PERCEPTIONS OF SOUTHERN CULTURE AND WRITING PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE: A PHENOMENOLOGY

by

Mary Allison Fetters

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to develop a deeper understanding of the perceptions of students, faculty, administration, and visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program for encouraging composition student writing and learning about Southern culture. Southern culture is defined as phenomena which shape the regional experience and resonate through the lives of individuals native to the US South. Participants in the study that was conducted in Chattanooga, Tennessee consisted of two current English administrators, four current English professors, eight composition students who participated in the Writers@Work program, and two visiting Southern authors whose works were used as the common texts for the Writers@Work program for two academic years. Data collection was conducted through one focus group, interviews, and textual analysis of the Writers@Work common texts used during the 2011-2012 and 2013-2014 academic years. Data analysis was performed ontologically (Creswell, 2013) using phenomenological reflection (van Manen, 1990) and thematic analysis (Ayers, 2008; van Manen, 1990). The results of this phenomenological qualitative study show the Writers@Work program provides greater depth of materials and a more meaningful learning experience for students by combining Southern literature with composition studies. This approach provides greater opportunities for students to learn more about Southern culture while advancing their critical thinking and written communication skills. The combined perspectives presented in this study demonstrate the effectiveness of a program, such as Writers@Work, for providing an enhanced and inspirational learning experience that enriches the overall experience for stakeholders.

Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my dear parents, Larry and Mary Webb, and my uncle, Howard Webb, for instilling a love of learning and education in me from a very young age. Had it not been for this foundation, I would not be where I am today. Who knows? I might have ended up being an "Icee Man."

I dedicate my dissertation to my husband, Ryan. I appreciate your constant encouragement and for reminding me that I could do this when I felt that I could not. I appreciate your keen intelligence and your sense-of-humor that helped me maintain the confidence I needed to see this through to the end. You are the best!

I dedicate my dissertation to the late Jenny Salladay. Jenny was one of the most enthusiastic educators I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. Jenny's love of learning was evident in the way she constantly encouraged and inspired others. Jenny's excitement about learning, reading, and broadening minds was contagious and has continued to inspire me to this day.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to the late Dr. Donald F. Andrews. I had decided that a Master's degree was enough and was at peace with that decision. That was until one day when Dr. Andrews called me into his office and said, "Have you given any more thought to pursuing a doctorate? I'd really like to see you do that." I would never have had the courage to take the next step without Dr. Andrews' prompting followed by his endless support and encouragement.

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I would like to thank the many dear friends who have supported me in this process. I would like to especially thank the following people: Dr. Maria Rankin-Brown, you have cheered me on from the beginning and I will be forever grateful for your love and friendship. Dr. Dorothy Weathersby, you have been my role model and dear friend for years. Your advice over Friday lunches made a world of difference in helping me see through to the end of this process. Dr. Anna Harrington, through cups of tea and conversation, you pushed me toward the finish line while offering thoughtful advice when hurdles appeared.

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Special thanks go to authors Terry Kay and Jill McCorkle (who just happen to be two of my heroes). Terry, you have been a source of encouragement through the entirety of this process. And like it or not, Ryan and I have decided to adopt you as part of our family. As soon as you served us your famous eggplant parmesan, we had no choice. The deal was sealed. Jill, I cannot thank you enough for your hospitality and graciousness when Ryan and I traveled to

Hillsborough to meet with you. I will never forget the conversation on your back porch during that lovely spring day. And yes, Ryan and I want to adopt you, too, if you're game.

Liberty University, you have developed a stellar doctoral program from which I am happy to be a graduate. During my studies at Liberty, I was constantly impressed by the high academic standards in every course I took. I especially appreciated the student support resources in place to make the journey less onerous. It is with the highest of praise that I recommend Liberty University to those wishing to continue (or begin) their educational experience.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The culturally rich works of Southern literature typically provide a solid means by which to identify and isolate values and to establish a deeper understanding of the culture itself as portrayed through characters' actions, thoughts, and dialogue. The works of Southern literature can also provide valuable learning materials through which composition students can further their writing through cultural exploration. This study attempted to analyze the perceptions of students, faculty, administration, and visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program for encouraging student writing and learning about Southern culture. I will begin this chapter by providing background information and situation to self. Next, I will discuss the problem and purpose statements. Then, I will address the significance of the study and present the research questions. From there, I will discuss the research plan as well as delimitations and limitations. Finally, I will provide definitions for pertinent terms used in the study and I will summarize the chapter.

Background

In a disintegrating society where values are no longer prioritized, it becomes necessary to return to the roots of literature for a fresh perspective. As reported by Fries, Shmid, Dietz, and Hofer (2005), "Societal values are a key concept in social as well as cross-cultural psychology" (p. 259). Societal values, on both regional and cultural levels, are frequently expressed through representative literary works. The works of Southern literature, with their rich cultural heritage, traditionally provide abundant material for extracting values and an understanding of the culture

itself as portrayed through characters' actions, thoughts, and dialogue. The works of Southern literature can also provide valuable sources through which composition students can further their writing through cultural exploration.

Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program was developed with the idea that composition students would become more actively engaged in their own writing and would be more interested in the required reading and Southern studies if given the opportunity to work directly with Southern authors. Within the Writers@Work program, a common Southern literary work is selected each year and is studied in all class sections of the second semester of the first-year composition program. Then, the author of the common text is invited to campus for one week during spring semester to work with students through a variety of activities, such as writing workshops, classroom visits, interviews, community presentations, and other campus events. This study attempted to analyze the perceptions of students, faculty, administration, and visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program for encouraging student writing and learning about Southern culture. Through this assessment, I hoped to develop a deeper understanding of the evolving needs of composition students in finding a more relevant experience in college composition studies through initiatives such as Writers@Work. Reviewing the educators' and the authors' perspectives where possible provided valuable information which identified student connections with writing in the second-semester composition course and learning Southern cultural expression and nuances through the common book selection.

The available literature today reports various influences and discusses current topics typical for composition studies. Process-based writing theory is the most prevalent focus within most composition programs due to its ability to prepare students for academic writing across all

disciplines (Brown & Marshall, 2010; Prince, 2007). When students learn to plan, draft, revise, and edit, they learn a structured process that can lessen the stress some feel when writing (Eckstein, Chariton, & McCollum, 2011; Prince, 2007). Teaching multi-draft writing and peer-editing is also emphasized in many composition programs as a means by which students can improve their writing skills (Eckstein et al., 2011; Kreth, Crawford, Taylor, & Brockman, 2010; Tsai & Chuang, 2013). Both process-writing and multi-draft writing are most effective when taught in a workshop setting, another standard in many composition programs (Brown & Marshall, 2012). Composition studies require students to learn to analyze their thoughts and the research of others to begin exercising higher level thinking skills that ideally evolves into writing from a more critical angle (Macbeth, 2009; McCune, 2004). Research demonstrates the increased likelihood of greater academic success that can result from strong academic writing skills (Perpignan, Rubin, & Katznelson, 2007; Preiss, Castillo, Flotts, & San Martin, 2013; Preiss, Castillo, Grigorenko, & Manzi, 2013).

By learning more about student perception of technologically-supported writing tasks where students are allowed to use technological devices available, educators can better assess restrictions and triumphs students will experience through a technologically-supported writing process (Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009; Kirtley, 2005; Sweeny, 2010). Students of today are prolific writers, editors, and communicators because of the available technology (Alvermann, 2008; Amicucci, 2014; Haas, Takayoshi, Carr, Hudson & Pollok, 2011; Kirtley, 2005; Maranto & Barton, 2009; Purdy, 2009; Sweeny, 2010). Educators must work to bridge the gap between informal, social writing and formal, academic writing by teaching students the art of code-switching for different audiences (Amicucci, 2014; Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009; Sweeny, 2010). Current research also demonstrates the need for composition instructors to

incorporate literacy practices within courses which can lead to improved writing skills (Monte-Sano, 2012).

Even though these aforementioned topics of composition studies are addressed in the literature, the research does not reflect a conclusive or sufficient indication of student perceptions toward English composition when combined with a literary genre, specifically Southern literature. There is a significant gap in literature when it comes to the role of teaching Southern literature as a means by which to make composition more relevant for first-year composition students.

Current literature provides limited information pertaining to Southern literature taught within English composition courses. Southern studies within the classroom serve as a valuable means by which to review the cultural elements that are present. Youssef (2010) and Newell, Tallman, and Letcher (2009) expressed the need for active learning that is relevant for students to most benefit from Southern cultural studies of any sort. Numerous research studies have shown the importance of increased development of writing communities and writing workshop environments for creating a greater sense of relevance for students within composition classes (Lei, Kuestermeyer, & Westmeyer, 2010; McCune, 2004; Prince, 2007; Rahimi, 2013). Collaborative learning can serve to further student motivation and development (Lei, Kuestermeyer, & Westmeyer, 2010; McCune, 2004; Prince, 2007; Rahimi, 2013).

Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program provides active learning throughout the academic year. Students must seek to find their own identities within the cultural identities presented from all literature (Figueira, 2010; Roberts, 2007). The Writers@Work program provides a direct means by which this can occur. Southern literary studies have undergone a change in recent years in order to move beyond the traditional black-

white review in order to consider greater diversity, including gender and sexuality studies, and regional studies (Brinkmeyer, 2001; Burrison, 2003; Kreyling, 2005; Prenshaw, 2006; Stecopoulos, 2011). As such, the administrators of the Writers@Work program work to select varying literary genres by Southern authors of diverse backgrounds in order to embrace and encourage the diversity that is now an accepted part of Southern studies. Current research fails to address the importance of teaching specific literary genres for the purpose of teaching students more about the cultures in which they live; as a result, this creates a significant gap in the literature.

This study aimed to review the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program as perceived by composition students, faculty and administration, and authors of the common texts in providing students with a deeper experience with writing and learning about Southern culture. As the majority of the participants were Southern natives, this produced a rich source of information to contribute to the overall research and to Southern cultural studies. Further, a hermeneutic textual analysis of the selected texts of participating authors was conducted in an effort to identify prevailing Southern themes reflecting cultural nuances.

Situation to Self

Growing up in the South, I have always had a love of Southern literature as I could best relate to the stories and situations due to their general familiarity in both setting and characterization. When I was pursuing a master's degree in English at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, I focused on literary criticism and took as many classes pertaining to Southern literature as possible to continue with this personal interest. I began teaching at a local, private high school teaching general literature and eventually progressed to more of an administrative role at Chattanooga State Community College. After serving in this role for three

years, my husband and I moved to Florida for him to pursue his own education. While there, I continued in an administrative role at Florida State Community College. The next transition involved a move to Maine for my husband's career where I ended up working at a marketing research firm, a career path that was drastically different from anything I had experienced previously. It was during this time of living and working in a completely new and different environment that I really began to reflect on the contrasts between the northeastern United States and the southeastern United States. I felt at times like a displaced Southerner as I wondered how I had gotten so far away from my roots geographically but also in terms of my career and interests. I began noticing the strength and beauty of the Southern experience while also recognizing the weaknesses that lingered as a result of a tumultuous history. I constantly noted the varying comments of others who were from the North when they discussed their own perceptions of the South. Amusingly, I was even asked several times if people in the South wear shoes or not. During this time, I returned to my own exploration of Southern literature as a way to remain grounded in what I loved while also embracing the newness of a different experience. I worked to suspend any assignment of stereotypes and to view the contrasts, and the occasional comparisons, through as neutral of a lens as possible. When I relocated to the South a couple of years later, I had a new appreciation of my background and from where I had come. I lived in the South again. I was teaching English again. It seemed I had come full circle and was back where I was meant to be. When the English department at Chattanooga State began its initial planning of the Writers@Work initiative to focus on Southern literature, I felt a new and inspiring excitement both professionally and personally.

The purpose of the Writers@Work program is to provide students with a richer experience within their second semester of composition studies. By reading a common book and

having the opportunity to meet the author during the academic year, students may better connect with the readings and, in turn, with their writing. I was interested in conducting this research study to determine whether the program influenced writing practices and learning about Southern culture as perceived by students, educators, and authors involved in the program. Since I have taught Freshman English previously, I am familiar with the learning objectives for the course and see the potential for a more meaningful educational experience as a result of the Writers@Work program. As I have not taught Freshman English for several semesters, I was able to view the initiative from a more distanced perspective.

I utilized an ontological philosophical assumption with a social constructivism interpretive framework to guide the study. According to Creswell (2013), an ontological philosophical assumption questions "the nature of reality" (p. 21) and allows for multiple realities to exist as multiple perspectives exist. This study revealed "different perspectives as themes develop in the findings" (Creswell, 2013, p. 21). Within a social constructivism interpretive framework, "multiple realities are constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with others" (Creswell, 2013, p. 36). As such, a social constructivism interpretative framework supports an ontological philosophical assumption which was most suitable for this study.

Problem Statement

In the analysis of literature that is representative of composition studies, there is an increasing need to make the first-year composition experience one of relevance and personal worth to students (Goodburn & Camp, 2004; Kreth, Crawford, Taylor, & Brockman, 2010; McCune, 2004; Robertson, Taczak, & Yancey, 2012). Because the experience becomes more relevant, students are more invested in learning more about writing rather than viewing writing

assignments from the usual stance of dread. Thus, we are driven to respond to the call to reconsider composition studies in order to best address ways we can improve student motivation toward developing their writing skills (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008; Lei, Kuestermeyer, & Westmeyer, 2010; Wolsey, Lapp, & Fisher, 2012).

First-year composition programs do not typically include literary genre studies. This structure creates limitations as argumentative writing can be taught simultaneously with the teaching of critical analysis typical in literary studies. By using Southern literary works as the subject matter for a second-semester composition course, the course content enables students to engage in a richer, more meaningful experience. A more thorough understanding of the culture and its implications can be understood and discovered by examining the cultural values present within Southern literature through the educators' and the authors' perspectives for the purpose of developing argumentative writing skills. This can make a difference when teaching writing skills and also when teaching cultural implications of Southern literature.

Roberts (2007) and Brinkmeyer (2011) identified the presence of a political lens through which values are sometimes established; however, Ferris (2012) suggested an exploration of a greater context of Southern literary works. Zhang (2012) asserted the importance of culture as a means by which to define the human experience when he said:

> Culture includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom, other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society, and thus Sapir (1921/2000) defines culture as what a society does and thinks. Culture is learned, and we learn culture from proverbs, folk tales, legends, myths, art and mass media. Culture is based on symbols, and language bridges between culture and symbols. Culture is transmitted from generation to generation through language. (p. 32)

The discussion of the concept of culture and its many modes is useful in setting the stage for composition students as they begin an examination of the role of Southern culture in literature and the portrayal of values important to a set cultural group.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to develop a deeper understanding of student, faculty and administration, and visiting Southern authors' perceptions of the effectiveness of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program for encouraging student writing and learning about Southern culture. Southern culture is defined as phenomena which shape the regional experience and resonate through the lives of individuals native to the South. Participants of the study conducted in Chattanooga, Tennessee consisted of two current English administrators, four current English professors, eight students who have participated in the Writers@Work program, and two Southern authors whose works have been used as the common texts for the Writers@Work program for two academic years. A textual analysis of the selected common texts for the Writers@Work program was conducted to further establish Southern cultural themes.

Significance of the Study

Research had not been conducted to examine the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program's ability to teach second-semester composition students about writing skills and Southern culture simultaneously. This study sought to provide insight into a deeper understanding of the perceptions of students, faculty, administration, and visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in assisting students with developing their writing skills, as well as broadening and deepening their understanding of Southern culture.

This study sought to provide a deeper understanding of the overall emerging themes and the prevailing essence of the shared experience through the varying participant perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). This study also provided a greater understanding of how composition programs that provide richer experiences for students outside of the typical composition objectives influence students' perceptions of writing. Additionally, this study presented the added benefit of students' perceptions of Southern cultural studies as a more meaningful basis for their writing assignments that creates greater student interest in engaging with the materials. Understanding faculty perceptions of student learning in composition courses that combine writing pedagogy with Southern literary studies provided a strong example which other composition programs may wish to emulate. Delineating possible Southern cultural themes present in the literary texts through textual analysis provided a more complete understanding of the subject-matter possibilities available to students simultaneously exploring composition and literary genre studies.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were developed with the objective of trying to establish the essence of the perceptions of students, faculty, administration, and visiting Southern authors of the Writers@Work program for inspiring students regarding a deeper understanding of writing and Southern culture (Moustakas, 1994). As van Manen (1990) stated, "To do phenomenological research is *to question* something phenomenologically and, also, to be addressed by the question of what something is 'really' like. What is the nature of this lived experience?" (p. 42). Based on a review of current and related literature pertaining to composition and regional studies, five research questions were developed that sought to capture the perceptions of students, faculty, administration, and visiting Southern authors of the

Writers@Work program for inspiring students toward a deeper understanding of writing and Southern culture (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). Thus, the research questions were developed after a thorough review of current literature in order to best ground them in the literature. Additionally, the research questions were developed with the objective of honing in on the "nature of this lived experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 42).

Research Question 1. What are the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging the development of writing skills?

Research Question 2. What are the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

Research Question 3. What are the perceptions of visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with the development of writing skills?

Research Question 4. What are the perceptions of visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

Research Question 5. Which themes are present in the Writers@Work texts used during the 2011-2012 and 2013-2014 academic years that provide the framework for a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

Research Plan

This qualitative study was conducted using a phenomenological design to explore the phenomenon of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program's

effectiveness in providing composition students with a deeper understanding of writing and Southern culture. A phenomenological approach was appropriate due to its ability to demonstrate research "oriented toward lived experiences (phenomenology)" (Creswell, 2013, p. 79). In fact, this concept of lived experience informs the entire phenomenological process (van Manen, 1990). As van Manen (1990) expressed, "A lived experience has a certain essence, a 'quality' that we recognize in retrospect" (p. 36). This approach was appropriate due to its ability to establish a deeper, richer meaning of a shared phenomenon through reflection and retrospection. Creswell (2013) described phenomenology as "the exploration of [a] phenomenon with a group of individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon" (p. 78). Van Manen (1990) stated,

> The point of phenomenological research is to "borrow" other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience. (p. 62)

Participants of the study conducted in Chattanooga, Tennessee, consisted of two current English administrators, four current English professors, eight composition students who have participated in the Writers@Work program, and two visiting Southern authors whose works have been used as the common texts for the Writers@Work program for two academic years. Data collection was conducted through one focus group, interviews, and hermeneutical textual analysis of the Writers@Work common texts used in 2011-2012 and 2013-2014. Through the research gathered in a focus group and interviews of students, faculty and administration, and authors who have participated in the Writers@Work program, I aimed to demonstrate the shared phenomena of the Writers@Work program.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations that existed include the use of a very specific program, Chattanooga State

Community College's Writers@Work, as the basis for the phenomenological study. As this is a

qualitative study, strong results can be produced with 10-15 participants and through

triangulation of data collection. Due to the amount of information that was obtained through a

focus group with students, interviews with current English faculty and administrators, and

interviews with participating authors in the Writers@Work program, I defined the results

according to the information gathered from individuals with direct experience with the program.

The results should be applicable to the other composition programs while keeping the boundaries

of this study relatively confined.

Limitations included using a rather new program, such as Writers@Work, to make a

larger statement about composition studies and the influence Southern literature may have on

students' overall learning experience. Limitations also included using only two participating

authors' experiences to provide a larger indication of the effects on students' perception.

Definitions

1. Critical writing – Students writing to "examine ideas in depth, to integrate and critically

   evaluate what they read, and to state their understanding" (McCune, 2004, p. 257).

2. Southern culture – Cultural implications of the Southeastern United States examined

   through that which comprises Southern identity, such as racial contexts, Appalachia

   studies, regionalism, myth and stereotypes, and ideological and philosophical beliefs

   (Prenshaw, 2005; Kreyling, 2005; Stecopoulous, 2011; Burrison, 2003; Roberts, 2007).

3. Southern literature – Southern literature is literature associated with the southeastern

   United States. Southern literature also forms an undeniable connection with geographical

and historical association (Rubin, 1990). Further Southern literature is shaped as a genre by regional connectedness and the role of memory as well as a sense of values and honor suggesting similar theological and philosophical beliefs among its people (Ladd, 2005).

4. Writing process – Four primary stages of writing that consists of planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Eckstein, Chariton, & McCollum, 2011; Prince, 2007).

Summary

The works of Southern literature, with their rich cultural heritage, traditionally provide abundant material for extracting values and an understanding of the culture itself as portrayed through characters' actions, thoughts, and dialogue. The works of Southern literature can also provide valuable sources through which composition students can further their writing through cultural exploration. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to develop a deeper understanding of the perceptions of students, faculty, administration, and visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program for encouraging composition student writing and learning about Southern culture.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter Two presents the theoretical framework and related literature pertaining to the elements of first-year composition studies and the use of a literature genre, specifically Southern literature, to teach composition. Schwandt (2001) asserted the necessity of reviewing current literature in order to best establish what is already known; it is only when this occurs that gaps in current literature can be revealed. Creswell (2013) emphasized the necessity of a scholarly literature assessment in order to best "provide the rationale for the problem and position one's study within the ongoing literature about the topic" (p. 133).

For this phenomenological study, there is a significant lack of current and applicable research demonstrating the role of teaching Southern literature as a means by which to make composition more relevant for first-year composition students. Further, current literature presents a gap in the exploration of student perception of first-year composition studies. I will begin by discussing the theoretical framework which forms the foundation for this study. Then, I will provide a review of current and related literature to address composition studies and the use of Southern literature in the classroom. Finally, I will provide a summary of the current literature while clearly establishing gaps this study will seek to address.

Theoretical Framework

I used two theories in the development of the theoretical framework for this study: Bandura's (1979) Social Learning Theory and Bruner's (2004) theory of constructivism. In both composition studies and cultural studies, students are responsible for building upon that which has been shaped by previously attained knowledge and experiences and to construct deeper

meanings to take them to the next level of learning and understanding. The Writers@Work program as a part of the second-semester English composition course provides a specific format for Bandura's (1979) Social Learning Theory and Bruner's (2004) theory of constructivism to be engaged. As students write essays that build on previous essays, they are employing the theory of constructivism as they work to build on their previous knowledge of the writing process. They also actively engage in Social Learning Theory as they work with other classmates through peer-editing, small group work, and class discussions. Further, when learning more about Southern culture through an exploration of the common text, students must draw from the knowledge they brought into the class and build on that knowledge through personal reference as they are exposed to the literature. They also learn from other students from varying backgrounds and experiences that serve as a legitimate basis of comparison and contrast from their own experiences. Students learn from this shared experience by either confirming what they already know and believe and/or by opening their minds to new ideas and principles. First, I will discuss Bandura's (1979) Social Learning Theory and how individuals bring knowledge from previous experiences into new learning environments. Second, I will discuss Bruner's (2004) theory of constructivism where learners work to build their own learning foundations based on experiences. Both theories formed an important framework on which this study was based.

Social Learning Theory

According to Bandura (1979), in normal human functioning, reflection and self-referent behavior held a prominent role in keeping with social learning theory. This provides a foundation for each individual by which knowledge of previous experiences can be derived in order to best forge ahead into new experiences. Individuals apply self-referent thought to decisions throughout every day as they seek to determine the best course of action; as such, self-

referent behavior is an active part in determining individuals' behavior. Social learning theory does not assert individuals are blank slates (tabula rasa) at birth. Bandura (1979) posited, "Infants display attentional selectivities [sic] and some capacity for organizing experiences . . . [and] infants reciprocally influence their social environment from birth" (p. 440). Such self-regulation of the human system from birth provides decision-making parameters while also providing motivation toward action. Self-referent behavior is evident among literary characters. Within the study of literature, the reader is provided access to the minds of the characters and allowed to witness self-referent thoughts at play that frequently influence the actions of the characters. This theoretical foundation is important for observing literary characters but also for seeing how the actions of the characters influence the decisions of real people. The act of writing about these reflections and observations through literary analysis within essays demonstrates an active role in Social Learning Theory.

Constructivism

Bruner's (2004) contributions to constructivism asserted that learning is an active, learner-based process whereby learners work to construct their understanding of the subject at hand. Learners analyze the material against prior experience and knowledge in order to progress to a higher level of understanding of the material or situation. Learners bring their cultural understanding to learning scenarios in an attempt to find contrasts and comparisons and to learn from such similarities and differences in order to form a new reality. Constructivism is an ongoing process for learners with more advanced scaffolding being constructed as learners constantly builds on their learning foundation and understanding. In this sense, according to constructivists, learning is not acquired; rather, it is built by learners themselves (Bruner, 2004). This provides an understanding of the role of constructivism and the manner in which it: (a)

Serves as the basis of interpretation for readers using their own backgrounds and cultural experiences to further develop their understanding of the ideals, and (b) serves as the foundation for writers hoping to take previously learned skill-sets to the next level within composition studies.

Related Literature

When conducting a review of English composition studies in higher education, there are nine specific areas addressed according to the literature available today. These areas consist of (a) student-centered writing, (b) writing as a process, (c) critical writing and analysis, (d) writing as craft and imitation, (e) student awareness through relevance and personal connections to writing, (f) student use of computers in composition classrooms, (g) student relevance found through the use of digital literacy in composition, (h) awareness of today's students' literacy practices, and (i) student motivations with writing. Current gaps exist in the area of student perception of composition studies in higher education. When specifically researching regional studies within the composition discipline, current literature explores Southern literature in the classroom and its respective implications, the concept of new Southern studies and its influence on literature and teaching, and Southern culture themes and values. Overall, the research available is extremely limited; there is a gap in current research demonstrating the effectiveness of combining English composition with Southern literature to teach both writing and the Southern cultural experience.

Student-Centered Writing

Within college-level English composition classes, student-centered writing encourages more of an active, engaging writing process than simply following specific steps to produce an essay. Student-centered writing calls for more self-exploration and active demonstration of

writing as an organic example of reflection while students actively work with materials on a deeper level. Student-centered writing, as taught in the composition classroom, consists of student collaboration in various forms (Chao & Lo, 2011; Haas, Takayoshi, Carr, Hudson, & Pollock, 2011; Lei et al., 2010; McCune, 2004; Prince, 2007; Rahimi, 2013; Woo, Chu, & Li, 2013). This student-centered approach is not viewed as separate from the writing process pedagogy of traditional composition classrooms; rather, it should be taught in conjunction with the writing process as a mutually supporting system where the student-centered methods support and strengthen the writing process and vice versa (Prince, 2007). Current literature has shown the most common trends of student collaboration in writing through the development of writing communities and writing workshops (Chao & Lo, 2011; Haas et al., 2011; Lei et al., 2010; McCune, 2004; Prince, 2007; Rahimi, 2013).

Lei et al. (2010) defined collaborative (cooperative) learning as "students working in small groups to achieve a common goal" (p. 317). Lei et al. (2010) and Chao and Lo (2011) elaborated on this by asserting the need for some type of interaction among the group for goals and learning outcomes to be reached. It is through this interaction for the sake of obtaining knowledge and learning within collaborative groups that true student-centered learning occurs (Chao & Lo, 2011; Lei et al., 2010; Prince, 2007). Bogdan et al. (2009) demonstrated the positive nature of group work as perceived by students as "being able to contribute to the group task, learning something from group members, sharing the workload with their group members, and perceiving the group experience as helpful for their future careers" (p. 823). A study by Haas et al. (2011) established an increased consideration of writing group dynamics due to social contexts created by social network spaces and other digital communication forums. Particularly at the higher education level, a correlation exists between student interaction and successful

achievement of learning outcomes within composition classes. Collaborative efforts within composition classes assist students with "increas[ing] student learning and social-emotional outcomes such as social skills, self-esteem, and attitudes toward others" (Lei et al., 2010, p. 317).

Collaborative assignments provide an opportunity for students to learn from each other, both in terms of materials and social skills, as they work together to develop a plan to collectively accomplish the tasks at hand. Collaborative writing environments better prepare students for the workforce where projects are typically assigned to more than one individual in an effort to produce the best product possible. Lei et al. (2010) stated, "Students who work in cooperative learning groups often outperform students who work independently or in competition with each other" (p. 318). Additionally, student collaboration can help develop and strengthen the skills and motivation levels of weaker writers as students work collectively toward achieving desired learning outcomes (Bogdan, Eidsness, Johnson, Myers, Schoo, Smith, & Zackery, 2009; Lei et al., 2010; Peterson, 2014; Prince, 2007; Sweeny, 2010). A mixed-methods study by Woo, Chu, and Li (2013) demonstrated the importance of student collaboration for essay revision and peer-feedback, especially when employing the use of technology, such as that provided by wikis. A mixed-methods study by Chao and Lo (2011) confirmed the importance of collaboration through wiki-technology for essay development, revision, and peer review. Chao and Lo's (2011) research reflected students spending more time on writing assignments while also maintaining greater focus when writing through wiki-supported environments. Sweeny's (2010) research further supported the use of technology for student collaboration by emphasizing the importance of incorporating the technological tools available for students to work together virtually.

When considering other technological tools that promote student-centered writing, a grounded theory study by Haas et al. (2011) showed how instant messaging (IM) utilizes collaborative writing elements that can easily translate into the English composition classroom. Given the current number of digital resources inundating the world of written communication, Haas et al. (2011) predicted greater progression toward the teaching of overall composition strategies and a movement away from specific language-level concerns, such as those found at the word-level and sentence-level (punctuation, spelling, etc.). Haas et al. (2011) established that even beyond instant messaging, text messaging is "the most common computer-mediated communication among college students" (p. 398). Haas et al. (2011) also believed the mobile phone better supports writing in standard written English compared to other digital technologies of today. Whatever the approach, student collaboration can be especially beneficial to students working their way through the various stages of the writing process.

Writing as a Process

The purpose of teaching composition students to internalize writing as a process is to provide exact steps for students to follow in order to remove the nebulous nature of an otherwise daunting action: Writing in a manner that is concise and communicates precisely that which the writer wishes to convey. Understanding this process as a whole is fundamentally important to one's academic success as writing is an integral part of coursework and examinations (Brown & Marshall, 2012). Process-based writing pedagogy removes some of the stress involved with writing to allow students to reflect more deeply with their subject matter (Prince, 2007). Mastery of such skills can lead to strengths with applying skills that ultimately "orient the reader to the theme and substantive material of an academic essay" (Brown & Marshall, 2012, p. 653). Chao and Lo (2011) asserted the importance of teaching the writing process in its ability to shift the

students' focus from producing the final product to developing writing skills applicable to all disciplines and all types of writing assignments. When writing is viewed as a process, students quickly learn the importance of the multiple stages to build a strong written product, such as an essay, from the beginning stages to the development of the finished and final product. The Writing Program Administrators of America's "Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition," stated composition students should:

> Be aware that it usually takes multiple drafts to create and complete a successful text/ Develop flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading/ Understand writing as an open process that permits writers to use later invention and re-thinking to revise their work/ Understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes/ Learn to critique their own and others' works/ Learn to balance the advantages of relying on others with the responsibility of doing their part/ Use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences. (as cited in Prince, 2007, p. 3)

Ultimately, composition students are best served when taught four primary stages of writing that consists of planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Eckstein, Chariton, & McCollum, 2011; Prince, 2007). Chao and Lo (2011) added a fifth stage to the process to include publishing. Mastery of the various steps of the writing process works best when accomplished in a manner that emphasizes an organic approach to the writing where various parts of any essay may at any time undergo one of the four stages before the essay is completed. Eckstein et al. (2011) referred to this as multi-draft composing where students "write successively improved drafts of a single composition between periods of feedback from peers, tutors, and/or teachers. It forces and mechanizes the act of revision—a skill long associated with good writing" (p. 162). This process should be viewed as iterative where steps are continuously

repeated until the desired outcome is achieved (Crawford, Taylor, & Brockman, 2010; Eckstein et al., 2011; Kreth, 2010). Research has demonstrated the benefits of multiple-draft writing for students working to improve academic writing competency (Crawford, Taylor, & Brockman, 2010; Eckstein et al., 2011; Kreth, 2010). Eckstein et al. (2011) showed the iterative model as one where significant improvements are made to better prepare students for all types of academic writing. As seen in a study by Brown and Marshall (2012), when these skills are taught in a workshop format, more immediate effects of teaching various parts of academic writing, such as rhetorical structure and content organization, are realized.

When learning the various parts of the writing process, literature has shown students interacting with and responding to the different considerations and requirements of the writing process. McCune's (2004) longitudinal study showed the emergence of three primary factors of the writing process as identified by students: "The role of evidence in their essays, the structures of their essays, and the conclusions of their essays" (p. 260). The study also demonstrated the need to design writing pedagogy that goes beyond mere instruction through "standard written feedback and handouts" (McCune, 2004, p. 279). Brown and Marshall (2012) utilized a longitudinal model to exhibit the importance of rigorously addressing the role of the introduction for any academic writing assignment. Brown and Marshall (2012) also showed how significant student learning occurs when teaching students how to employ solid rhetorical structure through the use of a writing process. Kirtley's (2005) multimodal study showed the importance of teaching students the writing process through the use of computer technology.

Although all parts of the writing process are important, current literature demonstrates the significance of peer-editing in contributing to the growth and development of English composition students' writing and approach to writing assignments. Peer-editing serves an

active part in the writing process while also adding to the role of student collaboration in composition studies (Lei et al., 2010; Peterson, 2014; Rahimi, 2013). According to Rahimi (2013), "Peer response is significant due to its ability to help learners improve their writing" (p. 68). When peer-editing is included in the writing process, students are encouraged to develop multiple drafts as they actively work to improve their writing (Peterson, 2014). Peer responses enable students to become more purposeful writers than they would be if they were only writing for their instructors (Rahimi, 2013). Rahimi (2013) stated, "Peer feedback as compared to teacher feedback, is more compatible with the students' level of proficiency, thus more manageable for the students to apply, and, more importantly, creates a sense of audience in the student writer" (p. 68). Rahimi (2013) and Tsai and Chuang (2013) demonstrated the importance of providing training for peer reviewers which, according to their studies, led to greater receptivity by students and an increased likelihood of applying peer comments to work. Lundstrom and Baker (2009) studied peer-editing from the position of the giver and discovered that peer reviewers who conducted the reviews and provided feedback demonstrated more significant growth in their own writing over the course of a semester than those students who solely received feedback. The most significant growth occurred for students with lower writing abilities at the beginning. Tsai and Chuang's (2013) quasi-experimental study showed a connection between applications of peer assessment and improved critical/argumentative writing.

Critical Writing and Analysis

Composition studies in higher education require a deeper level of analysis of material in order to hone students' critical writing and analytical thinking skills. Students must not only actively work with materials but must also "examine ideas in depth, to integrate and critically evaluate what they read, and to state their understanding clearly – which often means that they

develop their understanding further" (McCune, 2004, p. 257). Ultimately, students in higher education should improve and advance their ability to communicate effectively in varying delivery methods (Alfino, Pajer, Pierce, & Jenks, 2008). Improved communication can be improved in a variety of ways.

Macbeth's (2009) qualitative study established the importance of academic writing that sometimes begins as more of a definitive than argumentative product but progresses to a more complex product as the students become more comfortable with the writing objectives. A quasi-experimental study conducted by Tsai and Chuang (2013) demonstrated a definite link between structured peer assessment and its role in improving university students' skills in argumentative writing that was of better quality than that which had not undergone peer assessment. Preiss, Castillo, Grigorenko, and Manzi (2013) and Preiss, Castillo, Flotts, and San Martin (2013) showed the connection between writing skills (particularly skills which exhibited strong argumentative attributes) as a predictor of academic success for first-year university students. Phelan (2001) addressed the importance of incorporating critical analysis, specifically when writing about literature as he stated, "Including these critical arguments often enriches discussion and student understanding by providing students with new terms and concepts for analyzing texts and by showing them how knowledge gets constructed in literary studies" (p. 527). Wolsey et al.'s (2012) research showed a need for instructors to consider the following guidelines when teaching any type of academic writing: (a) Providing content area language models for students to follow, (b) creating literacy-rich classrooms from which "students should be expected to build from the oral, visual, and written models of academic discourse" (p. 722), and (c) teaching relevance of formal academic writing as it translates to informal writing tasks. Perpignan, Rubin, and Katznelson's (2007) qualitative study demonstrated the added benefit of secondary

outcomes many students experience when engaging in academic writing. Such secondary outcomes can lead to students advancing more with their writing skills than projected through pre-established course learning outcomes. The study specifically cited students reporting having learned more in terms of reading, speaking, and listening comprehension through a study of academic writing (Perpignan, Rubin, & Katznelson, 2007).

Teaching the elements of critical writing in academics is an important basis for composition studies. Alfino et al.s' (2008) case study demonstrated the benefits of teaching critical thinking and composition together in order to instill greater confidence in the writers. A qualitative research study conducted by Monte-Sano (2012) identified five primary characteristics that comprised a well-structured argumentative essay, such as "factual and interpretive accuracy, persuasiveness of evidence, sourcing of evidence, corroboration of evidence, and contextualization of evidence" (p. 296). Before advancing to this level though, students must learn to apply basic critical thinking skills as they address topics on a level deeper than sheer summary (Monte-Sano, 2012). As established by Perpignan, Rubin, and Katznelson (2007):

> Much of higher education research is still predominantly concerned with cognitive, administrative and ideological issues, i.e., with the development of critical thinking, accessibility, and accountability, lifelong learning, as well as learning skills. (p. 177)

These learning skills within the framework of teaching composition and literature serve as that which can provide the greatest improvement and advancement within students' writing and general communication skills (Mendenhall, 2013; Monte-Sano, 2012; Perpignan, Rubin & Katznelson, 2007). Advancement in writing and general communication skills, in turn, can lead

to more realistic understanding of expectations of writing tasks in business and industry fields (Mendenhall, 2013).

Although composition students in higher education are taught the process and general objectives of argumentative writing, research demonstrates a need to also teach students writing as a means of general human expression (Preiss, 2013). Mendenhall (2013) asserted the importance of maintaining the historical perspective of general education in its ability to "inculcate cultural and civic values and to prepare students for professions" (p. 90). Part of this includes teaching composition in a way that provides the outlet for general human expression while also being deemed transferable to other fields (Mendenhall, 2013; Preiss, 2013). This can be done in various ways, including writing through the art of imitation.

Writing as Craft and Imitation

Very limited research has been conducted regarding the teaching of writing as a craft through the art of imitation. Preiss (2013) contended students should be taught writing as a means of expression of thought, but also as a manifestation of a form of art. Preiss (2013) addressed the fact that creative writing is often neglected due to the supposition that it does not teach the same skills as the traditional argumentative writing taught in composition courses. Preiss (2013) argued both types of writing can ultimately lead to the development of a writer's persuasive communication skills.

Prince (2007) discussed the long-lost tradition of teaching writing through the use of imitation and also contends that careful reading and study of any genre can lead to successful imitation of that genre even when students do not necessarily possess the language level required for full understanding and comprehension of the genre. Cillerai et al. (2013) maintained the benefits of exposing students to many writing styles and writing genres in order to assist them

with finding their own style of writing. A study by Macbeth (2009) supported this by demonstrating the usefulness of students learning to model the various parts of the writing process when using works which contain the necessary elements, such as an introduction with thesis statement, body paragraphs to support the thesis, and a conclusion. Goodburn and Camp (2004) addressed the manner by which students can learn to mimic language for "shaping society and to realize, in turn, that they can write themselves into these conversations—to participate in, complicate, and perhaps re-make them" (p. 91). The art of imitation allows writers to advance more quickly than might otherwise be expected. For most students, advancement of skill is likely to occur due to nothing more than interest in the subject matter and a willingness to work with the material as a result. When students see the relevance and/or when personal connections can be established, learning occurs.

Student Awareness through Relevance and Personal Connections to Writing

Whether students are tasked with a more traditional expository writing assignment or with creative writing, when personal connections are made, students are more willing to actively engage with the materials. Macbeth (2009) and Robertson et al. (2012) discussed the importance of students drawing from prior knowledge when working to make writing more relevant and to develop more personal connections for themselves and their audience. Their studies demonstrate the effectiveness of students using this approach to "create their own new models of writing" (Robertson et al., 2012, p. 16). McCune's (2004) longitudinal study showed the roles of reading and careful reflection in allowing students to better connect with their own writing. Levine's (2001) research specifically demonstrated the role of literature for providing automatic student connections, such as through the instruction of values. As Levine (2001) explained, teaching literature "is far more the teaching of how to read, how to understand the relation of language

and genre to history, how to work with fictions [sic], symbols, metaphors, how to think about the relation of texts to culture" (p. 16). Learning these connections can provide a deeper experience for students that can translate into further development of composition skills. Further, McCune (2004) demonstrated the various disconnects that can easily occur when assignments are not perceived as relevant by students. Kreth et al.'s (2010) and Peterson's (2014) research reflected the need for relevant writing assignments that speak to today's students. Goodburn and Camp (2004) commented on their desire for students "to see the writing of argument as both a personal and critical matter as they study the intersections between public writing and their own lives" (p. 90). Peterson's (2014) research reflected the positive effects of allowing students to select topics of personal interest and relevance to naturally create a setting in which they were more apt to be excited to learn, research, and write.

Another key component at this stage is to allow students the time to properly research and gather as much information as they can about a topic in order to increase a sense of ownership and relevance (Peterson, 2014). When following this process, students begin to develop more advanced composition skills, especially when instruction is provided in a workshop format that allows students to advance their information gathering skills (Peterson, 2014). Students can further develop their writing skills when allowed to use computers for generation of writing products.

Student Use of Computers in Composition Classrooms

A multi-modal study conducted by Kirtley (2005) demonstrated the importance of instructors assessing students' previous computer and technology experience at the beginning of each new course. Kirtley (2005) asserted the importance of this assessment to understand challenges that may be present if computers are to be used within composition classes to assist

students with advancing their writing skills. Through understanding student perception, instructors can more thoroughly gauge limitations and success students will experience through a technologically-supported writing process (Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009; Kirtley, 2005; Sweeny, 2010). Kirtley (2005) suggested that writing instructors use the topic of computers and computer literacy as subject-matter for writing tasks. As Kirtley (2005) stated, "As instructors we should encourage students to discuss the entire composition process, stressing brainstorming, organizing, handwriting drafts, and typing, revising, formatting, and printing on the computer" (p. 224). In the technology age of today, many students find relevance when digital literacy practices are combined with more traditional composition tasks.

Student Relevance Found through the Use of Digital Literacy in Composition

Pulling from the research of Kathleen Blake Yancey, past president of National Council of Teachers of English, Haas et al. (2011) noted the increasing prevalence of writing education gleaned from everyday communication situations outside of the classroom setting. Predominantly, this increase in writing instruction is due to the upsurge of technological resources available for communication purposes. Digital resources, such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter encourage students to develop social relationships outside of those traditionally provided within school settings. Digital communication, as the means of communication within these environments, encourages continuous writing, including crafting and editing while exercising critical thinking skills (Chao & Lo, 2011; Haas et al., 2011). Students are writing more than ever even though these digital communication compositions do not take the form of what is considered to be traditional, academic texts (Haas et al., 2011). Haas et al.'s (2011) study showed students have a true understanding of written language; however, they need assistance with transitioning from casual communication to academic writing. Educators must

work to bridge the gap between these two seemingly different worlds. Now is the time "to develop new models of composing, new models of curricula, and new models for teaching" (Haas et al., 2011, p. 378). A new focus of composition studies in teaching should include teaching students how to transition from a more informal style of digital communication to the more formal style required in academic contexts.

In today's digitally driven world, students frequently have trouble transitioning from the informal, digital language used in texts and emails to the more formal, academic style required of college writing assignments. This is especially the case with English composition assignments. Amicucci (2014) demonstrated how the digital form of language students are accustomed to can actually be used as a teaching advantage as long as students are taught to "code-switch" (p. 483) between the two styles. Amicucci (2014) emphasized the need for students to have both the "contexts for situated writing practice and opportunities to exercise and recognize code-switching abilities" (p. 483). Sweeny (2010) explained these newly established contexts do not have to occur in a manner that replaces old instructional techniques. Instructors can gradually begin to integrate new literacy techniques using technology into current writing assignments. Most importantly, connections must be made so that students begin to see the relevance in all forms of writing while learning that code-switching is required for different writing objectives (Amicucci, 2014; Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009; Sweeny, 2010).

Students of today are avid writers because of the means by which they communicate with each other, such as through texting, instant messaging, and social networking (Alvermann, 2008; Amicucci, 2014; Haas, Takayoshi, Carr, Hudson & Pollok, 2011; Kirtley, 2005; Maranto & Barton, 2009; Purdy, 2009; Sweeny, 2010). Rather than discourage the use of such tools for traditional composition studies, research studies have shown increasing benefits of using varying

technological mediums to encourage students with their writing (Alfino, Pajer, Pierce, & Jenks, 2008; Alvermann, 2008; Amicucci, 2014; Chao & Lo, 2011; Haas, Takayoshi, Carr, Hudson, & Pollok, 2011; Kirtley, 2005; Maranto & Barton, 2009; Purdy, 2009; Sweeny, 2010). As Haas et al. (2011) stated, "The 'linguistic exuberance' resulting from the creative adaptation of technological resources to an expansive understanding of textual features offers to say much to writing researchers and teachers interested in the evolution of written discourse" (p. 399). By embracing this evolution, writing educators can promote the advancement of writing practices in an environment familiar now familiar to students.

Woo, Chu, and Li (2013) and Sweeny (2010) further demonstrated the importance of utilizing today's technology for promoting academic writing practices. More specifically, their mixed-methods study showed the benefits of incorporating wikis into peer collaboration and peer editing practices (Woo, Chu, & Li, 2013). Incorporating new technology-based literacies students are accustomed to using on a daily basis into the composition classroom can lead to more relevant learning experiences for students as they work to improve their written communication skills (Alfino, Pajer, Pierce, & Jenks, 2008; Amicucci, 2014; Haas, Takayoshi, Carr, Hudson, & Pollok, 2011; Kirtley, 2005; Maranto & Barton, 2009; Purdy, 2009; Sweeny, 2010).

Haas et al.'s (2011) grounded theory study exhibited the need for educators to recognize the prevalence of today's digital technologies, such as instant messaging, in order to better establish relevance and engagement with students. Amiccuci's (2014) qualitative study demonstrated ways in which students can learn to utilize digital formats to accomplish certain writing tasks, such as brainstorming with friends on Facebook to produce ideas for a paper or writing a paper in text-language first and then translating it into a more acceptable, academic

form. Part of what made this endeavor successful, according to Amicucci's (2014) and Alvermann's (2008) research results, was when teachers openly communicate with students to learn the digital technologies they use most frequently and to incorporate the specific technologies into assignments. Kirtley (2005) also asserted the importance of such communication between instructors and students as students entered classes with varying degrees of computer experience. As Sweeny (2010) posited, "By integrating new literacies into writing instruction, teachers can provide a bridge to emerging forms of writing and communication and make writing more meaningful and engaging for students of the digital era" (p. 121).

Additionally, incorporating digital literacy into composition studies encouraged students to further develop critical thinking skills as they worked to complete the writing tasks while selecting the appropriate digital media for the task (Amicucci, 2014; Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009; Purdy, 2009). Amicucci (2014) stated, "By bringing students' nonacademic digital literacies into writing education, teachers can facilitate students' critical thinking about the technologies they use" (p. 489). Writing for an appropriate audience is one way students are able to exercise critical thinking as they learn communication within appropriate contexts of academic and professional writing. Teaching reflective practices within the writing process creates a sense of engagement and ownership for students and allows them to learn at a deeper level for more successful advancement in writing skills (Amicucci, 2014; Purdy, 2009). Traditional composition studies combined with an awareness of today's students' literacy practices can lead to enriching writing experiences for students which increase student motivation and engagement.

Awareness of Today's Students' Literacy Practices

Becoming aware of students' changing literacy practices is important at this juncture as students are changing the way they learn and process both reading and writing-related skills (Amicucci, 2014; Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009; Sweeny, 2010). Whereas the various disciplines of reading and writing were once thought of as separate, they are now viewed as corresponding disciplines that work best in conjunction with each other (Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009; Sweeny, 2010). Considine, Horton, and Moorman (2009) demonstrated the need for instructors "to connect the literacy skills that students develop in their social environment with the literacy environment of the school" (p. 471). Incorporating literacy practices with discipline specific topics can lead to students improving their writing skills and producing better essays (Monte-Sano, 2012).

When the ever-changing dynamics of technology is added to this equation, instructors must work to develop a new understanding of how they can all work together to best accomplish learning objectives. As Sweeny (2010) asserted, "These changes necessitate an understanding of how the Internet and other ICT's 'require new social practices, skills, strategies, dispositions, and/or literacies'" (p. 122). Specifically, educators need to work to bridge students' technological know-how with the competencies and knowledge needed to be successful in today's world (Chao & Lo, 2011; Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009). Equipping students with necessary skills required in this technological age is also imperative to prepare them for the workforce; thus, new literacies and technological options must be incorporated into all disciplines of language arts (Sweeney, 2010).

Incorporating today's students' literacy practices into traditional English composition studies can lead to more meaningful learning experiences for students (Amicucci, 2014; Haas,

Takayoshi, Carr, Hudson, & Pollock, 2012; Kirtley, 2005; Maranto & Barton, 2009; Purdy, 2009; Sweeny, 2010). "Teachers are experimenting with multimodal digital composition, writing on blogs and wikis, and communicating with students via social networking platforms" (Amicucci, 2014, p. 483). Many educators see these options as viable additions for teaching composition due to the provided rhetorical space in which students are constantly exercising their critical thinking skills through the linguistic decisions they make (Amicucci, 2014; Maranto & Barton, 2009). Educators are beginning to recognize a change in approach is necessary to meet the needs of today's students who are fully immersed in communication technologies that are changing the way students communicate with others (Sweeny, 2010). Students are bombarded with language and communication techniques from all media resources and they must be taught critical thinking and discernment skills to allow them to identify and learn from the academically sound resources available to them (Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009).

Students are a part of a larger social network than that which the traditional classroom provides and they rely on language skills to communicate with others in this virtual world (Alvermann, 2008). According to Alvermann (2008), in a 2007 survey of 935 adolescents, "93% treated the Internet as a venue for social interaction" (p. 9) making computer technologies a natural environment for students to progress from only social participation to including academic advancement in skills, such as composition and literary studies. The participatory nature of the digital culture elevates standards of adolescents as they work to find "necessary technology and related resources . . . available for accomplishing the kinds of content they are interested in producing" (Alvermann, 2008, p. 15). Such an approach makes for a natural connection for students advancing their composition studies. Further, allowing students to utilize resources with which they are familiar can help students move beyond the boundaries they have previously set

creating space for a perception of greater relevance and, as a result, greater advancement of skills (Alvermann, 2008). Whenever student awareness through relevance leads to personal connections with writing, student motivation is affected.

Student Motivation with Writing

According to Lei et al. (2010), "Motivation is an internal state that arouses learners, steers them in particular directions, and keeps them engaged in certain activities" (p. 321). In cooperative learning settings, such as those provided through writing workshops, students are more likely to actively engage with others and will be more motivated to serve in a capacity that is for the betterment of the group (Lei et al., 2010; Woo, Chu, & Li, 2013). A mixed-methods study by Woo, Chu, and Li (2013) showed positive correlations between the numbers of peer comments made for students with the number of revisions student writers made in subsequent drafts. Their study also indicated active revision among students on all levels of writing concerns as prompted by peer comments and feedback, and, as a result, an overall improvement in student writing when compared to the control group (Woo, Chu, & Li, 2013).

In addition to students responding positively to their peers, student motivation within writing courses can be positively influenced when closer alignment between students' perceptions and teachers' expectations occurs (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008; Wolsey et al., 2012). Educators must encourage students toward developing a more positive perception of writing as a means by which to communicate their own personal interests and goals. Peterson (2014) stated, "Students should view writing as 'liberating, satisfying, even joyful' because of the social, communicative, and personal intentions that writing helps them carry out" (p. 499). Peterson's (2014) research supported the notion that student motivation should be the main objective of all writing courses. As Peterson (2014) stated, "If students are to learn the technical writing skills

outlined in the curriculum, they must first feel the sense of commitment to and excitement about their writing that comes when they follow their passions, feed their curiosity, and then share their writing with others" (p. 504). Student motivation can be influenced within composition studies when combined with regional cultural studies, such as composition students in the southeast learning about Southern literature within the context of a second-semester composition course.

Southern Literature Defined

Rubin (1990) and Ladd (2005), notable researchers in the field of Southern literature, established the difficulty of assigning a specific definition to the defining essence of Southern literature that transcends location. There is a general understanding that Southern literature is literature associated with the southeastern United States; however, Southern literature itself is much more complex. As Rubin (1990) posited, literature from the South forms an undeniable connection with the region in more ways than geographical or historical association; Southern literature takes shape according to the positioning of elements (place, language, values, etc.) and the manner with which they affect the characters and the readers. Rubin (1990) asserted:

> These special ways, particular forms, traits of behavior, and resources of language come out of the Southern community experience, a community that, however much it may differ from place to place and individual to individual, so shapes the imaginative response of its literary people that when they write their stories and poems they do so, to a markedly recognizable degree, as Southern authors. (p. 63)

Ladd (2005) contributed a list of qualities that further shape Southern literature as a genre in and of itself as it is characterized by: Regional connectedness, role of memory, and "insularity" (p. 1629). Additionally, Southern literature conveys a sense of values and honor, represents a sense of concrete social structure, and suggests similar theological and philosophical beliefs among its

people (Ladd, 2005). Southern literature also supports the oral tradition of storytelling, again suggesting the rich quality of its people (Ladd, 2005). Because of the many qualities distinctive to Southern literature, it is a valuable resource to use within the classroom (Cillerai, Bross, Curtis, & Logan, 2013).

Southern Literature in the Classroom

Southern literature possesses traits and universal themes as expressed through narrative within Southern literary works; however, when teaching Southern literature in the composition classroom, it is important for students to identify with themes according to their own understanding. To this end, active learning, classroom participation, critical thinking, and cultural studies should be encouraged among students (Newell et al., 2009; Youssef, 2010). Further, the selection of literary works to study within the context of writing courses can make a difference in student relevance. Cillerai et al.'s (2013) research showed the difficulty in establishing a positive student response to literature that is older and seemed irrelevant to students of today. Because of this challenge, Cillerai et al. (2013) established the importance of helping students find relevance from historical times by linking the past to the present within their first-year composition courses.

With his research rooted in the reader-response theory of Rosenblatt, Iser, and Jauss, Youssef (2010) determined students of today have no interest in viewing "universal themes that transcend spatial, temporal, and cultural boundaries" (p. 31) unless they apply to the students personally in some manner. As such, teachers must be mindful of this limitation and design assignments which allow students to find personal relevance to the characters, actions, and themes. Students must seek connections while also recognizing otherness and the contribution of otherness in one's study of diversity and multiculturalism (Figuera, 2010). Through literary

study and analysis, students must work toward interpretation and toward developing the ability to support their own analysis of the work (Newell et al., 2009; Youssef, 2010).

Mendenhall (2013) drew upon the knowledge of Glenn E. Palmer, stating, "a scientific investigation of rhetoric, including historical philology, literature, psychology, philosophy, could inform composition" (p. 96) in an effort to "unify culture and efficiency" (p. 96) through the art of composition. The genre of Southern literature as taught within a classroom of a majority of Southern students lends itself to such analysis as "towns, families, and lineages play an intricate and present role in Southern fiction, in settings so real [students] feel as if they could exist nowhere else on earth" (Anonymous, 2001, p. 5). As with most genre literature, Southern literature presents a platform that influences the manner in which individuals see themselves either as a part of or on the outside of the culture (Cillerai, et al., 2013; Frega, 1996). Through the courses he teaches, Mendenhall (2013) demonstrated the ability to unify the study of American culture and writing while engaging students' analytical skills. Southern literature instructors must help students navigate the "divisions, sectionalisms, turf-battles, ideological struggles, methodological struggles, pedagogical struggles, and identity crises" (Roberts, 2007, p. 128) while maintaining their own voice and relevance as literary scholars. Students must strive to dispel myth and stereotypes and the voices within literary works that define these aspects of Southern literature (Ferris, 2010; Frega, 1996; Roberts, 2007). As Mendenhall (2013) stated, "We all must draw from values embedded in our local contexts in ways that strengthen writing in its institutional environments" (p. 99). Students can do all of this through composition studies.

The Role of the Student in Literary Interpretation

The research of Brooks and Browne (2012) emphasized the role of individual readers when establishing the meaning of literary texts of all genres. True to constructivist fashion, readers construct their own literary interpretations using their own backgrounds and what they know at the time. When readers develop similar interpretations, it is due to the individuals rather than the texts being reviewed (Brooks & Browne, 2012). Readers pull from "age, sex, size, family situation, race, income and other things" (as cited in Brooks & Browne, 2012, p. 76) when developing their own analyses of literary texts; however, the texts themselves serve as guides that may challenge readers to explore and/or consider different perspectives through the texts' use of "recurring cultural themes, ethnic group practices, and distinct linguistic styles" (Brooks & Browne, 2012, p. 77). Using the idea of "homeplace", Brooks and Browne (2012) suggested that readers draw upon a primary cultural position. The research of Frega (1998) confirmed this assertion. As the researchers specified, "These positions represent various multilayered aspects of one's culture and the multitude of practices inherent within it" (Brooks & Browne, 2012, pp. 78-79). Readers interpret literary texts through the perspectives of characters; yet, readers carry out this action through a lens of their own understanding.

As educators recognize the place of cultural influence significant for students analyzing literary texts, educators are more likely to select literature based on the cultural exploration potential while also recognizing varying interpretations are possible (Brooks & Browne, 2012). Selecting literary texts with the students' varying backgrounds in mind can create a basis of greater relevance for students. Peterson (2014) argued the role of student experience and its ability to propel students into new realms of interest and research when, at base, they are able to make literary connections of personal relevance. Increased relevance, and as a result, increased

engagement, can provide a valuable connection to composition studies through which students can further explore their literary interpretations through written expression.

New Southern Studies and the Influence on Literature and Teaching

There has been a gradual shift in Southern literature in terms of the selections taught and the framework provided (Brinkmeyer, 2001; Frega, 1996; Kreyling, 2005; Stecopoulos, 2011). Kreyling (2005), an influencing force in the change, had a hand in changing what was previously thought of as Southern literature to Southern studies. Stecopoulos (2011) provided the distinction as he stated, "Southern studies, in large part, Southern literary studies, responded to-and helped shape-the canonization of Southern literature, a phenomenon usually identified with the Southern Renaissance (ca. 1929-55)" (p. 125). Even a change in nomenclature as seemingly simple as this has been a challenge as Kreyling (2005) stated, "Becoming 'new' has always been a problem for a discipline with so much of its foundation dedicated to strict borders: Who was white and who was not, what was literature and what was not, what was southern [sic] and what was not" (p. 4). Within the classroom, this presents an interesting task as instructors and students strive to "debate and contrast different 'constructions' of southern [sic] identity, and to contextualize the often-simplified black-white racial binary" (Kreyling, 2005, p. 6). This new construction has presented the new category of Appalachia studies as well as gender and sexuality studies that operate outside of the typically Southern black and white confines (Kreyling, 2005; Stecopoulous, 2011). There is also a new approach when considering regionalism and its effects on Southern studies (Burrison, 2003; Prenshaw, 2005). As Burrison (2003) stated, "No region of the United States has a more stereotyped identity than the South" (p. 3). There has been a specific initiative in Georgia to foster a greater sense of awareness and understanding of regional culture among its students as defined by literature through

collaboration "among libraries, a university, and a school system" (Yontz, 2004, p. 292). Due to the new consideration of all aspects of Southern studies, we, as instructors, are able to teach to our students "contemporary works of fiction that portray the experience of race identity in today's U.S. South but in [also] broadening our view of the expanding territory of southern studies" (Prenshaw, 2005, p. 137). Using Southern literature as the basis for composition studies allows students to explore the cultural themes and values addressed in literature on a deeper level through writing.

Southern Culture Themes and Values Addressed in Literature

Roberts (2007) addressed the presence of cultural implications, such as myth and stereotypes, and the voices within literary works that work to shape the concept of Southern literature. While addressing the ideological, methodological, and pedagogical approaches to Southern literature, Roberts (2007) purported the undeniable presence of political persuasion, one that is deeply rooted in its own value-system, within the representative literature. Similarly, Brinkmeyer (2001) suggested the presence of politics within the South as discussed through the works of Scott Romine, Richard Gray, and McKay Jenkins. Brinkmeyer (2001) further addressed all of these elements combined with a prevalent sense of community drawing from Cleanth Brooks' assessment where "true community…is held together by manners and morals deriving from a commonly held view of reality" (as cited in Brinkmeyer, 2001, p. 128). Rather than accept this notion in its entirety when establishing the boundaries and nuances of Southern literature, Romine argued "that communities enforce rather than draw from foundational beliefs through practices of avoidance, deferral, and evasion" (Brinkmeyer, 2001, p. 128). As such, communities as portrayed through Southern literature enforce such value systems within the culture.

This examination of Southern culture and narrative as expression serves as a valuable means for discovery of cultural representation within the literature. Ferris's (2012) research revealed the merging of storytelling and visual expression as extensions of narrative voice. Although narrative voice within certain literary genres produces freedom of expression, within certain cultural limitations, such as those present in the conservative South, Southern writers of alternative views must reflect on the Southern experience while residing somewhere other than their native soil (Ferris, 2012). In other words, in a world deeply rooted with traditional, and mostly conservative, values, many Southern writers throughout history have been forced to relocate. As Ferris (2012) stated, "Southern black and homosexual and lesbian writers have made their homes as exiles in New York, San Francisco, Chicago, and Paris – free to express their complex feelings of alienation and nostalgia from outside their region" (p. 141). Though they are stifled by the restrictive values as artists, they nonetheless value the fodder the Southern cultural context provides for the stories they have to tell.

Lee and Ousey (2010) noted the presence of "a set of values (e.g., a [S]outhern code of honor) stitched deeply into the social fabric of [S]outhern communities for centuries" (p. 900) and an increase in violence as a result. This violence is frequently portrayed within Southern literature and is seen as justifiable within the cultural scheme whereas in other cultures, such expressions of violence would be deemed as unacceptable. Lee and Ousey (2010) stated, "[this] violence that has been evident for at least two centuries is explained by the different value orientations of [S]outhern residents" (p. 920).

Summary

When conducting a review of English composition studies in higher education, there are nine specific areas addressed within the literature available today: Student-centered writing,

writing as a process, critical writing and analysis, writing as craft and imitation, student awareness through relevance and personal connections to writing, student use of computers in composition classrooms, student relevance found through the use of digital literacy in composition, awareness of today's student literacy practices, and student motivation with writing. Research regarding the current teaching approaches of Southern literature demonstrates five specific themes addressed, albeit minimally: (a) Southern literature defined, (b) Southern literature in the classroom and its respective implications, (c) the role of the student in literary interpretation, (d) new Southern studies and its influence on literature and teaching, and (e) Southern culture themes and values. Although helpful in shaping and influencing the genre, the research does not reflect a conclusive or sufficient indication of student perceptions toward English composition when combined with the teaching of a literary genre, specifically Southern literature. There is a significant lack of relevant research demonstrating the role of teaching Southern literature as a means by which to make composition more relevant for first-year composition students.

This phenomenological study sought to address the gap in literature and provide a deeper understanding of the student, faculty, administration, and author perceptions of the effectiveness of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program in encouraging the development of writing skills and a deeper understanding of Southern culture through a more personal and relevant experience. This research will impact the teaching of composition studies through critical analysis and experience with specific works of Southern literature. The Southern literary works selected are written by Southern natives seeking to portray the many facets of Southern culture through their works and through the voices of their characters.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This phenomenological study sought to address the gap in literature and provide a deeper understanding of the perception of students, faculty, administration, and participating Southern authors on the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program for encouraging composition student writing, reading, and learning about Southern culture. This chapter is organized as follows: (a) The phenomenological research design will be described and the effectiveness of a phenomenological design for this study will be explained; (b) my role as the researcher will be established to include my background in Southern literature as well as my part in the development of the Writers@ Work program at Chattanooga State Community College; (c) the setting, in Chattanooga, Tennessee, will be described in detail to include justification for the setting selection; (d) the composition of participants will be explained; (e) data collection methods will be described to include plan for triangulation of data; (f) data analysis procedures will be set forth to demonstrate a comprehensive analysis of collected data; (g) considerations of trustworthiness will be described to exhibit credibility and confirmability, dependability, and transferability; and (h) ethical considerations will be discussed to show my attempt to protect the interests of all research participants.

Design

This study was conducted using qualitative research methods, specifically a phenomenological research design. Phenomenological research involves getting to the root of the true nature of a phenomenon by asking "What is the nature of this lived experience?" (van Manen, 1990, p. 42). A qualitative research method was most effective for this study because it

utilized the numerous facets that define qualitative research according to Creswell (2013). These facets include "an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry" (Creswell, 2013, p. 44) as the research gathered may produce results not anticipated. Additionally, data was collected in a natural setting in which participants were more comfortable. Finally, data analysis occurred in a manner "that [was] both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 44).

Phenomenology was appropriate because of its ability to demonstrate research based on "lived experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 34). This methodology was suitable for its ability to establish a deeper, richer meaning of a shared phenomenon as experienced by participants who have been a part of the Writers@Work program. Creswell (2013) also described phenomenology as "the exploration of [a] phenomenon with a group of individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon" (p. 78). The interviews and focus group with participants aimed to demonstrate the shared phenomenon of learning more about writing and Southern experience through the Writers@Work program. The literary analysis of two representative Writers@Work texts served to establish the shared phenomenon of common Southern themes.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1. What are the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging the development of writing skills?

Research Question 2. What are the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

Research Question 3. What are the perceptions of visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with the development of writing skills?

Research Question 4. What are the perceptions of visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

Research Question 5. Which themes are present in the Writers@Work texts used during the 2011-2012 and 2013-2014 academic years that provide the framework for a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

Setting

Chattanooga State Community College, a two-year public college, is located in Chattanooga, Tennessee, a mid-size city in Southeast Tennessee. Chattanooga State is regionally accredited by the Tennessee Board of Regents College System and is a part of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Chattanooga State is comprised of five campuses which serve six counties in the surrounding area. The College offers both certificate and associate degrees in a variety of majors. Approximately 10,100 students attend Chattanooga State annually with the following demographic breakdown:

- Race – 74% white, 16% black or African American, 6% other, 4% unknown
- Gender – 60% female, 40% male
- Enrollment Status – 85% in-state, 15% out-of-state
- Age – 57% 24 & under, 43% 25 & over. (Chattanooga State Community College, 2014)

Chattanooga State works to provide support for students at all stages of their educational pursuits. With an 18-to-1 student-faculty ratio, Chattanooga State is able to successfully maintain its focus as an educational institution. Chattanooga State's student population consists of 100% transient students as on-campus housing options are not available. The majority of the student body is comprised of students who are native to the Southeastern United States.

Participants

Participants of the study (conducted in Chattanooga, Tennessee) consisted of two current English administrators, four current English professors, eight students who have participated in the Writers@Work program, and two Southern authors whose works have been used as the common texts for the Writers@Work program for two academic years. Purposive sampling was used to identify the human participants used for data collection. This was an effective means of selecting participants for a phenomenological study as "the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). Purposive sampling strategies were also effective "not for the representativeness but for their relevance to the research question, analytical framework, and explanation or account being developed in the research" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 232). Pseudonyms were used for the participants except in the cases where they are easily identified, such as the authors whose works have been used as the common texts for the Writers@Work program for two academic years.

Of the participants selected for this study, one administrator was from the Southeast while the other administrator was from the Northeast; both administrators had a significant role in developing and promoting the Writers@Work program to stakeholders. Three of the four English professors selected were from the Southeast with one being from the Northeast. All of

the professors have been involved in the Writers@Work program for several years and all have

incorporated the curriculum into their second-semester English composition courses. Four of the

eight students selected were born and raised in the Southeast; two students were born in the

Midwest; one student was born in the North; and one student was born in Russia. The four

students born outside of the Southeast relocated to the Southeastern United States when they

were young children. Both participating Southern authors were from the Southeast. The age

range of the 16 participants was from 18 to 77 and included nine males and seven females. All

participants were presented with and signed consent forms prior to data collection.

Procedures

Upon receipt of Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval on February 19, 2015, I

began to conduct the research for this study. I conducted the research using data collected from a

participant focus group and interviews as explained in greater detail in the Data Collection

section. For phenomenological studies, it is necessary to collect data from individuals who have

experienced shared phenomena in order to more accurately determine the full impact and

meaning (van Manen, 1990). As van Manen (1990) stated, "The deeper goal, which is always

the thrust of phenomenological research, remains oriented to asking the question of what is the

nature of this phenomenon . . . as an essentially human experience" (p. 63).

I recruited the student participants by working with composition instructors and asking

them to have willing students contact me voluntarily. I also recruited student participants

through satisfaction surveys distributed by the Writers@Work planning team. The survey

produced by the planning team included a place for students to indicate if they would like to

serve as volunteers toward any type of research conducted for Writers@Work. Additionally, I

recruited students from the literature courses I teach as the second-semester composition course

is a prerequisite for all literature courses taught at Chattanooga State Community College. Once I produced a list of interested student volunteers, I emailed students to determine if they preferred to participate in a focus group session or to be interviewed individually. Faculty and administrative participants were recruited by contacting composition instructors and administrators who participated in some aspect of the Writers@Work initiative. Faculty and administrative volunteers were asked to participate in interviews. The Southern author participants were recruited by contacting two of the authors who have participated in Writers@Work since 2011 and asking if they would be willing to take part in an interview. After collecting data, I analyzed the data as described in Data Analysis using triangulation and phenomenological reflection (van Manen, 1990). Thematic analysis techniques were used to review the transcripts of interviews and the focus group to identify themes that presented themselves in the discussions.

The Researcher's Role

I am an Associate Professor of English and Humanities at a community college. As a Georgia native, I have held an interest in Southern literature for 20 years. I completed my Master of Arts degree in English from University of Tennessee in Chattanooga. Knowing that I wanted to share a love of literature with students, I pursued a literary criticism cognate with a focus on Southern literature. Through this research project, I examined how the assignment of a common text and working with authors in the Southern literary genre affects the perception of composition students as they work to develop their skills in writing and their exploration into Southern studies. Although I grew up in the South and remained there until well into adulthood, I spent two years in the northeastern part of the United States, specifically Maine. During this time, I began to consider Southern culture as expressed through literary works.

Creswell (2013) proposed a definition of epoche (bracketing) that encompassed the researcher deferring his understanding of a subject in order to best reflect on the information from a new perspective. Epoche was appropriate for my study due to its ability to allow new information to emerge outside of the researcher's understanding. I used my own understanding of Southern themes and commonalities as the lens through which to view the themes of participant perceptions emerged; however, I momentarily suspended my understanding of Southern themes and commonalities in order to allow new themes to emerge from the data. Biases and assumptions were naturally factors in this phenomenological study given my Southern background and previous role as a composition professor; however, this served to enrich the identification of emerging themes. Recognizing and working with these factors prevented problems that naturally arise when one seeks to ignore biases and assumptions that are present. As van Manen (1990) stated, "It is better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories" (p. 47). A peer outside of the research who is well-versed in composition and Southern literary studies helped ensure I was looking at the study from all angles without becoming overly influenced in any one area. The process of having a peer reviewer increased the reliability of the study because he/she assisted me with maintaining a clear lens through which to view the data. Having a peer reviewer was also beneficial from a cathartic standpoint (Creswell, 2013).

Data Collection

Data collection consisted of a student focus group, student interviews, faculty and administrator interviews, and author interviews. Further, a hermeneutic textual analysis of the selected texts of participating authors was conducted in an effort to identify prevailing Southern themes reflecting cultural nuances. This provided a triangulation of data collected from three

sources: Stakeholders, authors, and the texts themselves. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2005) defined triangulation as "the process of using multiple data-collection methods, data sources, analysts, or theories" (p. 320). For this research, three data sources were used.

Data collection for this study was conducted according to principles of emergent design. When following an emergent design model at any time "the questions may change, the forms of data collection may be altered, and the individuals studied and the sites visited may be modified" (Creswell, 2013, p. 47). Schwandt (2001) further asserts:

> [Emergent design] analysis thus becomes a process of elaborating a version of or perspective on the phenomenon in question, revising that version or perspective as additional data are generated and new questions asked, elaborating another version, revising that version or perspective, and so on. (pp. 64-65)

Although a general plan was established at the onset of the study, I remained flexible to the possibility that at any time the direction of the research might change in keeping with emergent design. Both common texts selected from two representative years of the Writers@Work program were read and studied to obtain a general idea of the themes present within these works of contemporary Southern literature. This step was important to equip myself with knowledge of the themes participants might address within the data collection stage. This step was also important as a means by which to study the literary elements that shape the Southern literature genre represented by these works. Next, I moved to the data collection stage with human participants. Student interviews were conducted first to capture the perceptions of the largest group of participants and to set a baseline for potential emerging themes. It was also important to conduct student interviews and the student focus group as soon as possible upon obtaining IRB approval before the semester came to an end and students left for the summer. Data

collected from student participants was carefully reviewed before moving to the next group, faculty. Faculty participants were interviewed to determine if there was a presence of commonalities between faculty perception and student perception. It was helpful to obtain student perception and then move to the other side of the desk, so to speak, to see if there were any common trends among faculty perception. After reviewing the data collected from the student interviews, the student focus group, and the faculty interviews, I interviewed the administrators. Administrator interviews provided more of a global perspective of the program; however, common links in perception with student and faculty perception were still revealed. After interviewing student, faculty, and administrator participants and reviewing the data of all interviews, I conducted interviews with two former Writers@Work visiting authors to obtain their perception of the Writers@Work program. The overall order of interviews conducted provided a clear progression of starting with those participants most involved with Writers@Work program overall while moving progressively to participants who are more removed. Finally, I conducted a hermeneutical analysis of the texts reviewed initially before the data collection with human participants began. The texts were used to demonstrate representative forms of the themes present in the Southern literature genre for the purpose of supporting data revealed through the perceptions of participants.

Focus Group

According to Patton (1987), there are several advantages to using focus group interviews for collecting qualitative data. Focus group interviews provide an efficient means by which to collect information from more than one person at the same time. This form of data collection insinuates a natural means by which to control extreme views of participants as "participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other which weed out false or extreme views"

(Patton, 1987, p. 135). Interviews in a focus group setting also provide a manner for common themes and shared beliefs to emerge (Patton, 1987). Facilitating a focus group in a setting most natural to the participants provided a more comfortable environment and resulted in a greater willingness of participants to converse freely.

Focus group participants for this study consisted of six students who participated in the Writers@Work program throughout the semester and during the week of the authors' visits. The focus group meeting, consisting of one meeting with six participants, lasted around 60 minutes. Hatch (2002) explained that a range of six to 12 participants is ideal as dictated by the majority of texts based on research methodology. The focus group took place in a regular classroom on Chattanooga State Community College's campus in order to stay within an environment most natural and comfortable to the students. I will gather field notes by recording observations of the focus group session by using thick description methods. Thick description is important due to the "interpretive characteristic of description . . . that makes it thick" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 255). I, as facilitator, guided the discussion when necessary to encourage an exploration of the participants' perception of the impact of the Writers@Work program with teaching them more about writing and Southern culture. I audiotaped and transcribed the focus group session. I used two audio recording devices during the focus group. I used the voice recording function on my iPhone as one audio recording device. I used a camcorder as the second recording device. Participants were notified at the beginning that the recordings would only be used by the researcher and would be kept confidential. Student participants were informed that their names would be changed for data reporting in order to protect their identities. Both recording devices were tested ahead of time for functionality and clarity in the setting of the focus group.

The focus group session addressed the following research questions (see Appendix A for focus group questions): (a) What are the perceptions of students of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging the development of writing skills? (b) What are the perceptions of students of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging a deeper understanding of Southern culture? First, students were asked to describe their overall experience with the Writers@Work program as a part of their second-semester English composition course. This question was asked in order to gain a broad overview of student experiences with the program. Second, students were asked to describe the ways in which their experience with the Writers@Work program influenced their overall perception of their second-semester English composition course. The answers provided gave insight into students' perceptions regarding the program's ability or inability to provide a deeper educational experience compared to the typical composition course. Third, I asked the students to discuss the ways in which their experience with the Writers@Work program served to influence their overall perceptions and understanding of writing skills and the writing process. Fourth, I asked student participants to discuss the ways in which their experience with the Writers@Work program served to influence their overall perceptions and understanding of Southern literature. Finally, students were asked to describe the ways in which their experience with the Writers@Work program influenced their overall perception and understanding of Southern culture. Focus group questions were piloted with a colleague familiar with the Writers@Work initiative.

Interviews

I used an interview guide to conduct interviews with two current English administrators, four current English professors, and two Southern authors whose works have been used as the

common texts for the Writers@Work program for two academic years. The interview guide

consisted of a list of questions asked in each interview in order to guide the interviews and to

ensure the same questions were posed in each interview. Interview guides, while providing a

sense of structure and consistency, give the interviewer a sense of flexibility "to build a

conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a

conversational style—but with the focus on a particular predetermined subject" (Patton, 1987, p.

111). While flexibility might be beneficial with the different stakeholders in order to best extract

a sense of their experiences, the structure of the interview guide provided more of a systematic

approach for data collection while "increas[ing] the comprehensiveness of the data" (Patton,

1987, p. 116). An additional strength to this method is the means by which "logical gaps in data

can be anticipated and closed" (Patton, 1987, p. 116).

The interview guide was followed closely using the same sequence of questions for each

interview to minimize potential weaknesses caused by exercising flexibility to the extent of

omitting questions and important topics of conversation (Patton, 1987). The interview guide was

used to construct the data according to the participants' experiences. Hatch (2002) asserted,

"Constructivist interviewers will work with informants to co-construct understandings that are

reported as interpretations or narratives" (p. 23).

Through these interviews, I gained a better understanding, through interpretations or

narratives, of the administrators' and professors' perceptions of the effectiveness of the

Writers@Work program in encouraging students with the development of writing skills and a

deeper understanding of Southern culture. I also interviewed two authors who participated in the

Writers@Work program to further determine their perceptions of the merit of the program's

approach to advance students' writing skills and to educate them about Southern culture. I

extended the option to participate in interviews to students unable to participate in the focus group session due to preference or scheduling conflicts. Each interview took between 30 and 60 minutes depending on the extensiveness of participants' responses.

For the participant interviews, a natural setting that was comfortable for the participants was purposefully selected. As Creswell (2013) explained, "Qualitative researchers gather up-close information by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context" (p. 45). For the educators and students, this was in Chattanooga, Tennessee, as that is where they reside. For the authors, this included Athens, Georgia and Hillsborough, North Carolina, where the authors reside.

Faculty and administrator interview questions (see Appendices B and C for interview questions) were designed to address the following research questions: (a) What are the perceptions of faculty and administration of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with the development of writing skills? (b) What are the perceptions of faculty and administration of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with a deeper understanding of Southern culture? First, I asked faculty and administrators to describe their overall experience with the Writers@Work program as a part of the second-semester English composition courses being taught. Second, I asked faculty and administrators to describe their overall perception of the Writers@Work program's ability to encourage students with the development of writing skills. I asked for examples of how faculty and administrators have observed the Writers@Work program's ability to encourage students with the development of writing skills. Third, I asked faculty and administrators to describe their overall perception of the Writers@Work program's ability to further develop composition students' understanding of the writing process. I asked for specific examples. Fourth, I asked

faculty and administrators to describe their overall experience with incorporating a specific literary genre, such as Southern literature, into the teaching of English composition. Fifth, I asked faculty and administrators to describe their overall perception of the Writers@Work program's ability to provide students with a deeper understanding of Southern culture. As with previous questions, I asked for specific examples. I also asked a colleague to review the questions before conducting the formal interviews.

Student interview questions (see Appendix D for interview questions) were the same questions asked during the focus group session with student participants. Similarly, student interview questions addressed the following research questions: (a) What are the perceptions of students of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging the development of writing skills? (b) What are the perceptions of students of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging a deeper understanding of Southern culture? Student interview questions were piloted with a colleague familiar with the objectives of the Writers@Work program before the official interviews began.

Author interview questions (see Appendix E for interview questions) were designed to address the following research questions: (a) What are the perceptions of the visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with the development of writing skills? (b) What are the perceptions of the visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with a deeper understanding of Southern culture? First, I asked the visiting Southern authors to describe their overall experience with the Writers@Work program as a part of the Humanities Department's second-semester English composition courses. Second, I asked the visiting Southern authors to describe their overall perception of the Writers@Work program's ability to encourage students

with the development of writing skills. I asked for examples of how the visiting Southern authors observed this in action during the weeks they visited campus. Third, I asked the visiting Southern authors to describe their overall perception of the Writers@Work program's ability to further develop composition students' understanding of the writing process. I asked for specific examples of how they saw this in action during their weeks on campus. Fourth, I asked the visiting Southern authors to elaborate on the effectiveness of incorporating a specific literary genre, such as Southern literature, into the teaching of English composition. I piloted the author interview questions with a colleague before conducting the interviews with the authors themselves.

I audiotaped and transcribed the interviews to gather insight into the participants' perspectives of the Writers@Work program's effectiveness in teaching students more about writing and Southern culture. I used two audio recording devices during the interviews. I used the voice recording function on my iPhone as one audio recording device. I used a camcorder as the second recording device. Participants were notified at the beginning that the recordings would only be used by the researcher and would be kept confidential. Student participants were informed their names would be changed for data reporting in order to protect their identities. Both recording devices were tested ahead of time for functionality and clarity in the setting of the interviews. The student, faculty, and administrators' interviews took place in a classroom, an office, or a conference room on the campus of Chattanooga State Community College. The author interviews took place in the towns in which the authors reside.

Hermeneutic Textual Review

Van Manen (1990) discussed the ability of literary works to provide experiential description. Thus, literature provides a solid foundation from which the phenomenologist can

gather insight pertaining to shared experiences and phenomena (van Manen, 1990). Literary

works offer means by which readers "are given the chance of living through an experience that

provides us with the opportunity of gaining insight into certain aspects of the human condition"

(van Manen, 1990, p. 70).

I conducted an in-depth literary analysis of the common Writers@Work texts used during

the 2011-2012 and 2013-2014 academic years to identify themes within the works that establish

a sense of the composition of Southern culture from the authors' and characters' perspectives.

This is an appropriate data collection strategy for this research due to its ability to establish,

through extraction, "themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and

imagery of the work" (van Manen, 1990, p. 78). I used Van Manen's (1990) method for

identifying themes by reviewing the text wholistically asking "What sententious phrase may

capture the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole?" (p. 93). I

generated detailed notes as I reviewed the texts while attempting to identify important sentences

and phrases that captured the overall significance of each work (van Manen, 1990).

Simultaneously, I selectively reviewed the literary works on a paragraph level asking "Which

statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or

experience being described?" (van Manen, 1990, p. 93). I made notes of these statements in the

margin of the texts to identify them throughout the literary works. Extraction of themes that

shape the Southern cultural experience provided a comparison basis for themes identified by

stakeholders in determining the perception of the Writers@Work program's ability to teach more

about Southern culture. The data collection method sought to answer the following research

question: Which themes are present in the Writers@Work texts used from 2011-2014 that

provide the framework for a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

Data Analysis

Ontological data analysis (Creswell, 2013) was performed using phenomenological reflection (van Manen, 1990) and thematic analysis. The purpose of this approach is "to grasp the essential meaning of something" (Creswell, 2013, p. 195). According to Creswell (2013), "analyzing the data for themes, using different approaches to examine information, and considering the guides for reflection should yield an explicit structure of the meaning of lived experience" (p. 195). Gall, Gall, and Borg (2005) referred to reflective analysis as "a process in which qualitative researchers rely mainly on their own intuition and personal judgment to analyze the data that have been collected" (p. 317). To specifically conduct this type of data analysis, interview transcripts and focus group transcripts were analyzed separately using thematic analysis techniques.

When working with qualitative data, coding is a procedure by which the researcher takes data collected and "breaks it down into manageable segments" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 26). Further, data is compared and contrasted for the purposes of categorizing data. As Schwandt (2001) explained, "Qualitative data can be coded for the purpose of generating theories and concepts as well as for testing hypotheses" (p. 27). Extra diligence was taken to avoid coding the data too generally, too descriptively, or too rigidly to cause the data to be viewed as too static. To this end, first, I reviewed the data holistically; second, I selected common statements that stood out and circled and/or highlighted the statements color-coding specific themes as they were identified; and, third, I reviewed the data at a sentence-by-sentence level.

Bracketing was used to code the data. According to Schwandt (2001), when bracketing, the researcher aims to view the data by momentarily "setting aside or bracketing everyday assumptions to concentrate on the phenomenology of the experience" (p. 19). Suspending my

own understanding of Southern themes and Southern culture better allowed participants'

perceptions to emerge allowing for additional concepts beyond those of my own understanding.

The data collected was reviewed through an ontological lens as Creswell (2013)

emphasized "Reality is multiple as seen through many views" (p. 21). As I worked to isolate

specific themes identified through the focus group and interviews of the various parties and

through hermeneutic analysis of the texts, I used van Manen's (1990) approach toward

identifying common themes. Van Manen (1990) discussed three approaches to thematic

identification of phenomena that included: "(1) The wholistic [sic] or sententious approach; (2)

the selective or highlighting approach; [and] (3) the detailed or line-by-line approach" (pp. 92-

92). This data analysis method was appropriate for my study due to the progressively detailed

approach of reviewing the material. Analyzing the data beginning with a wholistic review and

moving to a progressively more detailed level was necessary to thoroughly explore the shared

phenomena and to extract the essence of the shared phenomena (van Manen, 1990).

Thematic analysis strategy allows for the researcher to look for commonalities with the

data which will provide an understanding of thematic trends and overall concepts that unite

them. As Ayers (2008) stated, "Thematic coding is a strategy of data reduction, in contrast to the

axial and open coding strategies of grounded theory research, which enrich and complicate data

through the inclusion of analytic insights and inquiries used" (pp. 368-369). Further, a

construction-enumeration approach was used in which the number of times certain themes

appeared was recorded to establish commonalities among participant responses (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985). Specifically, I was looking for "quotations or observations that go together, that

are examples of the same underlying idea, issue, or concept" (Patton, 1987, p. 149). Thematic

coding and analysis was appropriate for this phenomenological study due to the manner "by

which qualitative data are segmented, categorized, summarized, and reconstructed in a way that captures the important concepts within the data set" (Ayers, 2008, p. 868).

Trustworthiness

As presented by Schwandt (2001), "In ordinary usage, validity is a property of a statement, argument, or procedure. To call one of these things valid is to indicate that it is sound, cogent, well grounded, justifiable, or logically correct" (p. 267). Trustworthiness, also referred to as validation, is important in a research study due to its ability to establish "the quality of goodness of qualitative inquiry" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 258). Trustworthiness criteria consists of a set of objectives by which the researcher learns to trust the data as sound and provides a foundation by which the researcher can present his findings in order for interested parties to also trust the qualitative inquiry before them (Patton, 1987). Lincoln and Guba (1985) offered four questions the criteria of trustworthiness strive to answer for qualitative studies:

- How can one establish confidence in the "truth" of the findings or an inquiry for the respondents with which and the context in which the inquiry was carried out?

- How can one determine the degree to which the findings of an inquiry may have applicability in other contexts or with other respondents?

- How can one determine whether the findings of an inquiry would be consistently repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) respondents in the same (or similar) context?

- How can one establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry stem from the characteristics of the respondents and the context and not from the biases, motivations, interests, and perspectives of the inquirer? (p. 218)

My research study employed credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability to establish trustworthiness.

Credibility

Credibility, also referred to internal validity, works to provide "assurances of the fit between respondents' views of their life ways and the inquirer's reconstruction and representation of the same" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 258). Member checks were conducted using a Likert scale to verify an accurate depiction of participant interviews (English administrators, English professors, and authors) to establish credibility (see Appendices F and G). Member checks are important because of their ability to give the participants a part in confirming the accuracy of the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted this is vital for asserting credibility to research studies. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), "The member check, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314).

Confirmability

Schwandt (2001) defined confirmability, also referred to as objectivity, as that which "establish[es] the fact that the data and interpretations of an inquiry [are] not merely figments of the inquirer's imagination. It call[s] for linking assertions, findings, interpretations, and so on to the data in readily discernible ways" (pp. 258-259). As with credibility, I employed member checks using a Likert Scale by which to establish confirmability within my research study (see Appendices F and G).

Dependability

Dependability, also known as reliability, relies on the researcher's ability to "ensur[e] that the process [is] logical, traceable, and documented" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 258). An additional question of dependability comes from the fact researchers "do not have direct access to truths experienced by their subjects; they can never know or represent the lived experiences of those they study" (Hatch, p. 18, 2002) thus creating the potential crisis of representation. By using participants' direct quotes to better convey their direct experience in their own words the crisis of representation is minimized if not eliminated altogether. For this research study, direct quotes from interviews and the focus group session were used in full, original form to reduce the crisis of representation and to establish dependability.

Transferability (External Validity)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined external validity as "the approximate validity with which we infer that the presumed causal relationship can be generalized to and across alternate measures of the cause and effect and across different types of persons, settings, and times" (as cited on p. 291). In other words, transferability presents the necessary details within the qualitative study to ensure the possibility of "case-to-case transfer" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 258). In order to facilitate external validity (transferability), I provided ample details through thick description pertaining to the specifics of the research study to allow readers to determine if "findings are applicable to other cases with similar circumstances" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 107).

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Ethical Considerations

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When it comes to qualitative research, Schwandt (2001) emphasized "addressing ethical issues in social research typically requires taking into account considerations beyond those of ethical theories and models of ethical reasoning" (p. 73). As such, all effort was made to account

for ethical considerations from the very beginning of this study. All aspects of the study were thoroughly explained to participants before the study officially began and at the beginning of the study so participants would know what to expect and would know the timeline involved. Participants, specifically students and faculty within the study, were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. All information gathered will be kept confidential and will be stored in a password-protected computer and/or in locked drawers/cabinets in locked offices. Data will be kept and stored for three years and will then be destroyed. Electronic files of transcriptions were password protected. Paper transcripts, notes, memoing forms and thick description notes are stored in a locked file cabinet. Informed consent was obtained from all participants (see Appendix H).

The research proposal was submitted to Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. The study did not begin until approval had been obtained from the IRB (see Appendix I). If during the course of the research any changes were made to the research plan, the changes were submitted to the IRB for additional approval.

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Summary

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A phenomenological study was conducted to develop a deeper understanding of the perceptions of students, faculty, administration, and visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program for encouraging composition student writing and learning about Southern culture. Purposive sampling was used to select participants in this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in the study. Data was collected through stakeholder interviews, a focus group, and hermeneutic textual review. The data was analyzed using coding and bracketing. Ethical standards were followed throughout this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of phenomenological study was to develop a deeper understanding of the perceptions of students, faculty, administration, and visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program for encouraging composition student writing and learning about Southern culture. Purposive sampling was used to select participants in this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in the study. Data was collected through stakeholder interviews, a focus group, and hermeneutic textual review. The data was analyzed using coding and bracketing. Ethical standards were followed throughout this study.

In this chapter, I presented the data analysis findings. Identified themes from data collection were presented using direct quotes to best reveal participants' perceptions. The quotes preserved original statements and grammar by participants to reflect their voices with accuracy. Identified themes from the literary analysis of two representative Writers@Work novels were also presented.

Participants

Chapter three includes a description of the overall sample as well as a brief description of the individual participants in the study. Pseudonyms were used for the participants except in the case where they are easily identified, such as the authors whose works have been used as the common texts for the Writers@Work program for two academic years. Participants of the study included two current English administrators, four current English professors, eight students who

have participated in the Writers@Work program, and two Southern authors whose works have been used as the common texts for the Writers@Work program for two academic years.

James - Administrator

James was born in Memphis, Tennessee, and grew up in Missouri. He also had the experience of living in Arkansas and Southern Mississippi before returning to Tennessee. Although he grew up in the Midwest, he considers his experiences in the South to be the ones that most established his identity. James reflected:

> I spent about 4 years in Arkansas and then about 4 years in Southern Mississippi and if you want to develop an identity as a Southerner, go live in the Deep South, you know, for several years. It was really a formative experience for me. And when we finally moved back to this direction – sort of in some ways back home to Tennessee – it just, I felt like a Southerner. (James, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 27, 2015)

In his administrative role at the College, James has had a predominant role in the development of the Writers@Work program and has been the primary negotiator in terms of bringing in authors for the program. James sees the rationale behind the Writers@Work program as having two main objectives. He said, "The rationale is two-fold: One, to give students a sense of what writers really do. And then two, to give them an opportunity to talk to the writers directly about 'what do you mean here? How did this work? How did you settle on that sort of thing?'" (James, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 27, 2015).

Amy – Administrator

Amy was raised in New York State but relocated to the Southeast several years ago. She has fully immersed herself in Southern literature as a way to learn more about the people, the geography, and the region that is so new to her. Amy said,

I think as a Northerner, you know, I've come into the South . . . with maybe different

eyes than some of my students but also maybe eyes that are the same because maybe

these students haven't spent a whole lot of time in reflection about their own culture –

uhm- or this type of literature. (Amy, personal correspondence with interviewee, April

24, 2015)

Amy served in an administrative role within the College's composition program and

viewed her position as one to provide as many resources as possible for students. Additionally,

Amy has taught the Writers@Work curriculum within her own composition classes for the past

several years. Amy has also served on the Writers@Work curriculum committee and feels very

passionate about making positive contributions to the curriculum so students will have a well-

rounded experience within their English composition courses.

Overall, Amy sees the Writers@Work program as being "a pretty strong contributor to

our Comp program's ability to develop these writing abilities" (Amy, personal correspondence

with interviewee, April 24, 2015). Amy also sees the program as a means by which students can

be better connected to the literature and, as a result, their writing. Amy stated, "If a student cares

about what they're writing about, they're going to spend so much time on it and they're going to

be so much more invested in it" (Amy, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 24,

2015).

Libby – English Professor

Libby was raised in Mobile, Alabama, where she lived until she moved to Troy,

Alabama, to attend college. Libby moved to Chattanooga for a teaching position at Chattanooga

State Community College. Libby teaches English composition and has actively incorporated

Writers@Work activities and materials into her second-semester composition classes since the

program began. When asked about her overall experience with the Writers@Work program, Libby stated:

> I think it's a really cool thing that [the students] are getting to meet who is writing what they are reading and so the fact that they are writing with the authors . . . it just makes them feel like they are both composing . . . And I think they take more account for their writing and it becomes – they are able to connect on some accord – and I think whenever that happens then they become more passionate about the topic that they have to write about. (Libby, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015)

Although she has enjoyed traveling to other places, Libby feels very strongly that she will always live in the South. Libby said, "I've always lived in the South. I will always live in the South. I will visit. I shall tour. I shall return" (Libby, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015). Libby has taught for 7 years.

John – English Professor

John grew up in Pennsylvania and never considered himself to be Northern or Southern; he considered himself to be Pennsylvanian. John reflected, "I even remember when I first came here and people thought that I was a city slicker because I grew up in Pennsylvania and I pointed out that I grew up on a 12-acre farm" (John, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015). John has taught English composition for 23 years. John has been an active part of the Writers@Work planning committee from its inception. He has been a part of the curriculum planning committee and has been the technology expert behind the program's Facebook page, Digication page, and website presence. John has integrated the Writers@Work curriculum into his composition classes. John observed that within the program, "We have a diverse set of Southern writers to see that Southern culture is really part of American culture" (John, personal

correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015). John also noticed that a strength of this program is the way it promotes student engagement. John said,

> I think it's a really good thing. I see students getting more engaged when the writers are here especially. They get excited about hearing the writers. They talk to the writers. Yeah, I think there is an energy building semester-by-semester. (John, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015)

Maggie– English Professor

Maggie is the sixth generation in her family to have grown up in a suburb of Chattanooga, Tennessee, where she has resided for all but nine months of her life when she lived in Memphis, Tennessee. Maggie recalls family stories of her Southern upbringing that has shaped her identity as a Southerner. Maggie said, "I've grown up with stories, you know, we have the family rifle that my great, great uncle used to keep the Union soldiers from stealing his chickens" (Maggie, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015). Maggie has been a part of the Writers@Work curriculum committee for several years. Maggie has taught English composition for 11 years. As a part of her normal teaching responsibilities for the College, Maggie has the unique position of teaching several dual enrollment classes at area high schools where students receive both high school and college credit. Maggie uses the Writers@Work curriculum within her second-semester composition classes and brings groups of students to attend the events with the authors each year. According to Maggie, the Writers@Work literature "provides some little – uhm – entrances into other places for [students] and thus it improves their writing because they can identify with the reading;" further, Maggie has observed that "it helps develop them as critical thinkers which leads to better writing" (Maggie, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015).

Steve– English Professor

Steve was born and raised in Chattanooga where he attended a private military school. He attended college in Virginia where he majored in English. Steve also lived in Massachusetts for a while and was able to truly see some of the similarities and differences, particularly in terms of stereotypes, when comparing the North to the South. It was over 30 years before Steve retired from a career in business and returned to his original intentions of teaching. Since then, Steve has taught English composition at Chattanooga State Community College part-time for 6 years where his ultimate goal is to teach students "to be able to communicate better" (Steve, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015). In the second-semester composition classes Steve teaches, he has planned his assignments around the Writers@Work program. Steve said, "I think the biggest impact on a student's writing comes not so much from reading the author's work but engaging with them and finding out how that author goes about writing a novel" (Steve, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015). Ultimately, Steve felt it was his Southern upbringing that has made it where he can provide a better understanding of the Southern culture for his students.

Alan – Student

Alan was born and raised in Hidden Creek, Tennessee, where he has lived all of his life. Alan found the Writers@Work experience to be a positive experience where he challenged himself as a writer by trying to demonstrate an individual perspective. In other words, Alan explored different ideas and angles than those addressed by his classmates. Alan stated he enjoyed the class discussions due to their ability to show him "how much personal history affects a piece of literature" (Alan, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). This experience also presented Alan with a scenario in which he was able to view his roots and really

question Southern stereotypes. He said, "It really brought to life for me the idea of development through this Southern culture. The negative connotations and the positive connotations" (Alan, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). By the end, Alan felt better able to accept both positive and negative aspects of his heritage and he felt as though he was a part of a greater world than that limited by his geographical location. Alan stated, "[The literature] kind of gave me a sense of there was not so much solitude involved where I'm from. I'm not the only person who lives in the middle of nowhere" (Alan, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Alan is an Associate of Science General Transfer student in the Liberal Arts division at Chattanooga State Community College.

Amber - Student

Amber was born in Michigan; however, her family moved to Chattanooga, Tennessee, when she was 1 year old. She has lived in Chattanooga ever since. Amber recently graduated from Chattanooga State Community College with her Associate of Science degree with a General Transfer focus in the Liberal Arts division. Amber enjoyed the distinctive nature of the Writers@Work text as a part of the Southern literature genre and said she "felt like it really set the base for the course" (Amber, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015. She felt there was a distinctive feeling of pride of Southern heritage exhibited by the stories' characters. Amber also appreciated the marked Southern setting established within the literary work and how she could visualize that setting as a result of being in the South much of her life. Additionally Amber commented on how Jill McCorkle's *Creatures of Habit* really gave her the opportunity to make connections because she felt connected to the literature. Amber said:

> It's like we would read the stories and I would kind of see how they're related but then as
> soon as I would start writing my essay . . . [I] would start to see all of these parallels and

like   how I could tie in this story with this part of this other story and it really made it

clear to me, like, just by writing and really like just getting it all out onto paper, like,

how the stories were really connected. So that made it really clear for me. (Amber,

personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Blake – Student

Blake was born in Iowa and lived there until he was 7 years old. His family then moved

to Chattanooga, Tennessee, where they reside today. Blake felt that the Writers@Work program,

as a part of the second-semester composition class, really gave him a chance to learn the

literature since the second essay assigned was built on the first essay, the third essay was built on

the first and second essays and so on. Being raised on Midwest values, Blake found it interesting

to view Southern literature through that lens. Blake commented:

[S]eeing how they discussed these small town scenes in the South – it really did seem like

they were sort of similar in a sense, because like if it's a small town, it's a small town

anyway, and uh, it was really cool to kind of see that as, "Hey, I can relate to this even

though I'm from the Midwest and this is still happening in the South" and so it was kind

of a cool connection I saw there. (Blake, personal correspondence with interviewee,

April 8, 2015)

Through this experience, Blake felt that he learned a great deal from a cultural perspective as a

result of comparing and contrasting situations presented in the literature and by other students.

Blake is an Associate of Science General Transfer student in the Liberal Arts division at

Chattanooga State Community College.

Bill - Student

Bill was born in Southern Louisiana. Bill proudly claimed, "I'm from further South than people from around here – and so when I say I'm from Louisiana – if you know the show *Duck Dynasty* – that's the town" (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). As Bill was growing up, his family moved all over the South from Louisiana to Texas to Mississippi to Georgia and finally to Tennessee. Bill felt the Writers@Work program gave his composition class a sense of focus and a sense of direction. He enjoyed working with the thematic similarities of one author's work for several weeks and feels that he advanced his critical thinking skills as a result of this exercise. Bill attended workshops offered every year with the visiting authors since the Writers@Work program began and realized through the process that "no matter where you're from, you have similar experiences growing up" (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). As a result, he was able to clearly recognize the distinctions between each author while simultaneously recognizing similarities of the Southern literature genre they all shared. Bill addressed the thematic similarities provided through the Writers@Work program quite emphatically:

> With the Writers@Work, you actually get to take similar stories from the same author and you do that all semester so . . . you actually start to see connections from a previous paper you wrote in your second paper. And then you see the connections in your third. Just like the stories have those undertones that connect them back to the other works, your own papers start to have those connections and you are able to draw upon your own work to reinforce what you're stating based on this writer's work. (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Bill is pursuing an Associate of Science General Transfer degree in the Liberal Arts division at Chattanooga State Community College.

Joseph – Student

Joseph was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where he has always lived. Joseph spent most of his school life attending private schools. Joseph found great benefit in the sense of professionalism the Writers@Work program added to his second-semester composition experience. Joseph said:

> It felt significantly different than classes before when it was just kind of show up, here's a topic that's just been picked out of a textbook or whatever. Here, it felt more – specifically a constructed thing that's built on an overall theme throughout the entire semester. (Joseph, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

He also felt the common text allowed the class to build a sense of community as they worked in small groups to develop their writing skills using the text as subject matter for the essays. He said, "It was like creating a community over time around the class" (Joseph, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Joseph felt it was beneficial to work with a contemporary text to obtain "a more realistic depiction of Southern settings today" (Joseph, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015) and to have a consistent thematic foundation from which the entire class was built. Joseph is an Associate of Science General Transfer student in the Liberal Arts division at Chattanooga State Community College.

Katie – Student

Katie was born in Texas and lived there for 1 year before her family moved to Florida. Her family lived in Florida for nine years and then moved to Chattanooga, Tennessee, where

they currently reside. As a result of the Writers@Work program, Katie felt a greater sense of connection to the literature. Katie said,

> The works are more interesting, too, when you feel that you understand the person or you know more about them. I feel like when I know more about authors, I want to read their stuff more. Even if it's not something that I would be typically interested in. (Katie, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Meeting the authors encouraged Katie to read more of their works and to read different genres. Katie is working on an Associate of Science degree in Social Work at Chattanooga State Community College.

Linda – Student

Linda was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, where she lived until she was 6 years old. At that time, Linda and her mother moved to Cleveland, Tennessee, where they currently live. As a result of having lived in Russia for several years, Linda can understand Russian when it is spoken; however, she cannot speak Russian fluently. Linda found the Writers@Work program to be inspiring as it encouraged her to write both academically for her composition assignments and personally to develop her creative writing skills because of the author being someone who is "during this time period" (Linda, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 20, 2015). Linda felt the common Writers@Work text provided a contemporary and relevant context for the Southern culture of today. Linda commented on one of the short stories in *Creatures of Habit* by Jill McCorkle:

> I really liked "Snakes" because it really did show how our society really works. It was so honest, you know. It was like one of those stories that I read and I used for the essay but

that I can see after the class as well. I can see it in real life. (Linda, personal

correspondence with interviewee, April 20, 2015)

Additionally, Linda saw the common text as an excellent resource for the essay

assignments in the class. Linda said, "So it's like her stories – you were able to use them

because she made them interesting" (Linda, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 20,

2015). Linda is a non-degree seeking student at Chattanooga State Community College with a

strong interest in studying math and sciences.

Mike – Student

Mike, physics major at Chattanooga State Community College, was born in Sarasota,

Florida, where he lived for 25 years of his life. He has also lived in Ohio and Arizona. When

listing the places he has lived, Mike said, "I've kind of covered the spectrum" (Mike, personal

correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). He has resided in Chattanooga, Tennessee for

the past 10 years. Mike saw the Writers@Work program as an added benefit to his second-

semester composition class. Mike felt the program inclusion made the course seem grounded and

real. He found great advantage to being able to study and write about an author's work and then

meet the author in person. Mike reflected:

> It was also nice to not just sort of be gaining ethereal knowledge for a class in school. It
>
> was actually grounded and real – somebody's work and you got to meet them in person.
>
> (Mike, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Mike appreciated the fact Writers@Work provided the course with structure and a sense of

purpose beyond just reading literature and writing essays about the literature. Even as a science

major, Mike found the experience to be inspirational and important in encouraging the

development of his writing skills. He even began to work on his own creative writing endeavors more through journal writing as a result of the experience.

Terry Kay – Author

Terry Kay was born in Hart County, Georgia and has been a Georgia resident all of his life. Mr. Kay is one of twelve children who grew up on a farm. Before becoming the award-winning author he is known as today, Mr. Kay worked as a sports writer and film and theater reviewer for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Mr. Kay also served as a public relations executive. Mr. Kay moved away from the corporate environment in 1989 to pursue his writing full time. Mr. Kay stated, "I became a writer out of need, you know, out of opportunity and honestly, accident more than anything else" (Terry Kay, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 4, 2015). Mr. Kay has published 16 books in more than 20 foreign languages of varying genres and voice; three of the novels, *To Dance with the White Dog*, *The Runaway*, and *The Valley of Light*, became Hallmark Hall of Fame movies. In the course of his career as a writer, Mr. Kay has been awarded two honorary doctorate degrees and was the recipient of the Georgia Writers Association Author of the Year awards for four years as well as their Lifetime Achievement Award. Mr. Kay was inducted into the Georgia Writers Hall of Fame in 2006 and was a recipient of the Governor's Award in Humanities in 2009. Mr. Kay has received numerous other awards for his achievements (The Terry Kay Corporation, 2015).

Jill McCorkle – Author

Jill McCorkle, born in Lumberton, North Carolina, is a notable Southern writer who, in 1984, had her first two novels published on the same day. Ms. McCorkle lived in Boston for 20 years of her adult life; however, she returned to North Carolina where she resides today. Ms. McCorkle has published ten novels, five of which have the distinction of being named "notable

books" by *The New York Times*. Ms. McCorkle has been the recipient of numerous awards

including "The New England Booksellers Award, the John Dos Passos Prize for Excellence in

Literature, and the North Carolina Award for Literature" (About Jill McCorkle, n.d.). Ms.

McCorkle has had an integral role as a prominent member and participant in the Fellowship of

Southern Writers. Ms. McCorkle has extensive teaching experience in creative writing through

her experience with UNC Chapel Hill, Tufts, and Brandeis. She was "a Briggs-Copeland

Lecturer in Fiction at Harvard for five years where she also chaired Creative Writing" (About Jill

McCorkle, n.d.). Ms. McCorkle has active teaching assignments at NC State University's MFA

Program and Bennington College Writing Seminars. She is also a regular part of the Sewanee

Summer Writers Program (About Jill McCorkle, n.d.). Regarding the Writers@Work program,

Ms. McCorkle said, "I think it lets these students know that there's so much interesting in the

world right in front of them" (Jill McCorkle, personal correspondence with interviewee, May 14,

2015). She also noted the connection between the faculty and students as she affirmed "that is

what it's all about" (Jill McCorkle, personal correspondence with interviewee, May 14, 2015).

Researcher's Voice

I specifically employed a bracketing technique when I developed the interview questions

for the study. I wanted the interview questions to facilitate productive conversations and

hopefully beneficial data in the process; however, I did not want the interview questions to

reflect any type of researcher bias. Additionally, during the interviews and focus group session,

when asking participants follow up questions based on their responses to the interview questions,

I made sure I carefully contemplated each follow up question before asking it. By doing this, I

allowed myself the opportunity to determine if I was asking the question to glean additional data

or if I was asking the question because of my own bias to the subject matter. In essence, I

bracketed out my assumptions pertaining to Southern themes and Southern culture to allow the participants' views to emerge without undue researcher influence. This process was effective toward ensuring all questions asked did not exhibit researcher bias.

Results

Data analysis was conducted for the purpose of identifying emergent themes to show if stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) perceived the Writers@Work program to be effective overall in encouraging the development of writing skills and learning more about Southern culture. The themes were established when the themes' presence was noted among the responses of the majority of the participants. Open-codes were identified and enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets was tallied to establish common themes (See Appendix J).

Research Question 1. What are the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging the development of writing skills?

Data analysis showed that stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) perceived the Writers@Work program to be effective overall in encouraging the development of writing skills. Several themes began to emerge as the data was collected and then analyzed. The themes were established when the themes' presence was noted among the responses of the majority of the participants. Open-codes were recorded that led to identification of the overall emerging themes. Open-codes were enumerated to further identify emerging themes (see Appendix J). The specific themes that emerged from the focus group and interviews with stakeholders include:

1. Course and Assignment Purpose: The Writers@Work program provided a structure in the second-semester composition course that gave the course and its assignments more purpose.

2. Writing Process: The Writers@Work program provided students with a deeper understanding of the writing process as they learned more about the relevancy of process from the writers.

3. Critical Thinking: The Writers@Work program encouraged greater development of students' critical thinking skills as they engaged with the literature on a deeper level.

4. Style: The Writers@Work program exposed students to different writing styles which helped them develop their own sense of style and understanding of the use of language and writing techniques.

5. Students Connecting to Literature: The Writers@Work program provided students with the opportunity to better connect with literature they could relate to, either through comparison or contrasts, because of their own backgrounds.

6. Students Connecting to Authors: The Writers@Work program provided students with the opportunity to connect with the authors as real people and writers with real struggles and common interests.

Common threads were revealed among participants' responses to better specify ways in which students learned more about writing skills as a result of their participation in the Writers@Work program as a part of their second-semester composition course.

Course and Assignment Purpose. The Writers@Work program provided a structure in the second-semester composition course that gave the course and its assignments more purpose. All student participants felt that the Writers@Work program provided a good framework for their second-semester English composition course and gave it a greater sense of purpose than just an ordinary composition class. One interviewee said:

I would say that it felt a lot more professional. It felt significantly different than classes

before when it was just kind of show up, here's a topic that's just been picked out of a

textbook or whatever, and here, it felt more – specifically a constructed thing that's built

on an overall theme throughout the entire semester. (Joseph, personal communication

with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

One student participant stated, "It sort of grounded it. It sort of impressed me that it was so well

thought out . . . it actually felt like there was a purpose and that made it more endurable. It was

inspirational" (Mike, personal communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Amber felt as if

it "really set the base for the course" (Amber, personal communication with interviewee, April 8,

2015) and gave it a more solid framework than typical English composition courses. Alan said,

"For me, I liked it because it gave the course a sense of progression" (Alan, personal

communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Alan further discussed how the Writers@Work

common text provided a baseline for the course they would always return to after discussing

other texts used in the course which gave it consistency. As he stated, "And then when you

come back to this same author – this same time period for her – and you do these other works,

you feel like you make a step forward – like you're getting somewhere. There's an actual goal to

meet" (Alan, personal communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Bill further elaborated

on this idea when he said,

It was a good thing because it kind of kept the whole course on one track so you knew

where everything was kind of going. And with staying with that one author it kind

of made the whole course feel like you had this building thing throughout looking at

their works at certain different stages. It kind of gave solidity to the course. One solid

foundation. (Bill, personal communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Faculty participants felt the Writers@Work program provided a deeper purpose for the second-semester English composition course by setting up a framework that culminated with the students meeting the authors. The students had the opportunity to work with the texts during the preceding semesters leading up to the author's week on campus. As John, a professor of over 23 years, stated, "I see students getting more engaged when the writers are here especially" (John, personal communication with interviewee, March 31, 2015). Libby saw the program as one that provided a unifying framework within the course overall, as well as the campus, as she said, "It's really cool having all the students on the same accord – where they are all reading the same works – so even if your friend takes class online, they're still reading the same text . . . it kind of unifies the campus as a whole" (Libby, personal communication with interviewee, March 31, 2015). Maggie saw the use of the Writers@Work program as being integrated into the course curriculum "as kind of framing it as the whole" (Maggie, personal communication with interviewee, March 30, 2015)

Of the two administrator participants, one addressed the importance of designing useful and engaging curriculum for the Writers@Work program to incorporate in the second-semester English composition course in order to best shape the framework within the context of the course. Amy recalled approaching her new role as a part of the curriculum committee for Writers@Work with the driving question of "How can I craft some writing assignments that are going to get students excited about this material and get them to comprehend this material?" (Amy, personal communication with interviewee, April 24, 2015). Amy attributed the success of this to the fact the common text changes every year and as a result, the curriculum changes, too. As Amy stated, "I love the idea of reinvigorating the curriculum every year for both the instructors and the students" (Amy, personal communication with interviewee, April 24, 2015).

The other administrator, James, thought the program provided the general means of showing what writers really do while providing students with a format for them to learn from writers in person. James did not see the substructure affected by the Writers@Work program as he stated, "You know we're still using literature – we're still teaching analysis in Comp II and so that hasn't changed" (James, personal communication with interview, April 27, 2015); however, he indicated that the program definitely enhances the curriculum.

       Writing Process. The Writers@Work program provided students with a deeper understanding of the writing. Students felt the use of a common text also provided them with a constant they could rely on while learning more about using the writing process to advance their writing skills. Alan described the importance of the common text as a tool for the writing process as:

> For my writing – whenever I write, it's kind of like trying to maneuver around a new
> place in the dark . . . I feel like with the story, it's kind of like you're walking down a
> staircase in the dark. You have a rail to hold onto and you have a general direction to
> focus on, so I think it kind of helps guide you through the writing process . . . I think it
> really helped guide you through the process from beginning to end to keep a good,
> concise, clear, straightforward thought process on the writing. (Alan, personal
> communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Students unanimously concurred with Alan's description of how the text helped ground the writing process for them.

       Joseph truly saw benefit with the process as a means by which to construct the essays. As he explained, "Just this ongoing process of building something from the start and then building upon it instead of just putting something together and that just being the final result. It

was like building something and then altering parts of it until it finally hit the final result"
(Joseph, personal communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Students felt that having a

better understanding of the literary elements equipped them with knowledge to help construct

their essays. In other words, their knowing how to use the writing process assisted with how

they wrote and understanding the literary elements assisted with what they wrote. The

Writers@Work program provided the framework for all of it.

Students saw great benefit with being able to discuss the writing process with the writers

themselves. Students saw the writing process as having greater relevancy when hearing the

writers talk about the importance of the writing process in their own craft. As Mike stated,

"Getting to talk to the authors about their process . . . it inspired me to really enjoy and develop

my own process of writing" (Mike, personal communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015).

Mike even went on to say he actually had fun with the writing process for the first time as a

result (Mike, personal communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015).

Faculty participants felt students were able to learn more about using the writing process

through all stages of writing. John called attention to the purpose of the Writers@Work program

for teaching process. He said, "That's the point of Writers@Work that they're seeing writers at

work – writers in the process – writers talking about their process – writers thinking through

what they do" (John, personal communication with interviewee, March 31, 2015). Libby felt the

Writers@Work text provided greater support early in the writing process with idea generation

and initial brainstorming. Libby reported success at this stage due to students' ability to "think

outside of the box with the early writing process" (Libby, personal communication with

interviewee, March 31, 2015). She attributed this to students connecting more with the

Writers@Work text. Steve observed his students learning, through interaction with the authors,

that the writing process requires more than just a single writing session. As he stated, "[The students] go and interact with the author and the author reemphasizes what we've emphasized in Comp II class which is that writing is not an event, it's a process, and it requires planning" (Steve, personal communication with interviewee, March 30, 2015). John further developed this idea when he said,

> Because that's how the writing process works and so listening to the writers and hearing them talk about struggling with writing because they assume they can just do it automatically because they're writers, and hearing them talk about maybe – I think the students begin to realize, "You know – that's what I do. I have these problems, too". (John, personal communication with interviewee, March 31, 2015)

Faculty observed that students learned more about the more advanced stages of the writing process. Libby discussed students' newfound realization of the work writers put into their publications and the necessity of multiple revisions. Steve also noted the fact that students learned more about the importance of the revision stage of the writing process. He commented, "[The writing process] requires planning. It requires revision. Numerous revisions" (Steve, personal communication with interviewee, March 30, 2015). Students better related to this when hearing it from the authors rather than it merely being emphasized in class. Maggie began to see her students learning to view the writing process as more formulaic as a result of observing the patterns and formulas that writers commonly use.

Participating administrators addressed the ability of the Writers@Work program to provide an extra layer of instruction both inside and outside of the classroom when teaching students about the writing process. "[W]hat we've tried to do by bringing in this living author is to provide students with the opportunity to see past the text and to have a chance to converse

with the author about the writing process" (James, personal communication with interview, April 27, 2015). James acknowledged the need to emphasize to the authors the importance of discussing the writing process with students as much as possible as the focus of the student sessions. Amy perceived that the Writers@Work program is "a pretty strong contributor to our Comp program's ability to develop these writing skills" (Amy, personal communication with interviewee, April 24, 2015). Amy observed that through the Writers@Work program, students learned more about the research process that goes into writing. Amy also indicated students have learned more from authors about the real way they use the writing process in their own compositions. This made the usefulness of the writing process seem more relevant to students (Amy, personal communication with interview, April 24, 2015). Amy mentioned one activity in class where students looked at the authors' social network sites to learn more about the authors' current works in progress. This, too, made the writing process real and relevant in a context students of today can relate to.

Participating administrators and faculty members observed a new recognition by students of the work ethic that is a part of the process and craft of writing as a result of their engaging with the writers. Libby felt that students, especially those from the South, were able to connect with the writers and were driven to work harder on their essays as a result. As Libby stated, "I think they take more account for their writing and it becomes – they are able to connect on some accord – and I think whenever that happens then they become more passionate about the topic that they have to write about" (Libby, personal communication with interview, March 31, 2015). John noticed that students began to realize the amount of work that goes into a quality piece of writing through the writers' examples. John said, "There's a work ethic to the writing process that if you want to get good at writing, you've got to put effort into it and you can't do it at the

last minute" (John, personal communication with interviewee, March 31, 2015). In short, John felt work ethic and the writing process go hand-in-hand as he stated, "the writing process is just a technique to work hard and work well and that's what students have to learn. They have to learn to work hard. They have to learn to work well and they have to learn – are there shortcuts? – well that's part of working well" (John, personal communication with interviewee, March 31, 2015). Amy, one of the participating administrators, noticed a difference in students' work ethic as they began reflecting on their own writing practices compared to that of the authors. She observed students as they realized, "Ok, I can't write my paper overnight . . . This is something that takes a long time and is a long process" (Amy, personal communication with interviewee, April 24, 2015). Amy also perceived that the Writers@Work program is "a pretty strong contributor to our Comp program's ability to develop these writing skills" (Amy, personal communication with interviewee, April 24, 2015). Students learned through the authors' examples the work ethic that is required to write successfully and is an integral part of the writing process.

Critical Thinking. The Writers@Work program encouraged greater development of students' critical thinking skills as they engaged with the literature on a deeper level. Students perceived they were able to develop their critical thinking skills, particularly through working with the common text and establishing overall connections, as a result of the Writers@Work component in their second-semester English composition course. Students felt the common text enabled them to establish deeper comparisons and contrasts of the literary works as they progressed through their essay assignments. As Bill stated:

With the Writers@Work, you actually get to take similar stories from the same author and you do that all semester so it gives your own writing, instead of, ok, "I've got to

make it fit this format for this submission – for this paper" – you actually start to see

connections from a previous paper you wrote in your second paper. And then you

see the connections in your third. Just like the stories have those undertones that connect

them back to the other works, your own papers start to have those connections and you

are able to draw upon your own work to reinforce what you're stating based on this

writer's work. (Bill, personal communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Students found they were able to take their literary analyses to a deeper level through the use of

common text. As Amber reported:

I feel really weird about writing essays. I really like it but I don't like it. I don't know.

But as soon as I would start writing them, I would start to see all of these parallels and

like how I could tie in this story with this part of this other story and really made it

clear to me, like, just by writing and really like just getting it all out onto paper, like,

how the stories were really connected. So that made it really clear for me. (Amber,

personal communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

The students agreed they all worked harder to present their own unique perspectives within their

essays through the use of the common text. Students acknowledged they exercised critical

thinking skills they had not exercised before by trying to compose essays that were different in

voice and perspective from those of their classmates. As Alan observed:

I would sometimes go home and delete the entire essay and completely start over from a

new angle that I could try to find to challenge myself to find an individual perspective

where everyone's looking the same way, I'd say, "Well what if we look over here

because no one else is exploring this area. This would be a good challenge that would

bring something new to the table for both the teacher and other students to read and

peer review." (Alan, personal communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Students recognized they used more advanced critical thinking skills as they began to see greater

connections within the literature and within their own essays. Alan described the course as

building momentum from one assignment to the next as deeper connections were established

from essay-to-essay rather than essays serving as stand-alone entities (Alan, personal

communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Bill said, "You could make all of these other

connections that you normally – you wouldn't make between the stories. And so it was all

opinion – it was almost opinion-based and you had to back all of your opinions up which made it

much more interesting and much more exciting" (Bill, personal communication with

interviewee, April 8, 2015). Students felt the vague and/or general essay prompts made the

course more interpretive giving them more of an opportunity to develop critical thinking skills.

As Amber stated:

I do remember with the Comp II assignments versus Comp I at least, they were very,

very vague. Like they were really like – you were able to write kind of almost

whatever you wanted a little bit – like definitely take your own path which made it

a lot harder to start the essays just because it's like, "Ok, I could write about

anything. There's so many options I don't know what to write about." But once you

figured it out I thought it was really nice how open they left the prompts and

everything. (Amber, personal communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Bill concurred with this sentiment and added "you got to make connections that, you know,

people don't normally – you know, wouldn't normally make between the stories" (Bill, personal

communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015).

Students felt they advanced their critical thinking skills through building on Writers@Work materials in the course which allowed them to see deeper meaning and deeper connections. Joseph stated, "You would build upon the last story and apply some things you are had learned from the previous story to the new one" (Joseph, personal communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Bill elaborated:

> With the Writers@Work, you actually get to take similar stories from the same author
> and you do that all semester so it gives your own writing, instead of, ok, "I've got to
> make it fit this format for this submission – for this paper" – you actually start to see
> connections from a previous paper you wrote in your second paper. And then you
> see the connections in your third. Just like the stories have those undertones that connect
> them back to the other works, your own papers start to have those connections and
> you are able to draw upon your own work to reinforce what you're stating based on this
> writer's work. (Bill, personal communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Alan saw this common text as being the catalyst for grounding the course while giving it forward momentum which allowed for more critical thinking to occur (Alan, personal communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015).

Faculty and administrators saw a marked development in students' development of critical thinking skills as a result of the Writers@Work program. Amy, one of the administrator participant, stated that with these works, students are being asked "to read these works, think about them critically, to comprehend them, and then to write about them critically" (Amy, personal communication with interviewee, April 24, 2015). Maggie and John, faculty participants, saw students increasing their critical thinking skills by learning how to better work with the writing process. Maggie said:

There are realms of possibility so I think doing Southern lit and I think doing this variety

of texts allows us to show them there is a pattern, there is a formula, and you just kind

of swap pieces in and out so it helps develop them as critical thinkers which leads to

better writing. (Maggie, personal communication with interviewee, March 30, 2015)

John observed that through the interaction with the authors, students learned that sometimes the

writing process is not necessarily linear. It frequently took students experimenting with their

writing to learn that what they thought was the introduction was actually the conclusion. They

advance their critical thinking skills by using and learning how to work with the various pieces

of the writing process (John, personal communication with interviewee, March 31, 2015).

Faculty observed students creating larger connections. Students realized the magnitude

of the world compared to their own somewhat limited experience.

Maggie noted:

[I]t spawns larger connections and again what I kind of think is the emphasis of a

composition class is making them enter into not only an academic framework but to also

realize the world is much bigger than they are and what they've been exposed to and

that can make them better thinkers and writers. (Maggie, personal communication with

interviewee, March 30, 2015)

Steve detected students were better able to see and understand key issues and to better analyze

literary elements while John noted students making greater advancements toward seeing how the

works came together and identifying the logic of an argument (Steve, personal communication

with interviewee, March 30, 2015; John, personal communication with interviewee, March 31,

2015).

Style. The Writers@Work program exposed students to different writing styles which helped them develop their own sense of style and understanding of the use of language and writing techniques. Student participants appreciated being exposed to the different writing styles of the Writers@Work authors. Katie mentioned that when she was more interested in a writer because of the chance to meet him/her in person, she naturally wanted to read more of his/her works and to learn more about the author's style (Katie, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Bill felt that understanding the writers' styles can help students develop their own sense of style. He said, "So having the writers and continually going over their material helps you understand their tone which in turn can influence yours in your own writing" (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015).

The students felt that by examining different authors' writing style they were led to an almost deconstruction approach by breaking apart the writing elements and seeing how the authors wrote what they wrote. Bill described this as being able to "almost break out of that traditional sense of what an essay is" (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015) which concluded in more interesting and more advanced student writing in general. Along these lines, when trying to isolate the authors' themes, students felt it was harder to see common themes with the autobiographic and graphic novel genres and easier to see common themes within stories, and for the writers in general, when studying short story and novel genres. Amber emphasized the thematic commonalities that could be established within one author's work even when the stories were a bit different due to understanding the author's style (Amber, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Bill specifically attributed such thematic commonalities to the authors consistently writing about what they know and what influenced them growing up. Bill stated:

I mean, you can look at – you can look at Southern poets and if they grew up out in the

bayou, and – there's going to be that kind of influence in their writing. If they grew up

in the swamps, they're going to have that kind of scenery and imagery in their work

and the same thing with authors. No matter what kind of author they are, they are

going to take their real experiences. (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee,

April 8, 2015)

Katie reiterated how authors writing about what they know and exercising their own unique

styles made her want to read and learn more about the authors (Katie, personal correspondence

with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Student participants noted the similarities of experiences for

writers selected for Writers@Work as a part of the Southern literature genre; however, they

recognized that each writer had his/her own spin. Bill stated, "They all have similar stories –

similar experiences – but they all have a different take on it" (Bill, personal correspondence with

interviewee, April 8, 2015).

As a result of experiencing the different authors' styles, student participants felt the

Writers@Work program encouraged more creative thinking, more creative analysis, and more

creative writing both inside and outside of the confines of ordinary composition classes. Mike

found that he began enjoying the act of writing more – both freewriting on his own and by

exercising more creativity within the essays he was required to write (Mike, personal

correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Linda was inspired to begin writing her own

short stories and discovered that even though she plans to major in Math, she wants to pursue

creative writing as a hobby (Linda, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 20, 2015).

Students agreed they found themselves modeling their own writing after that of the authors they

were studying. They felt they would not have done this in an ordinary second-semester English composition course that did not contain the Writers@Work element.

Faculty participants noticed a difference with student writing as students began to understand the authors' styles and began to apply that to their own writing through imitation. Steve went so far as to say students became better writers through imitation of the authors they studied. Steve said, "They want to learn how to write better. They want to learn how to describe better – uh – and so it makes some sense that having a writer at work can help them improve that skill" (Steve, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015). He noticed this especially after students studied Rick Bragg, a very descriptive writer. Steve explained,

Rick Bragg this semester is extremely descriptive in his ability to share his visions

and his thoughts with the reader and so we talk a little bit about that descriptive style.

And a number of students imitate or will imitate that style in assignments that we give –

that I give them. (Steve, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015)

Faculty noted the benefits of exposure to different writing styles and genres in helping students understand the importance of finding their own voice. Steve noted the different styles represented within the Writers@Work common texts since the program began (Steve, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015). Maggie saw this, along with the students being able to meet the authors, as influential in exposing students to the importance of writing as an individual and yet personal endeavor. Maggie said students realized the possibilities within written expression are endless and up to the writer. Maggie's students realized "'Oh. There's not a just right answer – there's a bunch of realms of possibility that I could go with – that it really is just up to me'" (Maggie, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015). Further, Maggie witnessed students realizing the similarities between the development at the

base of storytelling and good essay writing and saw how they began to translate an author's style into their own writing and their own essays.

Administrators did not discuss any aspect of the Writers@Work authors' writing style and how it influenced student writing.

Students Connecting to Literature. The Writers@Work program provided students with the opportunity to better connect with literature they could relate to, either through comparison or contrasts, because of their own backgrounds. This led to greater enthusiasm about writing. Student participants felt better connected to the literature of the Writers@Work program and as a result, they felt more encouraged with their own writing. As Bill said:

> What I really enjoyed, you were able to take their work and use their arguments or their opinions or their facts in your own work but then you got to turn around, you got to understand the second layer of their work. You didn't just get the words on the page, you got the story behind the words which, in turn, could help you emphasize your own work even better. (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Katie followed this up with:

> The works are more interesting, too, when you feel that you understand the person or you know more about them. I feel like when I know more about authors, I want to read their stuff more. Even if it's not something that I would be typically interested in. It's more interesting when you know more about the author, in my experience. (Katie, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Bill, a student from the South, felt he related to the readings more. He said:

I can't see myself going to Hogwarts. I can't see myself on the Ring World

working with a group of aliens to save the universe. I can't see that. But I can see

myself running down the street, you know, or riding a bike down the street going out to a

blue hole and swimming all afternoon and then coming back in playing baseball on the

street corner and putting a baseball through, you know, Old Man Wickers backyard or

whatever or through his window or, you know, all of these different things, I can see

that. I'm there. I can live the experience because I understand where that writer is

coming from and you can't do that with other literature – with other types of

literature out there and there's just that deeper connection where immediately when you

start reading it, it's not words on a page, it's "I live something like this." (Bill, personal

correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Linda, a student participant from Russia, could relate to the literature even from her limited time

of living the South and found the works made her feel excited about writing. Linda said, "That

type of story moved me to write because it was really inspiring" (Linda, personal correspondence

with interviewee, April 20, 2015).

Further connections were made by student participants as they felt the Writers@Work

literature was relevant which helped them as well when composing their own essays. Linda

noted:

I used it – I used the material – I really liked "Snakes" because it really did show how

our society really works. It was so honest, you know. It was like one of those stories

that I read and I used for the essay but that I can see after the class as well. I can see it

in real life. (Linda, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 20, 2015)

Joseph described the literature as being "helpful and interesting" while "giv[ing] you subjects to write about" (Joseph, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Mike reflected on the experience as a whole when he said, "After reading a story and then writing a paper on it and then hearing the author tell about the story and what they meant by a certain thing, it was, I don't know, it was kind of surreal. It was nice" (Mike, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Blake noted the deeper experience with learning about the literature and writing about it:

> I know on like the last couple of papers we'd get to reuse some of the stories that we read before and so it kind of like built upon each other like the stories and how we wrote the next paper and stuff like that. By the end of the class it felt like you really knew the stories and what they're about. It's really interesting. (Blake, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Faculty and administrator participants observed students connecting to the Writers@Work literature and noted a change in their approach to writing. Faculty participants noticed the literature seemed more accessible to the students. Students could identify with the reading and as a result, they could better identify with the writing. John commented on the fact that students do not write as well when they do not find the subject matter to be interesting. That was not the case with the Writers@Work literature. John also saw the literature as being relevant to today's events, specifically when dealing with topics such as prejudice and racism. John perceived the program to be an excellent means by which to bring in more contemporary literature which students can understand better with the hopes of their writing being positively impacted as well (John, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015).

Faculty participants noticed heightened incidents of reader-response coming into play as students related to the literature as a result of their own backgrounds and experiences. Maggie recognized students began to see their own backgrounds as being relevant toward their understanding the text and or expanding upon what they already knew (Maggie, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015). Libby remarked:

Things like students who were children who remember the Civil Rights movements or students who grew up in poverty in the South. And so I think they are able to connect that – or even their parents – are able to connect these things and then they feel more connected. And then I think they take more account for their writing and it becomes – they are able to connect on some accord – and I think whenever that happens then they become more passionate about the topic that they have to write about. (Libby, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015)

Steve stated:

I guess the way I see it is this is a course that is geared to writing about literature and so you see a piece of fiction and it's important to understand what it's saying understand what the issues are understand what your thoughts are on those issues. (Steve, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015)

Libby saw students relating to the literature as being important while observing that students seemed to especially connect to the literature when given an opportunity to hear the authors speak in person at the Writers@Work events (Libby, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015). Steve also emphasized this as being an important aspect of the program as he remarked:

I think, particularly when they go and interact with the author and the author reemphasizes what we've emphasized in the Comp II class which is that writing is not an event, it's a process and it requires planning. It requires revision. Numerous revisions. So clearly I think that the biggest impact on a student's writing comes not so much from reading the author's work but engaging with them and finding out how that author goes about writing a novel. (Steve, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015)

John remarked that students' familiarity with the Southern setting leads to the greatest connection with the texts. Maggie believed this became a "touchstone with their own personal experiences" students were able to translate into their writing (Maggie, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015). Maggie stated:

[The literature] provides some little – uhm – entrances into other places for them   and thus it improves their writing because they can identify with the reading thus they can identify with the writing. (Maggie, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015)

Amy, administrator participant, noticed a significant difference in students' interest levels in their own writing when they connect to the literature. As Amy stated, "If a student cares about what they're writing about, they're going to spend so much time on it and they're going to be so much more invested in it" (Amy, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 24, 2015).

Students Connecting to Authors. The Writers@Work program provided students with the opportunity to connect with the authors as real people and writers with real struggles and common interests. Studying the Writers@Work texts throughout a semester, with the culmination of meeting the author at the end, provided students with an experience that allowed

them to better connect with the authors and, as a result, the literature. Students were able to better understand the struggles of every writer from a first-person perspective and to garner more confidence in their own writing abilities if they were willing to put the worked required into the final product. Blake noted:

> I liked it in the sense that it made it a bit more interesting for the fact that you spent all of this time getting to know an author's works and what they've done with their life and stuff like that. It was really kind of cool the idea that the end of the semester to actually get to meet these people and actually get to talk to them and see from their perspective. (Blake, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Mike commented, "It was also nice to not just sort of be gaining ethereal knowledge for a class in school. It was actually grounded and real – somebody's work and you got to meet them in person" (Mike, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Katie found the works were more interesting when she knew more about the author and could understand their perspective more. Katie observed:

> It's kind of cool to have these ideas of what this person is going to be like, too, and then really trying to see their writing like while you're talking to them and stuff and see the way they think. (Katie, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Linda addressed the fact she was inspired to write more on her own as a result of feeling a greater connection to the author due to the fact the author was current and wrote in a contemporary fashion she understands (Linda, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015).

Faculty participants observed the impact of students meeting and interacting with the authors. As Maggie stated:

[B]y being able to bring them and show them a live person who is still breathing kicking

writing thinking about their writing being questioned about their writing its they are able

to see that writing is even more of an organic process and thus identify with it . . . They

kind of get excited – even the ones who aren't writers or readers. (Maggie, personal

correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015)

Libby noted students learned more about writing through the authors' experiences with writing

and through the common connection they feel with the author by being in the South:

I think it's a really cool thing that they are getting to meet who is writing what they are

reading and so the fact that they are writing with the authors who have written uhm it just

makes them feel like they are both composing – it kind of levels the playing field with

them and the authors because a lot of times I think the authors can be and the readings

can be kind of impersonal – there's no way to connect but ultimately what we all have in

common is that we all are in the South at least and so the fact that the authors are from

this area and write about things that are indicative of this area, I think it makes, it pulls it

all together really well. (Libby, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31,

2015)

Libby also felt students seemed more responsible for their writing due to this connection with the

writer. She said, "I think they take more account for their writing and it becomes – they are able

to connect on some accord – and I think whenever that happens they become more passionate

about the topic they have to write about" (Libby, personal correspondence with interviewee,

March 31, 2015).

John asserted the purpose of the Writers@Work program for establishing this connection

between the students and authors:

That's the point of Writers@Work that they're seeing writers at work – writers in the

process – writers talking about their process – writers thinking through what they do.

The fact that they're Southern writers might make it a little easier. (John, personal

correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015)

John also addressed the extra element Writers@Work provides students in the second-semester

English composition course as a result of students connecting with the authors. John affirmed:

[L]istening to the writers and hearing them talk about struggling with writing because

they assume they just can do it automatically because they're writers, and hearing them

talk about that maybe – I think the students begin to realize, "You know. That's what I

do. I have these problems, too. " that, I think, is the realization. (John, personal

correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015)

Steve felt that it was specifically the engagement with the author that was most influential to the

students and their own writing development. As he emphasized:

I think, particularly when they go and interact with the author and the author

reemphasizes what we've emphasized in the Comp II class which is that writing is not an

event, it's a process and it requires planning. It requires revision. Numerous revisions.

So clearly I think that the biggest impact on a student's writing comes not so much from

reading the author's work but engaging with them and finding out how that author goes

about writing a novel. To be specific, an example came up when Jill McCorkle was here.

A student said, "How do you decide if you're going to write in the first person or the

third person" and I thought that was a great question because how does an author go

about that? And she provided some detail on the process she goes through in making that

determination. (Steve, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015)

Administrator participants observed students connecting and engaging with writers to learn more about how literature works and to learn more about the literary themes as well as advancing their own writing skills in the process. James addressed the importance of helping students establish a connection during the experience as he stated:

[T]here may have been one or two [students] that may not have said a word during the session but then wanted to corner the writer afterwards, you know, and really connect and talk with them and it wasn't self-aware posturing it was sort of this really genuine and unembarrassed "Well, what'd your daddy do?" You know that sort of stuff and to me, that's really powerful and that's what we ought to be doing – especially as a community college – is to help students see it's not this – it is erudite, it is scholarly, it is intellectual, but it's not only that. It's also approachable, you know, I mean to me that's the essence of Southern culture. (James, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 27, 2015)

Amy affirmed, "[I]n terms of strengthening writing – uhm – I think that for a lot of students the idea that the author is still around – that they're alive – is a big deal" (Amy, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 24, 2015). She followed this up by stating,

You know, I think that gets them sort of thinking about their writing slightly differently than say when we're writing about something like Eudora Welty's "A Worn Path" just because, you know, she's not going to come and visit with us. I don't think. [laughter] She may come back as a ghost. (Amy, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 24, 2015)

Amy felt as students connected with the writers, they began to realize the work that goes into a writing endeavor of any nature and that it cannot be done overnight, thus, reaffirming the writing process and taking the necessary time to work through the process.

Research Question 2. What are the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

Data analysis showed that stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) perceived the Writers@Work program to be effective overall in encouraging a deeper understanding of Southern culture. Several themes began to emerge as the data was collected and then analyzed. The themes were established when the themes' presence was noted among the responses of the majority of the participants. Open-codes were recorded that led to identification of the overall emerging themes. Open-codes were enumerated to further identify emerging themes (see Appendix J). The specific themes that emerged from the focus group and interviews with stakeholders include:

1. Recognition of Historical Past to Move toward an Optimistic Future: The Writers@Work program provided students with a deeper perception of the South's historical and sometimes negative past that has created a stronger present identity.

2. Characteristics of Southern Identity: The Writers@Work program provided students with a deeper awareness of the specific characteristics that characterize Southern identity.

3. Regionalism: The Writers@Work program gave students a deeper understanding of regionalism and how the geography and setting of a region perpetuates a sense of culture.

4. Identification of Stereotypes: The Writers@Work program led students to an analysis of Southern stereotypes as such stereotypes perpetuate the perception of Southern culture.

5. Literature as a Vehicle to Learn More about Southern Culture: The Writers@Work common texts provided students with a means, through direct exposure to the Southern literary genre, by which to learn more about Southern culture.

Recognition of Historical Past to Move toward an Optimistic Future. The Writers@Work program provided students with a deeper perception of the South's historical and sometimes negative past that has created a stronger present identity. Student participants emphasized the presence of the theme of oppression and struggle in Southern culture as demonstrated through the literature specifically in the areas of a reluctance to let go of old traditions, a general sense of shame due to the historical past, and a lack of progression.

Students observed the frequent presence of characters reluctant to let go of the way things have always been done. Amber noted the prevalence of characters stuck in old traditions in Southern literature even though supporting characters are typically present who recognize the old traditions as being negative in some way (Amber, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Blake commented on how this reluctance to move past traditions frequently kept the protagonists from realizing their full potential (Blake, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Linda observed this is still a part of the Southern culture today that results in oppression of the individual by the individual (Linda, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 20, 2015).

Students felt there was a general sense of shame within the Southern literature genre due to the historical past. Katie thought this was one of the prevalent themes during the year she was studying the Writers@Work literature (Katie, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). As Bill stated:

I definitely think there is the idea of shame . . . anyone from the South, anyone living in the South, knows some of the history of the South and things in the past always have a way of coming up in anything and everything. In politics, in writing, in plays, in, you know, whatever it is you're doing, just in typical conversation, there's, I think, some of that history's going to come up and not all of the history is great in the South. (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 20, 2015)

Joseph noted the sense of shame revealed itself through topics, such as racism, that is present in Southern literature. Joseph said, "It's usually just one of the main things of it that's lying around is the racism" (Joseph, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Joseph went on to state that poverty seemed to be as much of a contributing factor toward the sense of shame as race (Joseph, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Amber recognized the sense of shame throughout the Writers@Work literature, but at the same time, she noticed some of the characters making a concerted effort to move beyond the negative implications of the past for a more positive future (Amber, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015).

Student participants expressed recognition of oppression in the Writers@Work literature due to the characters' sense of a lack of progression. The students felt the characters knew they could not hold on to the negative aspects of the past if they had any hope of progressing on any level. Mike saw this as granting the literature a sense of oppression, but he felt it established more of a feeling of realism within the works that spoke to the Southern culture at large (Mike, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Joseph asserted the aspect of realism present in the Writers@Work literature due to the literature being more contemporary and more

representative of the South of today (Joseph, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015).

Even with the elements of the negative historical past, student participants found the presence of an underlying optimism within the literary works that is felt in today's Southern culture as well. Bill described it as follows:

And so I think that plays a bit of a role in all Southern literature and you can definitely see it in, you know, these different writers' works . . . you strive to end up better off than you are but then that - there's always that idea of circling back around and realizing that, you know, you have your family, you have your friends so everything is going to be ok anyway. (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Bill emphasized this again when referencing Southern literary themes as he stated, "Even when it's not, everything's ok" and "And Southerners – there's a little bit of that shame in there but at the same time even when things were bad, there's still the idea that things are going to be ok" (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Student participants felt this optimism was largely a result of three aspects: breaking free from something (such as the past), breaking through the perceptions of what others think, and accepting the good of one's history with the bad. Amber saw the characters refusing to accept what had always been done while striving to break free from the past (Amber, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Bill recognized characters trying to break free from the socioeconomic oppression the past created (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Katie noticed the characters working toward breaking through perceptions of what others think (Katie, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Katie emphasized this was influential as the year she was involved with Writers@Work the common text was an autobiography. Other

student participants concurred this was a common thread within their literary works as well. Students felt the optimism, and the aforementioned realism, represented Southern culture through accepting the good of one's history with the bad. As Mike stated,

[I]t's not all like war propaganda where you had, "The South is awesome!" You don't – it's not all that – you get both sides of the coin and I think that's a good thing to be able to notice and pick up on in a genre of literature. (Mike, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Bill asserted that whereas all of these elements are present in Southern culture, establishing connections with people and community can override oppression as demonstrated throughout the literature (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). As Mike said regarding the study of Southern literature and learning more about Southern culture as a result, "The program focusing on it brought it to our attention and then that just helps you learn about that more" (Mike, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015).

Faculty participants perceived that students learned more about Southern culture as a result of the Writers@Work program. Maggie observed students gaining a deeper understanding of Southern history and the cultural implications as a result of studying the common text that brought to light certain elements indicative of the culture. Faculty participants noticed students seemed to learn more specifically in the areas of classicism, oppression, and race.

Faculty participants addressed the recognition by students of classicism present within the Southern culture as represented by the Writers@Work literature studied. Libby commented on the fact that race seemed to be an obvious factor of discrimination students were most familiar with; however, they were able to identify classicism as another form they had not previously addressed. As Libby stated,

I think the element of classicism also was incorporated into the classroom because – uhm – Rick Bragg's family, you know, they weren't racially segregated against; however, since they were low on the socioeconomic status, they were discriminated against with this whole issue of class. (Libby, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015)

John reported student participants developed a realization that class, based primarily on socio-economic status, is a large part of the culture reflected within Southern literature and was an aspect they had not considered before (John, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015).

Faculty participants acknowledged the prevalence of oppression within the Writers@Work literature noted by students as a part of Southern culture. Libby saw this reflected predominantly through the aforementioned student recognition of discrimination – through race and class – as it oppressed the individuals represented within the literature (Libby, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015). Steve identified the presence of oppression through the general theme of struggle that students began to notice and understand as exemplified through the literature (Steve, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015). John addressed the general struggle as a result of the poverty much of the South is in that students were not thoroughly aware of until they studied the Writers@Work literature (John, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015).

Faculty participants acknowledged the prevalence of the topic of race within the Writers@Work literature noted by students as a part of Southern culture. Libby noted this topic provided students with an opportunity to discuss this aspect of Southern culture within the framework of general discrimination. Libby observed that when discussed as a general form of

discrimination, students were able to perceive it in a different, almost neutral, way (Libby, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015). Steve stated that writing about race is a common trait within Southern literature that allows students to gain a deeper understanding of its presence – both obvious and underlying – within Southern culture overall (Steve, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015). John noted the emphasis on racial issues within certain works of Southern literature. John addressed the fact that in his classes, he worked toward moving students' perception toward that of more of a general human race and less of an ethnic racial focus. Nonetheless, he observed students reflected more on race as a part of Southern culture as a result of the Writers@Work literature studied (John, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015).

Administrative participants perceived that students learned more about Southern culture as a result of the Writers@Work program. Specifically, administrative participants observed students becoming more aware of historical flaws and oppression as a part of the Southern culture. As with both student and faculty participants, administrative participants saw the recognition of these parts of Southern culture as important in order to move beyond negative implications toward a more positive future.

Amy observed students learning more about the historical flaws that are naturally a part of any culture but especially those of Southern culture because of the Writers@Work literature of focus. Amy emphasized the importance of using works from the Southern literature genre to help students see and understand that there are historical flaws but that there are also aspects of the culture that move beyond the negative perceptions. As Amy stated,

> We really want to show these students your culture is not about, you know, what you may
> or may not think it's about . . . there's a thriving culture of –uhm- authors who are writing

about all of the wonderful and unique and flavorful things about your culture and we

want to show you those and show you that those people are alive and well and excited

about you and your culture. And I think, you know, our program isn't just bringing in

people who are, say, one kind of Southerner either, I think our program is saying there's

so many types of Southerners. There are so many facets of Southern culture – uhm – all

of them are really worth taking off the shelf and looking at for a year and really

examining closely and giving them their due diligence. We want students to be

encouraged by that. We want students to embrace their culture. (Amy, personal

correspondence with interviewee, April 24, 2015)

Administrative participants noted the students' realization of the presence of oppression

and struggle within Southern culture. Amy saw this as opportunity for students to understand the

possibility of moving beyond oppressive forces through examples provided within the literature.

As Amy said, "We want students to embrace their culture" (Amy, personal correspondence with

interviewee, April 24, 2015). James discerned students progressing to more of an understanding

about Southern culture by learning to accept the negative historical past with the positive future

while realizing the South is more than labels and stereotypes (James, personal correspondence

with interviewee, April 27, 2015).

Characteristics of Southern Identity. The Writers@Work program provided students

with a deeper awareness of specific characteristics that characterize Southern identity. Student

participants perceived certain characteristics present in the Writers@Work literature that clearly

established the works as belonging to the Southern literature genre. Student participants found

themselves exploring the idea of Southern identity more and questioning what is truly Southern

within the culture. Linda found Southern identity to be closely based on a sense of values the

individuals and the characters used to guide them through life (Linda, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 20, 2015). Blake described this as being an extension of the Midwest values he was raised by that provided him with a deeper understanding of Southern identity (Blake, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Amber saw the sense of values rooted in a prevailing sense of pride that grounded the culture and the identities of its constituents (Amber, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Alan shared his own personal experience of really beginning to question the nature of what is truly Southern culture as a result of the Writers@Work literature he read. Alan revealed:

> [R]eading that story kind of put in perspective – I kind of started to wonder if Chattanooga is this true Southern culture? Or is Hidden Creek true Southern culture? So I started to wonder – is it this towns, barns, farms all going on – is that real Southern culture or is these small cities that are compared to rest of the world small cities – is this Southern culture? (Alan, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Alan found the Writers@Work experience as a study of Southern culture to be comforting as he realized during this time that he was not alone in the Southern experience. As he said:

> So that old – really old Southern culture of that solitude and being isolated from the rest of the world – it was kind of – gave a sense that there are more like me from such small areas. It kind of gave a sense that there's more Hidden Creeks out there. (Alan, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Bill felt Southern identity and culture was best captured through the portrayal of the "honest work type" characters (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015).

Student participants acknowledged the sense of community and the community as one's extended family that seemed to ground the ideals of Southern culture. As Bill expressed,

"There's just that feeling of, you know, you don't know who everybody is but everybody is family so there's still connection there" (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Student participants addressed this sense of community as being the basis for Southern hospitality for which the South is well known. As Bill stated, "[T]here's that sense of, you know, you may not know who your neighbors are, but if someone comes walking up to your door and they need help, you help them" (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). As an extension to this, Amber posited, "Everybody is really friendly and just like wants to help you out like and I feel like that's like the main thing from the South" (Amber, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Bill believed Southern hospitality was a part of the culture out of necessity as people lived far apart from others. Bill stated:

[P]eople here – there's that idea of Southern hospitality – I think people here are nicer because you had to be. You had to be nice to other people. You had to learn to overcome – and not say what you really thought because you never knew when you would get in a situation when you would need your neighbor's help. (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Students felt the element of Southern hospitality as a part of community was in direct contrast to their experiences with Northern cultures where people "keep to themselves" (Amber, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). As such, they considered this to be an integral part of Southern culture they learned more about. Student participants noted the importance of Southern food as a reflection of the culture expressed within literature. Bill said:

[E]ven the idea of the catfish and the way people talk and the way they interact and the smell of the food – everything is the same in these stories no matter where in the South

you are so there's always that underlying connection you could make between them all.

(Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

In humorous support of this, Linda said, "They like sweet tea a lot" (Linda, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 20, 2015).

Faculty and administrative participants perceived students learned more about Southern culture through the specific characteristics within the Writers@Work literature that shapes Southern identity as a whole. The characteristics noted by the faculty and administrative participants are reminiscent of those referenced by the student participants. Faculty and administrative participants felt the question of Southern identity formed the grounds for an exploration of Southern culture. Maggie stated:

[W]hat I started to notice – and it's gotten better as we've selected different texts- is that they, the students are picking up on greater questions about Southern identity that kind of reflect – and this is going somewhat tangential but it somewhat reflects the greater consciousness of defining what is Southern and what is Southern culture and what is the Southern world and who am I and how do I fit into that. (Maggie, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015)

Libby addressed the discussion she had with her students pertaining to elements and qualities of the South and "why they are indicative of the South and why they might not be indicative of other areas in the country" (Libby, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015) in order to establish as sense of identity. Steve's students spent time with each Writers@Work text to determine why the work is considered a work of Southern literature in order to isolate aspects of Southern culture that form its identity (Steve, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015). John employed a similar approach within the context of

distinguishing Southern culture from American culture as a whole (John, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015).

Faculty participants felt that a sense of values was a common characteristic of Southern culture identified by students through the study of the Writers@Work literature. All faculty participants addressed the topic of religion as best defining the sense of values of the characters presented within the literature. Faculty participants noticed students reflected more on religion as shaping the values as being a defining aspect of Southern culture in general.

Faculty and participants addressed the topic of community in Southern culture as an extension of one's family. As a natural byproduct of this sense of community there is the concept of Southern hospitality and the upholding of traditions that are rooted in the community and the individual. Administrative participant, James, observed the recognition of the aspect of Southern hospitality and its presence within Southern culture that seems to be lacking in other cultures. James described Southern culture as one that "exudes a warmth and accessibility that I think is missing [in other cultures]" (James, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 27, 2015). According to James, this exploration assists students by "helping them learn more about their culture and about themselves by extension" (James, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 27, 2015). Libby reported students learned more about Southern culture by studying the importance of tradition. As Libby asserted, "Tradition – we talk about tradition a lot – why a tradition is the way it is . . . and this whole idea of what makes a tradition a tradition and who's responsible for reinforcing it" (Libby, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015).

Faculty participants noted the importance of food as a reflection of Southern culture. Maggie addressed the food culture in the South and students' honing in on that topic as a point of

interest with Southern studies (Maggie, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015). John talked about this as well as an important aspect of Southern culture identified by students. John said, "I heard somebody say one time that only in the South could you go to a Jewish event and they'd have fried chicken. Because there is a sense in which Southern culture trumps everything else" (John, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015).

Regionalism. The Writers@Work program gave students a deeper understanding of regionalism and how the geography and setting of a region perpetuates a sense of culture. Student participants discussed their perception of the aspects of regionalism that most influence Southern culture as reflected in the Writers@Work literature they studied. Most notably, students felt the Southern setting and distinct feel of the literature most contributed to the sense of regionalism.

Student participants perceived various geographical elements, the rural setting, and small-town mentality best comprised regionalism of the South. Bill described the geographical elements that contribute to and comprise the distinctive Southern setting described within the literature:

> You get the idea of the pine trees of the mountains of the fresh air of the deep muddy waters of the river . . . everything is the same in these stories no matter where in the South you are so there's always that underlying connection you could make between them all and you know when they ran down the dirt road – you could instantly visualize, "Ok, I know what a dirt road is in the South" or they're out in the gravel and you can visualize that. Or they're out in the woods and you can visualize that because there's that connection in Southern literature. (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Amber added the frequent description of heat within the works as she said, "Like it's always like, yeah, the same setting for all of the stories. I feel like heat was really a common thing. Like, 'Oh that darn Southern heat and the blazing sun beating down'" (Amber, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Katie stated that she could relate to this and always knew what the authors were talking about since she is from the South (Katie, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Alan concurred that the setting and the general sense of regionalism is what made the literature relatable to him (Alan, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Alan also mentioned the presence of the rural landscape as a common setting within Southern literature that contributes to the regional feel and helps define that feature of Southern culture (Alan, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Bill added support to this statement and said that within Southern culture, "There are a lot of middle of nowhere's" (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). He elaborated further when he said:

> I think it goes back – I think that's something in our culture – far back in our culture when we live so far apart. When communities spread out over hundreds of miles – hundreds of square miles instead of a 20 square mile radius. You know, when it's spread out over hundreds of miles where you have farms and farms and so where you might not see your neighbors for three or four months in a row. (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Blake described his experience of making the connection with the small-town association while learning more about the culture. Blake shared:

> One thing I did learn or notice was that when I did live up in Iowa it was in a small town . . . and I was down learning about some of these different writings and stuff like that and

seeing how they discussed these small town scenes in the South – it really did seem like

they were sort of similar in a sense, because like if it's a small town, it's a small town

anyway, and uh, it was really cool to see that as, "Hey, I can relate to this even though

I'm from the Midwest and this is still happening in the South" and so it was kind of a

cool connection I saw there. (Blake, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8,

2015)

Amber followed up by indicating that she had the same experience of recognizing the small-town

influence as a Northerner who had relocated to the South (Amber, personal correspondence with

interviewee, April 8, 2015).

Students participants perceived a unique quality and feel to the tone of Southern literature

that contributed to Southern culture. Alan elaborated:

I loved it because you can tell when it's Southern because being from the South

automatically includes this, like, nostalgia. That's all it is when you can feel – you can

feel the slow, rolling rhythm from a Southern person. It's just there every time they

write, they speak, you can feel that. It's very nostalgic very slow, retro, vintage,

whatever you want to call it. You can feel that they're reminiscing by looking back. You

could never read a Southern literature book and you could never see them looking

forward to something. There's no rush to get anywhere. You can feel that leisure tone.

And that really reflects in all Southern works I've ever read. (Alan, personal

correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Amber supported this by adding the distinctive impression the literature leaves that contributes to

the overall character of the culture. As Amber stated:

I like a lot of Southern literature. I mean, it's going to seem redundant when I say this because it's Southern literature so obviously it's based in the South, but it's very, very clear that it's based in the South. (Amber, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Faculty participants perceived students learned the most about regionalism within Southern culture by the influence of small-town culture. According to faculty participants, this influence was most reflected throughout the literature by the presence of rural settings and the characteristic use of dialect and colloquialisms. John saw the works as teaching a great deal about "small town culture" and "small town rural" that spoke to a larger Southern culture (John, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015). Libby noticed students' recognition and understanding of the rural landscape both through the instrument of the small town notion as well as a defining factor of regionalism of Southern culture. Faculty participants also noted the use of dialect and colloquialisms as best reflecting cultural nuances of the South. Libby addressed dialect and colloquialisms used to characterize the South so there is little question as to the origin of the literature and the culture being described (Libby, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015). Steve also noted this as he stated, "[The authors are] writing in dialects that can only be Southern, so all of those aspects I think help define *All Over But the Shoutin'* and some of the other works of Southern literature" (Steve, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015).

Administrative participants perceived regional Southern culture being taught through dialects and through an expression of regional identity as a part of the larger Southern identity. Amy referred to the use of dialects students are exposed to that teaches them about one of the many "facets of Southern culture" (Amy, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 24,

2015). Amy saw this as teaching students more about the culture they live in either through

comparison or contrast. As Amy said:

> It really does kind of make you consider you know where am I sort of in this place – you
>
> know – sometimes – you know- different words you know might come up that were kind
>
> of like "Oh, well people say that in Georgia" or "People say that in Alabama" –uhm –
>
> and you really start thinking about geography, right, and so, you know, what if people say
>
> where and what and how's this work could potentially you know unique to a certain even
>
> state within the Southern region. I think definitely there's some of that sort of
>
> considering and sort of self-weighing, you know, sort of reflection of kind of "where do I
>
> fit into this puzzle?" (Amy, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 24, 2015)

Administrative participants saw a further connection with the learning of Southern

culture through the notion of a Southern identity that is specifically rooted in regional identity.

James saw the opportunities to explore the idea of what it means to be Southern and "what it

means, you know, to be a part of this Southern identity and the culture that goes with it" in order

to best understand the cultural context overall (James, personal correspondence with interviewee,

April 24, 2015). Specifically, he saw this as a part of a regional identity for students to study and

potentially learn to understand. As he stated:

> I think it's important for students to under – to have a sense of place and to understand
>
> where they've come from and so – you know, as a Southern community college, I think
>
> it's important that we are able to speak to that regional identity. You know, nowadays, it
>
> seems like Southern culture, Southern literature is very much a portrayal of the middle
>
> class . . . as a community college we certainly have that preponderance of students, I
>
> think, as well. (James, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 27, 2015)

Amy saw this conversation with students starting with a discussion of personal experiences of which they are most familiar that served as a natural segue into a discussion of the literature and Southern culture overall (Amy, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 24, 2015). Both administrative participants noted the recognition by students of a regional identity that served as a subcategory of the larger Southern identity and culture.

Identification of Stereotypes. The Writers@Work program led students to an analysis of Southern stereotypes as such stereotypes perpetuate the perception of Southern culture. Student participants felt that through an exploration of Southern culture, as a result of reading a common text in the Southern literature genre, they gained more insight into how stereotypes, both good and bad, contributed to the perception of people of that culture. Alan discussed how he began to look at the stereotypes addressed in the literature from somewhat of an introspective perspective. When discussing some of the stereotypes within his class, he began to question how much he fell within the stereotypes himself. As Alan stated:

> I think seeing students discuss that – you could almost see how they understand this level
> of development in themselves and others and that kind of makes a level of self-analysis
> after you discuss with them because -it made me think, "Well, I've lived here all my life"
> like I said in the beginning and it makes me wonder how much of me is brainwashed,
> Southern still thinking like a backwoods, redneck, crazy person – all of that negative
> connotation – it makes me wonder, "How much of this stereotype is living in me as a
> Southern individual?" (Alan, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Alan also revealed the growth he felt he had experienced as a result of this analysis he felt others must experience as well as he said:

And how much of this new and more proper, civilized way of thinking have I developed

as I've become an adult . . . It really brought to life for me the idea of development

through this Southern culture. The negative connotations and the positive connotations.

(Alan, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Amber discussed her own experience as a Northerner living in the South. She mentioned the

Southern stereotypes that she hears when she goes back to visit family in the North and how, as

with the literature, they do not really apply to day-to-day life in the South. Amber explained:

I feel like reading the Southern literature like, I don't know, it's just like it's always really

interesting for me to read stuff about the South because for me it's always been like – I

mean, I know the stereotypes, but it's like the North has always been where like I have to

kind of like be sheltered and be like calm and toned down, you know? And then when

I'm here it's like, I'm a lot more like who I really am and it's just like – I think it's really

interesting like reading that about the South where it's like, I don't know, where it's like

the stereotypes do apply in the reading and it's just like, I've never experienced that

though, like being from here. (Amber, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8,

2015)

Blake also mentioned the negative stereotypes he faced when discussing the South with people

from the Midwest where he is from. Like Amber, he felt the negative connotations he

encountered were not an accurate reflection of true Southern life and Southern culture (Blake,

personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Linda saw the stereotypes presented

in the Writers@Work text, particularly regarding Southerners enjoying football and fishing, as

not being an entirely accurate representation of Southerners based on her experience (Linda,

personal correspondence with interviewee, April 20, 2015). All student participants perceived

the stereotypes of Southern culture as presented in Southern literature to be an exaggeration of reality of Southern life and not an accurate depiction of reality.

Student participants perceived the root of Southern stereotypes to be that of insider versus outsider. Joseph noticed that by reading the Writers@Work literature, he gained a new perspective of the stereotypes presented as he felt the literature presented them from a more knowledgeable, insider perspective and less from an uninformed, outsider perspective (Joseph, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Although Amber is from the North, she felt that she was more of an insider and was constantly amazed by the negative stereotypes set forth by outsiders. Amber said, "I told someone that I was from Tennessee – that I live in Tennessee – and they were like, 'Oh, do you marry your cousin or something?' And I was like, 'No! What's wrong with you? What the heck?'" (Amber, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Even though Bill, from Southern Louisiana, felt he was from a deeper South than many in Chattanooga, he felt more like an insider of the Southern culture at large and embraced the stereotypes presented for what they are (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Student participants noted the presence of Southern pride within the literature that seemed to override much of the negative connotations and negative stereotypes presented. Students found the element of pride to be the catalyst toward positive change and characters breaking free from the stereotypes presented; however, they hinted at the fact these Southern insiders were at a risk of contradicting themselves by stereotyping themselves more than non-Southern outsiders had before.

Faculty participants saw the issue of insider versus outsider as the main source of cultural differences that led to students perceiving Southern culture in a different way. Maggie observed that students learned a great perspective as they studied the authors who served, in their own

way, as outsider to the students' experiences even though they were insiders within the Southern

culture being studied (Maggie, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015).

Libby encouraged her students to take an outsider perspective in order to explore the stereotypes

and impressions of the South as presented in the literature. Libby stated, "We kind of look at all

of these things that someone who is not necessarily from this area would have to say about the

South and then as we begin discussing the works, we pull from those things" (Libby, personal

correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015). John felt he was able to help students

analyze the literary works as outsiders due to his own feeling of being an outsider as someone

who is from the North. He acknowledged that this seemed to work best for individuals from the

South though as he said, "I thought that worked better if you were an insider being critical rather

than an outsider" (John, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015).

Similar to student and faculty participants, administrative participants brought up

Southern stereotypes and insider versus outside perception as being the most prominent topics to

arise as students learned more about Southern culture through the Writers@Work experience.

James addressed the topic of Southern stereotypes that have a tendency to cast negative light on

cultural nuances related to the Southern experience. The Writers@Work program has provided a

platform from which "to show students that there are alternate portrayals to those that are in the

media and in portrayals outside of the region" (James, personal correspondence with interviewee,

April 27, 2015). Further, allowing students to engage in conversations with the writers

themselves allows them a chance to further break down the barriers which enable students to

"learn more about their culture and about themselves by extension" (James, personal

correspondence with interviewee, April 27, 2015). Amy addressed the topic of insider versus

outsider perception specifically from the lens of Northerner versus Southerner since she is from

the North. Her experiences as a Northerner allowed her to present topics and issues to her

students from a vastly different perspective that provided them all with an opportunity for

dialogue and learning more about Southern culture. Amy used the example of snipe hunting

presented in one of the Writers@Work texts, *Creatures of Habit*. She had never heard of that

being from the North; however, her students were able to tell stories about their experiences with

snipe hunting as children. This segued into valuable discussions pertaining to Southern

traditions and the contrasts with other parts of the United States (Amy, personal correspondence

with interviewee, April 24, 2015).

   Literature as a Vehicle to Learn More about Southern Culture. The Writers@Work

common texts provided students with a means, through direct exposure to the Southern literary

genre, by which to learn more about Southern culture. Student participants perceived Southern

literature provided them with a basis for learning more about Southern culture because of the

presence of universal connections within the literature but also because of the connections they

felt to the authors as a result of the experience.

   Student participants noticed the presence of universal connections and similarities within

the literature they could relate to and understand that, in turn, shed more light on their

understanding of Southern culture. Students noted Southern literature provided glimpses into the

lives of others allowing connections to be made from similarities in lifestyle, problems, etc.

Alan saw this specifically when coming to grasp with his own feelings of isolation as having

grown up in a small town. The literature allowed him a chance to witness others going through

similar problems that he has experienced. He found this connection to be a relief and a profound

way he learned more about the culture of which he is a part (Alan, personal correspondence with

interviewee, April 8, 2015). Mike followed up with:

Mine, uh, mine kind of ties into what [Alan] was saying . . . but, uh, not being from the South and not being a big particularly large reader, I was pleased to actually sort of get something from the reading that we had with McCorkle that I felt I could apply to myself and it was that, uh, it really - I wasn't the only one like - that even though I'm not from here that people here are still like me growing up. (Mike, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Blake addressed the universal connections that stood out to him as a Midwesterner:

One thing I did learn or notice was . . . how they discussed these small town scenes in the South – it really did seem like they were sort of similar in a sense, because like if it's a small town, it's a small town anyway, and uh, it was really cool to kind of see that as, "Hey, I can relate to this even though I'm from the Midwest and this is still happening in the South" and so it was kind of a cool connection I saw there. (Blake, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Amber addressed the universal similarities she noticed in the literature that made Southern literature relatable and Southern culture richer (Amber, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Bill felt it was his own understanding of Southern culture and personal experiences combined with a study of Southern literature that allowed to make deer connections to the writing and various aspects of Southern culture overall. Whereas more antiquated writing does not seem real, Bill made connections with the Writers@Work texts as a part of the Southern genre. Bill stated:

[Y]ou could pick up Ishmael Reed's book – you could pick up Jill McCorkle's short stories and you can say, you know, "I could see myself doing this" or "I know someone

this happened to." And it just provides another way to connect to the writer and to connect to the stories. (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015).

Bill elaborated further:

I think when you look at the different writers that Writers@Work has had in, when you look at their stories, you know, and to echo what I said earlier, there's still that connection between all of them. There's still this same idea that they all experienced similar things - different time periods but there's still that underlying connection. You really can see yourself – especially if you're from the South you can visualize yourself in there. And it's so amazing, I mean, I read a lot. I can't see myself going to Hogwarts. I can't see myself on the Ring World working with a group of aliens to save the universe. I can't see that. But I can see myself running down the street, you know, or riding a bike down the street going out to a blue hole and swimming all afternoon and then coming back in playing baseball on the street corner and putting a baseball through, you know, Old Man Wickers backyard or whatever or through his window or, you know, all of these different things, I can see that. I'm there. I can live the experience because I understand where that writer is coming from and you can't do that with other literature – with other types of literature out there and there's just that deeper connection where immediately when you start reading it, it's not words on a page, it's "I live something like this." (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

From Bill's comments, other student participants acknowledged a general recognition of the Southern literary genre connections between the writers. They specifically noted how they were able to relate to the writers and the culture presented through the common texts. Alan addressed

this from the perspective of studying the texts regarding past events that might have been construed as negative from a historical standpoint. He stated:

> But you've got to look – when you turn back after it's over – once you've removed
>
> yourself from an event and look back at it, you can understand where – how it's brought
>
> you to where you are today – how it's developed you as a person. (Alan, personal
>
> correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Bill reflected on his own experience of making connections with what the authors were saying, either in person or through their literary works, and how that led him to have a deeper experience with the materials that allowed him to learn more about the culture at large (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Student participants felt that being able to meet and work with the authors furthered connections that began with their reading of the common texts. As previously addressed, Mike reflected on his experience of connecting with the literature as someone not from the South and this connection was further substantiated when he met the author. Mike said when referring to his own life-comparisons with the literature, specifically one of Jill McCorkle's stories about kids riding their bicycles and talking, "Riding our bikes through the neighborhood. Talking about, you know, the various people in town – making rumors. Just general being kids" (Mike, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Then, as he said about meeting the author, "And it was nice to get that and then meeting her and hearing her talk about it just sort of solidified it even more" (Mike, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Bill addressed how his perspective actually changed as a result of spending time with the authors which altered his view of Southern culture. Bill shared:

And so I have a little bit different idea of what Southern culture was or I did until we

actually got to sit down and have these group meetings with other students and with the

writers and you actually got to talk and you got to understand what their ideas of

Southern culture was and the way they were raised and you make those connections with,

"Ok, family is important and friends are important and, you know, keep going forward"

and that whole idea that you don't give up and you don't quit. You do the best you can

and you keep going. That's still there but I had – I guess more of the bad parts of

Southern culture than a lot of other people did so I got to see how I don't have to worry

about that right there because I can still make these connections with people and I don't

have to worry about that stuff. (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8,

2015)

Bill reflected further on the importance of meeting the authors as a part of completing the

Writers@Work experience and enabling students to deepen their own educations as a result. Bill

said:

I mean, the whole idea, you know, "You're not going to learn anything if we just tell you.

You have to go experience it." And you want to understand about, you know, where you

come from, where you live – go out and do things in it. You mean you can and that

translated really well into the Writers@Work with the workshops. They could tell you all

day long where they grew up. What they did. You could read their stories all day long,

but if you already had that connection with them – if you understood the culture behind

the story – if you understood the connections that they had to the people in the stories and

you understood the importance the actions in the story – the people in the story and the

locations in the story – if you understood all that importance to them then you actually

experienced it. (Bill, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

When using the Writers@Work common texts and author meetings to complete the

experience, student participants acknowledged they learned more about Southern culture and felt

they had a more complete experience within their second-semester English composition classes.

Alan stated, "All of this gave me – the big ending message for me from the whole course was

that I am not alone and we as a culture are not alone. That's what it really gave to me" (Alan,

personal correspondence with interviewee, April 8, 2015). Mike shared his perspective on the

overall experience that other student participants agreed they shared:

> I think the program as a whole highlighted something that we all could have missed that
>
> was already going on. That we're in the South, we're reading Southern literature, and
>
> this taught us a good example of it, we all have similar views on things. And this is just
>
> something just in the student interaction at this school. It was almost already going on
>
> and we may have not realized it but the program focusing on it brought it to our attention
>
> and then that just helps you learn about that more. (Mike, personal correspondence with
>
> interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Faculty and administrative participants noticed three main themes with students using Southern

literature to learn more about Southern culture: students recognized the universal nature of the

literature, students connected to the literature because of personal experiences, and students

connected to the writers in real ways. Faculty participant John addressed the theme of universal

literature with his students and how the issues and situations that prevail could take place in other

genres as well. As John told his students when referring to Terry Kay's *To Dance with the White

Dog,* "If you had substituted apple trees for the pecan trees, you could have set it in Pennsylvania

and the story would have worked perfectly well because it really was a reflection of world culture" (John, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 31, 2015). John observed students drawing upon this and learning more about Southern culture in the process. Faculty participant Maggie felt students really began to pull from personal experiences as they drew connections within the parts of Southern culture they know while striving to learn more about the parts they do not know (Maggie, personal correspondence with interviewee, March 30, 2015). Administrative participant Amy perceived students established personal connections to the literature because of familiarity with the setting, character types, etc. Amy commented:

> [S]ome students have been kind of like . . . "I like reading Southern writers because it feels like home to me" or "it feel familiar to me" and some students are kind of like, "Huh, I had a totally different experience than that but I can recognize that this person's experience is Southern as well." (Amy, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 24, 2015)

Amy shared her opinion of the importance of starting with what students know in order to challenge them to move beyond their own frames of reference. Amy said:

> I think that's one of the great things about Writers@Work too is that people are for the most part fairly eager to share things about their family and their personal experience because that's what you know best. That's what you're most comfortable talking about – uhm- and so, if you kind of find that entry way with students a lot of times you can kind of push them to start to think about the literature from that entryway even if it kind of takes a little bit of a winding path to get there . . . Start with what they know and then kind of push them into the unknown and push them to kind of explore more and so I think, you know, in a way choosing Southern literature sort of saying like, "Let's start

with what you know or what you think you know" and then moving from that point on. (Amy, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 24, 2015)

Because of this, Amy found it important that the Writers@Work program brings in authors and works that represent different aspects of Southern literature and Southern culture so students can explore differences each year. Amy felt this would encourage students to embrace their culture and would inspire them to learn more about Southern culture and what makes it unique (Amy, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 24, 2015). Administrative participant James also observed students making connections with the literature due to their own cultural backgrounds and situations. James shared:

> I think there are a lot of anecdotal incidents of students who – I mean I can name that for Terry Kay for Jill McCorkle – I don't think for Ishmael Reed – but for Rick and Lila – students who are saying, "This really moved me in powerful ways. This speaks to my heritage. These are my people. You know, I've been through the family turmoil this described here" and obviously very different associations, right? I mean students who *To Dance with the White Dog* just moved them to sobbing, you know, because they had lost relatives and it really captured the way they felt and so I mean it's with any curriculum I think – uh – that it's only as effective as the students are responsive. (James, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 27, 2015)

James witnessed students connecting to the authors in real ways after reading the literature and then attending workshops with the authors. He observed one particular situation where a student had not spoken up during the workshop but afterward walked up to the author and asked, "Well, what'd your daddy do?" after hearing about a particular incident in the author's life (James, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 27, 2015). This approachability is what James

felt really defined Southern literature and the Writers@Work experience overall. (James, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 27, 2015)

Research Question 3. What are the perceptions of visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with the development of writing skills?

Data analysis showed that visiting Southern authors, Jill McCorkle and Terry Kay, perceived the Writers@Work program to be effective overall in encouraging students with the development of writing skills. Two themes pertaining to students' approach to writing and students learning the writing process began to emerge as the data was collected and then analyzed. The themes were established when the themes' presence was noted among the responses of the majority of the participants. Open-codes were recorded that led to identification of the overall emerging themes. Open-codes were enumerated to further identify emerging themes (see Appendix K). The specific themes that emerged from the interviews with visiting Southern authors include:

1. Students Learn through Freedom of Writing: Visiting Southern authors perceived students learned more about writing when given the freedom to experiment with their writing.

2. Students Learn More about Writing through the Fundamentals of the Writing Process: Visiting Southern authors perceived that students learned more about writing as they learned the fundamentals of the writing process and how to use them.

Students Learned through Freedom of Writing. Visiting Southern authors perceived students learned more about writing when given the freedom to experiment with their writing. Both authors addressed the importance of students being allowed to write without fear of penalty

at times in order to foster the writing potential students have within them. Terry Kay felt

students learned the most when they are allowed to learn from their mistakes as he learned

throughout the years (Terry Kay, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 4, 2015). Kay

perceived that the Writers@Work program has the potential to allow this for students to a greater

extent if some of the current rigidity can be relaxed to provide students even more hands on

experience with the authors (Terry Kay, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 4,

2015). Kay also noted that students will continue to learn more about their writing through

encouragement so they learn to not be afraid of the written word (Terry Kay, personal

correspondence with interviewee, April 4, 2015). Kay addressed the accessibility of the program

in providing students with a welcoming format to develop their writing. As he stated specifically

in reference to the Writers@Work experience and its ability to teach students more about

writing: "The most important thing they get from it or can get from it is not to be afraid of it"

(Terry Kay, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 4, 2015). Jill McCorkle also

emphasized the importance of students learning to not be afraid to experiment with writing and

she acknowledged that the Writers@Work program provided the opportunities for students to

begin opening up through personal experiences that could then be translated into writing essays

and such. McCorkle addressed her objective in the writing workshops she conducted with

students:

> I think a lot of times students don't feel they've been given permission to play, you know,
>
> it's all about work, it's all about getting it right, and so, I think any way as the teacher
>
> that you can alleviate that pressure that allows what is a more creative means of writing
>
> and storytelling and so – uhm – so I love to engage students in storytelling and I think
>
> what I've found most satisfying and I'm sure specifics will start coming back to me – but

students were so quick in these sessions to offer their own stories or examples and then

once – once one person crosses the bridge, others begin to follow. (Jill McCorkle,

personal correspondence with interviewee, May 14, 2015)

Kay perceived the program has great ability to teach students more about writing while providing

students with more than that of the typical composition class. He emphasized:

[I]f you create a program that has the ability to invite or even force a student to sit down

and try then you are doing what education ought to do I think. And in writing, yeah,

absolutely, I just - honest to God, I think that writing – I think writing ought to be an

adventure. (Terry Kay, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 4, 2015)

Both authors emphasized the importance of allowing students the freedom to write and to learn

more about writing in an encouraging and open manner.

Students Learned More about Writing through the Fundamentals of the Writing

Process. Visiting Southern authors perceived that students learned more about writing as they

learned the fundamentals of the writing process and how to use them. Terry Kay saw the

emphasis on the writing process as a means of providing students with "something to do" as they

approach the task of writing (Terry Kay, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 4,

2015). He said, "It's another experience in writing and [how] you would approach it" (Terry

Kay, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 4, 2015). The only contention Kay has

with the writing process is the role of peer editing. According to Kay, the peers, who know no

more than the others, should not be in the role of advising each other. Any type of editing and

guiding should be done by instructors (Terry Kay, personal correspondence with interviewee,

April 4, 2015). Jill McCorkle saw the benefit through the Writers@Work program of students

learning more about the writing process through the authors' personal experiences with using the

process themselves. As she said, "[A]ll I can bring to them is the way I do it, you know, I mean the whole deal is you have to get from point A to point B and there are a lot of different ways to go about it" (Jill McCorkle, personal correspondence with interviewee, May 14, 2015). She recalls having discussed with students the importance of experimenting and emphasized the importance of revision within her own writing. She revealed:

> I would suspect they probably hear different things from different writers but I would suspect that revision is a key part of it and it's the part students often don't want to hear about and yet as a writer for me revision is the most satisfying and I think the most artistic part of what we do. I mean I really think that's the real art. To take what comes out of that freedom of the first draft, or the kind of writing you might do in a journal, but then you look at it and see what's there and determine how to take it to the next level.
>
> (Jill McCorkle, personal correspondence with interviewee, May 14, 2015)

Terry Kay addressed the beneficial aspect of the Writers@Work program in teaching students potential writing tricks, both within and outside of the writing process, which will help them with future writing tasks. Kay felt that if students walked away with only one new writing trick, success had been achieved. Kay adamantly expressed the importance of students learning to use tricks that work for them within any writing discipline that they can always return to. Kay imparted:

> That's what I'm talking about so they can say ten years from now when they're writing their fourth novel or screenplay or something and say, "I go back to this trick. I go back to this trick." We need that. We all need that. All of the writers that I've ever encountered, they need that. (Terry Kay, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 4, 2015)

Research Question 4. What are the perceptions of visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students toward a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

Data analysis showed that visiting Southern authors perceived the Writers@Work program to be effective overall in encouraging students toward a deeper understanding of Southern culture. Two themes focusing on students establishing a greater sense of Southern identity through connections to the common text and connections to the authors began to emerge as the data was collected and then analyzed. The themes were established when the themes' presence was noted among the responses of the majority of the participants. Open-codes were recorded that led to identification of the overall emerging themes. Open-codes were enumerated to further identify emerging themes (see Appendix K). The specific themes that emerged from the interviews with visiting Southern authors included:

1. Southern Identity through Students' Connections to Literature: Visiting Southern authors perceived students learned more about Southern culture through the Writers@Work program as a result of establishing a greater sense of Southern identity through connections to the literature.

2. Southern Identity through Students' Connections to Authors: Visiting Southern authors perceived students learned more about Southern culture through the Writers@Work program as a result of establishing a greater sense of Southern identity through connections to the authors.

Visiting Southern authors found the question and exploration of Southern identity to be important aspects of students learning more about Southern culture. Terry Kay asserted that Southern identity "is not a single thing. It is made up of many, many, many things" (Terry Kay,

personal correspondence with interviewee, April 4, 2015). Jill McCorkle shared this opinion as well and perceived students recognized Southern identity could be of its own making based on their own individual backgrounds. McCorkle considered this to be "such a wonderful story about the broadening and the growth of what we think of as Southern" (Jill McCorkle, personal correspondence with interviewee, May 14, 2015). This Southern sensibility, according to McCorkle, serves as "home base" and is "always present" for the individual (Jill McCorkle, personal correspondence with interviewee, May 14, 2015). As McCorkle stated, "[T]hat Southern sensibility is always present. So I don't consciously put it in. I think it's just there and that is where, you know, when people preach write what you know, for me, that is what that means" (Jill McCorkle, personal correspondence with interviewee, May 14, 2015). McCorkle found students engaged with this idea as they were beginning to understand the richness of tying writing in with one's native origin. McCorkle shared:

> I just thought that the questions that came to play about the process allowed me to talk so much about my experience as a writer which is closely tied to my native origin. And so I did talk a lot about being from the South because I talk about a strong sense of place. I talk about voice and the language I'm used to hearing. (Jill McCorkle, personal correspondence with interviewee, May 14, 2015)

Southern Identity through Students' Connections to Literature. Visiting Southern authors perceived students learned more about Southern culture through the Writers@Work program as a result of establishing a greater sense of Southern identity through connections to the literature. Author Terry Kay felt the students were able to connect to the literature because it invites interest as it presents scenes, settings, and characters students can relate to through their own Southern experience (Terry Kay, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 4, 2015).

Jill McCorkle perceived the awakening in students when they realized the world and more specifically, the region, in which they live provided the basis for their understanding Southern literature and for gleaning a deeper understanding of Southern culture. As McCorkle stated:

> [T]he beauty in [Writers@Work] being about Southern writers is that they can identify and I think they stand to identify in a way that they say, "Oh, well, maybe my family's not so strange after all" or "Maybe I'm not the first person who has ever felt this way" and it's just much – literally – much closer to home than say if you were reading, you know about someone in another country or what's going on. I mean not to take away from that reading, but I do think there's something really exciting to recognize that all of this grew out of this area that you call home. (Jill McCorkle, personal correspondence with interviewee, May 14, 2015)

McCorkle perceived that when students related to the reading and learning, they had not only fodder but also inspiration for their writing. McCorkle also noted students finding interest in their own regions as a result of the Writers@Work common texts. McCorkle reflected:

> I think it lets these students know that there's so much interesting in the world right in front of them to write about that if you have someone who has never left the city limits - that suddenly the shades are open and you see, "Well, for the sake of writing, the should not stop me." (Jill McCorkle, personal correspondence with interviewee, May 14, 2015)

Southern Identity through Students' Connections to Authors. Visiting Southern authors perceived students learned more about Southern culture through the Writers@Work program as a result of establishing a greater sense of Southern identity through connections to the authors. Author Terry Kay contributed this to the emphasis on the common ground with students due to Southern heritage and Southern culture (Terry Kay, personal correspondence

with interviewee, April 4, 2015). Jill McCorkle attributed this connection to students being given opportunities to meet the authors after studying their literary works. She felt they were able to make connections with the authors as writers who are real people. McCorkle stated:

> Well, I think for all of us – certainly for me as a young person, the opportunities I had to meet writers who were out there actively working and publishing – you know, it just makes it all seem possible to try. I mean, I think otherwise writers, you know the whole notion of a writer can just seem so foreign and distant that a student would not even know where to begin to sit down with an idea or a thought. (Jill McCorkle, personal correspondence with interviewee, May 14, 2015)

Author Kay addressed the importance of connecting with students as a means of helping them dispel negative perceptions and stereotypes of the South through the eyes of someone who is from the South. As Kay said about writing and the message he wishes to convey:

> I choose the South because I understand the aura of the South and what you're trying to work for when you're writing the setting, or period, or culture, you want the reader to understand the aura – to understand the sense of it – the sensation of it – this is quintessentially Southern. So that - and it is not an invitation of "Ya'll" and "good buddy" and all – no, it's not – It's not a Southern dialect exercise in a way that is just tiresome. It's not Beverly Hillbillies. It's just not. It never has been and never will be. (Terry Kay, personal correspondence with interviewee, April 4, 2015)

McCorkle and Kay both perceived students developed a deeper understanding about Southern culture and the representative literature due to the connections they established during the authors' visit to campus.

Research Question 5. Which themes are present in the Writers@Work texts used during the 2011-2012 and 2013-3014 academic years that provide the framework for a deeper understanding of Southern culture? Within *To Dance With the White Dog* by Terry Kay and *Creatures of Habit* by Jill McCorkle, representative Writers@Work common texts from two years, there are numerous themes present that provide the framework for students to obtain a deeper understanding of Southern culture (Table 1). These texts provide the foundation for an exploration into the Southern literary genre through the writing assignments required within the second-semester English composition courses.

Table 1.

To Dance With the White Dog and Creatures of Habit Common Literary Themes

Themes	*To Dance With the White Dog*	*Creatures of Habit*
Agriculture	X	
Community Connections	X	X
Domesticity/Food	X	X
Family Connections	X	X
Guilt	X	
Honor	X	
Nature	X	X
Memory	X	X
Outsider versus Insider		X
Patriarchy	X	X
Religion	X	
Rites of Passage		X
Small Town		X
Southern Stoicism/Pride	X	
Values	X	

To Dance With the White Dog

Summary of Text. *To Dance With the White Dog* is a story about the aging Robert Samuel Peek of Hart County, Georgia. Peek's wife of 57 years, Cora, passes away leaving Peek's family to worry about their father being on his own. When Peek begins talking about

White Dog, a mysterious white dog that shows up shortly after Cora's funeral, his family starts to believe he is losing his mind. Peek works to maintain his independence and insists on doing things his way, much to the great distress of his family. Through great determination and courage, Peek makes the decision to attend the 60th reunion at Madison A&M where he and Cora met. Before her death, Cora expressed a desire to attend the reunion and he is set on carrying out her wishes. Accompanied by the white dog, Sam Peek sets out on an odyssey that takes him out of his comfort zone and presents the realization that life will never be the same for him. Through moments of humor, fear, and sadness, this Southern tale presents themes and ideals of universal significance.

Themes Identified. *To Dance With the White Dog* contains ten distinctive themes positioning the text as a representative example of the Southern literary genre. The themes present are dreams/memory, nature/agriculture, honor/values, family connections, community connections, patriarchy, guilt, domesticity/food, and Southern stoicism/pride (Table 2).

Table 2.

To Dance With the White Dog Literary Themes

Themes	References in Text by Page Number
Agriculture	15, 17, 41, 51, 54, 80, 115, 146, 153, 155, 160, 174
Community Connections	10, 33, 37, 45, 47, 48, 49, 51, 56, 87, 98, 99, 102, 124, 127, 139, 145, 152, 159, 165, 166
Domesticity/Food	10, 11, 12, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 27, 28, 30, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41, 44, 46, 50, 51, 53, 56, 58, 59, 60, 74, 88, 104, 116, 117, 120, 139, 140, 174
Family Connections	2, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, 29, 41, 45, 57, 65, 66, 69, 74, 82, 87, 89, 104, 106, 107, 110, 123, 124, 147, 154, 165, 166, 167, 170, 173, 175, 176, 178
Guilt	39, 42, 43, 49, 53, 66, 121, 156
Honor	42, 47, 48, 49, 57, 59, 102, 103, 132, 139, 141, 142, 150, 165
Memory	46, 47, 50, 61, 66, 80, 85, 86, 93, 94, 95, 102, 103, 106, 114, 121, 130, 133, 151, 154, 156, 157, 162, 166, 176
Nature	2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 12, 16, 23, 25, 33, 35, 41, 44, 53, 54, 56, 57, 74, 80, 97, 105, 116, 117, 122, 133, 134, 135, 155, 156, 174, 178
Patriarchy	15, 17, 19, 22, 23, 24, 36, 39, 41, 42, 43, 51, 57, 58, 70, 84, 87, 90, 103, 104, 107, 115, 118, 123, 129, 141, 146, 147, 149, 150, 161, 165, 167, 173, 175
Religion	9, 17, 34, 53, 54, 149, 150
Southern Stoicism/Pride	1, 2, 18, 22, 24, 28, 39, 42, 43, 47, 48, 49, 57, 59, 60, 72, 85, 95, 108, 113, 127, 142, 153, 159, 165, 169, 172
Values	39, 49, 49, 50, 53, 53, 120, 139, 141

Dreams/Memory. Dreams and memory play an important part in Sam Peek's life as he goes back over his life in dealing with his grief of Cora's passing. There are times when Sam, due to illness and while in an unconscious, dream-like state, relives events in his life that were prominent memories for him. There are other times in full lucidity, such as when he is visiting with his remaining friends at the funeral home after another friend has passed, when Sam visits his memories from childhood and beyond.

> "Another one gone," the men always said matter-of-factly, and then they would praise the departed by reciting (and embellishing) some small, special story out of memory. The dead had been good, or the dead had been mischievous or thrifty or strong or shy or outrageous or brave or jovial or any of countless other attributes that, given forgiveness for shortcomings, made for a likeable person. That was the common agreement among them: the dead had been likeable, and in their front-porch, rocking-chair eulogies, the men who remained – waiting their turn to be likeable – momentarily elevated the deceased to a rare, but impermanent history. (Kay, 1990, p. 160)

James, one of Sam's sons, encourages Sam to talk about his memories to learn more about this man he loved more than anything: "James listened in amazement, realizing that his father had seldom spoken of his youth, and he urged the stories from him" (Kay, 1990, p. 50). When he goes to the reunion, Sam finds comfort in knowing others his age, rely on memories as he has been doing. Martha Dunaway Kerr tells Sam:

> "Oh, there are days when I want to blink my eyes and have it all turned back, back to when we were children. I want to run again and dance and do all those things that I loved doing, but I know it's not to be. Know what I do, Sam? I get out my albums, with all the

pictures, and I look at them and pretend that somebody just took that picture yesterday. It

makes me feel all young again." (Kay, 1990, p. 162)

Dreams and memory bring Sam comfort and peace in his last years.

Nature/Agriculture. Sam Peek frequently comments on elements of nature, such as

when he comments on the sounds of the birds, the tastes of leaves, and the cast of the light.

Within the book, nature provides a sense of comfort for Sam. The elements of nature also

remind him of his late wife and her love for living things.

The corner window beside his roll-top desk was open and he could smell the greening of

the spring and the squalling of swamp bugs and the low, serious voices of his children

from the kitchen, he could hear the sharp, spirited whistle of a whippoorwill below the

barns. He opened his lips slightly, moistened them, drew in a breath and soundlessly

answered the whippoorwill. She had liked him answering birdcalls – the whippoorwill,

the bobwhite. In spring and in summer, at dusk, they had often sat on the screened-in

sideporch and listened to the birds, and he had answered them, cry for cry, and it had

pleased her to hear him playful after a day of field work. Sometimes the bobwhites

would walk into the grass of the lawn when he whistled for them and she would whisper,

"Look!" She would not permit anyone to kill the bobwhites that lived in the grainfields

of their land. (Kay, 1990, pp. 2-3)

In the world of agriculture, Sam Peek developed quite the reputation for himself due to

the work he did throughout his life with trees. Ever humble, Sam shrugs this off as Martha

Dunaway Kerr reminds him, "You're one of the smartest men in the south when it comes to

trees" (Kay, 1990, p. 160). When Sam reaches the point of being too old and infirmed to

actively care for the pecan trees on his land, he still finds comfort and solace in the nursery where he is often found.

> He got into his truck and drove it to the edge of the field and got out of the truck and began to work in the small nursery plot of pecan trees, pulling away weeds, laboriously pushing himself from tree to tree with his walker. He thought of himself as an ancient turtle, dragging in inches across the crust of topsoil, legs clawing and legs pushing, stopping, resting, moving, resting again. But it did not matter. He was at peace in the nursery plot. (Kay, 1990, p. 15)

The presence of nature and agriculture within Sam's life provides a strong foundation for Sam and is where he is most grounded and at peace. Sam's frequent reflections involving nature and agriculture also provide a reminder of the rural landscape of his surroundings in Hart County, Georgia and the surrounding counties where he travels to attend the reunion.

Honor/Values. Many of the actions within *To Dance With the White Dog* are dictated by a sense of honor, values, and morals by which the characters were raised having lived in the South all of their lives. A sense of honor is demonstrated as the old men gather to pay their respects after their friends have passed away: "The men were sitting quietly, with the look of people enduring a familiar ritual" (Kay, 1990, p. 47). There is a sense of honor bestowed on Sam as his family works to allow him to maintain independence for as long as possible in his aging state: "For another week, there was always someone with him . . . The arrivals and leavings of his children were deliberately and smoothly timed, like runners in a relay, and their transparent, covert planning amused him" (Kay, 1990, p. 23). Sam pays honor to his late wife and son by visiting their graves.

The lives of the characters within the literary work are dictated by a sense of values based at times on their Protestant beliefs. Howard Cook, the man who rescues Sam Peek, is a part-time preacher who stresses the importance to Sam of living the Good Samaritan message he shared with his parishioners. Two of Sam's children are preachers who live and teach the word of God as the source for living by biblical standards. Sam exhibits his own values through his actions toward living things. As he says about the white dog, "If it's that stubborn about staying around, might as well give it a chance to live. No need killing something that's making it on its own. If it was in misery, that'd be different" (Kay, 1990, p. 40). Readers also witness Sam's sense of values and morality through the narrator's descriptions: "He had never been a man for the churches, though he believed in keeping the Sabbath and in treating people fairly, and he believed most of all in the inexplicable power of something far grander than man or earth" (Kay, 1990, p. 53) and "Even though he'd never been a churchgoer, he had always believed there was an Almighty" (Kay, 1990, p. 56). Sam notes the diminishing of values in society when he tells White Dog that "People don't much care anymore" (Kay, 1990, p. 120). Obtaining a sense of honor and upholding certain values are important priorities in the lives of the characters within *To Dance With the White Dog*.

Family Connections. The theme of family connections runs through the entirety of *To Dance With the White Dog*. From the very beginning, Sam's children are there for their father as they all grieve the loss of his wife and their mother. Sam's children look after Sam and he sees his late wife's influence in their wanting to care for him. Sam reflects in his journal, "I know my children are concerned about me . . . Their mother taught them to care and I see her hand in all of this" (Kay, 1990, p. 24). Sam knows about the expectations of taking care of family and he does

not want that burden placed on his children as it had been placed on him at a young age nor does he want the feeling that his children are watching and waiting for him to die. As Sam states:

> He had been called home from Madison, from school, to care for his grandfather when he was seventeen and he'd hovered, watching his grandfather wither into death. He had not wanted to stay with his grandfather, but it was expected and he'd done it. He'd hovered, watching, watching. He did not want his children to be watching, watching. (Kay, 1990, p. 2)

Sam also reflects in his journal on the eve of his wife's funeral about the family he and his wife raised and the joy they had in their lives. Although Sam feels insurmountable sadness, he feels comfort knowing his children are there. Sam writes:

> Today ended for me a lifetime of joy and I am grateful to the Almighty for giving me the wife I wanted and the children we both wanted. Times were not always easy and I wished often that I could provide more than I was able to, but I can say that we had things that money could not buy . . . All of our children have been here. They are very kind. (Kay, 1990, p. 12)

Sam's children worry about him and his safety due to the love they feel for him. When they are concerned that the white dog is a result of their father's failing mind, they confer with one another to try to decide what to do.

> None of them believed him. They were likely talking to one another on the telephone saying, "Maybe it's too much for him, living alone like he is. Maybe we ought to check on a home of some kind. Maybe somebody should move in with him." (Kay, 1990, p. 57)

The family connections run strong among the Peek siblings.

In addition to the biological family produced by Sam and Cora Peek, family connections extend to their closest family friend, Neelie. Neelie is the African American woman who helped Cora around the farm with chores and with raising the children. As a result, Neelie is more of an insider to the family that an outsider with a loose community connection. Neelie is family as accepted by all of the Peeks. As the narrator explains:

> Once a visitor had asked Kate if Neelie belonged to the family, saying the word
> "belonged" with the acid of cynicism, and Kate had answered, innocently, "No. We
> belong to Neelie." (Kay, 1990, p. 20)

Family connections run strong throughout the book as demonstrated by Sam's love for Cora, the children's connections with their parents and with one another, and the Peeks' acceptance of Neelie as being a part of their family.

Community Connections. The theme of community connections is present throughout *To Dance With the White Dog* as might be expected in a small, rural town where the Peeks settled and have remained for much of their lives. Evidence of community presence is shown when members of the community pass away and they all gather to express their grief over the loss of a beloved community member. There is even a humorous acknowledgement of this ritual that seems to be occurring with greater frequency as the community member age.

> One of the men laughed suddenly, coughed, fought for his last breath. "Crowd gets
> smaller every year," he wheezed at last. "Some of these days, they ain't but one of us
> gon' be sitting here." "Yeah, and he's gon' be too damned old to talk," another said.
> "Just gon' be sitting here, staring off, looking at nothing, drooling down his shirt." He
> giggled and nodded his head rapidly. "Ain't gon' be me. I guarantee that." (Kay, 1990,
> p. 48)

For the Peeks, this community support is demonstrated when the community members gather

after Cora has passed:

> The house is still crowded, he thought. The church committee of women, there to clean
>
> and cook and grieve, would still be placing food on the tables and there would still be
>
> buffet lines of visitors picking at the sorrow feast. (Kay, 1990, p. 10)
>
> The presence of community connections extends to community members looking out for

each other. Sam Peek notes the kindness of the newspaper man:

> The man who delivered the Sunday paper brought the paper into the house for him, and
>
> he made a mental note to write about it in his journal – The paper carrier did a neighborly
>
> deed for me, knowing I must use a walker. (Kay, 1990, p. 56)

When Sam travels to his reunion and gets lost, Howard Cook and his wife, local people in a

neighboring county, take Sam into their home and provide him with food and a place to rest.

Afterward, Howard creates a fictional errand in Madison and suggests that Sam follow him there.

Howard wants to ensure Sam arrives to his destination without further mishap but does not want

to injure Sam's pride by suggesting that Sam should be driven there. After Howard knows Sam

is safely on his way, Howard notifies Sam's family of his whereabouts so he will be safe.

Howard feels a community obligation to follow through in this manner.

> And he would do one other thing: he would call Sam Peek's family in Hart County and
>
> tell them what had happened and advise his preacher sons to come for their father. If
>
> Sam Peek had gotten lost coming to Madison, he would get lost going home. (Kay, 1990,
>
> p. 152)

The community supports its members by being there for one another in times of need.

Patriarchy. *To Dance With the White Dog* presents a patriarchal hierarchy of which Sam Peek is at the top. Sam Peek's adult children respect their father as they have been raised and work to honor him as the head of their family. They respect Sam's property:

> There would be only one place his daughters and Neelie would not clean, he reasoned: his desk. The desk was private. None of them had ever opened his desk or asked about its contents. "Don't bother the desk," she has warned their children. "That's your daddy's. Leave it alone." And their children had obeyed and had passed the warning to their children and they, too, had obeyed. (Kay, 1990, p. 17)

Sam's children also respect Sam's need for independence in his aging state even though they worry about him.

> They were watching him carefully, not wanting him to know but betraying themselves with their faces and with their poor acting of poor scenes, and he knew they were talking constantly about him in telephone calls to one another, saying, "What do you think? How's he doing? Is he bearing up? What should we do? What?" (Kay, 1990, p. 24)

When Sam decides he can no longer stay on his own, his children honor that request and work to provide him with the support he needs, but they do not make such arrangements until he asks out of respect for him.

Sam asserts his patriarchal authority when he sets off alone to go to the reunion. He wants to attend the reunion on his own as a tribute to Cora and secretly makes his plans to attend. He wants to visit the sites he and Cora had loved and revisit the memories they shared. He wants to assert his last action of independence knowing he would not make a trip like this again. The narrator states:

He did not know why he was there or what he should be looking for – if anything – but being there seemed imperative, as though nothing else would end the odyssey of foolishness that had preoccupied him for weeks. (Kay, 1990, p. 156)

Sam's patriarchal standing is asserted throughout *To Dance With the White Dog*.

Guilt. Guilt is a representative theme in *To Dance With the White Dog* as the living remember the dead and as Sam reflects on how his own actions affected his children in the past and the present. At the funeral of his wife, Neal Lewis, one of Sam Peek's friends expresses guilt over not giving his wife the credit due to her while she was alive. Neal says about his late wife, "She put up with me. God knows that took some doing. Uh-huh, uh-huh. Guess we don't credit them enough while they [sic] alive" (Kay, 1990, p49). Sam feels a similar type of guilt when he remembers his son, Thomas, who passed away as a result of an accident when Thomas was young. Sam carries the guilt with him and acknowledges the sorrow he feels for having never placed flowers on his son's grave. Sam feels remorse for blame Cora assigned to him for his son's death. This is the one aspect of his relationship with Cora that was never resolved before she passed away. Sam reflects:

The death of their son was a grief that she could not release, and she had obsessively tended the grave, pushing him away with her sobs and her bitterness. It was the one thing they had never been able to resolve; she blamed him for their son's death. "Drove him away from home when he was too young," she had said. "Too hard on him. Too hard." (Kay, 1990, p. 43)

Sam is reminded of Thomas when he is on the way to Madison and sees a young man hitchhiking. As the similarities between the young hitchhiker and Thomas register, Sam is filled

with overwhelming emotions and is forced to pull over to collect himself before continuing his journey. The narrator reports:

> He leaned heavily against the seat of his truck and closed his eyes and fought to keep
>
> from crying. The presence of his son, of Thomas, entered him through the opened mouth
>
> of his deep, tremulous breathing and filled him with ancient regret. He had buried his
>
> son; he had never buried the hurt. (Kay, 1990, p. 121)

Sam experiences remorse at times for the way his actions affected his children in the past. Sam feels regret for having not spent more time with his children when they were younger. He writes in his journal:

> When they were small, I could not play games with my children. There was always work
>
> to do. I did not throw baseballs to my sons as other men did. I did not build doll houses
>
> for my daughters. There was never enough time. It was sunup-to-sundown work. (Kay,
>
> 1990, p. 66)

Additionally, Sam acknowledges guilt for the way his actions affect his children in the present. When Sam is listening to the radio preacher, he thinks about the fact he has never been a man who goes to church. He thinks to himself, "I ought to start going to church again. Surely my sons are ashamed that I don't" (Kay, 1990, p. 53). Sam feels guilt for his plan to lie to his children about going to stay with Neal Lewis when in reality he plans to go to the reunion; however, his motivation for going – the promise he made to Cora - overpowers the guilt that might otherwise hold him back.

Domesticity/Food. Domesticity and food play prominent roles in *To Dance With the White Dog*. There are numerous references throughout the book to women cleaning and the importance of keeping everything in order. Sam notes the ritual of cleaning that takes place after

Cora passes away when his daughters come in to clear Cora's effects and put the house in order.

He says,

> They would take away much of her in the trunks of her car, leaving just enough for her to
> be vaguely present. A jewelry box. A robe in a closet . . . She had died, and his
> daughters – their daughters – and Neelie were removing her, room by room . . . It was
> their ritual. A rite of daughters. (Kay, 1990, p. 16)

The daughters, under Neelie's supervision, continue to come to Sam's house to ensure he is not overburdened with housekeeping matters after Cora has passed away and he continues to live on his own.

Food plays an important part of the novel. The community comes together after Cora's passing to provide food for the family. Sam takes note of his meals and often references biscuits, a food staple he uses to feed White Dog.

> He did not finish the oatmeal (he ate sparingly now, even when his daughters filled his
> table with bowls of soft food and pushed it before him with worried urging), and he took
> the bowl and crumpled a day-old biscuit into it and spooned bacon grease from a cup
> over the biscuit and oatmeal and blended it. He then took the bowl to the steps of the
> back porch and left it . . . (Kay, 1990, p. 27)

This is one reference of many involving Sam leaving food for the dog.

After Cora dies, Sam asks one of his daughters to teach him how to make biscuits bringing the two of them together for him to learn. When Howard Cook and his wife invite Sam into their home, they offer him a meal as a sign of hospitality rather than leaving him to fend for himself. Domesticity and food are prominent themes within the novel that contribute to the Southern feel of the setting.

Southern Stoicism/Pride. Southern stoicism and pride are dominant themes within the novel as shown through the character of Sam Peek in his fight to take care of himself and maintain his independence as he is aging. Immediately in the first chapter, Sam's children describe him as, "He's got pride all right. It's his mark" (Kay, 1990, p. 1). As a part of maintaining his independence, Sam refuses to give up his truck even though it is old and he has trouble driving it appropriately at times. Sam thinks to himself, "He could no longer walk over his land, and the truck carried him, two sluggish old things getting about. Let them snicker and shake their heads in pity. It was his truck, by God, and he loved it" (Kay, 1990, p. 18). Sam also demands that his children stop hovering and allow him to live as he is capable of doing. He tells his daughters when they try to dictate his actions, "Well, I guess you're just going to have to worry. I know what I can do and what I can't. If you want to worry about it, that's up to you" (Kay, 1990, p. 22).

Sam maintains throughout that he is able to see White Dog even when his children claim they cannot. Sam stoically holds on to his convictions that the dog is real even when his children are concerned he is seeing things. He tells his children, "I know what you think. You think I'm seeing things. Think I've got some old-age crazy disease and I'm seeing things" (Kay, 1990, p. 39). Although initially bothered that the dog can only be seen by him, Sam knows what he sees and decides it does not matter to him if anyone else can see the dog or not. As Sam has a right to do what he wants to do or not, Sam asserts, "The dog had a right to be seen or not" (Kay, 1990, p. 57).

Creatures of Habit

Summary of Text. *Creatures of Habit*, by Jill McCorkle, is a collection of 12 short stories set in the fictional Southern town of Fulton, North Carolina. Within this collection,

McCorkle likens human characteristics and tendencies to those of animals. In many cases, the characters are shown as a lesser form due to their deviant behavior that does not necessarily set them up as stellar representations of polite, Southern society. The short stories progress from the challenges of children growing up and the disappointment and stress of adults living with false hopes and dashed dreams until it ends with the reflections that take place during the final hours.

Themes Identified. Within *Creatures of Habit* there are six themes and three subthemes that emerged. The themes are domesticity, memory, nature, community connections, rites of passage, and family connections. The theme of community connections contains the two subthemes of small town influences and outsider versus insider. The theme of family connections contains the subtheme of patriarchy. All of the themes, as they are represented within the short story collection, firmly place the literary work in the Southern literature genre (Table 3).

Table 3.

Creatures of Habit Literary Themes

Themes	References in Text by Page Number
Community Connections	1, 5, 8, 12, 14, 24, 55, 56, 57, 60, 62, 80, 83, 90, 92, 94, 113, 115, 188, 126, 127, 132, 141, 142, 144, 145, 147, 150, 154, 157, 168, 173, 174, 176, 183, 186, 198, 200, 204, 205, 206, 210, 211, 213, 214, 223, 225
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Domesticity. Domesticity is a dominant theme in *Creatures of Habit* particularly with

the way it places males and females into certain, specific, domestic roles dictated by societal

expectations. Men are most commonly portrayed as the breadwinners who are allowed certain

leniencies to do as they wish outside of their marital obligations. "Hominids," one of the short

stories in the collection, presents this quite vividly as the narrator says,

> Bill's old friends and their wives – gathering for the golf weekend Bill pulls together
>
> every year . . . Most of the time is spent drinking and telling tales. Bill has just told how
>
> he and the boys could not help but pull off of I-95 and check out Café Risque, which
>
> advertises all up and down the highway. (McCorkle, 2001, p. 78)

This is further demonstrated with the nonverbal exchange that takes place between the narrator

and her husband in "Hominids":

> Bill catches my eye and I can't tell if it's to apologize or to say *Give me a break, I only*
>
> *entertain these guys once a year, let us act like boys. Let us have some fun.* (McCorkle,
>
> 2001, p. 85)

When compared to their animal companions, men are depicted in the story, "Cats," as being most

like the tomcat. Through a conversation with Aunt Rosemary, the narrator reports:

> "Marriage goes against nature," Rosemary had said. She sat stroking the big tom, the
>
> white of his throat bright orange with Mercurochrome. "The tom wants to roam while
>
> the missus stays home with the little ones until they pull her old teats to death. Then she
>
> just wants to stay home. I myself have always just wanted to stay at home." (McCorkle,
>
> 2001, pp. 100-101)

Domesticity for women within the literary work involves being the nurturers and caretakers of

the husbands and children. The female characters who do not fall into that role either by choice

or by happenstance are deemed different and are somewhat demonized by the townspeople. In

"Monkeys," a childless widow is taunted by the neighborhood children and left to her own

devices by the adults after her husband commits suicide. She does not fit the role a woman her

age should be in, so she is treated as an undesirable outlier. Carly, the elderly protagonist in

"Turtles," reflects on her domestic life when she was younger further demonstrating the place

and expectations of the specific genders:

> She took care of her parents until they died and then she took care of her husband, a man
>
> who never really loved her. If he had, he would've stayed; he would have tried to make
>
> her life a better one, and he would've given the boy what he needed to grow to be a good
>
> man. (McCorkle, 2001, p. 196)

Children are viewed as being "the business of women" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 99) and are

frequently the recipients of the collateral damage that occurs when their parents' relationships

fail. The young girl narrator in "Billy Goats" says of her friends:

> Some kids had seen their parents drunk. All of us had overhead at least one really bad
>
> argument. Most of us had seen our parents cry, and even for those who glimpsed only
>
> the briefest losses of control, the memories remained vivid. Our parents were as
>
> vulnerable as we were. (McCorkle, 2001, p. 11)

"Snipe" reflects the pain and fear that children experience as a result of domestic discord as

Danny, a child himself, tells his younger sister in secrecy what he has learned:

> "Mama is about to make us leave." He stared straight ahead. "I heard her tell Mrs.
>
> Hopper that as soon as school starts and you ain't scared anymore that she's gonna take
>
> us and move across town, maybe even to a new town. But that all depends on how we're
>
> doing in school and how Dad is doing all by himself. She told Mrs. Hopper that she had

had all she could take. She said she does not love him at all. She said the only good

thing he ever did was have us." (McCorkle, 2001, p. 41)

Domesticity plays itself out in *Creatures of Habit* through the presentation of gender roles and

relationships.

Memory. The theme of memory is present throughout *Creatures of Habit* as characters

reflect on times past that have remained with them in some way. Memories fall into two primary

categories throughout the novel: past relationships and childhood memories.

In "Chickens," Lisa is incapable of fully residing in the new relationship with Alan

because of the feelings she harbors for her former childhood sweetheart, Randy. When she met

Alan, she admits, "[A]ll she could think about was Randy, whom she had known her whole life

and had always assumed she would marry" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 52). When the reality of her

nuptials with Alan seem too harsh, Lisa finds herself traveling back in memory to the times she

spent with Randy that brought her joy. She revisits trips they took and time they spent together

doing what they both enjoyed. On her honeymoon, Lisa spends more time with her memories of

Randy than she does in the current time with her new husband, Alan.

Carly, the protagonist in "Turtles," also spends more time reliving past relationships as

her thoughts travel back to memories more readily than grasping her current situation in the

nursing home. Carly relives the conversations and encounters with her former lover, a married

man, almost as a way of trying to justify her actions at the time. Carly feels guilty for having

invested her time in a fruitless relationship while somewhat abandoning her son during his

formative years. Her memories lead her to fully admitting her mistakes as Carly cries, "'Please

forgive me…I'd go back and do it all different if I could. You know I love you better than life

itself, don't you?'" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 207).

Childhood memories also play a prominent role in development the theme of memory within *Creatures of Habit*. "Toads," "Starlings," and "Fish," present lead female characters who have fond memories of their fathers being supportive and loving them throughout their young lives. The three stories recall times when the father came to the rescue of his sick child and brought comfort and a sense of nurturing that was otherwise absent. These stories also present memories of the mother, if not absent entirely, being removed and distant either emotionally or circumstantially. Revisiting childhood memories also plays an important part in "Billy Goats" as the narrator relives small town life with the other neighborhood children and how their experiences forever changed them in some fashion. She reflects on her ability in college where "memories were something I could bend and shape into a suitable representation of who I was" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 16); however, her reminiscing as an adult has a more realistic edge as she remembers both the fun times and the ugliest parts of the past.

Nature. Nature is an important function in *Creatures of Habit* as it contributes to the setting of fictional Fulton, North Carolina to present a real and believable Southern town. McCorkle vividly describes the pine trees, mountains, dirt roads, and peonies. In "Snipe," "the lights from the house were hidden by the slope of the hill and the thick dark pine branches" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 21). Caroline, when dizzy, is described as "if she had been spun around and around like a June bug on a string" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 22). While frogs and crickets are noted in "Snipe," other creatures are described as well: "She felt something brush against her bare legs, leaves or snipe feathers or snakes or mosquitos" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 33). In "Chickens," the characters drive "down the dirt roads to the river" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 71). Peonies are described in "Hominids" as being "just on the verge of busting into full bloom" (McCorkle,

2001, p. 89) which places the story in the late spring; peonies are also described in "Monkeys," again, providing the time placement for the story.

Nature is an important theme as it serves as a therapeutic outlet for characters healing from past emotional trauma. In "Monkeys," Rommy works in her garden in an attempt to fulfill the empty feelings she has before her husband, Albert, commits suicide, and also afterward as she tries to work through the grief and feelings of loss. In an otherwise lonely life, Rommy finds solace among the fruit and flowers of her garden. The narrator reports, "When Albert died the wave was cresting . . . She wanted to crash herself, to give up, too. Instead, she took to gardening as she never had before" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 149). Carly, the elderly protagonist in "Turtles," seeks the comfort of the resident dog, Homer, as she strives to be accepted and find her place in the lonely environment of assisted living. She enjoys the companionship of Homer and tries to keep him close to her as much as possible. When naming Carly's favorite things, the narrator says, "The first is Homer, the dog who without a doubt loves her the best out of everybody and would sleep right there on the rug by her bed if that one ugly night nurse would stop stealing him" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 188). Mary, in "Starlings," turns to the solidity of the old oak tree in her yard and the call from the bird for comfort as she reflects on past traumas and current frustrations in her life. At the beginning of the story, she references the "sad bird she hears every morning, calling and calling, hopeless of an answer" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 214). Later, she references the bird again as she refers to it as "That bird with the sad sound is high in the oak" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 223). The bird serves as the siren that brings her back to the comfort of her life now and away from the discomfort of the past. By the end, the bird represents the freedom to rise above as the narrator says, "But for now she just needs to rest and wait, to tune her ear to that bird far far away, its wings spread as it lifts and circles the hot tin

roof of her porch, circling and calling…" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 226). Nature serves as an important theme in *Creatures of Habit* as it contributes to setting and provides healing for the wounded souls of the characters.

Community Connections. *Creatures of Habit*, being set in Fulton, North Carolina, depicts the community connections expected of a small Southern town where the lives of its residents are intertwined. More than community being a place that provides support for its constituents, *Creatures of Habit* presents a more sinister side of community life that highlights dysfunctional relationships of siblings, relatives, and spouses. "Starlings" presents a flawed relationship between the protagonist, Mary, and her older brother as he abuses her. This leaves her with a negative view of her community as others watch and do not come to her rescue. Mary's negative view of the community is furthered due to her mother's job of caring for another family's child rather than staying home and taking care of her own children. She even tells her mother, "'I hate that girl you keep…I hate her with her old white face. I hate her for thinking you love her" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 212). Other stories present broken relationships between relatives, such as mothers and daughters. In "Snipe," Caroline struggles with what her mother tells her to do when the relatives arrive as she would prefer to run off as her brother has done. "Toads" presents a daughter who is angry with the fact her mother has passed away leaving her to care of her mother's husband. She says, "I have to find myself some ways to handle the anger I feel toward my mother for leaving me this boring ottoman of a man" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 126). "Hominids" addresses a defective nature between spouses due to societal allowances for males that differ from that of females. While listening to the men share their experience of having visited a strip club, the narrator thinks to herself:

Men, for instance, like my spouse, Bill, who is college educated and should know better, and his sidekick, Ed, an old fraternity brother who has flown in from Atlanta and who chooses to spend part of his day this way while his wife and newborn are back at home. (McCorkle, 2001, p. 79)

"Cats" tells the tale of a divorced woman, Anne, plagued by her former husband frequently returning to her house as a byproduct of his dementia. He returns each time with the expectation he and Anne are still married until a word or some action brings him back to his present reality. Although Anne has moved on in her own way, she cannot help but remember how things were when she and Abbott were together and each time he shows up, she travels down the path of pain and regret left by their relationship. Anne reveals:

Now she hated the part of herself that over the years still refused to let go of a love that he refused to return. She hated the part of herself that delighted in the fate of the young unencumbered women that so many men who stray manage to find . . . She was disgusted with the part of herself that pictured Abbott in such a state of aloneness. (McCorkle, 2001, p. 97)

Community connections within this literary work are further shown through the subthemes of living in a small town and the role of outsider versus insider.

Small Town. The small town setting in *Creatures of Habit creates* an interesting facet of community connections. Rather than the community connections always providing support and solace for those in need, it frequently creates a greater sense of dysfunction as residents know too much at times about others' lives and the rumor mill is left to spin on its own accord. "Monkeys" focuses on Rommy, a widow in the small-town community who is subjected to pranks and ridicule from neighborhood children due to their fear of her since her husband

committed suicide. The narrator says, "She knew the children came to look at her; a lot of adults who didn't know any better did, too. Her husband had killed himself" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 142). Rommy remembers a similar scenario of an old woman being feared by Rommy and her peers when she was growing up in a small town and now, with great irony, Rommy recognizes that she has become that woman in the small town where she currently resides: "How strange that Rommy had grown up to become such a woman, an object lesson in fear" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 144). Other rumors abound in the small-town setting such as in "Snipe" when a neighbor is portrayed as witch-like and evil from young Caroline's perspective as a result of the stories her brother has told her.

> Mrs. Hopper looked normal enough but Danny said that at sundown her yellow hair stood straight up and her teeth grew long and mossy green. He said that her husband hadn't really left like the grown-ups said he had; she had eaten him . . . The picture in her head of Mrs. Hopper's teeth growing made her shaky . . . (McCorkle, 2001, p. 25)

"Chickens" tells of a childhood romance that has ended though others in the town serve as constant reminders as the narrator says, "If people saw her, they asked about him, and vice versa" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 55). "Starlings" addresses Mary's distrust of her neighbor, a young college boy who offers to help her, that seems rooted in the failings of neighbors in the past when she was in need. Mary declines the boy's offer even though she knows she should not. When Anne's husband leaves her in "Cats," people of the small town reached out to her to show support as she says, "People from far away who loved her began calling as soon as word reached them that Abbot had left. They called to say *come home come home*, and she was tempted" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 94). This is one of the few supportive stances taken by community members in the stories presented. All of the stories in *Creatures of Habit* allude to the problems

of small-town living with others knowing more than they should about each other's lives, failures, and successes.

        Outsider versus Insider. *Creatures of Habit* presents an entire collection of stories that contain the subtheme of outsiders versus insiders. In some ways, this provides the characters with some type of advantage; however, in other ways, it contributes to heightened feelings of isolation and loneliness.

        "Billy Goats" centers around a group of town children and what they observe around them as the adults encounter their own struggles in life from when they hope to keep the children sheltered. The group is seen as one unit even though the narrator notices unique characteristics about group members that make them unique. The narrator comments on one boy who is a part of their group but would be considered an outsider elsewhere. She says,

> One boy, tall with a freckled complexion and ears that stuck out from his head, was a bit
>
> of an outcast at the junior high school. But here in the neighborhood where he had lived
>
> his entire life, he fit in . . . His acute observations and large vocabulary that brought
>
> laughter and scorn in the classroom were accepted – really expected – by the
>
> neighborhood crowd. (McCorkle, 2001, pp. 3-4)

        "Chickens" examines a young woman, Lisa, who feels out of place in her hometown after she and her childhood sweetheart have broken up. As she moves on, she meets a man who is an outsider and who, in her mind, promises her a life outside of the confining nature of small town life. Lisa also looks to a fortune teller for insight as she realizes she does not know the future her life holds; she is an outsider to her own life and seeks perspective. "Hominids" attends to the disparate views of men and women and the societal expectations placed on each. The men are viewed as insiders allowed into their own elite club where philandering and disreputable

behavior are allowed and women are the outsiders left to the world of raising children and maintaining domesticity. Although the protagonist is firm in holding her own opinions amongst the males, her female counterparts feel more at home away from the men and readily accept their outsider role. After a heated conversation about the men having visited a strip club, the women leave the men in the living room and return to the kitchen:

> The women are moving toward the warm yellow glow of my kitchen, where I have promised them a comfortable seat and a glass of good wine while I finish preparing the meal. "Maybe this is the reason the women go to the kitchen," Ron's wife, a relatively new wife, says quietly. "I wish we had done it sooner." (McCorkle, 2001, p. 88)

In "Toads," James T. Allen is the outsider left to the care of the family when the narrator's mother passes away. The protagonist uses the insider advantage to bond with her family regarding the situation of James T. Allen which furthers Allen's placement as an outsider within the family dynamics. It is not until after a much-needed personal conversation with Allen that the protagonist realizes he needs more as a human being in want of human connection with others.

Within "Snakes," the insider-outsider roles shift. When the neighbor saunters over and interrupts the couple's annual tradition of airing their grievances, the couple treats her as an insider with a litany of inside jokes and references she does not understand. However, when the protagonist glimpses the potentiality of a former relationship between her husband and the neighbor, the protagonist is quickly cast into the outsider role and must deal with how to respond to the new information. *Creatures of Habit* creates a scenario where no comfort zone is left untouched and no one can be truly secure in his or her place within the community.

Rites of Passage. *Creatures of Habit* contains a rites of passage or initiation theme for many of the characters as they move through different stages of their lives. Specifically, the literary work addresses rites of passage through traditions, children progressing to adulthood, marriage, and leaving home.

"Snipe" is centered on the Southern tradition of snipe hunting as a means to fool the young and uninformed. As Uncle Tim tells young Caroline, "A snipe, Miss Caroline, since you're the only one here that don't know, is a great big brown bird" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 34). Uncle Tim also tells Danny, Caroline's brother, "'Take advantage of the fact that you're just the right age for a snipe hunt' . . . Uncle Time looked at their daddy and grinned" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 37). "Chickens" references a bar mitzvah – another tradition – taking place at the honeymooner's hotel.

> Finally there were all checked in just in time for a flock of kids to rush past and into a
> room off of the lobby as big as a skating rink and just as loud . . . It was a bar mitzvah.
> Oy. Funny what manhood looks like from a distance. (McCorkle, 2001, pp. 66-67)

"Hominids" explores the tradition of an annual gathering among friends and the ugly truth behind the posing and positioning that occurs at such groupings. The narrator says, "You can learn a lot on a weekend like this . . . I look around the room . . . I might as well be on another planet even though it's a scene I have lived through for over a decade by now" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 80). Finally, "Snakes" presents the annual tradition a couple shares when the children are away and they spend an evening airing their grievances with each other. The narrator explains, "This is our favorite night of the year. We turn off the phone, we drink a little bit too much, and we write out our grievances of the past year, read and then burn them"

(McCorkle, 2001, p. 166). This is a cathartic experience that keeps the couple together through their mutual dissatisfaction of where life has led them.

The process of children progressing to adulthood is highlighted throughout as the readers witness the various experiences and growing pains that serve as a type of rite of passage for all young people. "Billy Goats" presents a group of neighborhood children on the verge of adulthood who know more about what is going on their small town than the adults realize they know. As the narrator describes the group: "We were too old for kick the can and too young to make out. We were restless" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 7). The children observe different events and actions of adults that, sometimes painfully, propel them into harsh realities of innocence left behind. In "Snipe," Caroline wants to be mature as she perceives her brother to be and strives to act older than she is in order to be allowed to participate in the event. When Caroline is invited to the snipe hunt, she "froze, part of her wanting so bad to go; it was the same part of her that wanted to be in the first grade and have a book sack to carry" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 36). Caroline is required by her brother to past certain tests as a rite of passage toward her being more accepted by him. The narrator tells,

> She knew that somewhere out in the yard Danny was hiding and watching to make sure she passed the test. If she passed today, he would let her go to the pool with him again tomorrow and he would even admit to people that she was his sister. Today she had been an orphaned neighbor child he was being paid big money to watch. (McCorkle, 2001, p. 24)

Marriage, a rite of passage in its own way, is explored throughout *Creatures of Habit*. "Chickens" exposes a young bride's regrets during her honeymoon as she reminisces about her childhood sweetheart from whom she had previously parted. She realizes she was so caught up

in playing out her childhood dreams of being a bride and experiencing the rite of passage this

offered, that she did not fully consider the consequences of life after the vows were made. In her

mind, "The honeymoon was over before it even began" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 47). "Monkeys"

also presents a young woman who marries the man of her dreams only to learn after the fact that

life with this man would not be what she anticipated. Rommy reflects, "If she could have, she

would have poisoned Albert's demons, deflated the black doom that shadowed him and their

house, found a way to tell him that they didn't have to continue living as husband and wife"

(McCorkle, 2001, p. 149).

Leaving home, both on a voluntary and involuntary basis, is presented as a rite of passage

theme. In "Chickens," the young fortune teller explains to Lisa:

"We're all hoping that we can see beyond what the eye sees, but for most it's just trial

and error. You know, you reach a certain age and it's time to fly the coop, no time to

think about anything other than that very moment. There's never the perfect time. We'd

all do something a little different if given another chance." (McCorkle, 2001, p. 75)

For Lisa, getting married was a natural part of the process but as much as anything, it was a

respectable way for her to leave home and her previous life behind. In "Snakes," the children are

expected to go to camp every year as a natural part of learning to be away from home. The

mother in the story shares,

[We] watch them get herded off with all the other ten and nine year olds, respectively.

We can't imagine that they will both make it the whole two weeks. We anticipate poison

ivy and bee stings, broken limbs, near-drowning episodes. We worry about practical

jokes and cruelty within the cabin; we fear black widow spiders lurking in the latrines,

ticks raining from the pine trees, snakes coiled under rowboats. (McCorkle, 2001, p. 165)

Carly undergoes a different rite of passage at the other end of life when she is forced to go to a nursing home when she can no longer live on her own. Carly feels her "whole life is behind her and she is just sitting around waiting to die" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 188) while another resident "says that he is in this hellhole as a last resort" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 189). Carly, though still ambulatory, is forced to deal with the wanderings of her mind as she travels between the memories of the past and the realities of today. When the narrator of "Fish" goes off to college, she experiences a rite of passage that is common but that signals the passage into a new way of thinking and experiencing life. She reflects on this experience and her father's handling of it while watching her father go through his own transitions as he progresses toward the final end: death.

Family Connections. Family connections abound in *Creatures of Habit* as the work is centered on the lives of humans and their base motivations and desires that affect not only the way they respond to people around them but also the relationships they engage in as a part of human existence. Much of the time, the closest relationships affected are family relationships as evidenced within the literary work. The subtheme of patriarchy is a prominent example of the types of relationships represented and the dynamics, and sometimes, dysfunction, present within the relationships.

Patriarchy. *Creatures of Habit* addresses the subtheme of patriarchy through three types of relationships: 1) brothers and sisters, 2) husbands and wives, and 3) fathers and daughters. The patriarchal expectations are established in "Snipe" when Caroline is taken on her first snipe hunting expedition and is left to the care of her brother while they are waiting for the snipe to appear. Danny assumes his role as the older brother, both as protector toward Caroline and as her greatest antagonist as he orders her around reminding her that he is in charge. The narrator

reports, "Caroline quieted with Danny's words as she usually did. After all, he was older; he was going to be in the fourth grade come fall and she would be starting school for the very first time" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 22). In a more dysfunctional sense, the patriarchal role is used to the disadvantage of others at times as when the older brother abuses his sister in "Starlings" leaving emotional damage behind in its wake.

Within the husband and wife relationships, a patriarchal framework exists. In "Chickens," the patriarchal role the husband assumes is somewhat of a comfort to the protagonist as she desires the comfort of security and not having to make her own decisions. The narrator says, "She felt secure in the knowledge from one day to the next that someone was planning where she would eat and what she would do, and sometimes even what she would wear" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 60). In contrast, other stories present the patriarchal context as one that provides much of the advantage to the male while assigning the disadvantage to the female as in "Snipe," "Hominids," and "Dogs."

The patriarchal theme is distinct through the depiction of fathers and daughters. Although the fathers are frequently absent, there are times when the fathers come to the rescue when their daughters are ailing. As the narrator in "Toads" reflects when remembering a time when she fell ill in church: "But what I remember best is being lifted up by my father and carried out into the cool wet day, put down on the backseat of our old Chevrolet . . . " (McCorkle, 2001, p. 132). The narrator in "Starlings" provides a similar account from childhood when she passed out: "Her father scooped her up then and carried her to the shade of the back porch" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 214). The narrator in "Fish" reflects on her father being there for her when she needed him: "And when I needed to come home, you came to get me" (McCorkle, 2001, p. 230). Although the majority of the stories show a father who is frequently absent, in

contrast, "Fish" shows the most positive father/daughter relationship where the father was the caretaker and a more honorable patriarchal representative.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented this study's findings based on analysis of interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, and representative Writers@Work common texts. Major emerging themes from the data were explored for each research question.

Six themes emerged for research question one which addressed the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging the development of writing skills. These themes were (a) course and assignment purpose, (b) writing process, (c) critical thinking, (d) style, (e) students connecting to literature, and (f) students connecting to authors.

Five themes emerged for research question two which addressed the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging a deeper understanding of Southern culture. These themes were (a) recognition of historical past to move toward an optimistic future, (b) characteristics of Southern identity, (c) regionalism, (d) identification of stereotypes, and (e) literature as a vehicle to learn more about Southern culture.

Two themes emerged for research question three which addressed the perceptions of visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with the development of writing skills. These themes were (a) students learn through freedom of writing and (b) students learn more about writing through the fundamentals of the writing process.

Two themes emerged for research question four which addressed the perceptions of visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students toward a deeper understanding of Southern culture. These themes were (a) Southern identity through students' connection to literature and (b) Southern identity through students' connection to authors.

Fifteen themes emerged for research question five which addressed the themes present in the Writers@Work texts used during the 2011-2012 and 2013-2014 academic years that provide the framework for a deeper understanding of Southern culture. These themes were (a) agriculture, (b) community connections, (c) domesticity/food, (d) family connections, (e) guilt, (f) honor, (g) nature, (h) memory, (i) outsider versus insider, (j) patriarchy, (k) religion, (l) rites of passage, (m) small town, (n) Southern stoicism/pride, and (o) values.

The final chapter of this research study will summarize the findings, discuss the implication and limitations of this study, and provide recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

This research study employed a qualitative phenomenological design. Data was used from interviews, a focus group, and literary analysis of two representative Writers@Work common texts. This research study was conducted to develop a deeper understanding of student, faculty and administration, and visiting Southern authors' perceptions of the effectiveness of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program for encouraging student writing and learning about Southern culture.

Chapter 5 will summarize the findings and will include the research questions explored, the methodology followed, and the limitations and implications revealed. This chapter will also provide recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this phenomenological study demonstrate positive perceptions by stakeholders toward the Writers@Work program's ability to encourage the development of writing skills and a deeper understanding of Southern culture for students taking the second-semester English composition course. This study exhibit positive perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging the development of the writing skills in the areas of: (a) course and assignment purpose, (b) writing process, (c) critical thinking, (d) style, (e) students connecting to literature, and (f) students connecting to authors. This study demonstrates positive perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work

program in encouraging a deeper understanding of Southern culture in the areas of: (a) recognition of historical past to move toward an optimistic future, (b) characteristics of Southern identity, (c) regionalism, (d) identification of stereotypes, and (e) literature as a vehicle to learn more about Southern culture. This study reveals positive perceptions of visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with the development of writing skills as: (a) students learn through freedom of writing and (b) students learn more about writing through the fundamentals of the writing process. This study establishes positive perceptions of visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students toward a deeper understanding of Southern culture through (a) Southern identity through students' connection to literature and (b) Southern identity through students' connection to authors. This study shows the themes present in the Writers@Work texts used during the 2011-2012 and 2013-2014 academic years that provide the framework for a deeper understanding of Southern culture. These themes were (a) agriculture, (b) community connections, (c) domesticity/food, (d) family connections, (e) guilt, (f) honor, (g) nature, (h) memory, (i) outsider versus insider, (j) patriarchy, (k) religion, (l) rites of passage, (m) small town, (n) Southern stoicism/pride, and (o) values. The following topics further address the research questions that informed this study.

Writing Skills

  Stakeholders (Students, Faculty, and Administration). Data analysis showed that stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) perceived the Writers@Work program to be effective overall in encouraging the development of writing skills. Several themes emerged as the data was collected and then analyzed. The themes were established when the themes' presence was noted among the responses of the majority of the participants. The specific themes

that emerged from the focus group and interviews with stakeholders included (a) course and assignment purpose - the Writers@Work program provided a structure in the second-semester composition course that gave the course and its assignments more purpose, (b) writing process - the Writers@Work program provided students with a deeper understanding of the writing process as they learned more about the relevancy of process from the writers, (c) critical thinking - the Writers@Work program encouraged greater development of students' critical thinking skills as they engaged with the literature on a deeper level, (d) style - the Writers@Work program exposed students to different writing styles which helped them develop their own sense of style and understanding of the use of language and writing techniques, (e) students connecting to literature - the Writers@Work program provided students with the opportunity to better connect with literature they could relate to, either through comparison or contrasts, because of their own backgrounds, and (f) students connecting to authors - the Writers@Work program provided students with the opportunity to connect with the authors as real people and writers with real struggles and common interests.

The specific themes that emerged from the focus group and interviews with stakeholders address topics presented in current literature. These include (a) course and assignment purpose – this study supports current literature that shows writing is more relevant to students when they are able to see assignments as relevant while making connections for themselves and drawing from prior knowledge and experience (Bruner, 2004; Bandura, 1979; Macbeth, 2009; Roberston et al., 2012; Levine, 2001). (b) Writing process - the Writers@Work program provided students with a deeper understanding of the writing process as they learned more about the relevancy of process from the writers. Working with the writers provided a relevant exercise for students to learn how to better utilize the writing process as a valuable tool for writing and to learn real-life

applications of the writing process that many published authors use themselves. This data supports current literature that addresses the importance of the writing process for giving students the tools they need to write and communicate effectively across disciplines and in a variety of writing settings (Brown & Marshall, 2012; Prince, 2007; Chao & Lo, 2011). As a part of the writing process, stakeholders in this study learned more about the importance of multiple drafts before an essay is deemed completed from the authors who employ multiple drafts in their own writing which, again, supports current research (Crawford, Taylor, & Brockman, 2010; Eckstein et al., 2011; Kreth, 2010). (c) Critical thinking - the Writers@Work program encouraged greater development of students' critical thinking skills as they engaged with the literature on a deeper level. Recent research addresses the importance of critical thinking when students are learning to write as a way to enable them to demonstrate a deeper level of thinking and stronger communication skills (Mendenhall, 2013; Monte-Sano, 2012; Perpignan, Rubin & Katznelson, 2007). This study shows a definite connection between the Writers@Work program and increased development of critical analysis; however, this study goes beyond current research by showing the increased perception of stakeholders for students learning more about critical thinking as they learn to critically assess literary works. (d) Style - the Writers@Work program exposed students to different writing styles which helped them develop their own sense of style and understanding of the use of language and writing techniques. Limited research demonstrates the ability of students to learn more about writing style through imitation (Preiss, 2013; Cillerai et al., 2013; Goodburn & Camp, 2004). This study extends on that research as stakeholders addressed the benefits students achieved when trying to imitate writers' styles within their own writing as they worked to create their own styles. (e) Students connecting to literature - the Writers@Work program provided students with the opportunity to better connect with literature

they could relate to, either through comparison or contrasts, because of their own backgrounds.

In accordance with Bruner's (2004) Social Learning Theory, this study revealed students actively

building upon their individual backgrounds as they worked to understand new materials and

advance their understanding of the materials while using their initial understanding as starting

points. When students find the literature relevant and relatable, as they reported having done

with the Writers@Work common literary texts, they are better able to learn and advance their

studies (Newell et al., 2009; Youssef, 2010; Cillerai et al., 2013). (f) Students connecting to

authors - the Writers@Work program provided students with the opportunity to connect with the

authors as real people and writers with real struggles and common interests. This study also

reveals the presence of an additional step beyond typical learning of literary works by providing

stakeholders with the opportunity to meet and learn from the authors themselves in workshop

settings. This moves past the more typical student collaboration settings presented in current

research (Bogdan, Eidsness, Johnson, Myers, Schoo, Smith, & Zackery, 2009; Lei et al., 2010;

Peterson, 2014; Prince, 2007; Sweeny, 2010). This study departed from current literature that

addresses digital literacy as a part of assignment relevance (Amicucci, 2014; Considine, Horton,

& Moorman, 2009; Sweeny, 2010). Stakeholders did not address the use of technology as

having any relevance on students learning fundamentals of writing and literary analysis.

Visiting Southern Authors. Data analysis showed that visiting Southern authors, Jill

McCorkle and Terry Kay, perceived the Writers@Work program to be effective overall in

encouraging students with the development of writing skills. Several themes emerged as the data

was collected and then analyzed. The themes were established when the themes' presence was

noted among the responses of the majority of the participants. The specific themes that emerged

from the interviews with visiting Southern authors included (a) students learn through freedom

of writing - visiting Southern authors perceived students learned more about writing when given the freedom to experiment with their writing. This revelation provides a new perspective to current literature that addresses the importance of allowing students to select their own writing topics (Peterson, 2014) and moves beyond to allowing students to write and explore writing with freedom. (b) Students learn more about writing through the fundamentals of the writing process - visiting Southern authors perceived that students learned more about writing as they learned the fundamentals of the writing process and how to use them. This supports research that addresses the importance of students learning writing process fundamentals in order to become stronger writers (Eckstein, Chariton, & McCollum, 2011; Kreth, 2010; Prince, 2007).

Understanding Southern Culture

      Stakeholders (Students, Faculty, and Administration). Data analysis showed that stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) perceived the Writers@Work program to be effective overall in encouraging a deeper understanding of Southern culture. Several themes began to emerge as the data was collected and then analyzed. The themes were established when the themes' presence was noted among the responses of the majority of the participants. The specific themes that emerged from the focus group and interviews with stakeholders included (a) recognition of historical past to move toward an optimistic future - the Writers@Work program provided students with a deeper perception of the South's historical and sometimes negative past that has created a stronger present identity. Because of this, this study reveals the emergence of a stronger present identity beyond the typical negative past addressed in research that is already very limited (Kreyling, 2005; Burrison, 2003; Yontz, 2004; Prenshaw, 2005). (b) Characteristics of Southern identity - the Writers@Work program provided students with a deeper awareness of the specific characteristics that characterize Southern identity that builds on recent research

(Brinkmeyer, 2001; Frega, 1996; Kreyling, 2005; Stecopoulos, 2011). (c) Regionalism - the Writers@Work program gave students a deeper understanding of regionalism and how the geography and setting of a region perpetuates a sense of culture contributing to a limited body of research pertaining to Southern regionalism (Kreyling, 2005; Stecopoulous, 2011; Burrison, 2003; Prenshaw, 2005). (d) Identification of stereotypes - the Writers@Work program led students to an analysis of Southern stereotypes as such stereotypes perpetuate the perception of Southern culture. Current literature suggests that analysis and study of stereotypes can work to dispel stereotypes that have been perpetuated in a cultural setting (Ferris, 2010; Frega, 1996; Roberts, 2007). This study revealed open dialogue among stakeholders and authors that allowed for stereotypes to be addressed and dismissed when found to be false. (e) Literature as a vehicle to learn more about Southern culture - the Writers@Work common texts provided students with a means, through direct exposure to the Southern literary genre, by which to learn more about Southern culture. Contemporary literature notes the role of individual readers when analyzing literary texts (Brooks & Browne, 2012). This study supports this assertion while demonstrating the role of Bruner's (2004) constructivism and Bandura's (1979) Social Learning Theory as learners work to learn and move beyond the initial Southern cultural understanding they brought to the classroom.

Visiting Southern Authors. Data analysis showed that visiting Southern authors perceived the Writers@Work program to be effective overall in encouraging students toward a deeper understanding of Southern culture. Several themes emerged as the data was collected and then analyzed. The themes were established when the themes' presence was noted among the responses of the majority of the participants. The specific themes that emerged from the interviews with visiting Southern authors included (a) Southern identity through students'

connections to literature - visiting Southern authors perceived students learned more about

Southern culture through the Writers@Work program as a result of establishing a greater sense

of Southern identity through connections to the literature, and (b) Southern identity through

students' connections to authors - visiting Southern authors perceived students learned more

about Southern culture through the Writers@Work program as a result of establishing a greater

sense of Southern identity through connections to the authors. Both of these themes support both

Bruner's (2004) theory of constructivism and Bandura's (1979) Social Learning Theory that

purport learners build on their own individual knowledge foundations. These themes also

strongly support and add to current research that states students learn more through cultural

studies when they identify with what they are reading (Brooks & Brown, 2012; Frega, 1998;

Peterson, 2014).

Literary Themes among Common Texts

Within *To Dance With the White Dog* by Terry Kay and *Creatures of Habit* by Jill

McCorkle, representative Writers@Work common texts from two years, there are numerous

themes that emerged that provide the framework for students to obtain a deeper understanding of

Southern culture.

To Dance With the White Dog contains ten distinctive themes positioning the text as a

representative example of the Southern literary genre. The themes present are dreams/memory,

nature/agriculture, honor/values, family connections, community connections, patriarchy, guilt,

domesticity/food, and Southern stoicism/pride.

Within *Creatures of Habit* there are six themes and three subthemes that emerged. The

themes are domesticity, memory, nature, community connections, rites of passage, and family

connections. The theme of community connections contains the two subthemes of small town

influences and outsider versus insider. The theme of family connections contains the subtheme

of patriarchy. All of the themes, as they are represented within the short story collection, firmly

place the literary work in the Southern literature genre providing solid literary examples through

which students can gain a deeper understanding of Southern literature. The themes revealed

within these two representative literary works extend beyond many themes identified in current

research demonstrating a broader perspective that contributes to current literature that addresses

Southern culture themes (Roberts, 2007; Brinkmeyer, 2001; Ferris, 2012; Lee & Ousey, 2010).

Discussion

This study confirms and extends on previous research pertaining to the following topics

of writing instruction: student-centered writing, writing as a process, critical writing and

analysis, writing as craft and imitation, student awareness through relevance and personal

connections to writing, awareness of today's students' literacy practices, and student motivation

with writing. This study confirms and extends on previous research pertaining to the following

topics of teaching Southern literature within the English composition course: Southern literature

in the classroom, the role of the student in literary interpretation, new Southern studies and the

influence on literature and teaching, and Southern culture themes and values addressed in

literature.

Student-Centered Writing

Student-centered writing provides more of an active, community-based form of writing

through which students can learn more about the writing process and can advance their writing

skills by working with each other. Current literature discusses the implementation of student

collaboration in writing through the development of writing communities (Chao & Lo, 2011;

Haas et al., 2011; Lei et al., 2010; McCune, 2004; Prince, 2007; Rahimi, 2013). It is argued that

it is through such student corroboration that true student-centered learning occurs (Chao & Lo, 2011; Lei et al., 2010; Prince, 2007). Stakeholders (faculty, administration, and students) confirmed the importance of student-centered writing for students advancing their writing skills and creating a greater sense of a writing community within their second-semester English composition classes. Faculty and administration noticed greater generation of ideas among students through discussions. Student perception supported this. Stakeholders attributed more successful small-group and class discussions to the use of the common literary text to which students could relate in some fashion. The Writers@Work framework of having a visiting writer on campus working with students also contributes to this sense of a greater writing community.

Additionally, students felt that working with other students helped them see what they were doing right and wrong within their own essays so they could make changes accordingly. Students felt challenged to produce better and more unique essays than those of their classmates, but not necessarily in a competitive sense. This supports the current literature regarding the benefits of cooperative learning groups that allow students to learn more than they might otherwise (Lei et al., 2010). Stakeholders confirmed the importance of student collaboration for peer review and editing and for teaching students how to work through the various stages of the writing process.

Writing as a Process

Current literature suggests that teaching students how to work with the steps of the writing process not only teaches them how to complete the desired assignments for a particular class but also teaches them writing fundamentals they can carry into any discipline and any type of writing process henceforth (Brown & Marshall, 2012; Prince, 2007; Chao & Lo, 2011). Additionally, process-based writing removes much of the stress involved with writing

assignments. Stakeholders confirmed the benefits of students learning more about the writing

process from the visiting authors who use the writing process for their own writing projects.

Faculty and administration observed greater student connections made by using the writing

process and heightened student interest in the subject matter. Faculty discerned students learned

more about the time required to produce a quality product in addition to the importance of the

revision stage after hearing about the authors' experiences. Students found their experience with

meeting the authors make the writing process and its usefulness seem more relevant and

applicable to the larger world outside of English composition courses. Students in this study also

learned the planning stages come in different forms and are not necessarily linear in fashion.

Existing research shows the importance of the peer-editing step, particularly for its ability

to encourage students to write for an audience beyond just writing for the instructor and for its

ability to promote student collaboration (Lei et al., 2010; Peterson, 2014; Rahimi, 2013; Tsai &

Chung, 2013; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). This study confirms this research as stakeholders

detected increased learning about the writing process when peer-editing was implemented into

their classes. Students perceived they advanced their own writing abilities by seeing how their

peers were writing and utilizing the different steps of the writing process. Student participants

felt a greater sense of accountability when they knew peers would be reviewing their drafts.

They commented on not wanting to feel embarrassed by writing poorly or coming to class

unprepared when peer-editing was expected for the day. Finally, visiting author participants

noted the importance of peer-review for advancing students' writing and for giving them a

greater sense of collaboration among their peers.

Critical Writing and Analysis

Current research shows the need for composition students to develop more advanced critical writing and analytical thinking skills to advance their writing abilities (McCune, 2004). This is also an important for students to develop strong writing skills they can carry with them to other disciplines and use with multiple delivery methods (Alfino, Pajer, Pierce, & Jenks, 2008). For the composition class, writing objectives may start out being more simplistic and progress to more difficult levels as students become more comfortable with the materials and with their writing abilities (Macbeth, 2009). Phelan (2001) specifically noted the importance of this for students writing about literature and learning to view the literature more critically. Alfino et al. (2008) specifically address the benefits of teaching critical thinking and composition together. Further, research indicates critical thinking and composition taught through literary analysis serves as that which can provide the greatest improvement and advancement within students' writing and general communication skills (Mendenhall, 2013; Monte-Sano, 2012; Perpignan, Rubin & Katznelson, 2007).

This study supports the current research by demonstrating the positive perception of stakeholders for students to develop greater critical thinking skills when asked to analyze a literary work as a part of their composition studies. Faculty and student participants observed students engaging in deeper discussions and a more thoughtful examination of the literature as a part of the Writers@Work literature. Stakeholders attributed this specifically to their observations that students seemed to relate to the regional literature of the Writers@Work program more than the typical literature analyzed in the course. Students also felt more invested in the literature due to their ability to meet the authors during the academic years. As such, this study shows the selection of more relevant literature for student analysis may lead to deeper

consideration of the materials and greater advancement of critical thinking skills within composition studies combined with literary studies.

Writing as Craft and Imitation

Current research, although limited, demonstrates the possibility of the advancement of writing skills through the art of imitation (Preiss, 2013). Prince (2007) asserts the importance of genre studies for teaching writing ability as students learn the language of the genre and learn how to imitate the writing styles for their own writing styles. This imitation can serve as an important learning tool as students learn to work with the different parts of the writing process and for exposing students to a variety of writing genres and styles (Cillerai, Bross, Curtis & Logan, 2013; Macbeth, 2009; Goodburn & Camp, 2004).

Stakeholders in this study perceived students learned a great deal about the writing process and writing style by closely studying the common Southern literary works chosen for the Writers@Work program. Faculty members especially noticed students improving their abilities to better develop their writing through greater use of description as a result of studying the literary texts and attempting to imitate the writers themselves. Student participants addressed the increased awareness of different genre styles. Students also discussed how they began to notice an increased propensity toward certain genre styles for their own writing they had not previously considered. Visiting author participants addressed the ability for students to advance their skills through close study of literary works in an attempt to learn and develop their own take of the author's voice and style. This study addresses how the process of imitation can help with essays students write in composition; this is beyond that of the research available pertaining to the art of imitation as it implies only to creative writing. Students developing their own interpretation of the author's voice and style frequently led to greater student awareness through relevance and the

development of more personal connections to the writing of the literary text and the students'

own writing.

Student Awareness through Relevance and Personal Connections to Writing

Recent research demonstrates the importance of students developing personal

connections to writing assignments that can increase the relevance students associated with

assignments. Macbeth (2009) and Robertson et al. (2012) assert this is best accomplished when

students are able to build on prior knowledge and personal experiences that make the literature,

and as such, the writing, seem more relevant to them. Personal connections can be made through

careful reading and reflection as well as deeper analysis of literary works (McCune, 2004;

Levine, 2001). Research addresses the need for more relevant assignments that speak to students

of today and addresses the positive outcomes that can occur when students are able to tailor

assignments to their own interests (Kreth, Taylor & Brockman, 2010; Peterson, 2014; Goodburn

& Camp, 2004).

This study demonstrates the effectiveness of students learning more about writing and

adopting a greater level of interest with working on writing with which they feel personally

connected. Stakeholders addressed noted differences among students who felt connected to the

Writers@Work literature and were able to build on prior knowledge and understanding of

philosophies and ideals. Faculty and administration participants noticed increased interest and

participation with the writing endeavor as a result of students being able to meet and work with

the authors. Student participants addressed their own desire to work more with their writing and

to spend additional time crafting their thoughts and ideas when they felt more connected to the

literature they were studying. Visiting authors asserted the importance of students forming

personal connections to the ideas and being pulled into the desire to write more as a result of

interest in the subject matter. This study extends on current research that just addresses the study of literature in general to include the importance of genre and regional studies for developing the students' interest and helping them see greater relevance with writing tasks and written expression in general.

Awareness of Today's Students' Literacy Practices

Current research asserts the need for educators to remain in awareness of students' changing literacy practices pertaining to how students learn and process both reading and writing-related skills (Amicucci, 2014; Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009; Sweeny, 2010). Specifically, research demonstrates the need for educators to develop co-curricular models that address multiple literacy skills within one course rather than addressing the skills separately (Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009; Sweeny, 2010). Monte-Sano (2012) affirms research demonstrating better essays are produced and greater indications of improved writing ability are shown when multiple literacy practices are incorporated within the context of a single discipline. Further research demonstrates the possibility of more meaningful learning experiences for students when literacy practices are integrated into English composition studies (Amicucci, 2014; Haas, Takayoshi, Carr, Hudson, & Pollock, 2012; Kirtley, 2005; Maranto & Barton, 2009; Purdy, 2009; Sweeny, 2010). This integration can occur when instructors incorporate multiple literacy and analysis techniques, as well as digital literacy concepts that address computer technologies and the digital culture more students are a part of in today's world.

This study confirms the need for an increased awareness of today's students' literacy practices. Faculty participants addressed the need for developing assignments and incorporating learning outcomes that address increased literacy and students learning to develop their reading and writing skills simultaneously. Faculty participants addressed the connection between strong

readers and strong writers and work to encourage a strong awareness of this connection among students. Faculty and administration addressed the increased need to pull digital literacy aspects into the composition classroom to further develop students' interest and to make assignments and research applicable to the internet-based world of today. Faculty and administration both mentioned how they encourage students to maintain an active social network presence with the Writers@Work program in order to feel they are a part of a bigger structure that extends beyond the second-semester English composition course. Faculty participants also addressed the importance of students researching the authors' social networking sites to further emphasize the active writing and working lives of the authors for the purpose of students developing a greater sense of relevance to carry into their own writing assignments. Visiting authors perceived the importance of students being encouraged to read and write without fear in order to advance beyond the boundaries that might hold students back from advancing to the levels of which they are fully capable. This study confirms the need for an increased awareness of today's students' literacy practices and demonstrates how increased awareness can extend into student motivation with writing.

Student Motivation with Writing

Research pertaining to student motivation with writing suggests an increased sense of motivation when student feel they are a part of a group setting during which writing workshops and peer assessment take place (Lei, Kuestermeyer & Westmeyer, 2010; Woo, Chu, & Li, 2013). Research also shows students are more likely to engage with others and are more motivated to work for the betterment of the group when they are a part of cooperative learning settings (Woo, Chu, & Li, 2013). Another important aspect of student motivation with writing has been linked to students have a clear understanding of the instructors' expectations for writing assignments to

lead to students having more positive perceptions of writing and their ability to meet those expectations (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008; Wolsey et al., 2012; Peterson, 2014).

This research study establishes an increase in student motivation when students feel they are a part of a larger learning group and are not left to approach writing alone. Faculty and administration participants observed students engaging in their writing more and developing a greater interest in their second-semester composition course by being a part of the Writers@Work program. Faculty and administration noticed greater interest in discussion and idea generation among students as a result of students being given the opportunity to meet and work with the authors. Faculty and administration also perceived increased engagement in small-group and class discussions as a result of students' motivation to engage with the literature. Faculty and administration recognized an increased motivation toward peer-review as a part of the writing workshop setting where students could learn at their skill level and could learn from their peers how to advance their writing skills. Student participants discerned a deeper level of interest and motivation with their own writing as they established connections with the literature that seemed to be of a more personal nature due to their ability to better relate to the Southern literary genre. Student participants also noted an increased desire to challenge themselves toward advancement of their own skills as a result of working with other peers for editing and evaluation of their writing. Student participants addressed an increased motivation toward writing essay drafts for peer review in order to best represent themselves professionally to their peers. Visiting authors emphasized the importance of students being able to find their own interest within writing assignments. The authors also addressed conversations they had with students after the Writers@Work sessions where students expressed the newfound sense of motivation they had as a result of hearing and connecting with the authors. This study shows the

possibilities of increasing student motivation by using regional literature that is familiar to them in some fashion.

Southern Literature in the Classroom

Southern literature contains a variety of traits and universal themes applicable to today's students; however, current research asserts the importance of students relating to these themes according to their own understanding and backgrounds. In order to best accomplish this, it is important to create an active learning environment where classroom participation, critical thinking, and learning are encouraged (Newell et al., 2009; Youssef, 2010). Research also confirms the importance of selecting literary works that are more current and relevant to students today to better enable them to make stronger critical interpretive and personal connections (Cillerai, Bross, Curtis, & Logan, 2013; Youssef, 2010; Newell et al., 2009). As with most genre literature, Southern literature presents a platform that influences the manner in which individuals see themselves either as a part of or on the outside of the culture (Cillerai, et al., 2013; Frega, 1996). Combining literary analysis with composition studies provides a strong base to allow students to develop their analytical and written communication skills (Mendenhall, 2013).

This study provides additional research pertaining to the usefulness of combining composition and literature, Southern literature in particular, for advancing students' critical thinking and written communication skills. Faculty and administrators observed an increased interest among students studying Southern literature as a part of the Writers@Work program. Faculty and administration perceived students were better able to connect to the characters, themes, and setting in the literature so that it seemed to be an extension of what most students already knew rather than being something that seemed foreign to them. Faculty observed more students showing a willingness to spend more time and effort analyzing and writing about the

Writers@Work texts as a result of being able to better relate to and understand the texts. Student

participants appreciated the implementation of the common texts due to their ability to provide

the second-semester English course with a greater sense of structure that made sense to them.

Student participants also addressed their ability to relate to the literature as a part of or as an

extension of their own personal experience of having either grown up in the South or having

moved to the South and using their own backgrounds as a comparison or contrast to their new

experiences. Students felt a focus on specific works of Southern literature provided them with

more interesting information to analyze and write about within their essays for the second-

semester composition course. Visiting authors also commented on the implementation of

Southern literary works for their ability to provide students in the South with a greater context

they understand for their composition studies. All participants noted the importance of the role

of the student in literary interpretation.

The Role of the Student in Literary Interpretation

Current research indicates that literary interpretation is conducted through the lens of

students' backgrounds and what they know at the time they are reviewing the literature (Brooks

& Browne, 2012; Frega, 1998). In other words, readers interpret literary texts through the

experiences and voices of characters and situations within the texts; however, readers conduct

this exercise from the basis of their own understanding. Research suggests cultural exploration

within literature can provide greater levels of interest and greater relevance for students of

different backgrounds (Brooks & Browne, 2012). Most importantly, research implies the

greatest connections are made when the students find relevancy in materials.

This study supports current research regarding the role of the student in literary

interpretation. Faculty and administration participants all noted their observations of students

basing their own interpretations of the literary works on their own experiences and levels of

understanding of certain concepts. Faculty participants reflected on the importance of this in

class discussion for providing students with different frames of reference that readily compare or

contrasts with their own experiences. Student participants from the South and outside of the

South identified specific references and themes they could best identify with for their ability to

either support or defy their current knowledge and understanding. Visiting authors observed the

importance of students basing their critical analyses on their own respective experiences to allow

students to better address the subject matter in a deeper and more engaged manner. This also

allows for students to feel more engaged with the literature that can lead to deeper exploration of

the materials.

New Southern Studies and the Influence on Literature and Teaching

Current literature presents the idea of new Southern studies based on a shift in Southern

literature that allows for a larger conversation outside of the traditional dynamics centered on

strict geographical borders defining that which was considered to be Southern and that which

was not (Brinkmeyer, 2001; Frega, 1996; Kreyling, 2005; Stecopoulos, 2011). This conversation

is also one that extends beyond the racial boundaries associated with the Southern past

(Kreyling, 2005). Research supports a movement to include Appalachia studies and gender and

sexuality studies that work outside of the typical limit of Southern literature (Kreyling, 2005;

Stecopoulous, 2011). Further, research shows a new consideration being placed on regionalism

and its influence on Southern studies (Burrison, 2003; Prenshaw, 2005). Prenshaw (2005)

specifically addresses the importance of teaching students "contemporary works of fiction that

portray the experience of race identity in today's U.S. South but in [also] broadening our view of

the expanding territory of southern studies" (p. 137).

This study confirms the importance of teaching various aspects of Southern literature to provide students with a well-rounded perspective of the literature. Students review the literature from the basis of their own understanding; however, classroom activities are geared toward providing students with a broader understanding than that which they originally brought to the class. The Writers@Work program strives to present students with contemporary works of Southern literature; however, thus far, these works have been rooted in the more classical style of the Southern genre. Although the literary works might present situations through which the new topics of Southern studies can be addressed, the works remain grounded in classical Southern themes. Stakeholders observed the presence of traditional Southern themes within the literary works that provided fodder for discussions and literary analysis within written assignments. This study validates the use of Southern literature as the basis for composition studies which allows students to explore the cultural themes and values addressed in literature on a deeper level through writing.

Southern Culture Themes and Values Addressed in Literature

Current research addresses the presence of Southern cultural themes within literature that shape the ideals of Southern culture. Although somewhat limited in nature, research addresses the themes of cultural associations, such as stereotypes, that form perceptions of Southern literature (Roberts, 2007). A strong sense of community adds to the nuances of Southern literature for its ability to establish cultural boundaries and social expectations within the genre (Brinkmeyer, 2001). Ferris's (2012) research shows the importance of narrative voice for its ability to define the Southern cultural experience. The research of Lee and Ousey (2012) specifically addresses the presence of values within Southern literature as demonstrated prevalently at times through expressions of violence.

Although this study revealed themes similar to those found in current research, this study revealed so much more. Stakeholders addressed specific themes within Southern literature that define the Southern cultural experience to include a recognition of historical past to move toward an optimistic future, characteristics of Southern identity, regionalism, and identification of stereotypes that perpetuate the perception of Southern culture. Visiting Southern authors noted the prevalence of Southern identity established through student connections, both to the literature and to the authors themselves. Textual analysis of two representative Writers@Work common texts revealed such themes as dreams/memory, nature/agriculture, honor/values, family connections, community connections, patriarchy, guilt, domesticity/food, and Southern stoicism/pride within *To Dance With the White Dog* and domesticity, memory, nature, community connections, rites of passage, and family connections in *Creatures of Habit*. All of these themes provide students with ideas through which they could draw connections and conduct critical analyses to both identify with the text and advance their English composition skills. The texts reviewed provide an underlying sense of values by which the characters conduct themselves; however, the presence of violence is not particularly addressed in these representative texts as with some of the current research.

Implications

Implications for Stakeholders (Students, Faculty, and Administration)

This study revealed an overall positive of perception of stakeholders toward the Writers@Work program's ability to teach students more about composition fundamentals while engaging them in a study of Southern literature. The results of this study implied that when students are more engaged with the literature, they feel more comfortable writing about and reflecting on the subject matter and, as a result, can improve their writing skills more effectively.

Current research addresses the positive effects of creating more engaging writing assignments to better engage students and to create an environment where they are more apt to be excited to learn, research, and write (Peterson, 2014; Goodburn & Camp, 2004; Kreth, Taylor, & Brockman, 2010). The implication for faculty and administration is that a conscious effort must be made to select reading materials that are relatively current and engage students to create a more positive, enriched learning environment for students. By working with current, publishing authors for the Writers@Work common text, there is already an advantage that the text will be current and relatable. It is important for the faculty and administration to remain current and stay abreast of changes in literary trends within the Southern literature genre by attending literary conferences, reading literary journals, and communicating with other colleges and universities.

Theoretical Implications

The research for this study used two theoretical implications: Bandura's (1979) Social Learning Theory and Bruner's (2004) theory of constructivism. Social Learning Theory addresses the benefits students obtain from working with and learning from others. Theory of constructivism concentrates on students building on the knowledge they bring with them to class. The results of this study support both theoretical implications used for this study while also demonstrating practical implications.

Social Learning Theory

This study supports Bandura's (1979) Social Learning Theory by revealing participants' perspectives of the benefits of students engaging with each other and learning from each other to advance their skills in English composition and learning more about Southern culture through the study of literature. Administration, faculty, and student participants addressed four main

categories that support Social Learning Theory: peer editing, group work, discussions, and work ethic.

Peer editing. Current research demonstrates the importance of peer editing for its ability to enable students to more actively engage with their writing and the writing of their peers (Lei et al., 2010; Peterson, 2014; Rahimi, 2013; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). Administration, faculty, and student participants discussed the role of peer editing. Administration and faculty saw the role of peer editing as one which helps students learn more about their own strengths and weaknesses through other students. Administration and faculty also saw peer editing as a means by which students learn more from each other about how to approach the writing process. Faculty participants saw peer editing as a means for students to connect with each other and learn from each other through conversation focused on their writing assignments and the Writers@Work common text. Student participants addressed the benefits of peer editing for learning more about where they are in the learning scheme compared to their peers. Student participants also felt peer editing was an important part of developing a sense of a writing community where they felt they could learn from other students with the instructor modeling different writing steps taking place along the way. More advanced students felt they still learned from their peers in a peer editing setting as they worked harder to produce writing assignments that were better for themselves.

Group work. Administration observed an increase in special student presentations for showcasing group work produced in the second-semester English composition course as a result of the Writers@Work program. Administration commented on this as an effective means for allowing students to work with others and, again, to establish a greater sense of a writing community within the classes. Faculty participants remarked on their use of group work within

their classes to allow students a chance to learn from other students and to potentially learn from other students with more diverse backgrounds. Student participants found small group work to be engaging as it allowed them to see how other students interpreted the literature and how they expressed their ideas within their writing. As research has demonstrated, group work is one of many forms of student collaboration that promotes student-centered writing (Chao & Lo, 2011; Haas, Takayoshi, Carr, Hudson, & Pollock, 2011; Lei et al., 2010; McCune, 2004; Prince, 2007; Rahimi, 2013; Woo, Chu, & Li, 2013). Student participants felt that group work allowed them an opportunity to learn more from their classmates compared to a class centered on instructor-driven lectures. Current literature has shown the most common trends of student collaboration in writing through the development of writing communities and writing workshops (Chao & Lo, 2011; Haas et al., 2011; Lei et al., 2010; McCune, 2004; Prince, 2007; Rahimi, 2013).

Discussions. Administration and faculty participants stated class discussions, both small group and full class discussions, were useful for creating a positive learning community where students worked together to advance their own individual writing skills and literary interpretation skills. Faculty participants saw the benefits of students learning from other students as everyone came to class with different backgrounds and different frames of reference. Faculty participants felt small-group and full class discussions were particularly useful when students were working to analyze the literature and to develop ideas for their essays. Student participants noted the usefulness of discussions for letting them know if they were on the right track with literary analysis and written assignments. Student participants saw discussions as being a beneficial way they could learn new ideas from other classmates to broaden their own perspectives.

Work ethic. Administration and faculty participants perceived students adopted a stronger work ethic when working with other students who demonstrated a strong sense of work

ethic coming into the class. Administration and faculty participants observed students acknowledging to their classmates when they had not made sufficient progress on their essays compared to other students and then coming to the next class better prepared and more engaged in the class. Student participants shared the responsibility they felt to demonstrate a strong work ethic so that other students could learn from them, but they also stated they learned from their classmates as well.

This study demonstrates the benefits of the Writers@Work program for its ability to actively encourage a Social Learning Theory construct where students work together and learn collectively from classmates.

Constructivism

This study supports Bruner's (2004) theory of constructivism as students are tasked to build on their current knowledge of the writing process in order to increase their knowledge and improve their writing skills for the second-semester English composition class. Students also employ the theory of constructivism when engaging in literary analysis of the common text. During the comprehension and analysis stage, students must draw from the knowledge they brought into the class and build on that knowledge through personal reference, particularly in regard to Southern culture, as they are exposed to the literature. Students learn from this shared experience by confirming what they already know while also opening their minds to new ideas and principles providing a new, and at times, more informed, perspective. Current research demonstrates the effectiveness of students using prior knowledge as a foundation from which to make writing more relevant and to foster more personal correlations for themselves and their audience (Macbeth, 2009; Robertson & Yancey, 2012) Research also shows the role of literary analysis and reflection for better engaging students with their own writing (McCune, 2004;

Levine, 2001). Administration, faculty, student, and visiting author participants all observed

ways the theory of constructivism took place within the Writers@Work program.

Administration. Administration observed students learning more about the authors of

the common texts through the authors' social networking sites. Administration noted students

seemed more inspired to do additional research about the authors since they are alive and

relevant to today's literary world. Administration noticed students built on their own

understanding of Southern culture through their reading of the Writers@Work texts that either

added to their current understanding of Southern culture and ideals or introduced new concepts

and themes students had not previously considered. Administration participants noticed class

and small-group discussion seemed to be the best way for students to openly dialogue and, in

turn, increase their individual understanding of the materials and concepts.

Faculty. Faculty participants witnessed students identifying with themes and ideals

presented in the common text through written assignments and class discussions; however,

students did not just address what they knew when the class began. Faculty noticed students

building on what they already knew to learn more about the subject matter from the texts and

through other students. Faculty heard students saying to others, "I didn't know that" or "I had

never looked at it that way" (Maggie, personal communication with interviewee, March 30,

2015; Libby, personal communication with interviewee, March 31, 2015). Faculty participants

observed students sharing new concepts and ideals with each other during both the peer-editing

and discussion assignments. Faculty participants also saw students constructing a new

understanding of the materials through the essays they submitted throughout the semester.

Students. Student participants communicated they used their individual interpretations

and experiences to start with when analyzing the literary texts; however, they all acknowledged

that they used the work and ideals of other students to challenge their own work and ideals. Student participants also noted they used the work and ideals of others to progress to a new way of considering the materials at hand.

Authors. Visiting author participants shared observations of how the Writers@Work program is providing composition students with great opportunities to increase their writing skills and their knowledge of Southern culture by using a common text based on current Southern literature. Visiting author participants noted students sharing personal experiences during Writers@Work workshops and then saying how the authors' works made them view those experiences through different perspectives based on new knowledge the students obtained.

This study demonstrates the benefits of the Writers@Work program for its ability to actively encourage constructivism where students can build on their own knowledge and broaden their perspectives.

Limitations

This qualitative research study was conducted to develop a deeper understanding of student, faculty and administration, and visiting Southern authors' perceptions of the effectiveness of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program for encouraging student writing and learning about Southern culture. One limitation to the study is the fact that the majority of the student participants were of the same ethnic group. A student participant group of a more diverse composition might have altered the overall perspective of the student group. Another limitation to the study is the fact the student participants were all within the same age range. A student participant group with varied age ranges might have altered the overall perspective of the student group. Of the teacher participants, all teachers had been involved with the Writers@Work program for several years with the planning of the curriculum

and with the implementation of the program into the second-semester English composition course. This level of experience could be viewed as a limitation with the idea that someone new to the curriculum might provide a different perspective as to how it does or does not work toward the objective of teaching students more about writing and more about Southern culture. Limitations included using a rather new program, such as Writers@Work, to make a larger statement about composition studies and the influence Southern literature may have on students' overall learning experience. Limitations also included using only two participating authors' experiences to provide a larger indication of the effects on students' perception.

Finally, as a lifelong fan of the Southern literary genre and a Southerner by birth, I, the researcher, was constantly aware of perceived as being biased toward the subject matter in the hopes the research would demonstrate a positive outcome toward the teaching of Southern literature and culture. Because of this, removing bias and viewing the materials subjectively was approached with assertive intent throughout the study through constant internal checks and by working with a peer reviewer to ensure any unintentional bias was controlled and eliminated if detected.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although a qualitative phenomenological methodology was fitting for this study in its ability to view the perceptions of the phenomena present, future research could be conducted using a quantitative methodology with data collected through quantitative surveys and other quantitative data gathering methods. As this study demonstrates a correlation between student engagement with literature and engagement with writing, a quantitative survey instrument could be employed to measure the extent to which students are or are not engaged with common texts selected for a course. Additionally, a survey might be generated to establish if texts faculty and

administrators find engaging equally engage students and to ascertain disconnects present within the different stakeholder groups. The results of this survey could provide valuable information faculty and administrators could use to select future texts. Researching stakeholders' perceptions of a program that has been in existence longer might provide more data collected over a longer period of time. As this study was conducted at a community college, future research might include four-year colleges or universities that offer programs to enhance the English composition experience when combined with literary studies. Additional research could be conducted pertaining to the impact of program such as Writers@Work in another geographical region to determine the presence of deeper perceptions among stakeholders learning about a culture outside of their own. Further research pertaining to outsider perception, including off-campus community stakeholders, could lead to new awareness of a program's ability to teach more than just the base curriculum.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

This phenomenological qualitative study shows the Writers@Work program provides greater depth of materials and a more meaningful learning experience for students by combining Southern literature with composition studies. This approach provides greater opportunities for students to learn more about Southern culture while advancing their critical thinking and written communication skills. While this might be too advanced for a first-semester English composition course, it seems well-suited for a second-semester course. Students are provided with the added benefits of meeting and working with the authors to learn new techniques and advance the writing skills they can apply to multiple writing tasks. As one student said about meeting the authors:

You could read their stories all day long, but if you already had that connection with

them – if you understood the culture behind the story – if you understood the connections

that they had to the people in the stories and you understood the importance of actions in

the story . . . if you understood all that importance to them then you actually

experienced it. (Bill, personal communication with interviewee, April 8, 2015)

Another student summarized his take-away from the program overall:

I think the program as a whole highlighted something that we all could have missed that

was already going on. That we're in the South, we're reading Southern literature, and

this taught us a good example of it, we all have similar views on things. And this is just

something just in the student interaction at this school. It was almost already going on

and we may have not realized it but the program focusing on it brought it to our attention

and then that just helps you learn about that more. (Mike, personal communication with

interviewee, April 8, 2015)

The combined perspectives presented in this study demonstrate the effectiveness of a program,

such as Writers@Work, for providing an enhanced and inspirational learning experience that

enriches the overall experience for stakeholders.

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APPENDIX A

Focus Group (Students)

Purpose:
The purpose of this phenomenological study will be to develop a deeper understanding of student, faculty and administration, and visiting Southern authors' perceptions of the effectiveness of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program for encouraging student writing and learning about Southern culture.

Research Questions Addressed:
Research Question 1. What are the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging the development of writing skills?

Research Question 2. What are the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

Focus Group (Students) Prompts

1. Describe your overall experience with the Writers@Work program as a part of your second-semester English composition course?

2. In what ways did your experience with the Writers@Work program influence your overall perception of your second-semester English composition course?

3. In what ways did your experience with the Writers@Work program influence your overall perception and understanding of writing skills and the writing process?

4. In what ways did your experience with the Writers@Work program influence your overall perception and understanding of Southern literature?

5. Describe your overall experience with the Writers@Work program in its ability to influence your perception and understanding of Southern culture?

6. Is there anything else you would like to mention about writing or Southern culture?

APPENDIX B

Interview (Faculty)

Purpose:
The purpose of this phenomenological study will be to develop a deeper understanding of student, faculty and administration, and visiting Southern authors' perceptions of the effectiveness of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program for encouraging student writing and learning about Southern culture.

Research Questions Addressed:
Research Question 1. What are the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with the development of writing skills?

Research Question 2. What are the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

Interview Prompts

1. Describe your overall experience with the Writers@Work program as a part of your second-semester English composition courses?

2. What is your overall perception of the Writers@Work program's ability to encourage students with the development of writing skills?

    a. Can you provide examples of how this has happened in any of your second-semester English composition class?

3. What is your overall perception of the Writers@Work program's ability to further develop composition students' understanding of the writing process?

    a. Can you provide examples of how this has happened in any of your second-semester English composition classes?

4. Describe your overall experience with incorporating a specific literary genre, such as Southern literature, into the teaching of English composition?

5. What is your overall perception of the Writers@Work program's ability to provide students with a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

     a. Can you provide examples of how this has happened in any of your second-semester English composition classes?

6. Is there anything else you would like to mention about writing or Southern culture?

APPENDIX C

Interview (Administration)

Purpose:
The purpose of this phenomenological study will be to develop a deeper understanding of student, faculty and administration, and visiting Southern authors' perceptions of the effectiveness of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program for encouraging student writing and learning about Southern culture.

Research Questions Addressed:
Research Question 1. What are the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with the development of writing skills?

Research Question 2. What are the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

Interview Prompts

1. Describe your overall experience with the Writers@Work program as a part of the Humanities Department's second-semester English composition courses?

2. What is your overall perception of the Writers@Work program's ability to encourage students with the development of writing skills?

    a. Can you provide examples of how this has happened in any of the second-semester English composition classes?

3. What is your overall perception of the Writers@Work program's ability to further develop composition students' understanding of the writing process?

    a. Can you provide examples of how this has happened in any of the second-semester English composition classes?

4. Describe the department's philosophy behind incorporating a specific literary genre, such as Southern literature, into the teaching of English composition?

5. What is your overall perception of the Writers@Work program's ability to provide students with a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

      a. Can you provide examples of how this has happened in any of the second-semester English composition classes?

6. Is there anything else you would like to mention about writing or Southern culture?

APPENDIX D

Interview (Students)

Purpose:
The purpose of this phenomenological study will be to develop a deeper understanding of student, faculty and administration, and visiting Southern authors' perceptions of the effectiveness of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program for encouraging student writing and learning about Southern culture.

Research Questions Addressed:
> *Research Question 1. What are the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with the development of writing skills?*

> *Research Question 2. What are the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with a deeper understanding of Southern culture?*

Interview Prompts

1. Describe your overall experience with the Writers@Work program as a part of your second-semester English composition course?

2. In what ways did your experience with the Writers@Work program influence your overall perception of your second-semester English composition course?

3. In what ways did your experience with the Writers@Work program influence your overall perception and understanding of writing skills and the writing process?

4. In what ways did your experience with the Writers@Work program influence your overall perception and understanding of Southern literature?

5. Describe your overall experience with the Writers@Work program in its ability to influence your perception and understanding of Southern culture?

6. Is there anything else you would like to mention about writing or Southern culture?

APPENDIX E

Interview (Authors)

Purpose:
The purpose of this phenomenological study will be to develop a deeper understanding of student, faculty and administration, and visiting Southern authors' perceptions of the effectiveness of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program for encouraging student writing and learning about Southern culture.

Research Questions Addressed:

    Research Question 3. What are the perceptions of visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with the development of writing skills?

    Research Question 4. What are the perceptions of the visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging students with a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

    Research Question 5. Which themes are present in the Writers@Work texts used from 2011-2014 that provide the framework for a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

Interview Prompts

1. Describe your overall experience with the Writers@Work program as a part of the Humanities Department's second-semester English composition courses?

2. What is your overall perception of the Writers@Work program's ability to encourage students with the development of writing skills?

    a. Can you provide examples of how you saw this in action during the week you were visiting the campus?

3. What is your overall perception of the Writers@Work program's ability to further develop composition students' understanding of the writing process?

    a. Can you provide examples of how you saw this in action during the week you were visiting the campus?

4. What, in your opinion, is the effectiveness of incorporating a specific literary genre, such as Southern literature, into the teaching of English composition?

5. What is your overall perception of the Writers@Work program's ability to provide students with a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

    a. Can you provide examples of how you saw this in action during the week you were visiting the campus?

6. How do you try to incorporate Southern culture in your writing and why is that important?

7. What Southern themes do you try to convey to your readers and why?

8. What take-away should readers experience with your work?

9. Is there anything else you would like to mention about writing or Southern culture?

APPENDIX F

Perceptions of Southern Culture and Writing Program Effectiveness at a Community College

Debriefing Statement for Authors

Thank you for having participated in my study regarding perceptions of students, faculty, administration, and visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program for encouraging composition student writing and learning about Southern culture. This debriefing serves to share with you the results of the study. Additionally, this debriefing serves to increase the trustworthiness of my research by allowing you the opportunity to review transcripts of your participation in a one-on-one interview (if applicable) and to indicate your level of agreement with our conclusions based on the research.

Thank you again for your time.

1. If you participated in a one-on-one interview session as part of this research, a transcription of your interview will be provided to you at the time of this debriefing. Please take a moment to review the transcript. You can make a note of any corrections you feel necessary on the margins of the transcript. If you participated in the one-on-one interview, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement. If you did not participate in the one-on-one interview, please skip to question number two (2) below.

   The transcript accurately reflects my interview with the researcher.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
        ◯   ◯   ◯   ◯

2. The next several statements will summarize the themes identified during data analysis. For each statement, please indicate your level of agreement with the validity of the identified theme. You may also use the space provided to make any notes about each identified theme.

   - *Students Learn through Freedom of Writing:* Visiting Southern authors perceived students learned more about writing when given the freedom to experiment with their writing.

   I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

○   ○   ○   ○

My notes about the theme, if any:

- *Students Learn More about Writing through the Fundamentals of the Writing Process:* Visiting Southern authors perceived that students learned more about writing as they learned the fundamentals of the writing process and how to use them.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
      ○   ○   ○   ○

My notes about the theme, if any:

- *Southern Identity through Students' Connections to Literature:* Visiting Southern authors perceived students learned more about Southern culture through the Writers@Work program as a result of establishing a greater sense of Southern identity through connections to the literature.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
      ○   ○   ○   ○

My notes about the theme, if any:

- *Southern Identity through Students' Connections to Authors:* Visiting Southern authors perceived students learned more about Southern culture through the Writers@Work program as a result of establishing a greater sense of Southern identity through connections to the authors.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
     ○   ○   ○   ○

My notes about the theme, if any:

APPENDIX G

Perceptions of Southern Culture and Writing Program Effectiveness at a Community College

Debriefing Statement for Faculty and Administration

e

Thank you for having participated in my study regarding perceptions of students, faculty, administration, and visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of Chattanooga State Community College's Writers@Work program for encouraging composition student writing and learning about Southern culture. This debriefing serves to share with you the results of the study. Additionally, this debriefing serves to increase the trustworthiness of my research by allowing you the opportunity to review transcripts of your participation in a one-on-one interview (if applicable) and to indicate your level of agreement with our conclusions based on the research.

Thank you again for your time.

3. If you participated in a one-on-one interview session as part of this research, a transcription of your interview will be provided to you at the time of this debriefing. Please take a moment to review the transcript. You can make a note of any corrections you feel necessary on the margins of the transcript. If you participated in the one-on-one interview, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement. If you did not participate in the one-on-one interview, please skip to question number two (2) below.

   The transcript accurately reflects my interview with the researcher.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
        ○   ○   ○   ○

4. The next several statements will summarize the themes identified during data analysis. For each statement, please indicate your level of agreement with the validity of the identified theme. You may also use the space provided to make any notes about each identified theme.

   - *Course and Assignment Purpose:* The Writers@Work program provided a structure in the second-semester composition course that gave the course and its assignments more purpose.

   I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
        ○   ○   ○   ○

My notes about the theme, if any:

- *Writing Process:* The Writers@Work program provided students with a deeper understanding of the writing process as they learned more about the relevancy of process from the writers.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
       ○   ○   ○   ○

My notes about the theme, if any:

- *Critical Thinking*: The Writers@Work program encouraged greater development of students' critical thinking skills as they engaged with the literature on a deeper level.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
       ○   ○   ○   ○

My notes about the theme, if any:

- *Style:* The Writers@Work program exposed students to different writing styles which helped them develop their own sense of style and understanding of the use of language and writing techniques.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
     ○   ○   ○   ○

My notes about the theme, if any:

- *Students Connecting to Literature:* The Writers@Work program provided students with the opportunity to better connect with literature they could relate to, either through comparison or contrasts, because of their own backgrounds.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
     ○   ○   ○   ○

My notes about the theme, if any:

- *Students Connecting to Authors:* The Writers@Work program provided students with the opportunity to connect with the authors as real people and writers with real struggles and common interests.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

○   ○   ○   ○

My notes about the theme, if any:

- *Recognition of Historical Past to Move toward an Optimistic Future:* The Writers@Work program provided students with a deeper perception of the South's historical and sometimes negative past that has created a stronger present identity.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
         ○   ○   ○   ○

My notes about the theme, if any:

- *Characteristics of Southern Identity:* The Writers@Work program provided students with a deeper awareness of the specific characteristics that characterize Southern identity.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
         ○   ○   ○   ○

My notes about the theme, if any:

- *Regionalism:* The Writers@Work program gave students a deeper understanding of regionalism and how the geography and setting of a region perpetuates a sense of culture.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
    ◯   ◯   ◯   ◯

My notes about the theme, if any:

- *Identification of Stereotypes:* The Writers@Work program led students to an analysis of Southern stereotypes as such stereotypes perpetuate the perception of Southern culture.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
    ◯   ◯   ◯   ◯

My notes about the theme, if any:

- *Literature as a Vehicle to Learn More about Southern Culture:* The Writers@Work common texts provided students with a means, through direct exposure to the Southern literary genre, by which to learn more about Southern culture.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
　　○　　　　　　　　○　　　　　　　　○　　　　　　　　○

My notes about the theme, if any:

APPENDIX H

CONSENT FORM

Perceptions of Southern Culture and Writing Program Effectiveness at a Community College: A
Phenomenology
Mary Allison Fetters
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of Perceptions of Southern Culture and Writing Program
Effectiveness at a Community College.

You were selected as a possible participant because you have participated in the Writers@Work program
at a community college. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before
agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Allison Fetters, a doctoral student enrolled in the School of Education at
Liberty University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to answer the following research questions. The research questions will
guide the research study. The research questions were developed from a review of related literature.

1. What are the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the
   effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging the development of
   writing skills?
2. What are the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) of the
   effectiveness of the Writers@Work program in encouraging a deeper understanding of
   Southern culture?
3. What are the perceptions of visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of the
   Writers@Work program in encouraging students with the development of writing
   skills?
4. What are the perceptions of visiting Southern authors of the effectiveness of the
   Writers@Work program in encouraging students with a deeper understanding of
   Southern culture?
5. Which themes are present in the Writers@Work texts used from 2011-2014 that
   provide the framework for a deeper understanding of Southern culture?

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following:

Volunteer student participants will be asked to participate in one 45 minute focus group session. The
focus group session will be audio recorded and video recorded in order to fully and accurately capture
student responses for transcription and data analysis. The audio and video recordings will be kept
confidential and will be used by the researcher only for the purpose of this study.

If volunteer student participants cannot participate in the focus group session, they will have the option to
participate in one-on-one interviews with the researchers. The interview sessions will last 30-45 minutes

and will be audio recorded and video recorded in order to fully and accurately capture student responses for transcription and data analysis. The audio and video recordings will be kept confidential and will be used by the researcher only for the purpose of this study.

Volunteer English administrators, English professors, and Southern authors will be asked to participate in one-on-one interviews with the researcher. Each interview will last 30-60 minutes depending on the extensiveness of participants' responses. The interview sessions will be audio recorded and video recorded in order to fully and accurately capture participant responses for transcription and data analysis. The audio and video recordings will be kept confidential and will be used by the researcher only for the purpose of this study.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

This study presents minimal risks to participants. Participants will not encounter any risks they would not ordinarily encounter in everyday life.

The benefits to participation are:

1. It provides additional resources for understanding the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) toward the Writers@Work program's ability to encourage the development of writing skills.
2. It provides additional resources for understanding the perceptions of stakeholders (students, faculty, and administration) toward the Writers@Work program's ability to encourage a deeper understanding of Southern culture.
3. It provides additional resources for understanding the perceptions of visiting Southern authors toward the Writers@Work program's ability to encourage a deeper understanding of writing and Southern culture.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participation in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a student or faculty subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Participants, specifically students and faculty within the study, will be given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. All information gathered through focus groups and interviews will be kept confidential. Although information gathered through focus groups is limited in confidentiality due to the presence of multiple participants; however, the researcher will explain and emphasize the importance of maintaining confidentially and privacy to protect fellow student participants. Audio and video recordings, which will only be used for the purposes of data collection by the primary researcher for this study, will be saved through the primary researcher's personal devices that will be in the sole possession of the primary researcher. Password protection will be utilized whenever possible. Electronic files of transcriptions will be password protected and will be located on the primary researcher's private computer and password protected flash drives for backup. Paper transcripts, notes, memoing forms and thick description notes will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Only the primary researcher and the dissertation committee will have access to the data transcripts for analysis. All forms of data collected during the study will be stored in a fireproof safe for one year after the study has been concluded. At the end of one year after the conclusion of the study, all documents will be destroyed and all audio and video recordings will be erased.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Chattanooga State Community College. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Allison Fetters. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact Mrs. Fetters at ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇ or ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study. Please initial here: _____

I consent to the audio recording and video recording of interview or focus-group responses. I understand the documentation will only be used by the primary researcher for data analysis for the purposes of this study. Please initial here: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

IRB Code Numbers: *(After a study is approved, the IRB code number pertaining to the study should be added here.)*

IRB Expiration Date: *(After a study is approved, the expiration date (one year from date of approval) assigned to a study at initial or continuing review should be added. Periodic checks on the current status of consent forms may occur as part of continuing review mandates from the federal regulators.)*

APPENDIX I

February 19, 2015

Mary Allison Fetters
IRB Approval 2087.021915: Perceptions of Southern Culture and Writing
Program Effectiveness at a Community College: A Phenomenology

Dear Allison,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon,
Psy.D. *Professor, IRB*
Chair **Counseling**

(434) 592-4054

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APPENDIX J

Enumeration Table of Themes – Research Questions 1 & 2

Open-Codes	Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets	Themes
Writers@Work Good Framework/Foundation	8	Course and Assignment Purpose
Professional Feel	2	
Common Theme	12	
Grounded Course	5	
Purposeful	1	
Well-Planned	3	
Sense of Progression	5	
Curriculum Development	8	
Reinvigorated Curriculum	5	
Author Visits Enhance Curriculum	14	
Relevant	11	
Repetition	6	Writing Process
Connection with Authors to Learn about Writing Process	13	
Work Ethic	25	
Revisions/Peer Review	26	
Brainstorming/Idea Generation	7	
Real Application	11	
Research Process	5	
Comparisons/Contrasts	2	Critical Thinking
Writing Connections	9	
Building on Course Materials	4	
Examining Different Perspectives	7	
Composing Unique Essays	7	
Analyzing Literary Elements	10	
Creating Larger Connections	13	
Seeing the Logic of Arguments	9	
Writing Process Assists with Critical Thinking	9	
Exposure to Different Writing Styles	7	Style
Deconstructivism	1	
Modeling	8	
Imitation	6	
Encourages Creative Thinking	9	

Thematic Similarities	12	
Language/Dialect	2	
Identifying with Reading/Subject Matter	37	Students Connecting to Literature
Relevant Literature	17	
Accessible Literature	10	
Reader-Response	12	
Authors as Real People	18	Students Connecting to Authors
Engaging with Authors	28	
Background Similarities/Relatability	9	
Learning More about Writing	24	
Learning More about Literature/Culture	12	
Inspirational	10	
Optimism	3	Recognition of Historical Past to Move Toward an Optimistic Future
Breaking Through Perceptions	3	
Breaking Free	7	
Accepting Bad with Good	8	
Struggle/Oppression	13	
Classicism	4	
Shame	18	
Racism	19	
Historical Flaws	9	
Pride	13	
Writing to Progress	4	
Realism	2	
Values	1	Characteristics of Southern Identity
Honest Work Type	1	
Southern Hospitality	5	
Southern Food	6	
Sense of Community	6	
Southern Identity Defined	18	
Family	6	
Religion	4	
Nostalgia	2	
Tradition	9	
Reminiscent	2	
Southern Setting/Atmosphere	6	Regionalism
Rural Landscape	6	
Southern Tone	2	

Small Town Culture	15	
Dialect	5	
Regional Identity	14	
Sense of Place	7	
Isolation	2	
Outsider-Insider	19	Identification of Stereotypes
Stereotypes	20	
Breaking Away from Stereotypes	4	
Northerner vs. Southern Perception	11	
Universal Similarities	8	Literature as a Vehicle to Learn More about Southern Culture
Relating to Characters, Situations, and Southern Experience	16	
Connecting to Literature through Personal Experiences	22	
Relating to Writer through Literature	13	
Different Authors Provide Broader Presentation	9	

APPENDIX K

Enumeration Table of Themes – Research Questions 3 & 4

Open-Codes	Enumeration of open-code appearance data sets	Themes
Encouragement through writing freedom	5	Students Learn through Freedom of Writing
Writing without fear	2	
Writing as a sense of adventure	3	
Experimenting with writing	1	
Encouragement through authors' fearlessness with writing	1	
Writing process as a tool	2	Students Learn More about Writing through the Writing Process
Writing process as a structured approach to writing	6	
Authors' use of writing process models relevancy for students	2	
Writing process for all types of writing	2	
Writing tricks for idea generation	3	
Importance of editing	1	
Importance of multiple drafts	2	
Southern identity	5	Southern Identity through Students' Connections to Literature
Southern heritage	3	
Southern culture	4	
Southern regional interest	5	
Southern sensibility	3	
Sense of place	2	
Native origin	1	Southern Identity through Students' Connections to Authors
Southern aura	1	
Author inspiration	2	
Voice and language	4	