Writing as Inquiry for Student Self-Understanding and Integrity

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Author Note

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This paper was supported by funding from the Aspirations for Student Learning Symposium at Virginia Tech.

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Abstract

In this paper, we present the value of writing as inquiry for student self-understanding and integrity, particularly in preparation for student engagement in fields of human service. The authors introduce Creative Alternative Processes (CAP) as one methodological approach to writing as inquiry, emphasizing that CAP may be harnessed to support students to develop empathy for those that they learn about and seek to serve in human services (Lather & Smithies, 1995; Munly & Sheusi, 2012; Munly & Tilley-Lubbs, 2013; Munly & Tilley-Lubbs, 2014; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Munly and Tilley-Lubbs discuss writing as inquiry as a way to promote multilogicality among students, as well as a means to teach Freire's value of resistance of the banking concept of education (Freire, 1970; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008; Noddings, 2010). Writing as inquiry can provide a personal and comfortable engagement with material that is a hopeful platform and first step in self-understanding toward developing multilogicality, optimal integrity in living and acting in a community with others. Our suggestions for practical implementation of writing as inquiry lead into the learning outcomes and practical implications of our paper:

Three Proposed Learning Outcomes:

1. Understanding the nature of and substantive literature surrounding writing as inquiry.
2. Understanding existing example applications of Creative Alternative Processes (CAP).
3. Understanding the substantive literature related to multilogicality and resistance of the banking concept of education.

Three Practical Implications for Scholars and Practitioners:

1. Understanding the value and potential for implementation of writing as inquiry and Creative Alternative Processes (CAP) across diverse course content and structure.
2. Learning how to apply *writing as inquiry* and Creative Alternative Processes (CAP) across diverse course content and structure.

3. Understanding the value of multilogicality and resistance of the banking concept of education across disciplines, with this understanding as a platform for developing related pedagogical methods of implementation.

*Keywords:* Writing as Inquiry, Creative Alternative Processes (CAP), Multilogicality, Banking Concept of Education, Pedagogy, Self-Understanding, Integrity
Writing as Inquiry for Student Self-Understanding and Integrity

In the following discussion, we present the value of writing as inquiry for fostering student self-understanding and integrity, with particular relevance for student engagement in fields of human service (Goodall, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Munly & Sheusi, 2012; Munly & Tilley-Lubbs, 2013; Munly & Tilley-Lubbs, 2014; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). According to Goodall and Ellis, the act of writing alters the way we think about what and how we know; it follows that writing gives meaning and values to what we are learning. Similarly, through writing, students are able to understand their own values and positions with regard to course topics and concepts, and through establishing this self-awareness, they have a more stable, grounded platform for their own integrity and for exploring these topics and concepts related to communities and cultures outside of their own experiential parameters. Such a stable platform based on self-knowledge can support more thorough exploration of coursework, a broader understanding for related human services field study, and readiness to work with and serve others.

Following our presentation of this fundamental understanding of writing as inquiry, we introduce Creative Alternative Processes (CAP) as a methodological approach to writing as inquiry, discussing how it has been and may be further implemented to support empathy among students and future human services professionals (Lather & Smithies, 1995; Munly & Sheusi, 2012; Munly & Tilley-Lubbs, 2013; Munly & Tilley-Lubbs, 2014; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). We also discuss writing as inquiry as a way to support multilogicality among students, and in effect resist the banking concept of education (Freire, 1970; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008; Noddings, 2010). Writing as inquiry supports a connection with material that is foundational for
self-understanding toward developing multilogicality, and consequent integrity in living and acting in a community. Our discussion of the value and applications of writing as inquiry that follows incorporates key content to address the learning outcomes and practical implications of our paper:

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Three Practical Implications for Scholars and Practitioners:

1. Understanding the value and potential for implementation of writing as inquiry and Creative Alternative Processes (CAP) across diverse course content and structure.
2. Learning how to apply writing as inquiry and Creative Alternative Processes (CAP) across diverse course content and structure.
3. Understanding the value of multilogicality and resistance of the banking concept of education across disciplines, with this understanding as a platform for developing related pedagogical methods of implementation.

Learning Outcome 1: Understanding the Nature of and Substantive Literature Surrounding Writing as Inquiry

In presenting writing as inquiry as a research method, it is important to establish that it stems from a specific theoretical framework, a unique foundational epistemology. “Different theoretical frameworks… privilege different ways of seeing the world in general” (Steinberg, 2012, p. 191). The idea that the act of writing itself is a valid method of inquiry, including the
subjective reflection involved in the writing process, stems from poststructuralist feminist thought that has questioned the authority and motive of objective science.

[Feminist researchers charged that the so-called objectivity of modernist science was nothing more than a signifier for the denial of social and ethical responsibility, ideological passivity, and the acceptance of privileged socio-political position of the researcher. Thus, feminist theorists argued that modernist pseudo-objectivity demands the separation of thought and feeling, the devaluation of any perspective maintained with emotional conviction. Feeling is designated as an inferior form of human consciousness—those who rely on thought or logic operating within this framework can justify their repression of those associated with emotion or feeling. (Steinberg, 2012, p. 190)

From this foundation in feminist theory has evolved further critical poststructural thought that accepts the “humanness” as a valuable insight and “that we can use the human as a research instrument” (Steinberg, 2012, p. 190). Steinberg (2012) thus describes the beginnings of **writing as inquiry** as a valid method of research: “From this perspective inquiry begins with researchers drawing upon their own experience. Such an educational researcher is a human being studying other human beings focusing on their inner world of experience” (p. 190).

Goodall and Ellis, authors who have written formative theory about and applications of **writing as inquiry**, further elaborate on the value of the human as a research instrument, as they describe how the act of writing changes the way we as humans think about what and how we know; it thus follows that writing lends values and meaning to our scholarship content (Goodall, 2008; Ellis, 2004). Goodall (2008) described **writing as inquiry** in the form of narrative “as a way of knowing,” and as a tool “for discovering meaning and communicating it to readers
through stories” (p. 13). Ellis (2009) elaborated on the potential for evolution in one’s *writing as inquiry* processes by revisiting one’s writing as a recursive method to explore and understand fresh layers of meaning within it, yielding deepening and broadening contexts of human experience. Poulos (2009) has taken a more applied stance to these recursive methods, describing them as “communicative action,” rejecting inaction in favor of action in the form of writing and understanding life contexts, continuously moving toward greater awareness of one’s self, others and community (p. 17).

**Learning Outcome 2: Understanding Existing Example Applications of Creative Alternative Processes as an Approach in Writing as Inquiry**

Creative Alternative Processes (CAP) is one methodological approach to *writing as inquiry*, and it may be harnessed to support students to develop empathy for those that they learn about and seek to serve in human services (Alexander, 2013; Munly & Sheusi, 2012; Munly & Tilley-Lubbs, 2013; Munly & Tilley-Lubbs, 2014; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). CAP is often a visual way of presenting data that evoke a greater response or recognition from the audience than traditional presentation of data (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). This evocative quality clearly relates back to Poulos’s (2009) description of *writing as inquiry* as “communicative action,” and in the case of CAP rejects inaction in favor of evocation of response. CAP may include processes that are solely in the form of writing, as well as other modalities, including visual art and performance. For example, Alexander (2013) discussed a student’s autoethnographic performance, a type of CAP, and how it gave “further *voice, visibility,* and *viability* to the issue of HIV/AIDS in the Black community,” both raising community awareness and evoking a response (p. 540). Alexander (2013) elaborated that “The immediacy and
actuality of [the student’s] performance forced the class to feel the issues” above and beyond a related chapter assigned for reading (p. 540).

The assignment forces them to filter lived experience through scholarly texts (and back) as a form of rehydration, like trying to move a prune back to a plum; knowing how they exist in their own existential space but how they are informed by the other. These students attempt to use their own sensed and critical reflection on experience as the hydrating liquid of both embodied and scholarly knowing. (Alexander, p. 540)

Lather and Smithies’ (1995) hallmark presentation of findings in Troubling the Angels: Women Living With HIV/AIDS integrated CAP formatting to acknowledge the researchers’ awareness of their hierarchical positionality, or their own self-understanding, in relation to the participants. Through this self-understanding, they were able to approach their participants with greater integrity. Incorporating CAP yielded a greater understanding of the content and meaning of the work for themselves as the authors and for their readers, and it also served as an evocation of response from the community toward greater awareness and support of women living with HIV/AIDS.

In collaboration with Sheusi and Tilley-Lubbs, Munly has also incorporated CAP to better understand the care providers she researches, as well as herself as a researcher and caregiver, in relation to care recipients (Munly & Sheusi, 2012; Munly & Tilley-Lubbs, 2013; Munly & Tilley-Lubbs, 2014). CAP formats have included scripted narratives of care recipients to be performed by Munly, Tilley-Lubbs and their audiences, as well as graphic figures to visually depict layers of experience of both care providers and care recipients in the context of a medical system. Not only has CAP served to support Munly’s awareness of her own role as a researcher and caregiver in relation to those she studies and serves, but it has also provided a
format to share with audiences in hope of evoking a community response in favor of better systemic support for both caregivers and care recipients. In its many forms and applied content areas, CAP can support students to build empathy and understanding with regard to the topics and concepts about which they study and write, as well as with regard to individuals and populations that they may work with in the field. It can also serve as a tool for students to elicit responses from audiences regarding topics of importance that may otherwise remain underexamined.

Learning Outcome 3: Understanding the Substantive Literature Related to Multilogicality and Resistance of the Banking Concept of Education

When instructors implement writing as inquiry in its various forms, they are in effect accomplishing two feats: a) promoting multilogicality among students, and b) imparting Freire's value of resistance of the banking concept of education (Freire, 1970; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008; Noddings, 2010). For example, Alexander’s (2013) implementation of performance autoethnography discussed above supported student understanding of “the other” in relation to the self, and in that sense, multilogicality among diverse groups; this activity included expressive transmission of personal reflection and understanding to the larger classroom community. The critical engagement inherent in this practice naturally resists the banking concept of education, because students are actively creating knowledge, not passive recipients of information.

In some forms of writing as inquiry that are more independent and private, and not performed or shared with classmates, this method can provide students with an opportunity to own their experience without judgment from peers or professors; such comfort and ownership can be a crucial way to engage with material in the face of diverse classroom politics and values. Establishment of their identity with regard to course topics through writing, whether private or
shared, may also support students to be on more equal ground with the professor, with writing from students and professors considered equally valid as authentic representations of experience. Respecting student writing in this way is again resisting what Freire (1970) terms as the “banking concept of education” in which “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (p. 53). This type of respect and reciprocal value in student-teacher interaction is also supported by Care Theory (Noddings, 2010). Such a reciprocal and supportive approach to teaching, respecting both student and instructor perspectives, also facilitates “multilogicality,” or understanding “multiple perspectives in all dimensions” of one’s life (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 138). This profound understanding of one’s own and others’ perspectives would only further bolster student self-understanding, as well as student integrity that is tied to the ethic of understanding others in a diverse community.

Writing as inquiry is often seen as a tool in “a complex collage” of research methods called “bricolage,” involving “taking research strategies from a variety of scholarly disciplines and traditions as they are needed in the unfolding context of the research situation” (Steinberg, 2012, p. 184). This multiplicity of strategies naturally facilitated multilogicality, the ability to see numerous perspectives at once, and simultaneously resists the banking concept of education as it demands that a student actively “interprets, critiques, and deconstructs the text in question” (Steinberg, 2012, p. 184). Bricolage does not devalue other methods, but responds to what a research context needs, digging deeper at the epistemological foundations of research and related thought because of the diverse perspectives underlying the various methods brought to the table.
Practical Implication 1: The Value and Potential for Implementation of Writing as Inquiry and Creative Alternative Processes (CAP) Across Diverse Course Content and Structure

Writing as inquiry, including CAP, can be an effective method whether teaching through lecture or online mechanisms. For example, whether teaching online or in a lecture classroom, Munly and Tilley-Lubbs have both incorporated regular writing as inquiry to support students to have maximum exposure to the course material, opportunity to acknowledge and state their positionality with regard to the content, and occasions to reflect on material with peers. Munly sees her role as instructor to be one with a primary aim of supporting students to engage with course material sufficiently to trigger their intrinsic motivation for scholarship in the content area, understanding that students may start from diverse vantage points, both in ability and life experience. Students effectively used CAP processes to reflect on their social positioning with regard to clients served in human services programming.

Munly has found that given the opportunity to write about their positionality with regard to course material, students felt safe in their expression, as she was the only person to read and provide feedback on their writing. Many of these students stated that they would not have felt comfortable to speak about some of the more controversial human development topics in the classroom in front of their peers. As stated previously, this personal and comfortable engagement with material is a foundational first step in self-understanding and then toward developing multilogicality. Being clear on one’s own perspectives and positionality is crucial to be able to see another’s vantage point and consequently act with integrity in the community. Providing opportunity to selectively share with peers subsequently provided opportunity for...
further growth toward multilogicality, understanding diverse perspectives within their classroom community, and fundamentally secure in self-understanding.

The value of *writing as inquiry* is apparent in human services topics such as human development in which content (e.g., marriage equality) is often personal and volatile, as well as because of the need to see multiple perspectives among clients that one might serve in a human services community context. However, this method can be invaluable in all content areas as a means to safely generate independent and original thinking and consequent self-understanding before bringing individual ideas to the larger classroom experience. In an academic context in which students have lately evolved in “teaching to the test” environments, this opportunity for individual reflection and writing would have the potential to generate novel ideas and solutions in numerous fields, whether engineering, social sciences, or arts production and analysis.

**Practical Implication 2: Learning How to Apply Writing as Inquiry and Creative Alternative Processes (CAP) Across Diverse Course Content and Structure**

Learning to apply *Writing as Inquiry* and CAP methods across diverse course content and structure requires reflection from the instructors and practitioners wishing to exercise these approaches regarding their specific contexts. We would advise that instructors and practitioners study other examples of implementation to ascertain how such examples might be adapted for their own contexts. Munly integrates some examples below of how she has adapted implementation to best suit her own research and practice area. For example, Williams (2006) described how *writing as inquiry* in the form of autoethnography may be used in the context of offender rehabilitation to support the growth of a therapist’s insights into themselves as therapists, as well as growth of their empathy for the offender. Williams (2006) also suggested that this form of *writing as inquiry* may be a tool that offenders can use for their own therapy, to
understand their experience and have a way of telling and venting their own stories. Munly was inspired by Williams’ (2006) understanding of these types of applications of writing as inquiry as she reflected on the therapeutic relationship between caregivers and care recipients that she presents in some of her own research and writing.

With regard to a completely different content area outside of the human sciences, Duncan (2004) used writing as inquiry in the form of autoethnography to reflect and document whether she was able improve her practice of hypermedia design. She wrote that she externalized her inner dialogue as part of this process, and she reflected in light of developmental and pedagogical theory. Munly learned from Duncan’s approach, as she reflected on her potentially unsustainable role as a care provider and documented her progress and reflections on shortcomings, in light of gerontological and critical theories, and from these reflections understood what might be the best next steps as a sustainable professional to support individuals in an Adult Foster Care context.

Evans (2006) provided a different model of writing as inquiry, with two different summary sections; one was based in experiential description, again bringing the power of the emotions and raw experience to the forefront, and the other in terms of relevant literature, which had the effect of grounding the piece in the larger body of literature to which it contributed. This approach was also effective for Munly’s work, allowing her to capture the depth of experience related to Adult Foster Care work, but also bringing this experience back to the empirical research context to which it is meant to be a contributing work.

Individual wishing to implement writing as inquiry may also learn from others’ specific stylistic approaches. For example, Evans’ (2006) work presented nonsequential content, including current reflections on research in the context of interviews with an elderly woman and
the author’s memories or flashbacks of visiting his own grandmother. Furthermore, Evans’ (2006) incorporation of historical background on issues related to health care for women, with marked implications for elder women, brought context and power to the piece. In Munly’s writing as inquiry work that is based in Adult Foster Care, similar in some content to Evans’ work on elder female health and institutional care, she intermixed descriptions of Adult Foster Care settings with flashbacks on experiences she had working in nursing homes, in psychiatric units with older adults, and with her own older family members. Because Munly would like to make a social statement with her piece, to raise awareness of the experience of Adult Foster Care providers and the context in which they work, bringing in historical and research background also bolstered her efforts and helps to make the overall piece more compelling.

Evans was an example of one author who brought specific “tactics” to writing as inquiry. Similarly, Muncey (2005) suggested tactics including snapshots of herself in the context of the story she presented, artifacts (such as related documents that embody meaning related to the piece), metaphor (in her case, herself and her growth as a garden), and an idea of journeys in life. Muncey (2005) also emphasized acknowledgement of hegemonic bodies in society that make us feel certain ways; in work with students, one could ask them to think about their own stories in terms of a journey, and how these stories and journeys may have social significance for other individuals living with and in social power structures. Such tactics bring meaning not only to the softer subjects in education, but also to disciplines such as engineering that also exist within life contexts, individual and community. Writing as inquiry can allow for deeper reflection on the sequence of events in an individual’s life and education that results in specific academic and professional choices, independent from or driven by related social structures in the same community. In a similar tone, Clews and Furlong (2006) stated that writing as inquiry including
autoethnography provided “means to understand and express the tacit knowledge from human experience that shaped professional practices (i.e., curricula)” (p. 200). The authors discussed bringing forth their own experiences in their class and providing opportunity for their students to do the same as an exercise to understand inner experience that is indeed foundational to their work related to social work and aging. This constant revisiting of the foundations of a field within each participating student and professor has the potential to continually bring fresh perspective to the forefront of field efforts, in any discipline, and again promoting self-understanding for the student and professor, as well as integrity in what they bring to the community.

Anderson’s (2006) distinction of “analytic” from “evocative” writing as inquiry in the form of autoethnography served to solidify autoethnography as work that contributes to “developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena” (pp. 373-375). Anderson (2006) presented criteria for analytic autoethnography that included that the author be “a full member of the research group or setting” and that the author also references others (not just him or herself) as informants or voices in that context, a possible approach to promote a thorough self-understanding, understanding of community, and allowance for multiple voices (p. 378).

**Practical Implication 3: Understanding the Value of Multilogicality and Resistance of the Banking Concept of Education Across Disciplines, with this Understanding as a Platform for Developing Related Pedagogical Methods of Implementation**

Vryan (2006) emphasized a question that should be fundamental in understanding a writing as inquiry piece’s “usefulness to others” and capacity in achieving multilogicality and active learning that resists the banking concept of education: “…does the work help us better understand or explain other people, experience, and/or context” (p. 408). The collective
autoethnographic method employed by Kidd and Finlayson (2010) seemed to achieve this value, presenting the contexts, inner and outer, of nurses experiencing mental illness (caused by the workplace or not). This was a very useful model for Munly to reflect on co-constructing her *writing as inquiry* with the Adult Foster Care provider with whom she worked, as well as presenting multiple voices of care recipients. Kidd and Finlayson were effective at framing their work as a coherent whole, and interspersing dialogue, narrative description and background information about nursing as an institution. Munly has also strived in her own work to include such a combination of elements to effectively communicate both emotive and informative pieces of the Adult Foster Care context.

Furthermore, the meta-autoethnography approach used by Duarte and Hodge (2007) to review and analyze pieces from multiple voices and times and the relationship with hegemonic structures also inspired Munly to adopt a similar strategy for the purpose of creating a co-constructed autoethnography. In Munly’s piece, she included narrative not only from her experience in providing care for Adult Foster Care residents, but furthermore from foundational professional experiences in a nursing home and caring for her grandmother, and formative childhood experiences with her grandparents. In all of these pieces, there is acknowledgement, subtle or explicit, of societal structures that are at the basis of disparity experienced by either Munly’s grandparents or individuals in professional care settings. Clark/Keefe (2006) also presented an alternative way of presenting multi-voiced, multi-formatted and multi-perspective material, through an approach she called “ourstory” (p. 1180). She described “ourstory” as one “that blends academic, personal, biographical, and popular culture discourses” for the purpose of dissolving the disconnect between “private troubles and public issues” (p. 1180). This is again relevant for Munly in her work, as all of her reflections on care recipients and other related,
personal contexts are couched in significant public concerns related to health and economic systems. Bringing together the personal and public in a *writing as inquiry* piece clearly exercises the value of self-understanding for the purpose of bringing integrity to community efforts.

Tilley-Lubbs has lead two classroom initiatives exemplifying multilogicality in action that were presented at Virginia Tech’s Conference on Higher Education two different years, as a practice and poster session (Henderson et al., 2014; Munly et al., 2013). In the practice session, Tilley-Lubbs and her students demonstrated the recursive process of writing autoethnography as a form of *writing as inquiry*, and thus including one’s own multiple perspectives over iterations of the writing process (Munly et al., 2013). This practice also acknowledged possible tactics for including multiple voices and perspectives in one’s narrative, bringing the value of self-understanding back to integrity in the larger social and political context. Multilogicality was also practiced as the session fostered co-contribution between the instructor and students in a joint praxis to support session participants to engage with *writing as inquiry* as a method. The poster session lead by Tilley-Lubbs described a joint project in *writing as inquiry* between a graduate class at Virginia Tech and the Universida Autonoma de Aguascalientes, who worked together to provide multiple perspectives through individual recursive pieces collected through theory in one book (Henderson et al., 2014). The process of creating the book and the book content were part of an effort to bring engaged pedagogy to light, again resisting the banking concept of education and promoting multilogicality through self-understanding and the value of bringing that understanding in integrity back to the community.

**Conclusion**

As a result of this paper, we hope that you can take the value of *writing as inquiry* with you into your respective educational arenas to promote your students’ understanding of
themselves in the context of the content areas which they study, strengthening their foundation for developing subsequent original theory and research, and bringing their knowledge in integrity to the community. We also hope that you may find Creative Alternative Processes (CAP) as a useful tool to support students to reflect on and connect with both the content that they study and the populations that they serve, whether communities that will benefit from their innovative educational curricula or from the engineering feats that they accomplish. We believe that use of writing as inquiry and CAP methods can support your students to embrace and understand their own perspectives and the multilogicality in their scholarship, with multiple perspectives supporting the breadth of their scholarship and the quality of their work. We also hope that writing as inquiry and CAP methods can support your students to understand that they are not individuals to simply be filled up with knowledge, but that they are active participants in creating new knowledge and applications of it to better their communities.
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