Chapter 5
The Paradox of Writing in Doctoral Education: Student Experiences

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I never had any problems [writing]. Then finally coming here doing my PhD, I felt like I had all these problems; I didn't know how to write anymore! ...So it was like suddenly I was just bad. Not a good student anymore, whereas before I never had any problems.

I used to think it [supervisor feedback] was a little bit hopeless. Like anybody's ideas are better than mine. So whatever they want to do is fine. So if they want to cross out anything or write it, fine. Just fix it; it must be better than what I've done.

It [handing in a draft to the supervisor]'s a little bit like spinning a roulette wheel as to where it will come back. We don't know. We always like to joke it depends on his mood. ...You kind of dread it in a way.

I gave her (the supervisor) [a draft] the first time a few months ago. She was a little bit angry with me. ...So this made me very afraid and not to show her [my writing] anymore. This was about four months ago and I'm still afraid.

These excerpts, returned to later, from interviews with doctoral students from different disciplines about their experiences with writing raise a number of highly consequential questions about the role of writing and writing development in doctoral education: What experiences do students have with writing, that is, with learning how to participate in the discursive knowledge-making practices of their research fields? What current practices and perceptions of writing underlie these experiences? What are the consequences of these practices and perceptions for doctoral student learning? And in the spirit of this book, how can practices of writing development during doctoral education be informed and re-envisioned by research?

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This chapter addresses these questions from the perspectives of doctoral students by foregrounding their experiences with writing during their studies and by situating these experiences in a research base on questions of writing, discourse, disciplinarity, and knowledge production. In line with the goal of this book, the purpose of this chapter is to offer ways of re-seeing, indeed re-conceptualizing, doctoral student writing as a vital site for student inquiry into the knowledge-making practices developed by generations of participants in the research cultures in which the students are learning to participate.

In addressing these questions, the chapter contributes to emerging research into writing at the doctoral level, where questions of writing as a discursive knowledge-making practice have remained under examined (Kamler and Thomson 2006; Lee and Aitchison 2009; Rose and McClafferty 2001). As Lee and Aitchison (2009) explain, for example, attention to writing in doctoral education remains "in some senses reactive and often intellectually poorly resourced" with "questions of textuality and of rhetoric…submerged and marginal" (p. 87). Although much work has examined the specific challenges faced by doctoral students writing and publishing in English as an additional language (e.g. Casanave and Li 2008; Flowerdew and Li 2007; Hasrati and Street 2009; Paltridge and Starfield 2007; Turner 2003), a growing body of literature is now emerging to expand this work and to re-conceptualize the role of writing in doctoral education by developing research-based pedagogies for writing development in doctoral education (e.g. Aitchison et al. 2010; Lee and Kamler 2008). In working to understand doctoral student experiences with writing from the perspectives of students, this chapter contributes to these efforts by paying particularly close attention to the systemic institutional situatedness of doctoral student writing practices, that is, to the perceptions underlying those practices that have been inherited over generations. As the chapter will show, these play out in consequential ways in doctoral student experiences with writing.

For this purpose, the chapter draws on interviews with doctoral students from different disciplines[1] in different years of their doctoral studies. Conducted as a part of the larger research project presented in this book, the interviews had a rather open goal: I was primarily interested in understanding better how students experienced the role of writing in their doctoral studies. For example, I was interested in the interactions they had around their writing, what kind of feedback they had received on their writing, or how they had engaged that feedback. Within that focus, the interviews were held as open conversations to allow for student insights to take centre stage.

As the insights shared by the students in this chapter show, at the heart of their experiences surfaced what I will describe as the paradox of writing in doctoral education—a paradox that proves to be highly consequential for doctoral student

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[1] The references to the disciplinary backgrounds of the students (and other aspects of their backgrounds) have been removed or altered in this chapter to protect the confidentiality of the participants; however, the larger disciplinary groups included the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. I realize and regret the loss of richness in the data resulting from this decision; however, the confidentiality of the participants is my primary commitment.

learning. To explore how the paradox of writing unfolds in doctoral education, the chapter begins by briefly sketching and situating the paradox in current theory and research in rhetoric and writing studies. The chapter then draws on the interviews with doctoral students to show how the paradox surfaces in their experiences with writing during their doctoral work. Finally, the chapter returns to the questions posed in the introduction in order to draw out the implications of the students' experiences for understanding doctoral student writing from a systemic perspective needed to address the paradox in doctoral education.

The Paradox of Writing in Doctoral Education: Between Normalized Disciplinary Traditions and New Ways of Seeing for Doctoral Students

The paradox that surfaced at the heart of the doctoral student experiences shared here consists of two sides, each with its own set of assumptions, perceptions, practices, and experiences. On one side of the paradox are the ways in which disciplinary and institutional traditions of producing knowledge through writing have become normalized to the point that they appear universal to long-time participants in research cultures, including supervisors. Yet, as writing sinks beneath a cloak of normalcy and universality, what disappears is the other side of the paradox: the situated nature of writing as a knowledge-making practice shaped in unique ways to meet the unique knowledge-making needs of a particular research culture. In other words, what is normalized and appears universal to long-time members of a research culture is deeply culturally specific to that culture and therefore new to doctoral students.

   As writing studies researchers have shown, the normalization of knowledge production through writing is the result of the repeated, habitual unfolding of the routine and regularized patterns of interaction—or genres—that generations of participants in a particular research culture have developed over time to accomplish the knowledge work pursued in that research culture (e.g. Artemeva and Freedman 2005; Bawarshi and Reiff 2010; Bazerman 1988; Bazerman and Prior 2005; Bazerman et al. 2009; Coe et al. 2002; Devitt 2004; Dias and Paré 2000; Hyland 2004; Miller 1984; Paré 2002; Schryer 1993; Tardy 2009). These genres include, for example, the giving of conference presentations; the writing of experimental journal articles, critical essays, or systematic reviews of the literature; the editing of anthologies or contributing of chapters to those anthologies; the writing of grant proposals to secure funding for a research project; or the supervision of dissertations. To take only one example, that of peer review as the most common genre system regulating academic knowledge production, this practice has become regularized and normalized through its repeated unfolding over hundreds of years, harkening back to the censorship protocols of the monarchy and church authorities in sixteenth-century Europe, the time of the printing revolution. At the time, these protocols were handed to scholarly societies, such as the Royal Society, to censor themselves when the ex-

plosion of publishing made it difficult for Church and Monarchy-censoring bodies to keep up with the increase in their censoring work resulting from the new potential unleashed by the printing press for the distribution of possibly unorthodox and destabilizing messages (Biagoli 2002). Despite considerable change over the past 400 years and much variation across research cultures, remnants of its original cultural logics and underlying enlightenment epistemologies continue to be reproduced in the genre system of peer review and to shape knowledge production in academe on an almost daily basis today.

The example highlights this process of normalization through repetition over time nicely—a process captured particularly aptly by Paré (2002) as follows:

> The automatic, ritual unfolding of genres makes them appear normal, even inevitable; they are simply the way things are done. And their status as historical practice within institutions or disciplines makes them appear immutable and certainly beyond the influence of the transitory individuals who participate in them. (p. 59; see also Chap. 4)

As such, they disappear from view behind what Paré (2002) calls a "facade of normalcy" (p. 60). What is particularly important for doctoral education is that as a result of their repeated unfolding through institutional and disciplinary routines, genres become so normalized that they appear universal, "common sense" to long-term participants in these genres. That is, to supervisors, the ways in which writing works in their research culture can easily appear as simply "clear writing", surely the way everyone writes, with writing appearing as a universal skill—transparent, invisible, hidden in plain sight.

To be sure, this normalization of discursive practices within research cultures produces a certain stability, a range of shared expectations for interaction and interpretation among participants in a genre that makes the collective knowledge-making work of that research culture possible. However, as genres and writing are allowed to sink into the realm of invisibility and universality, what disappears from our view is the other side of the paradox: the situated, that is, the culturally shaped nature of writing, its deep rootedness in cultural, institutional, and disciplinary traditions of knowledge production. After all, long before we enter the scenes of our research cultures, generations of colleagues before us have developed patterns of discursive practice or genres in response to the particular knowledge-making needs addressed in the field. Thus, over time, each research community develops its own unique discursive culture with its own habitual practices, norms, and conventions—its own ways of talking, arguing, and deliberating, that is genres, which regularize in a given research culture what can and cannot be said, thought, and known.

To provide only a few examples, in each research culture, genres regularize:

- Whether one's work is to be presented as a matter of arguing, describing, reporting.
- What kinds of questions can and should be asked and how they should be phrased.
- How data can or must be generated, justified, discussed, and interpreted.
- How much and what kind of subjectivity (e.g. "I") writers can or should project in their writing.

- What kinds of knowledge claims can be made, how, based on what kind of evidence.
- What constitutes appropriate evidence and how it is to be presented.

Although only a brief selection,[2] these examples of concerns arising in writing and regularized by the genres of particular research cultures may suffice here to illustrate *this other side of the paradox: What is normalized and appears universal to long-time members of a research culture is deeply culturally specific to that research culture and therefore new to doctoral students*. Accordingly, the decisions regarding the above concerns depend on the location of the writer in relation to colleagues and other readers in that research culture, to its traditions of inquiry, as well as to current exigencies in the long-ongoing research conversation to which the writer seeks to contribute. The genres of a research culture are therefore new territory for doctoral students; as such, genres are vital sites for inquiry and for learning how to participate in the discursive knowledge-making practices of their fields.

To be able to see and address writing as a vital site of student inquiry into discursive knowledge-making practices in their fields, however, we must retrieve this sociocultural situatedness of writing from behind its cloak of normalcy, universality, and invisibility. When we do so, we begin to recover two aspects of writing that while normally shrouded, are particularly vital to doctoral student learning: First, the questions that arise in writing are questions of knowledge production—they

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[2] A more extensive set of examples of what genres regularize:

- Whether one's work is to be presented as a matter of arguing, describing, reporting
- What kind of purpose is appropriate to have in a given genre
- What rationale is deemed compelling for making a particular kind of contribution to knowledge
- Who can participate in a genre—who, for example, is asked to write a particular kind of literature review, treatment, or analysis of the literature in a field to define the lay of the land in a field
- What kinds of questions can and should be asked and how they should be phrased
- How—with what kinds of methodologies—questions can be answered and how those methodologies must be justified, for example, in relation to what competing methodological assumptions
- How data can or must be generated, justified, discussed, and interpreted
- What is appropriate to be said and in what order, what not
- How much and what kind of subjectivity (e.g. "I") writers can or should project in their writing
- What background knowledge will be assumed
- What aspects require elaboration and emphasis
- What kinds of knowledge claims can be made, how, based on what kind of evidence
- What constitutes appropriate evidence and how it is to be presented
- The extent to which knowledge claims must be qualified, how, and under what conditions
- That disciplinary orthodoxies participants must reproduce and which ones can be questioned
- What kind of knowledge can or must be included or excluded (e.g. how practitioner knowledge, knowledge from different disciplines, or even research findings from members of competing theoretical factions within the same discipline are to be handled)
- How sentences are to be constructed to facilitate particular kinds of knowledge work, for example, whether the passive voice is to be shunned in order to allow for deeper researcher reflection about epistemological assumptions underlying the work at hand or whether the passive voice is indeed the only acceptable way of advancing particular kinds of knowledge claims
- How readers are to be oriented, what kinds of logical connections between ideas are to be foregrounded or assumed

are questions of what can be said, thought, and known in a given genre in a given research culture at a particular time; they are questions of what counts as knowledge or evidence, questions of how one goes about positioning, advancing, defending, critiquing, contesting, extending, or reshaping knowledge claims amid competing epistemological, ontological, and ideological commitments of different factions that make up research cultures; they are questions of what makes a knowledge claim credible to colleagues and accepted into disciplinary lore, or rejected, ignored, or suppressed. In short, what we uncover when we remove the cloak of normalcy is the epistemic nature of writing, that is, the role of discourse in the production and regulation of knowledge (e.g. Bazerman 1988; Dias and Paré 2000; Kamler and Thomson 2006; Starke-Meyerring et al. 2011). Conversely, when we allow writing to sink beneath the cloak of normalcy, we are glossing over the very knowledge-production practices in which doctoral students are to participate.

Second, when we uncover writing as a socioculturally situated epistemic practice, we also begin to see another important aspect of writing: its deeply transformative nature—transformative not only in the sense of transforming our knowledge and understanding of a subject matter, for example, when we know more about the subject at hand or about what our data mean after we have produced a text than we did when we began. Rather, importantly for doctoral student learning, writing is transformative in a different sense: it is transformative of writers themselves; that is, it is steeped in questions of identity as identities or subject positions are shaped largely discursively (Bawarshi 2003; Green 2005; Ivanič 1998; Paré 2002; Kamler and Thomson 2006; Paré et al. 2011). This notion of writing as identity work has a number of important implications for doctoral student writing, three of which are particularly important in understanding doctoral student experiences with writing.

The first implication is that the kinds of concerns that arise in writing, the kinds of demands research cultures place on us as writers are shaped not only by the discursive traditions developed in that culture, but also by the particular roles we play in these cultures. That is why writing differs not only across research communities, say in biology versus computer science, but also within research communities; for example, writing as an undergraduate student or even as a master's student is quite different from writing as a doctoral student even if students have obtained all their degrees in the same field (Prior 1998). Undergraduate student writing tasks, for example, tend to be designed for writing to learn disciplinary subject matter or for proving the acquisition of a particular disciplinary knowledge base for evaluation; rarely are undergraduate writing tasks rhetorical in the sense of authentic participation in the research conversations of their disciplines. In undergraduate student writing, citation practices, for example, are not usually ways of writers extending, questioning, or building on the work of colleagues, or of writers aligning themselves with and against competing epistemological or theoretical factions within a discipline; rather, citations are more or less sources of information on a topic acknowledged and documented by student writers for evaluation purposes. Although Master's students can often take first steps of participation as research colleagues, the demands placed on them are quite different from those placed on doctoral students, for whom research writing is not only a question of learning, but also of so-

cialization into the academic research workplace (Paré et al. 2011). That is a considerable shift, so that doctoral student writing is not just a matter of writing a longer document, the dissertation, but of a growing identification with particular discursive practices, disciplinary orthodoxies, or competing epistemological factions designed to produce particular kinds of identities or subject positions with particular ways of thinking and knowing that make highly specialized and, we might add, disciplined contributions to knowledge possible.

The second implication of this transformative nature of writing for doctoral education is that for students, the process of developing their identity as researchers is shaped largely discursively—through writing—and often involves considerable, albeit hidden, struggle. For example, over time, doctoral students learn how to align themselves with and against the multiple and often competing theoretical, epistemological, or ideological factions within their research cultures, working out their location on the disciplinary map. In this effort, different genres inscribe different kinds of identity work, with the literature review, for example, as Kamler and Thomson (2006) describe very compellingly, a prime site of identity struggle. With writing invisible, however, that struggle may well remain hidden, giving the process of doctoral student writing a deceptive appearance of a smooth assimilation.

The third implication of this complex epistemic and transformative nature of writing touches on the process involved in learning how to write in a particular research culture. Since learning to write is learning to participate in the knowledge-making practices of research cultures and involves struggling with complex identity issues, that process is not completed over night. Rather, as much research in writing studies has shown, learning to write is a process of development over time. Importantly for doctoral students, writing is learned through gradually increasing and mentored participation in the discursive practices that constitute the work of the research culture rather than in remedial generic workshops designed to "fix" presumably deficient general writing skills that can presumably exist outside of disciplinary knowledge-making practices (Artemeva 2008; Blakeslee 2001; Dias and Paré 2000; Dias et al. 1999; Simpson and Matsuda 2008).

This need for learning through participation within the research culture (rather than in generic workshops outside the research culture) is illustrated by the kinds of epistemic questions that arise in writing mentioned above. Consider, for example, how much participation and intimate sense of discursive practices in a given research culture are necessary for a newcomer to be able to make decisions about how much background knowledge on what aspect can be assumed in a given situation, what competing ways of asking a research question or of discussing data must be taken into account, or what kinds of disciplinary orthodoxies must be reproduced. Writers learn to make those decisions through their gradual and ideally mentored participation in the discursive practices of their research cultures. Accordingly, if the students are to make informed decisions, they need to have a particular kind of critical dialogue with long-term members—a kind of dialogue that allows for at least two kinds of learning opportunities. First, students need to have critical discussions about the role of discourse in the production of knowledge and identity in their research fields—a critical analysis of disciplinary genre and culture—to

understand how those decisions are constrained in their research cultures, and second, students need to be able to produce drafts in stages, and to have the kinds of discussions about their drafts that help them learn how to make those decisions in their texts and that allow them to take an active role in analyzing as well as negotiating the demands and constraints genres place on the production of knowledge and of researcher identities.

As the following insights shared by students into their experiences with writing show, however, this kind of critical dialogue is difficult to achieve when the paradox of writing remains unaddressed and deeply culturally shaped knowledge and identity practices remain hidden beneath the cloak of normalcy and universality. What then does this paradox look like from the perspectives of doctoral students? How does it surface in their experiences? What consequences does it have?

The Paradox in Doctoral Student Experiences with Writing

In the students' discussions of their experiences with writing, the paradox of writing surfaced in a number of ways. *First*, and perhaps most importantly, with the paradox unaddressed, students encountered supervisor perceptions of writing as "common sense", a universal skill and therefore as a non-question accompanied by a set of normalized expectations. *Second*, in many ways, these normalized assumptions and perceptions laid the foundation for doctoral student experiences with writing. As the student insights below reveal, with writing hidden beneath the cloak of normalcy, students may experience their learning as stifled in a number of complex ways.

1. *With the paradox unaddressed, students encountered supervisor perceptions of writing as a universal skill and therefore as a non-question in supervision.*

With writing submersed in the tacit realm, doctoral students encountered supervisors who did not perceive the introduction of their supervisees into the discursive knowledge-making practices of their research cultures as their pedagogical work. Instead, the students encountered supervisors who perceived writing as a universal skill that doctoral students should simply have—perhaps learned once and for all in high school or in their undergraduate or master's programs—rather than as a set of discipline-specific epistemic practices that students would learn over time through their increasing mentored participation in these practices. Accordingly, writing became a non-question in supervision or at best a question of remediation—of a decontextualized skill that students could presumably develop outside the research field in which they were learning to participate.

The following interview excerpt illustrates this normalized perception of writing as a universal skill quite vividly:

> Student: My supervisor said when he accepted me, "It looks like you're a pretty good physicist, but you'd better take a writing course." It was just a condition of my acceptance. He told me I had to. But the thing is I looked around for a long time for a course because I didn't want to waste my time. …I felt completely helpless. I mean he's a very strong writer

and he told me that he's more than willing to help me. But there's a certain level that he said I had to be above. I just had to get above that level or else it was too much kind of a waste of his time. He has no problem teaching me how to write physics but he was concerned about my just general writing skills.
Interviewer: Did he say anything about what he meant by what he was concerned about?
Student: Just like general grammatical errors and general writing stuff that's kind of gibberish and stuff like that.
Interviewer: Oh, where he couldn't understand what you were saying?
Student: Just like people might not have known what I meant. He felt like it was unclear and stuff like that.

This student's experience reflects a number of significant characteristics of the paradox in doctoral education. To begin with, again, it reflects the assumption of writing as universal, and as somehow universally clear, denying the ways in which the genres of a discipline shape and sanction the discursive practices of a research culture—both writing and reading—and hence what is perceived to be clear and what "gibberish". Accordingly, with writing perceived as a universal skill, the supervisor was left to conclude that the student was somehow deficient—somehow had not developed sufficient "writing skills" and had best undergo remediation elsewhere.

Perhaps even more important, the experience of this student reflects the institution-wide nature of the paradox both in the absence of research-based institutional attention, space, time, and resources dedicated to writing and—as the following comment by this student illustrates—in what Rose (1985) so aptly called the "myth of transience". As Rose explained, rooted in an understanding of writing as a universal skill, the myth of transience is the rather common belief that what is understood as a problem of deficient student writing will pass with some remediation, usually in the form of generic workshops or non-credit courses, a belief that, however, is not borne out by research. Even when offered, such generic workshops on writing tend to lack a research base, often advancing what are believed to be universal "principles of effective writing", denying the rhetorical and culturally situated nature of discourse. The nature of the generic workshop as experienced by the student illustrates this lack of a research base:

> [The instructor came] with a preconception of what makes a good writer. They're like: "This is what you need to do." Like, for example, eliminate jargon, like there's these rules: Well you have to do this in your sentence. Well I mean in physics…your paper's going to be jargon filled. Just look at this first sentence [student points at his draft of a journal article]. But someone who's in my field wouldn't find this jargon filled at all. …Like I can write you something that you'll be able to understand, but where is that going to get me in my career? Nowhere. You know what I mean? It's going to get you understanding, but really is that important to you, is that important to me? Let's face it, no.

What this student describes here reflects much of the non-research-based arhetorical advice dispensed in a plethora of writing handbooks—advice that denies the unique ways in which language use is socio-culturally situated and specific to the knowledge-making needs of different research fields (Kamler and Thomson 2008). This kind of generic, non-research-based advice or workshop, therefore, does little to support the student in a critical inquiry into the ways in which discursive practices in his research culture work to enable or constrain the production

of knowledge. At best, it's a waste of the student's time as well as of institutional resources; at worst, it reproduces the assumptions that put students in this situation in the first place.

Spending extra time trying to find opportunities for writing development outside the very research communities in which they wish to participate as writers is one way in which students experience the normalization of writing and its universal appearance to supervisors that characterizes the paradox of writing. Throughout their studies, though, the paradox also means that students struggle on their own without guidance in shaping their drafts, as this student explained:

> So I would give it [a draft] to him [the supervisor] and say, "Well what do you think?" And he was never really happy with it [and said], "Well you know, it's not finished. What do you want me to look at? Give it back to me when it's finished; then I'm going to be able to tell you if you're going to be able to publish it."

Again, with the paradox left unaddressed, the discussion of a draft—the shaping and situating of the student's contribution to knowledge in a complex long ongoing research conversation—becomes a non-question, and opportunities for student inquiry into the ways in which knowledge is produced discursively remain untapped.

For other students, the paradox has even more severe implications when supervisors, operating under assumptions of writing as a universal skill that students should simply bring with them, express their anger at what is perceived to be the student's deficiency. Consider this student's experience:

> I gave her (the supervisor) [a draft] the first time a few months ago. She was a little bit angry with me. …She [said], "Why don't all these people, why don't you know [how to write]? I don't understand; you're already a professional." So this made me very afraid and not to show her [my writing] anymore. This was about four months ago and I'm still afraid.

Again, with the paradox unaddressed, the supervisor does not recognize writing development as her pedagogical work, in this case with troubling consequences for the student's learning, the time required to complete her degree, and her wellbeing as she is working in fear of normalized expectations.

2. With writing as a non-question in doctoral supervision, students experienced their learning stifled in a number of ways.

As these student insights into their experiences with writing indicate, the paradox, if unaddressed, has numerous implications for doctoral student learning, which in the experiences of these students materialized in a number of consequential ways:

- With writing and writing development treated as non-questions, students experience a sense of being left in the dark, of not having access to important disciplinary knowledge-making practices, of learning by trial and error, or of learning as a question of lottery-like chance.
- That sense of being left in the dark becomes difficult to address for students because in an environment of normalized and universalized expectations students may fear asking questions of supervisors. In other words, asking questions about writing, that is, questions about the very knowledge-making practices in which students are to participate, becomes risky business for students.

- Despite their fear of asking questions, doctoral students express a strong need for dialogue about writing in their learning, but with the paradox of writing unaddressed, that dialogue is difficult to achieve.
- Without that dialogue, students forego vital opportunities not only for critically analyzing the epistemic work of writing in their research fields, but also for reflecting on and negotiating their emerging identities as researchers in their research cultures, being left on their own to struggle with considerable ruptures and loss of confidence in their sense of themselves as researchers in their fields.
- In searching for solutions, students may internalize the paradox as their own failure.

(a) *Students experience a sense of being left in the dark, learning by trial and error, or by chance.*

Perhaps not surprisingly, with writing perceived by supervisors as a universal skill rather than as a culturally specific knowledge-making practice and therefore not subject to critical analysis and dialogue during supervision, students described a sense of being left in the dark, of learning by trial and error, or by lottery-like chance, with disciplinary knowledge-making practices in their disciplines remaining shrouded from them. This sense of being left in the dark and of chance was accompanied by a resulting sense of disorientation and anxiety over the appropriateness of their work in their research culture. This notion of disorientation featured prominently in the students' experiences with writing and was captured by students in very suggestive metaphors, such as that of being a hitchhiker on a busy road without a sense of where the road is leading, of "shooting in the dark", or of "spinning the roulette wheel". As one student articulated this sense of disorientation:

> I feel a little bit like I wish there was a handbook on how things are supposed to go and how I'm supposed to do things; I even kind of joke with my partner about creating one of those things, so that other people can feel less lost. But I just kind of felt a little bit like there's this kind of road that everybody's on and I'm kind of on the side trying to hitchhike, trying to get somebody to slow down and show me where we're supposed to go. Because I just don't ever really feel that I'm on the right path or that I'm doing the right thing.

In a way, the metaphor with which this student discusses her experiences with writing speaks volumes to the paradox of writing—a busy road, with everyone whooshing by, and the student feeling like a hitchhiker. The excerpt reflects the student's sense as a newcomer to what for her is a new culture with a new set of activities where she is expected to know what she cannot possibly know, but what is normalized for long-time participants and therefore expected and beyond question or explanation. It also reflects some of the student's anxiety and uncertainty over whether she is participating in appropriate ways, whether she is "on the right path" or is "doing the right thing".

Another student described this sense of disorientation as a matter of "shooting in the dark", a comment that also describes the chance-like nature of learning how to participate in the discursive knowledge-making practices of her discipline:

> I think there's a myth going on or floating around that we all know how to write and somehow we do. …It makes for a lot of anxiety that you feel the expectation like okay, write this essay of twenty pages. Then, oh, what do they even want here? This is a new

university—I don't even know what they're looking for; nobody really tells you and then you're trying to find out somehow. …Kind of shooting in the dark.

This chance-like nature of learning how to produce knowledge through writing in their disciplines was articulated even more sharply by another student as closing her eyes, hoping for the best when submitting draft or by another student as a question of "spinning the roulette wheel":

It [submitting a draft to the supervisor] was just kind of close your eyes and just give it to them and hope that they don't tell you it's awful.

It [submitting a draft to the supervisor]'s a little bit like spinning a roulette wheel as to where it will come back. We don't know. We always like to joke it depends on his mood. It probably has more to do with the quality of the writing. But I mean if he sends something back and it's not up to snuff, then he'll tell you it's not up to snuff. You kind of dread it in a way.

These student comments highlight important implications for doctoral student learning. With the paradox of writing unaddressed, writing as a social practice remains hidden, here specifically the ways in which supervisor comments may reflect less individual quirks than demands placed by research cultures on the discursive behaviour of participants into which supervisors have been socialized and are now attempting to socialize the doctoral students under their supervision. After all, supervisors are part of research cultures, so that their sense of how a thesis should take shape reflects the normalized expectations, current paradigms, values, and practices of these research cultures.

(b) *With writing beneath the cloak of normalcy, asking questions about writing— about knowledge production—becomes risky business.*

When writing is perceived as a universal skill that students should bring to their degree work, that is, when the research-culture-specific epistemic and transformative nature of writing remains hidden, the students' experience of being left in the dark or of learning as a matter of spinning the roulette wheel becomes difficult to address because students may fear asking questions of their supervisors, given the high-stakes, intensive, and long-term nature of the student–supervisor relationship. In an environment of normalized, universalized assumptions around writing, students thus again experienced their learning stifled. As this student put it:

When there's this atmosphere that you're supposed to know this stuff, you're supposed to have all this stuff done, it's very intimidating to kind of show that no, I don't know, and I'm not quite sure how I was supposed to know or why I missed it, but I don't. If I don't ask this question and risk looking like I don't know as much as everyone else, I'm never going to know.
…
It's hard to allow yourself to be vulnerable to say to someone, "Hey, I don't know; do you think you might be able to." …Just to even ask the question, you risk looking like well, why don't you know that?

Another student explained a similar risk of asking questions of her supervisor in an environment of normalized assumptions:

When I have a question, I usually don't ask him. I always go see another professor. Because I'm…because I always think, I think that I am going to ask something I should know

already. I should know that. I should have found out. So I just feel like maybe I, maybe if I ask another professor he's not going to think too much about me.

When asking questions about writing becomes risky business in the face of normalized assumptions, students lose out on vital opportunities for learning to develop a critical sense of the discursive practices of their research communities and how those enable or constrain knowledge production; what cultural logics and epistemological assumptions, values, stances, and practices they reproduce, or what room for divergence or innovation they allow. Importantly, this aspect of the students' experience with writing is exacerbated when—as Paré (see Chap. 4) illustrates—supervisors are left to struggle with the paradox of writing as well. While supervisors are left struggling to articulate the discursive knowledge-making practices of their fields, students may not feel in a position to ask for clarification, fearing that they may not live up to normalized expectations of their writing, which again leaves their learning stifled.

(c) *Despite their fear of asking questions in an environment of normalized assumptions, doctoral students expressed a strong need for dialogue about writing in their learning, but with the paradox of writing unaddressed, that dialogue was difficult to achieve.*

Even if doctoral students did dare ask questions and initiate dialogue about writing in their field, such dialogue, according to the students, may be difficult to come by. As the student insights into their experiences so far have shown, students consider such conversations vital to their learning because they understand very well that something is happening to which they don't have access—that they are not being taught, although it is essential to their development as researchers. They understand that rather than being taught, they are simply expected to know, that they are stumbling through by trial and error, hoping for the roulette wheel to fall into a spot that offers learning—sometimes at great cost to their ability to complete their degree programs in a timely manner when they fear submitting drafts or spend time searching for remedial workshops that are usually not grounded in a solid research base in rhetoric and writing studies that would allow them to inquire into the discursive knowledge-making practices of their fields.

Without critical dialogue about writing with their supervisors, students have indicated limited access to these disciplinary knowledge-making practices, but as the following student comments indicate and as Paré's study of supervision sessions (see Chap. 4) amply illustrates, with the paradox of writing unaddressed, the discursive knowledge-making practices of a research culture remain normalized and thus beyond question or dialogue, let alone critical analysis and inquiry. Instead of the conversations the students wished to have about writing, students found their supervisors simply crossing out their text, writing over their own, or simply stating what is the "right" or the "wrong" way of writing something. As one student put it:

[I want]…the reader [the supervisor] to have a conversation with me rather than just saying, "This is wrong, take it out." Ask what was my process when I was looking at that. Why did I include this here? So then I can come back and say, "well if I were to put this here and that there, would that make more sense?" To create more of a conversation than "This is right; this is wrong; okay, we're done."

Another student identified a similar difficulty of engaging in dialogue about writing with the professor of an introductory doctoral seminar:

> So we're just kind of handing this in and we get feedback from the professor and he tells us why this was good or bad. But it's not exactly making you enter this whole world. But it just—it certainly is a good thing to do. But I would have wished to have this more addressed in class because all you get is "This paragraph wasn't so good because this particular periodical doesn't seem to appreciate this style." But beyond that, there is little reflection on writing in a more general sense.

The lack of dialogue about their writing was further explained by another student as a lack of exchange:

> I don't know. I just go there [to the supervisor] to get my feedback, but there's no exchange. We don't have any…You know, we're not going to talk like, "Did you read this article, and what did you think about it, and did it help your opinion, or what did you think, or what about the methodology—was it different?" You know, there's no exchange. It's like you've done your work, okay, you go. I feel like a…like a student in my bachelor [program] or in high school. If you find it's good, and if you find it's not, then you go and work on it. But there's no like stimulation of ideas.

Another student was hoping for a course that would provide a systematic introduction into the discursive knowledge-making practices of his field, taught by a researcher in his field:

> I asked, "Why isn't there a writing course in physics?" And someone said, "Well everybody's ideas on what's good writing in physics is so different that it would be futile to have someone to try and teach it." But that's kind of a cop-out, right? …I know they have taught it at other universities. There was a specific class that was taught by a physicist who writes well. Even if it is his idea on writing, I think it would go a long way in talking about writing; you just get a sense of what his ideas on writing are. It gives you a lot of understanding of the tacit ideas that physicists have about writing.

With the paradox unaddressed, though, a discussion of how writing works to produce knowledge in the student's field is difficult to achieve because writing remains hidden in plain sight, normalized, "common sense", inaccessible. Although there is now an extensive research base in rhetoric and writing studies examining the ways in which discourse works to produce knowledge in different disciplines, with the paradox of writing unaddressed, writing remains a non-question and that research base remains untapped.

(d) Without dialogue about writing, students forego vital opportunities to reflect critically on their emerging identities as researchers in their research cultures.

The lack of critical dialogue about writing has important implications for student opportunities not only to critically analyze the epistemic work of writing in their research cultures, but also to engage the transformative work of writing in shaping their identities as researchers in their field. Indeed, as the following student comments illustrate, without critical dialogue about writing, students are left to struggle with complex questions of researcher identity development on their own as they make the leap from being largely observers of disciplinary knowledge-making practices to being active participants with contributions to make, claims to stake,

reputations to build, and research cultures and their knowledge-making endeavours to advance, all of which present a complex set of new demands on doctoral student writing. Importantly for doctoral student learning, left unspoken and simply expected, these new demands on identity negotiation can present a considerable rupture for doctoral students, including a rupture in their confidence in themselves as writers, which they link closely to their success as researchers in their fields. This sense of rupture in demands on them as writers was captured particularly poignantly in the experience shared by this student:

> I never really had any problems [writing]. I actually had two MA theses…I never had any problems. Then finally coming there doing my Ph.D., I felt like I had all these problems; I didn't know how to write anymore! I was like, well, it was just the wrong choice, maybe. So it was like suddenly I was just bad. Not a good student anymore, whereas before I never had any problems.
> …
> I had no self-esteem in my writing. I felt like I didn't know how to write any more at all.

When writing is perceived as universal and simply expected, when the epistemic and transformative nature of writing are denied and complex identity struggles remain cloaked, it is easy to see how students can develop feelings of inadequacy. As another student put it:

> I wish I could feel adequate. It's a struggle that I have. The fear is that I am inadequate, I don't know the material enough, or don't have anything to say, or [am] inadequate in that these people can talk so beautifully with…fancy words and they know what they are saying.

As these student experiences indicate, without dialogue about the transformative nature of writing and the demands research communities place on member identities and the discursive practices that reproduce them, students may experience themselves as inadequate, having made the wrong choice, or simply not being cut out for academic work.

This rupture in the students' sense of identity and confidence as writers is exacerbated further when supervisors are left to struggle with questions of writing development and resort to simply crossing out and replacing student writing with their own. One student described this experience as follows:

> It [supervisor feedback] came back as a return email with, you know, in Word, where you can track comments and just kind of go in and change things and delete stuff. It wasn't like a conversation at all: "There are certain ideas here and maybe we can work on reshaping them" rather than just going in and deleting what I've written and writing something.

For the student, this kind of experience left little opportunity for learning or for working out epistemic and identity questions that were involved in the writing that she had received crossed out and "corrected" by her supervisor. As the student noted:

> I used to think it [supervisor feedback] was a little bit hopeless. Like anybody's ideas are better than mine. So whatever they want to do is fine. So if they want to cross out anything or write it, fine. Just fix it; it must be better than what I've done.

This sense of rupture in their identity as writers and researchers in their fields and the accompanying discouragement remains hidden beneath the cloak of normalcy when the paradox of writing is not addressed and writing remains a non-question.

With assumptions about writing normalized, students are denied the critical dialogue that might help them see the transformative nature of writing, including the gradual long-time development involved in that transformation as well as the politics of that transformation, such as the politics of learning to locate oneself on the disciplinary map—as this student explains:

> There was also positive feedback, but a lot of it was asking me to write more about things and directing me or pushing me into a certain direction, so I did not really feel so much that I was in control of the project, but that it was being pushed into certain directions that I did not consider part of it. …I felt under pressure even though it was done all nicely in the sense of personal contact—there was no kind of conflict in the situation whatsoever. Just the style of giving feedback and the kind of the thing I was being asked for, I felt like, "Oh god, now I have to get in that direction!" So [as I] was…leafing through my draft again, it was like who knows what kind of surprise will be on the next [page]. It was more like "Oh now she wants this and now she wants [that]." And I didn't want to do that! And I'm not interested in the [a particular research direction suggested by the supervisor]!

As this student's experience indicates, without critical dialogue about their writing, students may lose opportunities for learning how to work out actively ways of aligning and positioning their work as a contribution to their research communities. As in the case of this student, students may perhaps lose out on opportunities to recognize burning research areas the supervisor is aware of and might greatly enhance the value of the student's work for the collective knowledge-making endeavour of her research culture. Instead, students are left to resort to undercover strategies of thwarting what they may experience as whimsical supervisor demands or even attempts to take over their text:

> And then she axed about twenty pages, and she did that quite rigorously and even threw out a few things that I felt were really dear to me. So I left a few things that she had kind of axed and cut off less.

As these student experiences illustrate, with the paradox of writing unaddressed, and hence without critical dialogue about writing, students may be left to experience supervisor comments—what Paré (see Chap. 4) illustrates as their efforts to help students locate their contributions in their research cultures—as a matter of being disciplined, discouraged, or pushed and dragged about disciplinary landscapes.

(e) Students internalize the paradox as their failure.

What is perhaps most disturbing for us as educators and administrators is that students internalize the paradox as their failure to know what they cannot possibly know, as their failure of not meeting expectations based on normalized assumptions. As this student put it:

> She [the supervisor] said that it's incredible that we doctoral students still don't know how to begin doing our research plan [a written document]. So really and truly I didn't know. The truth is it's true what she said. So I just backed off and didn't want, I haven't yet [resubmitted anything].

The "research plan", though, is, of course, a genre and as such is a socio-cultural construct specific to the knowledge production needs of that research culture, in-

scribing a range of expectations, norms, values, commitments, and so on that the student cannot possibly know.

Another student also internalized the assumptions about his deficiencies as a writer that accompany the cloak of normalcy and universality and its denial of writing as a site of knowledge and identity production in doctoral education:

> I don't think it [the professor sending him for remedial work on writing] was cruel. I think it's very reasonable to say that there's things that you can teach me and that there are things that he could teach me, but he perhaps feels that his resources are better spent otherwise. You know what I mean?

Again, hidden beneath the cloak of normalcy and universalized assumptions, the disappearance of writing from supervision as a waste of time becomes normalized, leaving the student to internalize the problem as one of his own deficiency. However, when students internalize the paradox as their failure, the problem is, of course, allowed to continue festering beneath the cloak of normalcy.

Addressing the Paradox of Writing in Doctoral Education— Toward a Systemic Approach to a Systemic Problem

In my concluding thoughts, I would like to return to the questions raised at the beginning of the chapter about the ways in which doctoral students experience writing during their degree work, what practices and perceptions underlie those experiences, and how they might be addressed.

With regard to doctoral student experiences with writing, the insights shared by the students here show that their experiences with writing during their doctoral degree work are far from smooth or a matter of unproblematic assimilation. Instead, these experiences involve a considerable rupture in their sense of themselves as writers as well as friction, tension, identity struggles, loss of self confidence, and anxiety—a complexity, however, that remains effectively hidden beneath a cloak of normalized assumptions about writing. Hidden beneath a cloak of normalcy, universality, and invisibility, writing as an epistemic and transformative practice becomes a non-question in doctoral education—at the very least, one that is difficult to engage for supervisors and doctoral students. As a result, for doctoral students, writing as a vital site of inquiry and learning to participate in disciplinary knowledge-making practices is lost, with students disoriented, afraid to ask questions about the very knowledge-making practices in which they are to participate, and left without opportunities to actively negotiate complex identity struggles involved in that participation. As we saw, some students find themselves wandering around from one remedial workshop to another, events which are rarely grounded in research into writing and hence are ill positioned to help students make sense of what it means to be "clear" to physicists, anthropologists, engineers, or biologists, let alone guide students in a critical analysis of discursive knowledge-making practices in their fields. Other students continue to struggle without guidance or opportunities for discussing their drafts. Without any way of analyzing and discussing the discursive

knowledge-making practices of their disciplines, students stumble through trial and error for unknown lengths of time. Yet, others, faced with the anger of supervisors operating under assumptions of writing as a normalized universal skill, don't dare to submit a revised draft for months.

The practices and perceptions that underlie these experiences are what in the student descriptions of their experiences surfaced in complex ways as the paradox of writing in doctoral education: On the one hand, the discursive knowledge-making practices research cultures develop over generations to accomplish their knowledge work become normalized, transparent, invisible, and indeed appear universal to long-term members of research cultures, rendering writing a non-question. On the other hand, for newcomers, these very practices constitute new territory and a vital site of inquiry into how knowledge and researcher identities are produced and negotiated in these research cultures.

Given the highly consequential nature of this paradox in doctoral education, how, then, might it be addressed?

Emerging research on doctoral student writing has advanced a great number of important pedagogical strategies, for example, advancing the role of writing groups (Larcombe et al. 2007; Lee and Boud 2003; Maher et al. 2008) or the role of specific publishing pedagogies within students' doctoral work (Lee and Kamler 2008; Aitchison et al. 2010). However, as Aitchison and Lee (2006) caution, these pedagogical approaches have limitations and cannot solve the problems underlying current approaches to research education. As the authors note, "the broader issues about the location of responsibility within institutions for 'writing development' in research degree programs remain unresolved" (p. 276). What is needed rather is a larger systemic cultural shift in research institutions (e.g. Kamler and Thomson 2006; Lee and Aitchison 2009)—one that recovers writing from beneath its cloak of normalcy and, as Paré (see Chap. 4) notes, creates an environment for writing that is grounded in a solid research base.

To move toward such a shift, it seems, then, that we need to attend to the deeper and systemic nature of the problem. Although particularly consequential for doctoral education, the paradox of writing is, of course, not unique to doctoral education, but is indeed rather endemic to higher education institutions—reproduced at all levels of study, indeed, throughout institutions. After all, as much research in writing studies has shown over the last few decades, supervisors and doctoral students are not the only ones affected by the cloak of normalcy and universality that keeps writing invisible in institutions of higher education. Rather, what surfaced here in the experiences of these doctoral students is a systemic problem: Similar to the ways in which we have inherited from generations before us the different genres in which we—administrators, educators, and students—participate in our different roles, so we have inherited the cloak of normalcy and universality that makes these genres, the culturally specific discursive patterns of interaction, and specifically of knowledge and identity production, appear as common sense and beyond question.

Addressing the paradox of writing, that is, recovering writing from beneath its cloak of normalcy, then is not simply a matter of "business as usual" or even some added "assistance" or "support" for supervisors and students, and it is not even a

matter simply of "explicit instruction" in discursive disciplinary norms students are presumably to follow. Rather, addressing the paradox of writing involves infusing the doctoral curriculum with a solid research base that examines the roles of writing and discourse in the production of knowledge, researcher identity, disciplinarity—a research base, that as Paré (see Chap. 4) explains, has emerged over the last few decades and is now extensive. Without that research base, the paradox comes at great cost not only to doctoral students and supervisors, but also to institutions in general, which have faced significant burdens on precious resources in times of tightening budgetary constraints, for example, when resources are spent on generic non-research-based workshops dispensing ill-theorized advice on presumably universal principles of "effective writing", while students and professors are left struggling with complex questions of knowledge and identity production in the discourse of their research fields. Perhaps most importantly, when writing as a site of knowledge production is lost to inquiry and learning, for example, when supervisors and students lack the research-based attention needed to inquire into the ways in which genres shape what can and cannot be known in their fields, the paradox is allowed to undermine the core institutional missions of research and teaching.

Conversely, when we engage the systemic, inherited nature of the problem with a research-based approach, we can begin to recognize the productive potential the paradox harbours for re-seeing and strengthening doctoral education, with its location at the heart of the mission of research institutions. Indeed, situated between tradition and new ways of seeing disciplinary knowledge-making practices, the paradox has important potential for doctoral student learning if students explore with long-time members the ways in which the discursive practices of their research cultures are regularized to produce certain kinds of knowledge and certain kinds of researcher identities. In the same way, the paradox has great potential for innovation in knowledge production within and across disciplines when researchers have a research-based approach to reconsidering the ways in which genres inherited over generations enable or constrain what can and cannot be said, thought, and known in their research culture. In short, the paradox has the potential to nourish a culture of lively, vibrant, and robust research-based inquiry, critical examination, deliberation, and debate of the ways in which discourse and writing enable and constrain what we can and cannot know—a culture that produces generations of new researchers who are not simply left to imitate accepted norms, but are encouraged to explore what discursive traditions of knowledge production may be important to cultivate, challenge, or re-envision in order to innovate in knowledge production in their fields.

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