

## **An Introduction to the Work (and Play) of Writing Studies Research Methods through Micro Study**

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How do we learn to research writing? The answer is, in a sense, simple: we learn how to conduct writing research by “doing” it. Yet this simple answer becomes complicated when we try to overcome the obstacles inherent in teaching itself, namely, that “doing research” and “doing research for class” can be, and usually are, very different activities, especially when we consider the enormity of even modestly-scaled research projects and the profound complexity of the literacies they call for. One response to this problem is to create research projects for students that both have real or potential disciplinary ramifications—that contribute to knowledge in real ways—and are limited enough in scope that they are manageable in one semester by students who are not yet full participants in the community of practice known as composition research.

However obvious this approach may seem to some, providing students opportunities to conduct the all-important first attempt at writing research is often absent in methods curricula.

This article addresses the benefits and challenges involved with assigning small-scale research projects in one research methods class as means of introducing new(er) researchers to the work and rewards of empirical writing research. The following discussion does not claim to offer examples of cutting-edge methodological work. That is not our goal here; rather, the purpose of this article is to further Rebecca Rickly's call for increased curricular attention to empirical field research ("Messy Contexts: Research as a Rhetorical Situation") by offering three case studies—micro studies. Completed as part of a graduate methods class, the studies illustrate the emerging researchers' research experiences with conducting small-scale, "practice" observational inquiry. Our claim, then, is simple: we tend to forget how thoroughly we have already been enculturated as rhetoric and composition researchers—we tend, that is, to be unaware of the depth and complexity of our own literacies once they become second nature to us. But what may very well seem obvious to established researchers, whether it be the questions posed, the methods used, or the findings reported, are only obvious to those of us who have already had at least one (and likely many) such enculturating experiences. The authors—three student participants and the course instructor of the same graduate methods seminar—narrate critical, self-reflective, self-selected micro studies in order to examine how students of writing researchers came to identify and employ methods and methodologies as a way of "learning and using" writing studies research.<sup>1</sup> The studies, which include a survey of first-year college students on their transition from high school to college; an examination of the actions, sounds,

and voices the researcher observed in the hallway of a researcher's office building in her participant observation of "work in action;" and a textual analysis of Works Cited pages of *College Composition and Communication* serve as examples of the very real benefits of—and the need for—practical, hands-on experience enacting observational research methods and methodologies.

### **A Bit of Context: Research in Rhetoric and Writing Methods Seminar**

The studies discussed here were produced for Research in Rhetoric and Writing (RRW). RRW is a three-hour seminar and one of eight core courses required of doctoral students enrolled in the Rhetoric and Writing Program at Bowling Green State University. The sole core course dedicated to research as subject matter, RRW is populated by students in their second or maybe third year of the four-year doctoral program. Objectives for the course include introducing students to composition and rhetoric research as scholarship—an extended critical engagement with preexisting, published disciplinary research. But RRW also functions as the curricular site in which students identify themselves—perhaps for the first time in a systematic way—as rising writing researchers. Part of the students' process of identification as researchers then involves associating themselves with particular research methods. Finally, the course has come to signify a space in which doctoral students can begin or further develop progress on formal dissertation-related texts such as their graduate lecture, dissertation prospectus, or a first chapter of the dissertation.

The course was in many ways similar to many methods course offerings until we took up Rickly's call for hands-on research activities. As originally conceived, the course included the same course objectives Rickly identifies and yet it lacked attention to developing or doing empirical research. Enter the micro study, designed to help RRW more closely reflect Rickly's seven recommendations for research survey courses in "Messy Contexts: Research as a Rhetorical Situation." Rickly describes the scope of such required research survey courses as "vast" and "contain[ing] multitudes" in her recent article on the research methods course as knowledge-making space (378). According to Rickly, the required research survey course is to achieve the following goals:

1. Students should be grounded in the methods of the discipline early in their program as well as those disciplines that effect how research is studied and conducted in the field.
2. Students should be taught to read research critically.
3. Students should be given the opportunity—preferably within the "safe" context of the class—to conduct actual research studies that represent larger capstone projects.
4. Support for research should be available throughout the student's program.
5. Students should be challenged to critically examine their own sites for research.
6. Students should gain experience adapting methods for particular rhetorical situations.

(394-5)

We contend that a [micro study assignment](#) helps the traditional research methods course place Rickly's recommendations for hands-on experience into practice. It provides graduate student researchers new to writing research the opportunity to experience research as embodied practice

in which the researcher must identify, organize, pilot, write up, and represent findings to an audience of his or her peers. Such a process, as obvious as it may at first appear, provides new researchers hands-on opportunities to develop the literacies and embodied knowledges of composition research in the relatively low-stakes, social space of the graduate seminar before engaging in much more high-stakes and, often, more solitary capstone research efforts. The following accounts of specific micro studies demonstrate the benefits of this approach.

### **Method, The Micro Study, and Revision: Survey Research as Generative Failure**

All too often graduate students find themselves having completed coursework and facing dissertation projects. They are very uncertain about their roles as researchers and contributors to the field and lacking experience “practicing” or “testing out” methods and methodologies for researching writing prior to conducting research for the dissertation. The micro study assignment asked students to “engage the work of scholarly inquiry as researchers;” the assignment proved to be a first attempt at empirical research for many students in the class. Like so many of her peers, Emily began the methods class feeling ill-prepared to either discuss or, more importantly, conduct the work of writing research. However, she was certain about what it was she wanted to study: how first-generation students come to understand and perform in the first-year composition class. Emily had become interested in first-generation students and their experiences as they transition from high school to college as a master’s student. She knew her dissertation would continue her interest in better understanding how first-year compositionists might better serve this student population, although she was unclear on the details or approach. She approached the micro study purposefully, then, as an effort to inform her dissertation while at the

same time also building her methodological preparedness to identify and conduct a qualitative study of student experiences with first-year writing.

Faced with a micro study, which she viewed as a much smaller, far lower-stakes research project than the all-important dissertation, Emily worked through the various aspects of identifying, preparing for, and conducting her micro study research. She elected to pursue a feminist approach to inquiry because of her desire to use her study as a way of affecting change by bringing current composition theory into conversation with relevant questions and issues her participants provided. Emily elected to conduct semi-structured survey research as her preferred method of data collection. While survey research is often viewed as masculine, she sought to integrate a feminist methodology by incorporating into the work a feminist perspective that, as Miner-Rubino, Jayaratne and Konik argue “is [the] most applicable during two specific points in the research process: the development of the research questions and the interpretation of findings” (206).

Emily turned to Bowling Green State University’s first year writing program and recruited study participants. Her guiding questions included the following: What obstacles do first-generation students at BGSU face when transitioning from high school to college that traditional students do not? What obstacles do they face when transitioning from their home discourse to the discourses of the academy? Since the questions provided inquiry into the differing experiences of first-generation and traditional college students, it became important to explain how each term was defined for the goals of the study. The definition from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) defines first-generation students as “individuals with

neither parents having completed a four-year degree in the USA by the time that student entered college.” Furthermore, the NCES places non-traditional students in one of two categories: “Students who are older than the historically typical undergraduate student (usually 18-25), and had their studies interrupted earlier in life,” or “Students of traditional age but attending colleges or programs that provide unconventional scheduling to allow for other responsibilities and pursuits concurrent with attaining a degree” (NCES). Therefore, definitions for traditional students referred to individuals at university institutions that did not fit into the above two categories.

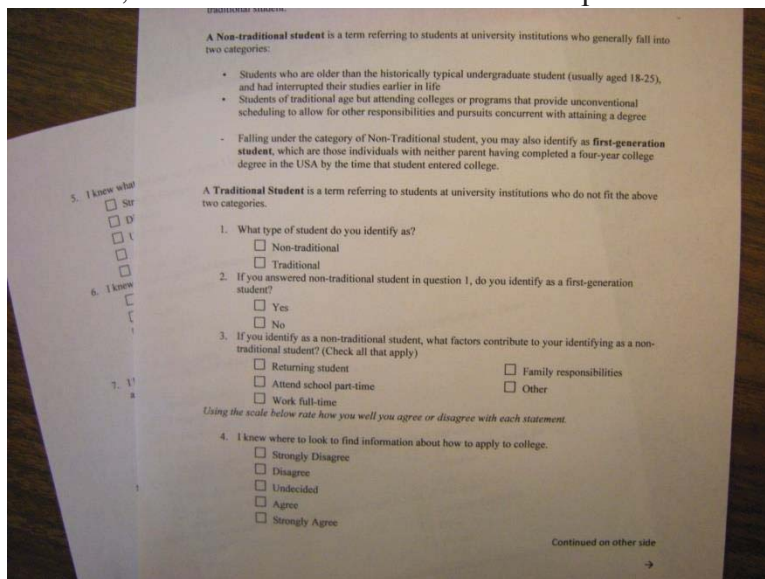
If a researcher is more self-reflexive in determining the methods and methodology used, the more beneficial the process and subsequent experience can be. Advised by Lauer and Asher’s models in *Composition Research: Empirical Designs*, Emily sought to draw from a sample of several first-year writing courses, which potentially represented a sample population of first-year writing students at BGSU. Several sample surveys were also consulted as a way to edit survey questions for directness, clarity, and simplicity (Lauer and Asher 65). After defining terms and revising survey questions, and after receiving approval from participating instructors, Emily selected two classes to survey.

Emily made several discoveries after reviewing the completed surveys. First, the survey research revealed challenges with the definitions and categories for first-generation and traditional students. The assumptions made about first-generation students as non-traditional were not entirely accurate, as not all first-generation students self-identified as non-traditional. Furthermore, some participants viewed themselves outside of the survey terms, leaving them

with nowhere to provide their experiences. Without a category to identify with, those students' insights would be completely excluded from data collection.

Survey participants often left entire questions blank even though survey questions offered choices of “Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree and Strongly Agree.” At other times, participants contradicted their answers. After reviewing the completed surveys, Emily noted several unforeseen questions: What do these choices actually mean? Who or what governs such choices? Do the researcher and participants hold the same understanding and opinion of such choices?

Emily observed limitations that consisted of few survey questions, minimum available choices, and even more limited “write-in” space with which to share insights. Another limitation



was the time given to complete surveys: participants were given only the last ten minutes of class.

Following the micro study assignment, Emily's initial thoughts on what it meant to be a feminist researcher changed, as did how her research would be conducted in the

future. One goal was to develop a familiarity and comfort-level with becoming a researcher/scholar. The micro study assignment certainly complicated feeling comfortable in that role for Emily. Restricting participants to limited definitions hindered the insights into students'



true experiences. Therefore, learning through experience was a way to “re-see” the research and how it might be approached in the future. Reshaping questions and definitions, perhaps totally re-thinking the choice of methods, as well as re-considering what it means to be a feminist researcher was necessary for Emily to arrive at decisions that would allow data and insights from this participant population to be collected.

The micro study assignment offered greater insight into all of the complexities of conducting research. As a new(er) scholar, Emily believed it became increasingly important to think through why such decisions were made. For Emily, the all-important process of asking ‘why’ and then thinking through what methods most effectively support her questions will inform her approach to research as a result of her experience with the micro study survey project. Even though the micro study was flawed, Emily now sees tackling future studies as more achievable and viable. The micro study assignment, she now believes, allowed Emily to better understand her roles and responsibilities as researcher and, thus, a contributor to the field.

## **Reflections**

For Emily, the micro study provided her an opportunity to take risks and fail. Such failures can be incredibly helpful. To her, her less-than-successful first foray into survey research greatly benefited her as she prepared to undertake her dissertation project. Thus, the experience of conducting the study offered Emily a better understanding of the nuances of research design as she began her dissertation research—a much more public, formal, and higher-stakes project to be sure. The micro study experience allowed Emily to realign her methodological choices with

her research questions for the dissertation: she gleaned only the information available from the questions posed. She believed, before completing the project, that she wanted to know who among her respondents identified as first-generation students and who identified as traditional. But upon reflection Emily realized she'd approached her study motivated by binary thinking: one would identify either as first-generation or traditional and thus arrived at questions that asked for either/or responses when, in fact, as she would learn through the process of coding and analyzing the survey data, just because one identifies as a first-generation student does not necessarily mean one might not also identify as traditional. She realized need must inform methodological decision-making. As a result of her experience, Emily decided on a mixed-methods approach for her dissertation: focus group, interview, participant observation, and textual analysis provide her with a more robust account of how graduate student writing teachers' identities affect their classroom pedagogies.

### **Seeing, Hearing, Looking, Listening: Using the Micro Study to Observe Work Spaces**

The Participant-Observation Activity, Suzan's micro study project, asks a researcher to select a setting to observe and describe, one that is part of the everyday professional or personal environment. Lauer and Asher categorize such a project as ethnographic, and describe a participant observer as one who is "a member of the classroom or other situations being studied, with a minimum of overt intervention" (39). Further, extensive observations can "generate hypotheses, [...] and produce thick descriptions" that include details of behavior in context (author emphasis 39). The Participant-Observer Micro Study required two twenty-minute

segments with one setting: the first observation should focus on environment; the second should focus on people. Though not required, photography, audio or video clips, or other elements could supplement the observations. As a research method that develops observation skills with a particular setting, the real challenge of the project would center on carefully unpacking the thinking within the micro study's overall goal "to understand the selected setting in new ways" (from the assignment sheet). The research methods project contained a depth and breadth that echoed the complexity of research protocols in general. So, this narrative intends to share the researcher's experiences with the research process as well as some of the resulting observations from the micro study.

Inspired by the potential for social action as well as ethical questions raised by Ellen Cushman's "Rhetorician as Agent of Change" and by Kirsch and Ritchie's "Beyond the Personal: Theorizing a Politics of Location in Composition Research", Suzan sought to question methods and roles regarding research and scholarship. She attempted to design a micro study that would grapple with questions of ethics, logistics, data collection and reporting, and questions of researcher identity in relationship to the subject of research—the office area where the researcher worked. Motivated by her own experiences as a certified secondary school teacher, and her experiences with the classroom spaces at both secondary and post-secondary institutions, Suzan decided that a participant-observer study of work spaces would draw on her own questions about the ways that scholars, teachers, and other professionals were guided and limited by the surrounding spaces and materials of the institutions at which they worked—and how those spaces and materials may shape or contain teaching and learning experiences.

Prior to the Participant-Observer Activity, some initial research questions that shaped Suzan's research were: In what ways is the building space used, and by whom? How do those uses compare with intended uses of the space? For example, classroom set-up of desks can position bodies in one spatial arrangement for learning; however, those desks are often moved to re-purpose the space. What visual or structural elements are in place to guide or instruct the use of the space? How do the spaces shape our work, shape our play, and shape the ways we exist? In other words, how do the spaces compose us, professionally and personally, and how do we compose the spaces? Finally, how do the spaces create hierarchies or channels of power? How do spaces allow us to challenge or examine structures of power? Focusing on a small work space in the framework of the micro study allowed Suzan the chance to conduct an actual research participant-observer study within the "safe" context of the class—as Rickly suggests.

Next, Suzan chose a location to study: the work space just outside her office in East Hall. The hallway is part of a larger system of activity that includes various departments, programs,



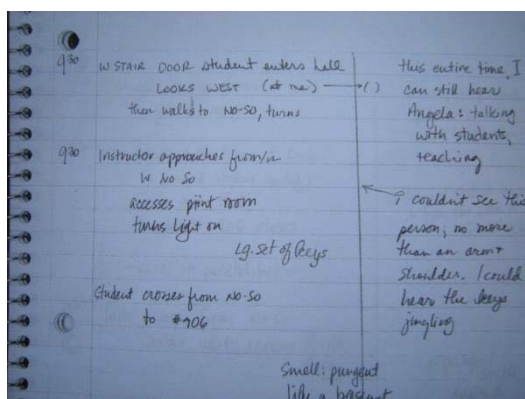
and publications. Suzan narrowed the scope of the observation area to a corner at the end of the fourth-floor hallway to assure a clear view of the environment and any activity; an inconspicuous observation space, one that would not interfere with or inhibit the normal flow of traffic or activity, or

elicit questions from passersby. From a seated position near the west end, Suzan would see the doorway of the conference room, the doorway to the print room, doorways of several offices, and

the openings of intersecting hallways. Similar to Cushman's articulation of the struggle to find her position as researcher, as participant, and as articulator of the research, Suzan weighed her position as observer in the area, but also as a researcher and participant in the space.

To prepare for the observations, Suzan spoke with instructors who used the conference room to establish a schedule of times for activity. Then, during a trial observation, the researcher discovered a documentation problem: she missed some observations because she wrote out whole words and phrases of description. As a result, Suzan formulated a key to create efficient note-taking during the actual observations. These preparations echoed Rickly's suggestions to "gain experience adapting methods for particular rhetorical situations" (18). Suzan's practice and preparation gave an embodied view of critical reading she had done of Cushman, Reynolds, and Kirsch and Ritchie.

During the scheduled two-part participant-observer activity, Suzan noted the arrival of various faculty and staff, as well as students who sought offices of faculty or who attended a



class in the conference room. For the researcher, one key observation was the arrival of a person using a wheelchair. She noted the amount of available space as that person maneuvered to the doorway of a professor, waited in the hallway, and then met with that professor. The hallway was barely wide enough to

accommodate the wheelchair; and, during the meeting, Suzan could still see the wheels of the chair in the hallway. It appeared that the student was unable to fully enter the work space and

was left partly in the hall. The maneuverability of the wheelchair in the hallway and office doorway allowed her to re-see the use of the space and how the space restricts not only the number of people but also the kinds of objects allowed in the hall. She also observed that building design accommodates certain kinds of movement and work, but not others; while there were areas of the fourth floor labeled as “handicap accessible”, it was evident that not all areas provided access to everyone. Aspects of teaching and learning are constrained, then, for both the student and teacher by the space and materials available.

Another conclusion of Suzan’s participant-observation activity came later as she read through the field notes. Reading through the documentation critically, as Rickly suggests, Suzan noticed many descriptions anchored in potentially subjective language. As much as the researcher had tried to document only the so-called objective observations, Suzan noticed persons, spaces, or movement were labeled with sensory details such as color, sound, or smell (i.e., “vivid red”, “printer ink smell”, “jingling keys”). She decided that the details are telling of the way that a person might observe a setting—the qualifiers say more about the researcher than about the subject because the language may or may not be considered objective data. Thus, Suzan was left with questions about the nature of data collection and data reporting. In fact, this researcher believes the micro study yielded more questions than answers. And, while this may be an unspoken goal for qualitative research practices, perhaps it is only in the practice of research methods that we learn to be researchers. Conducting a micro study of the ways that spaces shape, guide, or limit the work of scholars provided a necessary opportunity to practice research protocols, observation collection, coding, data interpretation, and, perhaps more importantly, the

thinking and decision-making that is part of the research process. Thus, the usefulness of Rickly's suggestions and the applied exercise of the micro study process became an observable, reflective and embodied practice for Suzan as a researcher.

## **Reflections**

For Suzan, the observation project left her with a newfound appreciation for the complexities of participant observation research: "We can only learn the benefits and drawbacks of a particular method by doing it, practicing it." Given an opportunity to revisit her micro study, she would extend the length of observations and revise her method of documentation so as to allow for greater depth and breadth of observations and critical self-reflections in order to arrive at a thick description of the site. She also made evaluative observations without intending to do so. For instance, the observation of an "over-sized key ring" or a "red shiny purse" may have been intended as an observation—it is summing a person or a work space by a single aspect. If participant-observer research is intended to bring out rich description, then the evaluative observations may or may not be considered rich descriptions, and thus may not function to draw out a full set of details from the research.

## **Quantitative Research and the New(er) Scholar, Finding a Way into the Conversation**

The research David decided to do for his micro study involved using a quantifiable research method to study the works cited pages from the June 2009 issue of *College Composition*

*and Communication*. He wanted to gather quantitative data regarding the publication dates of the works cited in the published research articles. The goal was to employ a quantitative research method he had not used before as well as to take tentative steps toward a better understanding of the advice that young scholars often hear: that becoming a part of the field means observing, understanding, and joining the various conversations taking place within the field.

This advice, derived from the Kenneth Burke metaphor of conversations taking place as if in a parlor, is sprinkled throughout our field—from the popular first year composition textbook *They Say, I Say*, to Gary A. Olsen and Todd A. Taylor’s seminal collection *Publishing in Rhetoric and Composition*, to Vicki Balyard’s 2009 book *Bibliographic Research in Composition Studies*. A book published, no less, by Parlor Press, which is also an allusion to the influential quote:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your part. (Burke 110)

Despite the ubiquity of this advice, how a young researcher goes about finding the conversations to listen to, the threads to follow and the methods by which others listen and join the conversation is daunting. He decided to follow another thread of advice uttered often informally,



that one must use “recent” sources, meaning that despite the fact that conversations exist and change, there appears to be a statute of limitations on just which conversations remain relevant. So the complexity of joining the conversation thickens when one must be open to listening, but only listening and responding to those voices others acknowledge as being heard.

In order to better understand how to go about joining conversations that are deemed relevant through publication, David had to choose a research method that would provide a stable and clear picture of those conversations, no matter how liquid and moving those conversations actually are. For this, he turned to Richard Haswell’s conception of RAD research (replicable, aggregable, data-driven research).

Looking at one issue of *CCC* would not provide any large-scale insight but would provide the first steps toward analyzing our own data: a literal tracing of scholarly conversations as they take place article-to-article, year-to-year and so on. The project allowed him to use scholarly research methods to explore both a personal-professional question as well as a scholarly question in the safe, socialized space of the classroom.

One goal of the micro study: get a graduate student's hands dirty by going out and actually conducting primary research, learning from that small encounter, and reflecting on how it may or may not contribute to future research projects. In the case of a quantitative research methodology, it allows a newer researcher an opportunity to deploy and critique research tools, those instruments they use to collect data as well as the data itself. In designing the project, David simply made a handwritten chart, counted each and every individual work cited on the works cited page twice for each article in order to ensure that the final count would reflect the

initial count.

After counting the grand total of works cited for the entire journal, David then began filling in the blanks of his chart, adding a slash mark to each publication year listed. The following is a facsimile of the handwritten work David completed in conducting this micro study. Though not an exact replica of his handwritten table, his chart looked much like the following:

"Article Title"	"Article Author"
Publication dates of work cited:	Tally Marks
2008	
2007	
2006	
2005	

Though the study intrigued him and confirmed much of the advice David has received over the years about joining the scholarly conversation, the results of the low-stakes, informal study meant more in terms of developing and using research methods and methodologies. In addition to confirming that many articles rely on source material from the previous ten years, the micro study taught him about using quantifiable research methodologies. Conducting this

research taught David how specificity and attention to detail required in a quantitative study contributes to its validity.

Though he came to the micro study believing that RAD research could be useful in its data gathering abilities, the experience of “doing” the research taught him there are much more nuanced questions to ask, not just about how to interpret the data once it is collected, but also the tools used to collect the data and the actual data that gets collected. Before and during the data collection process, many questions regarding this quantitative research method and the data collected occurred to David. Questions that would have needed to be addressed in much more formal and high stakes situations:

1. Why choose *CCC* as the journal to study? Why not choose *Radical Teacher*, *Composition Studies*, *Composition Forum*, *College English*, *Journal of Teaching Writing*, or *JAC* among others?
2. How exactly does one define ‘recent’ in terms of citations, especially since humanities often publish articles a year or more after they were actually written and accepted? Would recent mean three years, five years, or ten years?
3. How many journals would make up a reasonable study corpus to produce convincing data?
4. Could all the data come from several issues of the same journal?
5. What is the most efficient and accurate way to collect data?

Beyond the micro study project, this study taught David that the aims and scope of collecting quantitative data relies heavily on the personal position of the researcher. For instance,

he chose to study what “recent” research means when a much more seasoned scholar may have a much richer personal experience with “recent” scholarship from which to draw their sources. It also taught him that the means of collecting the data as well as the data actually collected come down to very real issues about access to research tools and the limitations a young researcher may have versus a more seasoned, well-connected researcher. If a researcher has access that allows for much more efficient data collection, as in having research assistants, colleagues with whom to collaborate, or access to software that can collect, chart and create visual representations of data collected with more accuracy and efficiency. As per Rickly’s urging, this micro study allowed David to explore research sites and question those sites as well as learn that one must adapt “research methods for their particular rhetorical situation” (Rickly 22). The micro study has prepared him to take on and articulate research questions, potential biases and material realities that he had not yet developed a research sense for. It taught him that as a researcher works, they not only have to revise the questions they ask, but also the ways in which they go about answering them.

## **Reflections**

For David, textual analysis provided quantitative support that, in fact, authors who published in at least one issue of the composition and rhetoric journal did indeed rely a great deal more on contemporary scholarship rather than work published earlier in order to situate and

advance claims. The micro study made him cognizant of this particular rhetorical feature of published writing in composition in ways that just *hearing* about the need to reference other recently published and relevant work—or even *reading* of the importance of situating one’s self in contemporary discussions on a topic—could not have. Simply put, the numbers spoke for themselves.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The benefits of including small-scale, low-stakes practice attempts at empirical research studies in the methods course curriculum are many: gaining practical, hands-on experience identifying and employing research questions; exploring methods of researching writing (collecting, returning to and making sense of data through coding and analysis); and writing up one’s findings in a manageable and (relatively) non-intimidating form. The micro study project, then, was invaluable for these three newer researchers, not only for the hands-on value it provides them, but also for the ways the embodied knowledges the individual studies enabled served as powerful professionalizing and enculturating mechanisms for Emily, Suzan, and David alike. We thus leave readers with a few suggestions for ways graduate (and even advanced undergraduate) writing studies programs might utilize micro study cross-curricularly not only to develop students’ ability to actively, critically engage published accounts of writing research but also, and perhaps more importantly, to develop writing studies scholars as practicing, critically-aware and self-reflexive researchers. These suggestions include:

- Integrating explicit attention to discussions of methods of inquiry for published research across seminar offerings.
- Assigning micro studies across course offerings as a means of gaining practical experience conducting scholarly inquiry similar to (or perhaps as an effort to replicate on a much smaller scale) the scholarship assigned.
- Offering an introduction to research methods course alongside the first-semester introduction to writing studies course.
- Committing to methods courses as spaces in which class members play and, yes, celebrate generative missteps and failures.

As we hope this discussion has made clear, we found the micro study assignment provides an opportunity for researchers to experience the work of writing research as embodied practice. The micro study project encourages critical reflection on methodological decision-making in ways that just reading about methods and methodologies simply cannot. By assigning micro-studies, graduate instructors open up and challenge their own pre-conceived notions of their own and others' research methodologies. The hands-on experience attempting to apply research methods coupled by critical reflection of the research process the micro study assignment provided benefited Emily, Suzan, David and Lee alike, for the opportunity to engage actual practice, however small and perhaps even conventional the case studies discussed here might read to more experienced researchers, proved an invaluable learning opportunity through a "first attempt." Our individual experiences with the micro study serve as a powerful example

that, although reading about research is important, it is only through the actual *doing* of research that we transition from students of research to researchers.

## Appendix

English 7260

Fall 2009

### Micro Study Project Description

Description:

An introduction to empirical writing research methods and methodologies includes careful attention to discussions of particular approaches and studies. It also includes opportunities to engage the work of scholarly inquiry as researchers, thus the micro study project.

The topic, scope, and approach for this project are up to you. Ideally, it will serve your larger research and/or pedagogical agenda(s). There are very few requirements, then, for the project other than (1) the method(s) you choose be appropriate for the research question you're exploring, and (2) that the research project is focused enough to be completed and written-up in a short period of time (roughly two weeks).

Audience(s): A target journal in the field that is likely to publish (an expanded version) of your study.

Format: Your micro study is just that: micro. It shouldn't be more than three-to-four double-spaced pages in length (APA or MLA format).

*Please use the following outline when writing up your study:*

Title



**Introduction:** Brief overview of the context surrounding the research, and a statement of the research question.

**Participants:** Describe, in as detailed a manner as possible, the nature of your subjects. Who they were, demographic information, how they were selected.

**Researcher Information:** Give a brief overview of your biases.

**Procedure:** Describe the method you used for gathering information.

**Analysis and Results:** Present the data you've gathered then analyze it according to the method you have selected.

**Discussion:** Synthesize the results in the context you've laid out in the Introduction. What does it mean? What is the significance in terms of your initial research question?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> We are tremendously indebted to Rebecca Rickly, not only for creating the micro study assignment, but also for generously agreeing to share it with us.

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