

University of Houston  Clear Lake

Demystifying the Theoretical Framework and Literature Review in the Dissertation for Doctoral Students

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Objectives

- Understand current research on doctoral students' writing difficulties
- Learn about the challenges mid-size (5000 – 15000 students), HSI, commuter colleges' Writing Centers face when addressing these needs, and proposed solutions
- Identify additional questions that must be researched to assure efficacy in solving doctoral students' writing issues



Writing Center's Goals for a Targeted Population

Mid-size, HSI, commuter college's Writing Center (WC):

- Identifies unnecessarily clouded services for doctoral students
- Uncover gaps in WC services
- Provides efficacious andragogy for doctoral students

Key finding from anonymized interviews:

- Doctoral students experience challenges writing theoretical framework (TF) and literature review (LR)
- Need to create discourse community with cohorts
- Need quiet, recurring, accountable time to write

Definition of the Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework (TF)

“the theoretical framework is the foundation from which all knowledge is constructed (metaphorically and literally) for a research study. It serves as the structure and support for the rationale for the study, the problem statement, the purpose, the significance, and the research questions.” “...it provides a grounding base, or an anchor, for the literature review, and most importantly, the methods and analysis (Lysaght, 2011 as cited in Grant & Osanlo, 2014, p.12).

The Literature

Eton, Dombroski (2022) and Sallee et al (2011):

- Doctoral students learn new writing genres, vocabulary, assumptions
- Balance heavy personal commitments

Goodson (2013):

- Doctoral students effective writing imperative for success

McRell, et al (2021); Sallee, et al (2011):

- Doctoral students expected to write with academic register and understand TF and LR

Writing the TF and LR: Issues Doctoral Students Experience

Anecdotal Evidence Suggests:

- Relayed by Faculty and Staff:
 - Robust instruction on TF and LR is critical
 - Faculty has limited bandwidth to incorporate instruction into coursework
 - Collaboration with WC positively impacts doctoral students' writing experience

Writing the TF and LR: Issues Doctoral Students Experience (continued)

- Anecdotal Evidence Relayed by Doctoral Students:
 - "A" students; why am I having difficulty?
 - Instruction from adjunct professors vs. full-time professors?
 - Were unaware of strong benefits of seeking help, working with mentors and cohorts
 - "Self-starters", conducted self-study, started early, worked with mentors
 - Connected coursework to their research and dissertation
 - Early drafting of dissertation – even if research questions or LR changed
 - Believed WC was valid resource for TF and LR workshops and writing circles for scheduled writing time

UHCL WC Solution

- **WC created TF and LR workshop**
 - Maximizes WC's resources without need to create separate writing support
- **In addition to one-on-one writing support**
 - Writing Circles offer convenience, community, accountability, and quiet time for writing
- **Collaboration with faculty ensures optimal participation and continued dialogue on solutions for doctoral students**

Intentional Dialogue Exercise

Goal: through "intentional dialogue":

- Identify additional questions to research / support to offer doctoral students writing TF and LR
- What do mid- size, HSI, commuter college WCs need to know / do?

What is "intentional dialogue"?

- Communication skills that promote connection, empathy and horizontal relationships between people – teller (speaker) and retellers (listeners)

Intentional Dialogue Exercise (continued)

Process / Examples:

Groups of 3 participants (doctoral student, faculty, Writing Center tutor)

- **Teller (doctoral student)** begins the dialogue. Describes issue writing LR and TF.

Example: "I do not know where to start / get help with TF and LR. Did not understand professor's in-class explanation. Also, I visited the Writing Center two years ago, and I believe the tutor did not provide a good explanation of integrating the TF into the LR".

- **Listener / Reteller #1 (faculty):** Mirrors, validates, and empathizes.

Example: (validate) "Your comment about...makes sense to me". (empathize / check for understanding): the professor paraphrases student's remarks, and asks "did I get the essence of your comments?"

- **Teller / doctoral student:** "yes, you understood my comments" or clarifies misperception / misunderstanding

During the exchange, the professor and Writing Center tutor note questions, suggestions, potential solutions that should be researched further

Intentional Dialogue Exercise (continued)

Process / Examples - continued:

- **Listener / Reteller #2** (Writing Center tutor): Mirrors, validates, and empathizes.
Example: (validate) "Your comment about...makes sense to me". (empathize / check for understanding): the Writing Center tutor paraphrases student's remarks and asks, "did I get the essence of your thoughts?"
- **(Teller / doctoral student:** "yes, you understood my comments" or clarifies misperceptions / misunderstandings

If student believes both retellers understand their challenge, first professor then Writing Center tutor query student / teller

Hendrix, H., Hunt, H. L., Luquet, W., & Carlson, J. (2015). The Journal of Individual Psychology, 71(3). [Using the Imago Dialogue to Deepen Couples Therapy.: EBSCOhost \(oclc.org\)](#)

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Intentional Dialogue Exercise (continued)

For example: Listener / Reteller #1 (faculty) “ I heard you say that you did not understand the explanations I gave in class about the literature review and theoretical framework. Would it be helpful if I conducted a very short review, then give the class an opportunity to form outside study groups to continue self-study of the topics?

For example: Listener / Reteller #2 (Writing Center tutor): “I heard you say that you visited the Writing Center two years ago to review your first draft of chapter two (literature review) and you believed that the tutor you visited with was unfamiliar with how to integrate the TF into the LR. Do you think it would be useful that when you want to have a session with a tutor, you call the Writing Center desk and ask them to partner you with a tutor who is working with doctoral students?

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Conclusion

- **Is Intentional Dialogue a useful tool to discover gaps and potential solutions to assist doctoral students with TF and LR?**
- **Were you able to identify additional questions to research/potential solutions to consider to help doctoral students write TF and LR?**

References

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Thank You

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