Transfer in Action: Writing Research Moves Beyond the Classroom

Annie Hackett

This article is a two part series. In part one, Writing Program Intern Annie Hackett met with Angela Sheets, a former English 101 Instructor at ISU who currently works as a writing researcher in the Claims Training department at COUNTRY Financial in Bloomington, Illinois. Here, they discuss elements of CHAT and activity theory to explain the writing systems Angela employs to complete projects for the company. In part two, Annie has transcribed the Q & A session that followed an in-depth presentation Angela generously provided to an English 101 class in Spring of 2016. The class, under instruction of Irene Taylor, was provided part one of this article in advance of the presentation to develop further questions. The video of Angela's visit can be found at http://isuwriting. com/category/grassroots-projects/half-mile-project.

Part One: Annie and Angela Discuss Writing Research Beyond the Classroom

ANNIE: Since you are a graduate of ISU and you actually taught in the Writing Program, we wanted to ask you, where are you currently working? What are you doing?

ANGELA: I am working at COUNTRY Financial. I work in the claims division and I am a training developer.

ANNIE: What does that mean?

ANGELA: A training developer means so many different things because I feel like it's constantly being redefined, which is a good thing, just because they're redefining it based on, "Hey, we can do these things! Do you want us to do these things?" "Yeah, sure, you can do those things!" There's a team of three of us and about a year ago they had us come up with a name for ourselves because they're like, "You guys do this odd collection of things and it's different than the facilitators who teach the class but we do this odd collection of other things so we called ourselves the VIC team. V is for virtual training, and I is for instructional design, and C is for communication so we

handle most of the communications for the claims division, we do—we're getting more and more into this these days but we do a lot of instructional design so right now the other person with the same title as me—we're working on redesigning one of our new hire classes, which is a two week course so that's a pretty big undertaking. And then the virtual training—we design a lot of online modules and stuff. You've probably taken them before, they're these compliance modules on how not to sexually harass people. We don't do those ones because that would be like the corporate training department. This last week we sent one out on comparative negligence which is like if you get in a car crash how to tell how much each driver is at fault for that so we had stories and scenarios and things like that. It was hopefully much less boring than how not to sexually harass people.

ANNIE: Would you say that the work that you do, you most identify as the writer or the teacher or that's pretty balanced?

ANGELA: I feel like I do a lot of writing so I identify as a writer. I identify more so these days as an instructional designer than a teacher just because I don't really have a lot of teacher interaction. Although the big difference with myself and my co-worker Matt, he's the only person who's got the same job title as me so we work together because we have similar skill sets, we came in from—both of us had a teaching background whereas everyone else in our department came in because they had claims expertise and then became trainers. So we're the only ones who really have that teaching side, so I identify some as a teacher but also there's other things but then the third thing to add to that that I think is also very critical is I'm a researcher in this role because there's just a lot of research that has to go on all the time so I think that's critical.

ANNIE: Yeah, definitely. In your job now, do you apply any of the concepts or ideas that you learned when you were working in the Writing Program?

ANGELA: Yes. Should I expound on that? *laughs*

ANNIE: Yes! *laughs*

ANGELA: I don't even know where to start.

ANNIE: What's the most important one?

ANGELA: I don't think there's "a" most important one. Because they all work together so it's just hard to say. One way I could describe it is to talk through a project that we implemented this year. OK so we had a problem in the claims division where communication was not all that unified. So it's kind of been a recent development that my team's taken on like, "OK we're gonna handle communications for the division, especially communications between

departments didn't really go very smoothly. Communication within our departments as a company, we work really well together, we like to collaborate, we like each other, but when you're trying to communicate with other departments, they have different priorities than me and so communication didn't always go super smoothly, so we launched this SharePoint page called "Claims Exchange" and it was kind of this central hub for any changes going through the organization that hit more than one department in claims. We put some sort of article or video out there and that was a really big deal getting that together, but we have to think a lot about our audience and how they would take it up, and how they would use it, and how we could get them to take it up, and so we had to think a lot about the activities and their ecologies so we have audience members who work in the home office here in Bloomington who work primarily on the phone. And then we have other ones who are primarily field adjusters—they work out of their car all day long and work on their cell phones and laptops in the car and then they're up on a roof or whatever so you have really different ecologies that they're in and then varying levels of tech skills so our appraisers, for example, are kind of renowned for being the most tech savvy and so when we were launching this it was not just a matter of—that whole if you build it, people will come is so not true on the Internet, like it's not a thing. So we had to really think through how to get it out there and spread it so we had a kick off video where we explained the site. And then we thought through a pretty strategic communication plan of communicating it through various levels of management and supervisors and stuff, but another big thing that we did that I think was probably one of our most successful ideas was that we made this thirty second video showing people how to set "Claims Exchange" as a second home page tab so when they launch their browser it would automatically come up. We couldn't have it be our first home page tab because there's the company Intranet and we probably shouldn't tell you not to use that, so we made it as their second home page tab which is different. It's a really different activity than if you have to click on it as your favorite or if it's a short cut on your desktop or something because you have to want to go to it for those things. If it's your second home page on the Internet, you just have to open the Internet. You don't necessarily have to want to visit "Claims Exchange" but oh, there you happen to be there so you might as well glance at the page while you're there. That was a really big thing that kind of led to successful adoption. I was in a workshop last week with people from different areas that work property claims and they were kind of trying to figure out, "OK, what are some issues that we have on the property claim process that we can resolve easily?" and one of them that came up was an issue that came up with "Claims Exchange" and I was like, "I'm so happy that it's been so widely adopted that it has problems." I think we get about 350 hits a day which is about a quarter of the staff and

I don't assume that everybody is going to it every day so that's a pretty good representation and it's been around for 5 months now so it's doing pretty well. Still working on it but yeah we used a lot of theory from the Writing Program with thinking about all that.

ANNIE: Yeah, that's crazy. Would you say that there's any particular idea or concept that you use most frequently when you're at work? Or really just everything?

ANGELA: I feel like everything is applicable. You don't always think about it in those terms. On a personal level in thinking about myself as a writer in my practices I find myself using uptake genres a lot where I actually just sit down and it feels like the stupidest thing in the world where I have this big project I need to write but I sit there for 5 minutes and write about what I'm going to write. That actually really helps me to focus and figure out, "Oh, I do know how to write this thing and then you go into it and you're like oh yeah I totally have this," whereas five minutes before that you're like, "Ah I have to write this big thing and I don't know what to do." This is my notebook I'm currently using for that process so I'm just kind of flipping through trying to think of anything that happens with that. So yeah I think uptake genres kind of enter into it a lot. There's another one I'm keeping right now where—I mentioned that we are currently redesigning one of the courses and my coworker, Matt, and I are both from kind of an academic background so we've been thinking a lot about like, if we're doing innovative things here, we also want to be able to share them with the industry because we want to try to acquire knowledge from others as well so as we've begun that process of researching and figuring out how to redesign that course, we're keeping a running log of everything that we do throughout the process because then if we are to go back later and reflect on our process and figure out what worked and stuff, we have a record of what happened rather than just trying to have a big memory of "what did we do next?" It also really kind of helps focus us and keeps us moving forward too because most of the time in those log entries I'll just write out a description: "hey we just had this meeting with Kelly and Dave today, and then we talked about this, and I thought that was a really good idea. And then these are our next steps," so I usually put a next steps section just to keep us moving.

ANNIE: Yeah, that's smart. It's helpful. If you can think of one, what's the surprising connection between the work in Writing Program and the work that you're doing now?

ANGELA: I'm trying to think of anything that's surprising.

ANNIE: Maybe that's not the right word.

ANGELA: I think a concept that I remember—

ANNIE: Or something you remember learning or using in the Writing Program that maybe you didn't think really would translate.

ANGELA: Well I can't really honestly think of things that I don't feel like translate because so much of it I just use all the time, but everything is interconnected with these concepts. One thing I remember that my students had a lot of trouble grasping that I find super helpful thinking about it was ecology, and they didn't really have a good concept of "what is ecology" and "how does this matter?" Because we would talk about both the ecology of you as a writer, what kind of environment are you working in, and I think that's really important with your writing process and thinking through practically you're on a deadline and you're gonna have to make some decisions with that kind of ecology in mind. Or a lot of times I have to change up my environment to be able to work well so I'll go down to the cafeteria and work for an hour because I'm just more productive. But also on the receiving end of your writing what's the ecology of the people who are going to be using the product? So I've actually gone and done a lot of observations of our audiences and looked at, "OK, what does your daily work life actually look like and so when you're receiving these messages, what's the context that that's coming in with?" A lot of the things that we've developed that have been kind of interesting came from those ecology observations I guess. So one of the things I developed was this map, it's on one of the SharePoint pages. And SharePoint by the way is an intranet thing so there's this map—I designed it—where if you click on one of the states, it'll take you to state specific claim information so if there are different claim laws for the different states that we work in, you can get directly to that information by clicking on the state map. That came from an observation when I went and observed a guy working for a while and I was writing down all the papers that he had hanging up in his cubicle around him because what are the things you have to refer to a lot? But there were three or four different documents that we were able to combine and then make it more accessible by putting it on that map. So we designed it for their department, for their SharePoint, but then every other department we've talked to since then is like, "Oh I love that map, can we have that map?" So just having an understanding of the environment the people were working in was helpful. It's also helped us with—so "Claims Exchange" where we put out a lot of our communications, we learned from our observations, a lot of our people who work on the phone all day don't really like watching the videos because they have to switch their headsets from their phone to their computer and it's just a really tiny activity but it actually interferes with them watching the videos because if they get a call in the middle of that, they have to switch it back real quick. So we've started putting out both the video and the transcript of the video and we find that we get about two thirds of the hits on the video and about a third of the hits on the transcript so we are getting

the information out to more people by thinking about the accessibility of the information for people working in different environments.

ANNIE: That's really interesting. This is sort of random but I was thinking about it because I know I'm like this. Do you listen to music at all when you work?

ANGELA: Yeah, I tend to listen to Pandora most of the day.

ANNIE: Yeah, I'm not the type of person who can sit at a desk all day and just work. I need to have something else going on.

ANGELA: Yeah. I don't really like to sit at the desk all day. There's a lot of meetings and stuff and I turn around and talk to my co-workers. We must be annoying people to sit around because we're talking the entire day. A lot of times, unless we're developing things because if we're developing and working on a video or doing something in Photoshop, we're in a zone and we have remind each other to eat like, "Hey, have you drank anything for an hour?" "No." "You might want to do that." "Oh OK." I don't know what it is about editing but you just bunker down.

ANNIE: Yeah my internship this summer . . . the floor I was on was so quiet. Nobody ever talked and so it was just the strangest thing. I always had my headphones in, too, listening to music but I felt like I couldn't be loud or make noise because I didn't want to interrupt anybody.

ANGELA: Right, yeah.

ANNIE: Can we talk a little bit about the "activity system" of the work that you do now?

ANGELA: Sure.

ANNIE: So what kinds of writing are involved? You already mentioned mapping out things before you write but with this thing that you're reorganizing, do you have to do proposals and all that good stuff?

ANGELA: That one is really, really, big so I think that would be harder to describe but I think I could talk about a safety training that I'm developing right now that's a little more manageable to discuss because that two week training is just a bazillion genres and it's too much to even talk about. I actually had ten minutes at the end of work today and I drew a diagram of the safety training. Some of these things when they come into my world, I have no idea from whence they came exactly so there's this vague beginning of the process where there were HR people involved and my supervisor and people from the field in claims and stuff and they're like, "We need safety training about these other topics besides ladders for field adjusters so there were these conversations going on. In a way, they're doing genre research themselves

because they were like, "What's State Farm doing for their safety training?" "Oh, well State Farm only trains them on these things so we'll be better off even if we have a very simple training on this other thing." I knew that this was going on but it was just kind of vague in the background and I'd heard bits and pieces of it but didn't know exactly what was going on. I got an email on Friday that was two sentences from my supervisor like, "Hey you're going to work with Jason on this safety training and you need to make it happen" and I'm like, "OK cool, I'm pretty sure they wanted this by January so that gives us not a lot of time." So I went right away and started researching some things and I have these antecedent genre knowledge that I was drawing from because I designed a ladder safety training before and so I assumed what they wanted from this, and I think I'm right, that they want a virtual training so some sort of virtual module. I have antecedent knowledge of building those virtual trainings but then I also have designed specific safety training before so I was able to transfer in a lot from those experiences, especially knowing what's valued in a safety training. Well the very first thing I think of was I went and watched some YouTube trainings on respirators and then they were mentioning the OSHA requirements on respirators and OSHA is the big overseeing organization that makes safety happen for the country. Then I went to OSHA's website and I found the OSHA respirator requirements and it was this 20 page document. I read it and I was like, "Oh I feel so cool reading through the OSHA requirements," which most people don't really have that reaction when reading OSHA requirements probably.

ANNIE: Yeah. . .

ANGELA: And I was thinking a lot about the cultural-historical implications behind this document. You know this probably came out of labor unions and stuff and a lot of history behind them saying employers have to make their workplace safe and so it's interesting because then you start thinking about how this basic safety training is actually an ethical thing and you have to make sure you do it right otherwise people could get hurt and that's not good. And plus you have your antecedent knowledge about how you as an audience member felt through various safety trainings. I worked at Walmart and I went through I don't know how many trainings about dealing with harmful chemicals and I worked in the clothing department. We don't have a lot of people walking through the men's wear section dumping battery acid all over the place so why it was so important that I knew how to dispose of harmful chemicals—I don't know. So that's probably how most of my audience is going to feel about a lot of these topics. There's this rhetorical dilemma of you know your audience isn't going to take it that seriously but you know it's extremely important that they take it seriously because it puts them at risk if they don't. I read through those requirements and then I felt

really cool and met with Jason who was a subject matter expert (SME). He's one of the trainers who, if we do any sort of face to face accompaniment with the virtual training, he'll be the one doing that. We had this big debate about we don't know if we have to meet all the OSHA requirements because it's not like they're doing construction, so we had this big debate about that and then we're like, "Oh OK is there other research we can do?" Can we find out if there is documentation elsewhere in the company that complies with all the OSHA stuff because if we already have that, we can piggyback off of that, that'd be great? So from there we kind of divided and conquered. We came up with a list of topics that we thought we were going to cover in the training. It was funny because you completely forget about your process sometimes because when I was drawing my map earlier I was like, "oh and then I wrote my storyboard," but that's not what happened. I had this whole time of planning and I was thinking and had this moment of uptake genre and I'm sitting there thinking, "I don't know what to do on this storyboard. This is really confusing, I feel like I should know how to do this because I've written a safety training before. I don't know why I'm freezing up on this." So I wrote out a little bit and then kind of designed what my storyboard is going to look like because I also am keeping in mind, long-term with the composition process with this, I'm making this multimedia thing and I'm also going to have to do filming, and so it's going to be better if I know how to film on the front end, and so I decided to add a column about filming and what kind of shots I needed to make sure that I got so I have my text on the slide, and I have my narration because in legalese world they're really into anything you say or write. So I know whoever reviews this is really gonna be interested in what's said or written in the module, and so I'm going to make sure that both of those things are really accessible. Then the last couple days I wrote my storyboard. It took me a couple days because I kept getting distracted and from here, the process is going to be that the storyboard will be reviewed a little bit by my supervisor and this SME. They might add to it and edit it a little bit and then ideally, we'll have a couple reviewers who will review it who are experts on the thing. What will probably actually happen is that we'll have ten people look at it and all have opinions on it and that'll really slow things down. Although my manager these days is really into, "No we're just going to have these people look at it and everyone else is just going to deal." So then after that we will probably do the filming first and we'll edit the film and then we will—I'll build the module. We use a program called Articulate—it's like really, really, souped up PowerPoint basically, you can do special things with timings and then I will put the video in and edit that together. Then I'll record the narration and I'll edit that in Audacity, which is a free audio editing program, so I'll put that on top and then I'll send it out and someone who didn't review the script well will have a problem with it and then it'll be

sent back and we'll make some changes and then ideally it will go out with some sort of email that accompanies it and gives direction about how it's supposed to be distributed. We might also have some sort of planning on what's the bigger communication plan about how it'll be distributed, where it'll be stored, things like that. Does that talk about activity systems?

ANNIE: Yeah, yeah definitely. Now that you've been out in the "real world" and have a job outside of the Writing Program, what would you do differently if you did go back and teach at ISU?

ANGELA: I was looking at this question when you sent it and I was thinking about it and I was like, "I don't really feel like there's a lot that I would super differently." Well, actually honestly, I would probably completely re-do everything but the things that I emphasized in my class before, I think are things I would emphasize all the more because the things I felt strongly about then, I feel strongly about now, and a big thing I would always drive home with my students was that identifying what you don't know takes a lot of work to get to that point. And that's something we've been talking a lot about as I've been designing this new hire course is that—and that was something that came up in Kathleen Yancey's talk when she was here too—novices don't ask good questions because they don't know how to ask good questions. It really is actually a significant point when you've gotten to the point where you can ask a good question and when you've gotten to the point where you can identify what you don't know because you're in this fuzzy I-don't-even-know-what-I-don't-know phase prior to that and it takes a lot of work to get through that because it's really undefined. So getting to the point where you know what you don't know is really critical and that's a really great place to be because once you know what you don't know, you can figure out how to know the things that you don't know which is good. I'd emphasize that all the more, and have celebrations of those moments and, in general, just a lot of emphasis on tracking your own uptake because the thing is whether or not you go into a profession that uses a lot of "writing," everybody uses writing, everybody uses genres honestly, you're going to have to learn things and so no matter what kind of genre you're performing, whether it's a written one, or just some sort of activity that you perform, having an understanding of how you're going about that process of taking it up helps you to do it more easily. And I think it's really critical in my job, and I guess a lot of jobs maybe don't function like this, but I have to learn a lot of new things all the time because I'm designing training content on stuff I know nothing about. I didn't even really know what a respirator was before last Friday and now I'm talking about OSHA regulations and we have to be compliant and I have a very strong opinion on it. Knowing how you function as a learner is helpful. Whether your uptake genre is you write things down or you talk it out with someone else, harnessing what helps it click for you I think is an important a thing.

ANNIE: Yes. So people, especially with math at least, a lot of times ask when am I actually ever going to use this in life. Do you feel like the things that are taught in ISU's Writing Program are useful in the "real world" as you get a job and things that are applicable and you're glad you actually learned this?

ANGELA: Yeah, well I mean I feel like I use all of it all the time. I mean, that's my preference but no matter what job you're in you're still going to have—it really helps you a lot with navigating some of the undefined aspects of your profession or your life too. I use this stuff outside of work, too. Honestly, I think that the skills here are basically just an outline of this is how you think critically. And most people don't actually think critically, all that robustly, and have kind of a methodology for doing that and my job, because I started as an intern and they hired me on, there wasn't actually a position opening. They created a position for me because I brought in a skill set that they're like, "Yes, we want some of that" and so that critical thinking, if you can really continue developing and using these concepts, it's extremely valued because critical thinking is not a normal thing.

ANNIE: It's not as common as you would think.

ANGELA: Right. Critical thinking or being a good reader or being a good writer and those things are highly particular to a particular genre and situation so if you know how to become a good reader of that genre, which is really all about activity, being a good reader is all about activity, being a good writer is all about activity, and most people aren't really that good of readers and aren't that good of writers and they don't know it. So getting to the point where you even know that I'm really not good at reading this genre, I don't know what I'm doing with it is good because then you can start to strategize and figure out how is this thing used and what do I need to be able to do with it. It's helpful.

ANNIE: Yeah, cool. Do you feel like you have any advice that you would share to students that are currently taking 101 or 145 now?

ANGELA: Pick a couple concepts that you like and run with them because there are a lot of concepts that we're throwing at you and using together in tandem, and I think all of them are important and I wish you would know all of them, but realistically, especially if you're only in the class for a semester, you probably aren't going to pick it all up in a semester. I didn't pick it all up in a semester, and maybe you're a superhero and you can, in which case, awesome, but pick a couple that you like and just go with those ones. I would usually ask my students at the end of the semester and pick three to five that they like the best and that they think they would carry forward. We would also talk about ones they didn't get because that's also useful to identify— identifying what you don't know.

ANNIE: Sometimes that's easier than the alternative.

ANGELA: Yeah, just picking the ones that you like and running with them is an option and it's an OK thing. And combine it with other things and other methodologies from other places and that works too.

ANNIE: Cool, well thank you so much.

ANGELA: You're welcome, thank you!

Following the initial interview, Angela later returned to campus and generously shared her time with Irene Taylor's ENG 101 class at Illinois State. The remaining section of this article details the questions that Irene and her students had for Angela about the work that she does, how she employs writing research in her job, and what her thoughts are on using CHAT and other Writing Program concepts beyond the classroom.

Part Two: Q & A with Irene Taylor's ENG 101 Class

ANGELA: So what are your thoughts and questions? I know you guys developed some questions, but before we get into any of the pre-made questions, do we have any in response to anything?

IRENE: Your plan that "failed," like I said we spent a lot of time on CHAT, or the components of CHAT. And I hope I've said enough about how much those interconnect with each other and you talked about the socialization affecting the failure that I'm looking at this—socialization and history—I'm looking at this and I'm thinking, for lack of a better word, your ignorance of that socialization of that history led you to represent one idea or one message, but the reason it failed was because of this history, the reception didn't match that representation. Would you say that would be an accurate depiction of the experience for you or am I trying to read too much?

ANGELA: No, I think that's a really good description that's kind of bringing in some of the other concepts because I think in any sort of description of anything you do, you kind of typically narrow it down like, socialization and history were an issue but the misunderstandings there impacted the way that we represented the information and definitely impacted the reception as well. And then probably bring in other elements as well.

IRENE: So as they go into the workforce—whatever their fields may be— you said you came into this job through an internship? Is that correct?

ANGELA: Mhmm, yep.

IRENE: Did that help you acquaint yourself with the socialization or with the environment or even, for lack of a better word, the ecology in which you were working?

ANGELA: Yeah it did. I've actually been in, like—my internship just transitioned into being a full-time position so I wasn't in a different position. I came in as an intern, they're like, "Hey she knows how to do things that we like so we'll keep her." So they just created a position for me so it wasn't really, yeah, but I've kind of become familiar with the culture of the division as a whole, but also the culture of the individual departments because when we're communicating with one group, we do it really differently than when we're communicating with another group depending on both their culture and then also the ecology that they're working in.

STUDENT: You were a teacher when working for COUNTRY as well or were you able to take on both?

ANGELA: I taught—one semester while I was at ISU I was teaching and working at COUNTRY. It was a lot to do. *laughs* But I was only teaching the one class here and I was also taking classes—

STUDENT: Online?

ANGELA: Yeah. I was teaching a class online and taking a class on campus.

STUDENT: This is a little off topic, but how did you end up working in Kazakhstan?

ANGELA: How'd I work in Kazakhstan? My sister lived there for three years. Her husband's from there; they're moving back this summer. But yeah. That's a great place, I like it.

STUDENT: Also an off topic question but you went to multiple, different— lots of different areas and did lots of different jobs. Do you think that that kind of helps you become a more versatile person? More understanding of your clientele's needs I guess?

ANGELA: I think it definitely can because you—if you're intentional about it. If you're thinking of that thing that happened before doesn't relate at all to this thing that I'm doing over here and you intentionally block off the opportunities to transfer it, then yeah there is that risk that you won't do that. But I think that, yeah, having kind of different backgrounds can inform the way that you think about things. Just because you've thought of things in different cultural perspectives. And I use the word "culture" really broadly so a workplace is a culture, or your family is a culture, so culture isn't just "nationality is your culture" because that's kind of vague. But, yeah, so the

different ways that the different groups that you've been in thought about things informs the way you think about things, and then so when you're in a new situation, you think about things not only in a way that your current context does but in the ways that your previous contexts have. So I think that informs that.

IRENE: Example of antecedent genres.

ANGELA: Lots of antecedent genres and antecedent knowledge, yep.

IRENE: And transfer. I'm looking at these—I typed up these questions for them. One that stuck out with me, I didn't write down who wrote these questions but one says, "What is the main thing that inspires you to write?" And I think that's a question that can be applied to your workplace as well as outside the workplace, especially if you're coming up against this brick wall, for lack of a better word, "writers block," whether in the workplace or not. What inspires you or what gets you around that?

ANGELA: Two things that I think of: First of all, one of the primary things that inspires me to write, which probably is common to all of you is that I have to. Can anyone relate to that? I write because I have to. *laughs* In a lot of situations. I mean I like to as well but I mean in my everyday context, I have to write a lot. One of my favorite things our writing program speaker a couple years ago, Anis Bawarshi, and he's the big guy in uptake so if you've heard of that, if you like the concept of uptake you have him to thank for it, if you don't like it you have him to blame. But one thing that he said that has really stuck with me is that writer's block is not really a thing but it's a failure to transfer. So if you're in a situation and you're like, "I'm looking at this thing that's hard and new to me and I don't know how to do it and I'm just coming up against this wall," you have to think about OK, well what knowledge do I already have? What situations have I been in before that might equip me to do it in this new situation? So writer's block—and I think kind of that relates a lot to procrastination, too. You come into this new situation and you're like, "I don't know what I'm doing and so I want to put it off." But if you can think about, "OK, what am I about to do?"; "What are the small steps involved with that?"; "Do I know how to do those small steps?"; "Do I know how to, you know, what prior knowledge do I have that will help me with that or do I need to research and get some new knowledge and skills before I can do those things?" That kind of helps get through that writer's block I think for me personally.

STUDENT: You were talking about culture. I know that some businesses or companies have certain culture. What's the culture at COUNTRY?

ANGELA: I like the culture at COUNTRY in a lot of ways. That's a really big question. *laughs* How would we describe the culture at COUNTRY?

It's very—it's hard to describe a culture that you're in, I find too. And a lot of times you only understand it when you're in contrast with another culture and I've not worked for another business before because my previous work was in education. It varies from department to department so it's kind of hard to say. My department, for example, is very empowering. So my manager and my supervisor like to kind of say, "Here is an assignment," but they don't really check in to see how you're doing on it because they assume that if you have a problem, you're going to come talk to them. So that's something that I work really well with. My husband also works at COUNTRY; he works in the central claims office, and the culture of that department is totally different. They have here are the criteria you're expected to meet all the time, you know you're on the phone all the time, and it's really different expectations. So the culture, I think, varies a lot from department to department. I don't think that was a very good answer but that's what I've got. *laughs* COUNTRY as a company I would encourage anybody who's looking for an internship to consider because I originally was like, "OK, I'm in Bloomington-Normal, I should try to get a job at State Farm" but they didn't really have anything that fit my interest and so I ended up at COUNTRY just as kind of accident and then I was like, "Oh my gosh, this is wonderful. I like this place."

STUDENT: Looking back at all of your experiences in the workplace, both in business and education, what do you think—what position did you grow most as a person overall?

ANGELA: Probably teaching Spanish. *laughs* Yeah. Well and that one was crazy because it was my minor as an undergrad and I hadn't had any Spanish classes in two years before I started teaching it and then the district where I taught, a lot of our students spoke Spanish at home. So I had, you know future teachers in the world, you will talk about differentiating instruction and stuff so I had students in a single class who couldn't really read in English and that was their first language and then I had students in the class who were fluent in Spanish so I was like, "OK, we're going to talk about colors today. It's too hard for you and it's way too easy for you." And then I learned a lot from my students. It was really challenging because I didn't know a lot so it was kind of trial by fire in a lot of ways.

STUDENT: Kind of an unrelated question but with the different majors that you chose and all the different positions that you've had so far in your lifetime, would you say that working at COUNTRY Financial fits all of everything you've done basically?

ANGELA: In a lot of ways, yeah, so that was kind of one of the great things about it. I'm at a job that uses all of my education. It actually uses a lot of my job experience that wasn't part of my formal education, too.

STUDENT: I was going to say you have a very—with your English and Spanish background, it just doesn't seem like working at COUNTRY Financial would be right off the top of your head, "That's where I could work."

ANGELA: *laughs* Well and the Spanish I find that I'm using more in my church context right now, especially working with—because we're trying to start that Spanish-speaking ministry and so that was just kind of cool how it's like, "Oh OK, well that background isn't just going away." My husband doesn't speak Spanish very well so last Wednesday, we labeled our house in Spanish so we have labels all over my house right now in Spanish. And I'm like, "Oh no! Daniel, all you know how to do now are nouns! And we have to put up some verbs so you can actually say full sentences some day."

ANNIE: I think we probably have time for one more question if anybody has one.

IRENE: There's one I want to throw out from them, and I think this came from one, two, or maybe three different people. At the end of the interview you recommended learning a few, I think you said two or three, of the CHAT components first instead of taking it all in at once, which I have kind of thrown it all to them at once. Are there ones you would recommend or do you think it's something that's up to them to decide?

ANGELA: I think it varies a lot by person because you have the ones that you have an affinity for and you have to kind of go with what works for you because it might be that this concept over here, it means nothing to me, I don't like it so I'm not going to use it. So you have to kind of go with a little bit of that preference. What are some of your favorite concepts?

STUDENT: Distribution.

ANGELA: Distribution is interesting, yeah. What else? What's your favorite concept?

STUDENT: Reception.

ANGELA: Reception, a good one; about audiences. What else?

IRENE: Which ones are easiest to understand, do you think? I don't know if they favorite or unfavorite anything.

ANGELA: OK well that's your assignment from me then. Choose a favorite. *laughs* I'll go ahead and put my email address on the board and if you have questions that we didn't have a chance to get to today, email me. I'd love to answer your questions or continue the conversation in any way.

ANNIE: If you don't have anything else, that's all we have for you guys. Thank you, Angela, again for coming back here. Soon the interview will be edited further and actually published in the next issue so that was just sort of the rough draft that you guys read through. But yeah, email her if you have any questions. She's great at getting back to you and she has a lot to say. Thank you for coming.

Annie Hackett is a senior in the Publishing Studies sequence. She was a Grassroots Writing Research Intern in 2015-16. When she isn't eating Chipotle, watching the Blackhawks, or singing with her a cappella group, you can find her enjoying life with family and friends. She's not quite sure what's in store for her after graduation, but she'd love to continue writing and to travel the world.