Next Steps: New Directions for/in Writing about Writing, edited by Barbara Bird, Doug Downs, I. Moriah McCracken, and Jan Rieman. University Press of Colorado, 2019. 306 pp.

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*N*ext Steps: New Directions for/in Writing about Writing* provides an expansive look at the increasingly popular Writing about Writing (WAW) approach to teaching writing. As the editors state, the collection reveals "the breadth of current WAW approaches" in order to "extend the representation of this 'thing' that has come to be called writing about writing" (3, 271). The collection does not taxonomize the approaches presented or offer explicit guidelines for best practices. Instead, the editors argue that WAW is neither a pedagogy, suggesting particular "techniques or practices in the classroom," nor a curriculum, mandating reading or writing assignments, but an "approach" that the contributors apply differently in many institutional contexts (3). The collection, then, provides a multitude of assignments, courses, programs, and possibilities, creating, "a deep repository of images of student learning through contemporary WAW approaches" (272).

Bird et al. set out three foundational principles for WAW approaches:

- Writing is the content of the course that students' study and write about;
- The course treats students as writers not "*student* writers;" and
- Instructors generate knowledge about writing "*with* their students not *for* them" (3–4).

These principles do not include the reading of writing studies scholarship that has been a hallmark of WAW in the past, seeming to leave the door open to using readings that are less than full academic articles. In the first chapter, however, the editors *do* reiterate the benefits of reading difficult scholarly texts, suggesting some preference for this prior staple of WAW courses.

The editors argue that approaches to WAW "might be impossible to taxonomize" (18), so it is no wonder that the organization of the chapters might seem somewhat unclear. Based on the three WAW principles above, they divide the book into three sections correlated to three desired outcomes: developing *writerly identities*, mindful and individual *processes*, and *engagement* with writing knowledge and students' own learning and transfer. Readers will notice considerable overlap among these outcomes and may struggle to see distinctions among the sections or consistency among the chapters in each section. In many ways, however, the ambiguous organization of contributions reiterates the larger goal of the collection: to highlight the significant variety of WAW approaches. The order of chapters is engaging: the variety of

approaches, methods, styles, and lengths readers encounter from chapter to chapter helps provide a better reading experience than had the editors sought to group chapters by more definitive similarities.

Three chapters present important historical or theoretical context for WAW: Bird, Downs, McCracken, and Rieman provide a brief history of WAW; Wardle and Adler-Kassner review recent scholarship on threshold concepts as they relate to WAW approaches; and Nowacek reviews writing transfer, which both the editors and many contributors assert is the primary goal of WAW approaches.

The twenty-six remaining chapters of *Next Steps* give a variety of accounts about particular WAW programs, courses, assignments, or experiences at a wide variety of institutional contexts—from a 550-student engineering program in Qatar to a 63,000-student R1 university in the US. While most describe first-year writing courses, others detail professional, advanced, and basic writing courses and one even highlights a professional writing major.

Contributions are relatively short, with "vignettes" of three to eight pages and longer contributions averaging around ten to twelve. Chapters are first and foremost accounts of the contributors' experiences with WAW and descriptions of the assignments, courses, and programs they have developed and implemented. Though some authors report on research methodologies that drive empirical inquiry, the brevity of the chapters and the primacy of describing how WAW is being used programmatically suggests that we might best read these chapters as reflections. While many chapters do include some qualitative evidence to support the authors' claims regarding the benefits of WAW, many of the assertions, particularly regarding metacognition and transfer, seem to rely more on theory, teacher experience, and optimism than empirical data. That said, many chapters seem to imply that fuller accounts of research that more firmly supports the reflections and discussions in *Next Steps* may be forthcoming.

The space of a short review inhibits a full review of all of the contributions to *Next Steps*, but there are themes that emerge among many of the chapters, and some of the unique contributions are worth mentioning.

The majority of contributions describe WAW approaches that focus primarily on readings and assignments that help students learn to research and analyze writing contexts. These contributors focus on teaching students to transfer writing knowledge by teaching them to identify and analyze differences and similarities in communities of practice and genres (Arbor; Cutrufello; di Gennaro; Johnson; LaRiviere; Lucchesi; Mahaffey and Rieman; Ogilvie; Read and Michaud; Robinson; Wenger). Most of these focus on concepts such as discourse communities, activity systems, ecologies, or genre. Di Gennaro has students read both composition and applied linguistics scholarship, focusing the entire course on similarities and differences of academic writing among

students' various disciplinary majors with a fine-tuned attention to features and patterns of academic language. Di Gennaro's chapter is also interesting because, in contrast to the editors, she presents her chapter as a how-to guide for implementing a WAW course and makes the contentious claim that writing about writing should not entail students writing about their own writing. She is also critical of teachers who approach WAW in ways she views as expressivist, which puts her at odds with many of her fellow contributors who do just that.

Approaches that primarily ask students to write about and analyze their own past and present writing and language experiences are the other most common contribution (Aksakalova and Zino; Grant; Hart; Hoover, et al.; Kleinfeld; Smith, Frick, and Siebel; Wilson, Jackson, and Vera). Christina Grant's account of her attempts to help multilingual international students at a top Canadian R1 institution "reestablish their voices and roles" is most clearly an example of the very expressive process pedagogy that di Gennaro critiques. Grant introduces students to scholarship on process, voice, identity, and language to help students develop self-efficacy as experts on their own writing by being empowered with language and research from writing studies.

Others focus their students' attention not on process but on experiences of language and literacy more broadly. Wilson, Jackson, and Vera's WAW assignment sequence for a non-WAW basic writing course asks students to research their literacy and language experience through translingual scholarship. This approach, because of the focus on the social nature of language, seems to move away from a solely self-focused project toward more context-oriented assignments, but comes short of context analysis. This is even more evident in Tremain or Casey's chapters, which use the social nature of language to bridge these two broad foci, asking students first to attend to their own process or language experiences but then also to connect what they learn to issues of disciplinarity. Casey describes assignments that attend to process and literacy but also ones that ask students to investigate disciplinary literacy practices. All these scholars, however, focus primarily on dispositions and self-efficacy, which Tremain in particular notes may be necessary for transfer.

Many of the contributions that focus on students' own experiences describe basic writing and FYW courses for international and other multilingual student populations, while context analysis assignments are commonly reported in FYW and professional writing courses. This suggests that there is room for further research on how these different types of assignments impact diverse students in different course contexts.

Some chapters add depth to WAW's possibilities by connecting it to gamification (Stinson), multimodality (Wenger), and podcasting (Smith, Frick, and Siebel). LaRiviere advises readers on how to integrate WAW into seemingly rigid non-WAW standardized curricula. Mahaffey and Rieman describe designing

and implementing a program-wide WAW curriculum inclusively with instructors from non-writing studies backgrounds. Bryan, Roozen, and Stack also reflect on their efforts to help diverse stakeholders become comfortable with WAW. deWinter describes revising the curriculum of a professional writing major using WAW principles. Two chapters, one by Gaier and Wallace and the other by Sugimoto, are student reflections, the authors all former students in WAW courses who describe how they have benefited from their experiences.

Next Steps is a truly broad look at the wide diversity of WAW approaches. This diversity, however, could be overwhelming. Readers looking for some guidance in deciding what concepts might be most important to teach, or what readings or assignments might best teach them, will finish this collection with many more options but few directions for making decisions about how to spend limited class time. *Next Steps* has certainly shown WAW's diversity, but further work is still needed to determine whether some WAW approaches might be better for different student audiences than others.

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