

THESIS

NARRATIVE, POSITIONALITY, AND PEDAGOGY: AN EXPLORATION OF THE  
CLASSROOM NARRATIVE

Submitted by

Jennifer Enoch

Department of English

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Masters of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2013

Master's Committee:

Advisor: Scott Gage

Donna Souder

Doug Eskew

Sue Pettit

## ABSTRACT

### NARRATIVE, POSITIONALITY, AND PEDAGOGY: AN EXPLORATION OF THE CLASSROOM NARRATIVE

Narrative writing has become an integral part of scholarship in the field of rhetoric and composition, particularly in the area of composition pedagogy. This thesis identifies and interrogates the classroom narrative, a form of scholarly, narrative writing that narrates classroom events in order to persuade its reader to adopt, reject, or think critically about its author's pedagogy. This thesis argues that, in order to accomplish this purpose, the author of the classroom narrative employs a persuasive process in which she deliberately uses positionality, the process of articulating the author's identity in the text, to persuade the reader to invest in her pedagogy. At the same time, she uses the text's narrative features to reinforce the reader's understanding of her pedagogy. The result is that the persuasive use of positionality and the text's narrative features combine to advance a pedagogical argument and create pedagogical knowledge. In order to illustrate this persuasive process, two classroom narratives will be analyzed: "Understanding Problems in the Critical Classroom" by William H. Thelin and "The American Scholar Writes the New 'Research' Essay" by Jackie Grutsch McKinney. The classroom narrative's persuasive process – both its use of positionality and its reliance on narrative features – has implications for the way that positionality is conceived of and for how pedagogical knowledge is created through narrative.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Introduction .....	1
Positionality, Narrative, and Knowledge – A Theoretical Framework .....	6
Characterization, Context, and Critical Pedagogy – An Analysis of William Thelin .....	25
Setting, Evolution, and Experience – An Analysis of Jackie Grutsch McKinney .....	37
Narrative Knowledge and Persuasive Positionality – A Conclusion .....	49
Works Cited .....	57
Works Consulted .....	59

## **Introduction**

In the fall of 2010, I was a brand new composition teacher. My first group of students was intelligent, lively, and not at all interested in rhetoric. At the mention of media – films, video games, comic books – they would straighten in their seats and lean forward, excited about and engaged in conversation. When I would begin to steer the conversation back towards rhetoric, the students would slump back, shoulders curving and backs hunching down in their seats. Wanting to capture the enthusiasm that I saw during their informal conversations, I decided that, for our final paper, we would analyze a film of their choosing. In groups, the students would choose a film and create a presentation that, using rhetoric, would convince the rest of the class that their choice was the best fit for analysis. We would watch and write about the film chosen by the group with the most persuasive presentation. To me, this sounded like an exciting, engaging, and straight forward assignment. I was wrong. While some of the students embraced the assignment, most did not. Some chose what they thought was expected of them, arguing for ‘school films’ that they did not really enjoy. Other students refused to make a choice at all, failing to put any kind of effort into the assignment or asking questions so specific that, in answering, I was effectively making the decision for them.

Looking back almost three years later, I should have expected this reaction, but, at the time, I was admittedly confused. In order to understand why the students reacted as they did and to improve the assignment for the next semester, I began researching student resistance. What I found during this search sent my academic work in a new direction. I found a genre of scholarship with which I was entirely unfamiliar and which I have come to refer to as the classroom narrative.

In many ways, the classroom narrative is exactly what it sounds like: a story about things that happen in the classroom. At its most basic, the classroom narrative is the telling of classroom events with the purpose of explaining, condemning, or advocating for a specific pedagogy. The author tells a story about her teaching that illuminates a specific aspect of her pedagogy in order to persuade the audience that her pedagogy is, or in some cases, is not valuable.

The classroom narrative can be distinguished from other genres of scholarship based on several characteristics. The first is that a classroom narrative is a narrative, in the sense that it is a chronological telling of events that includes a specific setting; a first-person narrator; a cast of characters made up of students, administrators, and teachers; and a pedagogical lesson at the end. Within this narrative framework, there are non-narrative, scholarly elements such as thesis statements, literature reviews, research, and methods sections. As such, the framework of a classroom narrative is the reverse of the framework found in many academic articles. Rather than a scholarly frame that incorporates narrative elements or anecdotes to support its argument, the classroom narrative is a narrative frame that incorporates scholarly elements.

In addition to being defined by its narrative features, a classroom narrative is defined by its focus on pedagogy. Because persuading the audience to practice or to cease practicing a specific pedagogy is the genre's purpose, the narratives provided are always linked to a threshold teaching event, to a moment that changed the teacher's perspective and makes a statement about her pedagogy. These characteristics differentiate the classroom narrative from other genres of scholarship, both narrative and non-narrative.

The classroom narrative, then, is a narrative about events in the classroom, and these events are narrated for the purpose of persuading the audience to embrace, to reject, or to

question a pedagogy. This thesis will argue that the author of the classroom narrative deliberately uses positionality, the process of articulating the author's identity in the text, to persuade the reader to invest in her pedagogy. At the same time that the author persuades the reader to make this pedagogical investment, she uses the text's narrative features to reinforce the reader's understanding of the pedagogy. The result is that the persuasive use of positionality and the text's narrative features combine to advance a pedagogical argument and create pedagogical knowledge.

This thesis will analyze two classroom narratives – “Understanding Problems in the Critical Classroom” by William H. Thelin and “The American Scholar Writes the New ‘Research’ Essay” by Jackie Grutsch McKinney- in order to illustrate the persuasive nature of the classroom narrative and its role in the creation of pedagogical knowledge. This analysis will illustrate that the authors use positionality to construct an identity that the reader will consider sympathetic. This identity is constructed by creating both a relationship with the reader and a separation from pedagogically undesirable others within the narrative. The construction of this relationship and separation creates a dynamic which the reader is persuaded to invest in the authors' desirable pedagogies rather than the others' undesirable pedagogies. The authors construct these identities by taking advantage of the classroom narrative's narrative features. The analysis of Thelin and McKinney will further demonstrate that these narrative features allow both authors to illustrate that the context in which they enact their pedagogies is not all that different from the reader's, allowing the reader to visualize the authors' pedagogies at work in her own classroom. The combination of the authors' positionality and the texts' narrative features provides the reader with an understanding of both the theory behind and implementation of the authors' pedagogies, thus allowing her to create new pedagogical knowledge.

The study of positionality as a form of persuasion and of the classroom narrative in general is worthwhile because it illustrates one way that teachers create and share knowledge through narrative, which, in turn, contributes to our understanding of how narratives create knowledge in the discipline of rhetoric and composition. For many teachers, narratives become a source of knowledge about teaching. When something out of the ordinary happens in the classroom, many teachers strive to understand it. They review the experience, compare it to theory, and attempt to find meaning in it. In doing so, they create a piece of knowledge that they did not have before (Doyle and Carter 133-135). The classroom narrative uses this same process. It presents an event in the classroom. It uses theory to explain the events. It finds meaning in the event's connection to the author's pedagogy. Seeing this process presented in a scholarly fashion allows for a better understanding of how narrative works, of how teachers move from incident to narrative to knowledge.

This thesis also argues that positionality can function as a form of persuasion. The majority of literature on positionality approaches it as an ethical obligation, as the need to reveal influences that may affect the research. Very little of this literature, however, addresses the effect that the researcher's position may have on the reader. Many texts in the field of rhetoric and composition utilize some form of positionality, beginning with a phrase like 'as a middle-class, Caucasian teacher.' Even if positionality is not extensively used throughout the text, as it is with a classroom narrative, this personal element affects the reader. Viewing positionality as an attempt to persuade will begin to provide an understanding of this effect.

This thesis will focus on defining the classroom narrative, demonstrating how its authors use positionality and the text's narrative features to persuade, and illustrating that this form of persuasion results in the creation of pedagogical knowledge. I will begin my argument with a

more detailed exploration of positionality, context, and classroom narratives. Next, I will analyze the Thelin and McKinney classroom narratives in order to illustrate the manner in which these narratives persuade. Finally, I will conclude with an examination of the importance the classroom narrative holds for composition pedagogy.



## **Positionality, Narrative, and Knowledge – A Theoretical Framework**

Before providing a detailed analysis of the classroom narrative genre, it is necessary to interrogate three terms in more detail: positionality, context, and classroom narrative. Each of these terms holds importance for the analysis of classroom narratives. A discussion of positionality will provide a deeper understanding of the term's meaning and use within the classroom narrative. Next, the idea of context is vital to understanding how the classroom narrative persuades as well as creates pedagogical knowledge. Finally, a discussion of the classroom narrative itself will illuminate specific persuasive features.

In this thesis, positionality is the process of constructing the author's identity in the text. This definition emerges from an ethnographic definition of positionality. Within ethnographic texts, positionality is defined as the author's position or stance and the affect this stance has on the development and composition of a research project (Fontejon-Bonnoir 31). As this definition implies, positionality is a complex concept, as it is used to denote both the author's identity – sometimes referred to as her position or stance – and the effect of that identity on the text. This complexity is explored by Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater as she reflects on her uses of positionality in her own work. I focus on Chiseri-Strater because, in discussing positionality, she details exactly how the author's position is constructed and how this position is articulated in the text, both of which are significant components of positionality in the classroom narrative. Although Chiseri-Strater does not specifically define positionality, she does provide enough examples and a clear enough discussion of the process to construct a definition. Positionality comes to indicate the position of the author and the ways in which this position influences the text. Essentially, position refers to the “age, gender, race, class, nationality, institutional affiliation, historical circumstances, and intellectual predisposition” of the author” (Chiseri-Strater 117). The

author's position is the accumulation of these characteristics. Chiseri-Strater argues that "all researchers are positioned" and that the delineation of this position is a vital part of ethnographic work (115). She writes that there is no part of the ethnographic research project, from inception to publication, that is unaffected by or independent of the position of the author (117). The pervasive influence of the author's position comes down to what the author is positioned to know. The position of the author facilitates her knowledge and understanding of certain things and limits her knowledge and understanding of others, both of which open and limit the scope of her research (115). As such, the author's position has direct bearing on the data collected and the ways in which this data is presented on the page. Chiseri-Strater argues that the author's position affects the critical framework and the methodology of the research study because the author can bring to the project only what she has been positioned to know. The data generated by the study is evaluated from the position of the author, which means that the evaluation necessarily excludes knowledge beyond or unviewable from her position. This fact can, if unacknowledged, create problems for the reader. For Chiseri-Strater, making clear to the reader what the author is positioned to know and, by extension, what the author is not positioned to know is the ethical responsibility associated with positionality.

Although Chiseri-Strater's definition of positionality is inherently complex, there is a place to start unpacking it. Her definition of positionality is based on a clear proposition: position determines the researcher's knowledge and knowledge determines her work. The position of the author determines the things that she knows and the ways that she knows. Her way of knowing determines her work, from formulation of the research question, to the theory selected to analyze her data, to the voice she uses in her final draft. Chiseri-Strater maintains that characteristics that determine position, in her case, her status as an "older, white, middle-

class, female doctoral student,” dictate what the author knows, or, in Chiseri-Strater’s words, what she is positioned to know (124). In other words, the author’s characteristics put her in a position to know certain things and not to know others. As a woman, Chiseri-Strater has access to a specific experience, but it also keeps her from knowing other experiences. In order to explain this idea more fully, Chiseri-Strater offers an example from one of her own ethnographic texts. In her book *Academic Literacies*, Chiseri-Strater focuses on her gender and the ways in which her position as a female researcher working with a female professor limits her understanding of many of her research subject’s classroom discussions. Both Chiseri-Strater and the female professor she observes share similar stances in the research context. As such, they are positioned to have similar knowledge about classroom communication. Once Chiseri-Strater begins working closely with a male research subject, however, her position in the research context and her relationship to the other changes. She is no longer interacting with someone who shares her position.

Because of this difference in position, Chiseri-Strater struggles to understand the ways in which her male research subject communicates because she has not been positioned to think about classroom communication from a gendered perspective. During the course of working with her research subject, she finds that he struggles with collaborative writing, commenting that it makes him feel like a woman (121). This comment is difficult for Chiseri-Strater as she has not been positioned previously to see collaboration as gendered: “It was not until [this comment] that I began to think more critically about differences in male and female learning styles” (121). For many who are trained in composition, collaboration is often a natural way to teach and to write. Upon reviewing her research notes, however, Chiseri-Strater found that this research subject was not the only male research subject to have difficulty with collaborative pedagogies.

She found that in the classroom and in interviews, another male research subject, who was to play a greater role in her study, was often combative and domineering, “work[ing] to wrestle the floor” from her and rankling against the collaborative pedagogies used in writing instruction (122). Chiseri-Starter remarks that she had not seen this before because, as someone trained in composition, collaborative and interactive pedagogies are the norm. She had not been positioned to realize that such pedagogies are not the norm for other people or for other fields-- that, in fact, her “gender and training as a writing teacher had positioned [her] to resist the noninteractive pedagogies....used in other disciplines (122). As such, her position, at least until she is able to research and adjust, limits her understanding of the way the male research subjects communicate, write, and revise in the classroom.

This adjustment explains the second half of Chiseri-Strater’s proposition: the author’s knowledge determines the work. According to Chiseri-Strater, the author only knows what she is positioned to know, and this knowledge determines the questions that she asks about her topic, the way that she approaches her data and, ultimately, elements that she chooses to include in her text. In the example above, Chiseri-Strater was not positioned to know about the ways in which her male research subject approached the classroom because of her gendered position. Chiseri-Strater writes that “thinking about possible changes [in learning and discourse styles] would not have been possible without [her] students’ own gendered perspectives on what kind of learning was valued in their majors and how these approaches affected their potential as learners” (123). In reviewing her research subject’s writing, she was coming from a position of a compositionist and was not taking into account that other styles of learning were influencing her students’ work. Without taking into account additional learning styles, Chiseri-Strater would not have been able

to fully explore her subject's writing process, which would have led to a very different and much more limited text. In this way, her positionality had significant effects on her text.

This example and its implications illustrate the reason why Chiseri-Strater puts so much emphasis on positionality. She writes that "readers of ethnographies should approach them critically: they should understand what the researchers were positioned to know and what they were *not* positioned to know" (116). In other words, when critically reading an ethnographic text, the reader must interrogate the author's position and analyze how it affects the author's understanding of her data. According to Chiseri-Strater the "situatedness" of the author will always "influence the understanding of their data" (117).

In the preceding paragraphs, I have discussed the definition and purpose of positionality. Before concluding my discussion, there is a concept connected to positionality that deserves additional explanation: context. In terms of positionality, context is comprised of the other, the element or elements in reference to which the narrator is positioned. This element is most commonly a person, an idea, or a combination of both. An author's position is defined, in part, by these elements, and it is important to remember that this position is not fixed. The author's position will change, even if it is a slight change, in reference to a context that changes. As such, an understanding of the author's position is not complete without an understanding of the text's context.

This definition of context, primarily its fluid, dynamic nature, is drawn from the work of Linda Alcoff. For Alcoff, positionality is a way of defining an identity by situating it in a shifting context. In her work, identity is used in roughly the same manner as Chiseri-Strater uses the term position. The primary difference is that Alcoff is not focused solely on research data, but on the way that people are discussed within a text. The way that people are discussed within

a text is dependent upon context. It is difficult to separate Alcoff's argument about context from her arguments about positionality, as context is a factor in creating positionality. Also, understanding Alcoff's definition of positionality begins with understanding the problem to which she applies positionality. Alcoff begins her discussion of positionality by identifying a problem within the field of feminist geography: the lack of consensus about the definition of the term "woman" or whether a definition actually exists. Alcoff argues that a definition does indeed exist and is necessary for work in the field to continue. As such, she devotes her essay "Cultural Feminism versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory" to finding a process for defining the term and articulating feminine identity. She finds that the field needs a definition of this term and a process of definition that does not utilize current "source[s] of knowledge about women," all of which are "contaminated with misogyny and sexism" (405-406). In other words, feminists need a way of talking about women and about what it means to be a woman that does not utilize discourse current to the field. In order to talk about women without utilizing "misogynistic discourse," Alcoff turns to positionality, which provides her with a solution (406).

Alcoff's definition of positionality hinges on "two points: first...that the concept is a rational term identifiable only within a (constantly moving) context; [and] second, that the position that women find themselves in can be actively utilized (rather than transcended) as a location for the construction of meaning" (434). Alcoff's first point is based entirely on the idea of context. For Alcoff, feminine identity is defined not by a set of internal and, therefore, subjective and unidentifiable characteristics but by an outward and, therefore, measurable and identifiable context (433). Feminine identity is, thus, defined by the woman's place according to a "network of elements involving others, the objective economic conditions, cultural and

political institutions, and ideologies” (433). In other words, a woman’s identity comes to mean her position in this context-- her position in relationship to outside factors-- rather than who she is internally.

Context and the idea of the other are very important to positionality. Although Alcoff does not provide an additional explanation of context, the manner in which she uses the term is not all that different from the way that the term is used in ethnography. In an ethnographic text, context refers to the research context and the factors that influence it. For example, when researching in a composition classroom, the research context would consist of the researcher, the students/research subjects, the teacher being observed, the course content being taught, the educational ideology of the teacher and of the researcher, and many other similar factors (Fontejon-Bonnoir 29-30; Chiseri-Strater 120-123). All of these things, both people and ideas, influence the research project by serving as the others in relation to which the author defines her stance or identity. Alcoff simply widens the idea of context. Instead of focusing on a small, contained research context, she focuses on the economic, political, religious, and social factors that influence the time period in which the woman lives (433). These elements form the ideas that create the context, but there is also an emphasis on the other. Alcoff writes that the woman’s identity is relative to a “network of elements involving others, the objective economic conditions, cultural and political institutions and ideologies” (433). Given the fact that others is mentioned independently of the cultural and political and given positionality’s general emphasis on defining the author’s position in relation to other people, I am assuming that others here refers to people and to one particularly important person: the woman herself.

In Alcoff’s view of context, the woman herself is a part of her own context, as her stance both influences and is influenced by her context. Alcoff is quick to point out that the woman is

not passive in her context, which is the focus of the second element of her definition of positionality-- that the woman's position within the context is a site from which to construct meaning and to define her own identity (434). According to Alcoff, the woman influences her own context, as the identity of the woman is "the product of her own interpretation and reconstruction of her history" (434). The woman is the filter through which all aspects of the context are interpreted. According to Alcoff, when the woman experiences a change in the ideas associated with her context, the way in which she interprets all of the other elements of her context changes as well. For example, Alcoff writes that when women become feminists they do not "learn any new facts about the world but...come to view those facts from a different position" (434). There is no change in the facts about the world; however, there is a change in the way these facts are viewed. As such, there is a change in her context because the idea of feminism becomes part of the context and, as a result, the rest of the context shifts as it is viewed from her perspective. When the woman changes her position to that of a feminist ideology, the facts are viewed from a new position, which changes their meaning (Alcoff 434-435). In terms of positionality, this change is not all that different from the change undergone by Chiseri-Strater. When working with her male research subject, a change in context, the introduction of gender-specific issues, forced her to reevaluate the ways that she had interpreted her research context. The introduction of a new idea changed the way she viewed her data. Both this example and the example from Alcoff illustrate two important aspects of context: it is constantly shifting and is influenced by the author.

Alcoff is not the only theorist to discuss context. Examples of context and its importance can be seen in all of the theorists discussed in this thesis thus far. The major difference lies in who or what constitutes context and how those elements interact. In ethnographic texts and in a



classroom narrative, context primarily includes people. The author, the research subjects, the teachers being observed, the author's colleagues, the author's advisor (if the author is a graduate student), and others constitute the context. When the author is positioned according to her race, gender, class, or pedagogy, these are the people who she is positioned against. For example, in her work with feminist African American women, Juanita Johnson-Bailey discusses the fact that her interview subjects, most of whom were "economically disadvantaged....and lacking in educational credentials[,] did not feel comfortable talking to an academician" (126). In this context, Johnson-Bailey defines her own identity by discussing the fact that her educational background and socioeconomic status differed from that of her interview subjects (126). A similar case is seen with Chiseri-Strater, who is positioned against her male research subjects according to her gender (Chiseri-Strater 120-123). In each case, the author's positionality is defined according to her relationship with a research subject.

In addition to people, context can also include ideas. Where the author stands in terms of ideology or pedagogy can also determine her positionality. Alcoff writes that context includes "economic conditions [and] cultural and political institutions and ideologies" (433), indicating that dominant social and cultural ideas influence positionality. In the Chiseri-Strater example explained earlier, while she is positioned according to her gender in reference to her male research subject, this relationship is complicated by her position in reference to an idea: collaborative pedagogies. In exploring the gendered communication between herself and her subject, she reviews his work in other courses, finding that the combative communication style with which she is concerned is the norm in other fields (Chiseri-Strater 122). In her position as a composition instructor, she has been "positioned to resist the noninteractive pedagogies....used

in other disciplines” (122). Chiseri-Strater’s position in relationship to the accepted ideals of composition pedagogy becomes a reference for her position as a writing teacher.

A text’s context includes the people and ideas in relation to which the author defines her position or identity. As such, explaining the context is a part of explaining positionality. In terms of the classroom narrative, context is important to both of the genre’s primary forms of persuasion. The classroom narrative persuades by using positionality to establish distance between the author and undesirable others in the narrative. These undesirable others are a part of the context. As such, context and positionality are central to persuasion in the classroom narrative.

Before illustrating this persuasion through the analysis of a classroom narrative, I would like to discuss the genre of the classroom narrative in greater detail. A classroom narrative is a telling of events that occur in the classroom with the purpose of persuading the reader to reject, adopt, or think more critically about a specific pedagogy. The classroom narrative shares several features with other forms of narrative research and narrative inquiry, such as the balance between narrative and scholarly features, but its focus on pedagogy and use of positionality differentiate it from other scholarly narratives. Classroom narratives are characterized by two elements: the narration of a story and the blending of narrative and scholarly elements.

The basis of a classroom narrative is a story about events that happen in the classroom, a feature that the classroom narrative shares with several other genres of narrative scholarly writing. Much has been written in the fields of narrative inquiry and narrative research about what a story actually is, with definitions ranging in scope and specificity. Education theorist Kathy Carter writes that “stories consist...of events, characters, and settings arranged in a temporal sequence implying both causality and significance” (6). Individual elements of this

definition are worthy of discussion as they relate to the classroom narrative. As Carter writes, the story within the classroom narrative does involve “events, characters, and settings,” although scholarly work using positionality employs alternate terms to describe these elements. The setting and characters become the context, with the characters occupying the place of the other, and the events become data for analysis. Most importantly, the stories within the classroom narrative are told in an order that “impl[ies] both causality and significance” (6). In other words, the classroom events are told in a manner that implies meaning, whether it be that one event caused another or that one event becomes more significant than another. This meaning is really the point of the classroom narrative. The author is not simply relating events that occur in her classroom; she is relating such events in order to illustrate that they hold some kind of significance for her pedagogy.

The author of the classroom narrative is arguing that the events that occur in her classroom hold significance, and she is arguing this to a specific audience. Kathy Carter and Walter Doyle argue that “stories are told to someone, an imagined reader, by someone, an implicit or explicit observer/narrator, who recounts the events and often presumes to know what the characters are thinking” (130). In other words, stories have an audience, and they have a narrator. In the classroom narrative, the audience and narrator take on a greater significance because of the use of positionality. The explicit narrator becomes the focus of the narrative and the primary means of persuasion. As such, the purpose of the story and the role of the narrator become linked.

The purpose of the story told in a classroom narrative is to illustrate the value of a pedagogy. In order to do so, the classroom narrative incorporates scholarly elements commonly found in non-narrative academic writing. The scholarly elements allow the author to illustrate

meaning and add ethos to the narrative. Scholarly elements include thesis statements, theoretical frameworks or literature reviews, and methods sections. These sections become storied as they become incorporated into the structure of the narrative. The elements become part of the narrative. For example, in his classroom narrative, William Thelin folds his methods section into his narrative. Rather than having an individual section for the data, which consists of “end-of-the-term student evaluations, attendance logs, [and] student performance on assignments,” this information becomes part of a narrative that describes the origins of the information (118). Rather than simply stating the he conducted student surveys, Thelin narrates the process of realizing that he needed the surveys, incorporating the methods into the narrative. Thelin goes so far as to clarify that he has “blended these elements together in a narrative” (118). So the methods section exists and includes the same elements as in non-narrative articles but is nonetheless incorporated into the narrative. All of the scholarly elements necessary for the rigor of a published article remain, but they become storied, become a part of the narration.

The juxtaposition between narrative and scholarly elements in the classroom narrative allows for the genre to illustrate narrative knowledge-making in a scholarly setting. The classroom narrative uses events in the classroom to create knowledge about pedagogy and teaching. The claim that narrating classroom events can be used to create knowledge is prevalent in the field of teacher education. Teacher education theory discusses the creation of knowledge through narrative by foregrounding the connection between narrative and experience. In discussing this connection, I focus on education theorists Walter Doyle and Kathy Carter because their work discusses both the ways that narratives make knowledge and the way that teachers, in particular, use narratives to create knowledge about teaching. Doyle and Carter, in their discussion of teacher education curriculum, advocate what they refer to as a narrative

perspective, which refers to the ways in which information is processed through story (134).

Using this perspective, Doyle and Carter come to the conclusion that experience is necessary for pre-service teachers to understand the theory usually front-loaded in teacher education courses.

They argue that pre-service teachers cannot understand theoretical information about teaching because they do not have a story about teaching (135). Within this argument, Doyle and Carter make two claims about narrative, knowledge, and experience that are meaningful for the classroom narrative: knowledge is understood through story and experience is a precursor of story.

Doyle and Carter begin their argument by discussing the current organization of teacher education curriculum in order to illustrate that the central assumption around which it is organized is flawed. The curriculum consists of courses in “methods, i.e. specifications and procedures for conducting lessons and prescriptions about how to solve common problems teachers face in classrooms” (135). Pre-service teachers take a number of pedagogy courses, move on to student teaching, and, then teach in a classroom of their own. According to Doyle and Carter, this structure indicates a central assumption about knowledge: “knowing precedes doing” (135). If the idea behind the curricular front-loading described here is that pre-service teachers need this information before they can perform as teachers, then knowing must come before doing. This assumption, Doyle and Carter argue, is backwards. In order to understand the knowledge -the curriculum- pre-service teachers require experience in performing as teachers.

In order to argue for a reversal in curriculum organization, Doyle and Carter argue that a narrative perspective must be applied to teacher education. In defining this narrative perspective, Doyle and Carter make a three pronged argument. They write that knowledge begins as a set of

“propositions” (134). These propositions “are apprehended – that is storied – as elements of experience” (134). In this statement, Doyle and Carter directly claim that story is necessary to apprehend knowledge and that experience is necessary to create a story. Although it is difficult to separate these ideas, both are worth exploration.

In defining the term narrative perspective, Doyle and Carter make the first of three claims: knowledge is understood through story. As mentioned previously, Carter defines a story as “events, characters, and settings arranged in a temporal sequence implying both causality and significance,” a definition that she reproduces in her work with Doyle (6). She and Doyle add to this definition by connecting the story with knowledge, adding that “human beings ...interpret [their] lives by weaving comprehensive frameworks in which incidents, people, actions, emotions, ideas, and setting of our experience are brought together, interrelated, and situated” (130). There are many similarities between these statements. “[I]ncidents, people, action, emotions, ideas, and setting” is a longer, and perhaps more poetic, way of describing “events, characters, and setting.” Bringing together, interrelating, and situating experiences is similar to arranging events “in a temporal sequence implying both causality and significance.” The fact that both claims are so similar implies that the “comprehensive framework” with which people interpret their lives is in fact a story. If people use a narrative framework to interpret their lives, then “story is a fundamental way of human knowing” (Doyle and Carter 130). Doyle and Carter support this argument by pointing out that the “use of narrative to make sense of the world” begins in childhood, as young children are able to create stories long before they are able to comprehend “abstract and detached facts, propositions, or laws” (130). The narrative frame, then, works as a kind of schema through which knowledge and information is filtered.

Doyle and Carter's brief explanation of the narrative perspective is similar to, and perhaps best understood in light of, Martin Kreiswirth's definition of the naturalist view of narrative. In this view, narrative is not a merely a device to impose "order on an inchoate flow of mental materials" but a function of the mind (Kreiswirth 305). Kreiswirth explains that "narrative naturalists want to see story as going all the way down, beyond language and textuality, into mental activity or cognitive process" (305). The story is not constructed as a way to explain events after the fact. The story structures and gives meaning to the events as they happen. The story is the innate thought process by which the mind processes events and information. Like Doyle and Carter's definition of narrative, Kreiswirth definition of narrative naturalism is based on the work of Jerome Bruner and of Mark Turner. From Turner, Kreiswirth draws an example that illuminates the interaction between knowledge and story. A child watches as milk is poured into a cup. The child constructs a story about this event, tracing the actions that result in the cup being filled with milk (Turner qtd in Kreiswirth 306) As she grows, the child uses the story to "assess new sensations....a different bundle of perceptions at a different time involving a milk and a cup" (Kreiswirth 306). This child assesses future knowledge about milk and cups against her original story about the topic, adjusting as new information changes the narrative. The child presents a scenario in which knowledge is constructed as a story, albeit a simple one, and this story is, then, used as a structure through which to understand and create new knowledge.

The child's milk and cup is not altogether different from the pre-service teacher's interaction with teacher education curriculum as described by Doyle and Carter. They write that pre-service teachers interact with knowledge as a series of "propositions" and attempt to understand these propositions with their story about teaching (134). The problem in this scenario

is that pre-service teachers don't have a story about teaching; they don't have a narrative, cognitive structure with which to understand the knowledge. All they have is a story about being students: "now our [pre-service teachers] story what they do in teacher education as they do all of their experiences. But without performance as a teacher, they can only fall back on the storyline they know so very well, namely the studenting narrative" (135). The problem with falling back on the studenting narrative is that not all information about teaching can be understood through it. In order to create a narrative about teaching, pre-service teachers need experience. This problem foregrounds Doyle and Carter's second major argument: story is constructed through experience.

Experience is necessary in order to construct a story. Carter indicates that stories are "events....arranged in a temporal sequence" (6). In order to arrange these events, experiencing them is necessary. As Doyle and Carter and Krieswirth argue, the mind forms stories as a way of processing experience. As such, it is necessary for the mind to have the experience order to create the story. According to Doyle and Carter, people "live storied lives" (130). They "story the experiences [they] have" (Doyle and Carter 133). If the mind creates stories from the experiences people have, then constructing a story without an experience is difficult. This difficulty is why pre-service teachers must have some kind of teaching experience in order to understand the theoretical information about teaching taught in the teacher education curriculum. Pre-service teachers have been students for a long time; they understand what being a student means and have a story about being a student. Unfortunately, the studenting story does not allow them to understand all information about being a teacher because there are aspects of being a teacher that are different from being a student. As such, there are sections of the teacher education curriculum that cannot be fully understood (Doyle and Carter 135).



In order to allow pre-service teachers to more fully understand the teacher education curriculum, Doyle and Carter suggest the use of stories. Stories are utilized in a four step process. To begin, pre-service teachers are given “orientation to classrooms as settings and as curriculum events” (135). The use of the terms “settings” and “events” indicate that, although they are not yet teaching, pre-service teachers are being asked to think of teaching and of curriculum as elements of story. If the classroom is a setting and curriculum is an event, thinking of teaching as story becomes easier because the basic story structures are already in place. In addition, pre-service teachers are taught to think of lessons as stories. Thinking of lessons as stories allows them to further develop a kind of teaching story without having actually taught. Finally, pre-service teachers become student teachers and then classroom teachers, allowing them to solidify their partial stories with experience (Doyle and Carter 135-136). With this kind of curriculum, student teachers are able to understand the theory in the teacher education curriculum because they have a partial story with which to process it.

Doyle and Carter’s argument about teacher education curriculum implies a cyclical nature between narrative, experience, and knowledge. Experience creates a story. The story allows the mind to understand knowledge. Knowledge becomes a part of the story. Before connecting this cycle to the classroom narrative and what the classroom narratives adds to our understanding of how knowledge is made, I must acknowledge that Doyle and Carter are not discussing written stories. They are dealing with narrative as a thought structure rather than a written text. That is not to imply, however, that Doyle and Carter’s argument cannot be applied to written narratives. The connection between Doyle and Carter and the classroom narrative is best understood through Martin Kreiswirth. In his discussion of naturalist views of narrative, Kreiswirth writes that a narrative, meaning a written narrative, is a discursive representation of a

way of thinking (305). The written narrative “displays the narrative means by which the mind functions” (Kreiwirth 305). The mind, according to Doyle and Carter, processes information through story. The written text becomes a visual representation of the way the mind thinks.

The written narrative is, of course, not that simple. Authors makes conscious, rhetorical decisions based upon purpose and audience, and these decisions may not be applicable to stories as thought processes; however, the important element is that stories and narrative contain similar properties. Both are “events, characters, and settings arranged in a temporal sequence implying both causality and significance” (Carter 6). These similarities mean that the classroom narrative - a story about things that happen in the classroom – shares a structure with the narrative function used to process information. The similarity in structure means that the classroom narrative is a kind of representation of how knowledge is created, specifically how knowledge about teaching is created. As such, understanding how the classroom narrative works is connected to understanding how knowledge about teaching is created and shared. Doyle and Carter outline a basic process: experience leads to story and story leads to knowledge. If experience is absent, then a text approximating the story normally created by experience can be used to aid understanding. This theory is not only applicable to educating secondary teachers; it can also be applied to the classroom narrative. If a teacher does not have experience teaching with a specific pedagogy, the classroom narrative can function as a text that approximates a story about teaching with that pedagogy. As such, the narrative perspective advocated by Doyle and Carter is applicable to teaching in general and not just to secondary education.

The classroom narrative makes knowledge creation visible because of the role it plays in helping the reader to approximate the experience of teaching with a specific pedagogy. That approximation only goes so far, however. Just because the reader begins to understand how to

teach with a specific pedagogy does not mean that she will do so. As such, the classroom narrative needs positionality, or the process of defining the author's identity within the text, and the context created by the text's narrative features in order to persuade the reader to actually use, or stop using, the pedagogy. The interaction between the narrative, its context, and positionality is best seen by analyzing a classroom narrative. In the next sections, I will analyze two classroom narratives in order to illustrate both how authors use positionality and context to persuade and how the classroom narrative creates knowledge about teaching.

## **Characterization, Context, and Critical Pedagogy – An Analysis of William Thelin**

The purpose of the classroom narrative is to persuade the reader to accept, reject, or think more critically about the author's pedagogy. In order fulfill this purpose, the author of a classroom narrative must persuade the reader to invest in or at least entertain her pedagogy. In addition, she must illustrate that her pedagogy can work in the reader's classroom. The classroom narrative's author does so by taking advantage of the persuasive nature of her own identity and the text's narrative features. To demonstrate this process, I analyze "Understanding Problems in the Critical Classroom" by William H. Thelin.

In the article, Thelin narrates what he describes as a disastrous section of freshman composition in which students failed to turn in work, fought bitterly amongst themselves, and complained to the Writing Program Administrator about Thelin's use of critical pedagogy. He discusses this class not as a way to reevaluate his pedagogy but to illustrate that his pedagogy is worth pursuing in spite of the failure that occurred in this classroom. Using this classroom experience, Thelin argues that, before giving up on Critical pedagogy, teachers "must find ways to learn from classroom blunders" (117). This argument is specifically written in response to the growing number of articles suggesting that, despite its lofty goals, critical pedagogy does not work in the classroom. As such, Thelin's purpose is to illustrate that his pedagogy does have merit. He does so by arguing that the kinds of problems he encountered – late work, lack of student engagement, bitter arguments amongst students, and student resistance – are caused not by the practices of critical pedagogy, but by student's frustration when critical pedagogy doesn't conform to what they have been conditioned to expect by years of current-traditional curriculum (136). In other words, the problem lies not with critical pedagogy itself but with how students react to the new and radical concepts and responsibilities associated with this pedagogy. In his

argument, Thelin attempts to salvage critical pedagogy and to persuade the reader that it is worth using.

In his classroom narrative, Thelin primarily uses contextual elements to persuade his reader. In positionality, context represents the elements in relation which the author is positioned. There are four key contextual elements that Thelin uses to persuade his readers. The first element of context that Thelin uses to define his identity is his reader. Thelin creates an identity for himself that is similar to that of the reader because doing so invites, in the reader, a willingness to be persuaded. In order to create this willingness, Thelin focuses on their shared identity as composition instructors. The identity that Thelin and his reader share is defined by two criteria: professional position and a focus on student learning. Thelin opens his essay by establishing his identity as a composition instructor: “Most composition instructors, I wager, will recognize the following method: the realization or uncovering of a worthy educational goal for a course, the reading of texts or articles about a method to achieve the goal, [and] the theoretical adaption of that method into a particular pedagogy” (114). Here, Thelin indicates that this process is one that most composition teachers follow, which allows him to establish his professional identity as a composition teacher and to appeal to a similar audience. The passage also illustrates that Thelin clearly envisions his readers as composition instructors, as he does not explain the process of creating theoretically-informed lesson plans. He simply references the steps that composition teachers typically take to develop theoretically informed pedagogies and expects his reader to recognize and accept them as such. Although he and the reader may share other qualities, Thelin chooses to emphasize their shared position as teachers. Opening the essay in this manner allows Thelin to assert his identity as a composition instructor, and, more importantly, to define it in relation to that of the reader.

Thelin also discusses his working conditions as a way to define his identity as a composition instructor. Later in the essay, he writes that he was “an untenured assistant professor” who “long[ed] for better working conditions than the 4-4-4 load and the \$35,000 a year salary that came with” his position (119-120). This workload and salary, as well as Thelin’s dissatisfaction with it, is potentially common among composition professors. Chances are his audience has or is working under similar conditions, which reinforces the fact that Thelin’s professional position is not dissimilar from the audience’s. At the very least, judging by the fact that Thelin does not explain what a 4-4-4 teaching load is, he expects the reader to understand his meaning and his dissatisfaction with his working conditions. In discussing his job and conditions, Thelin uses positionality to define his professional identity in such a way that emphasizes qualities he shares with his readers, which allows him to engender a willingness to be persuaded.

Thelin uses positionality to construct an identity as not only a composition teacher, but one who cares about student learning, a concern that he assumes his reader will share. Through this emphasis on student learning, Thelin uses positionality to illustrate his similarities with his reader and to characterize himself as sympathetic. In the course that he narrates for this article, eleven of twenty-one students failed (125). These students were eligible to fail the course relatively early in the semester because of repeated violations of their grading contracts. Instead of following the department practice of advising these students to drop, Thelin chose to encourage them to remain in the course, hoping that they would continue to learn (125). Thelin confesses that those eleven students who failed and “might have been better served by withdrawing from composition and studying harder in psychology or history...made [him] feel guilty” (125). As a composition teacher, the reader is likely to have experienced the situation

that Thelin describes; she is likely to have made a decision in regard to a failing student and later wondered if it was the right one. In his discussion of his guilt over his failing students, Thelin is not simply articulating or defining his identity; he is also using positionality to influence his audience's opinion of it. Thelin could have used many instances to articulate his professional identity as a composition instructor who cares about student learning. Thelin could have also narrated in many ways his reasons for encouraging students to persevere in his class. Yet, he chose to relay this experience in a way that makes him appear sympathetic. First, he describes that fact that he "pushed" these students to continue to learn and that he chose to do so in spite of the fact that he could have failed them because of behavioral issues, giving the impression that he values student learning over perfect grades and perfect students (125). Second, Thelin discusses his feeling of guilt over having potentially made the wrong decision. It matters that he feels guilty, that he is emotionally engaged in his student's success. Generally speaking, caring about students is a quality that teachers value and that his audience potentially values. As such, as Thelin defines his identity in relation to that of the reader, he makes strategic choices about which events to narrate, allowing him to positively characterize his identity.

Thelin uses positionality to create a professional identity that the reader can relate to and sympathize with, inviting a willingness to be persuaded. Narrative persuasion theory holds that audiences are more open to persuasion when the speaker, author, or character is someone they can relate to. Michael Slater, in a study of persuasive narratives, concludes that a high level of similarity between a character and the audience member enables that audience member to cognitively rehearse "the beliefs and values expressed or embodied by the character, leading to reinforcement or movement toward those beliefs and values" (172). Thelin takes advantage of this by using positionality to create a professional identity that is similar to the reader's. This

relatable identity and the persuasion it creates become particularly important in light of Thelin's purpose, as he is specifically arguing against the many articles and theorists that claim that his pedagogy does not work. As such, in order to persuade his reader that it does work, he needs to overcome all of that other research and any potential negative opinion the reader may already have about critical pedagogy. To do so, Thelin begins by using his own identity to create a willingness to be persuaded, a willingness to consider what he has to say.

In using positionality to define his identity as a composition instructor, Thelin focuses on his professional stance and his concern with student learning, a position that he shares with his reader. When Thelin positions himself within the second important relationship in a classroom narrative, the relationship between himself and another teacher, he does the opposite. Rather than positioning himself as a teacher, Thelin positions himself as a pedagogue, allowing him to focus on the differences between himself and other teachers within the narrative. Focusing on and characterizing these dissimilarities allows Thelin to create a dynamic in which the reader is persuaded to view negatively pedagogies other than Thelin's. At several points in the narrative, Thelin claims that he is the only instructor in his department who practices critical pedagogy. In discussing the student's reactions to his course, Thelin writes that "while many dedicated instructors in [his] department applied tenets of process pedagogy to their classes, none of them implemented the democratic elements of critical pedagogy" (134). Here, Thelin differentiates himself, and his critical pedagogy, from his colleagues based primarily on classroom practices. Thelin uses positionality to define his pedagogical identity by contrasting his position as a critical pedagogue with his colleagues' positions as non-critical pedagogues.

The first instance in which Thelin uses the position of other teachers in the narrative to delineate his own pedagogical identity involves his approach to struggling students. In discussing



the eleven students who failed his course, Thelin writes that “[he] felt that other instructors would have advised the students to drop while [he] had kept pushing them to learn” (125). In this statement, Thelin differentiates between his actions – pushing the students to learn – and his colleagues’ – advising students to drop. In a footnote explaining his claim, Thelin writes that it was “common practice among the department’s faculty to encourage marginal students to withdraw early in the quarter....it created class sizes that made the 4-4-4 teaching load manageable” (139). This footnote characterizes the difference between Thelin’s actions and his colleagues’ actions as a matter of classroom practice. For the non-critical pedagogy teachers, Thelin presents their actions as at least partially driven by the practical concerns of class sizes and workloads. For Thelin, however, actions are driven by student learning. Thelin presents his colleagues’ positions as teacher focused while presenting his own as student focused.

Thelin also uses positionality to define his pedagogical identity in relation to other teachers by discussing student portfolio evaluations, focusing on the ways that his classroom practices differ from theirs. Throughout the narrative, Thelin emphasizes the democratic nature of his classroom, describing student participation in choosing a text, creating grading contracts, and dictating the content of end-of-semester portfolios. In his discussion of the practices of other teachers in his department, Thelin consistently mentions the fact that they don’t utilize “the democratic elements of critical pedagogy” (134). In one such instance, Thelin writes that he “assessed portfolios with one colleague who gave a sentence-by-sentence outline of essay assignments for her students to follow” (129). He further explains that “many [instructors] used draft workshops but mostly to correct errors” (129). These examples illustrate classroom practices that are far removed from Thelin’s democratic, politically-oriented class. Thelin is quick to point out that, in the classrooms of his colleagues, “student responsibility and

participation were severely regulated” (129). Thelin uses positionality to create a pedagogical identity for himself that values democracy and student responsibility, as he “involve[s] students in curricular decisions” (129). The pedagogical identity of his colleagues is presented as one that does not focus on “students responsibility and participation,” instead curtailing these factors (Thelin 129).

Thelin works to characterize his pedagogy as positive while characterizing the pedagogy of his colleagues as negative in order to persuade his readers to view critical pedagogy more positively than his colleagues’ other, unidentified pedagogies. He does so through his use of vocabulary and through the nature of the examples used to define his pedagogical identity. When discussing his pedagogy, Thelin uses universal terms such as student responsibility, participation, and involvement. These terms would be familiar and desirable to teachers regardless of pedagogical affiliation, making Thelin’s position and his pedagogy seem desirable as well. In fact, most of the language that typically characterizes critical pedagogy literature – freedom, oppression, empowerment – is largely absent from this essay, as Thelin attempts to eschew terms that his reader may be familiar with and which, for some readers, may already have a negative connotation. In addition to the vocabulary used to discuss his pedagogy, Thelin also uses strategic examples through which to define the position of his colleagues. Through his narration, the reader sees instructors who privilege their own working conditions over student learning and restrict student involvement. The practices that Thelin describes – lack of student involvement, focus on reproducing outlines, and preoccupation with errors – are typically associated with current traditional pedagogy, a pedagogy that is not held in as high a regard as it once was and certainly is not aligned with the critical pedagogy espoused by Thelin. Because Thelin does not present other examples of his colleagues’ teaching or individualize them in any

way, all of his colleagues and their classroom practices become associated with current traditional pedagogy. This association allows Thelin to persuade the reader that the pedagogy and pedagogical identity of his colleagues is negative and that Thelin's, which is associated with student responsibility and engagement, is positive. The end result is that the reader is potentially persuaded to at least consider Thelin's pedagogy.

Using positionality, Thelin defines his identity in relation to the reader and his colleagues, both of which constitute elements of Thelin's context. In positionality, context is the elements in relation to which the author defines his identity. That said, Thelin does not use all of this contextual elements primarily for identity definition. He uses two of contextual elements – his students and his department – in order to persuade the reader that his pedagogy will work in her classroom. Thelin utilizes specific narrative features – characterization and setting – in order to create students and a department that have the potential to remind, in one way or another, the reader of her own students and department. Doing so enables Thelin to illustrate that, if his context is similar to the reader's context, his pedagogy can work for her.

In order to persuade his reader that critical pedagogy will work in her classroom, Thelin first uses characterization to create student characters that mimic those of his reader, allowing the reader to see her own students in his and, thus, demonstrating that critical pedagogy can be used in her classroom with her students. Thelin's first mention of his students provides an indication of the type of students that he teaches: "the student population of this [open-access] college consisted of students who, directly out of high school, had failed to gain admission into one of the other colleges on campus" (117-118). These students came primarily from working-class backgrounds, but a handful came from more privileged families. Thelin's class was composed of an equal mix of genders and ethnicities (118). This description of students is significant because

it is so general. In this description, there is nothing remarkable about the students and nothing significant about the mix of students. They are average students from average backgrounds, just as may usually be found in an access-based institution.

The generality of Thelin's characterization continues in his discussion of the students' interactions with him and with one another. The first peer-review workshop that they hold is "a disaster[:]" students came unprepared, with no draft, drafts that were half-hearted attempts at completing the assignment, or no copies to facilitate the workshop, and the feedback they received glossed over major problems regarding critiques of cultural myths, giving the prepared students little to go on" (122). This passage paints a picture of many first workshops in composition classes. A handful of students show up prepared and expecting quality feedback from peers, and a handful show up entirely unprepared without drafts. Most of the students, though, show up with unfinished drafts and do not yet possess the analytical skills to provide sophisticated feedback. Although Thelin describes the workshop as "a disaster," he provides such a low level of detail that his characterization of the students remains universal. The universality of Thelin's characterization is part of the classroom narrative's persuasion. The students in the narrative are meant to mimic the reader's actual students. The characterization - or rather, the lack of characterization- that Thelin uses provides a recognizable type of student, allowing the reader to see her own students in Thelin's and to see Thelin's context as her own. For the reader to see her context in Thelin's, his students need to be present in the narrative, but need to be described as generally as possible.

Thelin uses characterization, a narrative element, to create student characters that are connected to the reader's own students. Thelin has a similar purpose in his use of setting. Thelin uses setting to constitute the department in which he works. Thelin's purpose in his article is to

illustrate that critical pedagogy is a valid pedagogy; however, the section of composition that Thelin chooses to narrate is a failure. Thelin ultimately concludes that critical pedagogy failed partly because his department, or the setting in which he teaches, does not value or facilitate it. As such, Thelin describes his setting in order to emphasize the qualities that least resemble the reader's department by creating a setting that is so oppressive and so combative that the reader will hopefully find few similarities with her own. For example, Thelin repeatedly describes the ways in which the department's "the method of instruction denied students the opportunity to grasp and make use of essential concepts of writing" and frequently references the department's "deficit theory of cognitive development" (136) and its "draconian" (139) attendance policies. The implication being that, because the reader's department is so different from Thelin's, critical pedagogy could work there. It becomes clear from a relatively early point in his essay that Thelin does not have positive feelings towards his department. His overall description is of a department that uses bureaucracy to serve its own needs, even if it means disenfranchising both students and instructors. The lack of authority afforded to instructors is seen in Thelin's description of the department's portfolio evaluation process, in which the portfolio review committee can overturn a grade given by a professor. Thelin writes that "it did happen to students in [his] class several times [that] a student could work hard and earn a C from [him] only to have the quality of the work submitted in the portfolio be deemed unsatisfactory" (121). Thelin describes a department, or setting, that, more than once, does not reward a student's hard work or put stock in the assessment of her professor.

Thelin creates such an oppressive setting in order to persuade the reader that his pedagogy, although it did not work in his own setting, can work in hers. Thelin's theme of oppression and disenfranchisement within the departmental setting continues throughout the

article. One of the many negative outcomes of his disastrous section of composition was that, after failing the portfolio review, three students “colluded” to complain specifically about Thelin’s pedagogy, using his “lack of conventionality against [him]” (134). These complaints result in an investigation by the WPA. While Thelin acknowledges that the WPA “treated [him] fairly,” he points that she does acknowledge the fact that he “allowed more student freedom than most instructors” and that “eyebrows were raised” about some of his assignments (135). Thelin follows this description with a telling note about his dean: “I should note that in my tenure letter, the dean made considerable mention of my ‘alternative views of pedagogy and students’ and the risks I took that resulted in failures. Veering from the norm of the department was forgiven but not forgotten it seemed” (135). In these examples, Thelin describes a departmental setting in which instructors who deviate from the norm are punished through policy. The sum of Thelin’s examples is a setting, an impression of the environment in which Thelin works. These examples, coupled with Thelin’s defensive tone, constitute a setting of powerlessness and constant struggle. The reasoning for this negative representation of his department is that the reader will find few similarities between her department and Thelin’s. Thelin claims that his pedagogy did not work partly because of his department. If his department is vastly different from the reader’s, then the implication is that maybe critical pedagogy will work in the reader’s department.

This persuasion via context is predicated on the idea that, if the reader can relate to Thelin’s context, she is more likely to understand and ultimately to use critical pedagogy. The reason why lies in the mind’s use of narrative to create knowledge. As Kathy Carter and Walter Doyle state, the mind uses stories to create knowledge. Experience leads to story which leads to knowledge. Where there is no experience, teachers use pre-existing stories to evaluate new information and to begin to create knowledge (135). In using the text’s narrative features to

create context, Thelin is using the reader's pre-existing story about teaching to persuade her that she could teach using critical pedagogy. Even though the reader may not have a story about critical pedagogy, she certainly has a story about teaching, and this story can help her to see the potential in critical pedagogy. Doyle and Carter write that, because student-teachers don't have a story about teaching, they default to a narrative they do have: that of a student. The pre-service teachers use this narrative as a way to evaluate new information (135). The same can be said of the classroom narrative and of Thelin's work. By illustrating the way in which Thelin's context is similar to and different from the reader's, the classroom narrative encourages the reader to evaluate Thelin's work based on her own context, her own story about teaching. This encouragement has the potential to work because the mind typically evaluates new information against old. Colleen Fairbanks writes that "the narrative mode explores phenomena through the ordering of events...that are made comprehensible by their relation to different world views" (322). The classroom narrative uses context and narrative features to create and exploit the relations between world views. In the same way that Thelin creates a relationship with his reader, the classroom narrative creates a relationship between its context and the context of its readers. Through the foregrounding of similarities and differences, the classroom narrative illustrates how a pedagogy functions, persuading the reader that it can work.

## **Setting, Evolution, and Experience – An Analysis of Jackie Grutsch McKinney**

The preceding analysis of “Understanding Problems in the Critical Classroom” by William H. Thelin illustrated that classroom narratives make possible a two-stage approach to persuasion. Thelin uses his identity, as defined both through positionality and in relation to contextual elements, to persuade the reader to invest in his pedagogy. Then, he uses context, as constituted through characterization and setting, to persuade the reader that his pedagogy can be successfully implemented. The same approach to persuasion can be seen in Jackie Grutsch McKinney’s classroom narrative “The American Scholar Writes the New ‘Research’ Essay.” Like Thelin, McKinney uses positionality to define an identity, using her reader and other teachers as context. This identity enables her to potentially create, in her reader, a willingness to be persuaded and an investment in her pedagogy. Then, she uses additional contextual elements – her students and the field of rhetoric and composition as constituted through characterization and setting respectively – to illustrate that her pedagogy can be implemented in her reader’s classroom. While both Thelin and McKinney use a two-stage persuasive approach common to the classroom narrative, the authors organize the approach quite differently. Where Thelin’s organization creates a clear delineation between positionality and narrative elements, or between the first and second stages of persuasion, McKinney blends both elements so that the context is part of the use of positionality and is part of the setting. For example, Thelin defines his identities in relation to readers and other teachers but uses his department as his setting, meaning that each contextual element serves a different rhetorical purpose. McKinney, in contrast, defines her identities, both professional and pedagogical, against the field of rhetoric and composition and uses this same contextual element as her setting, so that each contextual element serves



multiple persuasive purposes. In the process of persuasion, each element is used as part of positionality and as a part of context.

While the structure and use of persuasion remains consistent between Thelin's and McKinney's classroom narratives, McKinney has a very different purpose and a different pedagogy. McKinney's pedagogy begins in a problem: the research paper, which, according to McKinney, finds its roots in non-critical, current-traditional pedagogies, is not suited to the "postmodern, post-current traditional sensibilities" current to the field of rhetoric and composition (73). As an assignment, the research paper encourages students to "write what they already [know]," to seek out sources that support their current beliefs and to ignore diverse perspectives (73). In response to this problem, McKinney proposes a technique for teaching the research paper that asks students to "analyze or blend their finding with their own lived experience or with others' perspectives," which is accomplished by incorporating both secondary scholarly research and primary experiential research (73). To illustrate her technique, McKinney narrates the writing experiences of three students and of herself, each of which illustrates different perspectives on and difficulties with McKinney's pedagogy. This pedagogy is grounded in the argument that the field of rhetoric and composition is evolving as it incorporates the personal and the experiential (72-73). McKinney acknowledges that, although the field may be evolving, the research paper is too entrenched in institutional policy and identity to be eliminated. As such, the research paper must be accommodated, and McKinney's pedagogy represents an attempt to do so. McKinney attempts to persuade readers that her technique will allow them to reconcile the research paper with the changing ideology of their field.

In order to persuade her reader to consider her pedagogy, McKinney uses positionality to define her professional identity as similar to that of the reader, which can create, in the reader, a

willingness to be persuaded; however, she accomplishes this goal by using positionality in a very different way than does Thelin. Like Thelin, McKinney envisions an audience of composition instructors, as indicated by her use of first-person pronouns when describing her teaching. She writes that “those of us who teach composition” are attempting to teach the research paper and that “we’re struggling as a field to find (and teach) [research] assignments” (72). The use of *us* and *we* indicates that both McKinney and her readers are to be viewed as composition instructors. While McKinney and Thelin share an audience, they do not share a university position, and McKinney’s position within the university influences her use of positionality. Where Thelin is a widely published, credentialed professor, McKinney is “halfway between starting and finishing a PhD,” and has “been teaching college writing for five years” (71-72). This difference in university or hierarchical position means that, to create a willingness to be persuaded, McKinney has a little more work to do than Thelin. McKinney’s university position as a graduate student is likely to differ from that of her readers, who are likely to hold PhDs, have more teaching experience, and generally rank higher within the university. In other words, when she defines her professional identity using her reader as her primary contextual element, the resulting identity contains just as many differences in relation to that reader as similarities. Because, for persuasive purposes, she needs to build a professional identity that focuses on similarity rather than difference, McKinney illustrates that both she and her reader share a similar identity in reference to a third contextual element: the field of rhetoric and composition.

In order to persuade her reader that they share a professional identity, McKinney illustrates that, in relation to rhet/comp’s status as an evolving discipline, she and her reader are in a similar position: both are working to define the field’s identity. McKinney begins by defining the state of rhetoric and composition as a discipline. According to McKinney, the

discipline is at a “coming-of-age” moment in which it grows closer to having its own “style” (83-84). She writes that the field “seem[s] to be teetering on a tradition that respects teaching, but is disdainful of lore[,] a tradition that values teaching, yet has a history of wearing ill-fitting suits of other disciplines in an effort to win respect as a scholarly field” (83). In making statements such as these, and in her frequent references to the evolving nature of rhetoric and composition, McKinney describes a field that is on the cusp of defining itself, that is moving past defining itself in relation to other scholarly fields, and that is forging a real definition of what it values. McKinney uses this definition to situate herself and her readers in relation to the field, illustrating that they are both in the same professional position: instructors working to further the new definition of rhetoric and composition. Regardless of whether or not they all have PhDs or the same amount of experience in the classroom, and regardless of whether or not they hold the same position within the university, McKinney and her reader are equalized in the classroom by a common struggle: “We are struggling as a field to find (and teach) different assignments that require [research] skills that mate better with our postmodern, post-current traditional sensibilities” (72-73). Here McKinney illustrates that all composition teachers – including the *we* that represents both McKinney and her readers – are struggling with the research paper. To reinforce the commonality of this struggle, McKinney points to several of the methods that have been attempted as way to teach the research paper, including theories that discuss argument, a Friereian approach, digital composition, and ethnography. The inclusion of so many different approaches to the same problem is indicative of a discipline-wide struggle, a struggle in which that McKinney, the theorists she discusses, and her readers engage. As such, McKinney is able use positionality to illustrate that both she and her readers – as teachers working to define their field – share a similar professional identity in relation to the field of rhetoric and composition.

As she defines a professional identity, McKinney also uses positionality to define a pedagogical one. McKinney defines her pedagogical identity in relation to the multiple approaches used to teach the research paper, the same list of approaches used in defining her professional identity. McKinney's pedagogy is based on two elements: incorporation of personal, experiential knowledge and the analysis of multiple perspectives. She defines this pedagogical identity by discussing her attempted use of other pedagogies, one of which is the use of argumentation to teach the research paper. McKinney writes that "many composition teachers ask students to write arguments using research" but that when she utilized this approach, she found it frustrating (73). Her frustration stems from the fact that "students wrote from their own established opinions...and found sources to support them" (73). For McKinney, this constitutes a failure because students "didn't analyze or blend their findings with their own lived experience or with others' perspectives" (73). In stating that the pedagogy did not work because students did not incorporate multiple perspectives or analyze their research materials, McKinney indicates that both are important elements in her pedagogy. McKinney follows her discussion of the argument-based approach with a narration of how she used her own pedagogy.

McKinney narrates the experience of a student named Reshonda who is able to use her pedagogy effectively. Through this narration, McKinney illustrates that Reshonda was able to incorporate multiple perspectives, critically evaluate research materials, and use primary, experiential research when the students taught with the argument-based approach were not, indicating that these tasks are important to her pedagogy. Reshonda begins the writing process with a specific, established opinion about her topic: "ADHD kids [are] just bad kids who need...discipline" (80). As Reshonda researches, however, she discovers primary and secondary sources that refute her opinion and incorporates an analysis of these sources into her paper. In

her final draft, Reshonda focuses on the ways in which the research led her to revise her opinion about children with ADHD. As McKinney explains it, Reshonda's use of research is successful because she uses both secondary research and experiential, primary research in the form of an interview with the mother of an ADHD child. Reshonda is able to incorporate multiple perspectives and experiential knowledge into her paper without expecting a clear, clean answer (80-81). In discussing Reshonda's success, McKinney describes three specific characteristics of her paper: a critical approach to texts, the synthesis of multiple perspectives, and the incorporation of experiential knowledge. In her discussion of the argument-based approach, McKinney writes that students who she taught with this approach failed to do the same three things. The fact that the elements successful in McKinney's pedagogy are the same three things that failed in the argument-based approach pedagogy allow the reader to see that these elements are central to the McKinney's pedagogy in teaching the research paper. As such, in comparing her success with the argument-based approach and her own pedagogy, McKinney uses positionality by defining her pedagogical identity in relation to the argument-based teaching of research narratives.

McKinney does not only define her pedagogical identity; like Thelin, she also uses positionality to positively represent it by creating distance between her pedagogy and current-traditional pedagogy and by making a link between the argument-based pedagogy and current-traditional pedagogy. In the article, current traditional sensibilities are defined by James McDonald as "a dangerous uncritical acceptance of the authority of [texts]" (qtd in McKinney 74). When McKinney describes the unsuccessful results of the argument-based teaching of research papers, she focuses on the fact that, when she tried these techniques, the students failed to analyze or interrogate their sources. In other words, they still did exactly what McKinney and

McDonald describe as current-traditional pedagogy. Emphasizing the similarities between the outcomes of teaching with current-traditional and argument-based pedagogies allows McKinney to use positionality to create a link between the two by representing them in relationship to each other. McKinney makes it clear through her essay that current-traditional pedagogy is something to be avoided, as it is an approach that rhetoric and composition has abandoned (73-74). As such, the argument-based approach against which McKinney's pedagogical identity is defined is negatively represented through its link with another negatively-represented pedagogy.

McKinney's pedagogy, on the other hand, is positively represented. In her narration of Reshonda's work, the reader can see that McKinney's pedagogy is associated with elements that oppose current-traditional pedagogy. Rather than accepting what she finds in secondary sources, Reshonda interrogates her sources in relation to her own views, allowing her to incorporate new information into her existing viewpoint (80-81). This is the opposite of what happens in the argumentative approach and in current-traditional pedagogy. As such, McKinney defines current-traditional pedagogy and then uses the definition to illustrate that, while other approaches fit that definition, hers does not, allowing her to use positionality to both define and positively represent her pedagogy.

McKinney uses positionality to create professional and pedagogical identities and to characterize those identities in a way that will appeal to the reader. Doing so allows her to persuade the reader to consider her pedagogy. McKinney's entire pedagogical identity, and much of her professional identity, is built around creating a sense of progress and of growth. In defining her professional identity, McKinney creates a link between her pedagogy and the growth of rhetoric and composition; her pedagogy is where the field is headed. As such, if the reader subscribes to McKinney's pedagogy, she becomes part of the field's forward momentum;

if the reader does not subscribe to McKinney's pedagogy, she gets left behind in a stagnant, current-traditional past. McKinney presents the reader with a choice between investing in her pedagogy or being labeled as current traditional. McKinney uses positionality to define professional and pedagogical identities that invite the reader to become a part of her own field rather than being left behind, a choice that ultimately has the potential to persuade.

Using positionality, McKinney attempts to persuade her reader to invest in her pedagogy, but this is only the first part of the two-stage approach to persuasion used in the classroom narrative. In the second stage, McKinney uses context, as constructed through narrative elements, to persuade the reader that her pedagogy can be implemented in the reader's classroom. The first contextual element that McKinney creates is a disciplinary setting based around the field of rhetoric and composition. This is the same contextual element that McKinney uses to define her professional identity, but, as a setting, it serves a different rhetorical purpose. In creating setting, McKinney attempts to persuade readers that, because her pedagogy works in their shared setting of the field of rhetoric and composition, it will also work in their individual classrooms. McKinney creates a disciplinary setting based around the idea of evolution, a setting that functions like an environment in which the entire narrative, including McKinney and her readers, is immersed. McKinney creates this environment and immersion through the organization of her literature review. McKinney begins by establishing that rhetoric and composition is evolving away from current-traditional rhetoric, which she defines as encouraging a reliance on textual authority, discouraging the personal, and marginalizing the students. The future of rhetoric and composition, however, lies in the direct opposite of these ideas; it encourages students to be critical about texts, it makes room for personal and experiential knowledge, and it recognizes that students can be researchers. McKinney creates a context in

which rhet/comp is somewhere between those two places. In order to create this inbetweenness as a setting and as an element of context, McKinney utilizes the organization of her literature review, which narrates the progression the field has made away from current-traditional ideologies and towards an incorporation of the experiential and the personal. She begins with the argument-based approach described earlier which, as McKinney demonstrates through her definition of her pedagogical identity, is still too closely aligned with current-traditional rhetoric. Then, she describes Ken Macrorie's I-Search approach which, through its focus on 'meta-writing [and] meta-researching' begins to incorporate experiential knowledge (74). Then, McKinney discusses Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater and Bonnie Sustain, whose textbook *Fieldworking* discusses the incorporation of the personal through ethnography. The literature review ends with a description of McKinney's own pedagogy, allowing it to serve as the next step in rhet/comp progression away from current-tradition and towards a new identity. Through the organization of McKinney's literature review the reader sees a story about the journey of the field of rhetoric and composition, as the theories discussed illustrate a disavowal of current-tradition ideas and incorporation of ideas that align with McKinney's pedagogy. The literature review is storied, as the narrative of rhet/comp's journey becomes the setting of the larger classroom narrative because the journey is ongoing. The placement of the literature review also contributes to creating the setting. The fact that the literature review is placed so early in the essay – it begins on the second page, even before McKinney has reached her thesis statement - means that it can serve as a setting for the entire rest of the essay. From the beginning of the essay, the reader is immersed in the disciplinary environment and in the journey of rhet/comp, as McKinney's pedagogy represents its next step. Before reading anything else, the reader can understand and see evidence of the evolving field of rhetoric and composition as a setting for McKinney's



pedagogy. This setting is not created with just any theory, but with widely used and recognized theory. Many of her readers, as composition instructors, will be familiar with the argument-based approach and with the specific theorists discussed, such as Ken Macrorie. Because these are theorists that the reader may know, may have studied, or may use in her own research and teaching, it becomes easier for her to see that McKinney is working within the same context that she does. Through the narrative presentation of rhetoric and composition's journey using theory with which the reader is familiar, the reader can see that journey as one she has experienced.

In addition to using setting to create an environment that serves as part of her context, McKinney also uses characterization to create student characters that mimic the reader's own students. Just as Thelin did, McKinney creates student characters that are general, a process that begins with a description of a class that is struggling with her pedagogy: "Even after my stressing the importance of their own research through our readings, discussions, and the assignment itself, my students in general wanted to use their library research almost to the exclusion of their primary research" (78). In the end, many of their "papers became data dumps" with prose that was "stiff and academic" (78). What McKinney describes is a situation that her readers have likely encountered in their own classrooms. Because of their lack of experience with academic writing and their lack of comfort with experiential, primary research, McKinney's students struggle with the complicated task of writing with both the academic and the experiential. Narrating this struggle allows McKinney to illustrate that her students, as part of her context, are not that different from the reader's.

McKinney reinforces the similarities between her students and the reader's by creating three specific student characters that function as elements of context. Even still these three students, rather than being individuals, function as representations of typical problems that

students encountered with McKinney's pedagogy. McKinney writes three short vignettes that describe the students' assignments, their topics, and the issues that they have with her pedagogy. Using both primary and secondary research, each student was required to complete a project that describes multiple perspectives about a subculture. Ryan, a student writing about the police department, recognizes multiple perspectives, but does not recognize how to reconcile all of them in one paper (79). Angel, a student writing about emergency rooms, struggles with the process of research in general, as she finds one Internet source and uses it as the basis for her entire paper (79-80). Reshonda, who is writing about her beliefs about children with ADHD, is the only student who successfully composes a research paper using McKinney's pedagogy. Even though McKinney provides these students with names and discusses their specific topics, she still does not characterize them as people. The list presented above is all the reader learns about Ryan, Angel, and Reshonda because they are meant to function not as individuals but as representations of three common problems that many students have with writing. Because these problems are potentially commonplace, McKinney's readers, as composition instructors, may recognize them, as they may have encountered such problems in their own classrooms or taught students who have these same issues. Because Angel, Ryan, and Reshonda resemble their own students, readers are able to recognize their own students in McKinney's student characters. By using characterization to create a context in the form of student characters, McKinney attempts to persuade the reader that they share a similar classroom context.

McKinney uses setting and characters as a way to persuade the reader that they share a similar context because, if they share similar students and a similar setting, the pedagogy can work for the reader as it did for McKinney. This connection between McKinney's context and the reader's is persuasive because of the connection between narrative and knowledge. As Doyle

and Carter write, experience is necessary for the mind to create a story about something and that story is necessary to create knowledge about it (133-134). The connection created between McKinney's context and the reader's is really a connection between the narrative presented in the text and the reader's pre-existing narrative about teaching. This connection allows the classroom narrative about teaching with McKinney's pedagogy to stand in for the direct experience of teaching with McKinney's pedagogy, a fact that allows the reader to understand the pedagogy and how to use it. This understanding is the crux of the two stage approach to persuasion used by the classroom narrative. The author's use of narrative elements to create a context that is similar to that of the reader takes advantage of the connection between narrative and knowledge, allowing the reader to understand how the pedagogy can be implemented. This understanding is preceded by the use of positionality to construct professional and pedagogical identities that are used to persuade the reader to invest in the author's pedagogy. The combination of investment and understanding is meant to persuade the reader to adopt, reject, or think critically about the pedagogy.

## **Narrative Knowledge and Persuasive Positionality - A Conclusion**

The preceding analysis of Thelin and McKinney illustrates that classroom narratives use positionality to persuade the reader to invest in the authors' pedagogy and use the text's narrative features to persuade the reader that the pedagogy can work in her context. It is a particularly effective persuasion, which is important to note in light of the fact that classroom narratives are not few and far between; the classroom narrative is a widely published genre that is part of the discourse of the field of rhetoric and composition. In the last year or so, several journals have published classroom narratives. In its two most recent issues, *Computers and Composition* published several classroom narratives. In "Make It Do or Do Without: Transitioning from a Tech-Heavy to a Tech-Light Institution: a Cautionary Tale," Erin Karper narrates the changes in her pedagogy as she transitions between institutions with varying levels of technology, while Susan Kirtley narrates the pedagogy she utilizes in teaching students to explore new literacies through the composition of technological literacy narratives in "Rendering Technology Visible: The Technological Literacy Narrative." Similarly, in "'Okay, My Rant is Over': The Language of Emotion in Computer-Mediated Communication" Angela Laflen and Brittany Fiorenza narrate their exploration of ranting in the online composition courses they teach. *College Composition and Communication*, in its December 2012 issue, published "Training in the Archives: Archival Research as Professional Development" by Jonathan Buehl, in which the author narrates his teaching of an archival research course. Additionally, *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* published classroom narratives in its 2012 issues, as did *Journal of Basic Writing* in its 2011 issues. The number of recently published classroom narratives indicates that the genre is a part of the way that teachers and scholars communicate about pedagogy. As such, the identification of the classroom

narrative and the techniques it uses to persuade can contribute to an understanding of how teachers communicate about pedagogy at a scholarly level. Classroom narratives are not fleeting break room conversations between teachers; they are published, scholarly works that exist in well-known journals and highly accessible databases. They are cited by other articles, both narrative and non-narrative, making classroom narratives part of the field's larger conversations about pedagogy. As such, it seems necessary to understand how they persuade and how they create knowledge because classroom narratives are part of the field's discourse.

As part of the field's discourse about pedagogy, the classroom narrative has a direct relationship to teaching practice. The purpose of the classroom narrative is to persuade the reader to think about the author's pedagogy. That is not to say that a reader will immediately incorporate a pedagogy after reading a classroom narrative, but, because the classroom narrative adds to her understanding of pedagogy, that knowledge can become part of how the reader thinks about pedagogy. The classroom narrative, more than other form of scholarship, allows the author to take advantage of the connection between theory and practice. In many ways, the classroom narrative represents a blueprint for conceiving and implementing a pedagogy. The narrative form allows the author to discuss the theory behind the pedagogy while simultaneously illustrating how it is enacted in the classroom, adding to the reader's knowledge about pedagogy. Even if the reader does not use the pedagogy described in the classroom narrative, it is still likely to become part of the way she thinks about pedagogy, which influences her practice. Because of the classroom narrative's connection to practice, it seems important to understand how the classroom narrative persuades and creates knowledge. As classroom narrative is part of the field's discourse about pedagogy and about teaching, it seems necessary to understand how the genre persuades and how it talks about pedagogy.

There are two significant implications to understanding the classroom narrative's use of persuasion. The first implication is that the classroom narrative, because of its persuasive use of narrative features, can create pedagogical knowledge. Understanding how the classroom narrative creates pedagogical knowledge allows for a more critical reading of narrative texts. Walter Doyle and Kathy Carter write that knowledge is created when the mind makes stories of experience. They are speaking of personal experience, the kind that a teacher would gain from actually teaching with Thelin's or McKinney's pedagogy (134-135). The classroom narrative is able to represent the experience through the act of narration, which allows for the construction of knowledge. Understanding this connection between narrative and knowledge, as well as the written text's role in that connection, creates the potential for a more sophisticated reading of narrative texts because the reader sees and can interrogate how the knowledge gained from the narrative is created. She can potentially critique and experience simultaneously. She can still experience Thelin's practice in his disastrous classroom and McKinney's frustration with teaching the research paper. She can experience the guilt Thelin feels about failing students and the triumph McKinney feels when Reshonda is able to write a successful research paper, while being critical about how the authors' emotions are connected to her own feelings about teaching and her feelings themselves. Through Thelin's and McKinney's use of context, the reader can experience the kinds of students they taught and the sort of departments and disciplines in which they worked while being critical about the connection the authors make between her context and their own. The text's narrative features allow the reader to experience what it is like to try and to fail at critical pedagogy or at teaching the research paper, and an understanding of the classroom narrative allows her to interrogate the representation of this experience in relation to her own teaching experience. Even as the reader experiences the events and emotions of the narrative, she

can be wary of and critique the knowledge being created, through an understanding that, because this knowledge is created through a persuasive narrative, it is subjective. Through an understanding of how classroom narratives persuade and create knowledge, the reader is able to be critical about the text and, by extension, the knowledge it creates.

The classroom narrative is able to create knowledge because of its persuasive use of narrative features. While understanding the classroom narrative's process of persuasion can allow the reader to be more critical in reading these texts, understanding of the narrative features themselves can help the reader become a more persuasive author of narrative texts. One of the more important features of the classroom narrative is its storying of scholarly elements or its blending of the scholarly and the narrative. In an analysis of a classroom narrative like McKinney's, the reader can see how, for example, the literature review is storied, how it becomes part of the narrative. McKinney's literature review does more than present the theory that influenced her pedagogy; it creates the setting for the entire article, a setting that functions as one of the article's primary persuasive tools. Thelin does the same in his results section, as his explanation of students' reflections on his course is presented as a series of mini-narratives used to explain those results. Understanding classroom narrative's use of narrative features can allow the reader to see the persuasive potential of scholarly, storied elements, like McKinney's literature review and Thelin's results section, potentially encouraging her to incorporate such elements in her own narrative writing. A second important narrative feature of the classroom narrative is its use of characterization and the line that it rides between creating characters and creating archetypes. Both Thelin and McKinney create students characters that function more as representations than as people. Understanding the use of characterization in persuasive, narrative texts can allow the reader to use her own characters more persuasively. An understanding of

these narrative features and their connection to knowledge creation can allow the reader to more persuasively compose narrative texts of her own. Ultimately, the ability to write and to be critical of persuasive narratives can allow for more in-depth participation in rhetoric and composition's ongoing discussion of pedagogy.

The second significant implication of this thesis's discussion of the classroom narrative lies in the classroom narrative's use of positionality as a form of persuasion, a topic that most positionality theory does not discuss. In the classroom narrative, the framework for positionality is created by the narrative aspects of the text, as the author's identity is defined in relation to contextual elements that are constituted through narrative features. Positionality is persuasive because, in the process of defining her identity, the author of the classroom narrative characterizes her own identity positively. Thelin, for example, strives to associate himself with student responsibility and engagement and with a concern for student learning, values that his audience likely shares. McKinney attempts to associate her identity, both professional and pedagogical, with a sense of progress, capitalizing on the fact that most readers will not want to be left behind as their discipline evolves. As such, their use of positionality is persuasive because the authors align themselves with qualities that the reader values. In addition, the author of the classroom narrative presents other alternatives, whether in the form of other teachers or other pedagogies, as being less desirable than his pedagogy. Both Thelin and McKinney attempt to associate pedagogies other than their own with current-traditional pedagogy. In this way, the reader is encouraged to accept the authors' pedagogies over the alternative. The primary element in this persuasion is the author, or the way that the author uses positionality to represent himself/herself in the text.



It is the author's identity and the way that she uses positionality to define it that makes the persuasion work, which is interesting given the fact that most positionality theory does not discuss the persuasive potential of positionality even though understanding this potential may be necessary for a critical reading of texts that employ it. The majority of positionality theory approaches it as a way of recognizing that fieldwork is not neutral. In the process of collecting data or interviewing research subjects, the author influences both the data and the subject. Positionality is a way to explain the author's influence by focusing on individual aspects of her identity and how those aspects affect the research process. Positionality theory holds that both the author's influences and their effects need to be explained because they offer the reader a way to evaluate the text critically. With this information, the reader sees the biases in the data, allowing a critical assessment of the data and the text (Fontejon-Bonnoir 32). Many of the data's biases, particularly in fieldwork about teaching, come from the author/teacher. Some theorists go so far as to recognize the use of positionality as an author's obligation to the reader (Altman 321). The interesting element about this concept is that, in fulfilling this obligation to the reader, authors who use positionality are also persuading her. In focusing so much on the author, positionality creates a kind of protagonist through which the reader can experience the narrative. The more similar the protagonist is to the reader, the more likely she is to view the protagonist favorably, which in turn means that she is more likely to be persuaded (Slater 172). While positionality theory discusses the effect that the author's identity has on her data and on her text, it does not often discuss the effect that the author's personality has on her reader. If, as positionality theory claims, it is necessary for the reader to understand how the author influences her data in order for the text to be read critically, then it also seems necessary to understand how the author influences the reader for the same reason. Approaching positionality as a persuasive

tool proposes a rethinking of positionality, or at the very least, an acknowledgment that the tool used to explain why the author cannot be neutral cannot itself be neutral. Understanding the classroom narrative is one way to begin this rethinking of positionality. As a part of reconsidering positionality as a persuasive tool, the reader becomes better able to critique and to produce texts that utilize positionality.

The classroom narrative's use of persuasion and the connection that it draws between narrative and knowledge are what initially drew me to the genre. During my first semester teaching, I gave an assignment that did not go as planned. I tried to create an assignment that responded to my students' interests, hoping that this would encourage them to engage with rhetoric. That engagement did not materialize, and I was met, in many cases, with confusion and resistance. As a teacher, I was concerned about what had happened and why. Did I make an error in conceiving the assignment? Had I not presented it clearly? Was there something about the students themselves or their dynamic that made such a group project untenable? Given this situation I, like many other teachers, turned to research to try to answer these questions. In the course of that research, I found the classroom narrative. When I found the classroom narrative, I found theory that was accessible. The narrative aspect of the classroom narrative allowed me to clearly see how and why the author's pedagogy worked and, most importantly, how that pedagogy was connected to my own practice. When I read the first classroom narrative that I found – "Understanding Problems in the Critical Classroom" by William H. Thelin – I was immediately struck by how closely his classroom and his frustrations resembled my own. The more classroom narratives that I read, however, the more clearly I was able to see why that resemblance was strong - I was responding to Thelin's persuasive use of positionality and narrative features - and what this resemblance meant for the knowledge I was gaining from

classroom narratives. In the end, I did not incorporate critical pedagogy into my classroom, but I did gain an understanding of critical pedagogy. That understanding enabled me to write this thesis and provided me with new knowledge about pedagogy and the relationships among pedagogies. As an instructor and a graduate student, this knowledge and an understanding of how classroom narratives persuade allow me to interrogate narrative scholarship more critically and to acknowledge my own positionality in my narrative writing, both of which allow me to engage more critically in the field of rhetoric and composition's discourse about pedagogy.

## Works Cited

- Altman, Dennis. "Writing the Self." *Anthropology Quarterly* 75.2 (2002): 317-321. *JSTOR*. Web. 28 Aug. 2012.
- Alcoff, Linda. "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory." *Signs* 13.3 (1988): 405-436. *JSTOR*. Web. 25 Aug. 2012.
- Carter, Kathy. "The Place of Story in Research on Teaching and Teacher Education." *Educational Researcher* 22.1 (1993): 5-18. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 Jan. 2013.
- Chiseri-Strater, Elizabeth. "Turning in Upon Ourselves: Positionality, Subjectivity, and Reflexivity in Case Study and Ethnographic Research." *Ethics and Representation in Qualitative Studies of Literacy*. Eds. Peter Mortensen and Gesa E. Kirsch. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1996. 115-132. *Google Scholar*. Web. 26 Aug. 2012.
- Doyle, Walter and Kathy Carter. "Narrative and Learning to Teach: Implications for Teacher-Education Curriculum." *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 35 (2003): 1-8. *Google Scholar*. 21 Dec. 2011.
- Fairbanks, Colleen. "Telling Stories: Reading and Writing Research Narratives." *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 11.4 (1996): 320-340. *Omnifile Full Text Select*. Web. 24 Oct. 2011.
- Fontejon-Bonnoir, Gina A. "The I in Interpretive Research: Positionality in Qualitative Studies." *Silliman Journal* 45.1 (2004): 29-43. Print.
- Johnson-Bailey, Juanita, "Enjoining Positionality and Power in Narrative Work: Balancing Contentious and Modulating Forces." *Foundations for Research: Methods of Inquiry in Education and Social Sciences*. Eds. Kathleen deMarrais and Stephen D. Lapan.

- Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2004. 123-138. *Google Scholar*. Web. 8 Sept. 2012.
- Kreiswirth, Martin. "Merely Telling Stories? Narrative and Knowledge in the Human Sciences." *Poetics Today* 21.2 (2000): 293-318. *Google Scholar*. Web. 10 Jan. 2013.
- McKinney, Jackie Grutsch. "The American Scholar Writes the New 'Research' Essay." *Journal of Teaching Writing* 20.1 (2002): 71-86. *Google Scholar*. Web. 7 Jan. 2013.
- Slater, Michael D. "Entertainment Education and the Persuasive Impact of Narratives." *Narrative Impact: Social and Cognitive Foundations*. Eds. Melanie C. Green, Jeffrey J. Strange, and Timothy C. Brock. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers (2002): 157-181. Print.
- Thelin, William H. "Understanding Problems in the Critical Classroom." *College Composition and Communication* 57.1 (2005): 114-141. Print.

## Works Consulted

- Aveling, Nado. "Where do you come from? Critical Storytelling as Teaching Strategy within the Context of Teacher Education." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 22.1 (2001): 34-48. *Google Scholar*. Web. 25 Sept. 2011.
- Bizzell, Patricia. "Beyond Antifoundationalism to Rhetorical Authority: Problems Defining 'Cultural Literacy'." *College English* 52.6 (1990): 61-675. *JSTOR*. Web. 17 Feb. 2010.
- "Classroom Authority and Critical Pedagogy." *American Literary History* 3.4 (1991): 847-863. *JSTOR*. Web. 17 Feb. 2012.
- Coulter, Cathy A and Mary Lee Smith. "The Construction Zone: Literary Elements in Narrative Research." *Educational Researcher* 38.8 (2009): 577-590. *JSTOR*. 13 Nov. 2011.
- Daiute, Colette and Michelle Fine. "Researchers as Protagonists in Teaching and Interpretive Process." *Up Close and Personal: The Teaching and Learning of Narrative Research*. Eds. Ruthellen Josselson, Amia Lieblich, and Dan P. McAdams. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2003. 61-78. Print.
- Dal Cin, Sonya, Mark P. Zanna, and Geoffrey T. Fong. "Narrative Persuasion and Overcoming Resistance." *Resistance and Persuasion*. Eds. Eric S Knowles and Jay A Linn. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2001. 175-192. *Google Scholar*. Web. 2 June 2012.
- Doecke, Brenton, Jenny Brown, and John Loughran. "Teacher Talk: The Role of Story and Anecdote in Constructing Professional Knowledge for Beginning Teachers." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 16 (2000): 335-348. *Science Direct*. Web. 25 Sept. 2011.
- Durst, Russel K. "Can We Be Critical of Critical Pedagogy?" *College Composition and Communication* 58.1 (2006): 110-114. Print.

- Ellsworth, Elizabeth. "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy." *Harvard Educational Review* 59.3 (1989): 297-325. *Google Scholar*. Web. 25 March 2011.
- Friere, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Continuum, 1970. Print.
- Gallagher, Chris W., Peter M. Gray, and Shari Stenberg. "Teacher Narrative as Interruptive: Towards Critical Collegueship." *Symploke* 20.2 (2002): 32-51. Print.
- Giroux, Henry A. "Academic Freedom Under Fire: The Case for Critical Pedagogy." *College Literature* 33.2 (2006): 1-42. *JSTOR*. Web. 1 March 2011.
- "Pedagogy of the Depressed: Beyond the New Politics of Cynicism." *College Literature* 28.3 (2001): 1-32. *JSTOR*. Web. 1 March 2011.
- "Insurgent Multiculturalism and the Promise of Pedagogy." *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*. Ed. David Theo Goldberg. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994. 325-343. Print.
- Gore, Jennifer M. *The Struggle for Pedagogies: Critical and Feminist Discourses as Regimes of Truth*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- Hamilton, Mary Lynn, Laura Smith, and Kristen Worthington. "Fitting the Methodology with Research: An Exploration of Narrative, Self Study, and Auto-Ethnography." *Studying Teacher Education* 4.1 (2008): 17-28. Print.
- Hay, Trevor and Julie White. "The Teacher Writer: Narrative Theory, Storytelling and Research" Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Australian Association of Research in Education. 27 Nov-1 Dec 2005, University of Western Sydney, Parramatta, Australia. *Google Scholar*. Web. 25 Sept. 2011.

- Hyland, Ken. "Bringing in the Reader: Addressee Features in Academic Articles." *Written Communication* 18.4 (2001): 549-574. *Google Scholar*. Web. 24 March 2012.
- . "Stance and Engagement: A Model of Interaction in Academic Discourse." *Discourse Studies* 7.2 (2004): 173-192. *Google Scholar*. Web. 24 March 2012.
- Josselson, Ruthellen. "Narrative Research and the Challenge of Accumulating Knowledge." *Narrative Inquiry* 16.1 (2003): 3-10. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 21 Dec. 2011.
- Jukuri, Stephen D. "Private Classrooms Made Public: Writing Program Administration and the Development of a Community of Scholar-Teacher Colleagues." *Rhetoric Review* 21.1 (2002): 70-79. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 Oct. 2011.
- Kirsch, Gesa E. and Joy S. Ritchie. "Beyond the Personal: Theorizing a Politics of Location in Composition Research." *College Communication and Composition* 46.1 (1995): 7-29. Print.
- Mayes, Patricia. "The Discursive Construction of Identity and Power in the Critical Classroom: Implications for Applied Critical Theories." *Discourse & Society* 21.2 (2010): 189-210. Print.
- Moser, Sarah. "Personality: A new Positionality?" *Area* 40.3 (2008): 383-392. Print.
- Preskill, Stephen. "Narratives of Teaching and the Quest for the Second Self." *Journal of Teacher Education* 49.5 (1998): 344-357. *Google Scholar*. Web. 25 Sept. 2011.
- Robertson, Jennifer. "Reflexivity Redux: A Pithy Polemic on 'Positionality'." *Anthropological Quarterly* 75.4. (2002): 785-792. *JSTOR*. 26 Aug. 2012.



- Salvatori, Mariolina Rizzi. "The Scholarship of Teaching: Beyond the Anecdotal." *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* 2.3 (2002): 297-310. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 25 Sept. 2011.
- Schaafsma, David et al. "Composing Storied Ground: Four Generations of Narrative Inquiry." *English Education* 39.4 (2011): 282-305. *JSTOR*. Web. 26 Sept. 2011.
- Seitz, David. "Hard Lessons Learned Since the First Generation of Critical Pedagogy." *College English* 64.4 (2002): 503-512. *JSTOR*. Web. 13 Feb. 2011.
- Slater, Michael D. and Donna Rouner. "Entertainment-Education and Elaboration Likelihood: Understanding the Processing of Narrative Persuasion." *Communication Theory* 12.2 (2002): 173-191. *Google Scholar*. Web. 24 May 2012.
- Thelin, William H. and John Paul Tassoni. "Introduction: Blundering the Hero Narrative: The Critical Teacher in Classroom Representations." *Blundering for a Change: Errors & Expectations in Critical Pedagogy*. Eds. William H Thelin and John Paul Tassoni. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 2000. 1-7. Print.
- "William H. Thelin's Response to Russel Durst." *College Composition and Communication* 58.1 (2006): 114-118. Print.
- Weber, Sandra. "The Narrative Anecdote in Teacher Education." *Journal of Education for Teaching* 19.1 (1993): 71-82. *The Image and Identity Research Collective*. Web. 26 Sept. 2011.
- Yoon, K. Hyoejin. "Affecting the Transformative Intellectual: Questioning 'Noble' Sentiments in Critical Pedagogy and Composition." *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory* 25.4 (2005): 717-759. Print.

Zeichner, Ken. "The New Scholarship in Teacher Education." *Educational Researcher* 28.9 (1999): 4-15. *JSTOR*. Web. 25 Sept. 2011.