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# 1

## THE CONTENT OF COMPOSITION, REFLECTIVE PRACTICE, AND THE TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE IN COMPOSITION

*Once you understand that writing is all about context you understand how to shape it to whatever the need is. And once you understand that different genres are meant to do different things for different audiences you know more about writing that works for whatever context you're writing in.*

— Clay

Since the formation of the field of composition studies in the latter half of the twentieth century, writing faculty have worked to develop writing courses that will help students succeed; indeed, in Joe Harris's (1996) invocation of the 1966 Dartmouth Conference mantra, composition is, famously, a teaching subject. Thus, in the 1950s, during a period of productivity in linguistics, we tapped insights from linguistics—style or coherence, for example—to enrich our classrooms. In the 1960s and 1970s, researching what became known as the composing process, we began putting at the center of our writing classes process pedagogies that have since transformed the curricular and pedagogical landscape.<sup>1</sup> And in the 1980s and 1990s, we had a new sense of the writing called for in school—what we began calling academic argumentative writing—that was on its way to being fully ensconced in the classroom, notwithstanding the Elbow/Bartholomae debates about the relative merits of personal and academic writing.

If we fast-forward to 2013, however, we find that the landscape in composition has changed yet again. The academic argumentative writing that so influenced the teaching of composition is now regarded as only one variety of writing, if that (see, for example, Wardle's 2009 "Mutt Genres," among others). Likewise, scholars in the field have raised questions about our motives for teaching (Hawk 2007) and about the efficacy of what are now familiar approaches (Fulkerson

2005). Just as important, the classroom research that distinguished the field in the 1970s and 1980s is again flourishing, especially research projects explicitly designed to investigate what has become known as the “transfer question.” Put briefly, this question asks how we can support students’ transfer of knowledge and practice in writing; that is, how we can help students develop writing knowledge and practices that they can draw upon, use, and repurpose for new writing tasks in new settings. In this moment in composition, teachers and scholars are especially questioning two earlier assumptions about writing: (1) that there is a generalized genre called academic writing and (2) that we are teaching as effectively as we might. Moreover, we have a sense of how to move forward: regarding genre, for instance, the singular writing practice described as academic writing is being replaced by a pluralized sense of both genres and practices that themselves participate in larger systems or ecologies of writing. Likewise regarding the teaching of such a pluralized set of practices and genres: curricula designed explicitly to support transfer are being created and researched. And as we will report here, various research projects (e.g., Wardle 2007) seek to document the effect of these new curricular designs as well as the rationale accounting for their impact.<sup>2</sup>

As *Writing across Contexts* demonstrates, we too are participating in this new field of inquiry, and our interest in how we can support students’ transfer of writing knowledge and practice has been specifically motivated by three sources: (1) our experiences with portfolios; (2) our interest in the role of content in the teaching of composition; and (3) our understanding—and that of higher education’s more generally—of the importance of helping students understand the logic and theory underlying practice if we want students to practice well.

A first source motivating our interest in transfer is our experience with portfolios of writing. Linking portfolios to writing curricula, especially when portfolios include texts outside the writing classroom (Yancey 1998, 2013), has been useful pedagogically, of course, but it has also helped put a very specific face on the transfer question. Through what we see within the frame of the portfolio—the set of portfolio texts and the student narration—we have been able to ask new questions about how students write in different settings and about how they understand writing. Looking at the multiple texts inside one portfolio, for instance, we can be prompted to observe—indeed, learn from the student—how he or she has made a successful transition from high school to college, while looking at another makes us wonder what else we might have done to support such a transition. Similarly, when exhibits

in a portfolio include writing from other college classes, we ask other questions, chief among them why some students are able to make use of what they seemed to have learned in first-year composition to complete writing tasks elsewhere, while other students are not. Through the portfolio reflective text, what Yancey has called a reflection-in-presentation (Yancey 1998), students tell us in their own words what they have learned about writing, how they understand writing, and how they write now. In this context, we often ask other questions. How is it that students, drawing on previous writing knowledge, are able to recontextualize it for new situations? When students cannot do so, can we see why not, and given what we see, are there adjustments we should make to the curriculum?

A second source we have drawn upon in our thinking about the transfer of knowledge and practice in writing is the recent discussion in composition studies about what might be the best content for a composition curriculum. Forwarded by CCCC in 2006,<sup>3</sup> this discussion about the relationship of content and composition has sparked vigorous debates. Such content, some say, can be anything as long as the focus on writing is maintained. Michael Donnelly (2006) argues: “There is no ‘must’ content; the only thing(s) that really matters is what students are *doing*—i.e., reading, thinking, responding, writing, receiving (feedback), and re-writing. When these things are primary, and whatever other content remains secondary, we have a writing course.” Given this view, it’s perhaps not surprising that many institutions—including many elite institutions like those in the Ivy League, as well as public institutions like Florida State University—provide additional evidence of this approach in the terms of their numerous theme-based approaches to first-year composition. Students in these FYC courses find themselves studying and writing about topics of interest to faculty, from medical narratives and video games to comic books and British history.<sup>4</sup> However, a competing theory of the role of content in any writing situation, including in FYC, is provided in Anne Beaufort’s (2007) model of writing expertise—including its five overlapping domains: writing process knowledge; rhetorical knowledge; genre knowledge; discourse community knowledge; and content knowledge. In this model of writing expertise, content knowledge is not arbitrary, random, or insignificant, but rather is one of five domains that expert writers draw upon as they compose any given text. Such a model of writing thus invites us to consider whether and how this domain of content might be designed for FYC. Put as a more specific question, is it the case that all content supports students’ transfer similarly, or is some content more useful than other content in assisting students with transfer?

A third source for us in our thinking about transfer in writing is recent discourse in higher education about the role of theory in assisting students with general learning. In fields like the scholarship of teaching and learning, and with the leadership of scholar teachers like Mary Hubar and Pat Hutchings, faculty in higher education are creating new ways of enhancing practice, especially in contexts where we incorporate theory *into* the practice as a mechanism for supporting students' development of practice. In other words, we are coming to understand that if we want students to practice "better," in fields ranging from chemistry to history and even in medicine, we need to help them understand the theory explaining the practice, the logic underlying it, so that it makes sense to them. Toward that end, for instance, advocates of "signature pedagogy" have created a tagline summarizing this approach: invoking "the core characteristics of a discipline to help students think like a biologist, a creative writer, or a sociologist." Here they emphasize the key expression *think like*. When applied to FYC, we began to consider how we might help students *think like* writers, in particular through the use of reflection. Including reflection in writing classes by now, of course, is ubiquitous, but its use is often narrow and procedural rather than theoretical and substantive. Students are often—perhaps typically—asked to provide an account of process or to compose a "reflective argument"<sup>5</sup> in which they cite their own work as evidence that they have met program outcomes. They are not asked to engage in another kind of reflection, what we might call big-picture thinking, in which they consider how writing in one setting is both different from and similar to the writing in another, or where they theorize writing so as to create a framework for future writing situations. We wondered, then, what difference, if any, it could make if we asked students to engage in a reiterative reflective practice, based both in their own experience and in a reflective curriculum, where the goal isn't to document writing processes or argue that program outcomes have been met, but rather to develop a theory of writing that can be used to frame writing tasks both in the FYC course and in other areas of writing.

What we present here, then, is our inquiry into the transfer question, an inquiry focused on the role a curriculum integrating composition content, systematic reflection, and the theory/practice relationship could play in assisting students with the transfer of writing knowledge and practice. More specifically, our research into how a curriculum *designed* to support students' transfer of writing knowledge and practice might function demonstrates our central claim: that a very specific composition course we designed to foster transfer in writing, what we call a Teaching for

Transfer (TFT) course, assists students in transferring writing knowledge and practice in ways other kinds of composition courses do not.

This research has two dimensions. First, the project developed the course content of the TFT course, one that is composition-specific, located in key terms students think with, write with, and reflect with reiteratively during the semester. The content is likewise reflection-rich, i.e., informed by readings in reflection and animated by students' use of the key vocabulary to create a theory of writing. Second, to inquire into the efficacy of this course, and more particularly into the role that this specific content of composition might play in fostering transfer of writing knowledge and practice, we studied the effect of composition content on students' transferring of writing knowledge and practice in three FYC classes. Each class offered a distinctive composition content: the TFT class focused on composition as content; an Expressivist composition class addressed voice and authorial agency; and a cultural studies, media-inflected composition class invited students to think about their place in an increasingly differentiated and mediated world. In reviewing these three classes and in interviewing students—as they completed FYC and again when they moved into and completed another semester of university courses, what we refer to as the post-composition term—we found that the reflective TFT composition curriculum we describe and analyze here supports students' transfer of writing knowledge and practice in ways (1) that the other courses did not and (2) that have thus far not been documented in the literature. In summary, the content of this course and its reflective practice provide a unique set of resources for students to call upon as they encounter new writing tasks.

As we conducted this research, we also encountered what we call a surprising finding. Although our study wasn't designed to explore the role prior knowledge plays in students' transfer, we found that prior knowledge—of various kinds—plays a decisive if not determining role in students' successful transfer of writing knowledge and practice. Based on our work with students, we have developed a model of students' *use* of prior knowledge as they encounter new writing tasks, located in three practices: first, an *assemblage* model in which students graft new composing knowledge onto earlier understandings of composition; second, a more successful *remix* model in which students integrate prior and new writing knowledge; and third, a *critical incident* model where students encounter an obstacle that helps them retheorize writing in general and their own agency as writers in particular.

In the rest of this chapter we provide considerable information as background for our study—indeed, one very helpful reviewer

encouraged us to alert readers to how considerable and complex our discussion of this background is. It develops in layers, moving from the most general to the composition-specific. The first layer involves the concept of transfer itself: our chronological review of contrasting definitions of transfer and summary of current theories of transfer, noting areas of agreement as well as questions, especially those with relevance for the transfer of writing knowledge and practice. The second layer involves research on composition curricula generally, particularly where the research has implications for students' transfer: although not all the studies we report were designed to trace transfer, they all nonetheless provide empirical evidence of the efficacy of transfer, and thus demonstrate ways that our curricula have, and have not, historically supported students' transfer of writing knowledge and practice. The third layer also involves research on composition, in this case students' writing activities outside of school: research shows that what students learn about composing outside of school—in terms of practices, textuality, and their own abilities—can influence what happens inside school, in some cases dramatically. And the fourth and final layer involves the experiences of two of the more famous students who have made visible the challenges of transfer, McCarthy's (1987) Dave and Beaufort's (2007) Tim; their experiences help us forecast some of the issues to which our study responds.

#### **LAYER ONE: DEFINITIONS OF TRANSFER: EARLY THINKING**

What we mean by transfer, and how much—if any—transfer of writing knowledge and practice might be possible is a subject of some contention in higher education and in writing studies. At the heart of the contention is the issue of generalizability: is the activity in question—for example, writing—one where generalizability from one iteration of a practice to another is possible? Perhaps not surprisingly, as scholars have pursued this question, our understanding of what is and is not possible has become more sophisticated.

A conceptual background for transfer has been provided by psychology and education, and in terms of teaching for transfer, research in both fields has shifted from concluding that transfer is accidental (and thus not very teach-able) to promoting the teaching of transfer through very specific kinds of practices. Early transfer research in the fields of psychology and education (Thorndike and Woodworth 1901; Prather 1971; Detterman and Sternberg 1993), for example, focused on specific situations in which instances of transfer occurred. Conducted

in research environments and measuring subjects' ability to replicate specific behavior from one context to another, results of this research suggested that transfer was merely serendipitous. Given our current research paradigms, however, which are more contextual and situated, such research is now discounted, in large part because earlier research traced evidence of transfer in highly controlled situations that were very unlike the situations in life requiring transfer. We now understand that research into transfer, to be helpful, will need to include contexts more authentic and complex than those simulated in a laboratory.

A conceptual breakthrough occurred in 1992 when David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon—often thought of as the godfathers of transfer—suggested an alternate approach: they argued that researchers should consider the *conditions* and *contexts* under which and where transfer might occur. They also redefined transfer according to three subsets: near versus far transfer, or how closely related a new situation is to the original; high-road (or mindful) transfer involving knowledge abstracted and applied to another context, versus low-road (or reflexive) transfer involving knowledge triggered by something similar in another context; and positive transfer (performance improvement) versus negative transfer (performance interference) in another context. Two points here are particularly important. One: the claim is that teaching for transfer is possible; indeed, if we want students to transfer, we have to teach *for* it. Two: given the complexity of transfer and the conditions under which it does or does not occur, Perkins and Salomon suggest deliberately teaching for transfer through *hugging* (using approximations) and *bridging* (using abstraction to make connections) as strategies to maximize transfer (Perkins and Salomon 1992, 7).

#### Definitions of Transfer Keyed to Tasks, Individuals, and Activities

Despite this breakthrough, scholars and researchers are still at odds about two issues: (1) how to conceptualize transfer and (2) how to develop a language for it congruent with what it involves. Thus, one difficulty some have with the word transfer is with what it suggests, that is, the sense that transfer could be understood as merely a mechanical application of skills from one situation to another. Such a conception of transfer, of course, is problematic given that the exercise itself, especially in the case of “high-road” transfer, is neither directly applied nor mechanical in its application. In other words, the historical definition of transfer can be seen as incongruent with what it is that we think transfer involves or requires, that is, with an adapted or new use of prior

knowledge and practice. And at some level, this difficulty is rooted in how we conceptualize and define transfer, as Elizabeth Wardle suggests:

Is transfer the act of an individual taking something she knows from one setting or task and applying it successfully in another setting or task? Is transfer the act of transformation, in which an individual takes something he knows and is able to repurpose or transform it for use in another setting or task that is similar or not quite the same? Is transfer found in the individual, in the task, in the setting—or in some combination of all three? And if transfer is found in the combination of individual, task, and setting, how do we understand and explain it? How do we teach for it, study it, and engage in it ourselves? (Wardle 2007, 66)

Based on questions like these, and drawing on the scholarship of Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström (2003), Wardle outlines three conceptions or constructions of transfer located in different units of analysis—(1) tasks, (2) individuals, and (3) activity—although as we will see, there is overlap or interaction among them.

The first of these, what Wardle identifies as *task conceptions of transfer*, “theorize transfer as the transition of knowledge used in one task to solve another task” (Wardle 2007, 67). To support transfer of knowledge and practice, then, efforts located in this perspective focus on the design of tasks useful in the “training of basic mental functions . . . thought to have general effects that [will] transfer to new situations” (Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström 2003, 19; quoted in Wardle 2007, 67). The second conception of transfer addresses *an individual’s disposition*, specifically a disposition to search for situations where previously learned knowledge and practice can be used, in part through reflective practice. Here, as Wardle observes, “the focus is on an individual’s ‘disposition’; the goal of schooling, according to this view, is to teach students ‘learned intelligent behavior’ that will help them seek out and/or create situations in which what they have learned will transfer” (Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström 2003, 24; quoted in Wardle 2007, 67). In this conceptualization of transfer, attention is given to helping a student develop a learner’s disposition, but ultimately it is the individual who is responsible for transfer.

In addition to task and dispositional conceptions of transfer, however, we have a third conception, this one targeting context and the one primarily of interest to many compositionists (e.g., Donahue 2012). This third perspective intends to highlight *the learner inside of an environment so as to look at the interaction between the two*. In addition, it includes three versions: situated, sociocultural, and activity-based. The first, a notion of *situated* transfer, attends to “patterns of participatory processes across situations” (Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström 2003, 25; quoted in Wardle

2007). Such processes come into play when an individual perceives the need to enact prior learning; terms to describe such an approach include *productivity* and *participation*. The second perspective, the *socio-cultural* transfer, also influenced by Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström, “shifts the emphasis from individual learners to interactions between people” who are engaged in the tasks (67). Wardle and Jessie Moore (2012) believe the work of another scholar theorizing transfer is helpful here: working in something of the same tradition, King Beach (2003) identifies *generalization* as the key term for the same perspective. According to Moore, King Beach, in “Consequential Transitions: A Developmental View of Knowledge Propagation through Social Organizations,”

critiques the notion of transfer and instead examines generalization as knowledge propagation, suggesting that generalization is informed by social organization and acknowledges change by both the individual and the organization. Generalization as propagation further emphasizes associations across social organizations as active constructions, not just the application of knowledge to a new task. Beach extends his discussion by introducing the concept of consequential transition, which he explains as follows: “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. (42)”<sup>6</sup> (Moore 2012)

What is particularly interesting here is Beach’s rationale for identifying generalization as a more appropriate description of a transfer interaction. As Wardle explains, in Beach’s view earlier conceptions of transfer point to a vague sense of learning, “which is difficult to isolate in studies and thus of little use to researchers even though we know such learning happens constantly” (Wardle 2007). But generalization in Beach’s formation allows us to conceptualize transfer as “our ability to use prior knowledge in new ways and in new situations.” It thus

includes classical interpretations of transfer—carrying and applying knowledge across tasks—but goes beyond them to examine individuals *and* their social organizations, the ways that individuals construct associations among social organizations, associations that can be continuous and constant or distinctive and contradictory (41). Generalization, according to Beach, happens through transition.” (68)

Building on this model, some writing researchers—and teachers—conceptualize transfer as requiring both the crossing of a boundary, otherwise known as a transition, *and* a willingness to engage in the new terms and practices the new context may require (e.g., Reiff and Bawarshi 2011; Brent 2012).

And last but not least, the activity-based perspective on transfer takes the ecosystem itself as the beginning lens, focusing “more explicitly on interactions between individual learners and contexts but expand[ing] the basis of transfer from the actions of individuals to the systematic activity of collective organizations” (Wardle 2007, 68). In this model, a key expression is not transfer, but rather “expansive learning,” and for two reasons. First, transfer in its historical definitions, as we have seen, tends to isolate the individual from the system; and second, with a new expression there is less likelihood of confusion regarding the concept and the focus.

### Transfer through the Lens of Bourdieu

In her most recent work on the conceptual problem of the ways we define transfer and the language we create to describe it, Elizabeth Wardle nominates yet another term, *repurposing*. In introducing her guest-edited fall 2012 special issue of *Composition Forum* focused on transfer, Wardle theorizes transfer as *repurposing*, contextualizing it through the conceptual lenses of Bourdieu’s habitus and doxa:

In this introduction to the special “transfer” issue of *Composition Forum*, I would like to offer some preliminary thinking about ways to expand our consideration of this phenomenon, which I will describe from here on out as “creative repurposing for expansive learning,” or “repurposing,” in brief (Prior and Shipka; Roozen). I argue for understanding repurposing as the result of particular dispositions that are embodied not only by individuals but also by what Pierre Bourdieu calls “fields” and the interactions between the two. In doing so, I focus primarily (but not exclusively) on the dispositions of educational systems. In sketching out my initial thoughts on dispositions, I draw on Bourdieu’s discussions of “habitus” and “doxa.” I suggest that to move forward in our consideration of repurposing and expansive learning, we might look beyond one task, one setting, or one individual to consider the habitus of the educational systems that encourage particular dispositions in individuals. I will suggest that creative repurposing is one consequence of what I will call “problem-exploring dispositions,” while “answer-getting dispositions” discourage such repurposing. (Wardle 2012)

What is interesting about this conceptualization of transfer is threefold. First, Wardle brings insights from composition studies and cultural theory together to provide another way of understanding transfer. Second, the expression itself—*creative repurposing for expansive learning*—taps a common practice of writers in the 21st century—that is, the repurposing of texts for new rhetorical situations and/or media. Her use of the word repurposing is particularly appropriate for research on transfer

in composition. And third, Bourdieu's notion of habitus corresponds roughly to dispositions, but in this case makes them available for institutions as well as for individuals.

Of notable interest to Wardle in this conception of transfer is the role that the educational system as habitus plays in shaping the dispositions of students, which, as indicated above, she categorizes into two types, problem-exploring dispositions and problem-solving dispositions. The first, 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 [in contrast] 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. (Wardle 2012)

In other words, a concern here is that, regardless of our best efforts, students are less likely to develop problem-exploring dispositions because the institutional habitus rewards only students' answer-getting practices, which practices exclude awareness:

What emerges for me from this discussion is not only that both individuals and fields inhabit dispositions, but how institutional habitus creates and recreates orthodox discourse and attempts to push the social world to the status of doxa—beyond question or even recognizable as anything other than natural and inevitable. Individual dispositions toward finding and answering and moving on, rather than asking questions and exploring problems, might be directly linked to dispositions of fields or educational habitus that have a vested interest in maintaining dominant structures, beliefs, and practices (doxa). (Wardle 2012)

Such concerns, of course, seem to be particularly important given the US and state governments' continued emphasis on testing, one that consistently rewards problem-answering as the highest value.

As this quick review of the history of transfer suggests, for nearly 100 years researchers in higher education have theorized and retheorized transfer, during which time models of transfer have become both more contextualized and more inclusive of various factors, identifying participants, systems, and interactions between them that may all play a role. Likewise, in this process we have shifted from a simulation-informed notion of transfer to a highly contextualized one located in a new set of terms, among them generalizability and repurposing. As important for composition studies—although we appreciate the complexity of transfer as a phenomenon and the difficulty it therefore poses for learners and

teachers—our interest in transfer continues for two reasons. First, education as an institution is predicated on the assumption that transfer of knowledge and practice is possible, and we take the role of education in supporting students as a first priority. Second, researchers and teachers alike believe that if we have a better understanding of transfer as phenomenon and practice, we are more likely to design curriculum and pedagogy effectively by creating tasks, support structures, and environments that do the best job assisting students with their transfer of knowledge and practice, regardless of how difficult that may be.

#### **LAYER TWO: STUDENTS' TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE IN WRITING: WHAT EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE SUGGESTS**

Sometimes informed by research on transfer generally and sometimes operating from other perspectives, research in writing studies has for many years inquired into how well, or not, our writing curricula support students and how our students use what they learn in our classes. Thus, despite the fact that some of this research was not designed to look specifically into transfer, the research reports often include findings bearing on the transfer question, precisely because they focus on the same concerns and employ similar methodologies. Some of this research has resulted from institutional interest in transition points (e.g., high school to college); some is an unexpected benefit of other kinds of studies (e.g., assessment studies; curricular studies); and some derives from research inquiring into the relationship between students' non-curricular literacies and their school-sponsored writing. In sum, we have empirical evidence showing that students do transfer knowledge and practice of writing. And as we explain, a general review of this research, including location, disposition, and institution, demonstrates evidence of such transfer in five dimensions: (1) the high school to college transition; (2) the introduction of writing process to students; (3) the rhetorical stance of the novice as a necessary beginning; (4) the interaction between students' academic and non-academic literate lives; and (5) the role of time—past and future—as influence and motivator.

*From High School to College: Problems of Process, Conceptualization, and Language*

Most studies of high school and college composers focus on either one or the other, but information about what students might bring with them from high school to college, in terms of writing practice and knowledge,

can be helpful to curriculum designers. We know, for instance, that most high school students do not develop elaborate composing processes (Scherff and Piazza 2005; Applebee and Langer 2009, 2011; Denecker 2013). We also know from Pew research studies that while students write frequently and voluminously outside of school—texts, emails, Facebook posts, and blogs, etc.—they do not identify those activities as writing, which they attach to school and find tedious, but rather as *communicating* (Lenhart et al. 2008). But these students do bring to college what the school culture has emphasized: a test-based writing practice keyed to creating texts with simple beginning-middle-end structures, a central claim, and some forms of evidence, producing what is often called the five-paragraph theme, and what one of our Florida State students, invoking the Florida state test, called “FCAT-writing.”<sup>7</sup>

One of the reasons we might be interested in what students bring to college in terms of writing knowledge and practice, of course, is that prior knowledge influences new learning. Transfer and prior knowledge, in the language of the National Research Council volume *How People Learn* (Bransford, Pellegrino, and Donovan 2000, 53), are interdependent: all “new learning involves transfer based on previous learning.” Not all such prior learning is efficacious, however; prior knowledge can function in one of three ways. First, as suggested above in our discussion of task-conceptions of transfer, an individual’s prior knowledge can match the demands of a new task, in which case a composer draws from and builds on that prior knowledge. We might see this use of prior knowledge when a first-year composition student thinks in terms of audience, purpose, and genre when taking up a first-term college writing task. Second, an individual’s prior knowledge might be a bad match for, or at odds with, a new writing situation. We see this in students who believe that correct syntax and punctuation are the most important features of any text. And third, an individual’s prior knowledge—located in a community context—might be at odds with the requirements of a given writing situation. For example, this writing classroom situation, in part, seems to have motivated the Vander Lei and kyburz (2005) edited collection that documents the difficulty some FYC students experience as a function of their religious beliefs coming into conflict with the goals of higher education.<sup>8</sup> As this brief review suggests, we know that college students, like all of us, call on prior knowledge as they encounter new writing demands, and the significant points here are: students actively use their prior knowledge; and while some prior knowledge provides help for new writing situations, other prior knowledge does not and can even present hurdles.

### The Role of Students' Prior Knowledge Writing

The interest in how first-year students use prior knowledge in composing has not been taken up by composition scholars until very recently. Just in the last four years, Mary Jo Reiff and Anis Bawarshi have undertaken this task. For example, "Tracing Discursive Resources: How Students Use Prior Genre Knowledge to Negotiate New Writing Contexts in First-Year Composition" provides a compilation of this research, conducted at the University of Washington and the University of Tennessee. Centering on if and how students' understanding and use of genre facilitates their transition from high school to college writing situations, the Reiff and Bawarshi (2011) study identified two kinds of students entering FYC: first, what they call *boundary guarders*, "those students who were more likely to draw on whole genres with certainty, regardless of task," and second, what they call *boundary crossers*, "those students who were more likely to question their genre knowledge and to break this knowledge down into useful strategies and repurpose it" (314). In creating these student prototypes, the researchers drew on document-based interviews focused on students' use of genre knowledge as they entered their first term of composition: first, as they composed a "preliminary" essay, and second, as they completed the first assignment of the term.

Specifically, we asked students to report on what they thought each writing task was asking them to do and then to report on what prior genres they were reminded of and drew on for each task. As students had their papers in front of them, we were able to point to various rhetorical conventions and ask about how they learned to use those conventions or why they made the choices that they made, enabling connections between discursive patterns and prior knowledge of genres. (319)

Based on this study, Reiff and Bawarshi (2011) identify two kinds of boundary guarding students, with the most important expression being what they call "not talk," what these researchers describe as language used by students describing "their written work (and writing process) by exploring what genres it is not" (325).

The first, what might be called "strict" boundary guarding, includes students who report no "not talk" (in terms of genres or strategies) and who seem to maintain known genres regardless of task. The second kind of boundary guarding is less strict in that students report some strategy-related "not talk" and some modification of known genres by way of adding strategies to known genres. (329)

These students, in other words, work to maintain the boundary marking their prior knowledge, at most adding to the schema only the strategies they seek to preserve. By way of contrast, the boundary-crossing

student accepts noviceship, at least implicitly, often as a consequence of struggling to meet the demands of a new writing task. Therefore, this writer seems to experience multiple kinds of flux—such as “uncertainty about task, descriptions of writing according to what genre it is not, and the breakdown and repurposing of whole genres” that may be useful to students entering new contexts in FYC (Reiff and Bawarshi 2011, 329).

What’s interesting here goes beyond the prototypes themselves and extends to how those prototypes might change given other contexts. Moreover, this study raises intriguing questions, such as: How do students draw on prior knowledge in FYC? How does that impact their success in writing? What happens when students move on to a second term and take up writing tasks outside of first-year composition? Do they call on the prior knowledge they created in FYC, or do they default to strategies they learned in high school? Likewise, assuming that we recognize boundary-guarders and boundary-crossers as prototypes in a FYC class, what difference might both curriculum and pedagogy make? In other words, what might we do *inside our curriculum* to motivate those students exhibiting a boundary-guarding approach to take up a boundary-crossing one? And once students have boundary-crossed, what happens then? How can we support boundary-crossers and help them become more confident and competent composers?<sup>9</sup>

### The Transfer of Process

In the 1960s, the field of rhetoric and composition began a well-documented shift from what’s been called current-traditional approaches to process-based approaches, approaches that Richard Fulkerson (2005) surmises we are still using today, although it’s fair to note that those processes can be very different one to the next. One important question we might raise, given the ubiquity of our “process pedagogy” over several decades, is whether or not the research shows that students transfer process. If transfer is possible, one would expect that students would be transferring some process of writing; if it’s not, then our teaching of process would lead to a student adoption of process that was only temporary. Similarly, low-road transfer, the use of practices in multiple contexts without conceptual understanding or reflection, presents another issue to consider: no one argues that low-road transfer isn’t occurring. Regardless of new situations, college students draw on their vocabularies, employ syntax, and create texts that have beginnings, middles, and endings, although it’s worth noting that different genres will call for different diction, sentence structures, and rhetorical

organizations. Thus, the issue that typically concerns compositionists is not the set of seemingly rudimentary practices associated with low-road transfer, but rather those associated with high-road transfer—the capacity to compose rhetorically, for a purpose in a given genre and for a specific audience—when two occasions are “paradoxical,” both similar and different. And not least, fundamental to transfer is a set of occasions for writing that provides a scaffold for writing development. Put differently, if transfer of knowledge and practice is to be successful, students need to have future occasions to which they can bring their knowledge of composing and composing practices. Such occasions can be provided more systemically—thus contributing a helpful repetition—through a vertical curriculum supporting student development from the first year of college into general education and beyond into the major (Miles et al. 2008).

The research suggests that students do *develop* a writing process and they do *use* and adapt it as they move beyond FYC. Here, two studies are particularly illustrative. Conducted at the University of California at Irvine (UCI), Jarratt et al.’s (2005) study, constituted of interviews with 35 upper-level students in diverse majors, looked into the knowledge students transferred from FYC into other writing contexts. In their interviews, students spoke of two forms of transfer: (1) the *idea* of writing process and (2) its *practice*. More specifically, students reported that in their first-year composition course they learned about writing as process, about writing as a mode of learning, and about ways to develop their own multi-draft composing process, a process they adapted over time and occasion:

The UCI undergraduates in our study demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of, or at least familiarity with, their writing processes. The majority reported engaging in pre-writing, drafting, and revision, techniques they learned from their lower-level writing classes. When asked an open-ended question about their approach to writing, students referred to a range of strategies: “cloud and visual diagrams, the use of arrows to organize ideas, brainstorming, and free-writing exercises.” Even those who eschewed a formal process and instead preferred “just to start writing” spoke of composing as a process. . . . A cognitive sciences major describes a . . . recursive and process-oriented approach to his writing: “Usually what I do is I will write and I will read through it and then I will write some more and then I will read the whole thing over again, and then if I remember something that I haven’t put down, I will work it in. I have never written down an outline, I don’t know why. I am writing and revising the whole time.” Though these students may not produce discrete drafts for revision, they still view their writings as works-in-progress rather than finished products. (Jarratt et al. 2005, 3–4)

Jarratt and her colleagues were especially impressed with the students' "acceptance of beliefs that we, writing studies specialists, have long held. They understand that writing, or more specifically, the process of writing, leads to the construction of knowledge" (5). At the same time, while the students could point to or describe writing practices, they often struggled to find language that would facilitate their descriptions, especially in regard to "modes of development" and "academic genres"—a point not unlike that made previously by Reiff and Bawarshi:

While the students we interviewed were articulate about writing process and disciplinary differences, many of them lacked a basic vocabulary well accepted across disciplines for modes of development and academic genres. If students don't remember, or can't reproduce the terminology for common academic writing practices, can they be said to have "learned" them? In a practice-based field, the case can be made for tacit knowledge, mobilized within various contexts and in response to situated invitations to write. On the other hand, one could make the case that any continuity of learning across the highly fragmented and long-term process of university education must rest in a shared language carried from setting to setting. This sample of students did not convince us that we have succeeded in cultivating a pedagogical memory of writing terminology. (Jarratt et al. 2005, 8–9)

A key question here, then, is how a shared language might facilitate students' progression across "various contexts"; another is what role such a vocabulary might play in fostering transfer of knowledge and practice in writing.

Like the UCI study, the Hilgers, Hussey, and Stitt-Bergh (1999) University of Hawaii project intended to explore the efficacy of its writing across the curriculum program; in its results, we see ways that students carry forward what they too have learned in earlier contexts. In their study, Hilgers, Hussey, and Stitt-Bergh set out to answer two questions: (1) How does disciplinarity affect students' understanding of writing tasks? (2) What do students nearing completion of the university's writing-intensive (WI) requirements report that they know about writing? This study involved two sets of interviews with 34 students, the first interview providing a chance to get to know the student, the second to explore with the student the impact of the writing experience provided by the University of Hawaii. Interestingly, this study also showed that students develop and carry forward an elaborated writing process they value, and that they struggle with a language to describe this activity. For example, Hilgers, Hussey, and Stitt-Bergh (1999) report that

None of the students viewed writing as a linear process in which they regurgitated facts or recorded their thoughts on paper. None of them

described writing as merely drafting and revising. Instead, students viewed “writing” as a set of problems to be solved and goals to be reached. In solving problems and seeking goals, they backtracked, changed tactics, and engaged multiple sources of information and advice. (334)

The writing processes that students engaged in varied, to be sure, but most of the writing processes that students described were “social”: 59% them “talked with their classmates or friends about their focal assignment and/or received feedback from them on written drafts,” even when not encouraged by their instructors. Students had a language to draw on to describe writing process activities—drafting and revising, for instance—but when trying to describe genres and disciplinary writing, students exhibited what the researchers refer to as an “unaware[ness]”:

Our interviewees, while confident in their facility with certain genres, seemed unaware that their understanding of genres was limited by the contexts of a specific classroom, a “controlled circumstance.” Further, the difficulties interviewees experienced in discovering appropriate inquiry processes and in solving content problems suggested that they had an essentially superficial understanding of genres: they were versed in format and stylistic conventions; they knew that the writing in their major was different from other writing they had done; but they in general lacked an understanding of the underlying values and epistemologies that different genres, or even a particular genre, represented. (Hilgers, Hussey, and Stitt-Bergh 1999, 347–48)

It’s good news, from a curricular and pedagogical perspective, that there’s a match between what we *teach*—writing process—and what students say that they *know* and *practice*, students develop composing processes in first-year composition, and they take those processes—and an understanding of their value—with them into other composing situations. Such a match suggests, per Perkins and Salomon (1992), that we can teach for transfer. This research recommends four areas of focus for our teaching of composition: on contexts of writing; on language or vocabulary of writing; on genres themselves; and on the “underlying values and epistemologies that different genres, or even a particular genre,” represent (Hilgers, Hussey, and Stitt-Bergh 1999, 347–48).

### The Rhetorical Stance of Noviceship

There’s a good deal of research showing how important it is that students beginning college inhabit the role of a novice. In this section, we report on two strands of that research—longitudinal studies, and studies of the impact of Advanced Placement on college writers—both of which speak to the need for students to begin as *new* writers when they enter college.

Like Jarratt et al. (2005, 2008) and Hilgers, Hussey, and Stitt-Bergh (1999), Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz did not intend to study transfer of knowledge and practice; their intent, as Sommers and Saltz (2004) explain, was to conduct a longitudinal study investigating students' experience of the writing curriculum at Harvard University. But perhaps not surprisingly, what they find is transfer-related. The early writing courses that Harvard students take are rich with scholarly and academic texts and the reading of them; readings provide the material for writing. Thus, as part of their study, Sommers and Saltz document and address ways that students seek to make sense of an overwhelming amount of material they must read in order to write. What Sommers and Saltz also find, however, is that as important as learning how to read is, even more important is the student's *disposition* toward the material itself and its uses.<sup>10</sup> This finding has two components. First, the first-year student must willingly adopt the stance of a novice in a new world, one that demands more of his or her writing than was asked in high school, and a stance fraught (admittedly) with uncertainty and ambiguity. Second, the student cannot write from a position of expertise, but must write *into* such expertise: students need to immerse themselves in the material, get a sense of the parameters of their subjects, familiarize themselves with the kinds of questions asked of different sets of evidence, and have a stake in the answers before they can articulate analytical theses (Sommers and Saltz 2004, 134–35). Students who were not successful in adopting this novice-as-expert stance, according to the study, did not fare as well as those that did; that is, they may have earned good grades and a Harvard degree, but they did not learn to “participate in the world of ideas,” or as one student put it, to both “give and get” as a participant in a larger conversation (141).

Other studies, like Lee Ann Carroll's (2002) longitudinal study at Pepperdine, have reported similar results. Examining the ways that students navigate the college's writing curriculum, Carroll's research pointed to two moments especially important for rhetorical novice-ship, first as students move into college, and second as they move into their majors. Interestingly, this model of college writing development corresponds to the model of curriculum Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) articulate in *Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines*. In this study of the writing across the curriculum program at George Mason, and based on multiple data sources (e.g., faculty interviews, student interviews), Thaiss and Zawacki hypothesize three tiers of activity supporting a college writer's development: a beginning tier where writers search for disciplinarity and for a set of rules that will govern their writing; a

second tier where, since the rules aren't clear, there seems to be only inconsistency; and a third tier where differences are associated with disciplinarity (109–10). Between each tier, of course, is a site of transition and thus an opportunity for transfer, and the two points of noviceship seem, like those plotted by Carroll, to occur at two entry levels: the college and the major.<sup>11</sup>

A second kind of study, focused on a somewhat different aspect of college writing, points to the importance of noviceship from the perspective of students who try, in some formal curricular way, to bypass it. Hansen et al.'s (2004) research on the efficacy of Advanced Placement, for example, speaks to the need for students to understand college writing—paraphrasing Moffett (1968)—as a *new* universe of discourse where they are novices: “our results show that students who score a 3 on the AP exam and do not take a first-year writing course are likely to suffer real consequences in sophomore courses that require writing assignments” (Hansen et al. 2004, 40). In this case, the AP students exempting FYC believe that college writing can be “delivered” in high school, but the Hansen et al. data suggest otherwise, that in fact being a college writer requires learning how to write college writing in college settings. More generally, as these studies document, success in college writing contexts requires (1) that students begin as novices and (yet) become novices again, especially as they begin the major, and (2) that they write their way into expertise from taking a position of expertise.

### LAYER THREE: THE ROLE OF WRITING OUTSIDE SCHOOL

At the same time students write *in* college they are writing *outside* of college, sometimes as a function of a college assignment, other times on their own—as part of a job or for personal reasons. Moreover, in the case of transfer of writing knowledge and practice, these other writing sites, even when linked to curriculum, function differentially, sometimes with an extra set of writing demands and challenges, other times as an opportunity for concurrent transfer. Nora Bacon (1999), for instance, focuses on the kinds of transfer involved in community service learning, where the service is linked to a course but whose writing requirements do not precisely mirror those of the classroom. Bacon observes that successful writing in this setting involves extra writing factors such as “social involvement.” Based on her work with students writing in this kind of setting, she raises several questions about the complex nature of transfer of knowledge and practice to a non-academic setting even when that setting *is* directly linked to the academic setting:

What exactly is the relationship between the knowledge students develop in school and the knowledge they need in other settings? Do the skills and knowledge we value here have value in the community and the workplace as well? Do students learn them well enough to make use of them? Do they transfer automatically, or with effort, or not at all? (Bacon 1999, 53)

Students engage in writing outside of school as well, and such writing can provide for an often-invisible concurrent transfer that is sometimes helpful, sometimes not. Matt Davis (2012) documents the experience of Natascha, a self-sponsored blogger whose very successful experience with blogging presents an obstacle to her completion of a fairly standard review of literature for a college assignment. In part, this may be because Natascha isn't just any blogger: she created, administers and writes a book review blog attracting over 2,500 members and, at the time, over half a million page views. Given this experience, and when asked to write a review of the literature for a longer project, Natascha enthusiastically perceives a connection between her blog reviews and the academic review. As Davis remarks, however, that connection conceals more than it articulates. Unable to discern the *distinctions* between the book industry model of "the review-as-summary-and-recommendation" and the academic model of review as "summary, connection, and synthesis" (17), Natascha writes the academic review as though it were the blogging review. The perceived connection in this case, as Davis comments, is unhelpful: "the connection hasn't provided [her with] substantive ways of dealing with the challenges of a new context and new genres" (75).

In other cases, a kind of self-sponsored transfer can also be both appropriate and useful, as the next two examples illustrate. Sometimes the transfer is a quick carry-over from practice, as explained by Yun Moon, a student at the University of Nevada Las Vegas, who adapted her text-messaging practices for note-taking in school, a case of both transfer and deicity (the latter a situation where someone uses given technology for a purpose for which it wasn't designed: see Yancey 2004). Yun decides to use texting as a mechanism to take notes in class because it forces her to use English: "When I speak English, I use a mix of Korean," she says, "But when I text message, it makes me use English instead of Korean-English." Moon thus *repurposes* her newly developed personal texting practices for a school task, which she says also "helps me to write faster." We see in this example that students can and do intentionally self-initiate transfer as a kind of repurposing, as Wardle (2007) suggests.

Another student, Doppel, shows us a different kind of transfer, in his case based in work experiences that have provided him with writing *strategies* available for transfer. In Michelle Navarre Cleary's (2013) study of

adult learners and the ways they attempt transfer between academic and non-academic settings, Doppel demonstrates what is possible. Doppel is something of a Renaissance employee and student, having worked in various jobs, among them as a researcher and a DJ. Having engaged in a variety of work situations, Doppel is adept at using what he has learned in them—in this case, from his architecture and project management training—to serve writing needs in other contexts, and he is quite articulate about how he understands his writing process:

part of my secondary education was finishing my Architect's Associates for drafting. So I used to think of things on paper in blocks and chunks, and I would move them around like that. And eventually, when I was doing more projects and keeping schedules . . . what I do is I draw blocks out on a paper, and they'll go down the left-hand side, say from top to bottom, and then next to that block is the information of that project. And I think eventually I suppose in a way that's sort of a bullet point . . . I see it parsed out. . . when I'm thinking about writing five pages, I will visualize okay what's the first three quarters of the page supposed to look like? And the bottom quarter into the full second page, what is that going to look like? So again it visually parses out like that. And that actually helps me establish the rhythm of the paper and where the idea is going to be presented. How do they segue into one another . . . then I'm not so worried. It's like okay here are the ideas. They're not in your head in some grandiose amazing developing concept. (Navarre Cleary 2013, 677)

In this case, the highly personalized writing process Doppel uses is an adaptation, or repurposing, of what he learned in a specific field: as an older student, he has multiple experiences to draw upon and add to what he will learn in school.

However, the writing behaviors Doppel developed *in* school, in his case going back to middle school, haven't disappeared either. When a writer perceives learning to be relevant, wherever it occurs, it can serve as a resource to be tapped. Thus, when the writing demands of the workplace prompt Doppel to review his composing, he goes back to what he learned in middle school and carries that, first, to the workplace, and second, to college. As Cleary explains, Doppel

initially learned about outlining, drafting and revising in middle school, but he did not apply these strategies until his experiences in the work world put him in situations where they became necessary. . . . In Doppel's case, it was not until the workplace that he found the need to apply the writing strategies he had learned in school. When he returned to school, he brought these strategies back with him. In describing his current writing process, he makes clear that "We'd be having a completely different conversation if this were ten years ago." (676)

More generally, what we see in these students' transfer is twofold. First, students develop both notions and processes—knowledge and practice—in many sites of writing, including the spaces of digital media and the workplace; students will draw on all of them, even when some of them are years, or even decades, old. Second, as in the case of writing experiences in school, some of these experiences will be helpful, others less so or not at all.

### The Role of Students' Conceptions of Writing

In transfer, time matters. As we saw in Natascha's (Davis 2012) and Doppel's (Navarre Cleary 2013) experiences, past learning can be tapped in contemporary situations, but how it functions varies. As important are the conceptions of writing that students develop in the process of completing writing tasks—that is, how they understand writing—and the ways those conceptions motivate students, for good and for ill.

A comparison between two different journalism students illustrates how such conceptions can affect transfer, or put differently, how it can shape a writer's future. The first student, profiled in “Big Picture People Rarely Become Historians’: Genre Systems and the Contradictions of General Education,” is Russell and Yañez's (2002) now well-known account of Beth, an aspiring journalist convinced of the integrity and objectivity of reportorial accounting. When asked to write in an Irish literature class that she needs for graduation, Beth is resistant, believing that “good” writing means her preferred writing, a clear, straightforward, and factually-based journalistic writing, not the historical writing required for the class, which to her feels inexact and duplicitous. What finally persuades her that it might be otherwise is learning about the relationships between two “kinds” of writing (i.e., history and journalism) and about how history—in its reliance on sources like newspapers—is created, in part, by the writing she values. In this case, once she has learned about how genres in these fields contribute to each other—that is, once she has a grasp of the bigger picture cited in the article's title—she is ready to write. And the bigger picture here, of course, is as much about a theory of genres, and their relationships, as it is about writing in a given genre.

A different case is outlined by Kevin Roozen (2009), who tracks the writing development of Angelica, a student who began writing in journals as a child, whose journal writing continues through her college years, and whose conception of writing is profoundly influenced if not

determined by this activity. As Roozen explains, “over a span of twelve years, this literate activity developed from a brief fourth-grade hand-writing exercise into a rich and complex set of literate practices and sustained engagement with multiple genres—from simple sentences into a blend of poetry, song lyrics, short stories, and daily observations” (550). As a college writer, Angelica continues her journaling practice and, much like Matt Davis’s (2012) Natascha, she routinely attempts to transfer what she does in her outside-of-school writing to that inside school. For example, in completing a curricular literary assignment calling for a conventional kind of rhetorical development, Angelica employs a highly personalized style characterized by rich images, the kind of style typically found in a newspaper or magazine feature story, but with disappointing results. Although the instructor valued aspects of the completed text, he wanted a more genre-specific enactment. Here, a genuine disagreement between student and instructor occurred: whereas Angelica “viewed the opening sentence as a creative re-use of key practices developed through her journaling, and the paragraph as a whole as an inventive blending of multiple practices, her instructor read it as a failure to conform to the privileged conventions of literary analysis” (Roozen 2009, 558).

Having begun her academic career as an English major, Angelica switches to journalism: from “Angelica’s perspective, further participation in English studies as a major and a career meant ignoring her penchant for vivid description and perhaps some of the cultural discourse practices she found so important.” In her journalism classes, especially those focused on feature writing, Angelica finds her personal-journal style located in rich descriptions, accepted. Writing one story, for example,

Angelica retooled a key literate practice from her private writing, re-deploying it from her journals to journalism. Angelica’s statements about the emphasis she placed on “the way the picture is painted” and “the forceful images” echo the penchant for rich description that marks her journal writing, and those practices resonated with the key aspects of feature stories: the use of creative and forceful language and the use of vivid imagery to capture the reader’s attention. (Roozen 2009, 560)

Later, Angelica takes an internship with *Hispanic Magazine* in Miami, where she is also able to bring multiple writing experiences together into a writing process and text appropriate for a new venue:

In addition to the colorful descriptions from her journaling so prominent in the story’s opening paragraph, Angelica’s reflection on her writing process points to the other practices that animate this story. Her reference to

the constant rewriting she engaged in, for example, echoes the drafting and redrafting emphasized by her Journalism 150 instructor, while her reference to “scene” and “mood” might index Angelica’s experiences with literary analysis in her undergraduate English literature courses, or perhaps from earlier English courses in high school or before. (Roozen 2009, 564)

As was the case with Doppel, Angelica is able to transfer her writing practice and knowledge; drawing on various resources, she repurposes them for a new rhetorical situation. Moreover, in doing so Angelica draws on experiences from multiple spheres of activity to create a literate identity:

In repurposing what has commonly been dismissed as private writing to accomplish literary analysis and journalistic feature stories, literate practices from Angelica’s journaling helped to splice together the dominant dichotomies (i.e., public/private, transactional/expressive, male/female, academic/personal, and intellectual/emotional,) and social spaces (i.e., home, community, school, work) traditionally used to divide the literate landscape that persons inhabit. And yet, this trajectory does not outline just the ontogenesis of literate practice but also the development of a literate identity. (Roozen 2009, 566)

In Angelica’s case, her desire to include in her school writing tasks what she understood as successful practices motivated a shift to a new major, with a family of genres more hospitable to such transfer. More generally, students’ conceptions of writing and of the value they assign to writing can motivate and inform choices small, as in writing assignments, and large, as in the choice of a college major.

### The Role of Students’ Perception of the Future in Motivating Transfer

The future—and in particular, the role curriculum can play in motivating students to prepare for future tasks—can also influence students, both negatively and positively. Three examples demonstrate how students’ perception of the connection between current writing tasks and future writing tasks influence their behavior.

In the first example, Linda Bergmann and Janet Zepernick trace how students can discount FYC precisely because of its perceived *irrelevance* to their future writing lives:

Because [the students] saw the writing they are asked to do in English classes as personal, subjective, creative, and primarily intended “not to bore the reader,” they failed to see any connection between what they have learned about writing in English classes and what they see as the objective, fact-based, information-telling writing demanded elsewhere in their academic and professional lives. (Bergmann and Zepernick 2007, 131).

Furthermore, without being able to make a connection between such contexts, the students weren't motivated. As Bergmann and Zepernick observe, "All of the many . . . concepts and skills that form the basis for composition pedagogy were perceived by our respondents as either inapplicable to their professional development (and therefore worthless) or as meddling with their self-expression or creative thinking (and therefore out of line)" (131). In sum, the students divided writing into two categories, one personal and thus not available for instruction, the second professional and not subject to the presumed expertise of faculty in English.

A second example turned out quite differently, in part because the students were further along in their academic careers, in part because in writing in the disciplines (WID) classes students could more easily make the connection between the writing in class and the writing they expected to be doing in the future. In other words, these students believed that the WID writing they were engaged in pointed them toward a future. In the aforementioned case of the Hilgers, Hussey, and Stitt-Bergh (1999) University of Hawaii study, "students on the brink of graduation were engaged in writing assignments that they believed prepared them for future employment or an advanced degree: more than 80% of the students reported preparedness for writing in their chosen fields" (345). In addition, a majority of the students, 68%, were sufficiently motivated to create their own goals for these assignments, much as did the "novice" students in the Harvard study of writing. As the researchers note, "the fact that the assignment was in their major, rather than in a general-education course, created a presumption of its relevance to personal interests and career goals" (330).

As important, however, is the fact that such relevance with an effect on motivation can be *designed* into a course. At Oregon State University, Tracy Ann Robinson and Vicki Tolar Burton (2009) found that students can be motivated to improve their writing when they understand that one course goal is for students to develop writing knowledge and practice that they can transfer into another context. In this model, students are explicitly told that transfer is an intent of the curriculum (Robinson and Burton 2009). Toward that end, the Oregon State project invited students to complete a Writer's Personal Profile (WPP), a start-of-term questionnaire to support writing and learning in upper-division writing intensive (WI) courses. Intended for use by students close to graduation, the WPP invites respondents to reflect on their college writing experiences, their strengths and weaknesses as writers, and the role of writing in their future careers. Then, based on these reflections, students

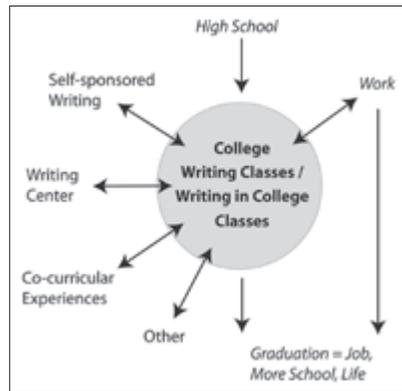
set personal writing goals that will serve them in their post-graduation workplace and toward which they will work throughout the WI course. As well as laying the groundwork for their forthcoming course experience, the WPP also establishes a baseline reference for students' self-evaluation of their writing progress, both during and at the end of the term (Robinson and Burton 2009). In addition, instructors were invited to ask students to revisit their profile before the conclusion of the term. Students who used the profile tool

collectively reported more growth as writers and saw more usefulness for the start-of-term tool than students who did not review their WPP responses before completing the end-of-term assessment. Perhaps the most striking difference in responses from these two groups pertained to personal writing goal achievement. Of those who did review their original WPPs, 42% reported having made significant progress toward their writing goals, while only 14% of non-reviewers reported significant progress. (Robinson and Burton 2009)

Belief that what a student is learning in a writing context will be useful in the future thus motivates students, and the reverse is true—that if no connection can be seen, students do not value the opportunity—as we see in the Bergmann and Zepernick study.

What does all this mean? When we consider this quick synopsis of what the research on transfer of knowledge and practice in writing shows, six patterns are clear.

1. As the graphic suggests, students write in many different sites: in high school before attending college; in personal venues before, during, and after college; in co-curricular sites like service learning and internships; in writing centers; in the workplace; and, of course, in college classes. Accordingly, there are abundant opportunities for concurrent, or cross-transfer, and students do engage in such transfer.



2. Students bring to college a sense of text and an ability to argue a claim, but as students begin college, they may fall into one of two groups, Reiff and Bawarshi's boundary guarders or boundary crossers, and it's also possible that such designations correspond to Wardle's problem-solvers and problem-explorers.

3. Time plays an often invisible but highly influential role in transfer: past experiences and future links contextualize it. Students draw on childhood experiences that can be formative; when they see a connection with the future, they are better motivated.
4. For several decades, we have been teaching process, and according to our students, they transfer process. In addition, there is some evidence that they also come to value composing process as a mechanism for learning.
5. Students have a sense of genre and write inside the conventions of genre, but they don't develop a conceptual understanding of or a language for genre, nor can they describe taking what they have learned about genre in one context and using it in another.
6. More generally, students don't create a mental map of writing that helps them move from one context to another and understand the relationships between writing in different contexts.

#### LAYER FOUR: McCARTHY'S DAVE, BEAUFORT'S TIM, AND THE TFT COURSE

We close this chapter by revisiting two students whose college writing experiences have, in some ways, framed the transfer question for composition, and we use the context presented here to outline the TFT course that we detail at the end of this book.

In 1987 Lucille McCarthy described Dave, a first-year college writer, as a stranger in a strange land—writing without a passport, a travel guide, or a portfolio to assist him in making some sense, some helpful meaning, out of diverse writing occasions and demands. In McCarthy's study, Dave wrote in three sites of writing, all of them early in Dave's career—FYC, literature, and biology—and perceived value in two of them, seeing value in each case for different reasons. Believing that first-year composition would set the stage for the rest of his academic career, Dave saw such writing as offering "four valuable functions":

1. Writing to prepare him for future writing in school and career;
2. Writing to explore topics of his choice;
3. Writing to participate with other students in the classroom; and
4. Writing to demonstrate academic competence. (McCarthy 1987, 253)

Dave thus saw first-year composition as providing him with generalized preparation for future writing tasks, both *in school and career*, as well as a site where he could *explore* and *participate*. The writing in biology, which

Dave also identified as valuable, served more specific writing functions for him:

1. Writing to learn the language of Cell Biology, which he saw as necessary to his career;
2. Writing to prepare him for his next semester's writing in Immunology;
3. Writing to make connections between his class work and actual work being done by professionals in the field; and
4. Writing to demonstrate academic competence. (253)

In the biology writing, Dave begins to make connections across classes and into a discourse community. He sees writing in the one biology course as a site that helps him *learn the language of Cell Biology* and prepares him to learn writing practices that he can transfer into another site, the class in Immunology; at the same time, he also sees writing in a specific academic discourse community as a preparatory link to *writing by professionals in the field*. As important, in identifying the values of both courses, Dave begins to create a set of links constituting a network, or mental map, of the writing cultures he values and the connections among them, both inside and outside the academy.

Ironically, however, Dave *does not* perceive relationships among them in terms of practices, nor does he understand or identify prior knowledge as a resource. McCarthy lists six resources Dave draws upon in writing for these two sites: (1) what teachers said in class about writing; (2) model texts; (3) talk with other students; (4) teachers' written response to writing; (5) Dave's prior experience; and (6) personal talk with teacher. But next to prior knowledge, McCarthy notes, "The extent to which Dave drew upon prior experience is difficult to say. In each class he believed he had no prior experience to draw from. However, we know he had had related prior experience" (259). In fact, it is that inability to call upon prior knowledge and, more generally, to frame the new in any way as relating to the old, that provides the grounding for McCarthy's depiction of Dave:

As I followed Dave from one classroom writing situation to another, I came to see him, as he made his journey from one discipline to another, as a stranger in strange lands. In each new class Dave believed that the writing he was doing was totally unlike anything he had ever done before. This metaphor of a newcomer in a foreign country proved to be a powerful way of looking at Dave's behaviors as he worked to use the new languages in unfamiliar academic territories. (McCarthy 1987, 234)

A generation later, the field of rhetoric and composition followed the progress of another student, Tim, the subject of Anne Beaufort's

(2007) *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*, and a college student whose writing experiences seem very like Dave's. In her study, Beaufort has two aims: on the one hand, she, like McCarthy, wants to document how students take up our assignments, and how in the process they do or do not develop as writers; and on the other hand, she also wants to know how we can foster student writing practices such that students can carry those writing practices and knowledge into other sites where they can be used, repurposed, and invented anew. To pursue these aims, Beaufort documents Tim's progress as he moves into very different writing situations across the curriculum and across six years, from general education courses to disciplinary writing situations and into professional life. Her conclusion is that academic writing, at least as it is often "delivered" in first-year composition, may enable students to learn to write in that context, but it does not prepare them to enter into other writing spaces.

Based on this study and on her 1999 work mapping four college graduates' transition into writing in professional spaces, Beaufort (2007) proposes a "conceptual model" of writing expertise located in five interacting domains: discourse community knowledge; rhetorical knowledge; genre knowledge; composing process knowledge; and subject matter knowledge. Useful for analysis, this model or a conceptual model like it, according to Beaufort, should be made explicitly available to students so they have a framework they can use to analyze writing tasks and then complete them:

to aid positive transfer of learning, writers should be taught a conceptual model such as the five part schema I have laid out here for the "problem-space" of a writing task, i.e., the five knowledge domains they will need to draw from to complete the task. Then, they can work through each aspect of the writing task in a thorough manner, looking for what in the current situation is similar to past writing tasks, or analyzing new tasks with appropriate 'mental grippers' [or concepts] for understanding. (Beaufort 2007, 152)

In addition, Beaufort points to the role of reflection in assisting transfer, and in the process she highlights its role in helping writers discern relationships among writing tasks and situations:

Literally thinking about thinking, meta-cognition implies vigilant attention to a series of high-level questions as one is in the process of writing: how is this writing task similar to others? Or different? What is the relationship of this writing problem to the larger goals and values of the discourse community in which the text will be received? These and other reflection-in-action kinds of questions, if part of a writer's process,

will increase the ability of the writer to learn new writing skills, applying existing skills and knowledge appropriately (i.e., accomplishing positive transfer or learning). (Beaufort 2007, 152)

Beaufort understands that helping our students make connections across writing tasks—the kinds of connections that Doppel makes but the very connections that Dave does *not* make—is a key to transfer, and to facilitate such connection-making she proposes a framework that can be used to articulate writing tasks one to the next. As important, this conceptual framework brings together two other virtues: as a model of writing expertise it articulates the domains writing experts engage with at the same time it invites students to develop such expertise by a similar kind of engagement. Not least, Beaufort's highlighting of reflection, while only briefly addressed (and principally in an appendix), aligns with the thinking on reflection mapped several years earlier by Kathleen Blake Yancey's (1998) *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, where three kinds of reflection—reflection-in-action, constructive reflection, and reflection-in-presentation—constitute a theory of and framework for reflection on writing.

Given this context, and as we explain below, we are especially interested in two particular dimensions of Beaufort's model, dimensions at the heart of the transfer question but that haven't been well theorized or researched. First, what is the role of content knowledge in first-year composition as a mechanism for assisting with transfer? Second, what is the role of reflection in helping foster transfer?

Oddly, the role of content in first-year composition, in terms of how the content might impact transfer, has been infrequently considered and never reported in the literature. Although Beaufort's model identifies content knowledge as one of the domains needed for transfer, the assumption seems to be that content knowledge happens only in non-composition classes, and Beaufort herself suggests that she isn't at all certain what content in first-year composition might look like.<sup>12</sup> As a working assumption, and given practices across campuses, this uncertainty makes sense in that so many composition classes—from the curricular model at Duke (Harris 2006) to the composition program at FSU—are “themed,” typically according to faculty interest; that is, faculty decide what interests them (topics are sometimes located inside their areas of expertise, sometimes not) and then this topic provides context and material for the course. Writing courses in the spring 2010 term at Harvard University, for example, included “The Art of Crime,” “American Sports Culture,” and “Family, Class and Nation in Nineteenth Century Britain” (Harvard College Writing Program 2010). Likewise,

at Pennsylvania's Haverford College during the 2012–2013 school year writing courses were sufficiently “content-laden” that the word writing hardly appears, and then only in reference to the medical “story-tellers” whose texts provide reading material for the course:

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Spring 2013

In “To Build A Case” Rita Charon asserts a polarity between the patient’s oral tale and the doctor’s written case history: “They are opposing entities. They are examples of language being used in fundamentally different ways. Their goals conflict.” We’ll test this pronouncement as we read across a spectrum of fiction and nonfiction texts. How does medical language illuminate, and how does it obfuscate, the patient’s individual experience? Do the doctor’s practices of “history-taking” and “case reporting” wrest narrative control from the patient—and, if so, what are the benefits and costs of a usurping authority? Can we detect the patient’s subjective dilemmas finding expression in the doctor’s own struggle for solutions? This course will attempt to place the two supposed narrative opponents into a larger context: a rich assortment of medical story-tellers. What types of medical narrative exist outside the consulting room and the “chart,” and do they effectively reconcile the alleged conflict between patient- and physician-narrator? We’ll look at illness through a variety of lenses, taking our readings not only from standard case reports but from patient memoirs, physician memoirs, medical journalism, essays in philosophy of mind, and (last but hardly least!) literary fiction. We will seek to understand the efficacy of each genre (even, one might say, its therapeutic implications) while training a clear eye on its inevitable evasions and over-sights. (Haverford College Writing Program 2013)

In contrast, and as we detail in chapter 2, others in the field suspect that using writing *itself* as course content might contribute to transfer, an effort often referred to as “writing-about-writing” (WAW). At the same time, the role of content in first-year composition relative to transfer is still an open question: to date, there have been no studies inquiring into what difference, if any, the content of a composition course—be it Expressivist, cultural studies, or teaching for transfer—makes.

Another absence also made visible in Beaufort’s model is a systematic study of reflection’s relationship to transfer, especially as students take up reflective practices in a first-year composition classroom and use such practices to help them engage in new writing tasks in diverse classes the following term. We know from general theories of learning that metacognition is central to the development of expertise; we know from Beaufort’s study, and theories of transfer like Beach’s (2003), that metacognition focused on similarities and differences—across rhetorical situations, across genres—is a critical component of transfer; and we know

from Yancey's theory of reflection something about the kinds of activities that would need to be interfaced for a robust set of reflective practices. But, to date, no one has inquired into how putting such activities together into a given class for the express purpose of facilitating transfer might contribute to students' ability to take up new writing tasks.

### Our Study and the Role of Language

The study of transfer across contexts of writing that we share here is guided by these two questions: what difference does the content in composition make in the transfer of writing knowledge and practice? and how can reflection as a systematic activity keyed to transfer support students' continued writing development? In addition, our study makes several assumptions. We assume that on most, if not all, campuses, there are many writing contexts, opportunities, and tasks. We assume that no one course, nor one first-year writing program, can prepare students for all the writing occasions they are likely to encounter in such contexts. At the same time, we are taken by McCarthy's (1987) metaphor of a stranger in strange lands, and despite the controversy surrounding the metaphor of travel as a guiding concept for composition (see, for example, Clark 1998; Reynolds 2004), we understand the kinds of shifts students have to make—from course to course, from genre to genre, from writing task to writing task, generally across contexts—as a kind of travel, a kind of “boundary crossing” that might work much better, and be more satisfying as well as instructive, if students have the kinds of assistance expert travelers do: a passport, a travel guide, a portfolio of key terms. We also assume that we can help students, but we can't simply give students frameworks, and if we could, such giving would be futile given that transfer—as other scholars, our students, and ourselves conceive of it—is a dynamic rather than static process, a process of using, adapting, and repurposing the old for success in the new. The value of such frameworks, we believe, is more in the nature of a Bakhtinian exercise: students need to *participate* with us in creating their own frameworks for facilitating transfer, and at some level this study is also a study of the efficacy of such participation.

In the rest of this book, then, we pursue these lines of inquiry, and we do so with two overarching observations.

First, this project, writ large, is something of a hybrid. On the one hand, it's a detailed research study into the efficacy of a certain kind of curriculum intending to facilitate students' transfer of writing knowledge and practice, especially as compared to two other composition

curricula. On a second hand, as indicated above and as chapter 2 details, it's also a synthetic account of scholarship, provided as context for the research, in several related areas—transfer generally, transfer in writing studies, composition curricula keyed to transfer and not, and prior knowledge, among others. And on a third hand, it's a text theorizing transfer of writing knowledge and practice while it considers, and at times speculates about, what we can, might, and should be teaching in first-year writing.

Second, and as important, this project is about the primary importance of language in conceptualizing writing, writing practices, and the transfer of writing knowledge and practice. As we saw in the Reiff and Bawarshi (2011) study, students coming into college don't have a language for writing, and as we saw in the Jarratt et al. (2005) and Hilgers, Hussey, and Stitt-Bergh (1999) studies, once in college, indeed even close to graduation, students haven't developed a language to describe key concepts in writing, such as genre. Likewise, as we saw in the discussion of general theories of transfer, several scholars are creating a new vocabulary to describe this phenomenon, whether that vocabulary be located in adjectives like high- and low-road (transfer), or in a new set of key terms like generalization and transition replacing the word transfer itself. And as is self-evident, we too are developing a vocabulary we hope will be helpful. Thus, rather than talking about students' declarative and procedural knowledge, which is admittedly a more conventional way of framing transfer, we talk instead

about writing knowledge and writing practice. We do this in part because (1) it shows the distinction between the two spheres of knowledge and practice, while also showing their participation in the same construct with the word writing, (2) in part because of the specificity we thus gain, and (3) in part because this way of thinking about writing connects our work to other scholarship on transfer and curriculum. In other words, the language we propose here speaks both to writing specifically and to concepts like content knowledge and process knowledge that we find in Beaufort's model. As important, we see the role of language in conceptualizing transfer, and especially transfer in support of students *writing*

#### A Set of Key Terms

- Writing knowledge and writing practice
- TFT: Teaching for Transfer, through key terms
- Reflection as systematic theory and practice keyed to creating a theory of writing

their way into college and across the college years, as fundamental. In our project, we therefore introduce new vocabulary for three specific purposes: (1) to describe the TFT course that is the focus of our study; (2) to articulate the curriculum in reflection culminating in students' development of a theory of writing; and (3) to conceptualize students' uses of prior knowledge. Thus, although they are introduced separately, these three small vocabularies constitute a single set of key terms articulating our curriculum to support transfer and the ways that students enact that curriculum based on their use of prior knowledge.

Given this context, in chapter 2 we review the relationship between curriculum and curricular transfer. Given the relationship between expertise and transfer, we begin by succinctly summarizing what we know about expertise from the National Research Council (NRC) volume *How People Learn* (Bransford, Pellegrino, and Donovan 2000). We then turn our attention to a continuum of curricular approaches toward fostering transfer, with Smit's (2004) model of impossibility on one end of the continuum and Brent's (2012) model of a "naturalized" practice on the other end, noting the assumptions and affordances of each. Inside the continuum, we proceed similarly, reviewing four models of transfer-promoting curricular design: the Downs and Wardle (2007) Writing about Writing (WAW) curriculum; the Dew (2003) WAW curriculum with a focus on language; the Nowacek (2011) "agents of integration" model; and our Teaching for Transfer (TFT) model. In chapter 3, we detail our study examining the impact of composition content on students' transfer of writing knowledge and practice, in the process also considering the role that a systematic reflective practice likewise plays. Located in four distinctive features—key terms, theoretical readings, writing in multiple genres, and reflective practices—the TFT course is shown to provide more conceptual grounding to students, what we referred to above as a conceptual passport or travel guide, and therefore more help with transfer than two comparable FYC courses. In chapter 4, we provide findings related to prior knowledge and its role in students' ability to transfer writing knowledge and practice: (1) students' pre-college relationships with tests and other external benchmarks of success and efficacy in writing; (2) students' use of prior knowledge in one of two models, assemblage or remix; and (3) students' responses to and uses of a "critical writing incident" or setback. And last but not least, in the conclusion we take up several tasks, among them, identifying themes emerging from our research, making recommendations about how to teach for transfer and offer a TFT course, and identifying questions that have arisen in our work and that we hope others will take up with us.

In this volume, then, we assume that when it comes to assisting students' transfer of knowledge and practices in writing, we both should and can do better—and here, we explore how.

## Notes

- 1 Not everyone agrees that we have moved beyond current traditional models of writing. See, for example, Matsuda (2003).
- 2 Interestingly, the relationship of the field's interest in academic writing, in genres, and in transfer is reciprocal: if all writing is (the same) academic writing, students don't need to transfer, at least inside school.
- 3 For a summary of the CCCC-sponsored discussion, see <http://compfaqs.org/ContentofComposition/HomePage>.
- 4 Given this set of course descriptions, how we distinguish first-year composition from writing intensive classes is a good question—or if we do at all, and why we might.
- 5 Reflection, of course, can take many forms, and at some level, asking students to argue that they have met outcomes they may in fact have not raises other questions.
- 6 For additional explorations of the utility of the consequential transitions perspective, see Jessie Moore's (2012) account in the *Composition Forum* issue focused on transfer.
- 7 Interestingly, "FCAT writing" appears here as a genre, and at the same time illustrates Wardle's point about the influence of institutional habitus.
- 8 See also Yancey's (1998) discussion of Kevin in *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*. He experiences a contradiction between his church-based conception of the history of the world's development and the version provided in a science class, which he documents but cannot resolve in reflective writing.
- 9 As we explain in chapters 4 and 5, there would seem to be a relationship between boundary guarding/crossing and dispositions toward problem solving and exploring. It may be that they both tap related tendencies; alternatively, they may be associated domains or constructs.
- 10 Dispositions point in at least four directions: one, a generalized sense as documented by Driscoll and Wells (2012); two, one sponsored by an environment, as theorized by Wardle (2012); three, a specific sense located in noviceship, as theorized by Sommers and Saltz (2004); and the sense we identify here as related to culture, defined and illustrated in chapter 4.
- 11 This model of a vertical curriculum seems to correlate nicely with William Perry's (1976) model of intellectual development, in which students generally move from dualistic to relativistic to reflective thinkers. Likewise, of course, students do transfer horizontally. The point of Nowacek's (2011) study is to trace such concurrent transfer given a set of linked courses, as we explain in chapter 2; we document our own findings in chapter 3; and we identify a set of options for concurrent transfer in chapter 5.
- 12 Beaufort (2012), in the August 2012 issue of *Composition Forum*, clarifies her position on subject-matter knowledge to advocate for two criteria for selecting a course theme that will promote transfer: (1) a focused theme rather than a multi-topic theme, and (2) a relevance to students. Furthermore, Beaufort suggests that there are many possible themes which might "encourage in-depth intellectual exploration into subjects from any number of discourse communities" and that teaching for transfer is a goal that can be achieved by using appropriate pedagogical strategies if content fits the two criteria she specifies.