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LANGUAGE DIFFERENCE AND EXPANSIVE LEARNING: NEGOTIATING  
CONCEPTS, CONTEXTS, AND IDENTITIES IN WRITING-RELATED TRANSFER  
STUDIES

By

Megan Jeanne Bardolph  
B.A., Grand Valley State University, 2005  
M.A., University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, 2008

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in English/Rhetoric and Composition

Department of English  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2015

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A Dissertation Approved on

May 1, 2015

by the following dissertation committee

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Bruce Horner  
Dissertation Director

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Beth Boehm

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Karen Kopelson

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Glynis Ridley

---

Constant Leung

DEDICATION

To Adam

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my advisor, Dr. Bruce Horner, for his guidance, patience, and insight. Thanks, also, and the members of my committee, Dr. Beth Boehm, Dr. Karen Kopelson, Dr. Glynis Ridley and Dr. Constant Leung, for the valuable feedback they provided at each step of this project. Special thanks to Dr. Kopelson for her encouragement and assistance in my thinking about this project over the past five years. Thanks, also, to Dr. Min-Zhan Lu, who gave me the confidence I needed to finish.

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## ABSTRACT

### LANGUAGE DIFFERENCE AND EXPANSIVE LEARNING

Megan J. Bardolph

May 1, 2015

This dissertation offers a theoretical examination of current conceptualizations of writing-related transfer of learning in Rhetoric and Composition. I analyze the models presently available for understanding writing-related transfer of learning and argue that they are constrained by narrow conceptions of language use/users that do not accurately reflect the rich and varied language practices student writers perform, nor the multilingual audiences students with whom students will interact when they leave our classrooms. As a result, I argue that transfer has been difficult for writing studies scholars to pinpoint and locate. Building on theoretical models of language from applied linguistics and second language writing, I develop a theoretical orientation to the idea of transfer in terms of dispositions or attitudes toward language that can be practiced, enhanced, and potentially mobilized across rhetorical moments and spaces.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter One narrates the scholarly context for my dissertation by surveying contemporary theories of writing development in postsecondary education, and explores why the idea of ‘transfer’ has become so critical (and polarizing) for the disciplinary identity of Rhetoric and Composition. Chapter Two offers an analysis of three recent efforts to revitalize research on writing-related transfer, including the domain model of writing expertise, studies on writing-related threshold concepts and Writing

About Writing curricula, and research on individual/institutional dispositions. Although the emerging perspectives purport to address the limitations of models that presume the existence of general or universal writing skills, I argue that they continue to work within the same terms of the models they propose to redefine. Chapter Three introduces the temporal-spatial framework advocated by translingual scholars to current transfer models. By locating contexts and practices in both time and space, I argue that it no longer makes sense to conceive of expansive learning as the process of transporting knowledge objects between two stable contexts. Chapter Four illustrates a set of critical reading practices that might help writing researchers and instructors identify the performance of rhetorical expertise in more nuanced and complex ways. Chapter Five concludes the project by situating my work within current fast capitalist discourses about writing across higher education.

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## CHAPTER I

### SITUATING TRANSFER OF LEARNING IN COMPOSITION STUDIES

In a recent issue of *PMLA*, Bizzell (2014) describes the continuing efforts of composition studies scholars to align writing instruction with the expanding linguistic and rhetorical abilities students bring into the classroom. Asserting that “we want to know who our students are,” she suggests that the increasing presence of diverse linguistic and cultural practices and populations in U.S. higher education has contributed to a reinvigorated interest in issues of cultural and linguistic difference as they pertain to college writing instruction (p. 442). While the questions that have guided scholarly inquiries into the nature and processes of writing development and improvement continue to be as crucial and as pertinent as ever before, composition studies, as a field, is witnessing a shift to integrate these concerns with the recognition that students are bringing more, and different, linguistic and rhetorical resources to their writing practices. Thus, while research in composition studies continues to work toward goals of helping student writers improve their writing ability, such goals are continually reimagined and reworked in ways that will allow teachers of writing to best respond to and engage the presence of difference.

Bizzell’s call represents one of many recent efforts to position issues of language difference as central to the enterprise of U.S. college composition. Historically, language issues have represented a “special interest” topic in the field of composition, perhaps in

part, as Matsuda (2006) argues, because of a lingering assumption that students in composition classrooms by and large are already proficient speakers of privileged varieties of English. In recent years, however, such issues have come to receive unprecedented attention in composition studies under the recognition that languages and language varieties are far from discrete, clearly defined entities. Scholars adopting a “translingual” approach to writing and literacy instruction, for instance, insist that the mixing and intermingling of languages and language varieties is the always occurring norm in language practice, rather than the exception to the norm. As Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur (2011) acknowledge in their oft-cited opinion essay, “the growing majority of English speakers worldwide – including substantial numbers within the United States – know other languages, and, through interaction, the Englishes they use vary and multiply” (p. 303). Approaches to college writing instruction that presume the stability of Standard English or Edited American English, from this view, are insufficient in that they unfairly privilege a dominant model of language as a stable and monolithic system that fundamentally does not match the variations occurring in and through practice.

The recent attention given to issues of language difference in composition studies makes it appropriate and important to think about what a translingual approach might have to offer to other established scholarly projects in composition studies and, conversely, to think about how existing conversations in composition studies might contribute to and extend the work of those adopting a translingual orientation. This project represents an effort to articulate the potential connections and overlap between the theoretical and pedagogical model of translingualism and theories of writing-related transfer of learning, as they are currently portrayed in the field of rhetoric and

composition. While current approaches for understanding transfer of learning both into and out of college composition have continued to reject the “transmission” model of learning often invoked by the term *transfer* as it is used in educational psychology (i.e., that knowledge-objects can be “deposited” into learners and can be reused, recalled, or reapplied in future settings in consistent and uniform ways), I argue that these approaches have not yet found ways to account for the difference and variation that arise in individual instances of writing practice. The impetus for this project stems from my curiosity about the assertion among translingual scholars that “difference is the norm” in writing, and to consider that assertion in relation to current work on transfer and writing.

Scholarly conversations about writing-related learning transfer, too, have proliferated over the past decade. In *The End of Composition Studies*, Smit (2004) expresses skepticism about the possibility of “teaching for transfer” in first-year composition. Citing Petraglia’s (1995) critique of “general writing skills instruction,” he advances two arguments: first, he argues that the task of equipping students with the skills they will need to write in subsequent settings does not make sense, given what we know about writing as a socially and contextually determined activity. Second, he describes the inherent difficulties of teaching toward an awareness of the contextual nature of writing in a setting that is itself highly contextual. The assumption that what is taught in college composition will be of use to students as they write in subsequent settings, from this perspective, is invariably problematic. Writing studies scholars continue to pursue pedagogical models that call into question Smit’s argument and have made impressive gains in articulating the rhetorical knowledge and awareness thought necessary for students to compose effectively in new or unfamiliar contexts. If writing

cannot be taught as a set of universal, decontextualized skills, such projects have set the goal of teaching toward an increased sensitivity to the rhetorical dimensions of effective communication, drawing on rhetorical genre studies, activity theory, and models of situated learning. Transfer theorists in composition continue to seek new frameworks, materials and procedures in attempt to teach toward a deeper awareness about writing processes, concepts, and contexts students might practice beyond the confines of the composition class. This commitment to continually revitalize and reinvent understandings of transfer indicates optimism about future research as well as an openness to reshaping the current terrain of transfer studies scholarship. Composition researchers and instructors already know, as Nowacek (2011) has asserted, that “students do, in fact, transfer writing-related knowledge” in ways that “are not often recognized or valued” by current approaches (p. 124), and emerging perspectives continue to highlight previously unacknowledged contextual, curricular, institutional, and behavioral factors. Driscoll and Wells (2012), for instance, have described the need for a pluralistic approach to understanding transfer, recognizing the partial and inadequate renderings of student learning that are made available when researchers focus on one approach (e.g., a rhetorical genre studies approach) at the expense of others (e.g., an intrapersonal or motivational approach). The development of multidimensional frameworks and methodological approaches, it is imagined, will provide a more complex and presumably more accurate understanding of how students draw on and make use of prior knowledge.

Below, I introduce some of the current concerns about transfer and language difference in composition. Ultimately, I argue that while issues of transfer and language difference have occupied very different spaces within rhetoric and composition

scholarship, they share a similar project of teaching toward an openness and flexibility to the ways language is practiced in different rhetorical situations. I argue that the model of translingualism might offer a productive lens through which to continue the exciting work of transfer studies in composition, to expand current approaches and explore new possibilities for writing-about-writing curricula, the notion of *threshold concepts*, and the intrapersonal factors imagined to influence student learning in composition.

### **Transfer of Learning: Definitions and Models**

Learning transfer first became a central issue for educational theorists in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in response to dynamic shifts in American public education. Education was no longer reserved purely for the elite nor for those entering trade professions – it was an increasingly public, inclusive, and expansive enterprise, and it needed to be concerned with the “portability” of knowledge and skills “in ways that it had never been before” (Beach, 1999, p. 105). Educational theorists of the time sought to move beyond models of learning relying on the “mind as muscle” metaphor, or the assumption that learning just “happened” through a process of mental discipline, or sustained practice in repeated, intensive drills. The mental discipline approach, as noted by Thorndike and Woodworth (1901), was insufficient for documenting how and why learning in one setting was reused and reapplied in specific contexts. Thorndike and Woodworth’s study, widely regarded as the first empirical study concerning the phenomenon of learning transfer, found that the process of “carrying” learning from one context to another occurred when identical elements could be identified between tasks. From this view, transfer could be understood as a function of explicit structuring of tasks,

rather than as the result of the generic exercising of the mind. The implications of this study had wide-reaching effects, in that it introduced the idea that transfer of learning does not happen automatically – learners have to actively perceive similarities between two contexts in order to draw on what they learned in a previous setting. The question then became how educational institutions could structure learning environments that would facilitate this process.

Much of the scholarship on transfer today (both in and outside of composition) refers to Perkins and Salomon's (1988) seminal essay on the need to "teach for transfer." Transfer, for Perkins and Salomon, is defined as "the phenomenon occurring when learning in one context is useful or helpful for learning in another context" (p. 23). Pointing to the dearth of empirical data in support of the transfer of isolated skills, they argue that transfer can only occur if students are taught to "mindfully abstract" general, more broadly applicable principles from an original learning situation. "Teachers," they suggest, "can point out explicitly the more general principles behind particular skills or knowledge or, better, provoke students to attempt such generalizations themselves" (p. 29). Their emphasis on metacognitive ability represents a significant shift from earlier conceptualizations of transfer; while previous studies had looked for (and often failed to find) the transfer of isolated skills from learning situation A to learning situation B, the notion of mindful abstraction set an alternative goal to teach learners how to be aware of what they learned and to anticipate how that knowledge might be relevant in subsequent settings.

Perkins and Salomon (1988) further identify several different kinds of transfer activity, and devise a transfer-related terminology still referred to frequently in current

scholarship. They articulate a distinction, for instance, between *low-road* and *high-road* transfer. Low-road transfer occurs when individuals apply well-established skills in an almost automatic or unconscious fashion (they use the example of driving a truck when you already know how to drive a car). High-road transfer, on the other hand, is the result of learners making conscious and mindful connections across two learning contexts. Learning situation B, they argue, may not provide all of the contextual cues necessary for learners to perceive a direct similarity to learning situation A, so it requires active abstraction of previously acquired knowledge resources that may assist a learner with performing a required task. Perkins and Salomon make a further significant distinction between *positive* and *negative* transfer. Positive transfer, by their formulation, occurs when what is learned in a previous setting enhances learning in the present setting, whereas learning delayed or hindered by what is learned in the previous setting is referred to as negative transfer. They additionally define *forward-reaching* transfer as the ability to anticipate how learning in a present context will be helpful for learning in a future context, while *backward-reaching* transfer is used to describe a process of actively recalling relevant past experiences and applicable knowledge to aid with a task in the present situation. Ultimately, their essay works to establish an “ideal” kind of transfer in educational contexts: high-road, positive, and forward-reaching.

While Perkins and Salomon’s (1988) metacognitive view continues to have a profound impact on cross-disciplinary conceptualizations of learning transfer, it has been called into question for its unclear stance on the role of individual agency. In effect, their model tends to depict action as somewhat predetermined – given the “right” conditions and the appropriate instruction, individuals will act in particular ways. Further questions

have been raised about the inevitable variation in and across sites of learning, and the role that individuals and individual actions play in shaping learning contexts. Sociocultural views of learning, including perspectives on activity theory (Tuomi-Gröhn & Engeström, 2003), situated learning (Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991), and discourse studies (Gee, 1992) have provided an alternative stance on transfer. Each of these theories, of course, draws its own conclusions; taken collectively, they offer a perspective on learning as an inherently social as well as an individual enterprise – learning, that is, occurs through dynamic and reciprocal relationships between individuals and social contexts. Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of situated learning, for instance, challenges cognitivist models that privilege the “assimilation” and “transmission” of reified knowledge-objects, which, they argue, tend to promote a “nonpersonal view of knowledge, skills, tasks, activities, and learning” (p. 52). In contrast, they support a “social practice” view of knowing, learning, and doing, one that emphasizes “relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world” (p. 51). While cognitive views of learning tend to imagine individuals and learning contexts as isolatable and relatively unchanging, sociocultural perspectives view these as always changing through their ongoing relation to each other.

The divide between cognitive and sociocultural perspectives on learning transfer has, according to Beach (1999), worked to sustain a series of arguments that “vacillate between binary oppositions” (mental vs. social processes; individual agency vs. socially conditioned agency; intentional vs. spontaneous practice), all theoretical constructs that cannot accurately capture the phenomena of transfer we seek to understand. Beach argues that the term “transfer” itself is too inextricably linked to cognitive models of learning,

and proposes “consequential transitions” as an alternative: “transition, then, is the concept we use to understand how knowledge is generalized, or propagated, across social space and time. A transition is consequential when it is consciously reflected on, struggled with, and shifts the individual’s sense of self or social position. Thus, consequential transitions link identity with knowledge propagation” (p. 42).

Composition studies finds itself in both camps at the same time – we continue to borrow the conceptual vocabulary of Perkins and Salomon’s metacognitive view, while simultaneously recognizing the need to view the transfer of rhetorical knowledge as a dynamically social and contextual activity. Studies on writing and transfer have tended to focus on two central sets of questions. The first pertains to issues of instructional content: what can instructors teach in first-year writing that will facilitate the transfer of writing-related knowledge? The second is focused on how individuals value what they learn: how do individual attitudes toward writing and writing instruction shape the way they make use of writing-related knowledge?

### **Writing-Related Transfer of Learning**

The extent to which writing knowledge and skills, as taught in a semester-long writing class, can transfer to other sites has generated considerable debate. Essays in Petraglia’s (1995) collection suggest that “general writing skills instruction” or GWSI is unlikely to enable transferability. There are no universal rules or formulas that, once acquired, will guarantee successful or effective written communication in future settings, as genres and generic conventions shift across contexts. Several transfer scholars, following Freedman (1993), have pointed to the flaws of explicit genre instruction, or

pedagogical approaches seeking to teach students the form and style of various written genres. With explicit genre instruction, students may learn to imitate the form and structures of a single given genre (as can be evidenced by many students' allegiance to five-paragraph essay formats), but are ill-prepared to recognize how conventions, forms, and structures shift to meet different rhetorical aims and purposes. Further, even if instructors were able to teach students to write in several different academic genres, scholars have noted the limitations of learning to write in multiple genres within an inauthentic setting. Russell (1995), for example, cautions against teaching students how to write in other disciplinary genres in FYC because this is not how learning works. Drawing on models of learning informed by cultural-historical activity theory, he argues that learning disciplinary genres occurs only through authentic participation in the activity systems of a particular discipline. Wardle (2009) reiterates Russell's argument, and claims that genres "cannot be easily or meaningfully mimicked outside their naturally occurring rhetorical situations and exigencies" (p. 767). A second related issue with explicit instruction in disciplinary genres pertains to the definition of "disciplinarity" and the ambiguity of disciplinary boundaries. Disciplinarity does not necessarily correspond to traditional departmental designations or majors, so the notion of "disciplinary genres" in and of itself is somewhat fraught. As disciplines, departments, and fields of study continue to shift, multiply, and merge, they are continually redefined in ways that complicate any sense of uniformity in disciplinary writing expectations.

Drawing on insights from rhetorical genre theory, scholars have sought, instead, to help students gain insight into how genres work to fulfill a rhetorical purpose, and how the various components of a text are informed by purpose (see Clark and Hernandez,

2011; Devitt, 2008). Genres, in this sense, are understood not primarily in terms of the formal features of different kinds of texts, but as loosely classified by the functions and purposes for which they are used. A deeply rhetorical understanding of genre may allow students to see how genres respond to and shift according to changing exigencies and expectations. As Berkenkotter and Huckin (1993) argue, genres “must accommodate both stability and change” (p. 481). They are “stable enough” to normalize and make familiar the recurring discursive practices of a given community, and they are dynamic in that they change as the conditions of their use change. When individuals have acquired rhetorical genre awareness, it is imagined they have moved beyond a view of genres as fixed, stable forms, and toward an understanding of the “work” they allow writers to accomplish, and how they are often altered in order to meet the demands of a particular situation.

In *College Writing and Beyond*, Beaufort (2007) argues that a rhetorical understanding of genre alone is not enough to promote transfer, in that it does not account fully for the role that discourse communities play in establishing and recognizing generic norms and conventions. She maintains that it is difficult to understand genre as a rhetorical act without a firm understanding of the shared values and activities of a given community. Without an understanding of discourse communities, the notion of genre still risks coming across as a transparent medium of communication, existing apart from the groups who use them. Beaufort uses the example of an abstract of an academic journal article or book to illustrate this point. The generic conventions of abstracts, she notes, are relatively stable, although the conventions they follow vary both within and across disciplines. Yet the function and purpose the abstract serves change significantly

depending on who reads them. Abstracts, she continues, may be “read by those in several different *discourse communities*” (p. 20, emphasis in original), including researchers in the writer’s field, researchers from outside the writer’s field, librarians who catalog the writer’s publication into collections and databases, and editors of publications in the writer’s field. Abstracts, as genres, may be recognizable in terms of their formal conventions, and they can be analyzed in terms of the “work” they allow the writer to accomplish. Importantly, though, the work they accomplish is different depending on the expectations and needs of different communities. Discourse communities, then, establish norms for genres that may be unique to the community or shared with overlapping communities.

Beaufort’s (2007) call to introduce students to disciplinary concepts about writing has been furthered by those advocating a “writing-about-writing” approach to instruction. Wardle and Downs’ (2011, 2014) *Writing About Writing* textbook maps out an explicit curriculum that seeks to introduce students to writing theory and research, under the assumption that disciplinary knowledge about writing will be useful for students as they continue to navigate writing tasks in subsequent situations. The first edition of *WAW* (2011) is structured loosely around five disciplinary concepts (rhetorical constructs, writing process, literacy, discourse, and authority) and clusters seminal readings from the field around each of these concepts. The second edition, released in 2014, introduces Meyer and Land’s (2003) notion of *threshold concepts*, defined as discipline-specific terms and ideas that are thought to be necessary for learners to progress in a field (see chapter 2 for an extended discussion of Meyer and Land’s work). The threshold concepts identified in the second edition include (1) *writing performance is informed by prior*

*literacy experiences, (2) writing mediates activity, (3) good writing is completely dependent on the situation, readers, and uses it's being created for, (4) writing is knowledge-making, and (5) writing is by nature a technology.* The book is structured in five sections, each section pertaining to a different writing-related threshold concept. The threshold concept approach adopted in the second edition of *Writing About Writing* sets writing instructors on a new path to understand the conceptual knowledge deemed necessary for students to develop, and ostensibly to transfer, writing expertise.

Current perspectives on writing-about-writing approaches to college-level writing instruction have raised important questions that remain unanswered: given what we know about the fluctuating nature of written genres, who is allowed to alter their conventions, and how do these alterations happen? How does a piece of writing evidence rhetorical genre awareness or discourse community knowledge? How do we know when students have acquired a disciplinary threshold concept? Teaching for rhetorical awareness, as Nowacek (2011) has argued, may be useful, but it does not guarantee that individuals will transfer knowledge. Individuals value this instruction in different ways, based on their past experiences, their attitudes toward writing, and their expectations for writing instruction.

Such concerns have prompted further inquiry into the role of individual attitudes and dispositions. Studies have shown how students often do not expect what they learn in first-year college writing to be useful for their writing in other courses and settings, which creates a significant barrier to determining and locating instances of writing-related transfer. When individuals do not perceive instruction as valuable, they will be less likely to “mindfully abstract” what they have learned previously in a new situation

where such knowledge may be useful or relevant. Robertson et al. (2012) and Wardle (2012a) describe how students often enter college with strong allegiances to the writing instruction they received in K-12 settings, allegiances which are difficult to “undo” in a single semester college writing course. Findings from Bergmann and Zepernick’s (2007) study suggest that students’ shared preconceptions about writing “as personal and expressive rather than academic or professional” (p. 129) may limit their ability to learn and transfer rhetorical knowledge and strategies. They conclude that “the attitudes expressed by our respondents suggest that the primary obstacle to...transfer is not that students are *unable* to recognize situations in which those skills can be used, but that students *do not look for* situations because they believe that skills in FYC have no value in any other setting” (p. 139). Transfer scholars continue to add detail to what we know about the outlooks students bring to their writing in postsecondary settings and beyond, and how those beliefs may enable or inhibit students from acquiring a sense of writing as a rhetorical and social act.

To further complicate these matters, Nelms and Dively (2007) suggest that faculty attitudes toward writing and writing instruction vary immensely across disciplines, which creates another potential barrier for transfer. Instructors from across the disciplines hold different expectations of student writing ability, expectations that frequently clash with those held by composition instructors. Further, they hold different expectations of the first-year college writing course, often assuming it serves a general preparatory function in teaching students “general” academic writing skills. When faculty from across the disciplines do teach writing, Nelms and Dively found that they utilize a different writing-related vocabulary, which can contradict the terminology used by instructors in first-year

writing courses. In short, they argue that the dissimilarities in the way writing is taught and valued across contexts make it unlikely that students will recognize the need and opportunity to transfer writing-related knowledge. As Adler-Kassner et al.'s (2012) study suggests, even when instructors from linked courses in writing and history attempt to teach the same threshold concepts about writing, these efforts often fail, as history instructors have not reached what Meyer and Land (2006) would describe as a “postliminal” understanding of the shared concepts.

These concerns over individual attitudes and dispositions toward writing have prompted the following kinds of questions: How can we ensure that students will receive the same reinforcement of writing-related knowledge, ideas, and skills as they progress through their academic coursework? What can we do to “undo” or redirect the preconceptions about writing that students bring to college? How can we promote attitudes in students to encourage forward-reaching transfer, or to increase their awareness about how what is learned in FYC might be put to use in future settings? What do we do with the different attitudes and dispositions that students bring? Where do they come from? Can they change?

Transfer studies, in this respect, are undergoing a significant turn toward the individual. As researchers continue to ask questions about the role of motivation, dispositions, and other intra-personal factors, the available models of writing-related transfer will need to be amended. Students do bring different attitudes toward writing, different prior experiences with writing, and different goals and expectations for their writing. Our models for understanding and recognizing transfer will need to shift to account for this difference. The primary purpose of this project is to theorize and explore

what this shift might look like. To do so, I argue that transfer researchers might productively look toward current approaches in composition studies for understanding, engaging, and responding to difference. The approaches I draw on here come out of scholarship on language difference in composition. While the “difference” encountered and described by transfer scholars is not immediately related to issues of language usage and second language writing, I argue that current work in these areas may serve as a useful model for conceptualizing difference in transfer studies. It may allow us to reconceive what the activity of “writing-related transfer” is, to articulate what we look for when we look for instances of transfer, and to devise new methods for looking for it.

### **Language Difference in Composition**

The renewed interest in language issues in composition has emerged out of multiple intersecting lines of research, including scholarship on “hybrid” and “mixed” forms of academic discourse (see Bizzell, 1999, 2000; Schroeder et al., 2002), emerging perspectives on English language teaching in global contexts (see Leung and Street, 2011), scholarship responding to efforts to make English the official language of the United States (see Horner, 2001; Horner & Trimbur, 2002), and scholarship on the globalization of U.S. college composition (see Donahue, 2009; Foster & Russell, 2002). This work can be identified as part of an intellectual movement to view language and language varieties not as static and discrete entities, but as situated, intersecting, and dynamic practices. Attention to language difference has increased also, in part, due to a growing recognition of the increased heterogeneity in student language practices. Students across higher education in the U.S., as well as elsewhere, are bringing more

languages and language practices to school than ever before. Part of the reason for this has to do with increased global and social mobility – the Institute of International Education (2014) predicted that a record-high 820,000 international students studied at US colleges and universities in the 2012-2013 academic year. Additionally, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated in 2013 that 61.8 million US residents spoke a language other than English at home – or roughly one out of every five people. As college enrollment numbers continue to increase, diverse language practices continue to shape the linguistic terrain of higher education. The rise in instantaneous global communication made possible by social media and digital networking has further contributed to the changing language practices across higher education. In such spaces, students are practicing and developing new forms of literacy that involve diverse linguistic and rhetorical resources. As communities continue to intermingle and intersect across various forums, people are practicing language – and English in particular – in new and exciting ways.

The presence of such linguistic diversity has raised new questions for composition researchers and instructors, who are tasked with the simultaneous responsibilities of teaching academic writing standards and responding appropriately to language difference in writing. Much of the literature on language difference in composition has focused on addressing the tension between the need to both accept student language varieties as legitimate, and to give students the skill of writing in standardized forms of English to help students compete in the global market. However, the aim to equip students with “standard English” can be aligned with a tacit policy of English Only, one that, as Horner and Lu (2008) argue, “anticipates a linguistically homogenous global future” in which “everyone will speak and write something termed ‘standard English’” (p. 142).

One recent development to address concerns of linguistic variation is the pedagogical model of translingualism, which adopts a view that “difference” is the always occurring norm in writing (see Canagarajah, 2013; Horner et al., 2011; Lu and Horner, 2013). This model responds to dominant assumptions that would view language difference as a problem that needs to be erased, tolerated, or fixed. Such assumptions presume that languages and language varieties exist as fixed, discrete systems, and that individual language practices either work within or deviate from the conventions of a particular system. However, translingual scholars would argue that this is not, in fact, the way language works in practice. Drawing on theoretical models in applied linguistics and second language studies, those adopting a translingual approach view language itself as the outcome of practice, rather than the precursor to it (see Calvet, 2006; Canagarajah, 2007; Khubchandani, 1997; Pennycook, 2010). This model would have significant implications for composition research and pedagogy, in that it locates agency in all instances of writing practice. Student writing, from this perspective, would not be viewed in terms of its apparent compliance to or deviation from a certain set of language conventions, but instead as active work that always redraws, reproduces, and recreates conventions (see Chapter 3 for further overview of the translingual emphasis in composition).

The attention to practice emphasized by a translingual perspective can be aligned with recent work in New Literacy Studies and Academic Literacies. Barton and Hamilton (2000) offer a conceptualization of *literacy practices* as situated, fluid, and emergent: they “straddle” the spaces between individuals and social contexts, and can be understood as “existing in the relations between people, within groups and communities, rather than

as a set of properties residing in individuals” (p. 8). Thus, by stressing the situated nature of literacy, they locate instances of practice within historical social contexts. Barton and Hamilton recognize how certain sets of literacy practices (in particular, those supported by socially powerful institutions) become codified as “dominant,” or a measure against which individual practices occurring within institutional contexts are compared (p. 12). Thus, when I refer to dominant approaches to writing and literacy instruction, it is with this understanding in mind.

### **Research Questions and Outline of Chapters**

To date, scholarly conversations about transfer and translanguaging have remained separate in composition studies. But the questions raised by each are arguably the most pressing concerns in the field – we must find ways to document student learning, and we must find ways to respond to shifting language practices. The overarching aim of this project, then, is to demonstrate how these two concerns need not and cannot be at odds with each other. In an attempt to build consensus about what transfers from first-year composition, transfer studies scholars have neglected issues of cultural and linguistic difference, and tend to falsely depict students as a homogenous and monolingual group, which may ultimately and counterintuitively limit our understanding of transfer. In an attempt to accept difference and variation as the always occurring norm in writing practice, translanguaging scholars are put to the test when faced with pressures to document long-term, expansive learning.

My project is guided by three central questions: first, why has it been so difficult to determine “what transfers” both into and out of college composition? Second, how

have researchers conceived of the activity implied by writing-related transfer of learning, and what affordances and limitations are offered through this conceptualization? Third, how might a translingual emphasis inform the ways we read for and identify potential instances of transfer activity? Through my theoretical exploration of these questions, I hope to show how the field has reached a critical moment for aligning our efforts to understand both writing-related learning transfer and linguistic diversity.

I begin this exploration in Chapter 2, “Three Perspectives on Writing-Related Transfer: Knowledge Domains, Threshold Concepts, and Dispositions,” where I offer a critical analysis of three recent efforts to revitalize research on writing-related transfer. These efforts include Beaufort’s (2007) domain model of writing expertise; emerging work on *threshold concepts* and Writing about Writing curricula (Adler-Kassner et al., 2012; Clark and Hernandez, 2011; Downs and Wardle, 2007; Wardle and Adler-Kassner, in press; Wardle and Downs, 2010, 2014); and research on individual/institutional dispositions (Driscoll & Wells, 2012; Nelms & Dively, 2007; Wardle, 2012). Although the emerging perspectives have been proposed as a way to address the limitations of models that presume the existence of general or universal writing skills, I argue that they continue to work within the terms and assumptions of the theories they propose to rethink or redefine, and thus are unlikely to transform our thinking about transfer substantially. While these approaches do offer new models for conceiving of the aims and effects of college writing instruction, I describe how they have not yet gone far enough to reject assumptions that knowledge about writing exists as a set of teachable rules that can be acquired and reapplied consistently across pre-determined contexts. Additionally, they seem to imagine that student writers can be identified primarily in terms of their status as

novices, which can obscure, as Nowacek (2011) has described, the ways students might actively recontextualize and create valuable new writing strategies in concert with academic writing conventions.

In Chapter 3, “Denaturalizing Transfer: Contexts, Conventions, and Identities in Time and Space,” I suggest that the current monolingual paradigm informing studies on writing and transfer has contributed to a “myth of linguistic homogeneity” (Matsuda, 2006) in student populations identified as native and nonnative English speakers. As a result, the literature on writing-related transfer has not yet developed a robust model for understanding difference as an inevitable feature of local language practice. The temporal-spatial framework advocated by translingual scholars, I argue, would work to shift the terms and assumptions of stability at work in current transfer models and metaphors. I conclude by outlining the recent metaphors proposed by writing studies scholars in efforts to “get outside” of the vocabulary of transfer, suggesting that these alternative terms evidence a need to rethink the underlying monolingual paradigm that has attended and informed current depictions of expansive learning in the field.

In Chapter 4, “Understanding Difference as a Central-Feature of Writing-Related Transfer Activity,” I describe and illustrate a set of critical, negotiated reading practices compositionists might productively employ in our efforts to better understand transfer and the activity it implies. The approach to reading I describe is informed by the interactional strategies adopted by translingual writers and speakers as identified by Canagarajah (2013), as well as a “responsibility logic,” which Ratcliffe (1999) describes as a central component of rhetorical listening. In my readings of two student essays, including Tim’s essay for English 102 in Beaufort’s (2007) *College Writing and Beyond*

and Claudia's essay from my Fall 2014 English 102 course at the University of Louisville, I show how a translingual emphasis might contribute to our sense of how students practice rhetorical knowledge and expertise in creative and often unexpected ways.

In the conclusion chapter, I emphasize how we have reached an especially fruitful moment for integrating conversations about language difference and learning transfer. Amidst increasing efforts across higher education to define a set of clear and effective written communication skills as a predictor of economic and professional success, I argue that it will be increasingly necessary for writing studies scholars to combat the monolingual paradigm currently shaping public discourse about writing and writing instruction. A translingual emphasis is needed to more closely align our inquiries into the nature of writing-related transfer with the heterogeneous practices and populations at work in U.S. higher education today.

CHAPTER II  
THREE PERSPECTIVES ON WRITING-RELATED TRANSFER: KNOWLEDGE  
DOMAINS, THRESHOLD CONCEPTS, AND DISPOSITIONS

Over the past decade there has been a proliferation of interest in how students make use of knowledge about writing; our unanswered questions about transfer have moved to the forefront of our disciplinary and pedagogical agendas. The most recent approaches to understand transfer have continued to reject the “acquisition and application” of skills model that characterized earlier accounts of learning outside of composition, and have sought instead to identify the general rhetorical processes and behaviors that allow writers to communicate effectively in unfamiliar situations. However, the recurring theme across current research is that transfer is limited and that students do not perceive instruction in composition to be relevant to writing in other settings. Studies have identified “students’ persistent struggles and often failed efforts” to “draw on what they learned in previous classes” as they engage in writing in new situations (Nowacek, 2011, p. 2). Scholars have speculated widely about why research on writing-related transfer has yielded unsatisfactory results. Bergmann and Zepernick (2007), for instance, have suggested that students’ preconceptions about writing and writing instruction limit their ability to generalize from the knowledge and strategies they practice in composition courses. Wardle (2009) has noted that transfer from composition

is complicated by “mutt genre” assignments without authentic exigencies, and has raised important questions about the limited function of inauthentic writing tasks in FYC.

Nelms and Dively (2007) have argued that faculty across the disciplines do not share expectations about what kinds of writing knowledge should ideally transfer to subsequent settings, which may lead to an unproductive rupture between what students are asked to perform in composition and what is expected of their writing in other courses. These findings point to the pervasiveness of the “myth of transience” (Russell, 1991; following Rose, 1985) both across post-secondary contexts and outside of the academy, despite the many efforts to draw attention to the existence and function of discrete discourse communities associated with particular disciplinary and social contexts. That is, students and scholars outside of composition still tend to believe that [X] can be done to solve the problem of deficient writing, all the while tacitly recognizing that standards of acceptable discursive practice vary among social and disciplinary communities.

Despite these barriers and perpetual frustrations, however, transfer researchers in composition continue to seek new frameworks, materials and procedures in attempt to teach toward a deeper metacognitive awareness that writers can utilize beyond the confines of the composition class. This commitment to continually revitalize and reinvent understandings of transfer indicates optimism about future research as well as an openness to reshaping the current terrain of transfer studies scholarship. Composition researchers and instructors already know, as Nowacek (2011) has asserted, that “students do, in fact, transfer writing-related knowledge” in ways that “are not often recognized or valued” by current approaches (p. 124), and emerging perspectives continue to highlight previously unacknowledged contextual, curricular, institutional, and behavioral factors.

Driscoll and Wells (2012), for instance, have described the need for a pluralistic approach to understanding transfer, recognizing the partial and inadequate renderings of student learning that are made available when researchers focus on one approach (e.g., a genre-based approach) at the expense of others (e.g., an intrapersonal approach). The development of multidimensional frameworks and methodological approaches, it is imagined, will provide a more complex and presumably more accurate understanding of how students draw on and make use of prior knowledge.

In this chapter, I explore three current approaches which claim to alter or extend the terms of previous studies in an attempt to create to a multidimensional view of writing-related learning transfer, focusing on Beaufort's (2007) domain model of writing expertise, research on threshold concepts and writing-about-writing curricula (Adler-Kassner et al., 2012; Adler-Kassner & Wardle, in press; Clark and Hernandez, 2011; Wardle, 2012b; Wardle & Downs, 2011; Wardle & Downs, 2014), and studies on individual and institutional dispositions (Bergmann & Zepernick, 2007; Driscoll & Wells, 2012; Wardle, 2012a). By looking at these three approaches in particular, I argue that transfer studies in composition have been unsuccessful because they continue to work within a similar set of epistemological and ideological assumptions about what the demonstration of writing-related knowledge should look like. This analysis points to three central assumptions embedded within the present orientation toward transfer in composition: first, the rhetorical knowledge imagined to be transferable is relegated to a system of mechanistic objects that ostensibly can be learned, used, and reused uniformly across contexts; this implies that preconstituted forms for meaning exist apart from social and contextual workings. Second, the notion of *context* in transfer scholarship is reduced

to a pre-existing set of conditions that is unvaryingly knowable and stable across time and space. This implies that communicative acts within a given context either reflect or deviate from a pre-established structure of discourse community conventions, and disregards the wider social, hegemonic forces that drive their maintenance. Third, students, often reduced to their identities as novice-learners, are described primarily in terms of what they lack; the role of the instructor, then, is inflated to that of a supplier of “knowledge-objects” that novices can possess and reproduce consistently. These assumptions characterize a long-standing, misguided framework in composition transfer scholarship that functions counterintuitively to narrow or obscure understandings of how knowledge is transferred or “repurposed” (Wardle, 2012a; following Prior & Shipka, 2003).

I choose to refer to each of these as approaches or perspectives (i.e., the domain model approach, the threshold concept/WAW approach, and the dispositional approach), rather than as theories or established frameworks. Although each approach can be distinguished by an identifiable set of themes or concerns, they are based on preliminary research data and often intersect and complement each other in complex ways. For each approach, I point to the compelling ideas or questions introduced, and then articulate the critical issues and complications that are likely to arise as each perspective develops. For instance, while the domain model advanced by Beaufort (2007) provides a compelling vocabulary for describing the knowledge and strategies used by expert writers, it problematically treats knowledge domains and writing conventions as politically neutral objects and ultimately resembles a version of the “general writing skills” curriculum described by Russell (1991) and Petraglia (1995). Similarly, although the notion of

threshold concepts has caught the attention of writing studies researchers seeking to redefine college writing as a content-driven course, the project of articulating such concepts reflects a troubling impulse to codify knowledge-objects that are proclaimed by disciplinary specialists to be useful in other settings. Finally, recent studies on perceived student dispositions have placed important emphasis on the intrapersonal and institutional factors that may indeed influence student learning experiences, yet they seem to presume that composition researchers can accurately label and categorize student attitudes toward schooled writing according to a pre-established taxonomy and, in the process, this approach denies student writers any possibility of agency. Therefore, although the emerging perspectives have been proposed as a way to address the limitations of prior understandings, I argue that they ultimately continue to work within the same terms and are unlikely to transform our thinking about transfer substantially. They counterintuitively reinforce the same assumptions and mechanisms of valuation that they propose to recast.

### **Beaufort's Domain Model of Writing Expertise**

In *College Writing and Beyond*, Beaufort (2007) proposes a composition pedagogy that expands on apprenticeship-style models of learning and argues for the explicit teaching of the cognitive aspects of writing expertise. Beaufort's stated goal is "to answer the fundamental question college administrators, college professors in disciplines other than composition studies, and business leaders ask: why graduates of freshman writing cannot produce acceptable written documents in other contexts" (p. 6). To address this concern, Beaufort suggests that first-year writing courses tend to treat

rhetorical concepts such as genre as static entities; in doing so, FYC can unwittingly support a view of writing as a set of general and universally applicable skills. Instead, Beaufort suggests that “teaching for transfer” requires explicit instruction focused on the cognitive resources that expert writers draw on as they navigate new contexts. According to Beaufort, expert writers not only draw on “very rich, deep, context-specific knowledge,” but also make use of “mental schema, or heuristics, with which to organize knowledge and aid problem-solving” in new or unfamiliar situations (p. 17). First-year writing, she argues, should teach what is entailed in gaining writing expertise, and then “challenge [students] to apply the same tools in every new writing situation” (p. 158). Presumably, such instruction will increase the likelihood of positive learning transfer. With the domain model, Beaufort claims, “the ‘product’ of FYC is students who are expert at learning writing skills in multiple contexts, rather than expert writers in a single context” (p. 8). Such instruction, she argues, can “set students on a course of life-long learning so that they know how to learn to become better and better writers in a variety of social contexts” (p. 7).

Based on data collected in a longitudinal case study of one student (Tim), Beaufort’s (2007) main contribution is a conceptual model of writing expertise advanced in her introductory chapter. This model is comprised of five knowledge domains – discourse community knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, writing process knowledge, subject matter knowledge, and genre knowledge – all of which overlap and interact to produce the knowledge and processes of expert writers. For Beaufort, the main problem of college writing curricula lies in a failure to address the notion of writing as a situated practice within specific social, professional, or academic discourse communities;

following Lave and Wenger's (1991) emphasis on participatory engagement in communities of practice, she describes how the development of writing expertise "only takes place in the context of situational problem-solving" (p. 22). Consequentially, students may wrongly assume that writing strategies appropriate for a given discourse community are applicable to others, which results in the "misappropriation of knowledge" (p. 25). Drawing on Perkins and Salomon's (1988) metacognitive model of transfer, Beaufort describes such misappropriation as "negative transfer of learning" (p. 25). She suggests first-year writing programs might rethink curricula in terms of the mental schema utilized by experts, which, presumably, are both teachable and transferable to other contexts.

Beaufort's (2007) study and conceptual model stem from an assumption that writing expertise is defined by the ways that full members of a given discourse community are able to recognize and wield the writing-related conventions that are valued within that community. However, her approach is distinguished from writing-in-the-disciplines (WID) models which attempt to provide instruction in context-specific writing skills. WID approaches, she claims, often fail to facilitate transfer of learning, as writing in disciplinary courses is commonly viewed as a way of displaying knowledge, rather than actually engaging in the intellectual work of the discipline through writing tasks. Additionally, Beaufort notes that WID courses are often taught by disciplinary experts who have difficulties in making their tacit knowledge about discourse conventions explicit. The domain model of writing expertise is proposed as an alternative to WID approaches; instead of attempting to teach the skills and knowledge necessary to write in multiple contexts, writing instructors might structure their courses around five

knowledge domains which Beaufort claims are utilized by expert writers in any context. Explicit instruction in these mental schema, it is proposed, will assist students in identifying the appropriate writing conventions valued in any new discourse community they encounter. Through in-depth exploration of “expert writing performances,” she suggests that it is possible to “identify the common knowledge domains within which writers must develop context-specific knowledge” (p. 17).

The domain model is inspired by earlier studies on cognitive abstraction and the development of expertise in relation to well- or ill-structured problem solving (see Glaser, 1984; Newall & Simon, 1972). By comparing experts with novices in specific knowledge domains, such studies have advanced significant findings concerning the cognitive strengths and abilities with which experts navigate an unfamiliar or new problem-situation. It is worth summarizing these findings here briefly in order to provide a context for Beaufort’s (2007) study, and her interest in the “mental schema” that appear to structure the performances of expert writers. Geisler (1994) offers a useful review of research on expertise and points to three general findings that tend to characterize expert performances in any specialized area. First, experts “appear to represent the world – or the part of it that lies within their expertise – in a way more abstract and less literal” than novices (p. 64). Geisler uses an example from physics: while expert physicists describe a given problem in terms of an abstract conceptual system (e.g., “force” and “mass”), a student-novice would try to attach the same problem to a literal and concrete example (e.g., “carts” and “springs”). Second, experts tend to use and rely upon “elaborate reasoning procedures” in order to link an abstract representation of a given task with an appropriate response. Drawing on findings from Voss et al. (1983), Geisler describes how

experts tend to embed complex reasoning structures within their specialized activities because they anticipate that whatever solution they propose will not be accepted without question. Novices, on the other hand, often neglect to recognize the value of constructing reasoned and detailed arguments, as they are not yet in a position to convince others to accept their judgments. Finally, experts are able to attend to and adapt their abstract knowledge onto case-specific considerations that novices generally ignore. That is, experts are able to read local contextual cues in ways that signal the adaptation of a particular strategy or abstract process that they have stored within a mental “toolbox.” This differs from the novice approach, in which one attempts to apply a general but often ill-fitting strategy to a specific and complex situation. Beaufort’s framework reflects these principles of expert performance and attempts to articulate the tacit knowledge resources that expert writers draw on as they approach new writing tasks. However, rather than relying upon a sharp distinction between novice and expert, Beaufort draws upon Alexander’s (2003) continuum of expertise, which is conceptualized in three phases: acclimation (limited or fragmented knowledge), competence (cohesive, domain-specific knowledge), and proficiency (marked by an ability to build new knowledge in the domain).

Against this backdrop, Tim’s writing “dilemmas” are examined through a detailed account of his experiences in two first-year writing courses with the same instructor (Carla), a first-year history course, upper-level history and engineering courses, and the first two years of professional employment as an engineer post-graduation. Beginning with Tim’s experiences in two introductory writing courses, Beaufort (2007) describes how Tim felt “liberated” by Carla’s approach to teaching writing. Whereas his

high school English instructors required Tim to compose in five-paragraph essay format, Carla permitted students to write in multiple voices and in different genres. In the first course, Carla emphasized narrative writing and journalistic projects focused around the themes of nature and nature writing, and always encouraged students to support their essays based on their personal experiences with these themes. The second course, also themed around environmental issues, involved a stronger focus on academic research and writing; however, Beaufort notes that the expectations for academic writing tended to be more rigorous in Tim's subsequent courses in history and engineering. Tim earned A's on all of his essays in Carla's courses, and an analysis of Carla's feedback indicates that the majority of her comments offered praise of Tim's "beautiful writing," rather than instructive suggestions (p. 43).

Beaufort (2007) shares two primary concerns pertaining to Tim's experiences in first-year writing: first, she notes that Carla tended to emphasize general issues of audience, genre, and purpose, and in doing so neglected to describe the various interactive social elements that influence writing in specific contexts. She describes how a broad emphasis on *audience* as a determining factor in text-production "does not go far enough toward illuminating a complex web of social relations, values, and conventions a writer must take into consideration" (p. 149). By encouraging students to write with nonacademic audiences in mind, such as environmental science journalists and community activists, Carla problematically intended for the context of Tim's first-year writing courses to "extend beyond the community of the course itself" in ways that encouraged Tim's misappropriation of concepts such as audience, purpose, and argument (p. 38). The second issue is related to the question of motivation and development: she

asks, “if Tim was an A+ writer...according to Carla’s standards, what motivation did he have to increase his writing skills in the three and a half years to follow?” (p. 57).

Beaufort concludes her analysis of Tim’s first-year writing experience by acknowledging that although Carla, as an instructor with a background in creative writing, was unable to train Tim in the discipline-specific conventions of writing in history or engineering, she might have encouraged positive transfer of learning by providing substantial instruction in and feedback on general issues related to the discourse community of first-year writing and the broader rhetorical functions of written genres across contexts. As Beaufort notes, “opportunities to give Tim a solid basis for transfer of learning from freshman writing to other contexts for writing were missed because the discourse communities which were informing what went on in the course were unnamed” (p. 42).

Next, Beaufort (2007) describes the differences between writing in Tim’s FYC and first-year history course, noting especially the different kinds of reading and writing tasks expected in each course. Tim struggled with navigating the different expectations for written texts in history, a difficulty that Beaufort attributes to Tim’s lack of understanding about how shifting values and purposes across disciplinary discourse communities would affect writing goals, content, structure, language choice, and so on. Several instances of negative transfer from FYC, or instances where Tim’s learning in FYC was inappropriately applied in history, are identified. For one, the genre of the “essay” assignment in Tim’s writing course was construed by Carla as a loose exploration of any topic related to the course theme; whereas in history, instructors required focused, linear arguments in response to highly specific prompts. According to Beaufort, Tim mistakenly attempted to use the open-ended essay writing approach in his

history course because he was unable to identify writing in history as participation within a different discourse community. Additionally, Tim inappropriately attempted to tie his personal experiences into his historical essays, often drawing on them as substantial backings for his arguments, which indicated to Beaufort his failure to recognize the value of “objective” points of view in history. Finally, Tim’s essays in history seemed to be written for nonacademic audiences, rather than for a discourse community of historians, which perhaps illustrates how Tim misconstrued Carla’s instruction in general notions of purpose and audience.

From there, Beaufort (2007) describes the “sea change” that Tim underwent during his coursework as an engineering major and his first two years as a professional engineer. Tim’s writing for engineering coursework, she claims, occasioned “a shift in epistemology and different types of critical thinking” (p. 115), as the discursive conventions preferred for writing in engineering and history appeared to be dialectically opposed to one another. Tim describes the “academic crisis” he faced when attempting to apply his previously learned writing strategies to schooled engineering projects, and notes feedback he received from an engineering professor on one project in particular:

Tim: “He [Tim’s professor] just kind of turned around, and he said, you know what your problem is, you believe yourself too easily...and so, that taught me, that felt like kind of an assault, not on his part, but in general, like an assault for the whole crisis upon my style of thinking...I have learned to value the thing over my opinion. In history pretty much, you know, you can make any point you want as long as you make it well...In engineering, well, you can make your point as well as you want, but if you’re wrong, you’re wrong.” (p. 114)

Beaufort narrates the ways Tim was forced to change his approach to writing tasks, both between history and engineering coursework, and between engineering coursework and his professional engineering writing. Although schooled engineering tasks often required Tim to write in many of the genres he would be asked to compose at work, she notes that schooled engineering writing is markedly different from writing as an experienced engineer: “there is little room for a novice engineer to make mistakes in his written communication on the job” (p. 140). Fortunately, according to Beaufort, Tim “was an astute learner in the informal learning environment of the workplace” (p. 140) and quickly picked up on workplace norms and conventions that “couldn’t have been replicated in a school environment” (p. 116). For example, Tim discovered the critical role of writing in order to ensure communicative efficiency on the manufacturing line, as well as an understanding of co-authorship and collaboration as a way to remove ownership and responsibility from the individual.

This detailed analysis allows Beaufort (2007) to propose a pedagogy that would have primed Tim to encounter, understand, and adapt to the different writing situations he faced. Beaufort argues that Tim made limited progress in gaining writing expertise in college, and that he was unable to advance beyond Alexander’s (2003) first phase of expertise: the acclimation stage. It wasn’t until Tim had two years of professional writing experience that he was “approaching competence,” according to Beaufort, because he was able to recognize “the interrelatedness of different genres in the discourse community he was working in” and was “fully engaged with his work and fully cognizant of the important role of writing in the company’s survival” (p. 144). In college writing, however, Beaufort notes that Tim’s development was “uneven” with no “smooth upward

curve toward expertise” because Tim lacked authentic motivation and a deep understanding of discourse community norms and values (p. 147). To rectify the shortcomings of Tim’s formal writing instruction, Beaufort argues that teachers “in all disciplines should employ techniques that aid transfer of learning for writers,” so that students “understand the connection between writing conventions and the work those conventions are meant to accomplish in given discourse communities” (p. 149). Beaufort rejects pedagogical models that emphasize similarities in the ways writing is done in different contexts, preferring instead instruction in broad concepts which will provide writers with “mental grippers” to rely on for each unfamiliar writing situation they encounter. “In sum,” she claims, “to aid positive transfer of learning, writers should be taught a conceptual model such as the five-part schema I have laid out here....then they can work through each aspect of the writing task in a thorough manner, looking for what in the current situation for writing is similar to past writing tasks, or analyzing new tasks with appropriate ‘mental grippers’ for understanding” (p. 152).

In many ways, the domain model offers a compelling framework and vocabulary for teaching the situated and contextual nature of writing in a way that is thought to avoid the codification of the rhetorical concepts of genre, purpose, argument, and audience. The case study and data analysis highlights the need to craft curricula intentionally to reflect particular pedagogical values or aims, and the rich description of the “dilemmas” Tim encountered provides a persuasive argument for specifying the multiple cognitive and social factors that must be taken into account at once during the writing process. And the model attempts to “break down into discrete pieces” the aspects of expertise left implied or unspecified in other models of writing development, including Geisler’s (1994)

theorization of subject matter knowledge and rhetorical knowledge, Berkenkotter et al.'s (1995) notions of declarative versus procedural knowledge, and recent explications of rhetorical genre theory (see Bawarshi, 2000; Devitt, 2008). Yet it is unclear if the domain approach will contribute much to our understanding of transfer; the data collected and analyzed do not provide a clear sense of whether Beaufort's model would have facilitated Tim's gaining of writing expertise substantially. Beyond this uncertainty, however, I note several unexamined issues with the domain approach which I articulate below.

### **Critical Issues for the Domain Model of Writing Expertise**

In a retrospective essay published five years after *College Writing and Beyond*, Beaufort (2012) explains that the domain model works ideally for composition pedagogies that are focused on achieving what she terms "pragmatic" goals. She states:

Although I value self-expression as a humanizing act, become almost ecstatic when encountering creative, artistic written expression, and take seriously the need for informed citizenry equipped with the critical thinking and rhetorical skills to evaluate social needs, hegemonies, and policies, my highest priority in academic courses is the pragmatic goal, or facilitating successful written expression in school and work contexts. (n.p.)

Beaufort's statement implies that while other goals for writing instruction are both available and commendable, they should not be of primary importance for pedagogies with an explicit focus on positive learning transfer. The unquestioned assumptions here are that goals for composition pedagogies are internally coherent and detachable from

one another, and that the domain model can be “operationalized” successfully if the classroom in which it is implemented de-emphasizes any expressivist, aesthetic, or critical aims. The immediate problem with these assumptions is that they depict first-year writing as having the potential to exist as an ideologically neutral space, even though conversations about knowledge transfer are, by nature, ideologically driven. Embedded in Beaufort’s remark is that some *thing* can be taught in order to improve novice writing performances across academic and professional settings. All pedagogical approaches, and especially those claiming to improve student writing, privilege a certain way of being and acting in the world. Although Beaufort (2007) claims that the domain model has “no particular political agenda” on the grounds that “no one interest group is being catered to” (p. 22), she subsequently presents a clear political agenda by claiming that instruction in the five knowledge domains is “crucial to the legitimate social causes of literacy, employment, and effective communication,” and might therefore be seen as “empowering to all across gender, race, ethnic, and class lines to write effectively in a range of social contexts” (p. 22). By claiming that certain “pragmatic” goals are somehow pure and free of conflict, Beaufort presents a *post hoc* justification for the domain model, and in doing so dodges the work of critically scrutinizing the assumptions upon which it rests.

The domain model of writing expertise reflects three problems that have characterized composition’s depictions of knowledge transfer. Although Beaufort (2007) presents the model as a solution to the shortcomings of WID approaches and FYC pedagogies grounded in rhetorical genre studies, the domain model does not actually revise or challenge these approaches significantly. By articulating the five knowledge domains of expert writers in terms of relatively stable, if at times overlapping categories,

the model treats cognitive capacities as fixed objects that are universally accessible and applicable across time and space. Beaufort appears to circumvent this problem by describing how the domains interact and influence each other, noting, for example, how subject matter knowledge necessarily affects the handling of genre conventions, and how discourse community knowledge informs the subject matter knowledge and the writer's process for completing a writing task. Yet, she claims, "in spite of these overlaps and interactions, the operationalized definitions of each knowledge domain do lead to fuller explorations of what's going on when writers seek to gain new skills" (p. 143). Beaufort presumes that the domains are both detachable from one another and can be developed, accessed, and applied universally. In other words, although the model is presented as a solution to WID or genre-based approaches which tend to codify the discursive conventions and forms valued by a particular discourse community, it simultaneously appears to suggest that knowledge domains themselves can also be taught as a fixed set of conventions valued and used identically by expert writers regardless of the situation. The articulation of discrete knowledge domains seems to reproduce a version of "general writing skills" instruction by establishing a set of cognitive traits, or a mental toolbox, that a novice must acquire in order to navigate new writing tasks successfully. In anticipation of this critique, Beaufort presents the following qualification:

Such a position could be critiqued as positivist or foundationalist, i.e., as falsely implying that learning is a matter of 'pouring in' knowledge to the blank slate of a person's mind and that the subject matter to be learned (i.e. writing knowledge) is fixed and stable. Those who would raise this critique might argue that knowing is only situational and dialogic – for the moment – and there are no fixed

‘categories’ of knowledge...[T]o conceptualize writing knowledge in distinct yet overlapping categories *does not inherently imply* either that those categories are fixed and discrete, or that learning is a rote affair, a matter of simply ‘banking’ such knowledge....a theory of writing expertise provides the schema that can guide a developmental process that empowers the individual writer, rather than place any limitations on writers (pp. 21-22, my emphasis)

Yet the domain model is, I argue, clearly influenced by positivist traditions of learning, and it is so in larger and more consequential ways than what Beaufort acknowledges above. The phrase “does not inherently imply” seems to suggest that the contradiction within the claim does not need further interrogation. Yet neither the data analyzed nor the framework introduced seem to fit within this caveat, because the problem is not exclusively the articulation of and distinction between five “fixed” knowledge categories. The larger problem is the assertion that the same mental schema, once learned, can be applied universally to any writing situations encountered in any discourse community, communities which are themselves imagined to exist as internally coherent spaces.

Further, as with other studies on novice/expert transitions and models of apprenticeship, expertise in writing is valorized as an established cognitive achievement that is universally recognizable and accessible to a novice. Although Beaufort (2007) attempts to circumvent this problem by utilizing Alexander’s (2003) continuum of expertise (including phases of acclimation, competence, and proficiency), Tim’s development is nonetheless reduced to the terms of the three phases. This approach does not prevent Beaufort from falling into the same limitations of the “novice/expert” dichotomy. Beaufort does not appear to conceptualize Alexander’s phases as part of a

continuum, but as discrete developmental categories that can be evidenced by Tim's writing and his self-reported reflections on his writing experiences. And she continues to rely upon the term *novice* throughout the study as the primary role that student-writers would inhabit, rather than insisting upon the multiple identities and experiences always enacted in a heterogeneous group of learners. The emphasis on the explicit teaching of expert knowledge domains seems to imagine that expertise is the ability to passively acquire, abstract, and reproduce an idealized and pre-established mental schema. Students, then, presumably enter the classroom with underdeveloped writing skills and leave with the tools necessary to write effectively in college and at work.

### **Threshold Concepts and Writing about Writing**

The idea that compulsory college writing courses have definable content has received much attention in recent composition scholarship. In response to the growing skepticism that academic writing skills can be taught independent of content and context, writing studies scholars have sought to challenge the perception that the first-year course serves a preparatory function, or as a service course that will teach students how to write for subsequent academic settings. The call to define FYC as a course focused around the content of our discipline has most notably been raised by Wardle (2009), who “advocate[s] sharing with our first- and second-year students what we as a field have learned about language and discourse, in the same way that biology, history, and philosophy share their disciplinary knowledge in first-year courses” (p. 784). Wardle and Downs' *Writing About Writing* curriculum (2010, 2014) represents a breakthrough effort to redefine college composition as a course about writing and focuses specifically on

introducing students to disciplinary research concerning rhetorical genre theory, literacy studies, discourse communities, and writing processes. As they suggest in the first edition of *WAW* (2010), “changing what you know about writing can change the way you write” (p. 2). In the same way that a biology or psychology course considers particular conceptual knowledge to fall exclusively under their purview, then, first-year writing courses might deal similarly with a clear and marked set of disciplinary content.

Further, as Wardle (2012b) has described in a recent Bedford/St. Martin’s blog post, teaching students about writing is potentially a different kind of project than teaching students the disciplinary content of biology or psychology, as “everyone writes, and everyone’s writing can be improved and enriched by understanding writing better at a conceptual level” (n.p.). Therefore, the project of redefining college composition as a course with its own set of disciplinary content is linked to the idea that knowledge about writing will be (or should be) useful for students as they navigate new or unfamiliar writing situations. As Wardle and Downs (2010) suggest, “what you learn about writing now will be directly useful to you long after the class ends. In college, at work, and in everyday life, writing well can have a measurable impact on your current and future success” (p. 2). The *WAW* curriculum, then, offers an alternative way of thinking about the phenomenon of learning transfer; by setting aside the problem of identifying universally applicable writing skills, it claims to equip students with a knowledge base and a rhetorical awareness firmly rooted in what composition scholars have learned about the nature and functions of written language.

The second edition of *WAW* (2014) introduces the notion of *threshold concepts* (hereafter referred to as TCs) as a lens through which to articulate the content of the first-

year writing course. This project seeks to extend recent calls to identify the TCs of writing studies, and to define the pedagogical value of such concepts (see Adler-Kassner et al., 2012; Adler-Kassner & Wardle, in press; Clark & Hernandez, 2011). The WAW curriculum is grounded on the premise that to engage students with what scholars in rhetoric and composition believe to be true about writing will likely facilitate the transfer of writing-related knowledge both into and out of the first-year course.

### *Defining Threshold Concepts*

A threshold concept, first defined by educational researchers Meyer and Land (2003), “can be considered as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. It represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress” (p. 2). Such concepts, once comprehended fully, are thought to represent or expose discipline-specific epistemological practices or ways of thinking. That is, disciplinary TCs constitute the boundaries of expertise and the gateway to full participation within a field. Certain learnable ideas, knowledge, and processes, from this view, can be represented as the essential concepts needed to progress toward becoming a full member of a community. Examples of such concepts, Meyer and Land suggest, include the notion of *heat transfer* in physics, *irony* in literary studies, or *opportunity cost* in economics. Meyer and Land claim to view threshold concepts as “something distinct within what university teachers would typically describe as ‘core concepts’” (ibid, p. 4), although this distinction is not entirely clear. While core concepts are imagined to exist as “conceptual ‘building blocks’” that contribute to one’s understanding of a given subject,

a TC differs in that it represents the most critical knowledge to grasp in order to understand the epistemological ways of thinking and acting within a given discipline. To illustrate this point, they suggest that the concept of *gravity* – “the idea that any two bodies attract one another with a force that is proportional to the product of their masses and inversely proportional to the distance between them” (ibid, p. 4) – represents a key TC within the applied sciences, whereas *center of gravity*, as a core concept, is presumably more fundamental and less difficult for learners to comprehend. Following this example, it seems the pivotal distinction between “core” and “threshold” is that a newcomer is likely to find the latter more *troublesome* to come to terms with – of which more later.

According to Meyer and Land’s (2003) initial framework, any TC “is likely” to possess five specified characteristics (p. 4-5). They are:

- (1) *Transformative*, or having the potential to “occasion a significant shift in the perception of a subject.”
- (2) *Irreversible*, or “unlikely to be forgotten, or unlearned only through considerable effort.”
- (3) *Integrative*, or having the potential to “expose the previously hidden interrelatedness of something.”
- (4) “Possibly often (though not necessarily always) *bounded*,” in that they operate in particular ways within the confines of a discipline.
- (5) “Potentially (though not necessarily) *troublesome*,” in that learners find them difficult to master for a variety of reasons, most notably, as Perkins (1999) argues,

due to learners' reluctance or inability to "get outside" of deeply held beliefs and epistemological framings in order to make space for the new concept.

Research on the teaching, learning and identification of TCs is underway across multiple disciplines, including art history (Wuetherick & Loeffler, 2014), mathematics (Quinnell et al., 2014), biology (Taylor & Meyer, 2010), economics (Davies, 2012), history (Cronin, 2014), philosophy (Aiken & Berry, 2012), and many others.<sup>1</sup> The past decade has witnessed the publication of dozens of articles and books on the subject, as well as the emergence of a transdisciplinary international conference devoted to research on TCs, now in its fifth cycle.

And yet, the recent work on TCs in composition draws almost exclusively on Meyer and Land's (2003) original framework, now published over a decade ago. Though this original framework is frequently cited as definitive in disciplinary research on TCs, it is important to note that Meyer and Land's formulation has been revised significantly (and challenged frequently) since their seminal paper in 2003. As Barradell (2012) points out, studies demonstrate a lack of consensus about what constitutes a TC. Land (2011) recently expanded the framework to include seven characteristics; Taylor (2006, 2008) and Carstensen and Bernhard (2008) have suggested that troublesomeness is the most significant characteristic and have questioned the relevance of the other features; Davies and Mangan (2008) have proposed that the transformative, irreversible, and integrative features can be interwoven into the same hybrid characteristic, and that boundedness and troublesomeness both derive from this hybrid; Irvine and Carmichael (2009) have found that few TCs possess all five characteristics, but many possess some combination of

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<sup>1</sup> For a frequently updated bibliography on disciplinary threshold concepts research, see <http://www.ee.ucl.ac.uk/~mflanaga/thresholds.html>

these; and Wilson et al. (2010) have discarded the notion of boundedness altogether. In a chapter from Meyer, Land, and Baillie's (2010) most recent edited collection on TCs, Mead and Gray (2010) acknowledge the "lack of any description of the conceptual structure surrounding a threshold concept" (p. 101) and have proposed utilizing *disciplinary concept graphs* consisting of "labelled circles and arrows" to illustrate how TCs are structured in relation to and by combination of other disciplinary concepts, both "complex and primitive" (p. 101-2). These alternative renderings and complications of the original framework suggest that the model proposed in 2003 has provoked discussion about the idea and very existence of TCs, rather than as a formula to be used uncritically in their identification.

Although consensus has not been reached regarding the definition of TCs, two pivotal themes tend to characterize the current perspectives: the feature of *troublesomeness*, and a given concept's demonstrated ability to provoke a state of *liminality* in a learner. The notion of troublesomeness is commonly cited as the most salient of the five original characteristics; given Meyer and Land's (2003) description of *gravity* as a TC as noted above, it appears to be the central feature that would distinguish a TC from what they term a core concept. That is, in order for a concept to be considered threshold, researchers have suggested that it must provoke a certain amount of difficulty in the learner's attempt to progress. The notion of troublesomeness as it appears in TC literature is borrowed from Perkins' (1999) articulation of what is termed *troublesome knowledge*. Perkins has described several reasons why specialized knowledge might be considered troublesome. First, Perkins argues that *ritual knowledge*, or knowledge that has 'a routine and rather meaningless character,' (p. 7) may prove to be troublesome as

learners can fail to recognize the deeper implications of routinized bits of information. For example, although learners might approach a mathematical problem with a ritualized understanding of how to multiply or divide numbers, they may not be fully aware of why given procedures work, and how they might be used in order to accomplish a given task. When asked to wrestle with the broader significance of this routinized knowledge, some may appear resistant to question that which they previously accepted as elementary or self-evident. Similarly, *inert knowledge*, or knowledge which “sits in the mind’s attic, unpacked only when specifically called for a by a quiz or a direct prompt but otherwise gathers dust” (p. 8) can represent a significant barrier to making connections between what one has learned and the broader contexts in which that knowledge might operate. Perkins suggests that learners possess considerable amounts of knowledge that can be recalled when specifically prompted, but are not applied in situations outside of direct examination. Perkins describes how the notion of *metabolism* in exercise science can represent a kind of inert knowledge; students may be able to provide a definition of metabolism when asked, but may fail to make use of the concept meaningfully in tasks that require more complex engagement. Perkins also identifies the troublesomeness of *conceptually difficult knowledge*, or knowledge so divorced from tangible, physical entities that learners struggle to comprehend how to operationalize it successfully. Finally, Perkins describes *alien knowledge* as inherently troublesome, or knowledge that “comes from a perspective that conflicts with our own” (p. 9). Some concepts, he notes, are so saturated by disciplinary ways of thinking that they seem to contradict a learner’s everyday experiences.

On its own, however, troublesomeness is an ambiguous quality; learners certainly do not experience difficulty with concepts in routine or predictable ways. In recognition of this uncertainty, Meyer and Land (2010) have sought to account for the inevitable variation in the ways learners encounter and attempt to make sense of difficult concepts. They suggest that troublesome knowledge must be identified by the extent to which it “leaves the learner in a state of *liminality*,” or “a suspended state of partial understanding, or ‘stuck place,’ in which understanding approximates to a kind of ‘mimicry’ or lack of authenticity” (p. 5). A focus on individual encounters with concepts thought to be troublesome forces the consolidation of the tentative characteristics proposed in earlier work; the learning of threshold concepts, from this perspective, can be viewed as a journey through preliminal, liminal, and postliminal states. This emphasis on states of liminality within a learner would allow the five features to be represented in ways that are complex, interrelated, and overlapping. Learners, from this viewpoint, oscillate between the three states of liminality in order to make sense of troublesome concepts as they attempt to gain entry into a disciplinary community:

In such a view the journey towards the acquisition of a threshold concept is seen to be initiated by an encounter with a form of troublesome knowledge in the preliminal state. The troublesome knowledge inherent within the threshold concept serves here as an instigative or provocative feature which unsettles prior understanding rendering it fluid, and provoking a state of liminality. Within the liminal state an integration of new knowledge occurs which requires a reconfiguring of the learner’s prior conceptual schema and a letting go or discarding of any earlier conceptual stance. This reconfiguration occasions an

ontological and an epistemic shift...As a consequence of this new understanding the learner crosses a conceptual boundary into a new conceptual space and enters a postliminal state in which both learning and the learner are transformed. (p. 6)

Further, Schwartzman (2010) uses the notion of liminality as a way to present TCs as different from a process of enculturation into a discrete disciplinary community, stating that “the very notion that liminality will likely be experienced by students in any (and every) field indicates that crucial elements of that experience – which constitute core issues defining TC – are unrelated to disciplinary context” (p. 22). Though TCs themselves are commonly associated with the knowledge thought essential for participation within a specific community, the ways in which learners encounter unfamiliar, difficult concepts are similar regardless of the immediate disciplinary setting.

### *Threshold Concepts in FYC*

Although no explicit claims for transfer have been made for TCs in composition, there seems to be an underlying supposition that certain concepts have the potential to trigger a troublesome and transformative learning experience, and, once a learner has achieved postliminal understanding, will continue to assist learners in subsequent contexts. To date, scholars with an interest in TCs have focused predominately on rhetorical understandings of genre. Clark and Hernandez (2011) have argued that genre awareness might serve as a critical TC in FYC. As they explain, “when students acquire genre awareness, they are not only learning how to write in a particular genre. They are also gaining insight into how a given genre fulfills a rhetorical purpose and how the various components of a text, the writer, the intended reader, and the text itself is

informed by purpose” (p. 67). They attribute the features of transformativity, troublesomeness, and liminality to the teaching and learning of genre awareness, which correspond to self-reported student insights described in their study on the usefulness of this knowledge in academic argument writing. Adler-Kassner et al. (2012) have similarly argued that an understanding of genre serves as a central threshold to learning in composition, claiming that the notion of genre is both troublesome and can foster a state of liminality in which a student “becomes aware of her work with the concept and her interactions with it” (n.p.). An understanding of the rhetorical dimensions of genre is central, they argue, for writers to be able to analyze the relationships between contexts, purposes, audiences, and conventions. Such analytical work is thought to enable students both to more fully participate in the epistemological practices of a given discipline and also to become more “adaptable” writers (n.p.).

Adler-Kassner et al. (2012) raise a compelling argument about the usefulness of TCs in writing classes. On one hand, writing-related TCs are treated as essential for “mastering” the epistemological ways of thinking and behaving within the discipline of rhetoric and composition. Additionally, however, they represent an opportunity to establish connections across seemingly dissimilar academic settings. Any disciplinary TC, they argue, is only useful in facilitating transfer if it is reinforced consistently across disciplinary boundaries. Adler-Kassner et al. suggest that there may be shared TCs that exist across the disciplines, and propose the use of TCs as a lens through which to understand the purpose of general education curricula writ large. In their study on shared writing-related TCs between writing and history, they conclude that “interrelationships between audiences, purposes, contexts, and genres are also considered threshold for

learning in history” (n.p.), which suggests that first-year history and FYC may, in a sense, share a conceptual border that warrants increased attention.

Yet, the study conducted by Adler-Kassner et al. (2012) reveals some potential challenges for ensuring that shared writing-related TCs such as genre will be taught in similar and mutually-reinforcing ways. The history instructors interviewed, for example, reported with confidence that concepts such as genre and narrative could be taught as universally-applicable writing skills, a perspective greatly at odds with the focus on the situatedness of writing conventions in differing rhetorical contexts in FYC:

The idea that students were writing for a particular genre and discipline was left unstated – it was assumed that the emphasis on argumentation, thesis, and evidence would enable students to understand how they might be applicable to other courses *without clearly distinguishing historical thinking from other disciplines*...the instructors missed the opportunity to relate and distinguish their discipline to others in the general education curriculum (n.p., emphasis mine).

The challenges identified by Adler-Kassner et al. point to potential complications for future research on TCs in composition. While the project of identifying the TCs specific to writing studies is already in full swing, it seems necessary to (1) articulate some of the attendant questions that have already arisen and will continue to arise in this undertaking, and (2) to situate our disciplinary studies on TCs with the most recent perspectives from educational research in mind, rather than within Meyer and Land’s (2003) initial inklings first voiced over ten years ago.

### **Critical Issues for the Threshold Concepts Approach**

The most immediate concern with the TC approach is the lack of an established definition in the present literature. Rowbottom (2007) and O'Donnell (2009) both have pointed to the grave shortcomings in Meyer and Land's (2003) clarification of "threshold." Each of the five attributes presented in the preliminary framework is hedged in multiple ways. A TC "is likely" to be transformative, irreversible, integrative, bounded, and troublesome. Beyond this, each of these attributes is "probably," "possibly," or "potentially" present. Based on their original definition, any TC is "likely to be probably irreversible," "is likely to be possibly (though not necessarily) bounded," and so on. To suggest that a concept *tends to possibly possess* several or all of these attributes does not expose much about what it is, or how it can be identified. Put another way, O'Donnell (2009) summarizes, "it is possible on the above definition for some threshold concepts to have all five characteristics, for some to have between one and four characteristics, and for some to have none of the characteristics at all" (p. 3). Designating a particular concept as threshold, then, is by definition a process of attributing tangibility to things or ideas that are, in practice, indeterminate and uncertain.

If research on writing-related TCs continues to work within this framework, scholars will have to reckon with some additional questions: How should we decide the TCs of writing (and relatedly, how can we achieve consensus on the TCs of writing)? How can we determine if TCs do what they purport to possibly do (e.g., facilitate an epistemological shift that is not likely to be forgotten)? That is, how do we know when students have a transformative experience – or reach a postliminal state – in their thinking about writing?

In response to the first question, we might turn to the second edition of Wardle and Downs' (2014) *Writing about Writing* curriculum, the content of which was determined using a TC-informed approach. The textbook is divided into five chapters, each of which contains readings and assignments pertaining to an established area of scholarly interest in rhetoric and composition. Wardle and Downs label five crucial areas of conceptual writing knowledge: literacies, discourse community, the rhetorical situation, composing processes, and multi-modality. One can immediately ascertain the omission of other plausible concepts, such as notions of error, identity and writing, collaboration, etc. Perhaps these ideas are considered to be subsumed within broader conversations pertaining to literacies and writing processes, but it seems prudent to note the sprawling perspectives (and the vast disagreements) within our field toward the five areas deemed "threshold." Given such existing discrepancies, who should be allowed to order and rank the significance of the conceptual knowledge that belongs to our discipline? Why are certain concepts emphasized over others? Should first-year writing, as a content-driven course, adopt a standardized curriculum in order to ensure consistent instruction in TCs? Is standardized instruction in writing-related TCs desirable or even plausible? The process of TC selection, however democratic, will inevitably involve contentious and perhaps unresolvable debate.

Even if some consensus on the TCs of writing could be reached, it is not clear how we should determine whether this conceptual knowledge has, in fact, facilitated a transformative shift in our students' perceptions of writing. What evidence might we turn to in order to conclude that a transformation has occurred? There is considerable variation in the ways students perceive and engage new conceptual knowledge. Meyer

and Land (2010), in acknowledging this potential for variation, have noted that TC researchers require a means by which “postliminal” states of understanding can be rendered visible. What is needed, they argue, is a nuanced model of assessment to “(a) discover what each student knows (rather than trying to anticipate it); (b) show what knowledge a student possesses, and illustrate how that knowledge is arranged in the student’s mind; (c) move from traditional ‘snapshot’ testing which often focuses on isolated ideas rather than developmental thought or affective processes, and (d) recognize that some ideas may be resistant to change, but interrelationships with other ideas may be more fluid” (p. 64). Through several “meaningful correspondences” (p. 77) between student and instructor, it is thought to be possible to ascertain the means by which individuals perceive, enter, and progress through conceptual portals.

Writing researchers and instructors are likely familiar with the aims of Meyer and Land’s (2010) assessment model, which are reminiscent of the cognitive process models of writing development and protocol analysis of the 1970s and early 1980s. The TC model of assessing variation resembles Flower and Hayes’ (1981) description of stages of writing development in which writing knowledge is imagined to exist inside the writer, divorced from any social or contextual workings. This particular model of assessment, then, does not appear to be convincingly relevant to assessing the threshold knowledge of students in first-year writing. This is not to say that students are unlikely to experience an ontological shift in understanding through exposure to TCs in writing; however, a great deal of thinking and discussion will be needed to clarify how we will know if these shifts occur and if they will be irreversible.

If we grant that it is possible to devise an accurate means of assessing students' transformation, one further question arises: What do we imagine, or hope, to be the result of this transformation? Adler-Kassner et al. (2012) seem to suggest that it is a deeper critical awareness of the relationship between texts, audiences, conventions, and contexts. Within this assertion, however, is an assumption that our disciplinary threshold knowledge, once acquired, will enhance a student's critical awareness of and engagement in the world. The potential ethical dilemmas in inculcating students to a transformed world view should not be approached lightly. Ricketts (2010) has noted that present studies on TCs have tended to conflate the critical awareness thought to result from a transformative learning experience with "loaded knowledge," which is where the discipline or disciplinary expert mandates the acceptance of ideological or philosophical assumptions which privilege certain world views over plausible alternatives. Loaded knowledge, Ricketts explains, "does not refer simply to information or content that contains embedded world views, as it is to be assumed that almost all content contains such elements. It refers only to those particular situations in which the discipline appears to be demanding unquestioned acceptance of a contingent perspective as a precondition to success in the discipline" (p. 48).

Finally, as the model is presently used in writing studies, the 'threshold-crossing' metaphor deserves more attention, as it seems to imply a gateway through a border or a limit that all learners may access universally, if only they heed our expert instruction. Scholars will have to decide if this is an appropriate and accurate conceptualization of what it means to develop writing knowledge. As Rowbottom (2007) has cautioned, "from this point of view, one may understand a threshold concept in a given area as a

prerequisite for progression (to a specified level). The problem with this view is that it makes threshold concepts look just like core concepts, when they are supposed to be something new” (p. 267).

### **Dispositions and Expansive Learning**

The disjunction between student and instructor perceptions of learning in first-year writing has been described repeatedly as a persistent obstacle to research on transfer. Conflicting sets of expectations for the course make it difficult to determine whether college writing curricula have the potential to alter reading and writing practices in observable ways. Research suggests that students approach FYC with either the sense that course content will not be useful for their subsequent writing practices, or that the course will deliver tangible rules for successful, error-free writing (Bergmann and Zepernick, 2007; Wardle, 2007). Durst (1999) has argued that students desire “efficient learning” which stands in conflict with the larger rhetorical goals of the FYC curriculum (p. 57). Much of the evidence of different perceptions of FYC position student and teacher understandings in flat contradiction to each other. For example, as Durst describes,

The curriculum seeks to extend and complicate the composition process, while students seek to streamline and apply it. The curriculum regards text as situated, contingent, and open to a variety of interpretations, while students see it as fixed and straightforward. The curriculum pushes for questioning of the status quo, with hopes of encouraging social transformation, while students wish to find a comfortable place for themselves within the existing status quo. On the one hand,

teachers must hope that students can somehow be persuaded to adopt the values and attitudes, the habits of mind, that underlie the curriculum, and they must work hard to convince the students of the advantages of critical literacy...On the other hand, students face the challenge of having to take a difficult course of study that appears to require a certain orientation that they themselves do not possess and that runs counter to their understandings and inclinations. (p. 62)

Student commitment to efficient learning, Durst claims, disinclines them from engaging in course content in the ways instructors would prefer. Depictions of ambivalent attitudes toward college writing have become a staple in the literature on writing and transfer. Research over the past several decades has repeatedly suggested that students do not see the value in compulsory college writing courses, and so they reduce their efforts in the course to “figuring out what the instructor wants” in order to “get the grade” (McCarthy, 1987, p. 233). Since students often perceive writing courses as a “waste of time” (Nelson, 1990, p. 363), they rely on labor-reducing shortcuts when composing, and thus are imagined to resist engaging in the kinds of learning, thinking, and reflection that writing assignments in composition are often designed to promote. Findings have also suggested that students do not perceive first-year writing instruction as valuable for attaining “good grades on writing assignments in other courses” (Wardle, 2007, p. 73) and further indicate their inclination to write papers that meet the immediate approval of their instructors (Baker, 2003; Bergmann & Zepernick, 2007; Durst, 1999; Wardle, 2007). Nelms and Dively (2007) describe how students’ apparent lack of motivation toward writing is a common frustration among faculty members from across the disciplines. Further, they purport that the absence of motivation proves to be a significant barrier to

rhetorical knowledge transfer because of the “key role that motivation plays in the process of learning. If we are not motivated to learn, we won’t learn, and thus, we will have nothing to transfer” (p. 123). Their study on faculty perceptions of knowledge transfer raises questions about the relationship between school contexts, student motivation, and successful knowledge transfer; such questions, they conclude, “deserve the attention of our profession” (p. 128).

In order to address the problem of student motivation, recent transfer scholarship has called attention to the function of individual attitudes or behaviors in first-year writing courses. While previous theories of writing and transfer have focused on issues of context, genre, and discourse community awareness, the shift toward the individual represents an attempt to develop a more accurate account of how and why individuals transfer writing-related knowledge. As Slomp (2011) has noted, context-based theories of transfer privilege social interactions and participation in activities, but disregard the individual factors that might inhibit students from navigating contextual dynamics successfully. Thus, he suggests that “failure to consider the role that intrapersonal actors play in the transfer process can cloud our ability to assess underlying barriers to transfer” (p. 84). Emerging perspectives on student dispositions raise questions about the complicated relationship between contexts and intrapersonal factors and about how increased attention to this relationship might offer new insights into what we presently know about writing transfer. Previous context-oriented models of transfer grounded in activity, situated learning, and genre theory perspectives often assume that writing classrooms are comprised of relatively homogenous groups of students, all sharing similar personal, academic, and professional goals. Studies informed by these theories

place an unfeasible amount of responsibility on pedagogical strategies and broad curricular devices to ensure successful knowledge transfer, without considering the diverse educational experiences and motivations represented in a given first-year writing class. Rather than focusing exclusively on particular skills or capacities that are thought to be teachable and portable across situations, attention to individual dispositions is thought to provide insight into the conscious and unconscious ways in which individuals make use of particular intellectual traits. Driscoll and Wells (2012) have articulated four categories of student dispositions based on various psychological theories of motivation – expectancy-value theory, self-efficacy theory, attribution theory, and self-regulation theory – which remind us that learners arrive in our classrooms with various and often conflicting motivations for achieving success in schooled writing practices. Further, they clarify that a focus on dispositions is not intended to replace all other models of transfer research, but rather opens up space for the simultaneous presence of multiple perspectives on transfer and student learning, which would allow for sensitivity to both the situated nature of writing-related knowledge and the intrapersonal or motivational factors that influence the ways in which such knowledge is used.

Emerging perspectives suggest that student dispositions toward schooled writing have been cultivated by prior educational experiences, echoing Petraglia's (1995) assertion that "educational contexts shape learning, rather than merely furnish a site for it" (p. 88). Individual learning habits are described as having been conditioned by the values of institutionalized systems of education, which often do not encourage the deep, "expansive learning" valued by composition instructors (Wardle, 2012a). Such a focus imagines students as having internalized rote learning processes through their substantial

experiences with standardized testing culture, in which writing instruction is positioned “chiefly as preparation for test-taking, with the single purpose of passing a test, and the single audience of the ‘teacher-as-examiner’” (Robertson et al., 2012, n.p.). Wardle (2012a) describes how student dispositions have been shaped by the standardized testing culture of K-12 educational systems, and the policies that structure these systems, which tend to conflate learning with an ability to find correct answers. Thus, she argues, students often settle on easy, formulaic answers to rhetorical problems whereas their instructors would prefer to see them ask exploratory questions and wrestle with multiple possibilities.

Research on the teaching and assessment of creativity in formal education further substantiates the concerns outlined above. As Sternberg (2002) warns, “[t]he increasingly massive and far-reaching use of conventional standardized tests is one of the most effective, if unintentional, vehicles this country has created for suppressing creativity” (p. 4). Standardized tests, he argues, are designed to promote a certain kind of learning and thinking – in particular, the kind of learning and thinking for which there is one right answer and many wrong answers. Given the wide-spread suspicion of standardized learning regimes, the literature on student dispositions calls for increased focus on the learning habits such methods promote. Making use of Bourdieu’s concepts of *habitus*, *field*, and *doxa*, Wardle (2012a) suggests that students’ extended participation in institutionalized answer-getting practices inculcate a rigid approach to rhetorical problem-situations when a more creative or resourceful approach might be more appropriate. These dispositions, having been shaped in part by the *habitus* or *ethos* of the educational field, do not change easily; the institutional practices with which they are

familiar become *doxa*, or an unquestionable natural phenomenon. Despite the writing instructor's best efforts to teach for deep and expansive learning, such instruction might lead students more comfortable with an answer-getting approach into a "psychological double bind;" this may prove to be a significant barrier to successfully transitioning into a context that encourages an exploratory approach to messy and unfamiliar questions. In these situations, students might respond in a variety of ways: "through confusion and failure, through attempts to follow directions without considering underlying principles and beliefs, through changing understanding, and sometimes through relief and excitement that another disposition is possible" (n.p.). Transfer studies in composition, it is suggested, would stand to benefit from further developing an understanding of the relationship between the habitus of educational fields and instances of resistant, disengaged attitudes in first-year writing courses. These insights serve to instigate new scholarly discussions about how best to counteract what Wardle has described as the "answer-getting" culture valued within educational fields.

### **Critical Issues for Research on Transfer and Dispositions**

Emerging perspectives on student dispositions serve as an important reminder that complex, evolving, pluralistic methods are needed for research on writing and transfer. Although the various perspectives described above only claim to offer preliminary suggestions for future research, the ideas they raise deserve rigorous consideration before they can be implemented. Those interested in further exploring the role of student dispositions in writing-related transfer will need to address several issues: The first issue that demands consideration is definitional: future research will need to develop a clear

definition of ‘disposition’ that articulates how dispositions are imagined to affect the transfer of writing-related knowledge. In general, the present literature tends to use terms such as *disposition*, *habit*, *attitude*, and *ethos* interchangeably; however, each of these terms carries weighty associations that will need clarification or redirection before they can provide substantial and relevant insight. The emerging studies suggests that student dispositions exist as fixed states of intellectual or behavioral development, each with an accompanying set of characteristics that would ostensibly guide an instructor’s response to or management of particular attitudes. However, without a guiding theory of what dispositions are, how they are formed, and how they evolve, subsequent work on dispositions will face the risk of relying on reductive or superficial understandings of a highly ambiguous term.

Second, researchers will need to address more thoroughly what markers or characteristics are evidence of particular student dispositions. As Driscoll and Wells (2012) suggest, observable student behaviors can be used to determine dispositional categories that exist on an either-or scale, as illustrated by the following examples: student learners either enter first-year writing classrooms with the expectation that they will gain useful knowledge about writing, or they enter believing the course will have no bearing on their future writing activities; they either have confidence in their capabilities as writers, or they lack necessary self-assurance; they either hold themselves accountable for learning, or they passively reproduce what they believe their instructors want; they either have the ability to self-regulate, or they neglect to set reasonable goals in order to accomplish a given task. Driscoll and Wells further acknowledge that students may embody several overlapping or contradictory dispositions, but presumably these are still

identifiable as one or the other. However, the relationship between observable behaviors and the dispositions they are imagined to signal is still unclear. Some anecdotal examples are provided, including observable rhetorical moves made in a written essay, degree of participation in class discussion, and attempt to make contact with the instructor outside of class, but these offer highly isolated depictions that are far from generalizable.

Similarly, Wardle (2012a) describes two dispositions that students seem to “primarily inhabit” in her writing courses:

Problem-exploring dispositions incline a person toward curiosity, reflection, consideration of multiple possibilities, a willingness to engage in a recursive process of trial and error, and toward a recognition that more than one solution can ‘work.’ Answer-getting dispositions seek right answers quickly and are averse to open consideration of multiple possibilities. The first disposition is appropriate for solving ill-structured problems, while the second seems connected to well-structured problems often found in the field of education (n.p.).

Problem-exploring and answer-getting dispositions are described as if they are easily recognizable and that instructors would agree on the distinguishing factors of both groups; however, these descriptions lack clarification of what markers might signal one dispositional category apart from another. On a very general level, it seems that if a student produces a conventional five-paragraph essay, her disposition toward schooled problem situations could be read as answer-getting. On the other hand, if another student responds to the same prompt in a less conventional manner, and clearly evidences the use of various rhetorical resources, her disposition toward schooled problem situations could be read as problem-exploring. Wardle seems to suggest that the latter of the two

dispositional approaches is of greater value in college writing; yet it is unclear which forms of exploration or creativity in a student essay would indicate a problem-exploring approach. Is a creative problem-exploring approach determined through experimentation with form, through avoidance of conventional tropes or clichés, through polished and sophisticated engagement with scholarly resources, or through something else? What counts as an acceptable display of creativity to one instructor may represent a failed attempt to repurpose knowledge to another. Future work will need to describe and maintain a consistent sense of which particular sets of behaviors characterize a given dispositional category.<sup>2</sup>

Third, future studies will have to attend to questions regarding how and why composition researchers are in positions that enable them to categorize and attribute value to perceived dispositions in first-year writing. In *Language and Symbolic Power*, Bourdieu (1991) advises social scientists to “take care to recognize that words play a significant part in the constitution of social reality, and that all attempts to classify contribute to the constitution of class and power relations” (p. 105). Assuming the definitional and methodological issues described above can be addressed, forthcoming studies will need to address the political workings of taxonomies devised according to

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth mentioning here, as well, the need to consider the increasing dependency on part-time faculty in first-year writing programs. Although my project does not address issues of instructional labor explicitly, I recognize that emerging perspectives on writing-related transfer, including the perspective advanced in this project, must account for the tensions and economics of staffing the first-year writing course. Scott and Brannon (2013), for example, observe the disjunction between the ways in which tenure-line faculty and part-time or term-faculty discuss and value student writing. Tenure-line faculty “often use the students’ drafts as a pretext for expressing their views about writing in general,” while full- and part-time lecturers tend to view student writing in relation to “the teaching they have done for years” in their programs (p. 283). One of the obvious differences noted by Scott and Brannon is that tenure-line faculty exhibit an acceptance of dialectical differences in approach, while contingent faculty “talk toward consensus” and rely on the established assessment criteria of their institution to describe what they value in student texts (p. 285). Scott and Brannon’s study further complicates Durst’s (1999) assumption that instructors have unified ways of defining the desirable outcomes of first-year writing education.

perceived student ability. The categorical systems described in recent scholarship run the risk of fulfilling expressly political functions; by reflecting notions of absence and deficiency, they may reproduce long-standing, dominant assumptions about what does or does not constitute good writing. For example, Wardle's (2012a) perspective essentially identifies only two possible ways of interpreting student dispositions: as an inclination to passively reproduce what one already knows, or as an inclination to draw on prior writing knowledge in creative or acceptably different ways. By taking ill-defined sets of behaviors as evidence of either an answer-getting or problem-exploring disposition, this perspective imagines student behaviors and prior educational experiences as stable entities that are either aligned or in conflict with the presumably agreed-upon goals of first-year composition. Further, as Robertson et al. (2012) have described, many students enter college writing classes with "an *absence* of prior knowledge" about "key writing concepts" (para. 15), which presupposes that student writers are neither agents of their own learning, nor experts in reading and responding to rhetorical situations. As a result, students who exhibit perceived difficulties in college writing are likely to be described in terms of the absence of a preferred disposition, which may tacitly position them as deficient in some way. This critique is not to suggest that all student writers respond to schooled writing tasks appropriately at all times, but rather to suggest that categories thought to represent "knowledge absence" or "answer-getting" habits may promote impoverished, inaccurate, and discriminatory interpretations of student writers and writing behaviors.

Because the existing dispositional perspectives have not yet developed clear definitional or methodological boundaries, it is uncertain whether future work in this area

will contribute substantially to our understanding of writing and learning transfer.

Although the perspectives described above are new and far from settled, it seems unlikely that future work on transfer and dispositions will be able to escape the political functions inherent to the structured taxonomies described above. At best, it is fair to say that classifications of student dispositions can only serve as highly generalized categories that cannot be reflected consistently in case-by-case situations.

### **Transfer and Dissensus**

The appeal of a dispositional approach seems to be that dispositions, unlike skills or knowledge domains, are not fixed capacities to be observed and measured; instead, they are imagined to hold influence over “the ways in which particular intellectual traits are used in a given context” (Driscoll & Wells, 2012, n.p.). Used in relation to and extension of prior theories of writing and transfer, such a focus is thought to offer more complete ways of understanding how student writers integrate prior writing knowledge. Ultimately, however, I suggest that each of these perspectives still adheres to the idea that forms of writing knowledge exist as objects to be “used” or employed for certain purposes. Additionally, they adhere to the notion that academic contexts are stable, discrete, and unchanging. And finally, they assume that student dispositions can be identified as fixed states that more or less determine student behavior and practices. These three approaches point to an ongoing struggle to describe transfer in ways that account for writing as a dynamic and situated practice, yet ultimately rely on an existing framework that codifies assumptions about language conventions, discursive contexts, and student writer identities. This framework, I argue, has contributed to imprecise and

inaccurate portrayals of language, language use, and language users as homogenous, mechanistic, and pre-determined entities. Transfer researchers continually set themselves up to resolve an impossible incongruity: they feel pressured to devise approaches that will allow them to reach a consensus about “what transfers,” all the while recognizing that student writers and student writing resist simple, one-size-fits-all representations. I argue that the drive to come to a consensus about the writing-related knowledge students need when writing for subsequent contexts has not only led to unsatisfactory results in empirical research, but also has worked to trivialize writing instruction at the postsecondary level. In order to gain a deeper sense of the aims and purposes of the introductory college writing course, we must find new ways to acknowledge and account for different and complex ways in which learners work with and on writing-related knowledge. This would require researchers to question the value of reaching an established consensus about writing transfer, and to consider the role and value of dissonance and difference in writing practices.

Similar projects to challenge consensus-driven goals are underway in other areas of composition research and have yet to be introduced to our scholarly conversations about writing transfer. For example, in their critique of consensus-building trends in first-year writing program assessments, for example, Scott and Brannon (2013) have described the need for a model that embraces dissonance and variation. The desire to establish consistent assessment practices across writing programs, they argue, has contributed to a pervading view that “difference” in assessment practices must be disparaged and eradicated, rather than recognized as inevitable. They suggest that programmatic writing assessments too often portray “consensus and resolutions in sites in

which dissonance and struggle are everyday realities” (p. 275). Drawing on Bakhtin’s notion of *chronotope*, or *time-space*, they describe how attempts to standardize writing assessment always involves the codification of a hegemonic value system that is imagined to exist naturally outside of social and historical workings. The terms upon which assessment mechanisms rely, they argue, are presented as obvious and natural, and so it becomes difficult for instructors and writing program administrators to recognize their ideological exclusivity and various levels of contingency. Recognizing the ideological, cultural and material framing of all consensus-driven policies, they attempt to “denaturalize” the terms of governing assessment standards by placing them in contrast with localized assessment practices. In other words, program assessment strategies might be developed with attention to the value (and ubiquity) of the *dissensus* that emerges through complex, diffuse, and messy local enactments. They conclude,

Assessments should be no less responsive to situations, no less resistant to reductive representations, and just as aware of variety, dissonances, and macro and micro struggles for power as the research methods [composition] scholars describe. Rather than appearing as clear and objective representations that result from natural-seeming measurement procedures, assessments should be represented as *praxis*, as reflexive involvement in the vexed, complicated workings of programs and institutions. Assessments should strive to create three-dimensional portraits and resist representations of the work of students and teachers that are limited, reductive, and subject to misleading clarity. (p. 296)

Scott and Brannon argue for a new framework that locates writing assessment in terms of power, struggle, and difference. Their push to embrace complexity and dissonance should

not be unfamiliar to composition researchers and practitioners; the issues they raise are not new concerns, of course. But I argue they can and should be made visible within transfer research and pedagogies. In the following chapter, I introduce perspectives on language difference and translingual literacy practices in first-year writing in order to envision how we might begin to “denaturalize” the terms and assumptions of current transfer research. In doing so, I present an occasion to explore the challenges of reassessing the normative, to contest simple representations of complex activities and phenomena, and to devise “new ways of researching, naming, and enacting” the idea of writing related transfer (Scott & Brannon, 2013, p. 276).

CHAPTER III  
DENATURALIZING TRANSFER: CONTEXTS, CONVENTIONS, AND  
IDENTITIES IN TIME AND SPACE

In the previous chapter, I explored three composition-based approaches for understanding rhetorical knowledge transfer and suggested that the assumptions of stability pertaining to writing concepts, academic and nonacademic contexts, and student-writer identities have impeded our ability to describe learning transfer both into and out of compulsory college writing. Each of the approaches attempts, in some way, to provide a more complex and complete vision of rhetorical knowledge transfer, yet they rely on the same epistemological and ideological assumptions about knowledge, language use and language users that underpin the collective body of transfer studies in rhetoric and composition. In this way, they align with a “general skills” approach to writing instruction and with assumptions that the introductory course serves a preparatory function for all academic writing activities (and, to an extent, all nonacademic writing activities as well). By attempting to establish a consensus about the knowledge students should obtain in college writing courses, they rely on an inevitably reductive account of dynamic and complex literacy learning activities.

Embedded in each of these perspectives (the domain model, threshold concepts, and the dispositional approach) are declarations about what students need or want from

first-year writing courses – declarations we can no longer be certain of as populations in US higher education continue to change and become increasingly varied in terms of students’ professional and academic goals, their present commitments and affiliations (economic, personal, cultural, political), their cultural identities and language practices, and, more broadly, in terms of the changes to employment patterns and practices in the U.S. and worldwide. Beaufort (2012) has lauded the domain model of writing instruction for its explicitly “pragmatic goals,” or for its capacity to “facilitate successful written expression in school and work contexts” (n.p.) as if such goals are obvious, unproblematic, and natural. But we cannot assume that the “pragmatic” has a unified and self-evident meaning given the unpromising and uncertain economic conditions with which our students have contended and will continue to face during and after college.<sup>3</sup> It is no surprise, then, that students are increasingly ambivalent toward the relationship of their academic work to their careers, and their investment in higher education is seen by Lu and Horner (2009) as “materially, intellectually, emotionally, and viscerally costly and risky: it’s not clear how, when, or whether that investment will ‘pay off,’ and what economic, emotional, or intellectual form the ‘return’ will take” (p. 115). In fact, as Scott (2009) has described, many students enter college seeking a temporary *escape* from work, rather than a means to improve economic prospects. We must further acknowledge that institutions of postsecondary education in the US are witnessing growing enrollments of international students as well as growing enrollments of US resident minority students

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<sup>3</sup> According to surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center, 42 percent of college graduates are in jobs that require less than a four year degree, and 41 percent of graduates in 2013 could not find a job in their field. Data compiled by the Project on Student Debt has estimated that students who borrowed money to pay for bachelor’s degrees granted in 2012 owe an average of \$29,400, and that nearly one-fifth of all graduates will default on their loan payments within three years.

and nontraditional students; our scholarly conversations about learning transfer must recognize and respond to the reality of the changing demographics of first-year writing in a globalizing world.

What is increasingly needed, I argue, is not an established consensus on the writing knowledge students need, but rather an orientation to writing itself, on the part of students, researchers, and instructors, that insists upon and validates different values, goals, and experiences, one that encourages a flexibility and openness to responding to new or unfamiliar writing situations. The pressure to come to a consensus about “what transfers” has compelled researchers to package their findings in ways that inevitably contradict what they claim to know and value about relations of social, cultural, and linguistic difference. Rich, complex data sets are analyzed in ways that efface complexity and valorize conformity to dominant expectations and writing conventions. Student writers and students writing, however, resist such simple classifications. Classrooms are not comprised of homogenous groups, and individuals are not internally stable and uniform entities, and our representations of student writers and student writing should reflect this understanding. Therefore, what seems to be needed is a critical reassessment of a consensus-driven framework which keeps us from recognizing the complex ways in which students draw on, recontextualize, and reproduce rhetorical knowledge and conventions.

If we grant that what we wish for our students is an attitude of flexibility, creativity, and rhetorical dexterity toward writing (as opposed to blind adherence to universal and unchanging rules, structures, and skills), it seems that what is needed is a perspective that will help assuage the proclivity to reduce, categorize, and generalize our

students, their goals and abilities. Further, what is needed is a perspective that will account for and acclaim difference in writing, or a more dynamic approach for engaging with diversity and a variety of discourses and practices, as uniformity in what students transfer will no longer be a viable or desirable goal. Such a perspective must be grounded in the recognition of heterogeneity in student reading and writing practices, and ultimately must insist on the potential value of all forms of variation and difference.

In this chapter, I introduce perspectives on writing instruction that urge a new orientation to writing and writing instruction that would offer potential insights for devising a new approach for understanding writing-related transfer. Particularly, I consider recent calls for a translingual orientation to literacy instruction as a platform from which transfer researchers might acknowledge and respond to the changing populations in composition. I argue that our scholarly conversations about transfer and language difference need not and cannot be at odds with each other. Our models for understanding transfer can only work if they are attuned to the multilingual realities in which teachers, researchers, and students participate. In what follows, I demonstrate how the available models we have for understanding transfer are constrained by a monolingualist paradigm – one that conceives of languages, and language use-in-context, as fixed, discrete, and enumerable. This paradigm is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain, given the shifting functions and purposes of English due to postmodern globalization. I then show how a translingual focus on language practices in both time and space would shift the terms of current conceptualizations of transfer. I argue that a translingual orientation to writing-related transfer can work to alleviate some of the contradictions posited in current positions on learning transfer in postsecondary writing

instruction and suggest that increased dialogue across these areas will be necessary to develop our understanding of transfer both into and out of composition.

Developing an alternative orientation toward transfer is profoundly difficult in light of current institutional pressures to measure and standardize student learning. The increasing marketization of educational enterprises, in some ways, demands that we ensure widespread conformity in writing instruction and student learning. Yet pressures for conformity from above have conveniently ignored the complex realities and possibilities we might engage to new and exciting ends in our teaching and scholarship. Our present research on transfer is limited in part, I argue, because we have not yet amended our understanding of transfer to account for and respond to increasingly complex and heterogeneous identities, goals, and practices of students in contemporary US higher education, the presence of which makes a critical rethinking of our assumptions and objectives all the more urgent.

### **Transfer and Translingual Realities**

To date, few transfer studies have attended to the vast presence of linguistic and cultural difference represented in student populations. When empirical studies on transfer have reported the cultural and linguistic identity markers of their participants, they most commonly have been identified as some combination of English native-speaking, white, often male, of traditional college-age, and of middle- to upper-middle class privilege. Several examples can be cited to demonstrate the recurrence of students identified as “mainstream” in current studies. In Beaufort’s (2007) longitudinal study, Tim, a “smart, mature, generous young man” (p. 1) is described as a “mainstream student (i.e. middle-

class and white)” (p. 215). Dave Garrison, the subject of McCarthy’s (1987) case study, is identified as a “white, middle-class, 18-year-old freshman, a biology pre-med major who had graduated the year before from a parochial boys’ high school near the college” (p. 234). The student participants in Wardle’s (2007) pilot study included seven traditional first-year students in their late teens: “All were white, middle- and upper-middle class honors students enrolled at a private liberal arts university” (p. 72). Bergmann and Zepernick’s (2007) study on student perceptions of learning to write in composition and upper-level writing-intensive courses included student participants recruited from the honors society and from the selective “Chancellor’s Leadership Class” at their institution. The series of case studies described in Nowacek’s (2011) book focuses on a group of honors students that constituted a “relatively homogenous and privileged group,” and she notes that “they had a history of academic success and were perhaps likely to feel authorized to write and make connections” (140).

Many studies have noted the limitations of their participant selection and continually note the need to conduct research with student populations who might be identified as located outside of the perceived mainstream. Beaufort (2007), for example, writes that studies involving students of “diverse backgrounds” will be needed to determine the usefulness of her framework for a “broader spectrum of writers” (p. 215). Similarly, Wardle (2007) describes her participants as “students one would expect to be savvy, educationally successful, and able to ‘transfer’ knowledge and abilities more easily and often than less well prepared students” (p. 72), implying that her results may not hold the same significance for student writers from underserved or underrepresented populations, and further tacitly asserting that those students from privileged backgrounds

“have” abilities that those from marginalized backgrounds do not. Nowacek (2011) also advises transfer researchers to consider “other student populations” in future studies (140). And Bergmann and Zepernick (2007) “would have preferred a less academically gifted (i.e., more generally representative) population” (p. 146).

The focus on “mainstream” students is an acknowledged gap in current empirical data on writing-related transfer. The above calls to extend studies to student populations identified as outside of the “mainstream” indicate that transfer researchers are sensitive to issues of difference, perhaps especially given the long-standing history of composition studies in relation to issues of student language “rights” and language politics. However, we might further interrogate how such calls work to perpetuate a myth of homogeneity among students who exist within the perceived mainstream. That is, by reinforcing the need to collect data from students from “diverse backgrounds,” scholars may unwittingly overlook the variance and fluidity among individual members of student populations marked as mainstream.

A growing number of composition scholars have sought to challenge the uniformity of mainstream students by calling into question the dominant perception that students of first-year writing are by and large speakers of privileged varieties of English. In order to challenge the distinction between native and non-native speakers, we might consider what Kramsch (2006) has identified as the “myth” of the native/non-native speaker dichotomy: “the idealized monolingual native speaker/hearer, representative of one monolingual discourse community, might still exist in people’s imaginations, but has never corresponded to reality” (p. 27).

Still, the idea and the ideal of the “native English speaker” persist in current discussions about writing instruction, and in discussions about language teaching more broadly. As Leung (2005) notes in his discussion of models of communicative competence in English Language Teaching, the appeal to “native-speakerness” relies on an assumption that there is “an almost hard-wired relationship between the status of being a native speaker of a language and a complete knowledge of and about that language” (p. 130). Based on this assumption, individuals identified as native speakers of any given language are presumed to share the same lexical and grammatical knowledge of that language. The model of the “native speaker” falls apart under the recognition that there is no universal model of how native speakers’ use their native language (see Leung et al., 1997, for further discussion). Students in FYC who have traditionally been identified as English monolingual are, indeed, multilingual in terms of the varieties of English they speak across various spheres of life. Language difference, from this view, is an inevitable component of all language practice, not just of those identified as L2 or non-native speakers. In this sense, the call to extend studies of transfer to “nonmainstream” writers may not ultimately be productive, as this would assume a linguistic stability among populations of writers that does not actually exist. Native English speakers do not practice English in uniform and consistent ways – their familiarity with and practice of norms and conventions varies.

Recent calls for a translingual approach to the teaching of writing have described “difference in language not as a barrier to overcome or as a problem to manage, but as a resource for producing meaning in writing, speaking, reading, and listening” (Horner et al., 2011, p. 299). Drawing from perspectives in applied linguistics and second language

studies, those adopting a translingual approach aim to address the gap between political and institutional renderings of languages and language varieties as monolithic and stable entities, belonging to certain hierarchically ordered groups, and the variations and modifications of language through actual instances of its use in practice. A translingual approach notes that conventional approaches to writing instruction adhere to monolingual assumptions about languages as discrete and unchanging forms. These assumptions are both inadequate and invalid, in that they are at odds with how language is not only used, but revised, learned, and produced through instances of practice.

The translingual approach described by Horner et al. (2011) responds to a growing intellectual movement to rethink the unidirectional relationship between language systems and language practice. Conventional renderings of this relationship posit that languages exist as fixed systems, and that individual utterances either work within or deviate from those systems. The notion of language as fixed system can be aligned with a myth of language purity, which assumes that discrete language systems and conventions exist prior to and apart from language practices. Scholars in applied and sociolinguistics have collected examples of language use-in-practice in diverse global locations as a way to push against the assumption of a one-to-one correlation between language systems and language use/users. Such work has focused on both the divergences between language policy and practice in regional contexts (see Prinsloo, 2012; Khubchandani, 1999; Canagarajah, 2009) as well as the changing uses and purposes of English in internationalized contexts (see Canagarajah, 2007; Kachru, 1982; Jenkins, 2007; Jenkins, 2009). Calvet (2006), for instance, argues that “languages exist only in and through their speakers, and they are reinvented, renewed, and transformed in

every interaction, each time that we speak” (p. 6). Therefore, to treat languages as stable, pre-existing, enumerable codes falsely presumes that language standards can be mechanistically imposed *a priori* to use. However, as Calvet (2006) describes, languages and language conventions do not exist externally from language users, but rather are “the constantly evolving product of a need to communicate, a quest for communication, and an awareness of this communication” (p. 11). Language, from this perspective, can be viewed as the always-emergent result of practice, rather than the precursor to practice.

Starting with the assumption that language is fluid and heterogeneous, those advocating a translingual approach view the boundaries between languages as ideologically constructed and imposed. Thus, the rules imagined to govern “Standard English” are viewed as historical codifications that have commonly been cited as unchanging standards in need of protection against the threat of nonstandard varieties. In this sense, pedagogical stances which demand adherence to the rules of privileged varieties of English are viewed as exerting hegemonic influence over other languages and peripheral varieties of English, and have rendered these languages and varieties as somehow inadequate or substandard. Dominant approaches have failed to acknowledge how English language standards change over time through specific instances of language use. Language use, as understood through the lens of translingualism, has always been a multilingual activity through which writers negotiate and rework accepted conventions in concert with their own heterogeneous linguistic resources. Recognizing the fluidity of language practices as the always occurring norm in communicative acts invites new understandings of conventional approaches to notions of difference, error, language use, and competence across disciplinary divides and across other public and private spheres

more generally. Given the reality of everyday language use as a multilingual activity, it calls for an orientation toward language that is open to the possibilities of making and conveying meaning through drawing on a wide range of available linguistic resources. Language difference is viewed “not as a barrier to overcome or as a problem to manage, but as a resource for producing meaning in writing, speaking, reading, and listening” (Horner et al., 2011, p. 299).

The emphasis on practice advanced through a translingual approach can be aligned with the “practice turn” in contemporary social theory (see Schatzki et al., 2001), which involves moving from viewing language as a system to investigating the “doing” of language as a social activity. The perceived structures of languages are derived from repeated activity. This notion of practice as a primary unit of analysis can also be found in conceptualizations of “literacy practices” in the fields of New Literacy Studies and Academic Literacies (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000; Gee, 1990; Street, 1984). Street (1984) identifies an “autonomous” model of literacy at work in dominant representations of literacy learning and acquisition. In the autonomous model, literacy is depicted as a set of skills to be acquired and applied consistently in future texts and contexts, a view that divorces literacy from the social dimensions that influence its use and value. The focus on literacy as a practice, rather than a skill, has emerged out of the recognition that literacy acquisition is a social process, and that definitions of “what counts” as literacy are not neutral, but “ideological” – they change in different social settings (for further discussion of autonomous and ideological models of literacy, see Street, 1984). Barton and Hamilton (2000) emphasize how practices are “shaped by social rules which regulate the use and distribution of texts, prescribing who may produce and have access to them

(p. 8). Their emphasis on literacy as historically situated draws attention to the fluid, dynamic, and changing nature of literacy practices across time and space. Situated literacy practices are understood in relation to “institutionalized configurations of power and knowledge” (p. 12), and are thus inextricably linked to, and often measured against, the local landscapes of which they are a part.

Horner et al. (2011) describe how “taking a translingual approach is not about the number of languages, or language varieties, one can claim to know. Rather, it is about the disposition of openness and inquiry that people take toward language and language differences” (p. 307). The attitude of “openness and inquiry” endorsed by a translingual approach can be seen in the example of Lingua Franca English (LFE) in applied linguistics, which has shown the negotiated character of English use in multilingual contexts between individuals who do not speak each other’s native languages. Scholars have described how English has become the international language of research, business and industry, and education, and can no longer be associated primarily with discrete geographic locations. LFE, as the variety of English used in these multilingual contexts, does not exist *a priori* as a standardized collection of norms or conventions, but rather operates as a “shared resource” between speakers that is “intersubjectively constructed in each specific context of interaction” (Canagarajah, 2007, p. 925). In these multilingual contexts, mastery of a standardized variety of English is not necessary for successful communication. Canagarajah (2007) notes that “the form of this English is negotiated by each set of speakers for their purposes. The speakers are able to monitor each other’s language proficiency to determine mutually the appropriate grammar, phonology, lexical range, and pragmatic conventions that would ensure intelligibility” (p. 925). Speakers of

LFE are not “moving toward someone else’s target” but rather are “constructing their own norms” as determined in local communicative interactions (p. 928).

### **Locating contexts in time and space**

The assertion that language norms and conventions are not discrete, pre-existing codes has immediate implications for research on writing-related transfer. At the heart of present conceptualizations of writing-related transfer are assumptions about both the stability and discreteness of discursive spheres. That is, the boundaries imagined to separate recurring communicative contexts are depicted as physical obstacles that students must cross. Recall, for instance, Perkins and Salomon’s (1988) definition of transfer as what occurs when learning in context A is useful for an activity in context B. The notion of context is conceptualized primarily in terms of the spatial relationship between two domains. These settings are imagined to exist and relate to one another in a fixed constellation of pre-determined and bounded spatial locations. Similarly, Tuomi-Grohn and Engestrom’s (2003) edited collection seeks to understand transfer as a process of “boundary-crossing,” whereby knowledge is carried from one physical space to another. The primary obstacle for transfer, from these renderings, is the perceived gap between context A and context B.

Transfer studies in composition, too, have focused primarily on the ways rhetorical knowledge is carried over from one context to another. Studies, for example, have focused on transfer between in-school and out-of-school contexts (Roozen, 2010), from high school to college (Robertson et al., 2012), from first-year composition to other courses (Adler-Kassner et al., 2012; Nelms & Dively, 2007; Beaufort, 2007), from

academic to professional settings (Anson & Forsberg, 1990; Bacon, 1999), and so on. Each context is characterized according to fixed sets of discursive norms into which writers must become socialized in order to write “appropriately” according to the expectations of a particular community.

The above conceptualizations of discursive contexts tacitly presume a conflict-free relationship between space and language: “appropriate” conventions exist, and one need only acquire them in order to communicate effectively with others in that space. The relationship between space and language is, of course, more awkward than this.

Deviations from context-specific conventions do occur in actual utterances and in actual communicative exchanges. In their study on literacy practices across the curriculum, Ivanič et al. (2010) suggest that notions of “boundaries and borders” and “border-crossings” seem to impose a “certain flatness, a static two-dimensionality” (p. 172) that was not reflected in the literacy practices they observed within and across particular domains, suggesting, ultimately, that “the relationship between domains and practices was more complex and messy: they co-emerged” (p. 172).

A translingual approach adopts a temporal-spatial frame to describe the relations between contexts, language users, and language conventions, in order to show how similarly recurring spaces, and the language patterns that occur within those spaces, are not substantively identical across time, but are always constructed in response to local demands, and are modified however slightly through their (re)construction. The emphasis on “boundary-crossing” in current transfer studies treats contexts as spatial entities only, and thus disregards how boundaries are always fluctuating across time; they continually shift and overlap, and they are drawn and redrawn through language practices.

Pennycook's (2010) notion of the "doing" of language is useful to further challenge boundary-crossing metaphors. In *Language as a Local Practice*, he describes how individual instances of language practices produce not only language itself, but the space in which the practice occurs. He argues that "What we do with language in a particular place is the result of our interpretation of that place; and the language practices we engage in reinforce that reading of place" (p. 2). Practices, from this view, are given meaning in relation to the social and spatial settings in which they are performed and interpreted. Practices situated in context cannot be assessed based on "a pre-given account of what is local; rather, local practices construct locality" (Pennycook, 2010, p. 7). While language practices do often recur in similar ways, they are also localized differently and each time "create the space in which they happen" (p. 128).

When we view contexts primarily in terms of their spatial dimension – that is, when we view them as recurring identically to the ways they have occurred in the past – they become codified in ways that do not account for their temporally different iterations. Situations that appear to recur regularly and repeatedly are not static spaces; they emerge differently through local activity. Thus, as Barton and Hamilton (2000) put it, "domains, and the discourse communities associated with them, are not clear-cut"; in recognizing the temporal dimension of discursive contexts, we might further investigate "permeability" of contextual boundaries, "of leakages and movement between boundaries, and of overlap between domains" (p. 11). In her exploration of the temporal dimension of literacy practices, Tusting (2000) describes how "the 'the same' event can never happen more than once. This," she continues, "enables change – for example evolutionary change – to happen within the framework of continually repeated similar

events, as small changes in one cycle can develop into vast differences many cycles later” (p. 37). Tusting argues for a more fluid relationship between past, present, and future literacy practices – practices occurring in the past, and practices imagined to occur in the future, cannot be detached from what actually occurs in the present. And, conversely, practices occurring in the present are necessarily a variation of what has happened previously. The emphasis on time allows us to see how practices occurring “within” a specific context contribute to and alter our understanding of that space and the activities occurring therein.

### **New Metaphors, Old Problems**

The above conceptualization of time would allow for more complex renderings of the boundaries students are imagined to cross with writing knowledge. The boundaries imagined to separate languages, contexts, and language-in-context are not fixed and unchanging, but are instead porous and contingent, and always modified through practice. Thus, the activity of “carrying something over” implied by the metaphor of transfer itself is in need of reevaluation.

Scholars both in and outside of composition have rightly pointed to the problems embedded within the term “transfer” itself, and the activity it implies. Wardle (2012a) has suggested that our continued use of the term in composition has limited our ability to understand the complexities of what it means to engage in expansive learning.

Educational researchers Hager and Hodkinson (2009) have described how the metaphor of transfer carries associated baggage that leads researchers to continually misunderstand the learning processes it is imagined to stand for. Despite attempts to develop and extend

theories of learning transfer, the notion itself has come to be associated with a “common-sense account of learning” (Hager & Hodkinson, p. 622), or what Freire (1970) describes as a “banking model” of learning, in which minds are imagined to exist as containers of knowledge objects that move with a learner and can be accessed as required.

To address the problematic “baggage” associated with the metaphor of transfer, composition scholars have used or proposed different metaphors to take its place. For instance, Wardle’s (2012a) rethinking of transfer as “creative repurposing for expansive learning” represents one attempt in composition to get around the problems associated with the metaphor of transfer. Wardle cites Prior and Shipka (2003), who define “re-purposing” as “the re-use and transformation of some text/semiotic object” (p. 238). Roozen’s (2010) case study on repurposing examines how one student repurposed her extracurricular literacy practices when she was asked to write a graduate level literary analysis paper. Roozen argues that the “re-purposing” metaphor is useful for research on writing practices across contexts, as it draws attention to the “wide range of participants’ semiotic performances,” and not just the activities that involve the production of seemingly similar kinds of texts (p. 330). He investigates the relationship between the extracurricular and academic literacy practices performed by one student, Lindsay, and found that her development of disciplinary writing expertise was profoundly enhanced by the discursive practices she “repurposed” from nonacademic literacy activities. Drawing on interviews and textual artifacts, Roozen shows how Lindsey “recruited” writing practices she had developed previously in two different spaces. The first of these came from the prayer journal she kept as a member of a church youth group, and the second came from her experience generating visual designs from an undergraduate graphic arts

class. Lindsey's writing process for a paper in a graduate course in American literature drew heavily upon the "verse-copying" practices she had used in youth group, which involved transcribing biblical passages and passages from other religious texts into a journal. Following this transcription, she would then compose a prayer that incorporated the language of the copied passages. Roozen suggests that Lindsey "repurposed" this practice in her academic writing, as a way to become more familiar with and to try out the conventions of literacy analysis. That is, she copied passages from literary criticism into a notebook, and then tried to mimic the moves she documented in her own academic writing. Lindsay also borrowed discursive strategies she learned in her undergraduate graphic design course, which involved a practice of "physically manipulating texts until she found a workable design" (p. 336). Roozen argues that Lindsay "repurposed" this strategy in graduate school, using it as a method for organizing her notes in order to develop an effective argument for a seminar paper.

Robertson et al. (2012) have also articulated an alternative set of metaphors imagined to capture the different ways students draw on or reshape prior knowledge resources – particularly those acquired in high school English courses – in new writing tasks. They describe how students "share a common high school background" and, as a result, often enter college with an "absence of prior knowledge" about writing, as their high school English and language arts courses fail to prepare them with the conceptual writing knowledge and the models of academic writing they will need to write successfully in college. From this perspective, students' previous encounters with schooled writing have served as inadequate preparation for academic writing tasks in college. Drawing on interviews with three students, they identify three different ways in

which students make use of previously acquired knowledge in college writing courses. The first is through a process identified as “assemblage,” in which students “graft isolated bits of new knowledge onto a continuing schema of old knowledge” (n.p.). The assemblage process is marked by a reluctance to see a shift in the kinds of writing required in high school and those required in college. The second is through a process identified as “remix,” in which students make some attempt to incorporate new writing-related knowledge and practices into their prior assumptions about writing, but never shed their previous approaches entirely. The third process involves the creation of new knowledge or a new conceptualization of writing, which is prompted when they encounter what they term a “critical incident” or a “setback,” when their prior knowledge comes into conflict with the present writing task. Facing such a setback, some students are described as being willing to “let go of prior knowledge” in order to “revised their model and/or conception of writing and write anew” (n.p.)

Nowacek (2009) offers a slightly different conceptualization of why and how students make decisions about how to use prior writing knowledge across contexts. Through an understanding of transfer “as an act of recontextualization,” (p. 8), she argues that students, as “agents of integration,” actively select from prior knowledge resources in present writing tasks in order to minimize the sense of difference in new or unfamiliar situations. This would work toward explaining why students often appear so reluctant to “let go” of prior knowledge from high school. From Nowacek’s view, students are always restructuring their knowledge about writing as a way to create connections and establish similarities across contexts. Drawing on rhetorical theories of genre, which “assume that individuals find themselves in fundamentally similar situations” (p. 20),

Nowacek outlines a framework that might allow researchers to recognize transfer not as an act of mere application but as an always occurring and purposeful act of familiarization.

The above examples demonstrate a trend in transfer studies to view space as fixed and immobile – practices learned in one setting are reapplied or reconfigured to meet the demands of a new setting, with varying degrees of success. Writing is still viewed as either working within the conventions of a given context, or as deviating from those conventions. In some cases, “reproducing” conventions is taken to be a sign of conformity to rigid or inappropriate rules or norms, while in others, it is taken to be a sign of having learned the appropriate rhetorical strategies to write effectively and successfully within a given context. Conversely, when students deviate from expectations, they are either lauded for their willingness to “let go” of rigid or ill-fitting rules about writing, or they are reprimanded for not meeting the conventions and expectations of a particular context. In any case, students are imagined to be either disregarding or working within whichever set of conventions is deemed suitable for the immediate context.

The translingual emphasis I outlined above would invite us to rethink writing practice not according to the degree it meets pre-existing norms but as an agentic process of working both with and on those norms in order to construct new meaning and understandings. Drawing on Giddens’ (1979) theory of structuration, those adopting a translingual approach invite a more dynamic reading of the relationship between structural conventions and individual activity. In this view, structure and activity are mutually interdependent: what learners do, think, and say is always affected by social

structures and relations, and at the same time is always reinforcing, reproducing, and revising those structures and relations. “Letting go” of prior knowledge and “writing anew,” from this perspective, is not reserved only for those who appear to be more open to experimenting with form and convention, but is what writers always do in and through language practice, whether written or spoken.

The notion of *adaptive transfer*, as described by DePalma and Ringer (2011), makes space for the ways in which writers actively reshape and reform writing knowledge in and through practice. Their model challenges perspectives that have described transfer in terms of the *use* and *reuse* of writing knowledge. To speak of transfer in terms of knowledge use, they claim, seems to suggest that writing knowledge can be learned and applied consistently, which depends upon the assumption that language conventions exist as a technical and ideologically-neutral system, and that writers can learn and reproduce this system in uniform ways. Their theory of *adaptive transfer* outlines six interactional components that must be considered in any understanding of knowledge transfer – that is, the activity of knowledge transfer must be viewed as:

- dynamic (characterized by change and fluidity),
- idiosyncratic (adjusted locally to respond to contextual factors),
- cross-contextual (influenced by a perceived similarity between contexts),
- rhetorical (shaped by one’s recognition of context, audience, and purpose),
- multilingual (negotiated through various discursive strategies and linguistic resources),
- transformative (produced differently through dynamic activity).

This orientation draws out key considerations that have gone underacknowledged in current transfer projects in composition. Specifically, while present studies have emphasized the rhetorical and contextual dimensions of knowledge transfer, DePalma and Ringer invite researchers to rethink matters of student agency, and to view all writing practices as intrinsically transformative and multilingual acts.

The publication of their alternative framework in the *Journal of Second Language Writing* was met with some skepticism. These reactions are, in many ways, representative of the consensus-driven anxiety in research on transfer in composition. For example, Grujicic-Alatriste (2012) noted concerns that such a dynamic model might be difficult to “operationalize” (p. 2) and pointed to the inevitable complications of assessing the six broad components, given the already existing challenges to measure transfer. DePalma and Ringer (2012) responded to this apprehension by indicating that although they are receptive to and understanding of these concerns, attempts to “operationalize” transfer processes are influenced by hegemonic social and institutional forces, as they seem to suggest that a “neatly ordered taxonomy” can be used to organize and explain a “highly dynamic, multidimensional phenomenon” (p. 43). Grujicic-Alatriste further took issue with the suggestion that researchers should view student writers not primarily as novices, but as inhabiting a range of roles. However, while “novice” is the primary role that most readers or writers would expect to occupy when they encounter an unfamiliar writing task or rhetorical situation, DePalma and Ringer (2012) argue that the continued adherence to a novice/expert dichotomy has allowed transfer researchers to overlook the multiple identities and prior experiences always enacted in a heterogeneous community of learners. Additionally, they argue, it removes the possibility of agency from the writer, by

imaging writing as the mechanistic reproduction of an idealized model or system. The novice identity, then, is one role, but certainly not the only role, that student writers inhabit.

To account for the various roles writers continually negotiate and enact, DePalma and Ringer (2012) advance an understanding of student writers as “agents of adaptation” (p. 467). The emphasis on adaptability complicates and extends Nowacek’s (2009) notion of students as agents of integration. Similar to the idea of integration, the adaptation model acknowledges that writers do call on previously learned strategies to make sense of unfamiliar situations. However, writers do not read unfamiliar situations in uniform ways, nor do they make consistent use of prior knowledge. Instead, writers creatively adapt and reshape their prior knowledge creatively to achieve their own communicative goals. Students enact agency, then, not by actively making selections from a range of fixed language resources, but by restructuring, experimenting with, and creating their own strategies in the course of their writing practices.

The notion of adaptive transfer is useful in that it shifts attention away from universal, fixed writing skills and toward an understanding of difference and variation as the always occurring norm. But it is still limited in that it treats transfer to be a problem of boundary-crossing between two dissimilar contexts. That is, while language practices are treated as dynamic, contexts are still treated as static and unchanging. There is no sense of how practices actively produce, contribute to, and alter the immediate landscape in which they occur. The difference produced through writing is still working within contexts imagined to recur as “the same.” The translingual approach I have outlined above would extend DePalma and Ringer’s (2011) model by emphasizing the co-

emergence of both practice and context, and thus further destabilizes the idea that the problem of transfer is, by definition, a problem of making previously acquired practices “fit” within the constraints of a new context.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how a translingual emphasis would work to shift current understandings of the activity implied by transfer and its related metaphors. I have pointed to the monolingual framework that currently informs research on writing-related transfer of learning, and I have discussed how practices cannot be divorced from the local environments in which they occur. I argued that difference is a feature not only of all language practice, but also of the contexts in which language practice occurs. By locating instances of language practice, and the contexts in which that practice occurs, in both time and space, I argue that we can more readily conceive of the transferability of rhetorical knowledge in relation to both established norms and emergent forms of practice. The following chapter offers an illustration of how a translingual emphasis might be employed in our reading of student writing, and in our identification and understanding of transfer activity.

## CHAPTER IV

### DIFFERENCE AS A CENTRAL FEATURE OF TRANSFER ACTIVITY

In the previous chapter, I argued that present conceptualizations of transfer in writing studies tend to operate within a spatial framework, one which imagines that what is taught and learned in one context should ideally appear “the same” in the next context. This framework, I argued, works within an acquisition and application model of learning, despite the widespread recognition that transmission models are inadequate for writing instruction and writing practice. Borrowing from recent calls for a translingual approach to writing instruction, I outlined an alternative conceptualization of transfer grounded in a temporal-spatial framework, which operates under the assumption that all instances of language practice are simultaneously “the same” and different. From this perspective, it would no longer make sense to conceive of transfer in terms of the transmission of conceptual knowledge about writing from one presumably stable context to the next. Rather, if writing is viewed as always producing “sameness” and difference, we can begin to conceive of all writers as always actively engaged in the “creative repurposing” of rhetorical knowledge in local instances of writing practice.

This chapter continues the work of exploring how a translingual emphasis would shift the terms and assumptions of the available models for understanding writing-related learning transfer. In particular, I describe a set of negotiated reading practices composition researchers and instructors might adopt in order to locate micro-level

instances of “creatively repurposed” rhetorical knowledge in student writing (see Wardle, 2012). These practices – which are informed by Canagarajah’s (2013) model of *performative competence* in translingual communication, as well as Ratcliffe’s (1999) notion of *rhetorical listening* as a code of cross-cultural conduct – would work toward collapsing the seemingly unavoidable (and undesirable) “either/or” dichotomies affiliated with the idea of the transferability of writing knowledge and skills: expert/novice, problem-exploring/answer-getting, positive/negative transfer, real/ideal, etc. I analyze student writing samples and assignments from Beaufort’s (2007) *College Writing and Beyond*, from Wardle and Downs’ (2011) *Writing About Writing* textbook, and from my fall 2014 composition course, which was organized loosely around the WAW curriculum. I argue that adopting these critical reading strategies would open up new possibilities for understanding how student writers are always and already actively engaged in the “creative repurposing” of rhetorical knowledge.

### **Negotiated Reading and the Transfer of Rhetorical Knowledge**

While several studies have offered pedagogical suggestions for what and how we might teach for transfer, little attention has been paid to the ways we read for transfer, or how we recognize, or, rather, construct, transfer through our reading practices. It is important to acknowledge the responsibility of readers as they work to interpret and evaluate the success of particular strategies and practices. By neglecting or deemphasizing the role of reading in determining positive or negative transfer, we fail to take into account what we already know to be true about the social, co-constructed process of meaning-making between both readers and writers. Consequentially, we risk

overlooking the potentially productive “moments of mismatch between what a teacher expects and what students do,” which may say more about our orientation to reading student writing than it says about what students have or have not acquired as a result of our instruction (Hull & Rose, 1990, p. 287). This is as true for instructors, as the primary readers and evaluators of student writing, as it is for students, in their reading of, negotiation of, and response to assignment prompts, syllabi, and other course materials.

Many composition scholars, of course, have pointed to the tricky role of the reader in assessing and evaluating student writing, particularly when it comes to locating instances of “error” (see Anson, 2000; Lees, 1987; Lees, 1989; Lu, 1994; Williams, 1981). From this work, we have learned that perceptions of error in writing are precipitated by readers, in terms of a reader’s knowledge of conventions and degree of leniency toward the violation of conventions. Scholars have argued for the value of ambivalence in reading student writing, in recognition of the co-construction of meaning between readers and writers. Adopting this approach, as Lu (1994) illustrates, allows us to read deviations from official codes and conventions “not only in relation to the writer’s knowledge of these codes but also in terms of her efforts to negotiate and modify them” (p. 448). Bringing this ambivalence to reading for transfer would invite readers to resist authoritative approaches in determining what, in fact, counts as an acceptable and legitimate display of rhetorical knowledge.

For example, while the threshold concepts approach seems to identify a singular, universal threshold that writers must meet and transcend in order to attain a certain desirable level of expertise, taking an ambivalent approach would allow us to view thresholds as multiple, intersecting, and evolving based on the immediate communicative

goals of a writer. In other words, there are multiple ways that awareness of a particular threshold concept might be performed – and readers of student writing bear a responsibility to look for the several possible ways writers might be working with and on those concepts. Writing that does not appear to evidence a sophisticated level of rhetorical awareness would not be treated as automatically substandard or inferior, or as evidence of a writer’s inability to progress past a preliminary or novice status. I am arguing, then, that writing instructors might adopt a set of critical, negotiated reading practices to identify moments of potential transformation – not only in the sense of a students’ transformed rhetorical awareness, but in the sense of the continual transformation and modification of rhetorical knowledge, including TCs, in which writers always engage.

Assuming a stance of ambivalence requires readers to maintain an awareness not only of the co-construction of meaning, but also of the power dynamics at play in any interaction. In writing classrooms, the reader often assumes the role of expert – while the writer, as a newcomer to the conventions of academic discourse, assumes the primary role of novice. The idea of expertise in present conceptualizations of writing and transfer is described as a linear progression, whereby writers enter composition as novices and attain expertise through a transformative process in which they develop a greater awareness of the interrelations between genre, audience, purpose, argument, etc. Robertson et al.’s (2012) suggestion that students enter college with an “absence of prior knowledge” about writing, for example, works within a linear understanding of the development of writing expertise. The depiction of students-as-novices entering college ill-prepared to compose for academic settings necessarily reinforces a deficit approach to

writing instruction. Applying a translingual orientation to the idea of writing-related transfer would complicate and destabilize traditional notions of novice and expert practices, for, from a translingual view, there is no endpoint or threshold for developing communicative proficiency or expertise. If we orient ourselves to student writing in way that is aware of this reality – that readers bear a responsibility to co-construct meaning, to reflect on our own positions and assumptions, to recognize our ideal vision of what we should see happening in the text is, itself, limited, and that it can be contested and restructured through dialogic interaction – the novice/expert dichotomy begins to collapse.

Beaufort's (2007) conceptualization of expertise is interesting in that it appears to work both within and against a linear, unidirectional model. She seeks to complicate the novice/expert dichotomy in her framework by invoking Alexander's (2003) continuum model consisting of three phases: acclimation, competence, and proficiency (see Chapter 2). This continuum, however, still seems to mobilize an understanding of expertise in terms of a linear and unidirectional progression from neophyte to visionary and, thus, works within a conventional understanding of the novice/expert divide.

Yet Beaufort (2007) does offer a more complicated understanding of the idea of expertise than the continuum framework is able to provide. On the one hand, Beaufort appears to suggest that a transcendent expertise is an attainable goal or endpoint that can be acquired through sustained instruction in and the repeated implementation of conceptual knowledge about writing (although it is unclear what this endpoint should ideally look like, as Tim never reaches it in Beaufort's analysis). In another sense, though, Beaufort seems to suggest that there is no endpoint and that expertise can be

characterized as continual practice: first-year writing, she claims, “can set students on a course of life-long learning so that they know *how to learn* to become better and better writers in a variety of social contexts” (p. 7, emphasis in original). In this way, Beaufort invites an alternative conceptualization of expertise as a process and a practice that is continually emergent, or a constant state of becoming.

Scholars working on the threshold concepts of writing studies have also advanced different understandings of the idea of expertise. On one hand, expertise is defined as an attainable goal, a post-liminal state of understanding that is achieved once a threshold is crossed. As I argued in Chapter 2, this approach is limited in that it seeks to articulate universally applicable ideas and ideals about writing without considering the infinite ways these ideas might be interpreted, implemented, and enacted in writing practice. Further, the idea that there exists a singular “threshold” which students must cross reinforces an exclusionary tendency – it sets an imaginary and ill-defined bar against which student writing can be measured. By articulating the conceptual knowledge about writing one should possess, it falls into the trap of reifying dynamic and complex processes into knowledge objects that are deemed, by some mysterious and enigmatic procedure, essential for student progress.

I want to be careful not to criticize the ideas and activities represented by the concepts identified as threshold, but rather the way they are packaged as neat and consumable truisms that can be applied as a consistent formula for composing across contexts. It would be senseless to argue that the TC “rhetoric” (more broadly construed by Wardle and Downs (2011) as the idea that “good writing is completely dependent on the situation, readers, and uses it’s being created for”), is a disadvantageous idea for

writers. However, a temporal-spatial critique of such concepts would destabilize the neat packaging of this notion in ways that might align more closely with the unpredictability of actual communicative encounters. We know, for example, that it isn't always so easy to determine audience when writing, and writers generally have multiple, at times conflicting, purposes for composing a text. The notion that "good writing is completely dependent on the situation, readers, and uses it's being created for" is important, in a sense, but it needs to be defined and practiced in a much more literal, local, and complex sense. That is, rather than viewing the TC "rhetoric" as a tool one can possess and wield in a consistent manner across genres and contexts, which would imply that there is a correct way to enact rhetorical knowledge, we might view the process it represents as most relevant in terms of local interactions. If understood in this way, rhetorical expertise is not something one either has or has not acquired, but it is something performed, enacted, and determined moment-by-moment.

Here, I argue that applying a temporal spatial frame would extend Beaufort's (2007) model by breaking down conventional distinctions between "novice" and "expert" performances and identities. Writers, from this view, might be understood as always performing the role of both novice and expert. All writers assume the role of novice in that each writing task they encounter is temporally different from those they have encountered previously. As novices, they must work to read and negotiate the contextual cues of an immediate local situation. All writers assume the role of expert in that, through writing practice, they rework and redraw language conventions, and thus contribute actively to the sedimentation of particular linguistic, discursive and semiotic practices. Conventional categories of novice and expert as singular positions one might occupy,

from this perspective, are inadequate for capturing both the learning and the labor that is always performed through language activity. Rather than determining one's status as a novice or an expert according to the knowledge he or she is imagined to possess, a temporal spatial view would attend to the emergent character of expertise through the choices writers make in writing practice.

To view writers as inhabiting the role of both novice and expert would require a different approach for reading student texts, paying attention not to what might be lacking, but looking for moments when the writing works to challenge conventional dichotomies. I want to illustrate what a translingual approach to reading for rhetorical knowledge transfer might look like, using two student essays as examples. First, I read one of Tim's English 102 essays in Beaufort's (2007) *College Writing and Beyond*. In using this example, I want to show how a translingual reading would differ from Beaufort's reading, bringing to light the ways the essay might push against and rework conventional notions of rhetorical expertise. Beaufort's reading of Tim's essays focuses only on the ways it deviates from an ideal display of rhetorical expertise. I align Beaufort's reading with an "accommodationist" stance toward difference (see Horner & Lu, 2008). That is, Beaufort's reading appears to indicate what Horner and Lu (2008) would call a "stable image of the student and his or her desires and purpose for writing" (p. 146); she views Tim as fixed in his desire to acquire and perform one kind (the "right" kind) of rhetorical knowledge, and he failed to do so, in part, because his instructor did not equip him with the appropriate tools. Second, I read a student essay from my own English 102 course. The course was inspired by Wardle and Downs' (2011) *Writing about Writing* textbook and curriculum. I use this example to illustrate how instructors

adopting a writing-about-writing approach face similar challenges in determining what constitutes a successful display of rhetorical expertise.

In my reading of each essay, I draw on communicative practices advocated by translingual scholars. I begin by starting from and acknowledging my own position as a reader – articulating what I would ideally like to see happening in the essay and also my level of investment in seeing that thing happen. Just as translingual communication requires participants to start their communication “from the contexts they are located in, and the language resources and values they bring with them” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 175), I recognize that my position inevitably requires me to attribute value and status to a certain set of practices. I assume, too, that the writer brings her own language norms, practices, values, and resources, which allows me to keep in mind that the status and value of what I am looking for in the text is not necessarily shared but is open to negotiation. I explicitly aim to focus on the practices I see happening in the writing, and attempt to reserve judgment about practices that appear to deviate from my expectations. To the best of my ability, I proceed from what Ratcliffe (1999) terms a “responsibility logic” instead of a position of defense. Ratcliffe explains “responsibility logic” as it relates to her idea of “rhetorical listening”:

By championing a responsibility logic, not a guilt/blame one, rhetorical listening offers us the possibility of getting past the guilt/blame tropes of accusation, denial and defensiveness – all of which are associated with authorial intent and all of which usually result in a stalemate that preserves the status quo. By championing a responsibility logic, rhetorical listening asks us, first, to judge not simply the person’s intent but the historically situated discourses that are (un)consciously

swirling around and through the person and, second, to evaluate politically and ethically how these discourses function and how we want to act upon them. (p. 208)

Bringing this sense of responsibility to my reading allowed me to see my interpretation of the text as a “joint accomplishment” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 175). That is, it required me to cede an authoritative stance toward the text and attend to the ambiguities and idiosyncrasies that emerged in the writer’s struggle to perform rhetorical expertise.

My decision to reprint both essays in the body of this chapter rather than as appendices is intentional. I want the essays to be read in their entirety prior to each analysis in order to encourage readers to consider explicitly the ways we are predisposed to mark certain practices as evidence of successful or failed displays of rhetorical awareness.

### **Tim’s Essay**

While Beaufort’s (2007) reading of Tim’s essay for English 102 appears to focus on the ways Tim performs the role of a novice, a reading of this essay from a temporal-spatial frame would raise questions about how the writing addresses the tension between the novice and expert roles writers negotiate. Beaufort provides some context concerning the nature of the assignment, although the prompt itself was not included in the appendix of documents from the course. Beaufort’s decision not to include additional details about the assignment prompt, both for this essay in particular and for the other assignments in Tim’s English 102 and History courses, strikes me as a shortcoming of her analysis. For obvious reasons, then, it is difficult for me to reproduce the exact contextual situation of

this essay. I have recreated the situation to the best of my ability, given the details provided. Based on Beaufort's description, Carla's 102 course was loosely focused around the theme "nature writing and environmental issues," although she allowed students to write and research topics that diverged from this course theme if they chose to do so. Beaufort included one of Tim's essays for this class in the appendix, and used this essay as a reference point in her discussion of the "negative transfer" evidenced in Tim's writing for the course. The assignment was the second major essay in the class and followed an assignment which asked students to interview an expert on a subject of interest to the individual student. The second assignment was intended to build upon this essay, and required students to locate a secondary source that would give them insight into an unanswered question raised in the interview.

Beaufort (2007) describes how Tim "switched topics" between the first and second essay, although the extent to which he abandoned the topic of his first essay is ambiguous. For the first assignment, Tim interviewed a religious studies professor about the influence of the Vatican II on the Catholic Church. For the second essay, Tim focused on an article written by a medical ethicist on the morality of genetic engineering for Christian researchers and practitioners, which I have reprinted below. From my reading, it seems plausible that Tim's topic for the second paper could have arisen from his interview with the religious studies professor, but no data in the study confirms or invalidates this hypothesis.

#### Right and Wrong in Genetic Engineering: A Christian's Perspective

The last decade's discoveries in genetic science have opened discussions at the dinner table, laboratory, and Congress on questions that ten years ago

existed solely on the pages of science fiction. Their relevance is not real, casting confusion over the decisions of birth, illness, treatment, and death. Is it morally justified, many ask, to read a fetus' genetic code, allowing the parents to abort a handicapped child? Is it right to consider altering the DNA, the very map of life? Isn't the integrity of life threatened by manipulating genetic traits?

Answers given to questions of right and wrong in genetic therapy range widely. Many fear that people who altered the genetic makeup of individuals would be 'playing God.' Other invoke the experience of the Nazi era in Germany and oppose any development of gene-altering processes, concerned that it will lead to similar atrocities. Still others suggest that any new technology that is useful should be put into practice.

Dr. Lewis Bird, professor at Eastern College, where he teaches medical ethics, responds to these solutions with a different framework. As the Eastern Regional Director of the Christian Medical and Dental Society, Dr. Bird has had the opportunity to spend a great deal of effort investigating the complexities of genetic research, testing, and therapy. In an article for the *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* quarterly, he answers those afraid of 'playing God' by pointing out that taking antibiotics for a sore throat also intervenes in the natural progression of human life. If it is justifiable to heal by performing invasive surgery with a knife or laser, to halt the spread of illness by administering antibiotics, and so on, then it is likewise acceptable to use genetic technology. This solution is acceptable to many people, but it leaves at least two questions: First of all, as those sympathetic with Christian Scientist and Amish persuasions

would ask, are modern medicine's techniques acceptable at all? Secondly, some wonder, doesn't genetic technology's deeper penetration into the fabric of human life set it apart from other forms of medical treatment?

Dr. Bird also allays the concern that genetic engineering will lead to abuses similar to those of Nazi Germany's medical community. There is no basis, he believes, for the assertion that use of genetic technology will inevitably lead to atrocities offensive to respect for human nature. Certainly, some crackpot in an unregulated laboratory may take it into his head to perform some evil deed, but he could just as well cause harm to people by using widely accepted technologies such as the surgeon's scalpel or the radiologist's X-ray. Dr. Bird recognizes the risk of powerful technologies like genetic therapy and recommends using caution and supervision to ensure the proper use of genetic engineering.

To those who think 'if it can be done, it should be done,' Dr. Bird has a simple response. Not necessarily. For him, if it can be done, it may be done. How to decide? To lay out a map for determining the path of ethical medical practice, he researched both the Eastern and Western traditions for common, universal principles of medical ethics and found five that relate to genetic engineering.

First of all, we must do no harm. This Dr. Bird derives from the Confucian Silver Rule: "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others." Because there is the chance that someone may disregard the harm done to patients of genetic treatments, he urges thorough regulation and caution in approving genetic therapy techniques.

Geneticists must honor the sanctity of human life taken from the belief that man was created in the image of God. At each step, we must ask, “Does this process ultimately enhance or degrade human dignity?” The answer will direct our steps. God as known in the Old and New Testament does not require a “hands-off” policy, Dr. Bird believes, but we must use caution in assessing the consequences of our work for human life.

Medical technology must be used to alleviate human suffering. The Hebraic-Christian tradition repeatedly calls to our sense of compassion and provides examples of healing as a ministry. The Golden Rule extends the Silver Rule in exhorting us to “do for others what you would have them do for you.” To know to do good and not to do it is sinful, in Dr. Bird’s view. God gave us the knowledge we now possess; we must rely on Him to guide us in using it for ultimate good.

The patient and his or her family must always preserve the right of confidentiality. Outside intrusion on the privacy of the family violates numerous historical codes of ethics. The Hebrew Oath of Asaph and the Greek Oath of Hippocrates both emphasized privacy, and the modern Declaration of Geneva gave it further sanction. Medical personnel must protect right in all cases.

The responsible patient also has the right to consent to the treatment based on truthful information about the treatment, its risks, and real potential. The sacred value of the human free will is underscored in the New Testament numerous times. The first line of the Nuremberg code of ethics [word unclear]

response to the Nazi atrocities reasserts the patient's right to [word unclear] against willful disregard for the patient's human rights.

This enumeration of Christian guidelines for medical ethics invites two responses: first, is this list both complete and correct? If not, what principles have been overlooked or misunderstood? Based on the new list, is genetic therapy at all justified? Second, if Dr. Bird's principles do capture the guidance of scriptures, does genetic therapy indeed pass their scrutiny?

A satisfying respond to the first question will result only from exhaustive research of scriptures and history. Dr. Bird's findings, however, seem to provide a universal basis for ethical decision-making. If one accepts these principles, the categorical denouncement of genetic technology is out of the question. The only alternative is fundamental rejection of all healing arts and reliance on spiritual healing alone.

In general, ethicists like Dr. Bird refuse to condemn technology, while focusing their scrutiny on motives and consequences. To a Christian involved in genetics, concern for the patient should be a top concern. The great potential of genetic technology for curing genetically transmitted diseases encourages Christians in scientific professions. Taking careful stock of the risks and nature of the technology now in discovery, they hope to make the most of technology's new promise while staving off abuse. Dr. Bird, at least, does not intend to ignore this God-given opportunity to fulfill his mission of ministering deeds of good will.

Beaufort (2007) notes three central issues with the essay which, for her, contribute to or serve as evidence of Tim's lack of writing expertise. First, she suggests that Tim's essay

was unsuccessful because it did not follow the conventions of any particular academic genre. This shortcoming is largely attributed to Carla's ambiguity surrounding the assignment itself and the broader function it was imagined to fulfill within the course. Elsewhere, Beaufort notes that the genre of the "essay" in Carla's class was characterized as a "loose exploration of a topic," which did not prepare Tim for the "focused, linear arguments" expected by Tim's professor in his subsequent history course (p. 104). Beaufort quotes from Carla's assignment prompt that the essay "might be an analysis, an argument, or a report depending on the nature of the question you are trying to answer" (p. 49). Because the genre was left unstated on the assignment sheet, Tim was unable to situate his writing in a way that might be legible to an academic community. Second, Beaufort critiques the essay on a "subject matter knowledge" level, arguing that it "lacks in-depth intellectual engagement with a subject matter through writing" (p. 53). Because the essay appears to Beaufort as "almost entirely a summary" (p. 209), she suggests it evidences Tim's failure to explore the topic – as well as his own perspective on the topic – in any substantial way.

Both of these issues, for Beaufort (2007), can be more broadly attributed to Tim's lack of discourse community knowledge. That is, because Tim was not provided with the tools to situate the article he read within the context of the discourse community for whom it was originally written, he failed to demonstrate sophisticated engagement with the assignment. Beaufort notes that "his understanding of that text would have broadened" with increased consideration of the academic discourse community that the author of the article was writing within (p. 210). The essay, as a whole, appears to

evidence a lack of expertise in the conceptual knowledge domains thought necessary for transfer to occur.

A reading of Tim's essay from a temporal-spatial frame would draw attention to the choices Tim made in writing, and would raise questions about what those choices might potentially accomplish. Tim's apparent summary of Dr. Bird's article, in other words, might not be read as a passive restating of the author's main points. Summary writing, as has been well documented, by definition incorporates many dynamic processes: it is a process of making sense of another's words and perspectives; it is a process of selection, whereby some details are foregrounded and others are left out; it is a process of "dialectical thinking" (Bean, 1986, p. 148), which results in the articulation of a viewpoint that differs or contrasts with one's own. An alternative reading of Tim's essay would consider the work Tim accomplishes to make sense of the article in terms of, or in opposition to, his own beliefs and commitments as a reader, a writer, a student, a religious person, or any number of other positions Tim occupied as he encountered and responded to the text. In reading Tim's essay from this perspective, we might explore more closely Tim's summarizing and sense-making processes as they appear in his writing.

One element that might be considered, for example, would be Tim's lack of citation and attribution throughout the paper. While no citations are provided in the essay, there are a few sentences where Tim attributes a particular idea to Dr. Bird. However, the majority of his essay is without attribution, which results in some ambiguity in determining what parts of the essay are, in fact, a summary of Dr. Bird's original article

and what parts involve Tim’s own thinking through of the topic and ideas raised. The following paragraphs serve as examples to illustrate such ambiguity:

Geneticists must honor the sanctity of human life taken from the belief that man was created in the image of God. At each step, we must ask, “Does this process ultimately enhance or degrade human dignity?” The answer will direct our steps. God as known in the Old and New Testament does not require a “hands-off” policy, Dr. Bird believes, but we must use caution in assessing the consequences of our work for human life.

Medical technology must be used to alleviate human suffering. The Hebraic-Christian tradition repeatedly calls to our sense of compassion and provides examples of healing as a ministry. The Golden Rule extends the Silver Rule in exhorting us to “do for others what you would have them do for you.” To know to do good and not to do it is sinful, in Dr. Bird’s view. God gave us the knowledge we now possess; we must rely on Him to guide us in using it for ultimate good.

While both paragraphs include one attribution tag, the remaining sentences offer unattributed declarations. It is possible that they are direct paraphrases from the article itself, but it is also entirely plausible that they represent Tim’s reading of the text in terms of his own beliefs. Beyond this, it is also possible that statements such as “Medical technology must be used to alleviate human suffering” are not originally drawn from Dr. Bird’s article, but serve as declarations of Tim’s own position in relation to the topic of the role of technology in preventing illness and disease. Ultimately, reading Tim’s essay from this perspective would not assume and impose a strict understanding of the paper as

summary – but would consider other possibilities raised within the text, and the potential effect of those choices on different readers. Tim’s use of the pronoun “we” seems to indicate a personal level of identification, and thus he appears to place himself within the role of “expert” regarding the topic.

If Tim’s essay is read as summary, a temporal-spatial frame allows us to view it not as evidence of a writer’s lack of progression to a particular stage of academic writing expertise, but as a complex and dynamic rewriting of the summary genre. Questions might be asked of this essay, either in feedback or direct conversation with the writer or as a part of a class discussion or workshop, that would prompt the writer to recognize how the choices they made in composing might be read in certain ways, and to give the writer a greater sense of his or her own agency in reading, writing, and meaning-making.

#### **Claudia’s Essay<sup>4</sup>**

I now turn to a student essay composed in one of my own writing courses. The essay was written in response to an assignment prompt titled “Navigating Sources That Disagree,” which I adapted from Wardle and Downs’ (2011) WAW curriculum. The purpose of the assignment is for students to explore how arguments are constructed rhetorically, and to gain a deeper awareness of how authors make use of particular strategies in order to position themselves in relation to an issue of public debate. The theme of the particular writing course I was teaching was centered on critical issues in literacy and education, with the intent of having students analyze the idea of “literacy” in terms of their own experiences in and out of school, and in terms of

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<sup>4</sup> I received written permission from Claudia to use her essay in my analysis.

educational/institutional policy and discourse. While the assignment prompt I distributed to my students was inspired and crafted around Wardle and Downs' original assignment in *WAW*, it was modified slightly to reflect the on-going theme of my course. That is, rather than having students locate and analyze three sources about a public issue of their choice, I asked them to select two sources that represented differing positions on a topic currently being debated in U.S. K-12 or higher educational spheres. The assignment prompt is reproduced below:

#### Navigating Sources that Disagree

For this assignment, you will explore an issue pertaining to US education that is currently being debated publicly either in a local or in a larger state or national context. The more nuanced or more difficult the debate is, the more useful and interesting your analysis will be – to you as well as others.

**Research and Analysis:** After you've selected a debate:

- Carefully choose two different sources within your debate that represent differing viewpoints. These sources need not be especially long or scholarly – they might be opinion pieces or articles taken from newspapers, blogs, or magazines. Look for texts that demonstrate nuanced kinds of disagreement, rather than just settling for obvious “pro” and “con” sources.
- Once you have chosen your sources, begin to analyze them. You should consider who the authors are and what their values, motivations, and constraints might be. Also consider any elements that indicate the broader social/political context of each text, including the genre, the publication venue, and the imagined audience for each piece.

- Next, you should analyze the arguments that the authors are making. What are their points? Do they disagree on everything? What kinds of evidence do they use? Do they seem to believe that the same things even count as evidence? What strategies do they use in order to make their claims?
- Take notes as you analyze your text and find ways to organize your notes. You might consider making a chart of questions with space for answers about each text.

**Draft:** After you have conducted the research and analyzed the texts, take a step back and ask yourself what you found. Write an essay in which you provide an answer to the question: Why and how do authors of texts in the debate on X disagree? Be sure to do the following in your essay:

- Provide background information on the debate and the three texts you chose to analyze.
- Make your claim(s) in answer to the question.
- Provide textual evidence (in the form of both direct quotation and paraphrase) from your sources to support your claims.

**What Makes It Good?** Your essay will be evaluated in terms of how well it accomplishes the goals set out. Remember that your essay should answer the following question: Why and how do authors of texts in the debate on X disagree? A strong essay will do the following:

- Orient the reader by initially providing enough background information on the debate and the three texts you chose to analyze;
- Make clear claim(s) in answer to the question;

- Provide textual evidence that is convincing and clear to the reader;
- Be organized in such a way that the reader can follow along without having to work to figure out where you are going.

I draw on this example to illustrate further what a translingual orientation might have to offer writing pedagogies with an explicit goal of teaching for transfer, specifically in terms of the ways instructors read and respond to student texts. This essay offers an especially relevant example, as it, I argue, demonstrates one student’s ambiguous and negotiated reading of and response to the assignment.

Leading up to this assignment, my students and I spent several weeks practicing the kind of analytical work that the assignment asked them to perform. We practiced a “mock” analysis as a class of two opinion essays that raised different arguments pertaining to the value of mathematics requirements in general education. The first essay, “Is Algebra Necessary?” by Andrew Hacker, was published in the *New York Times* in July 2013. Hacker argues that there is no evidence to suggest that the skills learned in introductory college algebra courses are useful for the kinds of mathematical reasoning graduates will be asked to perform outside of schooled settings. The second essay, “Yes, Algebra is Necessary,” by Daniel Willingham, was published in the *Washington Post* as a direct response to Hacker’s essay. Willingham critiques Hacker’s assertion that algebra is not directly relevant to general mathematical reasoning, arguing that “the mathematics learned in school, even if seldom applied directly, makes students better able to learn new quantitative skills” (Willingham, 2013, n.p.). I selected these essays purposefully because I knew my students held strong opinions about the value and necessity of general education courses – a topic that had come up frequently in class discussions earlier in the

semester. During one class period, we composed summaries of both pieces as a way to articulate the arguments of each author. During the subsequent class period, we analyzed the rhetorical situation of each source as a way to gain a sense of the authors' active roles in constructing meaning and advancing claims. Students identified and described moments in each text where the author made use of rhetorical appeals in order to persuade their immediate audiences, and discussed how and why those moves were (or in some cases were not) effective.

The week following this, my students read a blog published by Clay Shirky, a professor of journalism and new media at NYU, which advances an argument against student use of laptops in classrooms. My students completed a two-part informal homework assignment in which they summarized Shirky's argument in one paragraph, and then articulated specific moments in the blog where Shirky employed rhetorical technique, discussing how and why those techniques allowed Shirky to construct his position. I read and commented on each student's write-up. Although the analysis paragraphs often struck me as somewhat surface-level (describing the author's general attitude or ethos throughout the piece with only minimal textual support), many of them appeared to evidence a clear understanding of the difference between summary and analysis we had been working to articulate as a class. I made suggestions to each student on the kinds of textual support they might have drawn upon in their analyses.

The context I provide above is included to show the scaffolding techniques I employed in order to prepare students to compose the "Navigating Sources" assignment. My goal was to encourage students to read sources not only to locate information, but to recognize the rhetorical moves writers make in efforts to construct persuasive arguments.

Teaching students the difference between summary and analysis has been described frequently as a difficult but important component of college writing instruction. I was aware of these challenges when I began this unit, and the classroom activities leading up to the assignment, I felt, allowed students ample opportunities to practice and develop their understanding of the differences between summary and analysis.

I was surprised, then, that the vast majority of the essays I received in response to the “Navigating Sources” prompt did not engage in the kind of critical rhetorical analysis I had hoped the scaffolding and the assignment itself would promote. While many did draw on textual evidence from the sources they selected, this evidence was used toward demonstrating the content of each author’s argument, rather than to illuminate and analyze the rhetorical dimensions of each source. My initial reaction, after skimming several of the essays, was one of confusion and frustration, and I struggled with determining how best to respond to what I was predisposed to view as my students’ failed attempts to engage with their chosen sources in the ways I had imagined. Three potential responses came to mind immediately. First, I thought I might ask students to rewrite the essays entirely; this option, however, made me feel uneasy, as I recognized the labor that many of them had put into locating and reading their sources and composing the essays. Second, I thought I might write up general end comments that pushed each writer to return to their sources with the analytical orientation we had practiced repeatedly in class, and encourage them to compose and submit revisions. But I felt that sending generic feedback to the majority of my students would not actually accomplish much of anything – that is, I felt an obligation to personalize each response, which I knew would take as

much time (if not more) than option number three, which was to read and comment on the essays as I normally would.

I decided to proceed with option number three, and, with the first several essays, I found myself commenting on the essays in uncharacteristic ways. I skimmed over many paragraphs that appeared to do little more than summarize content. Many of the essays included a statement of which source the student found to be more persuasive, and I responded repeatedly with a vague “why?” in the margins. I tried to give examples in my comments of the kinds of details and elements each writer might have considered in determining the rhetorical situation of each source, but found it nearly impossible to provide this tangible feedback as I had not read the sources they selected to work with.

This approach was challenged when I read the following essay, composed by Claudia, an L2 student writer who had met with me several times to solicit feedback on previous written work for the course.

Is Parental Involvement in Motivating their Children a Help or Not?

Throughout this essay I would like to show two points of view on parents’ involvement in motivating their children. Parents almost all the time think that being close to their children and motivating in their studies should be beneficial to them. This perspective is discussed in “What Roles Do Parent Involvement, Family Background, and Culture Play in Student Motivation?”, an article published on the “Center of Education Policy” website.

In this first article research has shown a clear link between parent involvement and children’s success in school. Further, this article have also

demonstrated a correlation between parent involvement and children's educational development.

*“Even if parents are unable to assist their children with a specific subject area or skill, they can still play a vital role by encouraging students' feelings of competence and control and positive attitudes toward academics. When parents believe in children's competence and have high expectations for them, provide the resources the children need to feel connected to others, and facilitate a sense of autonomy by supporting children's initiations and problem-solving, children's motivation is most likely to thrive” (p. 295).*

In other words parents who are actively involved in their children's education and provide a stimulating learning environment at home can help their children development. This article not just tries to persuade us, also it confirms that parents who are actively involved in their children's education and provide a stimulating learning environment at home can help their children development. Also the article confirms that economics does not matter at all, how much poor or rich could be the family, the most important is how much parents believe in their children, how much they push forward and encourage their children to reach goals. For example parents who have high expectations for their children's learning, believe in their children's competence, expose them to new experiences, and encourage curiosity, persistence, and problem-solving can help their children develop an intrinsic motivation to learn. But it is not only push forward and encourage, the article shows that to make those positive changes in our children, we have to set up some rules at home such as control time of watching TV,

playing video games, chatting or internet, and many more distractions to our children. Another way to improve children grades is adopting at home some good habits like reading, debate society problems that involve family and safety for our family.

The first article goes directly to family (parents and children) because it comes from a social and educational resource that is “The Center of Education” who is always making articles to improve children education.

By contrast, parents who are controlling, use rewards and punishments for academic performance, like observing a child’s class, contacting a school about a child’s behavior, helping to decide a child’s high school courses, or helping a child with homework, do not improve student achievement. In some cases, they actually hinder it. I’m going to show you this perspective in one article from “New York Times” called “Parents’ Involvement is Overrated.”

*“When involvement did benefit kids academically, it depended on which behavior parents were engaging in. For example, regularly discussing school experiences with your child seems to positively affect the reading and math test scores of Hispanic children, to negatively affect test scores in reading for black children, and to negatively affect test scores in both reading and math for white children (but only during elementary school). Regularly reading to elementary school children appears to benefit reading achievement for black children. What about when parents work directly with their children on learning activities at home? When we examined whether regular help with homework had a positive impact on children’s academic performance, we were quite startled by what we*

*found. Regardless of a family's social class, racial, or ethnic background, or a child's grade level, consistent homework help almost never improved test scores or grades. Most parents appear to be ineffective at helping their children with homework. Even more surprising to us was that when parents regularly helped with homework, kids usually performed worse."*

So this article suggest that the idea that parental involvement, one of the most important issues in education in this country, it is not always of benefit to their children's academic performance. Because is more likely that parents over involved in their children's academic studies, they get lower academic performance than when they are studying by themselves. Sometimes parents are too much critical for how well children perform in school, just not in the conventional ways. This criticism could be harmful for their children, taking this criticism as a judgment of their ability. At the same time, this article shows that depending on the racial, ethnic, and economic background of the students' family could influence the student. For example, Hispanics may feel more comfortable when parents are less involved in their studies, because they know their parents are busy, working for giving them a better quality of life. And that one is a big issue for those students.

I could relate to different points of view about this topic, but what I would say about them or how I could learn from them is to help my daughter as a mother that I am.

I made my own conclusion about these articles. The first one show me that it is important to be close to our children because I could help them with whatever

they need, encourage them when I see something difficult for them, show them how to do it, or try to put me in their shoes for feeling their view. Another help could be making my home one of the best places to study for my children, where they feel comfortable, and make good habits about reading, conversation between families, and help each other as they need. For example I think helping children with the homework is good when they really need to understand something that is tough for them. But the other article says that sometimes when parents were over involved would become harmful to their children. Because students expect their parents to have some control on their education, such as how their grades and classes are going. But they are not expecting to have their parents above them making their homework all the time. Even if they made their homework one time, how could parents expect that their children would understand how to resolve the homework for themselves if they do not have the opportunity to resolve it? Or talking with their teachers, asking many questions, and sometimes shaming their children.

I am completely clear that one thing is to keep children and their educational achievements close to parents, as their encouragement is important. **But do not confuse the roles of students and parents.** Remember, the children are the students and have to learn a lot of things by themselves, sometimes making mistakes, and learning from those. And we are the parents, who are trying to direct our children for the best way.

There are several ways in which I had been conditioned to view this essay as a failed attempt to meet both the goals of this assignment and my expectations for sophisticated

or polished academic writing more broadly. The essay does not appear to situate either article within a specific rhetorical situation, and, perhaps as a result, it does not provide adequate analysis of the rhetorical functions or dimensions utilized by the authors. Further, it appears to treat the articles as autonomous and self-contained texts. This is exacerbated by the Claudia's use of textual evidence: she decided to reproduce large, italicized passages of text residing in stand-alone paragraphs, instead of synthesizing evidence from the two sources in relation to each other. Further, the writer's argument does not immediately appear to address the question "why and how do authors of texts in the debate on X disagree?", but instead appears to offer a statement of how the writer understands her own position in relation to the articles. Finally, the prose is far from polished and edited, to the point where a reader is likely to be distracted from her claims.

Because the essay was composed by an L2 writer who had met with me several times throughout the course to solicit feedback on her writing, I read it more attentively than I had the prior essays. As I did so, I struggled with providing the same kinds of feedback that I had on other essays that appeared similarly to disregard or misunderstand the expectations of the assignment. It seemed to me that, while this essay did deviate from the assignment in notable ways, it would not have been fair or accurate to dismiss the writer's work as entirely misguided. That is, I sensed that something "happened" for this writer during her process of locating sources, reading, thinking, and composing. I returned to the assignment prompt again, and examined the criteria that I borrowed from the original assignment in *WAW*.

***What Makes It Good?*** Your essay will be evaluated of how well it accomplishes the goals set out. Remember that your essay should answer the following question: Why do authors of texts in the debate on X disagree? And how?

A strong essay will do the following:

- (1) Orient the reader by initially providing enough background information on the debate and the two texts you chose to analyze;
- (2) Make clear claim(s) in answer to the question;
- (3) Provide textual evidence that is convincing and clear to the reader;
- (4) Be organized in such a way that the reader can follow along without having to work to figure out where you are going.

(1) *Background Information.* The assignment prompt first states that writers should provide background information about the debate they've chosen to analyze, as well as about the rhetorical situation of each source. The background information provided in Claudia's essay is minimal – far from what I had expected to see – but I could not say that it was non-existent. The second sentence in paragraph one seems to represent the writer's attempt to situate her analysis in the larger context of the debate on parental involvement in their children's schoolwork. She writes, "Parents almost all the time think that being close to their children and motivating in their studies should be beneficial to them." This sentence might be read as Claudia's attempt to question or complicate a conventionally accepted practice. Promoting an ability to question constructs or commonsense understandings is, in fact, a stated goal of the chapter in *WAW* from which this assignment was adapted. As Wardle and Downs (2011) note in the introduction to the chapter, "*Constructs* are mental frameworks that people build in order

to make sense of the world around them. One of the key features of an effective construct is that it quickly begins to seem ‘natural’ or inevitable, rather than made-up” (p. 35).

There is a way, I argue, to read this sentence not as a throw-away introductory statement, but as an indication that she wishes to question assumptions about parenting that have become commonplace or widely accepted as natural. The writer begins by stating a commonly held value, and then uses the rest of her essay to explore details that might shift or complicate that sentiment.

After the introduction, the essay does situate each article within a specific publication, although very little detail is provided to sketch out the rhetorical situation of each. One interesting exception comes in the fifth paragraph:

The first article goes directly to family (parents and children) because it comes from a social and educational resource that is “The Center of Education” who is always making articles to improve children education.

I am not able to determine if Claudia is aware of the multiple ways this sentence might be read. It does identify an audience that might be concerned with the issues raised in the article, and, further, it articulates an understanding of the purpose of the publication for which it was written, a website that publishes studies and perspectives on current educational issues and practices. The sentence also might be read satirically, in a sense, poking fun at the authoritative title of the website. Claudia seems to envision that there is an individual who is, in fact, the actual center of education. If read in this way, it is possible to see how Claudia had a very clear sense of how this source functioned persuasively – as it would be difficult to argue with *the* center of education, personified. For the second article, the writer names the publication and gives the title of the article.

By contrast, parents who are controlling, use rewards and punishments for academic performance, [...] do not improve student achievement. In some cases, they actually hinder it. I'm going to show you this perspective in one article from "New York Times" called "Parents' Involvement is Overrated."

Although no substantial analysis of the article's rhetorical situation is provided, one might read this omission as intentional. For instance, there is a way that invoking the *NYT* might already communicate a certain ethos to readers, or a discursive context or set of values that does not require explicit detailing. Additionally, the declarative statement at the beginning of the third sentence, "I'm going to show you this perspective," might be read as the writer assuming a position of authority or expertise in her analysis of the article. While the essay does not produce the contextual details I had expected to find, I argue that it certainly demonstrates a mindfulness of the situation of each source. As a result, it worked to challenge the stability of the first assessment criterion. I found I had no way to argue that Claudia had failed to meet this requirement. In effect, reading Claudia's essay with a "responsibility logic" in mind transformed my understanding of that particular task. Her writing articulated a different standard for providing contextual information, one that I had not considered previously.

(2) *Makes a clear claim in answer to the question "Why do authors of texts in the debate on X disagree? And how?"* In regards to the second evaluative component, I again struggled to come to a clear determination of whether the writer had addressed the question. I saw a "clear claim" advanced at the start of the concluding paragraph:

I am completely clear that one think is to keep children and their educational achievements close to parents, as their encouragement is important. **But do not confuse the roles of students and parents.**

It is announced by a strong metadiscursive marker (“I am completely clear”), and is additionally emphasized by the writer’s use of bolding. However, it does not appear to come in answer to the question “Why do authors of texts in the debate on X disagree?”

When I read through the assignment prompt again, it occurred to me that, ironically, what the question is asking is not entirely clear – it is ambiguous and open to interpretation. While in my first reading of the essay I was tempted to write off her “analyses” of each article as flat summary, a second reading has complicated this perspective by bringing to light a few small, seemingly insignificant details. In the fourth paragraph, for example, the writer acknowledges that the author was attempting to “persuade” an audience:

This article not just tries to persuade us, also it confirms that parents who are actively involved in their children’s education and provide a stimulating learning environment at home can help their children development. Also the article confirms that economics does not matter at all, how much poor or rich could be the family, the most important is how much parents believe in their children, how much they push forward and encourage their children to reach goals.

The above passage might be read as a simple overview or restating of the writer’s argument. Yet Claudia’s decision to use the words “persuade” and “confirm” seem to indicate a deeper understanding of how writers construct arguments rhetorically. It is unclear whether the student’s use of “confirms” is intended to indicate a passive

acceptance of the author's argument, or if perhaps she is alluding to the kinds of evidence upon which the author relied in order to establish a certain *logos* in the article. I imagine that the "Center of Education Policy" article may have included studies, numerical data, charts, or graphs to "confirm" that socioeconomic status does not influence the role of parental motivation.

The concluding sentences of paragraph eight offer an analysis of the *NYT* author's remarks about race, class, and ethnicity, perhaps in terms of her own experience. This indicates to me that Claudia may have come to her own sense of why the authors disagree:

...this article shows that depending on the racial, ethnic, and economic background of the students' family could influence the student. For example, Hispanics may feel more comfortable when parents are less involved in their studies, because they know their parents are busy, working for giving them a better quality of life. And that one is a big issue for those students.

Reading this statement from within a "responsibility logic" allowed me to consider the "historically situated discourses" that may have been "(un)consciously swirling around and through" Claudia as she read and responded to the source, and it helped me make a more informed decision as to how I might interpret and act upon her remarks (Ratcliffe, 1999, p. 208). When I approached my own assignment prompt as a negotiated text in and of itself, I recognized the possibility that Claudia had actually worked to answer the question in a way that resonated with her own cultural values and experiences.

(3) *Provide textual evidence that is convincing and clear to the reader.* Claudia's use of direct quotation and textual evidence does not demonstrate an ability to synthesize

sources or embed citations within sentences, or even paragraphs. In fact, her decision to italicize two large blocks of text from each source and to include them as stand-alone paragraphs represents a practice that I actively discourage in students' academic writing. On one hand, then, I might say that she failed to provide "clear" and "convincing" textual evidence, as the citations she provides are included in a way that suggests they should speak for themselves, without any clear analysis of the author's rhetorical strategies. In another sense, though, the block quotations might be seen as selected strategically when read in the context of the rest of the essay. They do seem to articulate what she understood to be the core argument of each article, which says to me that she read each source carefully and paid careful attention to the moments when the authors made moves to advance a complex position on the topic. The first quotation, taken from the CEP article, begins with a qualifying statement:

*"Even if parents are unable to assist their children with a specific subject area or skill, they can still play a vital role by encouraging students' feelings of competence and control and positive attitudes toward academics."*

Claudia's decision to begin the quotation with the qualifier might suggest her awareness that the author was directly addressing and responding to the feeling of helplessness that parents often feel when they try to help their children with homework or other school activities. Although she never addresses this move explicitly in her essay, I argue that it is possible that she sensed its rhetorical function within the article more broadly. While it would be erroneous to suggest that Claudia evidenced a sophisticated use of textual evidence in her essay, it is clear to me that she made selections from each source that

allowed her to advance a complicated understanding of the various factors influencing parental involvement in their children's schoolwork.

*(4) Be organized in such a way that the reader can follow along without having to work to figure out where you are going.* If nothing else, this essay follows a coherent and logical structure. The organizational pattern she chose indicates to me her awareness of a particular set of academic writing conventions. She sets up her intentions in the introductory paragraph and begins with a statement of relevance. Following this she introduces each source, includes a summative quotation from each, and expands on the ideas raised in that quote. Toward the end of the essay, she makes a move to identify her rhetorical position in relation to both arguments. And, in the concluding paragraph, she ends with a “so what” – a solid sense of what she learned from the process of completing this assignment.

The final three paragraphs offer some insight into why Claudia may have selected this topic and what was at stake for her as a mother of a school-aged child. While reading these concluding passages, the possibility occurred to me that what my student had gained from composing this essay was significant, even if it was not explicitly what I had hoped to see in her writing. Paragraph nine, for example, is a one-sentence statement that seems to suggest that my student read and made sense of her sources in terms of her own experience:

I could relate to different points of view about this topic, but what I would say about them or how I could learn from them is to help my daughter as a mother that I am.

Here, I see her demonstrating a very sophisticated technique of identifying her own position and identity, and recognizing that it shaped the way she read and responded to each source. This is a move that I encourage my students to make in their writing, and I've noticed that it is difficult for many of them to grasp the importance of one's own position when working with and analyzing sources. The above passage captures this move clearly and insightfully. The opening sentence in paragraph ten, "I made my own conclusion about these articles," extends this move even further. My student articulates a sense of her own agency in relating to, drawing from, and creating meaning from the sources in tandem with her own experiences as a mother. This move seems especially significant to me, as it indicates her awareness of the value of the assignment – to read carefully two sources that spoke to an issue in which she was personally invested, and then to create her own meaning and conclusion in a way that made sense with her identity and experiences.

The purpose of this analytical work is not to suggest that Claudia fulfilled the objectives of the assignment completely or successfully. Instead, I wish to describe how my second reading of the essay, when I adopted the negotiated reading practices described above, brought to light elements and idiosyncrasies that I did not pick up on in my initial reading. I couldn't help but notice how my readings of her essay changed. During the first reading, I looked for what I thought I should ideally see happening in the paper; during the second, I attended to what was actually happening in the paper. This allowed me to see the ways that Claudia may have been addressing many of the expectations of the assignment, albeit in unconventional or ambiguous ways. It gave me the opportunity to ask questions about what she was trying to accomplish in her analysis

that might ultimately strengthen her revision. Perhaps more importantly, I came to see that her essay in many ways represented the kinds of work I imagine explicit, intentional practice in rhetorical analysis will engender. The overarching goal of the assignment, of course, is not for students to be able to spell out each step of an argument analysis – even though that’s what I had asked them to do. The goal is to show students a method for making sense of texts in relation to a particular set of values, goals, and motivations. I would argue that Claudia’s essay puts such a method to work. She may not have shown all of the steps of her work to reach an answer (as is often required of displays of knowledge on assignments, tests, and exams), but the answer she arrived at was hers, and the process she followed shows her ability to question and explore an issue that affected her on a personal level.

This kind of reading, then, shows to me the value of bringing a translingual orientation to the idea of transfer in writing studies. While decades of studies on writing development have been concerned foremost with what ideally *should* happen in student writing, the translingual perspective brings a more complex reading of texts that focuses on what is actually happening, what is being reworked and created in and through the practices of both readers and writers. The questions about what ideally should happen are still there – but a simultaneous focus on what is happening in the present allows for more dynamic and complex readings of student writing – and it allows us to locate instances of potential transfer in more nuanced and exciting ways.

### **Practice vs. Product-Centered Reading**

The above analysis, by focusing on a method for reading student texts, is somewhat incomplete, as it does not provide explicit recommendations for commenting on and responding to student writing. Response is, of course, a critical part of engaging writers in dialogic interaction, and I do not want to dismiss its importance. The next step for my research is to develop a way of commenting that would help student become more critically aware of how the choices they make might be read or interpreted by different audiences. But my immediate project in this chapter is to illustrate how the practice of negotiated reading strategies advocated by translingual scholars would bring to light the complex and sophisticated ways writers practice rhetorical awareness and how these practices can work to transform our expectations, inviting us to question the stability and uniformity of the “thing” that would indicate positive transfer of learning.

I originally planned to produce and theorize a set of comments that I might have offered Claudia after my second reading of her essay. But I was uneasy with many of the reactions I received from colleagues in my discussions of this chapter and of Claudia’s essay. Many appreciated the reading approach I describe; they agreed with and were excited by the multiple conclusions I reached. But these points of agreement were quickly pushed aside in their requests for a method of providing response that would ensure that Claudia’s revision and writing would improve. Toward that concern, I would respond that commenting on Claudia’s essay would involve asking questions about the practices that deviated from my expectations in order to prompt her to continue to work to persuade readers to accept the rhetorical and discursive choices she makes. Canagarajah (2013) provides a model of instructor feedback that requires teachers to assume the stance of “a sympathetic but curious listener or respondent” who asks questions “to clarify meaning

and to understand the intentions and goals of the writer” before having to evaluate their writing (p. 185). I want to be careful not to disparage reciprocal, dialogic interaction between writers and readers. This might be accomplished through multiple drafts, conferences, and peer workshops. From here, then, I recognize the need to figure out how, and at what point in the texts, instructors can effectively insert comments, what the nature of those comments should be.

While developing an effective and informed approach to providing feedback is crucial, I argue that undertaking that work here would detract significantly from my focus on reading. In some ways, I worry that it might contribute to a project that is more “product-centered” than I am comfortable with in this chapter. To focus attention on finished products or end points, as I have argued, is at odds with the translingual emphasis on locating acts of meaning in both space and time. As Canagarajah (2013) notes, “it is not uniformity of meaning, but the capacity and willingness to keep negotiating for meanings that interlocutors strive for in negotiated literacy” (p. 155). My concern with including a detailed method of providing feedback is that this work might be misread in the context of my interest in writing-related transfer. The follow-up questions I have been asked invariably include: What changes did Claudia make to her essay to address your questions? Did you find those revisions satisfactory in light of the outcomes on the assignment prompt? To these questions, I want to answer that even if Claudia appeared to address all of the questions I posed in ways that were satisfactory to me, adopting a translingual emphasis would require me to reject the easy assumption that uniform meaning had been achieved and that my outcomes had been met.

My work here seeks to raise new questions about how composition scholars might look for and recognize the transfer of rhetorical knowledge. I have argued that identifying instances of transfer can be understood as a joint accomplishment between readers and writers, and that moments of mismatch between practice and expectation should not automatically indicate a lack of transfer, or negative transfer. My analysis of Tim's essay reveals, most significantly, that the ways we frame our reading of student essays shape what we notice about them. Beaufort shares a confident interpretation about Tim's essay. Her analysis suggests that Tim passively restated Dr. Bird's argument; as a result, his essay represents a failed attempt to demonstrate rhetorical expertise. Reading the essay with a translingual emphasis in mind, it is difficult to understand how and why she came to the conclusions she did. With a translingual emphasis, different details come to light that would have us question the extent to which passivity in writing is even possible. My analysis of Tim's essay complicates the "expert/novice" dichotomy that Beaufort brought to her reading of the same essay. It highlighted a way of reading the essay that showed how Tim performed the role of both novice and expert. As my work with Claudia's essay demonstrates, viewing students as always engaged in the production and transformation of rhetorical knowledge invites us to try out different understandings of what counts as an acceptable display of that knowledge. I can say with confidence that the work she performed in her essay transformed my immediate sense of the assignment itself. Consequently, I had an opportunity to read Claudia's essay as evidence of rhetorical expertise.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Composition scholars are not alone in their concerns about the transferability of writing-related knowledge and skills. Colleges and universities across the U.S. continue to develop programs and initiatives to support sustained and expansive writing instruction, perhaps in response to the circulation of narratives reporting the decline of “basic literacy skills” among college graduates (for example, see Holland, 2013). One example of such efforts is the GROW initiative implemented in the 2014/2015 academic year at California State University Stanislaus. The GROW project – an acronym standing for “Greatness Relies on Writing” – promotes a vertical curriculum of writing instruction across the disciplines, under the conviction that “students who develop their writing skills also gain strength in their ability to express ideas, think critically, conduct research, and carry out projects” (“The GROW Project,” 2015).

While it is encouraging, in some respect, to see this kind of attention paid to writing instruction, it is clear that compositionists have had little say in the crafting of initiatives such as the GROW project. Institutions of higher education in the U.S. still cling to the promise of general writing skills instruction, typically under the assumption that graduates equipped with what are thought to be a single set of skills at producing clear, effective written communication will acquire a better foothold in the job market.

The GROW initiative, for example, sets its sights on “good grammar” as a “foundation for excellent writing” and a skill that “effectively sets a graduate on the path to excel in a career” (ibid). To illustrate what “excellent writing” looks like, the GROW initiative website includes a database of writing assignments from across the disciplines, and includes examples of student essays categorized according to their perceived success, ranging from “developing” to “excellent.” This database is linked to on the university’s homepage as a resource for both instructors and students. Literally no attention is paid to the assignment prompts themselves, nor to the norming process used to determine the categories of each student essay example. The essay examples from first-year composition were written in response to a prompt that asked students to research a specific genre of music and to compose an essay comprised of “three distinct 2-3 page parts”: an informative section that “traces the roots” of the genre, a narrative section that depicts the “current forms and sounds” of the genre, and a persuasive section that “persuades audiences of both the importance and staying power” of the chosen genre (“Music,” 2015).

The prompt itself is problematic. It is reminiscent of a theme essay assignment, aimed at having students write about a given topic in three distinct rhetorical modes – informative, narrative, and persuasive. As it appears here, it is a perfect example of what Wardle (2009) describes as a “mutt genre” assignment: there is no authentic context to which this prompt could possibly respond, and it does not even try to approximate an “authentic” rhetorical situation. We might also note that there is no sense provided in the database about the kind of instruction needed to make this assignment work. We are given no information about the classroom from which the prompt and the sample student

essays were taken. No details are provided about the institutional position of the instructor. The prompt is so decontextualized that, from a compositionist's perspective, it is difficult to understand how and why it is being used as an example to demonstrate anything about writing at all.

The sample essays written in response to this particular prompt are not assessed based on the ideas they introduce or the content they cover, but based on the degree to which they fulfill the logistical guidelines and parameters. The essay ranked as “developing” is critiqued because it failed to meet the page requirements of each individual section and also failed to adhere to the conventions of standard English. The essay ranked as “excellent” is praised because it meets all of the assignment parameters: “six pages, MLA format, three distinct parts, and includes five sources, two of which are reference materials...the language is sophisticated, the prose is tight, and the essay is clearly polished. Overall, this essay showcases a writer who is clearly in control and comfortable with writing” (“Music,” 2015).

Initiatives such as the GROW project are troubling for compositionists on at least two accounts: first, we might note that the GROW initiative is situated firmly within a monolingual paradigm that treats error-free, standardized English as an attainable commodity, one deemed necessary in order for students to be competitive and desirable job candidates. In the case of Cal State Stanislaus in particular, a Hispanic-serving institution whose mission is founded on principles of inclusion and the embracing of cultural and linguistic diversity, it is interesting to note how initiatives such as the GROW project may not be fully attuned to, nor aligned with the interests of, the populations they are serving. The second problem with initiatives such as the GROW

project is that they seem to promote what compositionists might view as ineffective writing instruction, as well as an inaccurate representation of what writing is. The emphasis on “good grammar” perpetuates the popular misconception that writing consists primarily of syntactic and mechanical concerns, and that these issues can be taught independent of content and context. The present research on transfer and writing has demonstrated, time and time again, that this is not how writing instruction works.

It is promising, then, to see the concerted efforts of those involved in writing-about-writing pedagogies and the related threshold concept approach to redraw public and institutional perceptions of writing and writing instruction. The writing-about-writing approach itself, first described by Downs and Wardle in 2007, was devised as a way to reimagine FYC as “Introduction to Writing Studies,” and to distance the course from these kinds of “systemic misconceptions” about writing (p. 554). Adler-Kassner and Wardle’s (in press) book, *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, can be viewed not only as an effort to stake out the disciplinary territory of rhetoric and composition but as a significant effort to amend misconceptions about writing as a universal skill, and to challenge existing assumptions about FYC as a strictly preparatory course for writing across academic, professional, and civic spheres. Such work resists top-down efforts to control the dialogue around what writing instruction is or should be. As Downs and Wardle (2007) describe, introducing students to disciplinary knowledge about writing has the potential benefit of

educating first-year students, adjuncts, and graduate students about the existence and content of the writing studies field. Over time, as these groups move on to other disciplines, professions, and administrative positions, their knowledge about

our field may be of assistance in creating more writing studies majors. At the very least, educating the public about our discipline in this way should result in a more wide-spread understanding and awareness of its existence, focus, and research findings. (p. 578)

The WAW/TC approach combats initiatives such as the GROW project in at least two ways. First, by promoting a strong disciplinary locus, and by treating writing as subject worthy of research and study, it seeks to change public discourse about writing in ways that are more aligned with what we know about writing as a social and contextual practice. Second, it promotes a distinct pedagogical aim that rejects the teaching of general writing skills, under the recognition that teaching mechanical and grammatical “correctness” does not improve student writing.

As enthusiastic as I am about the growing efforts among writing studies scholars to resist inaccurate characterizations of writing championed in current educational discourse and policies, I also recognize that there are several issues that will need to be taken into consideration as the project moves forward (see Chapter 2). Above all, while I do see a need for collectively establishing and mobilizing shared aims and goals, it is equally important to maintain some apprehension toward broad assertions about what we know and do – especially when these assertions are framed as solutions to or as avenues for “getting around” the language of institutional discourse and policy. We should be attentive to the risk of presenting our disciplinary knowledge as an object to be advertised and consumed, and we should strive actively to make space for increased dialogue about how “what we know” as a field reflects, responds to, and engages what we practice in our research, in our scholarship, and in the classroom. We should, as Scott and Brannon

(2013) remind us, maintain a certain suspicion toward consensus-seeking frameworks, which all-too-often depict an illusory stability that does not mirror the realities we face. Without making space for difference, we risk reinforcing existing perceptions of writing in terms of “core knowledge” without which individuals are unable to progress. The WAW/TC projects underway in writing studies have, if nothing else, made this tension visible, and it is important to see the projects not as solutions to age-old problems, but as underscoring the need for increased dialogue about how we represent the work we do as literacy educators.

One avenue for increasing this dialogue, I have argued, is to develop a more integrated and robust relationship between conversations about writing-related transfer of learning and translingual writing instruction. While these conversations may not seem immediately related, perhaps due to their emergence out of two different pedagogical traditions in the field, I have found that they share some important links that are worthy of further exploration and development. These are summarized below:

First, it is important to note that while the notion of ‘transferability’ has been critiqued both within and outside of composition for its apparent compliance with fast capitalist aims and discourses of efficiency, I have found that writing-related transfer scholars are very vocal and persuasive in their rejection of the writing-as-commodity models represented in current educational policies and initiatives. As I described in Chapters 2 and 3, transfer scholars are continually seeking new frameworks and new terminologies for understanding how knowledge about and attitudes toward writing are developed, practiced, and repurposed. The problem, as I have argued, is that the available models we have for understanding transfer are not yet fully attuned to the difference and

variation that are always occurring in and through writing practice. Transfer scholars, as I described in Chapter 3, are acutely aware that the lack of attention to issues of cultural and linguistic diversity is a significant gap in current research. But the solution to this problem is not to expand current studies to observe the writing and learning practices of traditionally marginalized cultural and linguistic groups. Rather, scholars might turn their attention to the monolingualist paradigm under which current studies are situated, a paradigm that is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain.

The translingual emphasis I introduce in this project represents one potential way to address this gap in order to give voice to difference as an inevitable feature of writing-related transfer activity. In Chapter 3, I demonstrated how the temporal-spatial framework adopted by translingual scholars attends to practices located in both time and space. This framework has significant implications for the notion of “context” as it is currently depicted in writing-related transfer studies. Theories of transfer as a whole have relied on notions of context that presume their stability and discreteness, as evidenced by Perkins and Salomon’s assertion that transfer occurs when learning in context A is useful or helpful for tasks in context B. Based on this formulation, contexts are predetermined and pre-given, and practices either work within or deviate from the expectations mandated by a particular context. The rigidity of contextual structures is called into question with a temporal-spatial framework. Contexts are transformed – they are shaped by and emerge continuously – through local practice. For, as Pennycook (2010) asserts, “as we do language, we remake it and the space in which it occurs” (p. 7). This attention to practices located in time and space would invite transfer scholars to consider not only

the degree to which writing adheres to the discursive norms of a given rhetorical context, but also the ways in which practices shape and transform the norms themselves.

Bringing these perspectives together is especially possible at this moment because of the shared focus on developing attitudes of flexibility and openness to the ways language is practiced. Wardle's (2012) notion of problem-exploring dispositions, or attitudes which "incline a person toward curiosity, reflection, consideration of multiple possibilities, a willingness to engage in a recursive process of trial and error, and toward a recognition that more than one solution can 'work,'" is not dissimilar from the notion of *cooperative dispositions* adopted in translingual interactions, as articulated by Canagarajah (2013). Canagarajah describes how translingual writers "don't come with rigid and predefined norms for their own languages or for those of others," but instead are "open to reconstructing meanings and values in context, in collaboration with their interlocutors" (p. 181). Additionally, they "bring the humility to make mistakes, acknowledge their failures or limitations, and engage in self-correction. They can apply lessons learnt in one context to a new context. They can infer lessons from past mistakes for improved performance in the next context" (p. 183). When examined side-by-side, the attitudes toward writing that Wardle and Canagarajah describe are not all that different from each other. There is untapped opportunity for collaboration between these two perspectives.

Finally, while the focus on translingual practice in composition studies has gained significant momentum over the past several years, scholars advocating this approach have recognized a need to attend more closely to what such instruction actually looks like in classroom practice. Canagarajah (2013), for example, cites the need to determine the

“practicality and usefulness” of translingual writing in educational contexts where students face pressures to conform to certain conventions of academic writing (p. 12). That is, translingual scholars continue to look for new ways to communicate how students can develop critical attitudes toward existing language norms, while also developing writing strategies that will be recognized as effective and successful by future instructors, employers, and other audiences. The attention to ‘expansive learning’ in current studies on writing and transfer provides a vocabulary and a set of questions that may assist translingual scholars with these aims, and with communicating to administrators, educators across the disciplines, and employers, that “what is needed, and even demanded, is the ability to work across differences, not just of language but of disciplines and cultures” (Horner et al., 2011, p. 312).

I have argued for the need to reevaluate conversations about transfer and writing with a translingual emphasis in mind. I use Chapter 4 to begin thinking about what the interactions between these two perspectives might look like in practice, starting with instructor reading practices. When we read student writing, we have an opportunity to be more critically aware about what it is we notice (and what we might easily overlook) when we look for instances of transfer. My work with Claudia’s essay reveals how expectations shape what we find. It also demonstrates the trickiness of identifying successful displays of writing-related knowledge, and it points to the responsibility of both readers and writers to negotiate meaning in essays and assignment prompts. When I read the essay with this sense of responsibility, I saw Claudia, in her work to meet the outcomes of the assignment, actively and creatively redraw the outcomes themselves.

It's important to remember that the assignment I included in Chapter 4 was adapted from a *WAW* textbook aimed at promoting in students a conceptual awareness of how writing speaks to situations and contexts. The work I do in that chapter does not discount the potential value of the assignment, nor the broader aims of the *WAW/TC* approach. Indeed, the idea that writing responds to situations and contexts is something that I want students to learn and practice in my courses. But what would happen if we were to think about how to evaluate Claudia's work with and on this particular concept with a translingual emphasis in mind? What my work shows, I hope, is that the ways students learn, enact, and practice threshold concepts are not always easy to pin down and understand. I argue that there is a way to read the essay that would highlight how Claudia evidences a solid understanding of how writing responds to situations and contexts. Further, as a reader, I was able to see Claudia's essay as contributing to and re-forming the expectations I had set. There was, to be sure, a "mismatch" between my expectations and Claudia's performance. But I used my perception of that mismatch to challenge my own thinking about how she may have been learning, enacting, and practicing that concept, and the assignment itself, in different and productive ways. I found that, with a translingual emphasis in mind, I was able to read the essay for different results. And I think this is, in part, what Nowacek (2011) might be getting at when she argues that transfer does, in fact, happen, but in ways that are more complicated than our current models prescribe.

The work I have undertaken in this project is preliminary, and it opens up several possible directions for further inquiry into how scholars of rhetoric and composition can understand difference and variation as always-occurring features of writing-related

transfer of learning. One potential direction would be to conduct comparative analyses of student texts in classrooms using a writing-about-writing approach. Such work would help add detail to the different ways students practice rhetorical expertise. We can also continue to attend to the ways student interpret, negotiate, and respond to “official” classroom materials, including assignment prompts, syllabi, course readings, and peer and instructor feedback. We might also continue to ask questions about instructor reading practices, both within and outside of composition. How do faculty at different levels and in different disciplinary contexts know when their expectations for writing have been met? Tutor- and teacher-training courses may also yield productive sites of investigation into the ways faculty and consultants are trained to read student texts. Scholars might also extend the work I have started here into other institutional sites and contexts. Writing centers, for instance, seem to be an especially fruitful site for exploring how translingual attitudes toward writing can be developed and enacted, as they offer a space for collaborative, dialogical, peer-led teaching and learning to occur.

Finally, we can turn our inquiry toward the ways in which the idea of knowledge transfer is conceived and understood in cross-disciplinary contexts. While current studies have suggested that faculty from across the disciplines do not expect knowledge about writing to transfer from FYC to their courses, we might also question the extent to which transfer of learning, traditionally defined, occurs into and out of other general education requirements. My initial interest in the idea of writing-related transfer was provoked by a series of articles I read about transfer of learning and college algebra. Scholars in math education continue to wrestle with the growing recognition that very little evidence exists in support of the transferability of “general problem solving skills” out of algebra

courses. What is the relationship between conversations about transfer in composition and transfer in college mathematics? Is there something unique about the problem of writing-related transfer, or are the questions we seek to answer shared with our colleagues from other disciplines?

When I look at the work happening in transfer studies right now, I am ultimately encouraged. I see collective action underway to generate productive thinking about the shifting roles and purposes of writing instruction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This project represents my strong commitment to furthering these aims. Through collaborative efforts among writing educators, I believe we can encourage our students and ourselves to become new kinds of writers, readers, and thinkers for a globalized world.

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Wuetherick, B. & Loeffler, E. (2014). Threshold concepts and decoding the humanities:  
A case study of a threshold concept in art history. In C. O'Mahony, A. Buchanan,  
M. O'Rourke, & B. Higgs (Eds.), *Threshold concepts: From personal practice to  
communities of practice* (n.p.). Cork, Ireland: The Irish National Academy for  
Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

MEGAN JEANNE BARDOLPH

### EDUCATION

- 2015      Ph.D. in Rhetoric in Composition, University of Louisville  
Dissertation: "Language Difference and Expansive Learning: Negotiating Concepts, Contexts, and Identities in Writing-Related Transfer Studies"
- 2008      M.A. in English, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, 2008  
Concentration in Rhetoric and Composition
- 2005      B.A. in Writing, Grand Valley State University (Allendale, MI), 2005  
Concentration in Professional Writing/Journalism and Media Studies  
Study Abroad: Trinity College, Dublin; Queens University, Belfast (6/04-8/04)
- 2003      Additional Coursework in English, Calvin College (Grand Rapids, MI)

### PUBLICATIONS

#### Edited Collections and Guest-edited Journal Issues

With Mary P. Sheridan, Megan Hartline, and Drew Holladay. *Responsive Practices: New Directions for Teaching, Research, and Community Engagement*. Anticipated 2016.

With Bruce Horner, Mary P. Sheridan, and Drew Holladay. "Responsivity in Rhetoric and Composition." *JAC* 34.1-2 (2014).

#### Book Chapters

"Preferred Futures and Pedagogical Praxis." *Responsive Practices: New Directions for Teaching, Research, and Community Engagement*. Eds. Mary P. Sheridan, Megan Bardolph, Megan Hartline, and Drew Holladay. Anticipated 2016.

With Amy Lueck. "Informal Writing and the Design of Academic Conferences." *Economies of Writing: Revaluations in Rhetoric and Composition*. Eds. Bruce Horner, Susan Ryan, and Brice Nordquist. In Press.

#### Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

“‘That Strange Something Undreamt’: Paranormal Activity in Edith Wharton’s ‘The Lady’s Maid’s Bell’.” *Eureka Studies in Teaching Short Fiction* 9.1 (2008): 137-146.

### **Work in Progress**

“Understanding Difference as a Central Feature of Writing-Related Transfer Activity.” In progress.  
“The Dunning-Kruger Effect in Graduate Education: Imposter Syndrome as Professional Development Paradox.” With Amy Lueck. In progress.

### **Other Publications**

“Blind Date.” University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, 2008.  
“Serena.” *Fishladder*. Grand Valley State University, 2005.

### **AWARDS AND HONORS**

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 2015      | Graduate Dean’s Citation, University of Louisville       |
| 2013-2014 | Faculty Favorite, University of Louisville               |
| 2012-2013 | Faculty Favorite, University of Louisville               |
| 2010-2011 | Scholar-Athlete Faculty Mentor, University of Louisville |

### **CONFERENCE PAPERS**

“Understanding Threshold Knowledge: Variation and Transformation in Practice.”  
Conference on College Composition and Communication. Tampa, FL. March 2015  
(Proposal accepted).  
“Dispositions, Civic Engagement, and the Question of Transfer.” The Tenth Biennial  
Thomas R. Watson Conference in Rhetoric and Composition. Louisville, KY.  
October 2014.  
“Rhetorical Problem-Exploring Across the Curriculum.” Rhetoric Society of America.  
San Antonio, TX. May 2014.  
“Transfer of Learning: Drawing Connections Across College Algebra and FYC.”  
Conference on College Composition and Communication. Indianapolis, IN. March  
2014.  
“Participatory Engagement and the Production of Knowledge at Academic Conferences.”  
With Amy Lueck. Writing Research Across Borders III. Paris, France. February  
2014.  
“Crafting Literate Lives: Embodied Knowledge and Rhetorical Design in College  
Writing.” Conference on College Composition and Communication. Las Vegas, NV.  
March 2013.

- “Documenting Decay: Textual Economies in Urban and Rural Ruins Photography.” The Ninth Biennial Thomas R. Watson Conference in Rhetoric and Composition. Louisville, KY. October 2012.
- “Physical Literacies: Styling (Dis)Ability in FYC.” Research Network Forum. Conference on College Composition and Communication. Atlanta, GA. March 2011.
- “Rhetorical Listening and Writing Center Work.” East Central Writing Centers Association Conference. Adrian, MI. February 2005.

## **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

### **Pennsylvania State University-New Kensington**

Rhetoric and Composition (Fall 2015)

Honors Composition (Fall 2015)

### **University of Louisville**

Introduction to College Writing (Fall 2010, Fall 2014)

Intermediate College Writing (Spring 2011, Summer 2011, Spring 2012, Spring 2015)

Honors Composition (Fall 2011, Fall 2012, Fall 2013)

Science and Technical Writing (Spring 2014)

Business Writing (Spring 2013)

Women and Literature (Summer 2013)

### **Muskegon Community College**

Introduction to English Composition (Fall 2009)

English Composition I (Spring 2010)

English Composition I (Online, Summer 2010)

### **Grand Rapids Community College**

Intro to College Writing (Fall 2009)

College Writing I (Fall 2008, Summer 2009)

College Writing II (Spring 2009, Spring 2010, Summer 2010)

## **PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 2014 | Assistant Director. Thomas R. Watson Conference. “Responsivity: Defining, Cultivating, Enacting.” University of Louisville. |
| 2013 | Assistant Director. Thomas R. Watson Conference Symposium on “Responsivity.” University of Louisville.                      |
| 2012 | Assistant Director. Thomas R. Watson Conference. “Economies of Writing.” University of Louisville.                          |

## **DEPARTMENTAL AND UNIVERSITY SERVICE**

2011-2015 Graduate Student Peer Mentor, University of Louisville.  
2012-2013 Faculty Search Committee, University of Louisville.  
2011-2012 School of Interdisciplinary and Graduate Studies, University of Louisville.

### **ADDITIONAL TEACHING, TUTORING, AND SERVICE**

2011-2012 Writing Center Consultant, University of Louisville  
2011-2012 Virtual Writing Center Consultant, University of Louisville.  
2009-2010 Teen Mentor, Pine Rest Mental Health Services (Grand Rapids, MI).  
2008-2009 Tutor, Michigan Educational Resource Center (Grand Rapids, MI).  
2005-2006 Substitute Teacher, Grand Rapids Public Schools.  
2004-2005 Writing Center Consultant, Grand Valley State University.  
1998-2004 Piano Teacher (Grand Rapids, MI).

### **PROFESSIONAL WRITING EXPERIENCE**

2006-2007 Copywriter, Citadel Broadcasting (Chattanooga, TN)  
2005-2006 Copywriter/Designer, Gainey Transportation Services (Grand Rapids, MI)

### **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

American Association for Applied Linguistics  
Conference on College Composition and Communication  
Council of Writing Program Administrators  
Modern Language Association  
National Council of Teachers of English  
Rhetoric Society of America