Teaching Doctoral Students to Become Scholarly Writers: the importance of giving and receiving critiques

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ABSTRACT   *Data were gathered from 45 doctoral students through focus groups, observations, and written and oral reflections to ascertain their perceptions of a specific teaching process (the Scholarly Writing Project), which was designed to assist these students in learning how to do academic writing. It was found that preparing and receiving critiques from professors and peers was perceived to be the most influential element in helping them to understand the process of scholarly writing and in producing a better written product. More specifically, these students believed that two factors integral to the critiquing process were responsible for building their confidence as academic writers: personalized face-to-face feedback; and the iterative or ongoing nature of the critiques they received. In addition, these students emphasized that although the critiquing process was powerful and useful, it was also highly emotional and at times frustrating. The findings suggest that, in teaching scholarly writing, instructors should be very clear about the purposes and benefits of a strong and sustained critiquing process, and assist students in learning how to both receive and give useful feedback.*

Introduction

University faculty often assume that their doctoral students begin graduate school as proficient writers or that they will develop this skill during their program of studies. What is shocking to faculty is that many graduate students not only do not write like scholars, but they also may not think like scholars. This problem is particularly evident in professional schools in which many doctoral students in the USA are full-time practitioners with very demanding schedules and precious little time for research and writing. In general, many faculty observe that teaching the scholarly writing process often comes in the form of 'too little too late'. In particular, some students may not be exposed to the scholarly writing process until the dissertation, which may have significant implications for the completion of their doctoral program. Those of us who assist students in learning the scholarly writing process ask ourselves the following question: 'Is there a better way to teach novice scholars what we know about the seemingly mysterious process of scholarly writing?'

The purpose of this article is to describe a research study conducted in order to obtain doctoral students' perceptions of a specific teaching process (the Scholarly Writing Project, or SWP), which was intended to assist them to improve their scholarly writing skills. From our perspective, scholarly writing was equated with academic writing, such as the production of dissertations and journal publications. We were most interested to learn what these

students found to be the most helpful processes as they engaged in scholarly writing early in their doctoral program experience. In particular, our aim was to assist students to develop and/or enhance the form, style, content and quality of their academic writing during the initial phase of their doctoral study.

We begin our examination of scholarly writing by exploring the few studies we found that investigated either the perceptions that graduate students have of scholarly writing or programs that were developed to teach academic writing to graduate students. We then describe the SWP and the literature upon which this process was grounded. Next, we review the methodology used in the study, and follow this with a summary of our findings. We conclude by discussing these findings and recommending ways to improve how scholarly writing might be taught in doctoral programs.

Literature on the Scholarly Writing Process

Little attention has been given in the literature to graduate students' perceptions of the scholarly writing process or to what they have found useful in programs designed to teach academic writing. We could only locate a handful of empirical studies which sought students' opinions on the writing process (Torrance *et al.*, 1992, 1993, 1994; Koncel & Carney, 1992; Bishop, 1993; Torrance & Thomas, 1994), particularly the perceptions of students regarding writing in graduate-level programs. For instance, Koncel & Carney (1992) found a discrepancy between graduate students in social work programs and faculty as to what constituted effective scholarly writing, discovering that students wanted to learn how to write more concisely, follow a prescribed format and use correct terminology. Faculty, on the other hand, felt that students needed to improve their ability to make solid arguments supported by empirical evidence and theory.

Furthermore, Torrance and his colleagues have completed the most thorough studies of graduate students' perceptions of the scholarly writing process. They found that graduate students' notions were quite different 'from those of novice undergraduate writers, and approximately similar to those of productive academics. However, a significant minority of the research students reported writing difficulties that might hinder their successful completion of their research degrees' (Torrance *et al.*, 1992, p. 155). They also identified three distinct strategies students used in approaching their written work: planning, revising, and mixed strategies. Although these authors acknowledged that planning was important in the writing process, it was 'neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for writing success' (Torrance *et al.*, 1994, p. 379). Instead, 'both think-then-write strategies and think-while-you-write strategies have utility in the context of academic writing' (Torrance *et al.*, 1994, p. 390).

As a result of their first study, Torrance *et al.*, (1992) suggested that some form of writing training be provided to graduate students, but warned that 'it is not at all clear what form this writing instruction should take' (p. 165). Therefore, in their second investigation, they evaluated a training program that compared three conceptual orientations to the teaching of writing (Torrance *et al.*, 1993; Torrance & Thomas, 1994). They concluded that graduate students benefited from short-term term writing courses; however, no one form of writing instruction was suitable for all students. Rather, they advised that different instructional approaches should be incorporated and that students should be allowed to choose those which fitted their needs. Regardless, 'whatever form the instruction takes, it should focus on the production of text, and not solely on the sorting out of ideas prior to putting pen to paper' (Torrance & Thomas, 1994, p. 120). We agree with Torrance & Thomas (1994) that the production of text is critical in teaching academic writing to graduate students.

Therefore we designed a process, the Scholarly Writing Project, for teaching doctoral students academic writing, which incorporated the writing and rewriting of text as a key component of the activity.

The Scholarly Writing Project

The SWP is embedded in the first doctoral core course required of all students in one educational leadership doctoral program in North America. This writing project is one of the two major expectations for the course, the second being that students should learn specific content knowledge about leadership. The SWP had three major purposes: (1) to investigate a specific area of interest focusing on the content of the class; (2) to engage in the process of critiquing a colleague's work; and (3) to incorporate feedback from colleagues and instructors in preparing a formal academic paper. Students were required to produce three versions of a scholarly paper on a topic related to one of the themes of the course. Two drafts and a final copy of the paper were produced. A student colleague and a faculty member reviewed the first two drafts and written feedback was provided for each draft in the form of a formal critique. All faculty members who were involved in the process had had extensive experience as reviewers for professional journals and had also received numerous critiques of their own scholarly work; therefore, they had a good sense of what would help students improve their scholarly products. In addition, faculty reviewed the students' critiques to ensure that they were also useful. Following each critique, students prepared a revised draft of their papers along with a written response addressing the reviewers' comments. In their response to the critiques, students indicated how they addressed each of the reviewers' comments, including where appropriate their rationale for not incorporating their suggestions. In addition, students were required to meet at least once with one of the instructors in order to discuss their paper; however, most students chose to meet with an instructor more frequently.

In developing the SWP, we tried to simulate what scholarly writing entails. Three components were included as part of this assignment: content, process and critique. Content focused on the ability of scholars to present an argument for a specific thesis that was grounded in literature and/or empirical research (Olson, 1992; Hawley, 1993; Melroy, 1994; Cryer, 1996). The process element acknowledged that scholarly writing was an ongoing effort of writing and rewriting (Hartly & Branthwaite, 1989; Richardson, 1990; Dugan, 1991; Sullivan, 1991; Olson, 1992; Curren, 1993; Lamott, 1994). Finally, critiquing consisted of being able to receive and use critical feedback and to give helpful feedback as students developed their final drafts (Richardson, 1990; Wolcott, 1990; Ashton-Jones, 1992; Fiske, 1992; Olson, 1992; Lamott, 1994; Cryer, 1996).

Most of the literature supporting what we reviewed as important in the teaching of academic writing came from scholars in the humanities and the field of composition, who addressed writing instruction in general or as an element of undergraduate education. In addition, we used material written specifically for graduate research students, which focused primarily on what components should be included in a research document, or on writing mechanics or style (Rudestam & Newton, 1992; Creswell, 1994; Melroy, 1994; Bean, 1996; Cryer, 1996). Although we found these materials useful, we also were aware from the literature on writing and from our own experience that scholarly writing differed greatly between graduate and undergraduate students as well as between novice and experienced academic scholars (Hartley & Branthwaite, 1989; Torrance, *et al.*, 1992). In addition, we acknowledge our own biases in terms of what we consider 'good scholarly writing' based on the traditions from our own disciplines and the context in which we write, i.e. higher education (Baynham, 1995; Berkenkotter & Hucklin, 1995; Bazerman, 1998).

Methodology

In designing this study, and similar to Torrance *et al.* (1992, 1994), we believed that teaching the scholarly writing process would make a difference to students' perceptions about academic writing as well as to their actual practice of writing. Where we differed from Torrance and his colleagues was in how we framed the major components of scholarly writing, and when and how this material was taught. We chose to highlight three major facets of academic writing (i.e., content, process, critiquing) and to integrate the teaching of the scholarly writing process as an integral part of the initial stage of doctoral study. Since we wanted rich descriptions of students' perceptions of the writing process, our study was exploratory and qualitative in nature. Qualitative research methods are appropriate when seeking the reactions and perceptions of individuals who are experiencing a particular phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Flinders & Mills, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Rather than attempting to test or prove a series of *a priori* hypotheses or assumptions about the experiences of novice writers, including the factors they felt were most influential in their development as writers, our intent was to allow our students' voices to emerge, an approach best suited to qualitative methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The subjects of our investigation included all doctoral students from an educational leadership program housed at a university in the USA, who had been enrolled within the last 5 years ($n = 47$ students in these five cohorts). Two types of data were collected. One data source consisted of documenting the reactions of one of the five student cohorts as the students experienced the SWP process during their first semester of graduate study ($n = 10$). Of these 10 individuals, six were males, four were females, one student was of Hispanic origin, and the rest were Caucasian. Nine of these 10 students were working full-time in addition to attending graduate school. Throughout the 16-week semester, the two professors teaching the course periodically gathered students' written and oral reactions to the scholarly writing process. Written responses focusing on their thoughts and feelings about the SWP experience included having students:

- provide their initial reactions to writing at the beginning of the semester (i.e. perceived differences between scholarly writing and other types of writing, perceived strengths and weaknesses as writers, and the assistance they anticipated needing to become competent writers);
- complete sentence stems about writing (e.g. 'Doing the first draft is …', 'What I've learned about writing is …', 'Thinking about doing a critique is …);
- reflect on their perceptions about writing by keeping a written journal; and
- complete a final reflection paper at the conclusion of the semester, summarizing their overall reactions to the SWP and the course.

Also, throughout the semester, oral comments from the 10 students were solicited and recorded. Open-ended questions asking what students were perceiving about the writing process were posed at several points during the course: (a) near the beginning of the semester prior to completing their first draft of the SWP, (b) midway through the semester after receiving feedback on their first and second drafts of the SWP, and (c) at the end of the semester when handing in their final product.

The second type of data collection was a series of focus group interviews with the five student cohorts which had enrolled in the doctoral program over the past 5 years. Six focus group sessions were conducted with 28 students. Interview sessions were tape-recorded and tapes were transcribed. If students lived too far from campus or were unable to attend a focus

group session, they were asked to complete a written questionnaire addressing the same questions asked during the focus group interviews ($n = 14$). As a result of these procedures, focus group or questionnaire data were obtained from 42 of the 47 doctoral students (89%) attending the program over the past 5 years.

The questions posed to students ranged from whether the SWP process influenced their perceptions as writers to what was the most important lesson they learned from the experience (see the Appendix for a list of the interview questions and questionnaire items). For this group of 42 respondents, there was an almost equal portion of male and female students, the majority being Caucasian. About one-third had not completed their coursework, one-third had finished their courses and were taking their comprehensive examinations or were preparing their dissertations, and one-third had graduated from the program. All of the respondents were professional educators, with about 80% being employed full-time when these data were gathered. Since data were collected from five student cohorts, perceptions were obtained as early as 6 months after completing the SWP and as long as 4 years later. Using the constant comparative data analysis method (Glaser, 1965), the researchers reviewed the transcriptions of interview tapes and the completed questionnaires, created initial coding categories, and eventually developed cluster categories and overall themes.

Results

As a result of our analysis of the SWP elements which influenced novice writers' impressions about writing, we found that preparing and receiving critiques from peers and professors emerged as the most significant factors mentioned by graduate students. Since perceptual data were collected before, during and after students produced their scholarly writing papers, we were able to examine developmental trends in students' perceptions.

We begin by reporting doctoral students' reactions to preparing critiques for their peer colleagues, noting their perceptions before beginning the SWP, during the semester when the SWP was completed, and after the SWP assignment was finished. Similarly, their views about receiving written critiques are examined. Finally, the most influential elements of the critiquing process are explored. To highlight our findings, students' voices concerning the critiquing process are reflected in representative quotations taken from their written responses, focus group interviews, and questionnaires.

Preparing Critiques

As mentioned earlier, the methodology of the study allowed for the collection of data from graduate students as they were actually involved in the SWP. To determine the developmental trends in their perceptions, students' reactions are reported before beginning the SWP, during the semester in which their scholarly products were being produced, and following the completion of the project. Reactions before and during the SWP are from the 10 students from the cohort class; perceptions after completing the project reflect the responses of the 42 students who participated in a focus group interview or who completed a written questionnaire.

Before beginning scholarly writing. Most students remarked that they had little, if any, experience prior to entering this doctoral program with writing scholarly products or with providing feedback about their peers' writing. Not surprisingly, there was some apprehension about reading a colleague's paper and providing direct feedback. This apprehension manifested itself in two ways. First, because of their lack of experience and confidence, students

questioned their ability to provide meaningful feedback to another person. Their uneasiness was revealed in these comments:

I do not know enough to help the writer.

What if [the other person] has made a huge mistake and I don't see it? Does that make me a poor writer?

Who am I to judge another [person] when I myself am doing poorly in the process?

Second, although questioning their ability, there was a sense of excitement about the process and what they would learn. This more curious and enthusiastic viewpoint was clearly communicated by one student who wrote:

I am excited and optimistic [because] I have seen the title of the paper … and feel I will learn a lot.

During scholarly writing.   As they gained some experience in providing feedback to their peers, new insights about the critiquing process emerged as well as some continuing concerns. On one hand, the opportunity to critique a peer's work raised the level of concern about how their feedback would be accepted and provided a way for them to compare their own work with a peer. These reactions are reflected in students' own words:

I'm anxious to see how my feedback was accepted and [if it] made any difference in my partner's paper.

I was unsure of the reaction concerning some of my comments and did not want to upset my colleague.

I was relieved to read someone's paper and compare it to my writing ability.

On the other hand, the initial self-doubt of their capability to provide meaningful feedback to peer colleagues still lingered. Comments such as 'not wanting to give poor advice', 'not being able to provide more confident help' and 'feeling inadequate' were expressed repeatedly, indicating a continuing questioning of their ability to critique one another's work.

After finishing scholarly writing.   When students had completed the SWP and had the opportunity to reflect back on their experience of doing critiques, there was far less emotional reaction than before beginning the process or when they were engaged in it. Emotionally-laden words such as 'nervous', 'uneasy', or 'queasy' were not used to describe the process. Nevertheless, students continued to express some reservations and concerns about their contributions and revealed some new insights about their own writing. Their lingering concerns ranged from the type or level of feedback that they should provide, up to the continued questioning of the value that their critiques had for their partners, which are evident in these comments:

It was hard to get [students] to give feedback at a deeper, more substantial level.

I'm still a little spooked about how much feedback to give a peer.

What level of feedback should I give? There's only so much feedback that I think people can handle at a time.

This was my fear … I would read over [the paper] two or three times and go 'it's perfect' [and] I can't find anything wrong with it. I'd give it back to them with 'great

job' written across the top. Then they get it back from one of [the professors] and it's ripped to shreds. And it would just confirm that I don't understand any of this and I don't have a clue as to how to do [critiquing].

Besides these lingering self-doubts, students expressed positive aspects of having conducted reviews of their peers' writing. The major advantage of reviewing one another's work was the learning that took place. As the emotional fears of critiquing subsided, the most common reactions were the opportunity to compare other peoples' writing with their own work and the new information they gained about a topic by reading other papers.

Over time, students' reactions to critiquing one another's written products revealed some changes in their attitudes and some lasting impressions. As they gained experience in providing written feedback to their peers, graduate students' anxiety and apprehension tended to dissipate. Although feelings of comfort with the critiquing process emerged, they never lost the sense of their lack of efficacy as reviewers. Many students commented about their perceived lack of credibility as reviewers long after completing the process. On a more positive note, some of these students' earliest perceptions about the value of the process, especially as a means for comparing their work with a colleague, grew stronger the longer they were involved in peer critiquing. In order to contrast these findings on students' reactions to preparing critiques, we now turn our attention to the students' views about receiving critiques from peers and professors.

Receiving Critiques

Just as for preparing critiques, students' perceptions about receiving critiques throughout the semester were obtained. Once again, these data were collected at different points in time—before, during and after completing the project—in order to determine developmental trends and patterns.

Before beginning scholarly writing.   The novelty of receiving ongoing feedback from peers and instructors raised initial concerns and excitement among many students. Once again, emotions ran high in anticipation of receiving feedback from several people. In a similar manner to their early reactions to preparing critiques, students' feelings ranged from insecurity with their draft to keen interest in how others saw their work. Their emotions are best captured in their own words:

> I'm afraid of the feedback and I wonder if the person reading mine would even be interested in the topic.

> [I am] very disappointed about my own writing.

> I'm anxious, but not in a bad way. I am actually interested to see what is said.

> [My] feelings are dependent on who the reader is. Somehow, I'm not as anxious as I thought I'd be … Perhaps it's the release of letting [the paper] go.

During scholarly writing.   As they were receiving their critiques and were having to respond to feedback provided by peers and professors, students voiced growing comfort with the process. Comments such as being 'genuinely glad to receive suggestions' and '[my] fear and anxiety have been reduced by the way we approached critiquing' surfaced. However, most students remained apprehensive about responding to feedback, especially when two profes-

sors had different reactions. The following comments reflect the tension and conflict students felt in reacting to feedback:

> I feel awkward responding to a critique. I'm not sure how much time to spend on items.

> I felt that the paper was really coming together, but after receiving the second feedback, boy was I wrong. The feelings I had … first [I was] mad, really mad. Then I met with [the professor] later in the week, I had cooled down. After I met with [the professor], I knew I had to start all over again.

> I detest having to deal with feedback from both professors.

> I feel really uncomfortable having to choose [between two professors' critiques].

As these reactions indicate, the greatest sources of dissonance arose in not knowing how best to respond to various suggestions, especially conflicting feedback from different professors. Students' uncertainty regarding the resolution of contradictory messages from faculty seemed to underscore the lack of confidence in their writing ability. Without a sense of assurance and efficacy about their writing, students had great difficulty explaining to professors why they were reluctant to follow their suggestions.

After finishing scholarly writing.   Upon completing the scholarly writing project, strong emotions still emerged regarding being critiqued by others. One student commented with a metaphor, indicating that receiving critiques was 'scary … like an intellectual striptease'. 'Frustration' is probably the best word to describe some of the students' feelings, frustration with a lack of assistance from a peer reviewer and frustration with having to respond to conflicting feedback from different professors. These emotional reactions are evident in the following comments:

> I really disliked the type of feedback I received from my colleague. I felt that the student colleague was disagreeing with my topic, rather than critiquing my work.

> My [peer partner] didn't have the confidence from experience to understand what I was writing, so it really wasn't very helpful.

> … and that became kind of tough because of being a novice scholarly writer, which [professor's] advice to take.

> One of my frustrations was that I felt … if I chose what [one professor] said, then I was going to have to discount what [the other professor] said. And my ego and humility said I'm not going to blow that off. This [professor] has a doctorate who's way up there. I can't blow [the professor] off. I felt really uncomfortable having to choose.

Despite these frustrations, many students were more comfortable with receiving feedback and more confident about their ability to write a worthwhile scholarly piece:

> You begin receiving approval from people who really are expert and doing the very thing they are asking you to do … But I found sharing the paper with both a peer and faculty members to be really profitable personally, from the standpoint that I can say that I submitted this to a pretty high authority on writing skills and research skills and got some approval. So, I walked away feeling pretty good.

> [Receiving critiques] boosted my perception of myself as a scholarly writer. The

verbal and written feedback I received regarding my thoughts and writing about the topic added validity to what I perceived to be an issue worth studying.

Contrasting students' earliest perceptions about receiving critiques with their thoughts when the process was finished revealed some consistent reactions as well as some developmental changes. A strong sense of emotion ran through students' responses from the beginning of the scholarly writing process through to the completion of the project. Emotions that began as apprehension and anxiety about how others would view their written work turned into frustration and sometimes anger with the quality of the feedback they received from peer reviewers and/or with the dilemma of how to reconcile different feedback from two professors. At the two extremes, feedback either lacked quality and substance or it was contradictory and very difficult to resolve. Over time, however, the quality of the feedback received and the supportive manner in which it was delivered allowed most students to view their own writing more objectively, leading to increased confidence in their writing ability.

Most Influential Elements of the Critiquing Process

These reactions of graduate students suggest that their lack of experience with such an intensive and ongoing writing assignment contributed to their anxieties about how to provide helpful feedback and how others would critically evaluate their writing. As was noted earlier, concerns about their critiquing expertise and how to reconcile conflicting feedback did not completely vanish; however, students expressed noticeable growth in their critiquing and writing ability.

As students spoke about giving and receiving feedback, they felt certain factors were responsible for building their confidence as critiquers and writers. Foremost among these elements were the personalized, face-to-face feedback they received and the iterative or ongoing nature of feedback. Personalizing the process allowed students to comprehend better how to improve their written products without feeling personally attacked. Similarly, knowing that multiple drafts would be completed reduced the pressure to create a perfect product the first time. These two elements are captured in students' voices:

> The piece that helped me the most was sitting down before I started writing and talking through the outline with one of the instructors.

> Face-to-face feedback and not correspondence, not e-mail, not drop me a note [helped the most]. It was a hammer it out back and forth discussion.

> I figure the whole concept of a second draft [helped the most] … I'm used to going back for a second opinion, but not from the person [from whom] I got the first opinion.

Discussion and Recommendations for Practice

Before discussing our findings, we should be clear about the limitations of this investigation. First, this was a limited sample of graduate students from a single doctoral program. As a result, these findings cannot be generalized to doctoral students in other graduate programs where scholarly writing is being taught. Second, our methods for collecting data assumed students were being honest and forthcoming. We have no reason to believe they were not truthful in responding to their SWP experiences; however, we have little evidence to refute this potential challenge. With these cautions in mind, we now discuss what students told us about their scholarly writing experience.

For the graduate students in this research study, the critiquing process was perceived as the most influential element in helping them to understand the scholarly writing process and producing a scholarly product. Yet, for these students, being asked to provide feedback on their peers' writing as well as receiving multiple critiques of their own written products were novel. Despite the power of critiquing evidenced in this study, there is very little literature describing this process and its importance in developing scholarly works. Rather, what is stressed about scholarly writing are structural elements, such as the components to incorporate in a scholarly paper and the mechanics of writing. When the critiquing process is discussed at all, it tends to be addressed in a paragraph or two and as more of an 'aside', claiming that scholars should get someone to review their drafts prior to submission or that students should receive feedback as part of the dissertation process (e.g. Richardson, 1990; Rudestam & Newton, 1992; Olson, 1992; Torrance *et al.*, 1993; Creswell, 1994; Cryer, 1996). (Exceptions to this are the books by Wolcott [1990] and Lamott [1994], which are discussed later.) In addition to the brevity and lack of clarity about what the critiquing process is, we only found two empirical studies related to teaching the scholarly writing process to graduate students (Koncel & Carney, 1992; Torrance *et al.*, 1993; Torrance & Thomas, 1994). Although these authors did not discuss the critiquing process *per se*, they confirm our findings about graduate students in professional schools needing and wanting feedback about their writing by noting that the:

> … shared revision approach may be especially appropriate for writers at a postgraduate level. Apart from its apparent benefits for productivity, it creates a peer-support environment which many students are likely to find valuable, given that studying for a research degree can involve considerable isolation. (Torrance *et al.*, 1993, p. 182)

Not surprisingly, there was initial apprehension and anxiety about preparing and receiving feedback. These feelings tended to wane over time, but did not completely disappear. With time and practice, the scholarly writing process eased students' fears about critiquing one another's written work and increased their sense of efficacy and self-confidence as writers. Nevertheless, feelings of self-doubt lingered, especially regarding their inadequacy as reviewers and their inability to resolve conflicting feedback from professors. As Wolcott (1990) so astutely observed, 'Timely and useful feedback on writing is hard to give and hard to take' (p. 43). He advises writers to anticipate disagreements in the feedback and how these might be resolved. He also stresses that feedback implies nurturance, which most authors crave, and draws attention to what has already been completed, in contrast to where writers may want to go with their material. Therefore, Wolcott advises writers not to seek feedback too soon in the process, and to 'select readers with care and instruct them as to the kind of criticism [they] believe will be helpful' (p. 44).

Perhaps the most striking difference between students' perceptions about providing and receiving feedback was found in their emotional responses. As they gained experience providing critiques, their comments became much less emotionally charged. Over time, students' initial nervousness and anxiety gave way to a sense of growth, especially the ability to compare and contrast their work with their peers. In stark contrast, emotions about receiving critiques ran high throughout the process, and were still quite evident long after completing the assignment. For some students, frustrations with the type of feedback they received appeared to fester over time. Not only were they disappointed with the lack of useful feedback from their peers, but a few students also were extremely frustrated with the problem of dealing with conflicting feedback from different professors. In contrast, other students perceived receiving the critiques in very positive emotional terms, voiced by such sentiments

as believing other people were quite supportive of their ideas, receiving approval for their work, and generally feeling quite satisfied with their progress.

The current literature on critiquing, and especially on receiving critiques, almost totally ignores the positive and negative emotional aspects of receiving feedback on one's writing. Rather, the typical advice given is to be non-defensive when receiving feedback and to learn how to manage negative feedback with grace (Rudestam & Newton, 1992). Only two of the studies we reviewed even hinted at the fact that receiving critical feedback can be very difficult emotionally for writers (Fiske, 1992; Lamott, 1994). Of these two, Lamott (1994) does the best job in exploring the emotionality of receiving feedback on one's work. In her personal reflections, she relates the following:

> My first response if they have a lot of suggestions is never profound relief that I have someone in my life who will be honest with me and help me do the very best work of which I am capable. No, my first thought is, 'Well, I'm sorry, but I can't be friends with you anymore, because you have too many problems. And you have a bad personality. And a bad character.'

> Sometimes I can't get words to come out of my mouth because I am so disappointed … Criticism is very hard to take … But these friends usually talk me into going through the manuscript with them … so by the end, I am breathing a great sigh of relief and even gratitude. When someone reliable gives you feedback you now have some true sense of your work's effect on people. (pp. 166–167)

Lamott (1994) also observes that whereas writing alone can be less painful, receiving feedback from others helps improve her work. The students in our study echoed the sentiments of Lamott (1994) and Fiske (1992), namely that the feedback process can be highly emotional and frustrating. Therefore we believe that, when teaching novice scholars about the scholarly writing process, it is important to acknowledge their emotions, both good and bad, as legitimate and healthy reactions since they are developing the skills needed to become successful writers.

In speculating about the difference in students' emotional reactions when preparing versus receiving critiques, we have two observations. First, this difference may be a result of the personal investment involved in producing a scholarly product, especially for doctoral students. Although providing feedback to other graduate students builds mutual trust and support for many students, they are keenly aware that their ultimate success in the program will not be assessed by the quality of their peer feedback. Rather, they know that their own writing will be critically evaluated throughout their program of studies, culminating with a dissertation. The fact of the matter is that graduate students, and most professionals, are judged on what they write. With the stakes so high regarding their writing ability, it is not surprising that graduate students are so emotionally invested in how their work is critiqued. Second, if writing is a personal act (Lamott, 1994), then students' feelings of self-worth as productive scholars and learners may be tied to this process of having their work publicly critiqued. Therefore the critiques they receive may take on a very personal meaning, validating their worth as writers and scholars, questioning their ability to write, and leaving them to ponder on whether or not they should continue in a doctoral program.

In examining the literature on scholarly writing, what became apparent even in the limited material that was available on the critiquing process was that almost all of this literature came from fields outside of professional schools. Other than Wolcott's (1990) book, the process of giving and receiving feedback as an important component of the scholarly writing process is allotted only one or two paragraphs or is ignored altogether (Madsen, 1992;

Rudestam & Newton, 1992; Torrance *et al.*, 1993; Creswell, 1994; Melroy, 1994; Rossman, 1995; Cryer, 1996). Considering our students' impressions about the value and importance of feedback, we were surprised that critiquing has not received more attention in the literature. Our recommendation, based on our students' observations and our own experiences as faculty, is that treatment of the scholarly writing process should include more in-depth material about both giving and receiving feedback. This might include guidelines as to what skills reviewers should possess, what types of feedback to include in the critiquing process, how to handle conflicting feedback from different professors, and an acknowledgement that being critiqued is both a rational and an emotional process for most people, especially for novice scholars.

In summary, our students perceived that the critiquing process was one of the most influential elements of the scholarly writing process in terms of both learning about the process and improving their final product. As one student observed:

> … the interaction that I had with others regarding my work … at first it did not seem fitting that I would incorporate into my scholarly writing project an idea or suggestion made by someone else. I felt that I should somehow give credit to them … Exchanging works in progress not only helped me learn about the scholarly writing process, but it gave me the confidence to hand my work to another [person].

Therefore we would suggest that, as professors work with their students in teaching the scholarly writing process, they listen to the voices of their students and incorporate into their teaching and mentoring of students throughout their doctoral programs advice on how to both provide and receive feedback in an effective and helpful manner. Furthermore, we recommend that faculty carefully consider what the critiquing process is intended to achieve and prepare materials for students which will help them incorporate this process into their practice as students and professional educators.

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Appendix. Focus Group Interview Guide

1. Please introduce yourself, and tell us where you live and work, and where you are in your doctoral program in terms of course work.

2. Did the scholarly writing assignment in Doctoral Core I influence your perceptions about the scholarly writing project?

   If YES: What elements of the scholarly writing assignment most influenced these perceptions?

   If NO: Why did your perceptions not change?

3. Did the scholarly writing assignment influence your perceptions about yourselves as scholarly writers?

   If YES: What elements of the assignment most influenced these perceptions?

   If NO: Why did your perceptions not change?

4. Has completing the scholarly writing assignment assisted you in:

   —Your other classes?
   —The comprehensive examination process?
   —The writing of the dissertation?
   —Other ways?

   If YES, probe for specific examples.

5. If you have not reached the comprehensive exam and/or dissertation phase of your doctoral study, do you anticipate that your scholarly writing experience will be helpful to you in those aspects of the program?

6. Has what you have learned from completing the scholarly writing assignment influenced your work as a professional educator?

   If YES, probe for specific examples.

7. What was the most important thing that you learned from completing the scholarly writing assignment?

8. Should we continue using the scholarly writing project? If so, what might be changed?