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Book Author(s): KATHLEEN BLAKE YANCEY, LIANE ROBERTSON and KARA TACZAK
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THE ROLE OF CURRICULAR DESIGN IN FOSTERING TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE IN COMPOSITION

A Synthetic Review

> *My theory of writing that has evolved in this class can help me in all of my future classes, not just English. That will probably be the most helpful thing that I take out of this class.*
>
> — Rick

As we saw in chapter 1, we do know something about students' transfer of knowledge and practice in writing. We know, for instance, that when students come to college directly from high school, they bring with them some school-supported writing practices and understandings: an ability to create a text with beginnings, middles, and endings; and a nascent sense of genre, but one that is uninformed about the role of genre in shaping discourse. We also know that students bring with them writing experiences—and experiences they repurpose for writing—developed in other areas of their lives, as we saw in Davis's (2012) Natascha, Roozen's (2009) Angelica, and Navarre Cleary's (2013) Doppel. Moreover, some of this experience isn't in the immediate past, but rather in a past spanning several years and several sites of writing. Once in college, students transfer writing process and appreciation of process; their writing experiences seem more successful if they identify themselves as novices, particularly as they enter college and again as they enter their major. We know that college students develop a language for writing but that, even at the close of their college careers, this language isn't sufficient for the purpose of describing their own practice and theorizing their own knowledge.

Notably, most of what we know about transfer does not derive from curricula designed specifically to foster transfer. Recently, however, scholars

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have focused on how curricular design could support the transfer of writing knowledge and practice, and in this chapter we outline a range of such curricular models. On one end of what we might call a continuum of such models is the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of a model, as described by David Smit (2004); at the other end is a generalized, non-specific curricular model of general rhetorical education as put forth by Doug Brent (2012). And in the middle are four models, each with a distinctive contribution: (1) the Downs and Wardle (2007) Writing about Writing (WAW) model focusing on enhancing rhetorical awareness; (2) the Debra Dew (2003) WAW model focusing on language and rhetoric as content; (3) the Rebecca Nowacek (2011) "agents of integration" model focusing on genre as a portal to transfer; and (4) our Teaching For Transfer (TFT) model focusing on key terms, theoretical readings, writing in multiple genres, and reflective practices, including students' theories of writing.

Given our interest in fostering writing expertise and in the ways that transfer can support such development, however, we begin our chapter with an explanation of the National Research Council's *How People Learn* (Bransford, Pellegrino, and Donovan 2000) compilation of what we know about the differences between novice and expert.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT EXPERTISE

Published in 2000, the National Research Council-sponsored *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* expands on the idea of how we might teach for transfer by focusing, as the title suggests, on how people learn, in this case evidencing the potential for the teaching of transfer by drawing from literature on learning across multiple sites and ages, from elementary school through graduate school. As the authors note, the promise of transfer is located, in part, in the difference between training and education:

> It is especially important to understand the kinds of learning experiences that lead to transfer, defined as the ability to extend what has been learned in one context to new contexts (e.g., Byrnes 1996, 74). Educators hope that students will transfer learning from one problem to another within a course, from one year in school to another, between school and home, and from school to workplace. Assumptions about transfer accompany the belief that it is better to broadly "educate" people than simply "train" them to perform particular tasks (e.g., Broudy 1977). (Bransford, Pellegrino, and Donovan 2000, 52)

In addition to pointing to the kinds of transfer (e.g., near and far) defined above, *HPL* identifies key concepts and explains why they are

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important, among them the relationship between novices and experts, which we understand as being particularly important for developing writers, not because there is a clear trajectory from novice to expert, and not because there aren't numerous forms of expertise, but rather because, as we saw in chapter 1, noviceship is a state all writers potentially inhabit and yet not one that students necessarily recognize they need to inhabit. For example, in the educational system it is commonplace that when students move from one context to another they begin as novices, especially novice writers, even in the case of students in graduate school, as documented by Paul Prior (1991). Likewise, whenever we take up a new task in a new genre—the faculty member writing her first grant application, the law student writing his first brief, the car driver completing the first accident report, and the insurance adjuster filing the first estimate—we are all novices. In sum, writing development is predicated on noviceship.

In this sense, expertise is always limited and contingent. At the same time, as Sommers and Saltz (2004) argue, developing expertise often requires that we behave as experts; we write our way *into* expertise. Given this claim, and given the intent of writing curricula to help students develop expertise, it's worth considering what expertise is.

HPL makes six claims about experts focused on the ways that experts behave:

1. Experts notice features and meaningful patterns of information that are not noticed by novices.
2. Experts have acquired a great deal of content knowledge, organized in ways that reflect a deep understanding of their subject matter.
3. Experts' knowledge cannot be reduced to sets of isolated facts or propositions, but instead reflects contexts of applicability—that is, the knowledge is "conditionalized" on a set of circumstances.
4. Experts are able to flexibly retrieve important aspects of their knowledge with little attentional effort.
5. Though experts know their disciplines thoroughly, this does not guarantee they are able to teach others.
6. Experts have varying levels of flexibility in their approach to new situations. (Bransford, Pellegrino, and Donovan 2000, 31)

Taken together, these statements help us understand the nature of expertise, both its behaviors and its limitations. For example, rather than collect information around discrete facts, experts organize knowledge around "core concepts or 'big ideas' that guide their thinking about

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their domains," allowing them to review data sets systematically, discern patterns, draw inferences, and raise questions (42). As important is what this means for teaching for transfer:

> The fact that experts' knowledge is organized around important ideas or concepts suggests that curricula should also be organized in ways that lead to conceptual understanding. Many approaches to curriculum design make it difficult for students to organize knowledge meaningfully. Often there is only superficial coverage of facts before moving on to the next topic; there is little time to develop important, organizing ideas. (42)

This claim is particularly important for a writing curriculum: the inference here is that students would understand writing differently and better were a course organized through key terms or concepts rather than through a set of assignments or processes. In addition, there are questions about the usefulness and appropriateness of the key terms common in first-year composition curricula. As we see in the WPA Outcomes Statement (Council of Writing Program Administrators 2000, 2008), we seem to focus on a limited number of fairly broad terms—composing process, drafting, revising, critical thinking, and so on—some of which, like the expression critical thinking, can belong to other disciplines as much as, or more than, to writing. Not least, some of the terms we use—draft is a perfect example—speak to the moment when writers relied exclusively on writing implements like pen and pencils put to paper, rather than on the kinds of digital technology, ubiquitous now, like word processors and blogging platforms that supply writers' sites of composition (Yancey 2004). Were we interested in supporting the development of student expertise through such big ideas—which we are—we might ask what the key terms for a composing curriculum might be, why those constitute the appropriate set, how they speak to each other, and how they might provide the starting point for a FYC syllabus.[1]

What it *means* to be an expert is also important, especially—as *HPL* explains—its very short shelf life and tentative quality. In this sense, expertise is a status always beyond reach; indeed, when one thinks that expertise has been achieved, deleterious effects can result. *HPL* explains this phenomenon by focusing on a common assumption about expertise among "veteran teachers and researchers":

> an expert is someone who knows all the answers (Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1997). This assumption had been implicit rather than explicit and had never been questioned and discussed. But when the researchers and teachers discussed this concept, they discovered that it placed severe constraints on new learning because

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> the tendency was to worry about looking competent rather than publicly acknowledging the need for help in certain areas. (Bransford, Pellegrino, and Donovan 2000, 48)

In response, the researchers gave up the idea of "answer-filled experts"—who sound suspiciously like the bankers in Paulo Freire's banking model of education—in favor of a model of "accomplished novices" (Freire 2000).

> Accomplished novices are skilled in many areas and proud of their accomplishments, but they realize that what they know is minuscule compared to all that is potentially knowable. This model helps free people to continue to learn even though they may have spent 10 to 20 years as an "expert" in their field. (Bransford, Pellegrino, and Donovan 2000, 29)

As important, one practice that supports the development and practice of expertise is meta-cognition, which allows experts to define a problem, based in part on the mental model of the problem or situation under consideration.

> The ability to monitor one's approach to problem solving—to be metacognitive—is an important aspect of the expert's competence. Experts step back from their first, oversimplistic interpretation of a problem or situation and question their own knowledge that is relevant. People's mental models of what it means to be an expert can affect the degree to which they learn throughout their lifetimes. A model that assumes that experts know all the answers is very different from a model of the accomplished novice, who is proud of his or her achievements and yet also realizes that there is much more to learn. (50)

What's interesting here, relative to writing, is how the mental model of writing students develop—or don't develop—can affect how they approach writing tasks. One way of thinking about this is to say that a mental map is very like a larger road map that allows one to see different locations, routes to those locations, and connections among those routes. With such a map, one has a fair amount of agency in deciding where to go and how, at least in terms of seeing possibilities and how they relate to each other—precisely because one can see relationships *across* locations. Instead of print maps, of course, many people now use a GPS device, which can be enormously helpful in getting from A to B, and, depending on the model, can offer various routes from A to B (the quickest, the most scenic), traffic alerts, and alternative routes. Still, what a GPS offers is the route from A to B: one doesn't have much sense of how the route is situated or its relationship to other routes or places. The analogy, though imperfect, is self-evident: without a large road map of writing, students are too often traveling from one writing task to

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another using a definition and map of writing that is the moral equivalent of a GPS device. It will help students move from one writing task to another, but it can't provide them with the sense of the whole, the relationships among the various genres and discourse communities that constitute writing in the university (and outside it), and the opportunity for an accompanying agency that a fuller map contributes to—nor will the GPS support the development of expertise.

In sum, distinctions between novices and experts are clear, but the value of seeing the differences is that we can put into pedagogical practice opportunities for students to practice expertise as they write themselves into expertise, as we shall see.

CURRICULAR APPROACHES TO TRANSFER: A CONTINUUM

As we detail here, the approaches to transfer developed in writing studies, in terms of the role that curriculum and pedagogy can play in supporting students' appropriate transfer of writing knowledge and practice, range widely. As previously introduced, on one end of the continuum of approaches is the argument that, given the complexity of writing situations students encounter, it's nearly impossible to devise a curriculum that could succeed. On the other end of the continuum is an argument that students transfer knowledge and practice in writing as a kind of "naturalized" activity, what some scholars describe as the function of "common sense" derived not from a specific curriculum, but rather from the experience of curriculum *in toto*. In the middle are four approaches that leverage different aspects of curriculum in an effort to help students transfer. One of these is the well-known Writing about Writing approach, which itself comes with different emphases; it takes writing as object and practice as its curricular focus. A second is a specific variation of the WAW approach, one with rhetoric and writing as content but focusing on language. A third is an "agents of integration" approach located in multidisciplinary contents and contexts providing real-time opportunities for transfer. And last is the curriculum we propose here, one that in some ways is aligned with all three in its attention to content and its positioning of students as "agents of their own learning" (Yancey 1998), but one that also *extends* this curricular program in two ways: (1) by incorporating a set of key terms as conceptual anchors for a composition content; and (2) by threading throughout the course a specific, reiterative, reflective practice linked to course goals, which themselves take transfer of knowledge and practice as a first priority.[2]

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TRANSFER AS AN UNLIKELY AND TROUBLESOME ENDEAVOR: CAN CURRICULUM MATTER?

Why transfer of knowledge and practice in writing can be such a troublesome endeavor was outlined cogently by David Smit (2004), author of *The End of Composition Studies*, in the chapter titled "Transfer." Smit begins his three-part argument by first, invoking David Russell's (1995) comparison of writing with "games that use balls"; second, distinguishing "between strong and weak strategies for learning"; and third, reanalyzing already-published case studies to argue that transfer is much more difficult than we assume. Smit concludes that in writing situations transfer functions differentially: transfer is likely for surface constructions like spelling, punctuation, and (to a lesser extent) syntax, but very unlikely for the composing behaviors or textual performance that compositionists think they teach, be it writing process, coherent text, or the claims and evidence of "academic" writing.

Smit's argument derives principally from what he considers the implausibility of what has come to be known as academic writing, a claim-and-evidence text typically familiar to those in the humanities. Precisely because writing is so different from one situation to another, however, and from one genre to another—a point Smit makes using a chart showing the differences in his sample of claim-and-evidence texts in the disciplines of business, history, psychology, and biology—there is no "global" academic writing, a claim that, as we saw in chapter 1, several compositionists (e.g., Russell 1995; Downs and Wardle 2007; Petraglia 1995) have likewise argued, and indeed expanded. It's not merely that situations are different; it's that the situations, even when they look similar, are located in very different activity systems and are contextualized by different goals, participants, and tools. Thus, the writing of a feasibility study in a business communication class, which is a system dominated by learning, power relationships, and grades, is typically a very different exercise than writing in what appears to be the same genre in an engineering company, a system where international collaboration may be the norm and enhancing the company's net profits a likely goal.

This difficulty in the possibility of transfer in writing is compounded by two other factors, according to Smit. One difficulty is that, given their preparation to teach writing, the faculty teaching composition are limited in their ability to help students. As a quick review of the Pytlik and Liggett (2002) *Preparing College Teachers of Writing* demonstrates, teachers of FYC may know writing theory and practice, typically from the perspective of the English Department or more generally from the humanities, but they are unlikely to know, or be asked to learn, the content and

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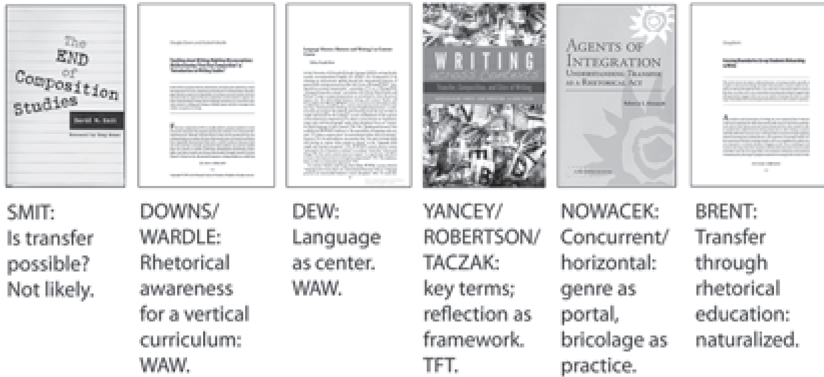

genres of the many disciplines inhabiting the academy in which their students need to write, a problem that, as we saw in chapter 1's discussion of the Bergmann and Zepernick (2007) study, students identify as a reason not to take FYC more seriously. Moreover, this unfamiliarity with the universe of differentiated texts extends to writing practices beyond the undergraduate years and outside the academy. As other scholars have demonstrated—Paul Prior (1991) focusing on the transition into graduate school, for example, and Anne Beaufort (1999, 2007) studying the adaptation to the workplace—the difficulties of teaching for writing beyond the baccalaureate are equally difficult. A second difficulty is the role that the individual writer plays in any situation available for transfer. Summarizing Lucille McCarthy's (1987) observations emerging from her study "A Stranger in Strange Lands: A College Student Writing across the Curriculum," Smit recounts the litany of potential obstacles:

> They include the function the writing serves personally to the writer, the role of the writer in relation to the subject matter, the task at hand, and the teacher. To her list I would add one more item: the individual ways that writers interpret the tasks that have been given to them in the first place. (Smit 2004, 131)

In sum, Smit's claim is that given what we know about writing and its social and cognitive character, about writing teachers' familiarity with the diversity of writing practices even inside the academy, and about the role of the individual composer in any writing situation, the likelihood of transfer is low, and the "degree to which any kind of knowledge or any given skill in writing is generalizable—that is, transferable from one context to another—will always be problematic" (133).

At the same time, Smit identifies four principles—ones that are often overlooked in the composition studies literature and that are very

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similar to those regarding the fostering of expertise recommended in *How People Learn*—that could point the way toward helping "novices develop the broad knowledge and skills it takes to write" (Smit 2004, 133). They include:

1. "First, writers may very well possess a kind of knowledge we might call 'general,' a kind of knowledge about many different things independent of particular contexts: knowledge of syntax, for example, or a general ability to adapt generic knowledge to particular rhetorical situations."
2. "Second, writers seem most obviously to apply general knowledge in situations in which they need to write outside the realm of their expertise. . . ."
3. "Third, expert writers learn to see analogies, to see similarities and differences between old and new genres and old and new contexts; novices don't. . . ."
4. "And last, writers seem to learn the general and the specific together, uncovering relevant generalizations, principles and strategies, and applying them and justifying that application in new contexts (Froertsch 378)." (133–134)

Finally, Smit sounds a note of cautious optimism: "We get what we teach for," he says. And: "if we want to help students to transfer what they have learned, we must teach them how to do so"—and do so in multiple contexts (134). In sum, Smit outlines how very difficult teaching for transfer is likely to be while endorsing the effort, and makes several general suggestions about how we might accomplish it, suggestions echoing those outlined in *HPL*.

"NATURALIZED" TRANSFER: THE EFFICACY OF A GENERALIZED CURRICULUM

At the other end of the continuum is a generalized, almost "naturalized" notion of transfer, this version of transfer researched by Doug Brent (2012). The claim is that students draw from the *entirety* of their academic writing experiences as they encounter new writing situations. More specifically, Brent seeks to learn about transfer of knowledge and practice across the two general contexts of school and work by observing six upper-level students engaged in various internships. Brent explains that his research intent is *not* to look for the resources a single writing course might provide to assist with transfer. Such a study—at Brent's host institution, the University of Calgary (as at most Canadian colleges

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and universities)—would be improbable given that first-year composition, while required in the US, is not available. Instead, most of Brent's students, as he explains, take only a single course in professional writing—if they take any writing course at all—and this dearth of writing-focused courses shapes both his study of transfer and the concept of rhetorical education whose effects he seeks to trace:

> Four out of the six students studied had taken or were taking this course [in professional writing]; the other two were not required to do so. As a result, my study does not primarily address transfer from any particular intentional source of rhetorical instruction. For the purposes of this study, the fact that some students had a single one-term writing course is interesting, and I paid close attention when students mentioned it. However, in the end, this one course is incidental to my larger purpose. (Brent 2012, 568)

The larger purpose here, as Brent puts it, is to trace how students who engage in an internship draw on their "rhetorical education," and the key to the study is Brent's definition of rhetorical education. According to Brent, rhetorical education could be defined dichotomously. On the one hand, it could refer to

> the sum of courses or programs designed explicitly to teach rhetorical knowledge and skill: first-year composition, first-year seminars with an emphasis on writing, courses in advanced composition and rhetorical theory, whether generalized or discipline-specific, Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing in the Disciplines programs, and the like. (559)

In other words, a rhetorical education might be the kind of curriculum we often see in US postsecondary education.[3] On the other hand, it might be defined very broadly, somewhat in the tradition of Roozen's (2009) Angelica or Navarre Cleary's (2013) Doppel, "as the sum of all experiences in a person's life, both inside and outside formal educational settings, that help him or her develop rhetorical knowledge and skills" (Brent 2012, 559). Brent's tactic here, however, is to stake out the middle ground between these two conceptual poles: he defines "a rhetorical education as the sum of institutionalized practices in the postsecondary education system that help a student develop rhetorical knowledge and skill, whether or not those practices are located in specific 'writing' courses" (559). Brent's sense is that as students move from course to course and task to task, "coping with the varying demands of the diffuse but pervasive rhetorical environment of the academy itself" (568), they develop a rhetorical education that includes both knowledge and skill.

The internships completed by the six students were diverse: students with various majors—including political science, marketing, sociology,

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and English—took positions as a Sunday school ministry assistant; a research assistant for a faculty member; an assistant in a financial services firm; an assistant in a human resources firm; an assistant in risk management for a telecommunications company; and an event planning assistant and media writer for a skin-care company. Several of them had already worked in that firm or office before becoming interns. Interestingly, when the four students who had enrolled in professional writing were asked about what they had learned in the course that was valuable in the internship—that is, what in effect they were able to transfer or use—they cited the values of clarity and concision (Brent 2012, 586). Brent also reports, however, that the students all experienced difficulty "explaining in detail on what prior experiences they might be drawing," in part it seems, because, like their US counterparts in the Hilgers, Hussey, and Stitt-Bergh (1999) and the Jarratt et al. (2005) studies, the Calgary students didn't have a language useful for describing the writing concepts or practices they called upon.

What students did describe, identified by Brent as themes, were three factors helpful in their internships, the latter two of which are writing-specific: (1) generalized workplace strategies; (2) models and genres that they could adapt; and (3) a sense of audience. In Brent's (2012, 588) conclusion, "the students seemed to be transferring not so much specific knowledge and skills as a general disposition to make rhetorical judgments."[4] Thus, students remarked on "highly general strategies for managing new task environments" that were helpful, and "almost all students referred to using models to determine what might be said and how information might be laid out, and even appropriate phraseology to use, in both their academic writing and in the workplace."[5] This "general sense of professional format" was particularly important for the students since it focused their attention on general rhetorical principles, such as ways "writers arrange information in hierarchies and how they use typographical conventions to signal those hierarchies." Such principles thus functioned as a kind of knowledge that could be adapted as students completed specific writing tasks. Moreover, such knowledge resulted not from explicit teaching or learning, but rather from what Brent calls "good rhetorical survival instincts that had been developed in order to survive varied academic writing tasks, but that appeared to carry over as a means of dealing with new workplace genres." While the students didn't always know "how they did so," they could "make complex rhetorical judgments about audience and genre, in some cases constructing for themselves ad hoc rhetorical genres such as the proposal, the mouseover text

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block, or the lesson plan, using models as starting points and then modifying by trial and error" (586–88).

Based on their interviews, Brent (2012) credits the students' successful internship experiences to three factors: "an understanding of how to extract genre features from models, how to analyze an audience, and how to use genre knowledge to interpret information." In terms of curriculum design to support even a generalized model of transfer, Brent recommends an emphasis on reflection and rhetorical awareness, so as to help "students become more conscious about what to observe and what questions to ask in new rhetorical environments" (588). Intentionality in this model, then, is enhanced through reflection.

There are three additional dimensions of this study that are worth noting, in part because they may have influenced the students' experience, and also in part because they may explain some of what Brent found. First, as Brent notes, since the University of Calgary doesn't offer a vertical writing curriculum, it's impossible to learn from his students how such a curriculum might support transfer. Instead, he studies a generalized rhetorical education and finds that students do indeed learn implicitly from their experiences: it's the curricular analogue to Roozen's (2009) and Navarre Cleary's (2013) findings, that students learn literate practices outside of school in a different kind of rhetorical education. Second, as suggested above and like their US counterparts, the students don't seem to have a language of writing, and without that it's difficult to know if what they tapped was generalized rhetorical knowledge, or whether there was something more specific they were drawing on but didn't have the language to name. Thus, when Celia says "I don't exactly know how I got better, but I guess it's just as you do more of it you just kind of get the grasp of it," it may be, as Brent suggests, that she is expressing knowledge that has become tacit and internalized (588). Alternatively, it could be that Celia attributes her success to practice because she doesn't have a vocabulary that would point her to other resources. Third, given that several of the students were already familiar with their internship workplaces, a good question is whether or how that prior socialization contributed to their ability to adapt. In other words, if students are already familiar with the workplace context, the task of transfer is different—and presumably easier—than it is for someone who is learning how to write at the same time he or she is also being socialized into a new workplace.

In sum, Brent's study, arguing for a kind of naturalized model of transfer based in a generalized rhetorical education, is provocative, raising numerous questions that speak to the complexity of studying

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transfer and the role of language in assisting students to describe their own writing activities.

WRITING ABOUT WRITING: A FOCUS ON WRITING AS AN AVENUE TO TRANSFER

The Writing about Writing approach to teaching composition, explained by Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle in their 2007 *College Composition and Communication* article, provides the parameters for a first middle-range curricular approach to supporting transfer of knowledge and practice in writing. In "Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning 'First-Year Composition' as 'Introduction to Writing Studies,'" Downs and Wardle (2007) suggest that misconceptions about writing and composition pedagogy can be "righted" by using a Writing about Writing (WAW) curriculum designed to teach students about conceptions of writing that will help foster transfer (554). In part, their proposal is a response to the misconception assumed by those in the university broadly, or in FYC programs specifically, that academic discourse is universal. As a remedy, Downs and Wardle advocate a move from teaching writing to teaching *about* writing "in a course topically oriented to reading and writing as scholarly inquiry" (553). The curriculum they suggest intends to foster a level of rhetorical awareness in students by using writing studies theory as course content in which "students are taught that writing is conventional and context-specific rather than governed by universal rules," and that "within each new disciplinary course they will need to pay close attention to what counts as appropriate for that discourse community" (559). In addition, Downs and Wardle employ two case studies to illustrate that the WAW curriculum is appropriate for all levels of student proficiency and comfort with writing, noting that students in the study demonstrated improvement in three specific areas: (1) increased self-awareness about writing, (2) improved reading abilities and confidence, and (3) raised awareness of research writing as conversation (564–72). While they suggest that this course design includes content that will transfer, citing the proven means of transfer established by other researchers (Perkins and Salomon 1992; Smit 2004; Beaufort 2007)—such as "explicit abstraction of principles and alertness to one's context" (Downs and Wardle 2007)—their research focuses on the writing conducted within their own curriculum; it does not investigate whether or what students transferred to new contexts.

At about the same time the Downs and Wardle *CCC* article was published, Elizabeth Wardle (2007) also published preliminary results from

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a longitudinal study she was conducting with seven students at the University of Dayton, "a private, Catholic, liberal arts school of 10,000 students in Dayton, Ohio" (70). In "Understanding 'Transfer' from FYC: Preliminary Results of a Longitudinal Study," Wardle identifies the students as her former students from a FYC class who are majoring in a variety of disciplines—biology, chemistry, political science, and undeclared business—as she outlines the rationale and purpose of the study:

> Given the more complex understanding of transfer suggested by socio-cultural theories, what might a study of generalization—Beach's alternative to transfer—look like? Taking context, purpose, and student perception of writing both in and beyond FYC into account, I designed a qualitative, longitudinal pilot study following seven students from my Fall 2004 FYC course as they wrote across the university to answer four research questions:
>
> 1. What do students feel they learned and did in FYC?
> 2. What kinds of writing are students doing elsewhere?
> 3. How do students perceive that writing and what strategies do they use to complete it?
> 4. Do students perceive FYC as helping them with later writing assignments across the university? (70)

The students reported to Wardle that they learned both concepts and practices: "they learned about new textual features (including new ways of organizing material), how to manage large research writing projects (including use of peer review and planning), how to read and analyze academic research articles, and how to conduct serious, in-depth academic research" (72). The next term, however, students didn't draw on this knowledge; in Wardle's conclusion, they didn't see the need to draw on it, so there was what she calls a "failure to generalize." Although Wardle was disappointed in this result, the failure to generalize isn't absolute: through the FYC curriculum students had developed a meta-awareness that served them well as they wrote elsewhere in the academy, and fostering such an awareness, she argues, might be one of the most important goals for a transfer-supporting curriculum.

> The only ability students seemed to consistently generalize from one writing task to another within the various activities of schooling was meta-awareness about writing: the ability to analyze assignments, see similarities and differences across assignments, discern what was being required of them, and determine exactly what they needed to do in response to earn the grade they wanted. (76–77)[6]

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A curricular approach oriented to WAW has been taken up by many, and with various alterations and change of foci, as Downs and Wardle (2012) explain. In their taxonomy provided in the Ritter and Matsuda (2012) *Exploring Composition Studies* volume, Downs and Wardle claim that those developing WAW curricula share a fundamental goal: "a desire to create a *transferable* and *empowering* focus on *understanding writing as a subject of study* (131). At the same time, Downs and Wardle identify variations in WAW curricula keyed to four factors:

1. The particular angle or perspective a course takes—what subjects it prioritizes and how student research is focused (if the course includes research);
2. The end of student learning that is emphasized—a primary focus on personal growth versus a primary focus on contribution to the field;
3. Types and numbers of readings; and
4. Types and numbers of writing assignments. (139)

In addition, Downs and Wardle report on three approaches to WAW currently in development.

> The first focuses on literacy and discourse, how writing and language demonstrate community membership. The second focuses on writing studies itself—the existence of the discipline qua discipline, with its knowledge and expertise on writing, emphasizing rhetorical strategies and its resultant strategies for writing. The third focuses on the nature of writing and writers' practices. . . . Other approaches, like the one at UCF, try to cover all of this ground by teaching "units" with particular declarative knowledge that must be covered. (139–40)

Schools offering these WAW curricula include Texas A&M, whose FYC curriculum addresses "how writing and language demonstrate community membership," and Marywood University, which highlights "the nature of writing and writers' practices" (Downs and Wardle 2012, 139–40).

In general, then, WAW curricula take a disciplinary focus as they respond to interest in transfer of knowledge and practice in writing, regardless of how explicitly this relationship is highlighted. It's also worth noting that rhetorical awareness, which is an important part of the Downs and Wardle (2007) model, *isn't* part of the Beaufort (2007) five-domain model. Nor has the relationship of rhetorical awareness to Beaufort's model been explored. At the same time, rhetorical awareness would seem to draw on some of the domains Beaufort identifies—on rhetorical knowledge or genre knowledge, perhaps—as well as on reflection; how it does so may provide a fruitful area for exploration.

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A SPECIALIZED CASE OF WAW: FOCUSING ON LANGUAGE AND RHETORIC AS CONTENT

A language-specific version of WAW, identified by Downs and Wardle (2012) as the version emphasizing "the existence of the discipline qua discipline, with its knowledge and expertise on writing, emphasizing rhetorical strategies and its resultant strategies for writing," is a second middle-range curricular approach to supporting transfer of knowledge and practice in writing. As explained by Debra Dew (2003), the writing curriculum at the University of Colorado–Colorado Springs (UCCS) was reimagined to achieve two purposes: (1) emphasize the disciplinarity of writing studies, and (2) focus students' attention on rhetoric and language.

In "Language Matters: Rhetoric and Writing I as Content Course," Dew (2003) cites David Kaufer and Richard Young's "conceptual parameters" as providing a beginning rationale for the new UC-CS curriculum (Kaufer and Young 1993):

> Our shift from a Writing-WNCP, "writing-with-no-content–in-particular," curriculum (77) to a Writing-WSC "writing-with-specific-content" curriculum, (82) follows David Kaufer and Richard Young's conceptual parameters as articulated in their theoretical inquiry into the relationship between writing and content. Kaufer and Young define the Writing-WNCP course as an instructional tradition that has long "dominated the thinking of most English departments," a tradition that encouraged "the splitting off of writing from the rest of what is taught and learned in the academy" via the establishment of the separate course in first-year composition (77). Such a course focuses on "mechanics, usage, style, and the paragraph" while other disciplines focus on "content, for which language is only a vehicle." (Dew 2003, 78)

Given this understanding of writing curricula, one dividing writing courses with "no particular content" from writing courses with "specific content," Dew and her colleagues engaged in a "curricular revision" aimed at writing instruction that "is now more fully a scholarly enterprise with disciplinary integrity." To accomplish this goal, the new course includes four specific features. First, it includes a subject matter: rhetoric and writing studies. Second, the combination of language and disciplinary content creates a renewed interest in rhetorical arrangement and an emphasis on "form as rhetorically contingent." Third, in this course the sentence itself has also received new attention. Fourth, the course is now conceptually at parity with other content courses (88).

Thus, much as the Downs and Wardle (2007) version of WAW focuses on rhetorical awareness, the Dew (2003) "Rhetoric and Writing Studies" has language awareness and use as its centerpiece. Using language as a lens, the faculty choose the topic or theme of the course:

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> RWS content, locally understood as the study of language matters, encompasses the following subtopics: multicultural rhetoric and language practices; language and technology; language and literacy; pop culture and language practices; or writing in the disciplines (WID), as a survey of discourse conventions (skills and content) across the curriculum. Faculty choose their specific subtopic, but no matter the subtopic, students analyze diverse essays that address language issues. (95)

In addition to providing rich resources for invention, the course's focus on language provides material for students who "analyze diverse essays that address language issues," essays that resemble the kind of writing tasks students encounter in other disciplines (95). The intent, according to Dew, is that the subject matter of language will enhance transfer, since students learn in RWS that writing "principles and practices" are always situated in disciplinary contexts.

The centrality of language as content and the role of its disciplinarity—a role emphasized to students, of course, but also stressed to faculty across the campus—is the distinguishing feature of RWS. At the same time, the research showing the efficacy of this approach in fostering or enhancing transfer, according to the Downs and Wardle summary of WAW, has yet to be reported:

> Dew's curriculum is concerned that students recognize the study of rhetoric and writing as a discipline, which inherently carries some emphasis on changing students' conceptions of writing and showing disciplinary differences in writing (though these are not the main emphases). No explicit attention is devoted to transfer, conducting primary research, or writing to contribute to the field. (Downs and Wardle 2012, 142)

In this model of WAW, then, we see a very specific content, one focused on language, as the centerpiece of the course. Two good questions follow: what difference does this make for students in terms of transfer of knowledge and practice, and what difference does it make compared to other options?

AGENTS OF INTEGRATION

An approach different in kind rather than degree from the middle-range curricula reported thus far, the agents of integration approach is located in linked classes that students participate in concurrently: it exemplifies a third middle-range curriculum. This linked three-course seminar, an "Interdisciplinary Humanities Seminar offered to first-year honors students at a Catholic university on the East Coast," substitutes for FYC and provides, in Rebecca Nowacek's *Agents of Integration*, a study

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of what we might call concurrent transfer (Nowacek 2011, 4). Unlike the other models, agents of integration doesn't focus on the design of curriculum per se, but rather, given its linked-class design, on how students attempt to transfer writing knowledge across three different but concurrent classes of literature, history, and religious studies. Based on multiple sources of data—including classroom observations, student notebooks, more formal student work, and multiple interviews—agents of integration provides a window into how students transfer across concurrent contexts that aren't designed to support transfer specifically, but that make such opportunity available.

Influenced by the Beach (2003) notion of transfer as generalization outlined in chapter 1, Nowacek identifies five principles of transfer oriented to transfer-as-recontextualization: "multiple avenues of connection [exist] among contexts, including knowledge, ways of knowing, identities, and goals."

1. "transfer is not only mere application; it is also an act of reconstruction";
2. "transfer can be both positive and negative";
3. "there is a powerful affective dimension of transfer";
4. "written and spoken genres associated with these contexts provide an exigence for transfer"; and
5. "meta-awareness is an important, but not a necessary, element of transfer." (Nowacek 2011, 21–30)

According to Nowacek, "theories of transfer assume that an individual is moving among fundamentally *different* situations and seeking to identify some similarity," while "theories of genre assume that individuals find themselves in fundamentally similar situations and draw on socially constructed and constitutive genres in order to minimize the sense of difference in these different situations" (20). In Nowacek's model of transfer-as-recontextualization, both spoken and written genres can help students navigate writing tasks, and it is through genre, the study claims, that students use writing knowledge—defined here as "a constellation of knowledges and abilities linked together by genre"—across contexts (100). Moreover, in this model students and faculty play distinctive roles: much like Yancey's (1998) students-as-agents-of-their-own-learning, Nowacek's students are "agents of integration," with faculty, ideally, functioning as "handlers" helping students engage in recontextualization. In sum, agents of integration, as a concept, offers

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> a means of joining transfer as an act of individual cognition with the institutional realities of a specialized academy that works against the recognition and valuing of transfer. Agents of integration are individuals actively working to *perceive* as well as to convey *effectively to others* connections between previously distinct contexts. (Nowacek 2011, 38, emphasis original)

And more specifically, the connections students draw on are genre and content.

What we see from this study is threefold. First, some students are adept at drawing on their prior knowledge of genre and/or information and using one or both in new writing tasks. For example, one student, Data, is able to draw on materials from his history class when making a successful argument in a literature assignment. Second, other students do not fare so well, transferring from one context to another, but, like Davis's (2012) Natascha, with disappointing results. In traditional terms, we would call such instances negative transfer, but Nowacek redefines them as cases of "frustrated integration." Assigned the task of writing one page of a medieval diary filled with material descriptions of life at the time, for example, Kelly instead composes a diary page oriented to the psychology of her subject, resulting in a lower grade than expected. Nowacek theorizes that Kelly does transfer, but it's more the transfer of what Kelly knows about the genre of a diary, which may sometimes be more oriented to thoughts and feelings rather than a report of material conditions. Kelly thus transfers, but it's a case of frustrated integration since the assignment specifies the genre of the writing task in a way at odds with Kelly's understanding. Third, while faculty in this model of transfer are identified as "handlers," their assignments—at least as they are presented in the study—not infrequently contribute to the difficulty students have in transferring, with the diary assignment as an interesting case in point.

As Nowacek observes, the diary assignment calls for a very specific kind of diary, one that fails to account for some students' prior experiences with diaries, but this difference is not mentioned or highlighted by the instructor:

> framing the assignment as a diary taps into associations with diaries prevalent in late twentieth century America: as personal and private, as focused on an individual's thoughts and feelings. A potential conflict, then, existed between the goals of the assignment (to focus on material detail) and the identities and goals often tacitly associated with the genre of diary (a self-absorbed author focused on feelings). (Nowacek 2011, 85)

Indeed, one of the points that Mary Soliday (2011) makes in *Everyday Genres* is related to this issue: what seems to help students, her research

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shows, is assigning them what she calls "wild genres," that is, genres that exist in the world. In this case, a diary is a wild genre, but in the history class it's been redefined to become something more "domesticated" to suit the needs of the class, and is thus doubly confusing to the students. In fact, Kelly is not the only student who encounters difficulty with the assignment. What's also interesting is that what Nowacek documents in Kelly's experience can be regarded as successful transfer if judged by the ability of the student to use prior knowledge successfully. What qualifies it as "frustrated integration" is the grade Kelly receives on the assignment; this in turn raises the issue of the relationship between what we consider success in transfer and the grade on an assignment, an important point we take up in later chapters.

More generally, here we see students recontextualizing, through genre knowledge and disciplinary context, what they have learned in one context in order to write in another, and again, good questions emerge from the study. One: as we have asked regarding other studies, if students had a working vocabulary, how might that support and inform their ability to transfer? Two, and as Nowacek (2011) observes, the role of meta-awareness is not clearly defined: "Finally, this study suggests the need—and a method—for future research into the role of meta-awareness in genre knowledge acquisition and transfer" (142). Third, Nowacek notes as well the need "for comparative studies. This study was not comparative, but an obvious question for future research is the relative merits of stand-alone FYC courses, linked courses, and the interdisciplinary L.C. model of FYC described in this book" (142), a research task we begin to take up in chapter 3.

TEACHING FOR TRANSFER: INTERLOCKING CONCEPTS AND A THEORY OF WRITING

The last middle-range curricular model is designed for transfer, the TFT course that is the focus of the study we share in chapters 3 and 4. Developed as the first step in the study, this course includes particular content for first-year composition, content that seeks to teach for transfer explicitly. It also provides material for students to write to, write with, and think with as they develop as writers and approach other writing tasks, both as they are enrolled in the class and as they participate in other courses. Different than that of the other approaches documented here, the course content is distinguished by two features. First, the TFT readings and assignments focus on writing-rich and writing-specific terms, concepts, and practices. Second, we include specific concepts

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and practices of reflection pointing students toward developing their own "theory of writing," a theory intended to help students frame and reframe writing situations. Students' development of their own "theory of writing" is a signature of the course, which engages students in a semester-long reflective process with the purpose of exploring the ways they develop, understand, use, and repurpose their knowledge and practice of writing. Thus, through a set of interlocking rhetorical concepts and practices, students in the TFT course learn content they are then able to transfer: (1) key rhetorical terms that aid in the understanding of writing as theory and practice; (2) the use of reflection as a tool for learning, thinking, and writing in the course and beyond; and (3) the development of a theory of writing that helps students create a framework of writing knowledge and practice they'll take with them when the course is over.

The first component, key terms and writing concepts, helps students describe and theorize writing; eleven such terms anchor the course. These terms, representing the core concepts about writing that students learn and practice in the course, are introduced in four sequential sets—(1) audience, genre, rhetorical situation, and reflection; (2) exigence, critical analysis, discourse community, and knowledge; (3) context, composing, and circulation; and (4) knowledge and reflection again—each set intended to support a specific writing assignment or course unit. In addition, earlier concepts are recursively integrated into the learning of subsequent concepts, as the general trajectory of the course, below, indicates.

> Sequence of Key Terms
>
> 1. audience, genre, rhetorical situation, and reflection
> 2. exigence, critical analysis, discourse community, and knowledge
> 3. context, composing and circulation
> 4. knowledge and reflection (reiterated specifically in this unit)

Unit 1: Students are introduced to key concepts/terms about writing while they learn to analyze and incorporate sources as evidence in their writing.

Unit 2: Students work with key concepts/terms about writing while they learn the importance of research and to conduct research, identify appropriate sources, and integrate sources into their writing.

Unit 3: Using the key concepts/terms about writing, students draw upon what they discovered and wrote about in the research phase (unit 2)

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for the development of strategically planned composition in multiple genres, or "Composition–in–three–genres."

Unit 4: Writing a reflection-in-presentation, students work from substantial reflections and other writing activities completed throughout the course to articulate a *theory of writing* that integrates the key concepts and terms learned in the course with the practical experience gained in applying those concepts to their own writing.

The second component of the course, reflection, is introduced as a theory and a reiterative practice that students engage in before, during, and after their writing process. Reflection is integrated into the course in three ways: (1) students learn reflective theory by reading about it; (2) students complete successive reflective assignments, including one accompanying every major assignment in which students theorize about key terms, writing processes and practices, and their identity as a writer; and (3) students engage in other reflective activities connecting readings, key terms, and assignments.

And last but not least, the final component of the course is the theory of writing that students develop; its intent is to ensure students can theorize about and practice writing using key terms and concepts learned in the course, and to support their development as reflective writing practitioners who are able to abstract their theories and employ them in new contexts. As part of the reiterative course design, students reflect on their theory of writing at ten different points—six different journal assignments ask them to think through one or two specific key terms they are learning at that point, and the short writing assignments that work toward one of the four major assignments also require students to define their theory at that moment. The final reflection, then, which is the fourth and final major writing assignment in the course, represents for students the culmination of writing knowledge they have been developing all semester. Given the aim of the course to foster transfer, the last assignment is critical in that it calls for reflection on transfer specifically—students are prompted to reflect and write about how they might apply writing knowledge learned in the course to other writing situations—and it functions to help students continue developing as they exit the course. As a reiterative process, the development of a theory of writing asks students to bridge the learning acquired in first-year composition to the writing required in other college situations. How it does so in the TFT course, especially in comparison to more conventional FYC courses, is the topic of our next chapter.

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Notes

1. Thus far in transfer literature there have been two efforts to use key terms as a major curricular element, ours in the TFT course, and Linda Adler-Kassner's (2012) use of "threshold concepts," a very different approach located in the Meyer and Land (2003; 2006) theory of threshold concepts as a gateway to a discipline. See her article discussing these in the Fall 2012 issue of *Composition Forum*.
2. There are many different models of WAW; see the Downs and Wardle (2012) chapter for a fuller account.
3. Rhetorical education seems to be something of a floating signifier. Suzanne Bordelon (2010), for instance, uses it as a term to describe the kinds of experiences women at the turn of the twentieth century encountered in colleges and as a function of their commencement speeches for the public. In its attention to the civic sphere, this notion of rhetorical education seems to be very different than the usage employed by Brent (2012).
4. Here we see another use of the word disposition.
5. The role of models, while often emphasized in pedagogy, seems undervalued in their influence on writers more generally. See, for example, our findings regarding the role of models—and their absence—in chapter 4, as well as Michael Bunn's (2013) research on their role in shaping student response to writing assignments.
6. The value of meta-awareness has been emphasized by other programs as well. The Stanford Study of Writing (2008), for instance, notes that "Participants who scored high in rhetorical awareness of audience in their freshman year showed their greatest amount of growth in subsequent years, indicating this variable as statistically significant (p>.0001)."

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