



Online Doctoral Students Writing for Scholarly Publication

Katherine J. Kirkpatrick

Clarkson College

Abstract

Scholarly publication remains an indication that doctoral students have successfully joined their field's dialogue—that they are doing the work of scholars, which is critical to their career progression in academia and important in other contexts, as well. Yet, how best to support and instruct doctoral students in writing for scholarly publication continues to be debated, particularly in relation to online students. As such, this qualitative archival analysis of online interdisciplinary leadership doctoral students' discussion boards from three course sections of an elective course on writing for scholarly publication uncovered behavioral and emotional barriers that inhibited students' progression toward scholarly publication. Its aim was to discover best practices for easing and quickening doctoral students' paths to scholarly publication. Findings resulted in the creation of a grounded theory that took a comprehensive vantage point of the issue and offered practicable tenets for programmatic implementation.

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Keywords: Doctoral students; Scholarly publication; Online

Doctoral students are expected to write as professionals in their field, and this includes writing for scholarly publication, which remains a primary, requisite objective both for students and for doctoral programs (Habibie, 2016; Jalongo, Boyer, & Ebbeck, 2014). Yet, how best to support students in this endeavor and facilitate their maturation to published scholars remains a contested arena. One of the pivotal issues in this process is students' self-perceived identity. Students have a difficult time developing past the role of student and replacing it with that of independent scholar (Aitchison, Catterall, Ross, & Burgin, 2012). The difficulty of this role transition yields doctoral students who struggle to publish because they do not position themselves in their writing as credible scholars who have something significant to contribute to their academic or professional arenas (Kamler & Thomson, 2008). In addition, they struggle to critique and join the dialogues of established scholars in their fields (Aitchison, 2009), and these complications seem to stall their abilities to publish.

As an additional component of this complex role transition, many students struggle with academic writing skills, compounding their lack of confidence in their academic writing abilities, and further hindering their abilities to publish. However, without learning to publish or, in some curricula, without actually publishing (Aitchison et al., 2012), students remain unable to join the very fields for which their doctoral programs are preparing them. Publishing in academia is a well-known path to recognition and success—not to mention a crucial path for disseminating a field's innovative research (e.g., Jasper, Vaismoradi, Bondas, & Turunen, 2014; Sengupta, Shukla, Ramulu, Natarajan, & Biswas, 2014).

E-mail address: kirkpatrickkatherine@clarksoncollege.edu

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2019.01.012>

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As such, without gaining these academic writing skills and, more importantly, donning the role of scholar, doctoral students remain stunted in the role of student and remain unprepared to matriculate to the role of independent scholar upon graduation.

In composition and rhetoric, this is an ongoing subject. As recently as the 2018 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), the Graduate Student Standing Group offered both a panel and a roundtable focused on building graduate students' professional identities (McCabe, 2018); in addition, the Writing Across the Curriculum – Graduate Organization offered a post-CCCC webinar titled, “Publishing as a Graduate Student: The Highs, the Lows, and the In-Betweens” (Russell, 2018). These offerings demonstrate the continuing dialogue and need for support within composition and rhetoric. However, the need for this support extends to many disciplines and becomes especially complicated by the growing number of online doctoral programs and how online doctoral students may best be supported in establishing their professional identities and increasing their publication potential. Thus, while important work is being done within composition and rhetoric, there seemed a need to expand the dialogue to encompass a more interdisciplinary angle, particularly given the decided growth of online doctoral programs across the disciplines, and to investigate if online doctoral students may need different forms of writing support.

This phenomenon, wherein doctoral students' behavioral barriers inhibit their publication productivity, is currently being explored in the literature, referred to recently by Cecile Badenhurst and Cally Guerin (2016) as “impostor syndrome” (p. 15) or students' “de-authorisation” (p. 15) in their writing. However, the field is still growing, and the best means to assist students in overcoming these writing barriers, particularly in the online environment, remain debated, fitting into Christa Ehmann and Beth L. Hewett (2015) call “for open-ended research into overarching areas of interest in [online writing instruction]” (p. 526). Therefore, building on this call, this study attempted to complicate the dialogue by applying an interdisciplinary focus, studying the research from across the curriculum. As a result, this qualitative study analyzed archived online discussion boards from three separate sections of an interdisciplinary leadership doctoral program elective course on writing for scholarly publication at a Midwestern Jesuit university. The aim of this study sought to discover best practices for easing and quickening online doctoral students' paths to scholarly publication.

Literature on Doctoral Students Writing for Publication

Ironically, what seemed clearest in the literature was that writing at the doctoral level is an ambiguous arena. Of course, the literature supported writing as an integral component of both doctoral students' research processes (Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Aitchison et al., 2012; Kamler & Thomson, 2004; Baker & Wilson, 1992) and doctoral students' matriculation to the role of independent scholar (Aitchison et al., 2012; Cotterall, 2011; Kamler & Thomson, 2004, 2008; Weidman & Stein, 2003). However, the best means to support doctoral students during the research process and in making the transition to independent scholar remained undetermined. Though the research body is growing, opaque areas continue to exist. For instance, many debated whether to dedicate class time to writing within the doctoral curriculum (Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Aitchison et al., 2012; Jalongo et al., 2014). Likewise, the appropriate roles of doctoral students' writing facilitators fluctuated considerably from the facilitator role being largely hands off to the facilitator role being largely hands on (Aitchison et al., 2012; Cotterall, 2011; Gürel, 2011; Lee & Kamler, 2008; Li, 2007; Weidman & Stein, 2003). Least investigated, though, was research into online doctoral student writing and writing facilitation, which is nonetheless a quickly growing segment of doctoral education, particularly in the applied social sciences—and rightly so. For instance, a quick search of “Best Online Graduate Education Programs” in the *U.S. News and World Report* (2017) revealed 274 U.S. schools offering online graduate programs, excluding proprietary institutions. Likewise, the *U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics* (2014) reported over 630,000 U.S. graduate students enrolled in exclusively online courses at Title IV institutions. Thus, while the number of online graduate programs and students continues to grow, and though important studies continue to emerge, consensus on best practices remains elusive, particularly for this growing population.

Dedicating Curriculum Time to Scholarly Writing Instruction

Dedicating explicit time within a curriculum for teaching scholarly writing to doctoral students was far from common practice. The most overt call for this actually stemmed from a less likely journal, *Early Childhood Education*, in which Mary Renck Jalongo et al. (2014) called for surpassing the standard ad hoc approach to doctoral students writing for

publication, saying that “most doctoral programs neglect this learning in their established curriculum” (p. 242). Thus, when a group of established professionals in practice return to earn a doctorate as a term of their employment, such as many of the 30 education doctoral students from three institutions in the U.S., Australia, and Canada in [Jalongo et al.’s \(2014\)](#) focus groups, they enter unprepared for the scholarly writing demands of the doctorate—even more so when trying to publish. Notably, their focus groups revealed requests for explicit writing instruction in their classrooms. For instance, “Some doctoral candidates expected nearly every major class assignment to have publication potential” ([Jalongo et al., 2014, p. 245](#)), else students felt that the assignments were somewhat of a wasted writing effort. In other words, if they were not writing for publication, the expected work of a scholar, then the assignment was not preparing them for their expected role. Jalongo et al. concluded by stating that the demands of the doctoral students in the current climate to publish means that programs can no longer fall back on tacit learning and expect students to innately glean the necessary knowledge.

Supporting this conclusion, [Donald R. Baker and Martha V.K. Wilson \(1992\)](#) concluded their study by suggesting that more courses dedicated to research methods and statistics equated to more student publication productivity. While not mentioning writing courses specifically, Baker and Wilson’s findings did indicate that the research process, and writing about these processes, benefitted from more frequent and more concerted courses dedicated to these endeavors. On the other hand, contrary to [Jalongo et al.’s \(2014\)](#) findings, [Michelle A. Maher and Brett H. Say \(2016\)](#) found that both hands-on and hands-off approaches were beneficial in their own rights, the former gave explicit guidance while the latter offered room for autonomous growth and individual resilience.

Approaching this from a slightly different angle, [Claire Aitchison et al. \(2012\)](#) recommended doctoral students plan publication attempts while undertaking their doctoral education. In their interdisciplinary survey of 36 students and 29 facilitators via a variety of survey, focus group, and interview modalities, they found that doctoral students benefitted when they submitted writing for publication as a pedagogy in itself. Because none of the students in their study had publication as a requirement for the degree, they found that some facilitators encouraged student publication efforts while other facilitators did not encourage student publication efforts. However, the students who did receive this encouragement found the process positive to their development and crucial for receiving professional feedback on their writing. One facilitator even mentioned that “her students learned to write by publishing” ([Aitchison et al., 2012, p. 443](#)). The experience itself lent her students the knowledge and authority they needed. Others planned publication as a component of writing the dissertation, showing students how to break a larger work into journal articles—again, eschewing the tacit approach by directing students on best scholarly writing and publication practices.

Moving attempts outside of the curriculum itself, [Claire Aitchison and Alison Lee \(2006\)](#) set up facilitator-led writing groups as supplementary assistance for doctoral students. Facilitators led group discussions on a variety of topics:

The development of a language for talking about writing, both technical language about language and writing from within linguistics, but also the language of theory to apply to the questions of textuality, discourse and subjectivity in relation to academic writing and self (trans)formation. ([Aitchison & Lee, 2006, p. 271](#))

They followed each discussion by reviewing one group member’s work in great detail. Participants claimed they received the necessary instruction, feedback, and nurturing they needed to progress their writing, contrary to the isolation and fear they experienced without the supplementary group assistance. Notably, several other studies promoted writing groups and peer reviews as a positive enterprise (e.g., [Aitchison, 2009](#); [Aitchison et al., 2012](#); [Lee & Kamler, 2008](#); [Weidman & Stein, 2003](#)).

Facilitators’ Roles

Adding to the ambiguity regarding where and how doctoral students best receive writing instruction necessarily includes the facilitator role—sometimes faculty member, dissertation supervisor, or dissertation committee member—yet this may be the most debated aspect of this dialogue, particularly when examining qualitative data from faculty and students regarding the facilitator role. Appropriately titled “‘Tough Love and Tears’: Learning Doctoral Writing in the Sciences,” [Aitchison et al. \(2012\)](#) discussed the heavy emotion that accompanied facilitator feedback, in large part due to the variance and inconsistency of facilitator feedback. They explained that few facilitators enjoyed working with students on their writing because so few doctoral students wrote at the scholarly level, creating substantial barriers for the students and requiring considerable attention and patience from the facili-

tators. Aitchison et al. (2012) claimed that both parties “suffered” (p. 439) through the process of learning to write and that, due to time constraints and the competitive nature of academia, facilitators often took a “natural selection” (p. 439) or sink-or-swim approach with students and considered it justified as a disciplinary norm or rite of passage.

Despite these hard feelings, both students and facilitators agreed that facilitator feedback was the “primary strategy by which students learned to write” (Aitchison et al., 2012, p. 441). This reinforced the role of the facilitator as necessary but complicated their role due to the varied approaches. Aitchison et al. (2012) specifically noted that many student responses indicated that facilitators either left students to develop on their own or tried to completely rewrite the students’ work. These polarities are not isolated to Aitchison et al.’s study. Though focused on international students, Sara Cotterall (2011) found a similar pattern in her narrative study. One student remained particularly anxious about her writing as her facilitator continually wrote the first few sentences of each of her papers for the student, leaving the student feeling heavily dependent upon the facilitator and learning very few transferable skills for independent writing outside the guidance of her facilitator. Cotterall (2011) concluded, similar to others, that more attention must be “paid to *writing as a practice*” (p. 423)—not simply as an innately learned skill.

Others investigated a doctoral program’s impact on student development from an environmental standpoint. John C. Weidman and Elizabeth L. Stein (2003) and Baker and Wilson (1992) both posited that a department’s environment and community play a crucial role in developing doctoral students as productive scholarly publishers. Weidman and Stein explained that departments with faculty who frequently modeled scholarly publication and other scholarly activities yielded students with similar practices and, notably, increased comfort with these activities. Essentially, departments treated their students as colleagues, resulting in an increased socialization to disciplinary norms, including those related to scholarly writing. Baker and Wilson (1992) supported this by stating that “the environment established by having a productive faculty evidently contributes to graduate publication outcomes, possibly as a result of the positive role modeling and collaboration that comes from a mentoring relationship” (p. 212). In short, the way in which a doctoral program’s faculty and community as a whole supported and modeled doctoral students’ writing and publication efforts seemed to have a tremendous influence on students’ comfort and productivity.

Online Doctoral Student Writing

Nowhere is this confusion over facilitators’ roles and best practices for students’ maturation as scholarly writers more prominent than in online doctoral student writing. The research is sparse but growing. Bruce E. Winston and Dail L. Fields (2003) mentioned writing briefly in their discussion of revisions made to their interdisciplinary distance education PhD program at Regent University. They reinforced Baker and Wilson’s (1992) call for more research-oriented offerings built into curricula, but they explained that “making mistakes and being corrected or redirected to do it better based on the specification of the mentoring faculty” (p. 165) was inefficient for online students and referred to it more as a “survival process” (p. 166). They explained, similar to Jalongo et al. (2014), that working professionals participating in distance education have different needs; Winston and Fields stated that distance doctoral students required a more structured contact schedule with facilitators because building a mentoring relationship was not as easy due to distance. They ultimately called for explicit competencies to be established throughout the curriculum. Gufidan Can and Andrew Walker (2014) echoed this call very briefly in their conclusions, supporting early and often feedback as especially critical for online students.

Seeming to answer the call for a pedagogy specific to online doctoral students, Natalia V. Smirnova (2016) created a pedagogical framework that applied to a “self-regulated learning” (p. 69) modality, apropos to the online context and doctoral population. She paired research writing competencies with self-regulated learning competencies (e.g., motivation, learning strategies, and self-reflection) in an online doctoral course. The course was designed for multilingual students at a Russian university; however, despite the multilingual population, Smirnova’s (2016) results were intriguing. For example, few students perceived an understanding of “hedging, genre ‘moves’ or text relationships” (Smirnova, 2016, p. 79) and most felt “expressing a critical contribution” (Smirnova, 2016, p. 79) to be a major challenge, paralleling the findings of native-English speaking, face-to-face challenges in earlier-mentioned studies. Overall, she advocated for a self-regulated learning modality as crucial to online doctoral students writing for scholarly publication.

Interdisciplinary Predictors of Doctoral Students Publishing

Interestingly, research has found other predictors of doctoral student publishing. [Jalongo et al. \(2014\)](#) found doctoral students' level and experience within their program to be more predictive of publication than the student's geographic location (Australia vs. United States vs. Canada). From a pedagogical angle, [Alison Lee and Barbara Kamler \(2008\)](#) found that students who viewed their work from a macro perspective, envisioning their research from perspectives outside their institution, were more likely to publish. This method encouraged one student in their case study to recontextualize her work at several stages and thus develop several conference papers, which she later published as journal articles. This macro approach involved teaching the student to consider the various audiences for her work, as well as how she might re-work and re-write her material to acquire the most productivity for her efforts.

Finally, though older and focused solely on social work doctoral students, [Baker and Wilson \(1992\)](#) found several predictors in their quantitative study. First, they noted that program prestige was a predictor of productivity, but they theorized that this was likely due to the program attracting talented students and by having top faculty role models for the students. Also like previously mentioned studies, they found that greater training in research methods and in statistics yielded greater productivity, as did the number of research courses taken. Moreover, they observed a correlation between the productivity of the faculty and the productivity of the students. They emphasized that doctoral students are greatly influenced by their environment and will model the actions of professionals in their departments (see also [Habibie, 2016](#)); therefore, they recommended programs aim for a holistic environment of productivity that supports scholars at all levels at all times.

Research Questions

Earlier studies have explored this topic from a variety of angles, including classroom ([Kamler & Thomson, 2004](#)), curricular ([Jalongo et al., 2014](#)), extra-curricular ([Aitchison, 2009](#); [Kamler & Thomson, 2004](#)), and environmental ([Cotterall, 2011](#); [Weidman & Stein, 2003](#)). To build on this dialogue, this study conflated these angles into a more comprehensive exploration of the topic. It analyzed participants' self-perceived thoughts about their behavioral development, including the most helpful and the most hindering aspects, throughout their path to scholarly publication. Rather than begin with any one angle in mind, I performed a grounded theory methodology—in partial response to [Ehmann and Hewett \(2015\)](#) suggestion that online writing research needs theories unique to the online setting—using generative questions that, through observation of students' discussions, helped to formulate a comprehensive theory of the phenomenon, verified through coding, and grounded in the data. Therefore, while earlier studies posited various hypotheses, I tried to avoid existing assumptions and to remain as open as possible to what students' discussions revealed directly.

The following research questions guided this qualitative study: (a) What do doctoral students describe when discussing their transition from student writer to published scholarly writer? (b) What (if any) notable behavioral transitions do doctoral students perceive related to their development into published scholarly writers? (c) What (if any) notable themes emerge differently and/or in tandem with the literature related to online doctoral students?

Research Design

The research design for this study was qualitative, consisting of archival analysis of three sections of an online doctoral-level elective course on writing for scholarly publication at a Midwestern Jesuit university. Each course section contained approximately 15 students, and each course section included seven online discussion boards, each with two to three discussion prompts—with the prompts and the instructor¹ identical across the three sections. Of note, the prompts were of two varieties: (a) those asking students to reflect on their writing processes, such as “What scholarly conversation do you want to join?” or “What challenges do you experience as you write the first draft?” and

¹ The instructor designed this elective course based on students' repeated requests. It began and continues as an online course, and the student data supported both the instructor's perceptions of the course, via her review of final data analysis, and the students' perceived satisfaction with the course, by way of the data presented in this study. The instructor was involved in the data collection only as much as providing permission for the study and providing a content review of final data analysis.

(b) those asking students to respond to the week's readings in a very general fashion, such as "What idea or concept particularly resonated with you in this week's readings?" The discussion boards consisted solely of student-student interaction, with the instructor providing individual written and/or video feedback to each student during the following week. Students in all sections were enrolled in an online doctoral program in interdisciplinary leadership studies but otherwise had no minimum requirements to elect the course; as such, student writing levels and self-perceptions of their writing levels varied greatly.

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the participating university, I received de-identified, archived discussion boards from course sections that took place between 2013 and 2015. I hand-coded the discussion boards, following [Johnny Saldaña's \(2013\)](#) process for a grounded theory approach to qualitative inquiry. He writes,

The process usually involves meticulous attention by applying specific types of codes to data through a series of cumulative coding cycles that ultimately lead to the development of a theory – a theory "grounded" or rooted in the original data themselves. ([Saldaña, 2013, p. 51](#))

Adhering to Saldaña's model, *in vivo*, process, and initial coding were used during the first cycle of coding followed by second-cycle coding, focused, axial, and theoretical coding, in order to reorganize, refocus, and compare codes as data were transferred from one large (711 pages) .pdf document to a more organized and focused coding spreadsheet. From this spreadsheet, emergent categories and central/core categories were developed, which ultimately led to the grounded theory.

The sample size of three course sections was adequate to reach saturation in this qualitative study. As coding continued through the second cycle (i.e., while transferring the data in a reorganized and refocused manner to the master spreadsheet), I transferred fewer coded data to the spreadsheet during the final discussion board because fewer inimitable comments surfaced that were distinct compared to what had already been transferred. Essentially, saturation became clear when the same comments began to appear over and over again in the data ([Strauss & Corbin, 1998](#)).

Findings

[Saldaña \(2013\)](#) is clear that grounded theory's coding canon proceeds in a fastidious manner, applying particular types of codes to the data through recursive cycles that ultimately develop a theory entrenched in the original data. In short, these cycles consist of first-cycle coding, second-cycle coding, and categorizing. In line with this method, each new cycle in this study refocused and reorganized the codes and, eventually, categories that then led to the exposition of the grounded theory. For brevity in this article, I focused on second-cycle coding as it best represented the essence of the data.

Second-Cycle Coding

In line with [Saldaña's \(2013\)](#) grounded theory framework, the second cycle of coding consisted of focused coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding.

Focused coding

Focused coding consists of the most frequent or significant initial codes ([Saldaña, 2013](#)) listed here but, for brevity, not explicated. These codes focused on the most frequent and significant codes pulled from the large quantity of initial codes originally found. In sum, these nine focused codes consisted of *tough to get started*, *writer's block*, *fear*, *doubt*, *voice/contribution*, *student role vs. scholar role*, *discourse conventions*, *importance of scholarly writing class*, *adult learners*, and *online learners*.

Axial coding

Axial coding, on the other hand, plucks the specific characteristics, attributes, locations, and relationships of the codes that make up a category, particularly the emergent categories ([Saldaña, 2013](#)). When synthesizing the first-cycle coding for these qualities, the axial coding eventually consisted of the following four codes: *continua*, *attributes of learning*, *self-described barriers*, and *being new to critique*, each of which I will discuss to explain how they refocused and synthesized the first-cycle coding and laid the foundation for the grounded theory.

Continua

Several codes seemed to exist on a continuum. One of the most prominent continua dealt with students' self-described role as student and/or scholar. The location of this code spanned a continuum from those who referred to themselves as student and explicitly *not* scholar to those who already considered themselves both student and scholar, with several in between mentioning various degrees of self-development into a scholar role. Donning the role of scholar (or not) can affect students' abilities to write and publish in various ways. The following comment highlighted a few of these:

One concept that resonated me [sic.] this week, from the assigned reading, was that of using your outline to highlight what you are adding to the literature. . . .however, I find it challenging being a developing scholar. Much of my graduate coursework has focused on supporting my writing with authorities in the field, so I have felt compelled to spend a great deal of time on the review of literature or practice to establish credibility. Because of this perspective, I have never sopped [sic.] to think what am I adding to the literature?²

This student specifically referred to himself or herself as “a developing scholar”; furthermore, he or she is beginning to recognize that thus far their writing has comprised little more than review of “authorities in the field.” Without an explicit pedagogical requirement, this student had yet to stake a claim or join a scholarly dialogue in any novel way, at least not consciously. Notably, they had not even considered it, had not recognized it as a scholarly writing requirement. This absent claim or failure to join the dialogue, conscious or not, will likely inhibit a scholarly publication attempt because the writing will not add anything novel to the dialogue.

A second continuum stemming from the first-cycle coding was the code, *understanding style*. This code spanned a continuum from students who felt having a personal writing style was unavailable to them as a doctoral student to those who self-perceived as already possessing a strong personal writing style. Beginning with the former: “Point of fact. . .most English teachers' criticisms of student papers are a reflection of how closely the writer's style matched what the teacher would have written on a paper or test answer.” This student seemed to feel unable to write with his or her own style and had, instead, felt he or she had been taught to write in his or her “English teachers'” styles. This perceived lack of voice is troubling as it can stunt individuals in a student role, not allowing them to find their own style and voice. If a student perceived it impossible to write in any style save the professor's to be successful, then they may not actively seek their own style; in essence, they remained unable to surpass the style of a student role.

Looking at this in another way, the dependence on others' styles could be beneficial when learning disciplinary discourse conventions; reproducing the style of established scholars in a discipline could be an effective way for a student to begin donning a scholarly voice. One student spoke to this specifically: “By reading other author's works, we can discover styles of writing guides and personal styles, which can help use [sic.] refine our own techniques.” The student wished to mine the style of “other authors”; however, there remained a bit of confusion in their desire to either “discover” a new style or “refine” an existing style. Either way, it spoke to the notion of a developing understanding of a personal writing style that intuitively mined others' work for assistance.

Other students were more explicit about recognizing and owning their own style and wanting to make it more “scholarly”: “I need to make that transition from my current style and structure and move more into that formal scholarly style, without going too far in the other direction.” Unlike the student who felt bound to the professor's style, or the student searching the literature for various styles, this student claimed a personal writing style but wished to make it more of a “formal scholarly style.” Also unlike the previous students, this student seemed determined not to lose too much of their personal style or voice while learning or adapting to a new style. While not demonstrating a firm command on their “scholarly” style, they nonetheless owned a style and wanted to retain control of it, demonstrating the continuum of students understanding and owning (or not) a personal writing style.

Overall, these continua demonstrated the breadth of locations that doctoral students can occupy at any one time on any one topic related to scholarly writing for publication. They also seemed to support the importance of an online scholarly writing for publication class, helping students to become conscious of their need to stake a claim

² Regarding the data, since I received the data de-identified, I was unaware if students were native English speaking, non-native English speaking, or international, nor was I aware of their current geographical location due to the online modality of the course. This may be a path to consider within online programs as doctoral students learn different academic writing conventions, as well as scholarly role conventions, in different regions of the world, despite publishing in English-language journals remaining the gold standard (e.g., Gürel, 2011; Li, 2007).

and, essentially, don a scholarly role and to secure a personal writing style acclimated to their discipline's discourse conventions without forgoing ownership of and comfort with their personal scholarly writing style.

Attributes of learning

The second axial code comprised the attributes of learning specific to this study: online learners, adult learners, and explicit or implicit pedagogical approaches. Students' comments related to their self-perceptions as *online learners* were rare, perhaps because no discussion question asked it directly. Nonetheless, when offered, the comments stressed the need for "affective" and multimodal communication, which may indicate two things. First, if students are accustomed to online learning and comfortable as online learners, they may feel less of a need to discuss that aspect of their education. For example, though one student readily acknowledged that online education was necessarily "different," he or she considered it a normal aspect of the "21st Century." In short, the lack of discussion on this topic may have indicated it was not a student-perceived barrier to scholarly writing. It also may indicate that online instruction is moving to a less ancillary disciplinary angle where, in this case, students are viewing it as standard or ordinary, something [Beth L. Hewett and Scott Warnock \(2015\)](#) predicted not long ago.

An additional, more detailed datum indicated a student's comfort with technology. He or she sought and appreciated feedback on writing through a number of modalities, mentioning specifically "voice" and "video" feedback, which provided them with a more "whole" perception of feedback on their writing. Importantly, this student also perceived that the multimodal feedback "minimiz[ed] some of the emotional overreactions" that had previously accompanied "critiques of [his or her] writing." Therefore, the combination of affective communication and the student's comfort with technology seemed to perhaps make up for the lack of synchronous communication, but more certainly to undo the emotional barriers that can inhibit students' maturation as scholarly writers, yielding online learning as a rather mild (if at all) barrier, under these course sections' circumstances, anyways.

Unlike self-perceptions as online learners, implicit self-perceptions as *adult learners* were more pervasive and seemed to fall into two primary themes: learned behaviors and time management. To the latter, students often mentioned family and work obligations that remained strong, competing pressures on their schedule, despite their likely status as full-time students, as one student described, "our extremely busy schedules as working adults, in school, with families." They referred to this as a "distraction" and intimated that their family did not "understand that this class is for real and it is important to me." However, just as pressing a challenge seemed to come in the form of quotidian behaviors that students were actively working to undo. For instance, one noted the "avoidance tactics" that were keeping them "away from the key board"; another noted the pressure of trying to "retrain [his or her] lazy behavioral and cognitive habits" after making a conscious effort to integrate scholarly writing into his or her "career goals." Overall, the self-perceived barriers related to being an adult learner swayed more toward the habits and schedules of these students, which often had not yet acclimated to include writing and research as an everyday portion of their life. In other words, they seemed to be still struggling to adjust their lives to accommodate this new endeavor of scholarly writing for publication.

Though not explicit in students' comments, these themes seemed at least speculatively applicable to online learners, as well, particularly related to self-motivation and fitting non-traditional education modalities into non-traditional students' lives. Online doctoral students are, in a sense, paving new territory and may find little assistance or demonstration in how best to structure their lives in a manner most efficacious for a doctoral program's rigorous requirements. Likewise, because these data stemmed from an asynchronous educational setting, they may show the effects of not modeling faculty's everyday work actions for online doctoral students as they would be modelled in a more traditional on-campus doctoral program. This may also speak to an inclusivity issue that the Conference on College Composition and Communication ([CCCC, 2013](#)) emphasizes in its Online Writing Instruction Principles related to providing the necessary online support structures for online students—an area seemingly unexplored as it relates to online doctoral students.

The final learning attributes synthesized from the data were *explicit or implicit pedagogical approaches*, specifically melding the implicit disciplinary *discourse conventions* and the explicit *importance of a scholarly writing class* from first-cycle coding. Contrasting the data from these codes lent a more complete glimpse into students' views related to writing pedagogy at the doctoral level. While data indicated that students were aware of the need to incorporate discourse conventions, they found the implicit learning method to be "stifling" and "suffocating," as well as noting the oft-used "overwhelmed" when describing this part of the learning process. One student found a decrease in their feeling of overwhelmed when they received explicit guidance on how to read for discourse conventions.

The positive attitude toward explicit guidance and instruction was repeated often as students reflected on the importance of their online scholarly writing course to their progression as scholarly writers. Comments indicated the course opened their eyes to the “misunderstandings” and “shortcomings” they had regarding their writing. One noted that the course granted them “clarity” about how they could contribute to their discipline’s dialogue. Another noted his or her appreciation for the “community of friends helping each other,” which had helped to decrease the student’s “blocks” and “overly emotional reactions to critiques. . . as criticisms of [him or her] as a person.” Still another stated that it “forced [him or her] to take a more critical look at [his or her] writing.” These data overwhelmingly trended toward explicit online writing pedagogy as preferable to implicit online writing pedagogy, particularly when it came to overcoming the students’ self-perceived barriers to their scholarly writing.

While these data emphasized the importance of establishing a community of writers in a doctoral program, of note, the online modality did not seem to impede students’ sense of community nor their appreciation of such a community. Students were fond of the course and its explicit discussions of writing concerns, and they seemed particularly fond of the candid forum that allowed them to unpack these misunderstandings, blocks, and heavy emotions. In sum, providing such a forum—via an elective course in this case—for these online doctoral students was perceived as helpful on a number of levels related to their progress as scholarly writers. This echoed [Kristine Blair and Cheryl Hoy’s \(2006\)](#) contention that, particularly among adult online learners, virtual communities may look different than on-campus communities in the way that communication occurs and how “neighborly” (p. 45) peer-to-peer and peer-to-instructor relationships are developed. These communities benefit from the public space of the course, but they also likely benefit from the private “two-way exchanges” ([Blair & Hoy, 2006, p. 45](#)) via email and the like that often occur simultaneously with an online course. In other words, that students did not mention the online modality as a barrier may be due to the still-developing idea of community that manifests in online courses and curricula—that the communication within the community simply looks different, and therefore community develops differently, than within a traditional on-campus course (see also [Andrew, 2014](#)).

Being new to critique

The barriers students did discuss may also stem from the final axial code. Drawn largely from the process codes during first-cycle coding, *being new to critique* emerged as further characteristics that students in the course sections demonstrated. This axial code encompassed perceptions of being new to self-critique, new to peer critique, new to receiving critique from others, and new to critiquing established professionals. This lack of experience surfaced in emotional reactions and even avoidance. One student mentioned he or she had “for years. . . veered away from allowing others to read [his or her] work for fear” of the criticisms. Another feared reviewing others’ writing, “afraid of someone taking my criticisms personally.” Similarly, a student expressed his or her difficulty giving feedback because they were a “people pleaser.” Yet another felt “conflicted” because he or she could not find anything to critique in a book they were reviewing. A final emotional reaction was a student who felt “enlightened” by the advice they received to reflect critically on their own writing in the way they do others’ writing, seemingly a new concept for him or her.

These emotional responses were not isolated to one aspect of critical feedback. Instead, they were related to receiving feedback, as well as to providing feedback—on both peer and professional levels—and to self-evaluation. This even ranged into guilt at times with one student, following a peer review, asking, “so who am I to critically edit someone else’s paper? I think I owe my colleague an apology.” These comments reflected students’ lack of experience in critical review, a piece of the writing process that is crucial at the scholarly level with peer-reviewed publications. Lack of experience with critical review seemed to serve as a barrier to students’ writing and publication efforts, particularly when providing and receiving critical feedback remained attached to writers’ emotions and when students remained unable to evaluate their own writing critically. While not tied necessarily to online doctoral students, the prevalence of these data and their importance to developing as a scholarly writer are well worth noting.

Theoretical coding

Theoretical coding takes things the final step toward creating categories by identifying the primary issues or themes concerning the participants. [Saldaña \(2013\)](#) referred to it as an umbrella, encapsulating all other codes and categories into central/core categories that get to the heart of the problem. Thusly encapsulated, theoretical coding revealed both behavioral barriers and emotional barriers as significant barriers to online doctoral students writing for scholarly publication.

Behavioral barriers

Getting to the heart of the problem included examining the behavioral barriers that students faced. First, the self-perception of being new to scholarly publication surfaced in a number of ways. Three individuals referred to themselves explicitly as “novice,” indicating a self-perceived classification as less developed than other writers. This in itself can be a barrier if it accompanies a perception of novice as equal to “as yet unable.” One student commented that “there is a different mindset that comes along with the published author or novice writer lifestyle.” This comment not only contrasted the published “author” with the novice “writer,” only identifying as author once published; it also contrasted the “mindset” associated with each, as if published authors had developed, behaviorally, past a certain maturation point.

Perhaps stemming from this same perception, additional behavioral barriers surfaced in the most pervasive focused code: *doubt voice/contribution*. Students commonly felt that their research and writing was not of a level that would be of interest/use to established scholars in their fields. These doubts appeared in each week, despite the course section and despite the week’s guiding discussion questions. In short, it seemed an omnipresent perception among a considerable portion of the students. Data for this theoretical code follow:

“I found myself wondering if my abstract was providing a summary that would be considered a contribution to literature. I am not sure it does.”

“I feel that I have been spinning my wheels over the past few weeks searching for a ‘worthy’ topic.”

“My reference to innovation was regarding finding something new and relevant to say about a subject. At times, I question my ability to do so.”

“I have a feeling that there is limited purpose in what I am doing, which makes it difficult to sit down and write on any topic.”

These comments lent hesitancy to these students’ progress in scholarly writing. The first was contemplating if a contribution existed in his or her writing, the second was “spinning [his or her] wheels” trying to hone in on a “‘worthy’ topic,” and the third was questioning his or her ability to posit “something new and relevant.” These all bespoke a doubtful and uncertain perception about their abilities to join a scholarly dialogue in a meaningful way. This seemed to be a barrier to students’ behavioral development. Importantly, the final comment even makes the connection explicit that doubting one’s contribution is a literal barrier, stopping them from “sit[ting] down [to] write.”

To speculate briefly, I wonder again if these barriers are connected to the asynchronous online modality of the program, in that students are positioned off campus and do not see faculty weekly. The isolation that may stem, perhaps subconsciously, from this distance may lend itself to a feeling of isolation from their disciplinary dialogue, as well. Curiously, the first datum indicates the student thought their abstract may have been making a contribution, but he or she was “not sure.” This constant hedging, particularly regarding students’ contributions to a dialogue, seemed a possible symptom of isolation, which may stem from the online environment. Anant Deshpande’s (2017) recent systematic review of online learning in doctoral education from 1998–2015 was very direct with this, finding that “the [online] student may feel extremely isolated and this can lead to thoughts of failure” (p. 22). While not a direct link to students’ struggles in writing to find a worthy topic and join their dialogue in a meaningful way, it nevertheless supports the idea that the isolation that can occur in an online doctoral program may have a significant behavioral influence on students.

The final behavioral barrier consisted of longstanding habits regarding writing and research processes and time management, synthesizing a number of first-cycle codes. One interesting learned habit, which also likely contributed to students’ difficulty in joining a scholarly dialogue, was students’ failure to immerse themselves in the literature of their field and/or topic. Several students admitted to not following any specific journals; one even commented that they had never considered it:

“This was a ‘duh’ moment. I don’t think that I had ever thought that if I want to publish in a particular journal, it would behoove me to read several articles in that journal first!”

While this spoke to a lack of knowledge, it nonetheless also spoke to a general behavioral barrier wherein students wanted to participate in a scholarly dialogue but had made little effort thus far to do so, even passively (e.g., staying current with the field’s scholarly dialogue without actually staking a claim of their own). Donning a new role means learning new behaviors, and failing to acquire this particular behavior is a significant barrier to any scholarly writer’s publication efforts.

Other longstanding habits related to self-described individualized barriers, such as never being “taught” to write, being a “perfectionist,” “think[ing] faster than I write,” and “being a passive writer [due to career writing].” These are longstanding behaviors that seemed to hinder students’ development as scholarly writers. They fell back on these

behaviors—some with positive notions of overcoming them but some who seemed unable, for varied reasons, to shed these behavioral barriers. The majority of these comments persisted in keeping their perceptions focused on why they could *not* become a published scholarly writer, rather than how they might overcome them, so they could, in fact, become published scholarly writers.

Emotional barriers

Possibly undergirding most of these behavioral barriers were students' emotional barriers, which were frequent and pervasive in the data. For instance, students mentioned some type of *fear* related to their research and writing processes 12 times, which did not include additional instances of “terrified,” “failure,” “sting,” and “pained” that also accompanied this theoretical code. Overcoming fears, such as the *fear of rejection*, presents a challenge for individuals as it can inhibit individuals from publication attempts, which, as mentioned earlier, has been seen as an important learning event in itself.

Notable other fears mentioned by students were fear of grammar, fear of judgement from both self and others (both peer and professional), fear of, as one student stated, “not knowing enough on the subject about which [I am] supposed to be the expert,” and even fear that spoke to more nuanced concerns:

“The real fear is that if I enter one conversation now, I will be excluded from other conversations later.”

“I must admit that the finality of ink versus the expression of thought verbally has been enough to stoke my insecurities and keep me from pursuing [sic.] publication.”

These two nuanced self-perceived fears indicated a possible misunderstanding about discourse conventions. The first seemed an ironic avoidance tactic that used the fear of being shut out of a dialogue to thus far shut himself or herself out of a dialogue. The second datum demonstrated a concern with the “finality” of publication. This student seemed worried that once they published, they would want to somehow retract what they had written, and they explicitly stated that this fear had kept them from attempting publication—a self-perceived barrier. In short, students' fears related to scholarly writing for publication were not only numerous but also wide-ranging.

These fears dovetailed with the second emotional barrier, which was an *overly emotional* perception of and/or attachment to their writing:

“In addition, you said it for all of us when you said you wanted to write something ‘Big.’”

“At this point I am trying to find the time to write meaningful words for a worthy journal article.”

“I have not embarked on the serious pursuit of publishing for fear of people hating my writing or for fear of it starting a controversy.”

While these comments harken back to students' hedging when joining scholarly dialogues, they also belie a great deal of emotion attached to students' scholarly writing endeavors. They desired a large amount of profundity in their work—something “big” and “meaningful” and “worthy”—but they remained only a “want,” something in the future. The second datum admitted that this desire was a barrier because they needed to “find the time,” perhaps indicating that writing something meaningful and worthy of scholarly publication was in some way different than the writing they had done previously and would require further attention and dedication. The third datum, however, revealed intriguing emotions. He or she referred to scholarly writing for publication as a “serious pursuit” and was concerned their writing might provoke “hate” or “controversy.” In other words, the emotional attachment to their writing placed (perhaps too) great importance on its message, or rather on the outcome of its message. The pressure of this potential outcome, in turn, created an emotional barrier as the writer then feared publication attempts.

These emotional barriers also included feeling *overwhelmed by the literature* and overwhelmed by other aspects of scholarly writing. The word *overwhelmed* appeared 10 times in the data, again not including closely related words and phrases, such as references to the writing process as “sprawling,” “quite daunting,” “freaking me out,” or “I collected way to [sic.] much material, and then needed to figure out what to do with it all.” In line with the definition of being overwhelmed, the barrier associated with these data may give students the perception of being buried, deluged, and drowned, and even parallel the speculative online isolation trend noted earlier. Consider the following comment:

“Because I don't follow any specific journals relating to my topic, I found the process of selecting a journal overwhelming.”

Due to this student's lack of following his or her field's dialogue, even the mere practice of choosing a journal left him or her feeling lost and burdened—a barrier to his or her progression toward publication. As can be seen, these emotional barriers were often paired with explicit self-perceived barriers to publishing, lending credence to their importance when

considering online doctoral students writing for scholarly publication and insight into how online doctoral programs might undo those barriers.

Synthesis of Findings Related to the Research Questions

Relating these second-cycle codes, then, to the research questions likewise revealed significant emergent and central/core categories related to online doctoral students writing for scholarly publication. Interesting avenues for further inquiry, particularly related to perceived behavioral barriers, were also found, as well as a few stray themes. The questions were purposefully broad in scope, in an attempt to investigate the full complexity of the issue (Creswell, 2014). This accounted for the broad range of themes identified in the data. The research questions and their summative analysis follow. While many findings seemed related to doctoral students as a whole, some seemed nonetheless specific to online doctoral students.

What do doctoral students describe when discussing their transition from student writer to published scholarly writer?

The primary findings related to this research question revealed students' great desire to publish a scholarly work notably accompanied by a great amount of anxiety, lack of knowledge, and a general difficulty transitioning into a scholar role. As discussed earlier, anxiety (i.e., fear) was a constant theme throughout students' discussions of the scholarly writing process, and this theme carried great breadth and depth—relating to several areas and ranging through all three course sections. Similar to Aitchison et al.'s (2012) findings, this became a piece of the larger issue of emotionalism, in general, that students described, relating to the process of scholarly writing and publication.

Students' lack of knowledge related not so much to the publication process, though this was apparent at times, such as with student questions related to how many sources a scholarly paper should include; rather, or perhaps closely related, it more often was akin to their lack of disciplinary knowledge, due to not staying abreast of their disciplines' dialogues and, in line with Smirnova's (2016) findings, not picking up on their fields' disciplinary discourse conventions. Both are essential to scholarly publication (Kamler & Thomson, 2004; Parry, 1998) and thus can present barriers for students' scholarly writing and publication efforts.

Likewise, students faced a general difficulty in donning the role of scholar. While some students were already making great strides in this area, such as referring to themselves as both student and scholar, other students seemed unable to self-identify as scholar. They either explicitly referred to themselves as student and not scholar or implicitly referred to the scholar role as an other—sometimes idealized or fictionalized—role that was, as yet, unattainable. Because this inability to self-identify as scholar likely influenced the pervasive doubt students faced in positioning their research as credible and worthy of joining their field's dialogue, it became a behavioral development barrier capable of greatly inhibiting students' progress (Rhodes, 2013). In sum, when students discussed their transition from student writer to published scholarly writer, significant issues related to anxiety and lack of knowledge surfaced, yet perhaps more important was the general difficulty students perceived in transitioning to the role of independent scholar. Again, this may apply to doctoral students in general, or it may be an effect of the asynchronous online environment, in which community and identity formation remain unsettled (Andrew, 2014, Blair & Hoy, 2006; Fielding, 2016). Further research into these facets in online, on campus, and hybrid modalities may help to tease out any significant differences.

What (if any) notable behavioral transitions do doctoral students perceive related to their development into published scholarly writers?

Students perceived several notable behavioral transitions as discussed earlier. In fact, they became a central/core category that greatly influenced the development of the grounded theory. These transitions included students self-perceiving as novice and self-perceiving their scholarly writing as lacking a scholarly voice and lacking a worthwhile topic, which was often perceived as a barrier to their publication attempts. Their comments indicated they felt unready to participate in their discipline's scholarly dialogue.

Importantly, and related specifically to literal behaviors, students also faced behavioral barriers when attempting to reform long standing habits related to their writing and research processes, such as not immersing themselves in a field's or a specific journal's literature. Reminiscent of Cotterall (2011) and Barbara Kamler and Pat Thomson's (2004)

findings, students had yet to develop the quotidian behaviors necessary to transition from perceiving scholarly writing as an objective skill set to perceiving scholarly writing as a regular, evolving lifestyle practice—and, perhaps most importantly, that they must join the conversation in order to begin enacting this practice.

What notable themes emerge differently and/or in tandem with the literature related to online doctoral students?

Similarly, interesting themes emerged both differently and in tandem with the literature related to online doctoral students. The literature agreed that online doctoral students who are working professionals have different needs (Baker & Wilson, 1992; Jalongo et al., 2014; Smirnova, 2016). To accommodate for this, they recommended creating explicit writing competencies and increased research-dedicated courses in curricula. Specifically for online doctoral students, Smirnova (2016) even created a self-regulated learning modality to assist with this explicit pedagogical approach. In other words, possibly due to the lack of face-to-face, scheduled class time and office hours, the literature recommended more structured feedback and communication schedules, which may also account for some of the adult learner issues that surfaced in the data.

Paralleling this, online doctoral students in this study struggled to carve regular scholarly research and writing practices into their everyday schedules, which may have indicated a desire (and need) for assistance in setting up this type of lifestyle framework. Heather Fielding (2016) discussed this struggle, albeit with undergraduate composition students. She explained online students' efforts to carve time and space from their lifestyles made messy the claim that “an online course fits any schedule” (Fielding, 2016, p. 107). However, ironically, when students turned the conversation about finding and managing time into a group Twitter discussion, it became a “group identity” (Fielding, 2016, p. 109), forming the community that can be somewhat elusive and/or difficult to define in online courses. In other words, allotting a dedicated online space for students to discuss their scheduling difficulties allowed at least Fielding's class to build their own community and time management assistance program, as it were, as online learners.

This also seems to harken back to the CCCC (2013) Online Writing Instruction Principle 3 that encourages “open[ing] up new opportunities for student thought and expression and prepar[ing] students for the 21st-century skills and modalities that will help them thrive as citizens and workers” (Rationale, para. 2). These new opportunities and new modalities may look different than traditional on-campus writing communities of support, such as using external social media modalities, but they are nonetheless crucial to both supporting and including the increasingly diverse student populations, such as doctoral students, who are already navigating online courses and curricula.

Differently, no data indicated an explicit discomfort with being an online student. While barriers related to being an adult learner emerged, being an online learner was perceived as a comfortable and normal part of their doctoral education. Certainly, these two codes may coincide in certain ways (e.g., adult learners working in professional settings need the flexibility of online learning); nevertheless, nothing explicit to online learning as a detriment to their scholarly writing and publication attempts was found in the data, making this a prime avenue for research moving forward, perhaps asking online doctoral students directly about their perceptions of developing as a scholarly writer while an online student.

Grounded Theory

In sum, these second-cycle codes through their relevance to the research questions eventually became categories, which then led to the development of a grounded theory, defined as “a general explanation (a theory) of a process, an action, or an interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 83). In this case, it was a theory of a process, rather than an action or interaction, grounded in the data. My theory of the process for supporting online doctoral students writing for scholarly publication follows: *Providing explicit guidance, pedagogy, and opportunity, regarding (a) early and often submersion in a field's literature, (b) providing and receiving critical feedback, (c) creating a community of support, (d) establishing a quotidian writing and research agenda, (e) and developing a personally authentic scholarly identity and voice will assist online doctoral students in overcoming the behavioral and emotional barriers that leave them stunted in the role of student, enabling them to matriculate to the role of independent scholar and, thus, be more capable of scholarly publication.*

The data analyzed in the three course sections' discussion boards led directly to this grounded theory. To make this data-to-theory map transparent, it is important here to explore each of the five tenets of the grounded theory, how they stemmed from the data, and how they can be applied. Also stemming from the grounded theory and eschewing the tacit approach, a reader will notice that the grounded theory's theme, "explicit guidance, pedagogy, and opportunity," is laced throughout discussion of these five tenets. This seems of particular importance within the online modality where it may be more difficult to attain these tenets due to less opportunity for faculty modeling, more tenuous communities of support, and fewer face-to-face interactions.

Early and often submersion in a field's literature

One of the most common sources of anxiety that appeared in the data was a lack of knowledge of the student's disciplinary discourse, including both the overarching dialogue and its rhetorical conventions. Beginning with the latter, students perceived it helpful when the elective course's readings and discussions began to center explicitly on discourse conventions, such as instructing them to read specifically for the conventions or explaining approximately how many outside sources to include in a scholarly article (e.g., [Sword, 2012](#)). Students expressed appreciation for these tips, being very clear that they had never heard and sometimes never considered them before and felt aha-type moments, including perceptions of relieved anxiety, upon receiving them.

This carried back to [Sharon Parry's \(1997\)](#) research, in which she found that even amongst the social sciences, considerable differences existed between disciplines' discourse conventions. She posited that doctoral students who tacitly acquired and applied these conventions had successfully joined their field's discourse. Thus, learning these conventions was a sign of scholarly publication productivity, but Parry warned that these conventions are rarely taught and, instead, must be gleaned by doctoral students—often because faculty members learned them tacitly, as well, and thus lacked the knowledge to provide explicit instruction on them. This seemed to be the greatest barrier to explicit instruction in disciplinary discourse conventions, requiring instruction for both doctoral students and, at times, faculty members. Regardless, making these conventions explicit for students may decrease their anxiety and provide them with the knowledge they need to increase their opportunities for scholarly publication. For online students, this is of particular importance due to the lack of modeling and face-to-face interactions that were the traditional avenue for tacitly learning the conventions, potentially putting online doctoral students at a disadvantage.

The additional component of this, lack of knowledge of the overarching disciplinary dialogue, was also a pervasive perception in the data. Students were unsure about where their ideas fit among the current scholarly dialogue and, in some cases, unsure of which scholarly journals were appropriate for their ideas. These were similar to findings in [Pejman Habibie's \(2016\)](#) study. Students' lack of knowledge in these areas led to increased anxiety, particularly feeling overwhelmed about having to wade through a seemingly mountainous stack of articles. In other words, they expressed hesitation about getting a handle on the overarching dialogue, let alone joining it.

The anxiety associated with this may be best assuaged through early and often submersion in a field's literature, with close attention paid to the *early*. Few students indicated they had acquired a sufficient cache of literature on their topic, which indicated they had not begun to do so at an earlier stage of their doctoral program. Granted, students enrolled in the elective course could have been at any stage of their program, so some may have been rather new to their doctoral studies. While a possible limitation, the number of students who expressed these concerns seemed too large to account for only being new to the program (e.g., in the second year). Therefore, class time dedicated to learning how to accumulate a literature review on a topic within the discipline, and then explicit instruction on how the student might join that dialogue—what [Gina Wisker \(2015\)](#) called a "threshold crossing" (p. 64)—may be key to undoing the anxiety associated with the literature review.

Additional applications of this tenet of the grounded theory might include projects related to analyzing various journals from the students' discipline—for both conventions and dialogues. This would introduce students to all three elements: journals, current issues, and disciplinary conventions. Applications might also include specific assignments, such as what [Wisker \(2015\)](#) described, with explicit objectives related to not just compiling literature, but also engaging with the theories and ideas in the literature. This shows doctoral students that scholarly writing is what [Badenhorst and Guerin \(2016\)](#) referred to as "*always situated*" (p. 10)—always in dialogue with others—and it teaches doctoral

students what knowledge the discipline values, the questions being asked, and ultimately how to join that dialogue (Lea & Street, 2014). Again, these applications should be explicit and early in, perhaps all, doctoral students' curricula.

Providing and receiving critical feedback

Likewise applying to doctoral students as a whole, in the data, many students seemed new to critical feedback in a number of ways: receiving professional critique of their work, receiving peer critique, providing peer critique, providing critique of established professionals' work, and self-critique. Their novelty in these areas caused them to hedge when entering a scholarly dialogue, unsure if their contributions were worthy, and to feel anxiety and even guilt when attempting to critique professional work and peer work, respectively. Students also demonstrated an overly-emotional attachment to their writing, which exacerbated their anxiety during any type of critical feedback scenario. Notably, for online doctoral students, providing affective feedback modalities, such as video, seemed to assuage this some; more on this later.

These causes for anxiety seemed fewer when students had more experience with providing and receiving critical feedback (Habibie, 2016). Encouraging doctoral students to participate in manuscript review opportunities, copy editing, as well as submitting to academic conferences seemed to garner students a critical eye, so to speak, for not only others' work, but also to enable them to turn that eye upon their own work. Importantly, Habibie (2016) recommended these tasks as "pivotal for learning writing for scholarly publication and developing writer/publisher identities" (p. 59). Thus, not only did these practices provide students with a more objective and less emotional observance of the scholarly publication and critical feedback processes, they likewise encouraged opportunities for establishing their identity as an author, revealing how others and, in turn, they joined disciplinary discourses in unique fashions.

Creating a community of support

While creating a community of support seemed an important tenet for any doctoral program, it may be principally important for an online doctoral program (Wikeley & Muschamp, 2004). In the data, students perceived less anxiety from having had a community of peer writers with which to share their concerns, ideas, and frustrations. Although students did not consider their online status to affect their education necessarily, they did imply relief that they were not alone during their initial attempts at writing for scholarly publication. Of note, however, is the fact that this particular writing community was facilitator led, which paralleled Aitchison and Lee's (2006) recommendation that doctoral student writing groups always be facilitator led. This keeps the writing community structured and focused on pertinent writing goals. In addition, these facilitator-led writing groups gave students the much needed opportunities to give and receive critical feedback, the importance of which was discussed previously, under the guidance of a knowledgeable professional in the field (Aitchison & Lee, 2006). Future studies may compare the efficacy of online modalities when creating online writing communities, such as an elective course versus a non-credit bearing, facilitator-led online platform for interested students.

Considering a community of support, however, moves far past facilitator-led writing communities. Earlier studies emphasized the community of a department itself—how faculty modeled writing and research productivity (Baker & Wilson, 1992; Habibie, 2016), how the department supported doctoral students monetarily (Cotterall, 2011) and as mentees (Habibie, 2016), and how the department encouraged collegiality between faculty-faculty and faculty-students (Weidman & Stein, 2003)—all finding that community played a substantial role in predicting doctoral students' publication productivity. Thus, while data in this study did not reveal perceptions related to departmental community, it should nonetheless be considered when applying this tenet of the grounded theory, paying special attention to the various ways in which online doctoral programs create and grow their communities of support—a much needed addition to the literature—as compared to the ways in which they have been created and grown for on-campus and hybrid doctoral programs.

Alternatively, firmly related to the data was online doctoral students' desire for affective feedback on their writing. Students were clear that they appreciated the multimodal feedback they received for its ability to convey emotion and add a human element to their distance coursework. They noted that, in particular, this decreased some of the anxiety they perceived when receiving faculty feedback on their work. As with Hewett and Warnock's (2015) prediction that students are expecting multimodal online support and feedback and that it will soon be "inherent components to all writing instruction" (p. 553), seeing the faculty members and hearing their voices seemed to undo the overly emotional

attachment that students retained for their writing. As such, specific to online doctoral students, faculty members should consider relaying feedback using modalities that stress affect and show themselves personally, rather than provide solely written feedback, which can be overwhelming and may no longer align with modern students' needs and expectations (Hewett & Warnock, 2015).

Establishing a quotidian writing and research agenda

Also specific to the online students in this study, establishing a regular writing and research agenda may be one of the most difficult of the tenets to achieve. The data revealed many online students who struggled to fit writing and research into their adult lives, let alone their daily lives. They admitted to avoidance tactics, large papers written in one sitting, and a reluctance to revise. However, these practices seemed to exacerbate their anxiety about the quality of their writing and tended to situate writing as ancillary to their daily lives. As developing scholars, doctoral students must begin to establish a dialectical writing and research agenda—with their writing informing their research and their research informing their writing (Kamler & Thomson, 2004)—occurring near daily.

One possibility for encouraging all doctoral students to begin establishing these agendas is to include research courses early and often in doctoral programs, which was found to be a predictor of students' publication productivity (Baker & Wilson, 1992). Students should receive guidance on research early that includes writing as integral to the research process (Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Creswell, 2014; Kamler & Thomson, 2004), giving students ample opportunities to explore and hone their writing and research skills in tandem throughout the curriculum. Importantly, faculty must explicitly stress the importance of this mutually informing process and that the process must be ongoing—not limited to an assignment. Though no doubt individual to each researcher/writer, in an online program, providing examples via monthly email updates or online newsletters of faculty's research and writing agendas may likewise be beneficial to students' development in this area (Baker & Wilson, 1992; Habibie, 2016), again modeling the behaviors for students that lead to publication productivity but also finding new ways of performing this modeling in the online environment.

Developing a personally authentic scholarly identity and voice

In addition to developing these quotidian agendas, students must also develop a scholarly identity and voice as they progress through their doctoral program in order to remain prepared to practice as an independent scholar post-graduation (Habibie, 2016). While the basic concept of developing a scholarly identity and voice was often present in the data, students seemed equally adamant that they wanted their scholarly identity and voice to be personally authentic. This desire for authenticity seemed to be a prominent crux of their concerns. They perceived anxiety about being so formal or “academic” that their voice somehow changed or became disengaged from their true selves, and they struggled to find a balance between their daily rhetoric and their scholarly rhetoric.

To assuage this anxiety, past practices have found mimicry to be somewhat effective during this maturation process (Cotterall, 2011), but this assuagement can also be expedited through more opportunities to receive and provide critical feedback (Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Cotterall, 2011; Kamler & Thomson, 2004), with a reminder that these processes, particularly peer review, must be facilitator led (Cotterall, 2011; Lee & Kamler, 2008). In other words, paralleling the previously discussed tenets, guidance on developing a scholarly identity and voice must be explicit and come from established professionals in the field in a way that also works for online doctoral students.

One additional consideration for this tenet of developing a personally authentic scholarly identity and voice was the intriguing data wherein students referred to scholars as seemingly fictional persons. One comment about theory-wielding professional authors seemed like an unattainable state of being to one student. On the other hand, another student noted that they realized through conversation with one of their mentors that everyone had to start somewhere—that established authors did not arrive at that point overnight. This seemed to be an aha moment for the student, and it demonstrated that explicit conversations about the identity and voice maturation processes can go a long way toward both relieving the anxiety that students associated with their developing scholarly identity and voice and making the identity development process an explicit, attainable component of their maturation to published scholarly writer that requires attention and work to hone into something personally authentic.

Conclusion

The qualitative data analyzed in this study paralleled much of the current literature, but its aim was more comprehensive and interdisciplinary in nature. The grounded theory that stemmed from the data was likewise comprehensive and attempted to paint a broad illustration of best practices while still offering real-world principles—practices that an online doctoral program might easily implement. In other words, these theoretical actions, grounded in the data of this study, are meant to be practicable—not abstract. They work to undo the emotional and behavioral barriers that often inhibit online doctoral students’ maturation into independent scholars, making them more capable of publishing post-graduation. Most importantly, though, they work to eschew the traditional tacit approach by which doctoral students learn to write for scholarly publication, replacing it with early, often, and explicit modalities for engendering understanding of their individual writing and research processes.

For the most part, these tenets seem equally applicable to online and on-campus doctoral programs; however, as a final consideration, while implementing the “early, often, and explicit” foundation of the theory into a program, online doctoral programs must also do so using rapidly-evolving innovative technological modalities—many of which remain underexplored and under-researched (Ehmann & Hewett, 2015). In other words, while establishing the theory’s foundation and tenets, online doctoral programs face the additional challenge of using, at times, as yet established techniques to determine if, for example, more synchronous feedback and mentoring or more transparent online modeling of faculty’s daily practices will increase students’ publication productivity. Further avenues for study might also include analyzing students’ perceptions about their maturation as scholarly writers early in a doctoral program compared to later in the program, even after publishing for the first time, in which case, they could explain what programmatic or mentoring services they perceived as most helpful. Overall, because many of these practices remain un-researched as they relate to online doctoral students, this rapidly growing segment of higher education remains fertile ground for improvement and innovation.

Dr. **Katherine J. Kirkpatrick** is an Associate Professor at Clarkson College, where she researches and teaches a blend of English and leadership studies, ranging from their undergraduate to doctoral programs. She received her Ed.D. in Interdisciplinary Leadership from Creighton University, where she first began combining her teaching of writing with her research in leadership studies. She has published on organizational change in the *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, and she regularly presents her research at academic conferences related to composition, online learning, writing centers, and leadership.

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