd. in Larson 51). This power structure that is set up, following a traditionally patriarchal hierarchy, inherently puts the “feminine” emotional labor at the bottom. This takes away recognition from emotional labor – and, in turn, teaching – and undermines its importance. Thus, we have a power structure at play that not only demotes the emotional labor that is so prevalent in the humanities, but simultaneously requires this emotional labor and sees it as beneficial to student learning. While this power structure is slowly changing – and will hopefully continue to change – there is no denying that the emotional labor that is being performed by humanities instructors is largely being ignored.

In no way does this mean that humanities instructors should stop participating in this emotional labor. As mentioned previously, the emotional labor done by instructors – especially

writing instructors – is immensely crucial to keeping students engaged and participating in their courses. If we, as instructors, put in some extra effort, our students will notice and often will give us extra effort in return. While this is by no means guaranteed, it does appear that the likelihood of this outcome is increased if writing instructors do take part in emotional labor. By keeping students engaged through the use of emotional labor, students will then participate more thoroughly in class and through their writing. On top of this, if students are more connected to their writing, they will be more motivated to do it – which could lead to better content being produced and better learning, with students taking more away from the class in general.

However, there are downsides to taking part in emotional labor. The toll that emotional labor can take on instructors – especially emotional labor revolving around responding to students’ trauma in their writing – is immense. Hochschild pointed out the importance of the cost of the labor, whether physical or emotional, by stating that “the worker can become estranged or alienated from an aspect of self – either the body or the margins of the soul – that is used to the work” (7). Emotional labor, just like physical labor, can begin to take a physical and psychological toll on the instructor’s well-being and even lead to burnout, with instructors acting essentially on autopilot, being completely disconnected from their class, or even being entirely apathetic (Larson 53). A major cause of burnout is the emotional manipulation that instructors are expected to take on, whether it is “faking” emotions that one does not truly feel or concealing emotions that one feels strongly (Larson 53). On top of this, experiencing emotion repeatedly, especially through providing empathy for students who disclose trauma, can be draining on instructors. Writing instructors – especially female ones – are expected to take part in this emotional labor, and thus are at a higher risk of experiencing adverse effects like burnout.

What needs to be focused on, then, is how to avoid said adverse effects. Jennifer Sumsion suggests that burnout and apathy can be prevented by finding a “balance between flexibility and authority”; however, this recommendation is mainly applied to student-instructor interaction outside of writing, like in the instances of missing class or meeting deadlines (qtd. in Larson 54). This recommendation does not clearly apply to responding to student writing – specifically that which includes a disclosure of trauma. This specific circumstance calls for potentially an even higher emotional toll to be taken on the instructor through interacting with trauma-informed writing, as there could be instances where the trauma invokes or “triggers” the instructor’s own personal trauma. While students can explore and potentially begin coping with their trauma through their writing, instructors must also be prioritized in instances like these. If students are allowed to explore trauma and human emotion with an audience that offers trust and respect, instructors must also be given this option.

Writing instructors are held to almost unobtainable expectations with how they conduct themselves and their classes. For some, it may be a shock to find out that teaching is a high-risk career, but most instructors would agree that these expectations are true. Instructors need to have the option to take part in emotional labor and other aspects that they feel make their teaching better. Emotional labor is not an optional part of teaching, especially for a lot of instructors who have this expected of them. Thus, there must be a way for instructors to take part in this while also preserving themselves in the process.

One option for this is ensuring that emotional labor is, on some level, optional for the instructor. While emotional labor itself may not be optional and instructors are often required to perform it, it should be up to the individual instructor how much emotional labor they choose to take part in. For instance, hiding frustration and, for a lack of a better term, “faking” positivity

can be quite beneficial to the class setting. However, instructors should not be required to take part in this completely – they should be able to voice frustration if it is warranted in the moment. As long as they have the option to opt out of certain aspects of emotional labor, the instructor can partially preserve themselves and their well-being in their teaching process.

This concept of keeping emotional labor somewhat “optional” also applies to when disclosure of trauma occurs in student writing. Instructors may, at the very least, acknowledge the trauma in an empathetic manner and offer resources to the student. However, steps taken past this should be left up to the instructor’s discretion. For instance, Instructor A may prefer to meet with students in person to discuss disclosure of trauma and may take part in extra services, such as checking in on the student at a later date, offering advice, or even helping the student set up an appointment with campus counseling services. On the other hand, Instructor B may prefer to approach the disclosure of trauma from a distance; they may suggest resources through an end comment in the feedback to an assignment and leave it there, potentially feeling comforted by the distance and the makeshift barrier that the physical assignment provides. Both of these are completely viable options; Instructor B may not be as comfortable approaching a student face-to-face about a disclosure of trauma, and Instructor A may prefer to handle sensitive situations in person. As long as the instructor acknowledges and responds to the trauma, they should be able to do it in whatever method they prefer and to the extent that they prefer. Instructors must practice mindfulness when it comes to this – they must be aware of how much they can handle and they do hold some responsibility to ensure that they do not push themselves past this limit².

² Here, we can look towards the currently growing research in mindfulness in first-year composition teaching, specifically *Yoga Minds, Writing Bodies* by Christy I. Wegner, “Excavating Indoor Voices: Inner Rhetoric and the Mindful Writing Teacher” by Paula Mathieu, and *Prolific Moment: Theory and Practice of Mindfulness for Writing* by Alexandria Peary.

CHAPTER 5

PILOT STUDY

Participants and Procedure

While conducting the literature review for this thesis, I noticed what appeared to be a hole in the research itself. Research had been conducted on the disclosure of trauma in student writing, instructor feedback to student writing, and the use of emotional labor in the composition classroom. There were even overlaps in research where it included one or more of these areas; however, the intersection of all three was more or less untouched. Thus, this study serves the purpose of being a pilot study for this area of research. As a result, it is rather small-scale and is designed to simply provide a glimpse into the kind of results we may see in future studies. This study was conducted from February to March of 2019 and drew on the voluntary participation of writing instructors recruited from the Department of English at Southeast State University (SSU), a four-year university in Appalachia. Since my thesis itself is focused on first-year composition courses, all participants were required to be currently teaching at least one first-year composition course.

After excluding participants that did not move past the first page of the study, the study was left with a final sample size of n=14 participants. Most participants were female (64.29%, n=9), Caucasian (78.57%, n=11), ages 20-35 (57.15%, n=8), and did not identify as LGBTQIA+ (64.29%, n=9). For job classifications, 42.86% (n=6) were adjunct professors and 28.57% (n=4) were graduate assistants, with the rest of the participants identifying as tenure-track professor, lecturer, or not answering (n=2, n=1, n=1, respectively). This appeared to correlate with how long most participants had been teaching composition and rhetoric, as 28.57% (n=4) answered

less than one year or 3-5 years; 14.29% (n=2) answered with 31+ years, and 7.14% (n=1) answered 6-10 years, 11-15 years, and 21-25 years.

The study itself was a survey performed through SurveyMonkey. Responses were optional for every question in the survey to ensure that participants could skip questions that they were uncomfortable with answering. There was a total of 32 questions in the survey, with 21 allowing for expansion of answers through either “other, please specify” options or a separate text box question asking for expansion on a previous answer. The survey was split into five sections: feedback, a teaching scenario, pedagogy, trauma, and demographics. For section one, participants were asked one question about the type of feedback approaches that they typically implement in their first-year composition classes. In the next section, they were given a scenario about a student disclosing trauma in a paper, with the paper also requiring feedback based on the writing itself. This scenario was left as an open-answer response so that participants could give a full explanation of how they would approach the situation.

The third section was meant to assess the participants’ pedagogies and their individual classroom approaches. Questions were asked about the amount of first-year composition classes they teach per semester, what kind of assignments they assign, if they assign narratives, and if they prohibit students from writing about any particular topics. The fourth section assessed how participants view and interact with trauma, how it is present in the academic setting, and the effects of emotional labor on the participants – both from teaching alone and interacting with disclosure of trauma. Lastly, the fifth and final section was on demographics, where it was meant to assess who the participants were, what kind of training they had received, and if there were potential factors that may inform their approach to trauma, such as being a part of a marginalized group through race, sexuality, or gender. See Appendix for the survey in its entirety.

Results

When it came to assessing feedback techniques used in classrooms, all participants acknowledged using marginal comments; 92.86% (n=13) utilized numeric scores and conferences, 85.71% (n=12) utilized end comments, and 78.57% (n=11) utilized rubrics. Although there are slight differences in the responses for each feedback approach, it was shown that all participants utilized at least three, if not more, different feedback approaches. All participants noted teaching one to three first-year composition classes per semester, with two being the most common response by a small margin (42.86%, n=6) and both one and three receiving n=4 each (28.57%). It is important to note that in the Department of English at SSU, graduate assistants currently usually teach two first-year composition courses each semester of their second year of enrollment. Thus, we can assume based off of demographics, that two classes per semester was the most common answer due to the teaching load given to graduate assistants.

Results reveal that 64.29% of participants (n=9) actually assign narrative assignments by personal choice, with 7.14% (n=1) answering that they sometimes assign narratives and 28.57% (n=4) total answering that they do not assign narratives (n=3 by personal choice, n=1 by requirement). In terms of types of assignments participants assign in their first-year composition classes, analysis assignments of any kind were the most popular with 92.86% (n=13) assigning them; a close second was argumentative assignments with 85.71% (n=12), followed by a tie between research papers, persuasive assignments, and narrative/memoir assignments with 71.43% (n=10) each. This was followed by proposals (64.29%, n=9), compare and contrast assignments (57.14%, n=8), definition assignments (50%, n=7), responses/summaries (42.86%, n=6 each), synthesis assignments (28.57%, n=4), reports (14.29%, n=2), and email assignments

(7.14%, n=1). At SSU, the second of the first-year composition courses (ENGL 1020) traditionally requires a project proposal, annotated bibliography, and research paper; this can explain why the rates are as high as they are for research papers and proposals.

A variety of topics were noted as being prohibited in participant's classes, with abortion having 85.71% (n=6) prohibiting it. This was followed by gun control (42.86%, n=3), as well as vaccinations and religion (14.29%, n=1 each). Three participants did note through comment responses that they do strongly discourage a variety of topics – such as gun control, marijuana legalization, and same-sex marriage – but are open to them if the students can offer an effective or unique take on the topic. However, it was found that this was the most commonly skipped question on the survey, with only half of the participants choosing to answer it. Participants who chose to skip this question may potentially not prohibit any topics in their classes; they also could have a similar outlook as those who left additional comments about not prohibiting topics outright and allowing them if students could take them on in an effective or unique manner, and the participants may have chosen to skip rather than leave a comment explaining this.

When it came to determining what participants found as being trauma, traumatic, or trauma-inducing, responses were fairly consistent across the board. All participants noted sexual assault and/or rape, domestic violence and/or intimate partner violence, childhood abuse, and emotional/psychological abuse as being trauma, traumatic, or trauma-inducing. This was followed by sexual harassment, stalking, suicidal thoughts, physical witnessing of death, death of someone close, food insecurity, homelessness, divorce and/or parental/familial disconnect, and terrorism, which all received 92.86% (n=13) of responses. War, non-war weapon-related violence, and juvenile economic hardship followed this with 85.71% (n=12) of responses. Next were stranger violence, physical illness, sustained poverty, being part of a marginalized group,

prison stay, and natural disasters with 78.57% (n=11) of responses. Physical pain/injury was the sole outlier in the listed answers, yet it still received 64.29% (n=9) of responses. Participants also left a variety of additional responses through comments, suggesting options such as under-education, childhood neglect, ongoing divorce, and loss of employment. One participant, who did mark all options as being traumatic, did note in their response that these are considered traumatic if the student actually went through them personally, not just by reading about it. Additionally, three other participants left comments mentioning that any of these options could be traumatic; one mentioned that it depends on the specific case, while another commented that “human life is trauma inducing – there’s such a broad range of suffering.” The last comment left by a participant noted “it is not [their] job to decide which events qualifying traumatic and which don’t. Really, I just try to respond with some compassion when my student is suffering.”

When asked if any groups of students are more likely to have experienced trauma than others, 21.43% (n=3) outright said no or not necessarily. 14.29% (n=2) answered that while there are students who may be parts of groups that tend to be more at-risk for trauma, this does not necessarily influence how severe the trauma is or if it even occurs. Impoverished students were most noted by participants as being at-risk, with 50% (n=7) naming them as an example; this was followed by minorities and marginalized groups, which had 42.86% of responses (n=4 for minorities, n=2 for marginalized groups). Inner-city or urban groups were also mentioned by 14.29% (n=2), as well as foreign and nontraditional students (7.14%, n=1 each).

Participants were asked how many times in the past five years students had disclosed trauma in a writing assignment for one of their courses: 35.71% (n=5) said five or more times, 28.57% (n=4) said twice, 14.29% (n=2) said never, and 7.14% (n=1 each) said either once, three times, or four times. As for what kind of assignments prompted this disclosure,

narratives/memoirs were overwhelmingly the most common response with 91.67% (n=11) of responses. This was followed by response assignments with 50% (n=6), definition assignments with 33.33% (n=4), research papers with 25% (n=3), and analyses and argumentative assignments with 16.67% (n=2 each). Compare and contrast assignments, persuasive assignments, synthesis assignments, and summaries all received one vote each as well. In the instances of providing resources for students, most participants have some sort of up-front mental health resources laid out for students. 85.71% (n=12) said that they do include mental health resources in their syllabus, with all of them including information about at least the campus counseling center, if not more resources.

It found that absolutely no participants noted student disclosure as not affecting them; 42.86% (n=6) responded with “pretty much” and 28.57% (n=4) responded with “extremely,” while 14.29% (n=2 each) responding with either “somewhat” or “a little.” Additionally, there were also no participants who said that they did not at all take their teaching home with them – in fact, 57.14% (n=8) answered “extremely” to this question. Lastly, it was also found that no participants said that faculty should not have to respond to student’s trauma disclosure by acknowledging the traumatic content with the student; 42.86% (n=6) said that faculty should, while 57.14% (n=8) said “sometimes.” Many clarified their answers by mentioning that it depends on how severe the trauma is and that they take this case-by-case; multiple did mention that composition instructors are not trained therapists, so there do need be more proper resources included, but 71.43% (n=10) did note that at least acknowledging the content was necessary in most cases. One participant noted that “faculty are here to help students become the people they want to become, and we can’t ignore their emotional needs in that process”; another even mentioned that “it’s important for our students to know that their trauma is real, valid, and

worthy of recognition.” Another participant had a similar sentiment but chose to connect it to how instructors are teaching writing: “Even in the case of trauma without blame, empathy is in order. We’re teaching them that their writing has real audiences, and a real audience ought to act human and humane.”

Discussion

Overall, participants appeared to be more open-minded and aware of different types of trauma than I expected when starting this study. The fact that all of the participants acknowledged multiple forms of trauma and most were aware that there are aspects that may make people more at-risk for trauma shows that we are likely moving past the age where trauma is really only legitimized when the survivor has gone through war or has been diagnosed with a trauma disorder. Previous research in this field focused heavily on more common or “obvious” forms of trauma, such as veteran students and those who have been imprisoned; thus, future research should adapt this broader definition of trauma. On top of this, future research should possibly look into the effects of different types of trauma – one participant noted “trauma without blame” in reference to natural traumas (natural disasters, death, etc.), so research should look at discrepancies between trauma with and without blame. Participants generally had very similar approaches with disclosure of trauma; since this study did take place at one school with participants generally being trained to teach in the same areas of the country (64.29% Southeast US, 28.57% Northeast US), this could have had an impact on the approaches being rather similar. Thus, following up on training in specific regions of the country and the effects of this on response to trauma disclosure would also be a beneficial direction for future research.

CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Through this research, a variety of implications have been revealed. As stated previously, this research is not meant to tell instructors exactly how to teach their classes, what approaches they should take, assignments they should assign, etc. If an instructor wants to gear their class towards expressivist writing, then they can, but it would be beneficial to them if they are aware of how much emotional labor that may call for them to take part in. As found in my study, many instructors – at least at SSU – tend to assign narrative assignments already, and I am not trying to imply that this is right or wrong. Rather, instructors can cater their courses towards their individual teaching approach and more importantly, they may try to stay mindful about what they can handle with their classes. If a student does disclose trauma in their writing, the instructor may choose to not reprimand or ignore the student and the traumatic content of their writing; instead, they may approach with caution. Instructors may choose to provide their students with an audience – that is crucial to teaching first-year composition. It is suggested that this audience must be respectful and provide validation for the student, especially if the content is sensitive and traumatic.

When it comes to giving this feedback to the student, it may be most beneficial if the instructor keeps it completely separate from the feedback on the student's writing. This could be through verbal feedback, in an email, on a separate sheet of paper – anything, so long as it is separate. In this feedback, the instructor can ensure that they provide the student with resources that are capable of being the most beneficial for the student, such as a campus counselling center. The instructor is suggested to not try to play the role of a therapist; they are not equipped and this process, while it could be beneficial to a student (though not as beneficial as a true mental health

professional), can be harmful to the instructor and their own mental health. The instructor can then give feedback to the writing in their preferred manner and may try to be mindful of how much feedback they are giving the student, especially if there is traumatic disclosure. In an instance like this, the severity of the disclosure may call for the instructor to give the student fewer major patterns to focus on with their feedback. This does not mean that the instructor should give the student no writing feedback or an easier grade – rather, they can be aware that given the disclosure, they may need to approach working with the student in a slightly modified manner from their usual approach.

There are plenty of areas that this research should be expanded upon. For instance, it could be beneficial to see how certain demographic categories may influence how instructors understand and approach trauma – if an instructor is more likely to have experienced previous trauma of their own, such as being a part of a marginalized group, they may have different approach than someone who is not. It would also be beneficial to research how specific types of trauma affect the instructor’s approach. Additionally, it would be beneficial to continue to assess how trauma is understood by first-year composition instructors; if instructors vary on what they understand to be trauma, this could impact how attentive they are to it in student writing.

Undoubtedly, one of the most important claims of this thesis is that a discussion must be had regarding mental health resources with first-year composition. First, instructors need to be informed about what mental health resources are available to the students, as well as themselves. This goes past a “sample blurb” that the university provides instructors for their syllabus – they must know details about these resources and how beneficial they truly are to the students. While this will vary depending on the university, I believe that it is a discussion that needs to be had universally: in writing program administration, in the field of composition and rhetoric studies,

and even at a government level. Even if we were to look locally, this is a discussion that absolutely needs to happen at SSU and universities in Appalachia, especially given the high ACE scores in this region. Education on mental health resources is something that does not just apply to first-year composition instructors, either; it can apply to every instructor. It would not be that difficult, either: most departments have yearly, if not more often, meetings, so it could easily be addressed there. This could be performed by a campus representative, campus safety, the counselling center, or it could even be a required online training. As long as instructors are receiving this training, they can help their students more when they need to and point them in the correct direction. By being educated on mental health resources, instructors can point students towards resources where workers are provided training to deal with distressed and potentially traumatized individuals; additionally, this can help prevent emotional labor on behalf of the instructors, which may help with their own mental health in the process.

Furthermore, instructors must also have access to mental health resources for themselves. This may already be in place for higher positions, but for those who are usually the ones teaching first-year composition – adjunct professors – this may not be in place. This calls for action on much broader spectrum and will likely, in all honesty, be a more uphill battle. First-year composition classes are taught by instructors who are held at an immensely low level, who need better working conditions, especially health insurance, considering the amount of work that is put on their plates and expected of them. Specifically regarding emotional labor, first-year composition instructors are expected to – on some level – partake in this performance, but are not given a proper “treatment” afterwards. This has to change if we expect composition to progress and thrive, and even moreso if we want to attract students to a sadly, slowly dying field of humanities.

WORKS CITED

- Acar, Didem, and Dirik Gülay. "A Current Paradigm: Written Emotional Disclosure." *Psikiyatride Guncel Yaklasimlar*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2019, pp. 65. DOI: 10.18863/pgy.364852
- Anderson, Charles M., and Marian M. MacCurdy, editors. *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2000.
- Anderson, Paul, et al. "The Contributions of Writing to Learning and Development: Results from a Large-Scale Multi-institutional Study." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2015, pp. 199-235.
- Batzer, Benjamin. "Healing Classrooms: Therapeutic Possibilities in Academic Writing." *Composition Forum*, vol. 34, 2016.
- Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas*. 2nd ed., John Wiley & Sons, 2011.
- Berthoff, Ann E. *The Making of Meaning*. Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1981.
- DeBacher, Sarah, and Deborah Harris-Moore. "First, Do No Harm: Teaching Writing in the Wake of Traumatic Events." *Composition Forum*, vol. 34, 2016.
- Department of Health. "Adverse Childhood Experiences in Tennessee." *Tennessee Department of Health*, May 2015, [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/tccy/documents/ace/Tennessee%20ACE_Final%20Report%20with%20Authorization%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/tccy/documents/ace/Tennessee%20ACE_Final%20Report%20with%20Authorization%20(1).pdf). Accessed 1 April 2019.
- DeSalvo, Louise. *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*. Beacon Press, 1999.
- Dutro, Elizabeth. "Writing Wounded: Trauma, Testimony, and Critical Witness in Literacy Classrooms." *English Education*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2011, pp. 193-211.

- Esterling, Brian A., et al. "Emotional Disclosure Through Writing or Speaking Modulates Latent Epstein-Barr Virus Antibody Titers." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, vol. 62, no. 1, 1994, pp. 130-140.
- Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery*. Basic Books, 1993.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *The Managed Heart*. The University of California Press, 2012.
- Jago, Carol. *Papers, Papers, Papers*. Heinemann, 2005.
- Larson, Holly Ann. "Emotional Labor: The Pink-Collar Duties of Teaching." *Currents in Teaching and Learning*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2008, pp. 45-56.
- Lindemann, Erika. *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*. 4th ed., Oxford UP, 2001.
- Lindquist, Julie. "Class Affects, Classroom Affectations: Working through the Paradoxes of Strategic Empathy." *College English*, vol. 67, no. 2, 2004, pp. 187-209.
- Mathieu, Paula. "Excavating Indoor Voices: Inner Rhetoric and the Mindful Writing Teacher." *JAC*, vol. 34, no. ½, 2014, pp. 173-190.
- Milner, Laura. "Compos(t)ing Loss: Transformation in the Telling." *The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*, vol. 9, no. 6, 2003-2004, pp. 32-46.
- Peary, Alexandria. *Prolific Moment: Theory and Practice of Mindfulness of Writing*. Routledge, 2018.
- Pennebaker, James W., and Cindy K. Chung. "Expressive Writing, Emotional Upheavals, and Health." *Foundations of Health Psychology*, edited by H. S. Friedman and R. C. Silver, Oxford UP, 2007, pp. 1-56.
- Pennebaker, James W., and Anna Graybeal. "Patterns of Natural Language Use: Disclosure, Personality, and Social Integration." *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 90-93.

- Schiavone, Aubrey, and Anna V. Knutson. "Pedagogy at the Crossroads: Instructor Identity, Social Class Consciousness, and Reflective Teaching Practice." *Class in the Composition Classroom*, edited by Genesea M. Carter and William Thelin, Utah UP, 2017, pp. 19-39.
- Smyth, Joshua M. "Written Emotional Expression: Effect Sizes, Outcome Types, and Moderating Variables." *Journal of Counseling and Clinical Psychology*, vol. 66, no. 1, 1998, pp. 174-184.
- United States, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative. *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*. Office of Policy, Planning and Innovation, 2014.
- Wegner, Christy I. *Yoga Minds, Writing Bodies*. The WAC Clearinghouse, 2015.

APPENDIX

First-Year Composition Classes and Trauma

For this survey, “first-year composition classes” is also meant to encompass “first-year writing classes”, meaning required introductory college writing courses.

Section 1: Feedback

1. In first-year composition classes, which feedback approaches do you typically use? (Pick all that apply)
 - a. Numeric score
 - b. Rubrics
 - c. Marginal comments
 - d. End comments
 - e. Audio feedback
 - f. Conferences
 - g. Other (please specify):

Section 2: Teaching Scenario

2. Please respond to the following scenario. You assign a paper that heavily emphasizes source integration. You receive a paper from a student that requires feedback from you, specifically involving serious issues with quote integration. In this paper, the student discloses a history of abuse in their childhood, as well as signs and symptoms of

depression stemming from this abuse. How do you respond to the student and/or the student's writing?

- a. Open answer

Section 3: Pedagogy

3. How many first-year composition classes do you usually teach per semester?

- a. 1
- b. 2
- c. 3
- d. 4
- e. 5
- f. 6
- g. 7+

4. Do you assign narrative writings in your first-year composition class(es)?

- a. No, by personal choice
- b. No, by requirement
- c. Sometimes
- d. Yes, by personal choice
- e. Yes, by requirement
- f. Other (please specify or add comments):

5. What kind of assignments do you assign in your first-year composition class(es)? (Check all that apply)

- a. Compare and contrast
 - b. Analysis (of any kind)
 - c. Research paper
 - d. Report
 - e. Proposal
 - f. Argumentative
 - g. Persuasive
 - h. Definition
 - i. Narrative/memoir
 - j. Response
 - k. Synthesis
 - l. Summary
 - m. Other (please specify or add comments):
6. In your first-year composition class(es), do you prohibit students from writing about any topics? (Check all that apply)
- a. Gun control
 - b. LGBTQ rights
 - c. Euthanasia
 - d. Abortion
 - e. Vaccinations
 - f. Religion
 - g. Racial discrimination
 - h. War

- i. Death
- j. Mental illness
- k. Other (please specify or add comments):

Section 4: Trauma

In this survey, we will be adopting the definition of trauma from The Center for Treatment of Anxiety and Mood Disorders, which defines trauma as “a psychological, emotional response to an event or an experience that is deeply distressing or disturbing”.

7. Which of the following do you see as trauma, traumatic, or trauma-inducing? (Check all that apply)
- a. War
 - b. Non-war weapon-related violence
 - c. Sexual assault and/or rape
 - d. Sexual harassment
 - e. Stalking
 - f. Domestic violence and/or intimate partner violence
 - g. Childhood abuse
 - h. Stranger violence
 - i. Emotional/psychological abuse
 - j. Physical illness
 - k. Physical pain/injury

- l. Suicidal thoughts
 - m. Physical witnessing of death
 - n. Death of family member, lover, friend, teacher, or pet
 - o. Juvenile economic hardship
 - p. Food insecurity
 - q. Homelessness
 - r. Sustained poverty
 - s. Being part of a marginalized group (religion, race, sexuality, gender, etc.)
 - t. Divorce and parental/familial disconnect
 - u. Prison stay
 - v. Natural disasters
 - w. Terrorism
 - x. Other (please specify or add comments):
8. Do you think of any particular groups of students as being more likely to have experienced trauma than others?
- a. Open answer:
9. How many times in the past 5 years has a student disclosed trauma in a writing assignment for your first-year composition classes?
- a. Never
 - b. Once
 - c. Twice
 - d. Three
 - e. Four

- f. Five or more
10. If you have experienced trauma disclosure in student writing in first-year composition classes, what types of assignments tend to prompt this disclosure? (Check all that apply)
- a. Compare and contrast
 - b. Analysis (of any kind)
 - c. Research paper
 - d. Report
 - e. Proposal
 - f. Argumentative
 - g. Persuasive
 - h. Definition
 - i. Narrative/memoir
 - j. Response
 - k. Synthesis
 - l. Summary
 - m. Other (please specify or add comments):
11. Does the disclosure of a student's trauma affect the grade and/or feedback they receive on an assignment?
- a. Yes, negatively
 - b. No
 - c. Yes, positively
 - d. Other (please specify or add comments):
12. Please provide additional comments to explain your answer to question 10.

- a. Open answer:
13. Does student disclosure of trauma affect you?
- a. Extremely
 - b. Pretty much
 - c. Somewhat
 - d. A little
 - e. Not at all
14. Do you suffer from any of the following symptoms as a result of teaching? (Check all that apply)
- a. Chronic fatigue
 - b. Insomnia
 - c. Forgetfulness/impaired concentration and attention
 - d. Chest pain
 - e. Heart palpitations
 - f. Shortness of breath
 - g. Gastrointestinal pain
 - h. Dizziness
 - i. Fainting
 - j. Headaches
 - k. Increased susceptibility to illnesses like infections, colds, and flu
 - l. Loss of appetite
 - m. Anxiety
 - n. Depression

- o. Anger
 - p. Loss of enjoyment
 - q. Pessimism
 - r. Isolation
 - s. Detachment
 - t. Feelings of apathy and hopelessness
 - u. Increased irritability
 - v. Lack of productivity and poor performance
15. Do you feel that you take your teaching home with you?
- a. Extremely
 - b. Pretty much
 - c. Somewhat
 - d. A little
 - e. Not at all
16. Do you feel that faculty should respond to students' trauma disclosure by acknowledging the traumatic content with the student?
- a. No
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Yes
17. Please provide additional comments to explain your answer to question 15.
- a. Open answer:
18. Are you familiar with mandated reporting requirements, such as the Clery Act?
- a. No

- b. Somewhat
 - c. Yes
19. Do you include mental health resources in your syllabus?
- a. No
 - b. Yes
20. What resources do you typically point students to in your syllabus (Check all that apply)
- a. Campus counseling center
 - b. Other counseling resources
 - c. Medical help (nurse, physician, doctor's office, emergency room, sexual assault nurse examiner, etc.)
 - d. Campus safety
 - e. Police
 - f. Religious help (clergy, priest, youth minister, etc.)
 - g. Campus housing (if student lives on campus)
 - h. Other (please specify or add comments):
21. What resources do you typically point students to after disclosure? (Check all that apply)
- i. Campus counseling center
 - j. Other counseling resources
 - k. Medical help (nurse, physician, doctor's office, emergency room, sexual assault nurse examiner, etc.)
 - l. Campus safety
 - m. Police
 - n. Religious help (clergy, priest, youth minister, etc.)

- o. Campus housing (if student lives on campus)
- p. Other (please specify or add comments):

Section 5: Demographics

22. What is your age?

- a. 20-25
- b. 26-30
- c. 31-35
- d. 36-40
- e. 41-45
- f. 46-50
- g. 51-55
- h. 56-60
- i. 61-65
- j. 66-70
- k. 71 or older
- l. Prefer not to answer

23. What is the gender that you identify with? (Check all that apply)

- a. Female
- b. Male
- c. Transgender
- d. Non-binary/third gender

- e. Gender non-conforming
- f. Gender fluid
- g. Other (please specify or add comments):
- h. Prefer not to answer

24. Do you identify as LGBTQIA+? (Check all that apply)

- a. No
- b. Yes
- c. Other (please specify or add comments):

25. What is your race? (Check all that apply)

- a. Native American or Alaskan
- b. Asian
- c. African American
- d. Hispanic or Latino
- e. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- f. Caucasian
- g. Other (please specify or add comments):
- h. Prefer not to answer

26. Where are you from originally?

- a. Northeast US
- b. Midwest US
- c. Southeast US
- d. Southwest US
- e. West Coast US

- f. Outside of the US
- g. Other (please specify or add comments):
- h. Prefer not to answer

27. How long have you been teaching composition and rhetoric?

- a. Less than 1 year
- b. 1-2 years
- c. 3-5 years
- d. 6-10 years
- e. 11-15 years
- f. 16-20 years
- g. 21-25 years
- h. 26-30 years
- i. 31+ years
- j. Prefer not to answer

28. What is your job classification?

- a. Graduate Assistant
- b. Adjunct professor
- c. Postdoctoral fellow
- d. Lecturer
- e. Teaching assistant professor
- f. Visiting assistant professor
- g. Tenured/tenure-track professor
- h. Other (please specify or add comments):

- i. Prefer not to answer
29. Where were you initially trained to teach writing?
- a. Northeast US
 - b. Midwest US
 - c. Southeast US
 - d. Southwest US
 - e. West Coast US
 - f. Outside of the US
 - g. Prefer not to answer
30. How were you trained to teach college writing? (Check all that apply)
- a. Teaching practicum (a credit-bearing graduate-level course focused on composition pedagogy)
 - b. Observing teaching
 - c. Teaching while being observed
 - d. Teaching workshop(s)
 - e. Ongoing research into composition pedagogy
 - f. Other (please specify or add comments):
 - g. Prefer not to answer
31. Please rate your perception of the quality of your training
- a. Very Poor
 - b. Below Average
 - c. Average
 - d. Above Average

- e. Excellent
- f. Open answer:

32. Do you enjoy teaching writing?

- g. Not at all
- h. A little
- i. Somewhat
- j. Pretty much
- k. Extremely
- l. Prefer not to answer
- m. Other (please specify or add comments):

VITA

KELCI BARTON

Education: Southridge High School, Johnson City, Tennessee
B.A. English and Psychology, East Tennessee State
University, Johnson City, Tennessee 2016
M.A. English, East Tennessee State University, Johnson
City, Tennessee 2019

Professional Experience: Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University,
Department of Literature and Language, 2017-2019
Instructor of Record, East Tennessee State University,
English 1010 and English 1020, 2018-2019

Honors and Awards: Academic Excellence Scholarship, 2012-2013
Dean's List (Fall and Spring), 2015
Nominated for Excellence in Teaching Award, 2019