

Navigating Contradictions while Learning to Write: A Disciplinary Case Study of a First-Term Doctoral Writer¹

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Abstract: For most graduate writers, acclimating to doctoral-level inquiry is fraught with numerous tensions, whether regarding the development of scholarly identity (Gardner et al., 2014), navigating graduate school's newly decentralized sources for support (Simpson, 2012), or mastering the writing and research conventions that govern disciplinary practice. Using a Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) framework, this case study analyzes the first-term experiences of Miranda, a first-year PhD student from the field of gerontology (who is also a co-author), and the tensions she feels around the drafting and revision of a single paper. Drawing from Engeström (1987), we theorize Miranda's challenges around motive, authority, and expert feedback as comprising three "contradictions" engendered by the contemporary activity system of doctoral-level learning-to-write, contradictions that at once challenge the writer's going presumptions about writing even while they enable new concepts and solutions to emerge. This analysis finally encourages researchers to take a wide, cultural-historical view of the many contexts in which doctoral students write during their first terms, including the instructor-led classroom, the larger culture of the program and institution, and the current high-pressure realities of doctoral-level academic study in the United States.

Introduction

Almost three decades of writing studies scholarship have shown graduate writing, and the complex forms of literacy learning it requires, to be fraught with numerous challenges. As they progress through their degrees, graduate writers increasingly produce texts that are no longer read and evaluated only by a single instructor; their disciplinary productions instead become more public-facing and professionally consequential (Clarke 2005, Curry 2016). This type of writing thus entails not only writers' acclimation to highly specialized forms of disciplinary procedural and declarative knowledge but also a change of identity and attendant relationship to a field. Rather than standing peripherally as what Paré, Starke-Meyerring and MacAlpine (2011) have called "eavesdroppers" (p. 219) to a discipline, graduate writers (and doctoral writers especially) move increasingly towards what Paul Prior (1998) has called "deep participation" (p. 103) in the kinds of valued knowledge construction that structure their chosen field.

In response to these observations, a number of edited collections and special issues have recommended varied ways that Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programming, writing centers,

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and faculty advisors can better provide graduate students with the distinctive forms of writing support that research has shown them to need (e.g. Brooks-Gilles et al., 2015; Lawrence and Zawacki, 2018; Simpson, Caplan, Cox, and Phillips, 2015). Scholars have also conducted numerous studies on doctoral-level writing, especially for later-stage dissertation writing (see, for example, Aitchison & Paré, 2012; Blessinger & Stockley, 2016; Cotterall, 2011; Kamler & Thompson, 2014; entries in Madden et al., 2020; Wisker, 2015). Less attention, however, has been paid to the earliest stages of the doctoral student experience of learning to write for a specialized field (Hancock 2017). This includes, primarily, the writing done for coursework, which for some doctoral students lasts upwards of three years, a context too rarely taken up in recent scholarship. This oversight is especially notable because, as research shows—and as many doctoral students’ personal experiences can confirm—the writing expectations that structure many doctoral programs are becoming increasingly high stakes, not least by exerting strong, if often implicit, pressure on students to publish and publicly perform professional writerly identities earlier and earlier in their graduate careers (e.g. Habibe, 2015).

This article thus identifies the first semester as a particularly rich site for investigating the struggles that currently shape many doctoral students’ experiences learning to write for their specialized fields. Through a collaboratively constructed case study in which our subject is also a co-author, this article investigates the experiences of a first-term doctoral student, Miranda, as she navigates these challenges, which include not only her acclimation to a new set of disciplinary conventions, but also her development of a new scholarly identity, new processes of production and revision, and new conceptions of scholarly participation.

As much of the research has argued, meaningful changes to graduate instruction can lead to meaningful change in students’ processes, productions, and conception of themselves as disciplinary writers, especially early in their student experience (Berkenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman, 1988; Cafferella and Barnett, 2000; Cotterall, 2011; Khost et al., 2015; Micciche & Carr, 2011). Yet, as this study will insist, doctoral learning also engenders challenges— affective, motivational, pragmatic—that cannot be resolved by curricular interventions alone (Casanave, 2015; Godbee, 2020). That is, even students taking the most well-designed courses will still struggle, and benefit from wider networks of support.

Indeed, one notable feature of our study—as we will detail further below—is that Miranda’s first-year graduate curriculum had been recently reinvented by her department’s faculty, with the support of robust WAC programming and in line with current valued practices for graduate writing instruction. Miranda’s writing struggles this first term did not, therefore, result from outdated or lax writing pedagogies. Nor should her struggles be understood to have resulted from a particular difficulty meeting the disciplinary expectations that structured these first-term writing tasks. As a former and continuing writing center consultant well versed in threshold concepts of writing (Adler-Kassner and Wardle, 2015), Miranda was, in fact, strikingly well prepared to face the new writing challenges presented by first-term doctoral writing, bringing to this work a healthy mix of self-scrutinizing humility and persistence. Our study shows that Miranda’s instructors, too, thought she was meeting expectations very well. Miranda’s experience thus presents a case in which her challenges as a first-term writer can be attributed neither to a tidy binary mismatch between her previous and current conceptions of writing, nor to her simple “misperception,” as Mike Rose (1980) has termed it, of the “rules” that govern different disciplinary forms of writing (p. 398). Instead, and as we will show, Miranda’s struggles emerged from the larger, more systemic pressures that structured this first-term writing experience: pressures that engendered often conflicting views of what her writing was for, and how it was to be achieved, and at times disconcertingly appeared to contradict even her instructors’ consistently positive assessments of her progress.

In order to take the wider view required to glean these larger systemic tensions, this paper thus examines Miranda’s perceptions of and experiences with first term doctoral writing through the lens

of cultural historical activity theory (CHAT). As a conceptual framework, CHAT helps us understand and analyze human activity and cognition—such as writing—as imbricated in a system constituted by various moving parts (Vygotsky, 1987; Engstrom, 1987; Russell, 1995). By insisting on learning as a culturally and historically situated activity shaped by a variety of forces, CHAT reminds us that learning is not nearly as stable or linear as other analytical frameworks might suggest. Research has shown, after all, that the activity of writing is recursive, affective, and contextual (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015); CHAT encourages us to look at learning to write as an activity that takes place over a period of time, and as shaped by varied and sometimes competing settings, stakeholders, expectations, and goals.

Especially relevant for the first-term doctoral writer, CHAT prods us to consider not only the guidance provided by curricula but additionally to account for the external and adjacent forces that impact students' developing conceptions of writing. In this, CHAT considers forces that may not be immediately visible to instructors, or in writers' texts themselves. Relatedly, CHAT helps us to resist viewing first semester challenges through a deficit lens, which can suggest these struggles are the shameful result of either ill-prepared students or ill-conceived curricula. Instead, CHAT reveals these challenges as constituting a crucible for generative transformation and opportunity. As we will argue, these fraught experiences can inspire the conceptual recalibrations that lead to transformational learning. As such, these struggles—which we define as challenging but ultimately fruitful contradictions—deserve both students' and faculty's active consideration and collaborative scrutiny, as our analysis below will highlight.

In what follows, we first detail the subject of this case study, Miranda, as she stands in relation to the doctoral program and institution in which her first-term writing took place. We then overview our research methods and the questions that came to organize our analysis of our data. Next, we explicate the ways we use a CHAT framework to analyze specific features of Miranda's first-term experience learning to write, and finally, we present our study's findings and implications.

Introducing Miranda, Doctoral Student in Social Gerontology: Research Subject and Site

By her own description, and as her co-authors can attest, Miranda is a hard-working, self-reflective and ambitious student. As a White cisgender woman who could afford to live independently and had accrued no student debt, Miranda was well positioned to succeed in her PhD. Unlike other doctoral students in her program, Miranda also had the advantage of bringing significant institutional knowledge to her first-term experience: for this PhD in social gerontology (the study of the social aspects of aging), she was returning to the university where she had received her bachelor's degree two years before. Even though the specific discipline of gerontology was new for Miranda (as an undergraduate and masters student her degrees were in social work), Miranda came into her first term already familiar with the larger campus ecosystem and aware of the many support resources it made available.

In all this, Miranda could be considered an insider to her university's general academic culture. Ours is a mid-sized midwestern R2 university with a strong devotion to undergraduate teaching, with 14 doctoral programs where doctoral students also teach. The student body is largely white (74.9%) and economically comfortable, while the gerontology doctoral program is more diverse, with each cohort a mix of domestic and international students. The doctoral program in gerontology is also well resourced because of its connection to an independent research center (Scripps Center), which helps fund and support students through assistantships and research work throughout their education. This social gerontology program is, moreover, one of the first doctoral programs dedicated to this field in the U.S., and it has a remarkably strong job placement rate (with 37% placed in post-doctoral

programs, 37% in tenure-track positions, and 17% in research positions). Finally, gerontology faculty had recently overhauled their graduate program to include explicit instruction in gerontology writing, with faculty members publishing about writing conventions for their field (see de Medeiros & Kinney, 2020 & Kinney & de Medeiros, 2022). Miranda entered this program with the plan to continue on in academia, and her doctoral program, to all intents and purposes, seemed well suited to enable these ambitions.

Miranda's profile as a learner was further shaped by her prior experience as a writing center consultant at this university, and as supervised her final undergraduate year by Lizzie, another of this article's co-authors. Because of this training, Miranda was not only aware of (and made liberal use of) this writing center's support of graduate students; she was also well versed, after three years of experience as a writing consultant, in the threshold concepts of writing that form the writing center's foundational principles (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015). Based on this writing center work—where as an undergraduate she had supported graduate students as well as other undergraduates in one-to-one writing consultations—Miranda entered the first term of her PhD well aware that she would be learning to write in new ways for her new field, that this learning process would be challenging, and that she would benefit from a variety of kinds of writing support.

In fact, it was Miranda who approached Mandy (at the time, a PhD candidate in composition and rhetoric studying graduate-level writing support while working as a graduate assistant in the writing across the curriculum program) and Lizzie (a tenure-track assistant professor and director of the writing center whose PhD is in English and education and who is also interested in graduate-level writing) about designing a study on the topic of graduate-level learning to write. As cisgender, White women working in a well-resourced center for writing excellence, both Lizzie and Mandy felt enabled to conduct their research from a position of relative privilege. That said, Mandy's doctoral research into graduate student writing, and Lizzie's recent experiences as a doctoral writer (she received her doctorate in 2018) also fed a shared interest in the challenges that doctoral writing tasks can present even to those who appear particularly well set up to succeed in these contexts. As Mary Jane Curry has long argued (e.g. 2016), doctoral programs make demands that will be new to all writers, no matter how well prepared or positioned they might otherwise be for this work. Mandy and Lizzie thus proposed a case study with Miranda as the subject, focused on analyzing the "pain points" that we presumed would emerge during the first semester of doctoral coursework.

Capturing First-Term Writing Challenges: Research Questions and Methods

This study was built from the conviction that learning to write for any new situation involves challenges and changes to one's conceptions of writing, of oneself as a writer, and of the most effective sources of writing support. Taking a social view of writing, we worked to design a study that avoided a strictly individualistic, linear view of writing development, in which challenge and change are traced solely through a writer's adaptation of a single new set of norms. Instead, we took seriously the idea that we could better understand the activity of doctoral writing through attention to the varied overlapping contexts in which this writing takes place, attention that a CHAT framework helps us to achieve. If we were to investigate Miranda's process of reconceptualizing what doctoral-level writing might more holistically entail and the changes that it might require of her, we would need a dual focus on the local demands and forms of guidance provided by her coursework, as well as the larger demands and forms of guidance Miranda understood her doctoral program to present.

Methodologically, we took further inspiration from recent writing studies scholarship that treats student learners as partners in writing research (Hall, Romo, & Wardle, 2018; Wardle & Mercer-Clement, 2017; Felten, 2016). We designed a case study in which Miranda was both our subject and

a co-author, helping to determine our research questions, methods, analyses, and conclusions. By engaging in ongoing collaboration with a single student's voice and perspective, we hoped to explore those facets of the doctoral learning to write experience that are otherwise difficult to capture, especially through methods relying only on researchers' ex post facto analyses of a student's retrospectively reported experiences. This kind of collaborative case-study also responds to calls for more detailed inquiries into doctoral students' lived experiences as learners (e.g. Jazvac-Martek, Chen, & McAlpine, 2011; Lassig, Dillon, & Diezmann, 2013; Madden, Eodice, Edwards, & Lockett, 2021; Maher et al., 2008; Wegener et al., 2016).

To construct a rich and multidimensional understanding of Miranda's evolving experiences this first term, we collected various forms of data. First, Miranda kept a regular writing log throughout the term, in which she took biweekly notes on her current reading and writing tasks for her courses; which of these were posing particular challenges, and why; how she was working to overcome these challenges; and how she more generally felt she was progressing as a writer at the doctoral level. Second, Miranda regularly uploaded assignments to our shared folder, which we used on an as-needed basis to track and further illuminate the influences and exigencies that she elsewhere referenced.

Third, we conducted three semi-structured interviews with Miranda, one mid-semester (when her first major drafts were due), one at the end of the semester (when she was finishing up her major drafts), and one after the semester was over (when she could reflect with more distance about her learning). Interviews were audio and video recorded and later transcribed verbatim. These interviews were designed to prompt Miranda to further reflect on significant ideas or situations raised in the writing log, helping us to round out our shared understanding of Miranda's learning to write experiences. Our questions asked Miranda to elaborate on her specific struggles and progress with first-term writing assignments; her changing feelings of competency as a doctoral writer; the changing kinds of writing supports that she used over the term; and her evolving conceptions of what doctoral level writing entailed, especially in comparison to how she had previously conceptualized academic writing. We also strove to keep these interviews collaborative by inviting Miranda, at the end of each interview, to add any further points she found relevant to our research objectives.

Drawing on a grounded theory paradigm (Saldaña, 2009), we began our data analysis with each researcher reviewing each interview transcript and noting what each felt were the most significant themes regarding Miranda's writing challenges and changing conceptions about learning how to write. Given these core concerns, we soon agreed on five broad (and often overlapping) themes, with which we then coded all the interviews and writing logs. These included Miranda's (changing) conceptions of what doctoral writing entails and requires; Miranda's (changing) ideas about how doctoral level writing differs from other kinds of writing activity, especially undergraduate-level writing; Miranda's experiences with and affective response to different sites of learning, broadly construed; Miranda's experiences with and affective response to different sites of writing support; and Miranda's changing conceptions of what constitutes useful writing feedback.

Through this process of coding, we soon found our interest centered on Miranda's experience over time with one specific writing task: the seminar paper assigned for one of Miranda's first-term required courses, Introduction to Social Gerontology. This paper assignment had, significantly enough, emerged from the faculty member's participation in a term-long faculty fellows seminar, and was designed with the complexities of graduate-level (i.e., both masters and doctoral) learning to write in mind. Walking students through each step of a research process, the assignment was intended to help newcomers to the field develop, synthesize, and demonstrate the declarative knowledge they would construct about a major theory in gerontology. The first step was to identify a concept of interest, which for Miranda was a "good death," or the idea that certain qualities of end-of-life care contribute to a better dying experience. Students collected scholarship on the topic and

then synthesized this research using various strategies, including concepts maps and matrices. They drafted a paper tracing the evolution of the concept, participated in peer review session with a classmate, and produced a final revision of their seminar paper. At each step, students also received feedback from their course professor. (Miranda's final paper advocated to abolish objective and prescriptive models of a good death, and instead to use subjective and critical lenses to assess end-of-life quality.)

Compelling to us were the number of intertwined conceptual and processual conflicts that marked this writing experience for Miranda, despite the fact that Miranda's sequenced fulfillment of these steps might be understood as a series of fairly straightforward successes. After all, and from quite early in the term, Miranda met her professor's writing expectations quite squarely; and, by her own admission, this was work that taught Miranda a good deal about some of the main moves and features valued by scholarly research in general and gerontological scholarship more specifically. Even so, our coded data showed this experience to have confronted Miranda with difficulties that could not be resolved simply by her instructors' ongoing guidance. These difficulties do not, we should be clear, support a critique of either Miranda's assignment or her understanding of this assignment. Rather, these difficulties—centered on questions about what might count in her larger doctoral writing ecosystem as the appropriate ways to conceive of audience, purpose, authority, and expertise—pushed us to expand our notion of the varied components we would need to consider to fully analyze their source. Here it became clear that the conceptual framework offered by CHAT, and more specifically its theorization of contradictions, would help us to more precisely map the origins of Miranda's writing challenges as a first semester doctoral writer, as well as helping us to explain the ultimately generative effect we found these contradictions to have on Miranda's learning.

CHAT, Contradictions, and First-term Doctoral Writing

Inspired by the complexity of Miranda's evolving experience with this paper, our analysis derives from the framework and methods recommended by cultural historical activity theory (CHAT), which uses the activity system as its unit of analysis (Cole & Engstrom, 1993). CHAT locates learners' activities in ongoing systems that have been shaped and influenced historically over time by said systems' cultures, and whose norms, expectations, and precedents directly impact individuals' lived experiences. The CHAT framework also underscores the significance of learners' more personal cultural and historical influences, including the prior knowledge and conceptions that impact their learning and understanding of their progress.

An expanded activity system triangle helps researchers analyze the varied human and non-human interactions that mediate activity, and thus to explain what can make apparently straightforward activities—such as the writing and revising of a single paper—sometimes so challenging to successfully carry out (see Figure 1, below). In Miranda's specific case, some components of her writing of her seminar paper remained relatively stable. The subject stayed the same—Miranda was the author of the paper throughout, and made final decisions regarding her revisions. The tool with which she would achieve her outcome likewise remained a single seminar paper. However, and as our analysis will show, what might constitute the other elements of this activity system could shift dramatically depending on the cultural-historical perspective through which it was understood. CHAT helped us to locate tensions between views of the paper's guiding rules, or norms, especially given the course's very specific goal of students writing using the course-described "gerontological voice"; this activity's community; the divisions of labor by which writing, responding, and revising responsibilities were allocated; and finally the motive and projected outcome towards which all of these components aimed.

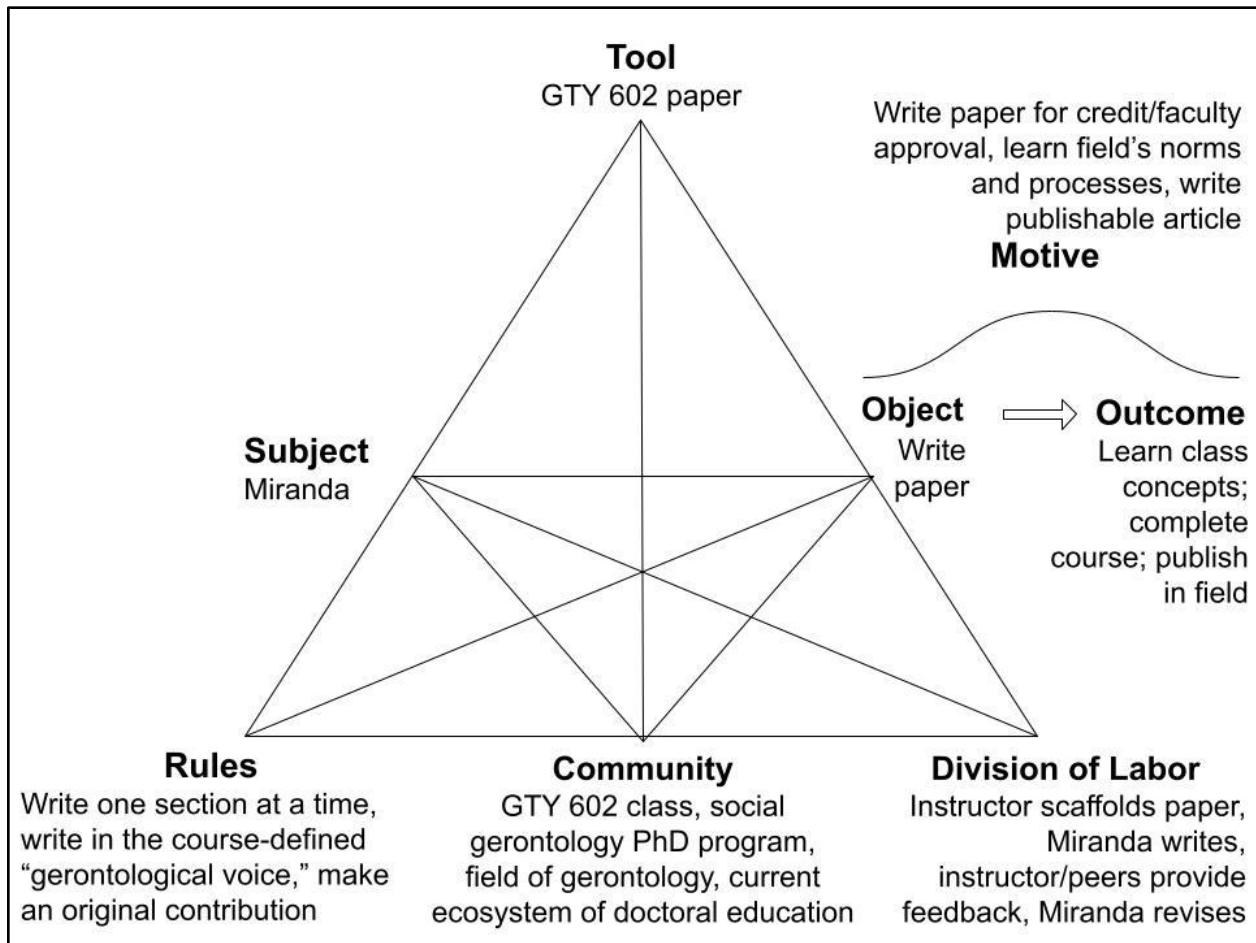


Figure 1: Activity system of Miranda writing her GTY 602 theory paper (adapted from Engeström, 1987 and Kain & Wardle, 2005).

Worth emphasizing, then, is that CHAT frames writing as an activity defined by multiple interpenetrating forces whose meanings are "inevitably contested, negotiated" (p. 341), as Engeström (1987) explains. In this, activity systems are not only social but "multi voiced" (Engeström, 2001)—which is to say, different perspectives on an activity can lead to different and sometimes conflicting definitions of its constituent parts. Over the last three decades, writing studies scholars have used activity theory to better understand the time-dependent, contextually mediated, and often conflicted nature of writing as an activity, especially as these impact college students (e.g. Russell 1997; Russell and Yanez, 2003; Wardle and Mercer Clement, 2017). As interest in the particularities of graduate writing has grown, researchers focused on this domain have also turned increasingly to a CHAT framework (e.g. Lei and Hu, 2019; Nigel, 2020; Watts, 2021). Our analysis builds from this scholarship, with a particular emphasis on how CHAT helps us view Miranda's intellectual and emotional experience with this single task in all its multidimensional complexity.

Even more specifically, we draw on CHAT's concept of contradictions to understand the source and nature of Miranda's challenges with this paper. Contradictions are, by Engeström's (2001) definition, "historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems" (p. 137), emerging when the different forces comprising one or many activity systems fundamentally conflict. As we show below, the tensions that defined Miranda's experience writing this paper operated precisely this way: as conflicts between differently defined components of her paper's activity

systems. Yet as contradictions theorists have posited, and as our study further illustrates, contradictions also present learners with the opportunity to reevaluate and transform how a given activity, and its component parts, can be conceived and worked through. Functioning as not just as disturbances to one's learning but as a generative force, contradictions, as Engeström (2001) explains, can prompt "innovative attempts to change the activity" (p. 137) in ways that might resolve these conflicts in newly integrative ways. As Miranda's experience will show, sustained engagement with these conflicts, and with multiple perspectives on the nature of these conflicts, yielded integrative solutions that she might not otherwise have reached.

CHAT's concept of contradictions, therefore, can provide a useful framework with which to analyze the experience of many doctoral-level writing tasks, perhaps most especially at the earliest stages of a student's program. To be sure, activity theory shows that complications and contradictions also crop up in many undergraduate writing activities (Russell and Yañez, 2003; Wardle and Mercer Clement, 2017). But unlike most school-based writing tasks—and as we will further illustrate below—the activity of doctoral-level writing takes place in far more distributed contexts and presents students with new and often unfamiliar networks of authority and conceptions of expertise. Understanding doctoral writers' challenges through the lens of contradictions can help explain both the root of some students' challenges and the potential of these challenges to inspire transformative change.

Findings and Analysis

We've divided our analysis into three sections in order to separately examine what we saw as the three central tensions organizing Miranda's ongoing work writing and revising this one paper. While these three sections may be distinguishable as different kinds of contradictions, as the components of an activity system they also impact and profoundly inform one another. In our first section, we examine a contradiction between Miranda's negative response to her first draft of the paper and her professor's very positive assessment of the same draft. In our second section, we examine a tension between the conflicting rules and presuppositions by which Miranda might establish her authority and "write like a gerontologist." In the final section, we explore a conflict that emerges in Miranda's thinking about the different roles played by peer and faculty feedback, and the contradiction this implies between differing conceptions of expertise.

Contradictions between Motives

The first contradiction we analyze centers on the dispiriting confusion Miranda felt around her professor's positive response to her paper's first draft as it compared to her own continuing dissatisfaction with this piece of writing. In this, Miranda's experience is the inverse of the story told about many graduate students' processes learning to write, in which they are shown to require more support either recognizing or embodying the discipline-specific conventions their doctoral-level writing is expected to begin to exhibit (i.e., Habibe, 2015). From her professor's perspective, Miranda's draft had hit these expectations squarely; in fact, had we not attended to Miranda's evolving experience with composing and revising, this tension may well have passed unvoiced and unnoticed by anyone except Miranda. Yet once Miranda's dissatisfaction had been aired, we were prompted to more closely examine the forces that might have caused it. Seen through the lens of CHAT, we argue that this tension constitutes an evolving contradiction between motives. More specifically, Miranda felt a conflict between the motive of the professor who assigned the paper—which was to learn the processes entailed in doctoral research, and to demonstrate some of the basic conventions of gerontological writing—and the alternate emerging motive that Miranda had started

to develop about also using this seminar paper as an opportunity to produce a piece of scholarship that was also publishable, which is to say argumentatively innovative.

In the moment, however, Miranda did not register these dueling responses to this paper as a contradiction, per se, much less as a contradiction shaped by what Engeström (2001) calls “historically accumulating structural tensions” (p. 137). Lacking a clear framework with which to understand this tension, Miranda instead described only a vague but gnawing sense of dissatisfaction that she did not know how to resolve. In her log, she wrote that she was “kind of discouraged by” the feedback offered, explaining:

[The professor] told us later in class that for those of us that got more sentence-level feedback (like I did) that it was because our writing was good and just needed more polishing rather than content-feedback. I guess this is a success also, but it was challenging for me because even though [my professor] said my writing was good, I didn't agree.

As Miranda went on to explain, she was eager for her professor's comments “because I was looking for some really constructive feedback on how to make it flow better and have the ideas connect better.” That her professor instead provided feedback focused on “mostly sentence-level word choice suggestions and APA format” was a disappointment, failing as it did to provide the content-based guidance she felt her paper still needed.

Making this tension around motive especially challenging was that it was not a zero-sum choice, resolved merely by adopting one perspective and abandoning the other. Nor did it merely involve Miranda sharpening up her sense of the paper's rhetorical “purpose,” since this purpose, which was to launch a critique of the scholarly conception of a “good death,” remained consistent across drafts. This tension around motive was instead a tension concerning the more practical outcome that the paper was imagined by different parties to enable, whatever its more particular topic. Indeed, Miranda's discomfort points to a “multi-voiced” contradiction in which both perspectives are shown to be valid: both motives, although different, provided this first-term doctoral writer with equally important opportunities for learning to write in this new context.

In fact, our analysis shows that Miranda very much valued the motive her professor had implicitly attributed to this assignment, and that she clearly recognized the significance of the learning that this carefully scaffolded assignment enabled. As Miranda explained, the work this assignment required—drawing up matrices, concept maps, and finally outlines for her draft to visually organize and compare the different scholarly perspectives her research brought together—was especially helpful in introducing her to writing practices specific to doctoral level inquiry, practices quite different from those she employed as an undergraduate and masters student. In her previous educational contexts, Miranda explained, “writing always came pretty easy,” and did not entail extensive pre-writing practices:

I would never spend too much time brainstorming or outlining or doing a couple steps in between a final product. I would just kind of go straight into writing because I felt pretty proficient in it that I could do that without having to take the time to do all the in-between steps.

In contrast to those undergraduate experiences, the multiple pre-writing tasks that this assignment demanded showed Miranda “a practice I will absolutely take with me in future grad school writing, because even though it takes more work on the front end, I think it will save me a lot of time and frustration on the back end of actually writing.” In terms of core learning, then, Miranda's experience

with this paper might well be considered a success, an interpretation especially vivid when one considers the first-term classroom writing as an activity system. Through this lens, the professor's assignment provided access to the procedural norms, communities, and tools that structure the core practices entailed in doctoral level gerontological research and scholarship production. Considering this activity system in its institutional context, moreover, shows the cultural-historical effects of the WAC-supported doctoral pedagogies embraced by Miranda's professor and learned through the WAC programming of their university's Center for Writing Excellence. By such a program's pedagogical ethos, graduate coursework is most effective when explicitly aimed at introducing students not only to the content but to the writing norms of a specific disciplinary field (Micciche & Carr, 2011; Sullivan, 1991).

It is only through also considering the larger context in which this paper's activity system is nested—that of high-stakes twentieth-first century graduate education—that we can better understand the root of Miranda's frustration with her professor's affirmative feedback. Miranda "didn't feel great about the draft I submitted" precisely because, for her, this draft did nothing more than exhibit her absorption of these new research processes. As she explained, "I felt like I basically just took the previous iteration of my project [a color-coded concept map] and put it into sentence form." For Miranda, the narrow pedagogical motive her professor had implicitly attributed to the paper had thus begun to feel insufficient. Indeed, and as the term went on, our interviews and writing log show Miranda beginning to look beyond the context of coursework to determine her writing aims. This change appeared to have emerged from a sensed pressure not from her professor more locally but from her program and the field more generally to "take these papers and turn them into something useful, not just for this class, but for me and my goals of trying to publish."

As these findings reveal, the pressure many graduate students feel to pursue scholarly publication earlier and earlier in their graduate career (e.g. Casanave, 2019; Lei & Hu, 2019) not only brings intense stress to bear, it can contradict the beneficial learning-to-write motives that structure early term coursework, especially as designed by WAC-supported faculty. Miranda's talk about her more general writing aims shifted significantly towards the end of the semester, shaped by a desire to move beyond what she calls the "class-paper approach of just wanting to report research in a clear and accurate way." As she explained, "my goal now is to present something new and different to the literature that pushes knowledge forward." Miranda's motivation for producing publishable work was primarily the result of faculty advice to "get as much mileage as possible" out of her writing. Nonetheless, and at least during this first term, she was left largely on her own to navigate the logistical challenges involved in writing for publication. Miranda explained, "I wasn't really getting clear directions from anywhere on how to get started or what exactly that process looked like." The explicit writing support offered through this instance of coursework stayed focused only on the specific pedagogical motive around which the professor designed and assessed this paper. As a result, the quite different processes and standards entailed in writing for publication were left, in this context, unaddressed.

As her experience shows, this new motive to publish produced a contradiction between Miranda's and her professor's expectations concerning her revisions, each of which were shaped by different goals for first-term doctoral writing, and the different historical-cultural forces that determine those goals. For the immediate context of the classroom, Miranda's teacher had been encouraged by her involvement with her institution's WAC initiatives to design a term-long series of linked writing tasks meant to acculturate students into the doctoral research and writing practices specific to this field. And Miranda's experience showed this assignment to have happily achieved its original aim. Yet this pedagogical aim also conflicted with the increasing pressures brought to bear by the professional academic industry more generally, in which doctoral students feel compelled not only to learn about their fields but also to begin to perform their expertise via scholarly publication earlier and earlier in

their doctoral careers. Miranda's logs and interviews showed how sharply she felt both these motives at once, as well as the tension between them: but our data also show that, because these motives were not explicitly acknowledged as potential contradictions that would deeply shape both her affective and intellectual experiences with doctoral writing, Miranda had little language with which to conceptualize such conflicting motives, much less bring them into reconciliation. As the following sections will show, in fact, it was only through a reconceptualization of authority and expertise that Miranda began to find new solutions for this contradiction.

Tensions around Rules and the Establishing of Authority

The second tension surfaced by Miranda's experience with her gerontology paper concerns her emerging and conflicted sense of what constitutes scholarly authority. As we will show, this tension illustrates a contradiction between different conceptions of the "rules" that govern doctoral level writing, especially as might be determined by one or another motive. Accordingly, this tension did not emerge from Miranda's responses to her professor's feedback, but instead from her own confusion about how to understand her dissatisfaction with her draft and what a satisfactory revision would entail.

One of Miranda's overall learning goals this first term (and rule she was held to in this particular course) was to learn to "write like a gerontologist," as she frequently put it. This was a goal that her professor shared, introducing it to first-term students explicitly in class. Yet, as our CHAT framework reveals, learning to "write like a gerontologist" pulled Miranda's writing and revising in two different directions, per two different sets of rules. As the above section showed, Miranda's draft might have aimed, by one view, to demonstrate her growing understanding of the concepts, processes, and conventions valued by the field. By such a paradigm, the performance of burgeoning scholarly authority can be conceived as "kind of like a formula," as Miranda put it in one interview: through the proper deployment of disciplinary rules that can be defined as generalizable procedures and norms. Indeed, these are the rules by which Miranda's professor so positively assessed her paper as a success, as it was built from Miranda's careful fulfillment of this assignment's many scaffolded research and drafting steps. Yet applying an activity systems analysis shows that the larger pressures of doctoral study also prompted Miranda to attribute both another motive and thus another layer of rules to this writing project. By this alternate paradigm, and as we will argue, the paper's scholarly authority—and understanding of the rules that govern doctoral level writing—would require more than just the writer's proper adoption of fixed norms.

Similar to our above analysis of motive, Miranda did not at first recognize this tension as a contradiction shaped by the conflicting forces and conceptualizations involved in doctoral level writing. Instead, her early dissatisfaction with the paper was fairly inchoate: something she vaguely felt but could not precisely describe. As she explained about her preliminary draft:

I couldn't really articulate what was wrong with it... it just felt kind of piecemeal. It didn't feel like a cohesive story. I liked certain elements of the paper, but it didn't feel like a paper with flow. It didn't feel like a good story, start to finish. There were parts, here and there, that were good, but it wasn't really one piece.

As this excerpt shows, Miranda understood that she had properly gathered and reported on "the elements" required for her paper; she was satisfied with some of its "parts, here and there." She had followed the procedures laid out by the scaffolded assignment and produced a paper that readily received her professor's stamp of approval, by which she could be understood as beginning to learn to "write like a gerontologist." Yet to fully "write like a gerontologist" in the ways that would align with her new motive of scholarly publication, Miranda intuited that she would also need to develop

a new form of authority in the production of a scholarly “story” that could, as she put it elsewhere, “contribute to the literature in some new profound way.” Indeed, Miranda’s characterizations of her draft—that the paper felt “piecemeal,” lacked “flow,” and was not “one piece”—can all be understood to circle around a single unstated concept: that completely realized, publishable scholarship needs not only to adhere to procedural conventions, but also to center on a single, original claim, as enabled by a personal sense of authorial ownership.

Miranda’s sense of this writing as “piecemeal” is perhaps inevitable to first-term doctoral experiences, given the fact that doctoral study asks learners to acclimate almost immediately to a slew of unfamiliar and challenging intellectual tasks. It only makes sense that first-term students would feel that their early writing and learning experiences are fragmented and frustratingly incremental. Developmentally, Miranda’s preliminary drafting of this paper seems to have taken place at the stage that Sprague and Stuart (2000) call conscious incompetence wherein a learner, having been introduced to a field’s full dimensionality, begins to recognize all that they still don’t know. By Miranda’s telling, such a stage can have a potent affective impact on learners. As she explained, “It’s helpful to see what gerontological writing looks like, but also intimidating because some of the reading goes way over my head and I have these moments of ‘my writing will never look like that.’” Through this lens, Miranda’s dissatisfaction with this draft resulted from her growing awareness of a gap between her aspirations and her current competencies as a writer. While Miranda felt she could accurately report on her research and produce a passable imitation of “what gerontological writing looks like,” she did not feel she had yet developed the confidence or ability to construct from these assembled elements any new coherent disciplinary knowledge of her own.

But conscious incompetence does not completely explain Miranda’s temporary paralysis in revising. Her uncertainty about how to properly diagnose what was “wrong with” her draft, and thus revise it to her satisfaction, was also structured by two contradictory views about the rules by which how scholarly authority could be achieved. By the rules laid out by this assignment, successful gerontological writing adopted the genre and process conventions that gerontological scholars generally followed, such as using a neutral voice and polite disagreement, recognizing the heterogeneity of aging, and integrating rich theory to generate new knowledge (de Medeiros & Kinney, 2020). However, the peer feedback Miranda received offered another view. As Miranda reported, her peer’s primary observation was that she “couldn’t hear Miranda when she was reading the paper,” and that “I wasn’t infusing enough of my own ideas.” At first, Miranda was puzzled by this comment. She explained, “I’ve been taught in the past, over many years of my education, that using too much of your own voice is a bad thing, that scientific writing was to be objective and logical.” By the perhaps flawed but well-intentioned view of scholarly authority that Miranda held, therefore, “writing like a gerontologist” meant writing like someone who was not Miranda; it required that Miranda acclimate to norms outside of the self. Indeed, as her interviews and logs show, she had approached all her first-term writing with the presumption that organizing writing around what she called “my own ideas and interpretation” could run the risk of “turning an academic paper into a personal narrative.” So strong was this inherited rule—and so well aligned did it seem with her professor’s rules—that Miranda had difficulty imagining ways to “balance writing in my own voice while still maintaining the caliber of academic writing and expectations.”

Miranda’s lingering dissatisfaction with this draft also suggested that this peer’s feedback might in fact hold the key to Miranda’s successful revising, and that this apparent contradiction might be resolved through Miranda developing a more nuanced conception of scholarly authority and the other rules that it requires one to adopt. From the start, Miranda had recognized that her draft lacked coherence, or a “good story, start to finish.” As she then came to understand, this lack of “flow,” as she called it, might be solved, as her peer suggested, with a more actively authoritative, argumentative throughline. By this new framework, to “write like a gerontologist” required Miranda to claim her

own authority as a gerontologist, and to recognize that this authority emerged not only from discrete conventions correctly deployed but also from the way the material is refracted through the scholar's singular perspective. As Miranda reflected, in her final interview of the term:

it's one thing to know the disciplinary expectations ... like at the beginning of the semester, we were basically given paragraphs and bullet points about what writing in gerontology is supposed to look like: you'd be respectful of different disciplines, you know, you give credit where it's due. It's kind of like a formula.... But it's a different thing to actually do it in practice. ...to be fully grounded in what it means to write as a gerontologist, I had to start doing it myself and start asking for feedback and getting feedback on how to improve.

Here, Miranda showed herself beginning to understand that effectively learning to write at the doctoral level requires not only acclimation to bullet-point rules, but also lived immersion in the messy experience of writing, as well as in a community of like-minded writer-practitioners who can provide “feedback on how to improve.” Indeed, this is the kind of learning that must be fully embodied to have its pedagogical effects, as also implied by Miranda's pivot in the above excerpt from second person (e.g. “you'd be respectful”) to first person (e.g. “I had to start doing it myself”). By the end of the term, Miranda had come to better understand both the cause of her draft's shortcomings and the significance of infusing more of her own perspective. As she wrote in her log, this new view of scholarly authority was “honestly relatively new to me”; but better understanding that “there's an expectation that I propose my own ideas and interpretation” and that she is “not just expected to regurgitate what's been done before” helped her approach her writing and revising with a clearer sense of purpose. Although it began as a contradiction, this new view of authority, as she explained, had a crucial impact on her view of her work: it “makes me feel like I have more control and autonomy over my writing.”

Tensions around Feedback and Expertise

Our data further suggest that Miranda's peer review experience was shaped by a third tension: her evolving and conflicted views about what constitutes expert feedback. In this third section, we examine Miranda's surprise that the most helpful feedback about her paper came from a classmate, and not her professor. “How was it,” Miranda wondered, “that my peer was able to put [her feedback] so eloquently when [the professor] hadn't seen it, when I hadn't seen it?”

In the context of the doctoral classroom's activity system, Miranda's surprise in many ways makes sense. Coursework, whether undergraduate or graduate-level, is often undergirded by an intractable “student-expert binary” (Wegener et al., 2016, p. 1095) that privileges faculty feedback as the prime arbiter of students' writing success, as well as the best source for writing and revising guidance. From early on in her first term, Miranda's interviews and logs suggest she viewed faculty feedback in precisely this way. Indeed, the kind of faculty feedback Miranda most often spoke about involved the grades she received on varied assignments, and which functioned for her as crucial affirmation that she was making progress acclimating to the writing norms of her field. In addition, Miranda explained that she frequently met with faculty for ongoing guidance throughout her writing process, whether when “getting a new assignment,” and seeking to “clarify with a professor what exactly is expected,” or requesting feedback on a draft in process “just to make sure I'm on the right track.” For the bulk of the term, then, Miranda appeared to expect the activity system of doctoral-level coursework writing to operate by norms and outcomes determined entirely by the instructor. As a result, Miranda thus also appeared to view the community for and within which students write to be composed only

of faculty and the established scholars of the field, not also by the peer learners who constitute a classroom's actual population.

From a cultural-historical perspective, we found that Miranda's attitudes about peer and faculty expertise to be further shaped by her personal experiences as a writing consultant. To be sure, and due to her writing consultant training in contemporary writing and learning theory, Miranda spoke often about writing and revising as social, rhetorical, and collaborative acts. As she explained, "I kind of grew up as a writer in [the writing center]... hearing things like writing is not a solo activity, everyone is a writer, everyone benefits from feedback." She understood peer feedback to be a crucial component of her process: she reported discussing her drafting and writing frequently with classmates and during writing center appointments. Even so, Miranda tended to characterize this peer feedback in decidedly supplementary terms. Compared to the more authoritative guidance that she expected from her professors, Miranda described peer feedback as valuable for prompting self-reflection rather than offering direct advice about the credibility of her claims. In some cases, she described peer feedback as primarily affective, providing "moral support" and building "classroom camaraderie." In others, she praised it for offering a general check on whether one is communicating clearly. Indeed—and possibly as shaped by the somewhat "generalist" mode in which she was trained (pre-dating Lizzie) as an undergraduate consultant—Miranda repeatedly described writing center peer feedback as useful precisely for lacking expertise in a writer's disciplinary field, as when she reflected that "getting feedback [from peers] helps me improve and make edits my own writing and kind of puts me in the position of, 'okay, what does a non-expert audience think about my writing? How can I make [my intentions] clear to them?'"²

This attitude about peer feedback both confirms the strength of the student-expert binary that shapes many early doctoral students' conceptions of themselves, and underscores the decidedly minor role that peer feedback plays in many doctoral programs. Scholarship has shown that peer review is not a mandatory or even common practice in most graduate courses (Sullivan, 1991; Khost et al., 2015), with many graduate programs promoting a more decentralized and isolated paradigm of learning (Simpson, 2012). This also proved true in Miranda's case. As she noted, this late-November peer review session was the only one required in any of her first-term courses. Miranda, in fact, seemed to have internalized some of these biases herself. Even though her experiences as a peer consultant had primed her to value peer feedback, she still expected little to come from this required, in-class peer review. As she explained, "Going into it, I wasn't really expecting to get helpful feedback." She predicted that her peer's feedback would mirror her professor's feedback, by focusing only on "word choice, APA, minor stuff."

Yet Miranda's actual experience with this peer review—in which her peer was able to succinctly diagnose Miranda's dissatisfaction with her paper—shows that a doctoral program's highly specialized forms of learning, and the highly specialized communities of peers that it assembles, can create an activity system in which students themselves can stand as expert community members, and can more actively partake, along with faculty, in the divisions of labor that support writers' progress towards their goals. Miranda's peer—to Miranda's surprise—showed herself more than capable of taking on that expert position. Indeed, Miranda's interviews and writing logs show that, after receiving her peer's incisive responses, Miranda began to recalibrate her sense of what peers can offer, and why. Because of this classmate's own cultural and historical experiences with the discipline, including having a bachelor's degree in the field, Miranda realized that the peer may have had a particularly nuanced grasp of what doctoral level writing entails. As Miranda reported, "Maybe she knew, 'hey, I'm used to hearing a new voice when I read something. I'm not hearing that in your writing.'"

Also significant is Miranda's realization that peer feedback might provide not only procedural (knowing how) and declarative (knowing that) expertise (Carter, 1990), but a level of open-ended

engagement with the revising process that could, in some cases, surpass what faculty can bring. Miranda recounted that her professor, who had already seen and responded to most of Miranda's pre-writing work, described this draft as "basically done. You just have to polish it a little bit." Given this faculty member's logistical constraints (teaching multiple students at once) and curricular goals (teaching towards specific course outcomes), such a response is understandable. But it diverged significantly from the detailed feedback offered by Miranda's peer. Unlike the faculty member, Miranda's peer had never before seen the paper, and was only responding to one draft rather than a classroom full of drafts; moreover, she came to Miranda's paper, Miranda explained, particularly interested in the research topic that Miranda was investigating. Indeed, scholars have noted the extent to which faculty feedback attends more to the final product than the intricacies of process (e.g. Rogers, Zawacki, & Baker 2016). Miranda's experience with peer feedback suggests that disciplinary peers may, in some cases, be better positioned than faculty to offer depthful engagement with a draft still in process, and to provide feedback that attends less to the narrow outcomes laid out by the course, and more to a writer's own evolving motives and ideas.

Overall, Miranda's initial surprise at her peer's feedback illustrates the difficulty many first-year doctoral students might have embracing the intellectual benefits of horizontal (student-student) modes of learning (Wegener et al, p. 1095), even for those students, like Miranda, who are well versed in the general value of peer support. These attitudes toward peer feedback also encapsulate some of Miranda's conflicting attitudes towards the sources of expertise in the context of doctoral study. Doctoral-level learning, of course, is shot through with this conflict: even as faculty may have the final word on students' high-stakes fulfillment of programmatic requirements, the nature of doctoral-level inquiry at same time begins to shrink the difference between student and faculty claims to disciplinary expertise. Miranda's experience similarly shows that such an apparent contradiction can be resolved through a less hierarchical understanding of what expert writing advice might comprise. As Miranda noted towards the end of the term, her experience with first-term doctoral writing inspired her to reconceptualize the nature of the writing guidance that faculty provide, reflecting that "In undergrad, you kind of take your professor's feedback as everything and just go off of that. But in grad school, you have to realize that professors are people, just like their students." As such, "the feedback [this professor] gives us is just that: feedback. It's suggestions." Indeed, and as her experience with this paper illustrates, faculty "are not going to catch every error in writing or always be able to articulate how to improve a piece of writing. ...We don't have to take everything [a faculty member] said, because she could have misinterpreted something."

By the end of the term, Miranda had begun to resolve each of these contradictions, or "historically accumulating structural tensions" (Engeström, 2001, p. 137), finding new generative solutions to what at times appeared to be intractable problems (e.g. "my writing will never look like that"). Indeed, explicitly working through these contradictions appeared to directly support Miranda's developing sense of agency as a burgeoning scholar, whether at the level of actively supplying her writing with its own motivation, seizing writerly authority and expanding her concept of the rules that govern scholarly writing, or recognizing the expertise held by peers little different from her in terms of scholarly status. As the term went on, in fact, Miranda expressed a new means of measuring her own success: a slowly developing, internalized sense of disciplinary goals and expectations that helped her to feel more capable of independently judging her progress and success in the field. As she explained:

I feel like I can gauge if I'm doing well if I feel like I'm doing well. I don't know if that makes sense but there's just a certain confidence that I think develops slowly. I am definitely not there yet, but I can already feel ... We're halfway through the semester now and I've definitely grown a lot in what I think gerontological writing is and how I think

I'm doing at it. I think I have a certain ... Kind of gauge myself of how I'm doing. I don't really know how to put that into words.

Indeed, and even if not yet embraced by most doctoral classroom practices, recent research has found that navigating feedback from multiple sources (i.e., both supervisors and peers) can help doctoral students develop a stronger sense of agency and scholarly identity (e.g. Inouye and McAlpine, 2017; Kim, 2018) as well as substantiating for students the “distributed” nature of doctoral level writing and learning (Wegener et al., 2016, p. 1093). Miranda’s experience shows both the difficulties and the benefits that these lessons can entail for learners. Such “confidence develops slowly,” as Miranda explained, in part because such confidence emerges only as learners redefine their conceptions of writing and themselves as writers, and confront the contradictions that inevitably arise as varied perspectives on the features of an activity system come into conflict. Even by the end of the term, Miranda still found it challenging “to put into words” exactly how she saw herself having changed. Nonetheless, she was able to recognize that a change had occurred, and through these reflections was able to recognize that such change had been at least partly enabled by her having to contend with the varied forces that a CHAT framework lays bare.

Conclusion

As our findings have demonstrated, doctoral writers face contradictions and tensions throughout their degree programs, even in the most carefully scaffolded and supported contexts. Indeed, these challenges are perhaps most visible at the beginning of their doctoral careers when they are acclimating to new disciplinary conventions and ways of writing. Yet for many doctoral students, these tensions remain inchoate and under-examined, vague curiosities and aberrations that appear marginal to the real work of doctoral-level learning-to-write (especially during their early and formative doctoral years).

Based on our analysis of these tensions, we offer three main conclusions. First, as tensions around motive, authority, and expertise may be inevitable to many doctoral level writing tasks, it is imperative to recognize and name them not as deficiencies, but as crucial opportunities for change and growth. In Miranda’s case, it was precisely these varied tensions that inspired her to resolve her own gnawing dissatisfaction with her writing. We should note that Miranda was able to revise her paper so productively that it has now been published at *The Gerontologist*, one of the leading journals in her field (Corpora, 2022). Even so, Miranda’s journey toward publication was far from straightforward. While the privilege of Miranda’s identity as a doctoral student at a university she previously attended and where she worked as a writing consultant is important context, her story also shows how difficult and messy doctoral writing can be, even in the most well-scaffolded circumstances. Indeed, Miranda’s experience suggests how much more complicated learning to write may be for those navigating less carefully designed pedagogical structures, or for international students, students of color, or other marginalized groups who face a host of other barriers within the academy (Ore, Wieser, & Cedillo, 2021).

As this case exemplifies, CHAT proves a critically useful framework in helping both researchers and students recognize and name these tensions, as it situates doctoral writing as an activity set in a system inevitably fraught with contradictions. Miranda reflected throughout our time working together on this project that she would not have understood her writing challenges in this way without the framework of CHAT, which prompts us to attend to the multiple elements entailed in the activity of writing, and the perspectives that different stakeholders may have on what those elements entail. Doctoral level writing tasks are often far more complex than their genre descriptors (e.g. “seminar paper”) can make them appear. In order to productively engage with their writing tasks, we argue, doctoral writers must engage with the contradictions that so often structure these tasks,

and find new solutions to the problems they present. Indeed, if such contradictions remain unrecognized and thus untheorized, students are less likely to recognize the crucial forms of learning these contradictions will also engender.

Second, we propose that the contradictions and tensions inherent to learning to write in graduate school not only be recognized as an engine of learning and growth, but that these potential contradictions also be made explicit to doctoral-level writers. Contradictions emerge precisely because doctoral writing is, by its very nature, defined by competing and ever-evolving perspectives on the tools, motives, rules, community members, and distributions of labor that enable writers to get specific tasks done. Too often, however, these conventions are left unspoken (Carter, 2007). Throughout her first term, Miranda was acutely aware of the publish or perish belief perpetuated by professors and advisors in her program, yet she felt unclear on how to meet these implicit demands. This experience is not unique; doctoral students are often confronted with the pressures of publishing and a simultaneous lack of transparent communication, and many do not feel comfortable asking for advice from their advisors or colleagues (Alvarez, Bonnet, & Khan, 2014). We argue that doctoral instructors and programs are obliged to more actively demystify these expectations, processes and challenges, along with other unspoken rules of doctoral education that, as Casanave (2007) has described, can create struggles for students trying to understand their roles in ambiguously-defined communities of academic writers. By demystifying these rules—whether in the classroom or other programmatic learning contexts—doctoral programs can foster a more supportive environment for doctoral students to recognize and work at more proactively resolving these tensions.

Finally, it is imperative to expand definitions of learning to write—as with all learning—with terms more inclusive than those provided by the typically vertical, instructor-student, expert-novice relationship. Not only will this help foster authority building among doctoral writers, but it will also allow for the recognition of peer expertise (which was crucial in Miranda’s case for resolving tension). Beyond the help provided by her peer-classmate, Miranda also drew and applied knowledge from her past experiences writing as an undergraduate and master’s student, sought support from the writing center, and even learned more about herself and her writing from collaborating on this project with research scholars (one of whom was also a graduate student peer) from a vastly different discipline (in this case, writing studies). Of course, no writing studies scholar would argue against the pedagogical utility of these separate sites of support. Our work, however, reveals some of the ways these forms of support can be triangulated to very good effect. That is: our case study demonstrates not only that these sites of support are separately useful, but that a graduate learner benefits from their combined use, and in whatever sequence will most help the individual learner, given the challenges they are confronting. Especially during the first term of a doctoral program, moreover, all students should be encouraged to take advantage of these triangulated forms of support, even students whom faculty might consider quite on track in meeting course expectations.

Our case study thus suggests that support for learning to write at the doctoral-level may be most productive when networked in this way, as well as when mindfully conceptualized as such. As we show, a single faculty member cannot provide everything a doctoral student will need, despite many programs’ institutionally sanctioned implication that a student’s advisor or classroom instructor stands as that student’s premiere source of guidance (e.g. Casanave, 2019). Turning to varied community members and support programs can help writers to reconcile many of the tensions they will face. Students’ self-reflective use of these support systems should therefore be understood as a crucial element in the larger activity that constitutes doctoral students’ learning-to-write, and engaging analytically with the tensions that mark this activity should be seen as a site of transformative growth. As Miranda’s experience shows, such self-reflection can result in a more

integrative learning experience for graduate writers as they learn new and highly specialized forms of disciplinary writing.

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Notes

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² Here, Miranda echoes the early scholarship defending so-called generalist (or at least non-specialist) tutoring for graduate writers, e.g. Hubbuch (1998), and Devet (1995). Michael Pemberton (2019), revisiting a 1995 essay on writing centers, WAC programs, and the question of disciplinarity, overviews

this literature and calls for writing centers to instead attend to graduate students' needs for more specialized and disciplinarily informed guidance from peers).

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